

Examining the Polarity and Convergence of Transcultural Encounters in Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*

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Abstract

Guided by the post-colonial theory, this study focused on Abdulrazak Gurnah, the Tanzanian novelist's *Admiring Silence* (1996). It examined the characters' cultural polarity and convergences occasioned by transcultural encounters. Being a purely library-based study, it purposively sampled the novel. It was revealed that Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* presents cultural encounters among the transcultural characters whose interactions are characterised by both negative and positive aspects. The findings further revealed that where characters find it too difficult to relate with each other due to cultural differences, they resort to silence as a coping mechanism. Despite the interaction imperfections shown by the transcultural characters, this study argues that in a multipolar world, all cultures exist as both divergent and convergent entities, that allow characters to forge meaningful interactions albeit their differences. Despite these cultural differences, they cultivate complementarity or mutual dependability expressed in shared world view for continued interactions. These findings highlight transcultural encounters as a preoccupation in some of Gurnah's novels. The study concludes that more studies should be conducted on Gurnah's other novels for the way they treat the reality of interactions in transcultural encounters which characterise the current world with multipolar cultural realities.

Key words: *Transcultural encounters, adaptive mechanisms, complementarity, dependability, multipolar*

Introduction

As the world has become much more interactive due to globalist influences, different cultures in the globe have tended to converge so are literary works as integral parts of the cultural influence of the given people. Globalisation has radically transformed world literatures by expanding their scope, by introducing global themes and enhancing accessibility. By doing that, it has fostered cross-cultural exchange and understanding (Kumar, 2022).

However, it has also been noted that this convergence has led to certain divergences due to unequal global economy occasioned by hegemonic cultural practices (Hogan, 2003). With regard to this scenario, Hogan (2003) notes that, both convergence and divergence, as entities characterising the encounter of transcultural characters, have the effect of reducing the diversity of narrative, thus resulting in deleterious effect on the literary aesthetics. Thus, generally speaking, the negative effect of the multicultural encounters in terms of literary crossings in a multipolar world exhibit element of uneasiness, complexities and inherent tensions thus assuming a typical manifestation of convergence-divergence dichotomy. This is expressed in terms of aesthetics, characters' interactions or dialogue where as a result, a kind of an 'uneasy' assimilative encounter is automatically forged to facilitate communication thus understanding and interaction between or among the characters.

As part of the world literature or writings exposed to a multipolar world, both diasporic and local Anglophone local literatures are likely to exhibit the convergence-divergence dichotomy as it has been argued above. In this regard, Charkour (2022) writing on the Anglophone Arab-Australian and Indian-Australian literatures in the 21st century, notes that despite the fact

that these kinds of literatures are culturally, historically and geographically discrepant, they bear within their diasporic writings the same pattern of identity, that is, exile identity, the diasporic identity and the transcultural identity. However, he reveals that through close examination of the intricacies and crystallisations of the dynamics and tools upon which each mode of identity is anchored, differentials are noted between these diasporic literatures' approach to identity.

Roy (2009) writing on the Anglophone South Asian diasporic fiction, argues that identities interface between the distant forces of global restructuring, local spaces and individual subjectivity, expose how localities are not passive spaces that are uniformly transformed by global restructuring. Rather, he claims, they are spaces that play an active role in promoting and resisting various aspects of global power. These aspects of identity, as he argues, are filled with consciousness, hopes and failures, desires and ambiguities as well as the negotiations of a moral, philosophical and religious nature that are often contradictory, inflected and spill beyond neatly defined categories. Thus, both the local and diasporic Anglophone literatures exhibit what I have referred to above as convergence-divergence dichotomy.

In the context of both the African local and diasporic literary writings, Datta and Woods (2024) observe that this kind of literature is characterised by cross cultural, multilingual and globalectic view of the contemporary African literary production. This literature is geared to reclaiming spatial belonging to the continent and visualises futurity as a response to the complex cultural and socio-political commitments and planetary conditions. They argue that through this literature, African communities are connecting

across and beyond the 'local' and the 'global' thus exchanging ideas, finding common ground and building bridges that unite them beyond the constraints of physical location. They reveal that there is an interesting dynamic involved when it comes to the 'local' and 'global' spaces in relation to African literary writings. That, is, a variety of oppositions and pluralities are usually noted. These are such as African cultural elements, motifs, settings and animist materialism. These elements are supposed to co-exist with literary or cultural artefacts from other cultures as highlighted in those writings, hence accentuating the necessity of multicultural elements present in these works, a reflection of existence of multipolar world.

Abdulrazack Gurnah's writings as diasporic Anglophone literary entities have been studied by scholars. For instance, Ünal (2022) concentrates on Gurnah's *Gravel Heart* (2017) by dwelling on the effects of colonialism on Zanzibar. He reveals the traumatic incidents of colonialism such as confiscation of properties, forced migrations and oppressions. Abderrahmane (2023) examines the aspects of alienation displacement, hybridity and powerlessness in Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994) as key aspect of transcultural encounters of characters (Moudoma, 2013), with a focus on Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*, reveals that the narrator seems unable to communicate effectively in order to feel comfortable with his exile identity. For instance, it is revealed that despite having lived in England with Emma for over seventeen years, he resists both his African origin and the English culture. This is because he does not fully accept his Africanity due to the history of colonialism and the trauma of not having known his father. He resists the English culture by virtue of English being the evil coloniser.

Antonsen (2023) discusses Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* by dwelling on central themes that surround traditional gender rules, thoughts on marriage and colonial relationships in a post-colonial society in which the unnamed character and other characters in the narrative interact. However, she does not focus on the characters' interaction in the narrative and how at times, they take recourse in silence as a coping mechanism or as a way of maintaining the relationship. The study by Shallin and Batta (2024) dwells on Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* by using Homi Bhabha's concept of the third space. It reveals that colonised people encounter the coloniser's culture, not simply as passive recipients but with the possibility of mimicry and subversion. Based on the briefly reviewed studies above, it was out of realisation that silence as an assimilative, adaptive or a coping mechanism that harmonises the interaction among the transcultural characters, had not been fully discussed in these previous studies, that the current study was conducted. It was intended to examine the reasons behind the silences of the characters and what implications such silences have in their interactional aspects which sometimes accentuate polarity or elements of differences between or among the characters although at times, they tend to encourage convergence which suggests understanding or assimilation of some cultural ways of life from either of the cultures of the characters

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the post-colonial theory with a focus on Homi Bhabha's three concepts that are likely to characterise the interaction between the formerly colonised subjects and their colonisers. These concepts are ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry. They are each briefly explained together with the justification as to why they were used as literary lenses that guided this study.

According to Homi Bhabha, there is always ambivalence at the site of colonial dominance (Sersour, 2019). Ambivalence refers to the in-betweenness categories of cultural difference across race, class, gender and cultural traditions. It reveals both positivity and negativity of the formerly colonised subjects towards the former colonial masters. In Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*, the unnamed character exhibits these elements in his interactions with the transcultural characters as an immigrant in the United Kingdom. On one hand, he exhibits convergence or assimilation of the British ways of life such as his forming an intimate relationship with Emma, who is a British woman despite the cultural differences existing between them. On the other hand, he shows ambivalence or polarity to the British ways of life as he retains or at least recognises and respects some of his religious (he is likely a Muslim, given the context) and African ways of life especially on the urge to marry a second wife who is an African and possibly a Muslim unlike Emma who is not. This is revealed by the narrator with regard to his relatives, who, on his going back home, finds that they have prepared a wife for him something that he does not accept given his adoption of the British ways of life. He has assimilated the British culture of monogamous marriages because he has formed an intimate relationship with Emma, the British woman, the relationship that has resulted into the birth of Emelia, their daughter. Likewise, the narrator reveals both convergence and polarity to the English people in general and specifically to some characters he interacts with in the narrative. For example, he admires (converges with) the English people's culture of reading which is revealed through Emelia, his daughter he has fathered with the Emma, the British woman. As it is revealed in the narrative, by the age of six, Emelia has read all the books in her library that her parents has bought for her

something which contrasts sharply with the children of her age in the narrator's native land in East Africa, which given the context of the narrative, is Tanzania where the reading culture is impeded by lack of books in schools. With regard to polarity, the narrator hates racism which is revealed to him by the English people especially Mr Willoughby, his prospective father-in-law and the unnamed medical whom he visits for medical diagnosis.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity refers to a transcultural form that arises from cultural exchange (Sersour, 2019). It can be social, political, linguistic, religious or any other. In Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*, the unnamed narrator has adapted the British people's way of life such as speaking the English language, having a habit of making regular medical check-ups and contracting an intimate relationship with Emma who is a British woman. These ways of life add or modify what he already has in terms of his culture thus making him be considered a hybrid character. For example, having a regular medical check-up is not a tradition for many people in Tanzania where he comes from. In Tanzania, many people on average, see or visit the doctor when they feel that they are sick. Thus, by embracing the culture of visiting the medical doctors for check-ups not necessarily being sick, he has embraced cultural hybridity in contrast to what things are done in his homeland where people visit the doctor only when they are sick.

The narrator has also embraced cultural hybridity as he now speaks English throughout in contrast to the Kiswahili language that is predominantly used in Tanzania, his homeland.

Mimicry, the third concept in Bhabha's perception of the encounter of the formerly colonised people and their colonisers, is the obligation of the colonised to give back the image which the coloniser provides, thus producing neither identity nor difference for the colonised (Sersour, 2019). Mimicry is one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. Bhabha looks at mimicry as a double vision which explains that indigenous people are constructed by language to fit in the society but remain subject to the authority (the coloniser).

It should be noted that there is a difference between being English and being Anglicised. Due to this fact, the colonised is incapable of fully becoming or representing the original that is, being English. In Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*, the unnamed narrator has become anglicised in the sense that he has settled in the United Kingdom and has adapted to the English culture but in no way, has he become English. This denotes his status of mimicking the English culture but where he does not qualify to be an English man completely as the narrative in the novel reveals him.

Methodology

This study was a largely library-based, relying on close reading and textual analysis of the primary text which was Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*. This novel was purposively sampled. This formed the primary source of data which was supplemented by secondary data sources such as journal articles, theses/dissertations and books both online and offline sources. Close reading was the main source of collecting the primary data. The data thus collected were analysed and presented as themes and quotations. The secondary data as collected from journal articles, theses/dissertations and books, were used to back up the discussion and arguments made with regard

to polarity and convergence of the characters in the narrative as mediated through silence as an adaptive mechanism. These data were used to back up similar findings from other researchers but refuting them in some incidents where differences were noted.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented and discussed based on the purposively selected novel as highlighted in the methodology. They focus on the manifestations of polarity or differences in terms of the interactions between or among the characters as well as convergences construed to mean similarities of opinion or understanding others of their thoughts, actions and ways of life. To make up for the deficit of cultural understanding of the other characters, silence within the narrative is used by the characters which is interpreted as a coping mechanism that facilitates the interaction among them as characters who are transcultural in nature. The encounters where the characters take refuge in silence are such as the act of the narrator not telling Emma, the British woman, he lives with that he has never told his people back home about her and their relationship. Likewise, Emma maintains silence by not telling her parents that she is intimately involved in a relationship with a black man who has his origin from East Africa, most likely from Zanzibar—a part of the United Republic of Tanzania. However, she is compelled to tell them about her relationship with this black man when she becomes pregnant, thus she cannot go on keeping silent or hiding the truth from her parents of her relationship with him. The other incident where the narrator maintains silence is when he goes to the doctor who tries to diagnose his sickness along racial lines but the narrator maintains silence although he would like to answer him back or correct him that what he says about some diseases being a domain of some races is not true.

The unnamed narrator's intimate relationship with Emma

The relationship between Emma, the British woman, and the unnamed African narrator is characterised by silences as a way of accommodating each other's differences based on culture and race. Despite the fact that Emma is a bit outspoken, she, at quite a number of occasions, has to contain herself as a way of facilitating a meaningful interaction between her and the unnamed character as a couple. The narrator, on his part, keeps this relationship a secret (a kind of silence) which he does not tell out to his parents back in Tanzania (That is, Zanzibar) for fear of creating a conflict between him and them, especially his mother. The narrative reveals this:

...The truth was that I had not written home about Amelia, and the other truth was that I had not written home about Emma either. As far as they were concerned back there in the Nativity, neither Emma nor Amelia existed. It was to go like that for years...In any case, I did not know how I could write to her that I was living with an English woman to whom I was not married. In the world I come from, such things were unspoken about. To my mother, Emma would be something disreputable, a mistress... (pg. 100).

Thus, the narrator maintains silence despite the fact that Emma keeps on pestering him with questions wanting to understand what would be the reaction of his mother if he told her that he was living with an English woman but without her marrying him officially. On this, the narrative reveals: "...Anyway, I never told them about her, and the longer I remained silent, the harder it became to tell Emma (pg. 100 - 101).

Even to her parents, liberal as they are, Emma does not try to disclose her relationship with the narrator. She keeps silent because she is afraid of their anticipated disapproval of the relationship as she has broken the cultural code of the British that is, mothering a child out of wedlock and to

complicate matters, with a person whose cultural orientations are radically different from hers. The narrator reveals the consequences of Emma breaking the strict social code of her British society. He writes:

...she would have to live with a contamination for the rest of her life. She would not be able to be a normal English woman again, leading an uncomplicated English life among English people (pg. 96).

Much as they would like to maintain this '**silence**' by not telling Emma's parents of their relationship, as common sense and social conventions would demand, she has to introduce her sweetheart to her parents. In deciding to go and see her parents, Emma knows their calibre very well. They are volatile, condescending and excessively proud of their race as English people. To make matters agreeable, Emma tells the narrator to maintain **silence**, a form of convergence or understanding which will involve him tolerating even the harshest remarks that may be made on him by Emma's parents in the course of the conversation. So, he should be resilient no matter what the amount of provocation to answer back might be exerted on him. The narrative reveals:

The first time she took me to meet her parents, Emma said 'don't tell them those kinds of stories [about his family]. They'll just hap them up and start up on their racist filth. You don't know what they're like, they fatten on that kind of thing. It makes all their obscene complacencies seem perfectly justified. I don't mean you should make anything up or something, but don't give them any ammunition (pg. 81).

When Emma introduces the narrator to her parents, each of them shows one's reaction to what they hear. This reaction is a kind of cultural polarity or negative cultural perception they have on this black young man. In fact, she disappoints them. However, civility and the need to maintain the

conversation or interaction dictate that they behave wisely and guardedly. Emma's mother reacts to this disappointing news with a **silence** as a kind of adaptive mechanism which reveals her cultural convergence or understanding that intimate relationships can be formed even among the characters of different races. Resorting to this silence as a coping mechanism, after a short time, she regains her composure and asks a question:

Later when Emma told her we had decided to live together she looked at her hands in **silence** for a moment and then said, 'I'll go and make some tea'. She returned after a few minutes with tea and biscuits, settled herself down carefully, and with the measured gaze and voice of someone doing everything to be reasonable, she asked Emma: 'Aren't you too young?' (pg. 26).

Based on the data presented above, we can reasonably argue that it is convergence or understanding mediated through silence that has made Emma's mother regain her composure. The narrative gives this clue: "I saw the effort it took her not to bluster or shout, not to get up and hurl the steaming teapot at me and then bundle me out of her house with imprecations and insults and accusations" (pg. 26). It is her convergence that is mediated through **silence** as an adaptive mechanism that she at least tries to understand her daughter's decision to have intimate relationship with this transcultural man but her concern is that, she thinks Emma has decided to forge this relationship a bit too early. Disappointed as she is with her daughter's decision, she at least tries to show some interest that is, some elements of cultural convergence manifested in her composure, politeness and respect for her daughter's choice to this intimate relationship. Encouraged by these convergences, she wants to know for example, if her intended son-in-law had had any communication with his family or said

anything about it to Emma: 'Have you had news from your family recently?' 'She asked as she handed me a cup of tea'. As decorum and civility would dictate, she wishes this young couple success in their relationship although she cautions that this relationship should not interfere with the narrator's studying: "I hope everything is well. Will you be taking her away with you? I hope not. You must make sure that this does not interfere with your studies. After all, that's what you are here for" (pg. 26).

Based on the findings presented regarding the narrator's interaction with his prospective in-laws, it is convergence or understanding that is mediated through **silence** that harmonises this encounter, which would have otherwise ended in disarray. Gurnah uses the **silence** motif to explain how the transcultural characters in his novel *Admiring Silence* (1996) interact meaningfully where the social and cultural gaps or differences are compensated for with **silences** thus making them interact among themselves understandably and harmoniously. This finding relates with Özlem (2014) who argues that **silences** of the characters in Gurnah's writings cover the things they cannot or which they simply refuse to say.

Equally disappointed is Mr Willoughby, Emma's father who, apart from knowing that her daughter has formed an intimate relationship with this young man, is even more disappointed to learn that Emma is pregnant. However, a spontaneous very harsh or negative reaction to this fact would complicate the scenario even more. As things stand now, wisdom would be needed to handle this shaming experience. That is why, when he is told of Emma's pregnancy, he takes a long time to think of what to do or say. This suggests that he resorts to **silence**, a kind of cultural convergence before he decides what he should do or speak. The narrative highlights this act:

“When he was called upon to intervene, he took so long to think of something wise and mollifying” (pg. 27) As the context of the narrative suggests, he decides to harmonise the situation after learning that her daughter remains unchanged in her decision to love this man “Mr Willoughby was brought into action as it became clear that Emma was immovable. He invited me to a pub” (pg. 27).

The act of inviting the unnamed narrator to a pub and buying him some food and drinks is Mr Willoughby’s trick to study the young man and if possible, get something to hammer him psychologically thus making him furious and therefore pull out of the relationship. Inwardly, he still cherishes some polarity or negativities against this black young man which as the narrative has hinted, stems from his racist attitude towards the black race in general. Thus, the battle is not yet over, although it is being handled very carefully with episodes of **silences** and speaking in between as temporary adaptive mechanisms. Being a racist, Mr Willoughby resorts to this trick to unnerve the narrator. He indirectly insults the narrator by saying the word ‘Sambo’ initially, a word that was used to refer to African Americans as stereotypically lazy who would like to avoid work whenever possible. The stereotypical Sambo was loyal to his slave owner who was a white boss. He was consistently shown to be docile and agreeable, ever behaving childishly and comically. He was also portrayed as dishonest, superstitious, improvident and musical (Krmarr, 2022). This label came to be used to refer to African Americans and by extension, to all Africans. In the context of the interaction with the narrator and Mr Willoughby, this Sambo negative connotation is a reference made by Mr Willoughby to someone black that had studied in the United Kingdom and later on became the president in his country. The referent ‘your chaps out there’ if situated within an immediate

context, would suggest that he is speaking about the first president of the United Republic of Tanzania, the Late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who had studied in the United Kingdom at Edinburg University and then came back to Tanzania, fought for his country's freedom and became the first president. Most probably, in its distant context, this referent phrase might mean any African who had studied in England and went back to his county and became its president. Immediately they are about to leave the pub, Mr Willoughby says:

Sambo, he said as we rose to leave the pub. It looked like a dramatic change of tactics to chase me away with racist abuse, but I wasn't sure if Mr Willoughby had the talent for that rough stuff. His eyes were blazing again. The darkie at school. We used to call him Sambo. I knew it would come back to me. Splendid runner, Black as ace spades. I expect he's life president in his country now. What will your chaps over there say about all that? Complete mess... (pg. 29).

These racist remarks as given by Mr Willoughby to the unnamed narrator are calculated to annoy or offend him. Thus, if he yields to them, it is possible that he may terminate his relationship with Emma, his daughter. However, the unnamed narrator navigates through this trick by resorting to **silence** as a form of cultural convergence which makes him understand and tolerate Mr Willoughby's racially stinking remarks. On this, the narrative reveals: "But he did not seem interested in my reply and I mumbled audibly, smiled brightly and said nothing [kept silent]" (pg. 29).

Having earlier been told by Emma that when interacting with his prospective in-laws he should not mind their racist dispositions to him, the narrator appears to have understood the lesson very well such that he has become the person least offended by Mr Willoughby by whatever he says to him including his stereotypical racist remarks. On this, the narrative reveals:

“I had been well primed for this, to expect to be offended by something her parents [Emma’s parents] were bound to say or imply or disguise in an apparently innocent commonplace” (pg. 12).

In fact, Mr Willoughby, as the narrative posits him, is a staunch racist. In yet another manifestation of this, although he appreciates that there has been improvement in education in Africa especially the higher education, he reveals his appreciation with the word **darkie**, which has a negative connotation. Regarding his racist behaviour, the narrator reveals: “Mr Willoughby came up with the goods at once, casually, almost kindly staring at me with bristly intensity, curious to hear my opinion. ‘I expect there are thousands of darkies in universities these days. It wasn’t like that way in my day” (pg. 22).

Like the way it has been discussed in the previous pages of this paper regarding the transcultural characters’ encounter in the narrative, the narrator has learned to navigate Mr Willoughby by taking recourse in **silence** a kind of cultural convergence that sustains his tolerance of near-abusive racial remarks. Even when he opens his mouth, he hardly says anything, something which pleases Mr Willoughby; therefore getting the conversation going on or sustained in that way: “murmur audibly, smile brightly, say nothing. My mumblings [**which are as good as keeping silent**] made Mr Willoughby’s eyes brighten even more as if I had said something witty” (pg. 23).

These findings, on this encounter of Mr Willoughby and the narrator as both transcultural characters, show affinity with what Okungu (2016) says with regard to the function of silence in Gurnah’s *Admiring Silence* (1996) and

The Last Gift (2011). She argues that silence is an important strategy of handling repressed contents by the subject. It is a kind of resilience that makes the transcultural characters regain their composure thus making the interactions among themselves rewarding or meaningful. Within this narrative, silence has been portrayed as serving to exhibit both negative attitudes of the characters (polarity) and positive attitudes where the same characters try to understand each other (convergence) thus sustaining their interactions at different levels and contexts.

Visiting the doctor and the narrator's silence

As it is revealed in the narrative, after experiencing some pains which he judges to be the early signs of heart attack, the narrator goes to hospital for a medical check-up. After he tells the doctor of his problem and the latter taking his history as a patient and examining him, the doctor says that his patient's heart is 'buggered'. This, 'buggered', is a terminology that is not very straightway clear in the narrative. Perhaps, it may suggest that his heart is enlarged or it has one problem or the other which makes it not function as it should. The narrative tells of this encounter and the doctor's early diagnosis of his problem:

...[He] drummed and poked my chest, and listened to it with a faraway quizzical look in his eyes and then could not help squeezing the small tyre that had recently wrapped itself round my midriff. Though what he expected that to emit I don't know. Squeak, a forbidden curse, a dribble of homogenised pus, an involuntary thrashing of atrophied muscle, muscle, what? (pg. 9).

While the doctor is doing his diagnosis, the narrator remains inquisitive in his mind of what might be his problem. Although he guesses of what might be the problem troubling him, common sense and respect to the doctor and

his profession dictate that he observes **silence**. Sensing of any discomfort, talking or asking questions or offering to give unsolicited information while the doctor is making the examination would possibly offend him as it would interfere with this delicate process. So, he chooses to be silent: “I stood silently while he kneaded my smouldering flesh, punching and squeezing and cracking his knuckles on my bony plates. Then frowning, he told me that my heart was bugged” (pg. 9).

To some extent, the narrator is not satisfied with what the doctor tells him. This is because he seems to already know that he actually has a problem with his heart. However, it is probably out of respect to the doctor and his profession that the narrator again decides to keep silent. This silence is meant to facilitate a meaningful interaction between the two; and, in fact, it acts as a coping mechanism of the uncertainty of what might be the problem with the narrator’s sickness. The author writes: “I could have told him that, truly, it was what I was there to tell him, but I sat in respectful silence while he went through his lines” (pg. 9)

The **silence** as an adaptive mechanism between the two people, that is, the patient and the doctor, in this encounter, helps to establish rapport between them. It is both a coping mechanism and a conversation starter and maintainer of that conversation. Encouraged by this **silence**, the doctor claims that the health problem that the narrator is having, by far and large, is to be found among some ethnic groups or racial lines. He says:

Afro-Caribbean people have dickey hearts’ he said, smiling to give me courage at such distressing time, and they are prone to high blood pressure, hypertension, sickle cell anaemia, dementia, dengue fever, sleeping sickness, diabetes, amnesia, cholera, phlegm, melancholy and hysteria.

You really should not be surprised at this state you find yourself in ... (pg. 10).

Despite the fact that he knows he is not an Afro-Caribbean, but rather an East African, the narrator decides to keep **silent**. He says “of course, after all this, I did not have the heart to tell him that I was not Afro-Caribbean or any kind of Caribbean...” (pg. 10). The reason he admires **silence** is that he does not want to discourage him from speaking or explaining what he seems to have arrived at this supposedly right diagnosis of his problem. The narrative hints at the possibility of what could have transpired between them had the narrator decided to tell the truth by saying:

Anyway, if I had told him he might have lost confidence in his diagnosis and might have started his kneading and pounding all over again and asked for blood tests and mercury cures or whatever... (pg. 11).

Encouraged by his patience's reticence, he appears to be comfortable and friendly. On revealing this scenario, the narrator narrates: “I could see he approved of my respectful **silence** because he smilingly issued his prohibitions and instructions wagging his finger now and then to warn me of naughty temptations” (pg. 11).

All this getting along smoothly of the two individuals of different races who have come into this transactional encounter is facilitated by the **silences** which, to some larger extent, dominate their conversation and interaction. This echoes what Jones reveals through the interview he held with Abdulrazack Gurnah as quoted in Farooqi and Jamil (2022:1045). He (Jones) says: “remaining silent is a way of preserving dignity and at the same time not putting yourself in harm's way”. As revealed by Gurnah in this interview, maintaining **silence** makes the narrator get respect from the

doctor. As it is suggested by the narrative, blurting out or speaking angrily to the doctor would have destroyed the harmony and understanding thus making him not get the medical services he needed.

Again, these findings echo the post-colonial theory, especially the theoretical underpinnings of Homi Bhabha which are hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence. With hybridity, the narrator has assimilated the English culture which includes the English language and the elements of his own African culture which includes, being a Tanzanian, his speaking of the Kiswahili language and the Kiswahili culture. It is a fact that although the narrator copes with the English culture, he will never be the master of it. He qualifies somewhere along the continuum hence reflecting the notion of Homi Bhabha's mimicry. Finding himself that he cannot qualify to be an English person with perfect observance of the English culture, he cherishes an ambivalent attitude by loving and detesting some of the realities of the English culture and history for example the history related to colonialism and slave trade as well as the racism of the white people which his prospective white in-laws exhibit to him both covertly and overtly. These account for his cultural in-betweenness or hybridity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has analysed and discussed the encounter and interaction of the transcultural characters in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*. It has revealed that this encounter and interaction is characterised by both polarity and convergence of cultural understanding, opinion or acts which are largely mediated by **silences** as a safe interactional space which reveals civility, understanding, tolerance, and respect. The resort to silence has also been analysed as a coping mechanism when characters think that they are

having too much on their mind and that speaking out would violate the interaction among themselves thus affecting their relationship which would result into misunderstanding or conflict. The study recommends more studies on Gurnah's writings to understand how he approaches the issues of communication or interaction among the transcultural characters in a world that has become intensely globalised and inclined to multipolar interactions.

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