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Imagining the Nation through Multiple 'Bildungsroman': Badar, Fauzia, and Karim in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Theft*

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Abstract

In his latest novel *Theft*, (2025), Gurnah, winner of 2021 Nobel for literature, returns for its entire setting to Tanzania in East Africa. The action shifts between Tanzania's largest city Dar es Salaam, and Zanzibar, Gurnah's town of birth, which is now part of Tanzania, and from where he had emigrated to the UK in 1968. A 'bildungsroman,' the novel charts the lives of three young people Badar, Fauzia, and Karim, whose lives crisscross and intersect at several points in the story. In the process, *Theft* also presents the everyday life of the nation, and the challenges faced by it as it enters a new phase, neo-colonialism, some twenty years into its Independence in December 1963, and a Revolution in January 1964. Using qualitative research as its methodology, this paper, through the story of these three characters, who may be described as 'Children of Revolution', (all three were born in the late 1960s), proposes to examine the novel as the 'bildungsroman' of a nation, Tanzania, at a particular point of time in its history. Leaving behind stories of genocide, political atrocities, slavery, imperialism that featured in his earlier novels, in *Theft*, the writer offers a post-colonial representation of the decolonized nation emerging from the throes of genocidal violence and totalitarian regimes of the 60s and 70s, and trying to grapple with the impact of economic liberalism and neo-imperialism, even as it struggles to build itself on its own terms.

Keywords: 'Bildungsroman,' Nation, Economic Liberalism, Neo-colonialism, Identity.

Introduction:

The entry on the term 'bildungsroman' in *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Cuddon, 1992) says that it is literarily an 'upbringing' or 'education' novel that gives an account of the youthful development of a hero or heroine. It describes the processes by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs of life. Cuddon's refers to Wieland's *Agathon* (1765-66) as one of the earliest examples of this genre, while Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96) as among the most famous and the most imitated, translated into

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English by Thomas Carlyle in 1824. Maturity marks the end of a successful search for identity and an entry into society.

Essentially an eighteenth and nineteenth century European model paralleling the rise, as against the feudal, of a laissez faire bourgeois society where the individual is free to chart his own destiny, the model has been viewed and experimented in postcolonial literature as an effective means of narrating the marginalized sections of post-colonized societies – women and the underprivileged, in particular, often subverting the European model in the process. *Theft*, while staying within the postcolonial framework, sticks to the classic 'bildungsroman' form. According to Moretti, eighteenth century 'bildungsroman' with its focus on youth was a challenge to the concept of classical heroes. It was the beginning of modern age but there was no modern culture. Goethe, for Moretti, saw "youth as the most meaningful part of life" (Moretti, 1987, p. 3), the symbol of modern culture. Yet youth also symbolizes free will and self-determination, a continuing maturity. The success of 'bildungsroman' as a form that has survived till date lies in its ability to compromise the conflict "between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization" (Moretti, 1987, p. 10). In *Theft* (2025), Badar and Fauzia represent this compromise while Karim is a critique of the same.

Literature Review:

Theft, Gurnah's last published novel to date, came out only ten months ago in March 2025. So, there is hardly any book of critical discussion on the text. These are still mostly confined to reviews in newspapers and journals; and none of these touches on the aspect of 'bildungsroman' in *Theft*. The March 14, *The Washington Post* review describes the novel as a "delicate exploration of true character value". *The Guardian* carried a review article on the novel dated 18 March, 2025, where it is described as a "coming of age chamber piece", but makes no critical assessment of the development of the three central characters. A second review in *The Guardian* dated 19 March, 2025, discusses the three main characters in the context of 'the tourism boom during the 1990s.' *The Times of India* review of *Theft* dated 11 April, 2025, highlights the economic inequalities in post-colonial Tanzania as a legacy of colonialism, and the impact of tourism on the lives of the Tanzanians. There is a passing reference here to how the history of a nation can be captured in literature through its characters. *The Hindu* dated 11 May, 2025, carries a review of the novel where the focus is on the 'surprise' element in the plot, and Gurnah's proverbial strength in character-portrayal. There are, of course, articles on 'bildungsroman' in Gurnah's fictions, but none on this recently published novel. My paper, in its detailed analysis of and discussion on the 'bildungsroman' aspect in *Theft*, proposes to make a significant contribution to the study and research of Gurnah's fictions.

Research Methodology:

This paper will make a close textual and qualitative study of *Theft*, using as its framework Franco Moretti's ideas of the novel of formation, especially his take on classical 'bildungsroman' model of the eighteenth century. In the process it will see the text as journey towards harmonious integration, thereby reversing the idea of identity formation of Marianne Hirsch, from expectation to disillusionment. The paper will, as part of its study, put the novel in the context of history of decolonized Zanzibar.

Discussion:

The 'bildungsroman' model is not new in Gurnah's oeuvre of fictions. *Paradise* has Yusuf as its protagonist. Published in 1994, it is set during the days of the Omani Sultans' rule in Zanzibar. *Memory of Departure* (1987), with Hassan at its centre, is set during the last days of

British imperialism. Dottie in the eponymous novel *Dottie* (1990) and Daud in *Pilgrims Way* (1988) are immigrants in the UK, growing in an alien land, among alien culture and people. In his latest novel *Theft* (2025), the central characters Badar, Fauzia, and Karim are not only characters in a 'bildungsroman' fiction, their journey from childhood to maturity is set entirely in post-colonial Tanzania, erstwhile Zanzibar. It is a multiple 'bildungsroman' novel where paralleled with the growth and development of these three characters, is the history of the decolonized nation in a neoliberal era of the late twentieth century and early twenty first century, when the early post-independent years of socialism are giving way to a capitalist culture, the allegiance of the State shifting from East Germany, Soviet Russia and China towards Europe and the USA. The narrator refers to buildings in the town which were at first used by "Soviets and Chinese and other fraternal experts, and more recently, after those relations soured, experts from rich countries who came to give advice" in *Theft* (Gurnah, 2025, p.185). The history of the changing times is effectively caught through the trajectory of these three protagonists – Badar, Fauzia, and Karim, so that not only does Gurnah present a multiple 'bildungsroman;' but he also presents the 'bildungsroman' of a fledgling nation at a crucial juncture in its history.

Gurnah's Zanzibar in *Theft* is in many ways a refreshingly different Zanzibar from his earlier works. *Pilgrims Way* refers to the gruesome violence, the genocide of Arabs by the Black community in Zanzibar during the Revolution in 1964. The central character has traumatic memories of being witness to mass killing and violence on women. *By the Sea* (2001) presents yet another gruesome picture of violence in the aftermath of genocide during the totalitarian regime of the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) in the late 60s and 70s. Omar Saleh is imprisoned for eleven years on false charges. In *Gravel Heart*, (2017) Salim, a diaspora in the UK, is appalled to learn from his father that his mother, Saida was forced into a relationship with a powerful politician to save her brother from imprisonment and torture. The unnamed protagonist in *Admiring Silence* (1996) on his temporary return to Zanzibar is disgusted by corruption, male lust of powerful politicians, and total collapse of civic amenities in his homeland. Abbas in *The Last Gift* (2011), escapes to the UK, a victim of machinations of people of his own Arab community. He is tricked into a marriage he did not want on false charges. None of the protagonists decide to stay back in their home country. In a conversation with Tina Steiner, Gurnah who had himself, like many his characters, had emigrated to the UK as a refugee says, as cited in *Critical Perspectives on Abdulrazak Gurnah* (2023) –

> …it's a little debate I keep conducting with myself about, not so much personally although sometimes it is, what is to leave, what is to stay. Who's the wiser one, the one who leaves or the one who stays? And it's the one of the questions that keeps returning in what I write. The fact is it's often the men who leave is because that is often the case. (p. 166)

Theft (2025) presents a more sanitized picture of Zanzibar. Echoes of the violent past are there at the very beginning of the novel. In fact, it is interesting to note that in terms of chronology, the novel begins in mid-sixties- the time of the Revolution of January 1964. Rafik, who is attracted by seventeen-year-old Raya, Karim's mother, is a member of the pro-communist Umma Party. Their young members were admirers of Fidel Castro and Che Guevera and trained in soldiering in Cuba. They wielded enormous clout during the decolonization months and the Revolution. In *Theft* (2025), Gurnah notes that Rafik and other comrades were back just in time to participate in the Revolution; "The warriors of that time, of whom Rafik was one, only knew how to terrify people, since there really was no enemy in sight, just scared browbeaten citizens" (p.1). Later, Rafik was shot dead in a bloodletting immediately after the Revolution.

There is also reference to an important landmark - the violent taking over of the police

barrack by the black racists on the very first night of the Revolution, 11 January, 1964. Raya's cousin, Suleman was recruited by the post-independence Arab-dominated new regime to replace the British forces. In a siege the entire barrack was overrun by the marauding forces of John Okello, baying for Arab blood. Suleman, who had just left school and was only a fortnight into his training, was murdered. His body, like bodies of many other victims of genocide, was never found; "…they could only assume he was among the disappeared…It broke Baba" (Gurnah, 2025, p. 9). Besides, there are passing references to the violence during the elections in the conversation between Karim and his mother during Karim's stay in Dar es Salaam. In *The Threat of Liberation: Imperialism and Revolution in Zanzibar* (2013), Amrit Wilson refers to such violence; "Every election since 1992 was accompanied by violence and accusations of rigging" (p. 100). Badar, Fauzia and Karim may be described as the Children of Revolution, all born, around the same time in second half of the 1960s. So, they belong to the generation of 1980s, the 80s of neo-colonial, neo-liberal Zanzibar. All three of them have three phases in their lives as in a 'bildungsroman' novel or novel of growth – childhood, adolescence and adulthood. All three of them, unlike their previous counterparts in Gurnah's novels, prefer to stay back in their native land and seek their identity within their native community.

Badar's Story: Childhood:

Orphaned in his very childhood, Badar is raised in a village in the house of a distant relation of his mother who died of a mysterious disease. His father had abandoned the child and was last seen at Mombasa. Much later, at Dar es Salaam, in the house of Uncle Othman, Badar would come to know that about his absent father. Badar was raised in a village house of Mohamed Rashidi. It was a life of utter humiliation. His foster father treated him with insolence, his foster brother Omari bullied him, and the foster sister Aysha, always accused him of peeping on her. His foster mother made him run errands. But sensitive and alert, Badar made the best of what he learnt and heard at the primary school where he got his first lessons. In fact, it was at the school on the first day that he came to know about his family name Ismail when his name was called out by the class teacher - Badar Ismail. His only happy memories of his childhood in the village were playing with the country boys.

Adolescence:

Thrown out of his childhood shelter when he is 14 under the false accusation of peeping into the privacy of the daughter of the house Ayesha, Badar is deposited in the house of the Uncle Othman's in the city of Dar es Salaam where he is taken as a servant boy. Uncle Othman, the paterfamilias, who had refused to entertain the same child fourteen years ago, now grudgingly agrees to take him possibly, to make him repay the money his father, Ismail had stolen. In *Theft* (2025), on the first night at the Othmans –

> Lying in the silent room, in the dark he wondered if that was why he was sent away because of Aysha's accusations. He wondered if he would ever be permitted to return. He did not know any other place in the world but the village. He had been cast adrift by the only people he knew. (p. 42)

After the initial trauma of displacement and fear of strangeness in an unknown place, Badar finds the members of the house, except for Uncle Othman, sympathetic towards him. He is supposed to perform the domestic chores - cleaning the rooms and toilets, washing clothes and doing the beds. Besides, he is supposed to run errands for the Mistress, Raya, and assist her in her cooking. In the context of the history of the nation and the patriarchal Arab community that treated servants as virtual slaves, *Paradise,* first published in 1994, being a good example of such treatments, it is a refreshing change that though a servant boy, Badar is given a small room to sleep, a toilet for ablutions, new clothes to wear. Karim, son of Raya, took a particular fancy for him when he found him reading an English newspaper to the

gardener, Juma. He provided Badar the special clothes required to attend the Juma Prayers on Friday. But Badar must leave Dar es Salaam. As ill fate would have it, he is falsely accused of theft. Hence, there is this one of the many possible explanations why the title of the novel is *Theft*.

All Gurnah's novels have a mystery element, somewhat similar to detective novels, which is only unfolded somewhere in a later part of his novels. Badar has mystery about his birth which is unfolded in the Dar es Salaam chapters. His untraceable father last heard about in Mombasa, had been a worker in Uncle Othman's farm. He had taken advantage of Othman's loneliness and illness after his wife's death, robbed money from his farmhouse and bolted. Uncle Othman has bitter memories of Ismail, Badar's father, and had no intention of accommodating the son of a thief, one reason he had refused to accept the orphaned child thirteen years back when Rashidi had brought Badar to him. Instead, he provided some money for his sustenance. But Uncle Othman has been all along nursing a prejudice against Badar, so that when the family accounts with the grocer are found to be fudged, he accuses Badar of stealing and wants him to be thrown out of the house. The accusations are false, the fudging having done by the grocer himself, and Haji and Raya see through the grocer's deceit. In the aftermath, Karim, who is already a young officer in the development department and married to Fauzia, takes him to Zanzibar where he is given the job of a reception assistant in a hotel. "Once again Badar found that the direction of his life had changed without any effort on his part" (Gurnah, 2025, p. 148).

Adulthood:

Badar is the chief protagonist in the novel. His character comes closest to identifying with the nation. Not only the Black Bantu community, but also the under privileged Arabs were victims of atrocities of their master class for at least three hundred years if not more of the nation's history. The rich Arab landowning and business community under the patronage of the Sultan of Oman had reduced the underprivileged to slavery. The blacks faced racial discrimination while the Arabs from the poorer section, economic. Things did not change much in reality despite the coming of the British who abolished slavery in 1897 but did nothing to remove the glaring social inequality between marginalized blacks and poor Arabs, and their privileged Arab masters. In fact, the genocide during the Revolution of January 1964 was a result of this racial abuse of Blacks by the rich Arabs who continued to enjoy privileges under the British Colonial rule. During the genocidal revolution even, poor Arabs were not spared, nor the leftist, anti-colonial intellectuals like Ahmed Musa Ibrahim in *Gravel Heart* (2017).

Although denied formal education at an early age, and without any of the privileges enjoyed by Karim and Fauzia, Badar had educated himself in the school of life. He is sensitive, intelligent, always alert to the world around him, and self-schooled. Karim finds him one day reading from an English newspaper to the gardener Juma, explaining to him the contents of the newspaper. A fast learner, he adapts himself to the ways of the world, i.e. the ways of the city without being sucked in, unlike Karim, by the city life downside. In his new job at the Tamarind Hotel, he is a fast learner from day one in the novel *Theft* –

> That afternoon he had his first lesson in logging on and accessing the hotel inbox. Issa, the Assistant manager, explained that was how guests made reservations, so it was important to keep a regular check on the inbox. He showed him how to open the window website page. (Gurnah, 2025, p. 160)

It is symbolic that Fauzia's daughter, given to violent tantrums, a reason why Karim deserts Fauzia, is calmed invariably in the presence of Badar. It is logically convincing therefore that at the end of the novel Fauzia takes the hand of Badar, both offering to themselves

the promise of a better life. Zanzibar, the new nation would be better off with empowered women and rehabilitated slaves in whose hands seems to lie, and Gurnah seems to suggest, the future well-being of the nation. They do not seek better pastures as the generation of 60s and 70s. It is also significant that for all the ills of neo-liberalism, a servant boy, orphaned at an early age, can find a respectable footing in the new order. Badar's ethical position is seen as an enduring quality for a nation still grappling with corruption under economic neo-liberalism. In *Theft*, when a guilt-ridden Karim lambasts Badar for no reason, reminding him of what he had done for the servant boy, saying, "What have you learned in your life, you useless wanker?" (Gurnah, 2025, p. 240), Badar thought to himself, "I have learned to endure" (Gurnah, 2025, p. 240). That is the lesson he has learnt from the sufferings of his life. Badar's story is a confirmation of the argument made by Marianne Hirsch that maturity, identity-formation, social integration in novels of growth comes through suffering.

Fauzia's story: Childhood:

The patriarchal Arab community in Zanzibar had over centuries treated women as chattels. In *Paradise* (1994), Khalil tells Yusuf pointing to the houses of rich Omani merchants, "they only marry their daughters to their brother's son" (Gurnah, 1994, p. 42). Signs of breaking free from this male domination are found in *Gravel Heart* where Saida is a member of the Youth League, attending party meetings during the days preceding the Independence. She also works at the Water department as a clerk. But the Revolution destroys her dignity, reduces her to being the mistress of a powerful politician. Gurnah presents Fauzia as a new woman in a more permissive society, who while taking into her stride her vulnerabilities, is quietly determined to empower herself with education and financial stability. Her childhood illness epilepsy, described in the text as "falling sickness", gives her a low self-esteem. The fear that she might pass the illness to her child plagues her. But that cannot stop her from upward mobility through education.

Fauzia, unlike Badar who is an orphan, and Karim, who has hardly any memory of his father, is born in a happy home. But at three she has her first fit of "falling sickness". The recurrence of the illness affects her mother who becomes a victim of constant anxiety. Even the best doctors could not guarantee a complete cure. But although the anxiety remains, fortunately for Fauzia the sickness does not come back after her sixth year to spoil her education. In *Theft* (2025), Gurnah notes - "She had not had an episode since she was six years old, the week before she started school but a decade later her mother still worried. She tensed if Fauzia suddenly caught her breath or if she sighed unexpectedly, as sometimes happened to anybody" (p. 45). At school, she stands out as a brilliant student who can understand the class lectures with easy confidence. She could easily calculate the gradient using x and y coordinates and represent it with a diagram. Mathematics could not torment as it did to her friend Hawa.

Adolescence:

Her horizon widens at the secondary school. The disciplines are difficult, but she takes them as a challenge. She is fascinated by history. She devoured every book or idea that came her way and wasn't deterred by lengthy or confusing concepts. When she encountered difficult material, she persisted with an adventurous spirit, working through it until she finally grasped it with relieved satisfaction. In class, teachers regularly asked her to interpret poems or solve algebraic problems. She became more confident because of what she learned and her academic achievements. By the time she was leaving school she had decided on her career. She had a clear idea of what she wanted to be – a teacher. Hawa advised her to become a doctor. Her teachers wanted her to be more ambitious in her choice. But Fauzia was adamant and her father was supportive of her 'noble profession'. The new routines, new friends and teachers excited her at the teacher training college. It gave her confidence, social ease, and popularity among friends. When she was 19, she was posted in a town school for her internship. She caught the notice of Karim even as she sensed inside herself a desire to meet him.

Love, Courtship, and Marriage:

It was during her college days that Fauzia got attracted by Karim's look of self-assurance. A fresh graduate from college, Karim at 23 was new to his job at the Works department. Although they passed each other on the streets, and exchanged glances, they met for the first time at a musical concert, both expressing their liking for each other. And when their love became a talk among their family friends, their marriage was decided upon. Unaware of her love for Karim, Fauzia's father wanted to be sure whether Fauzia was agreeable to the marriage. He did not want to force a marriage on her. Society has come a long way from the time when Raya was forced to marry against her wishes. Even more rebellious was Fauzia's decision to refuse a dowry, to break the ancient tradition. In *Theft* (2025), Gurnah underscores this new reality- "To her mother's dismay and her father's skepticism, Fauzia refused to allow a dowry to be set. She was not being purchased, she said, but agreeing freely to a marriage" (p. 120).

The birth of a daughter Nasra brought new challenges for Fauzia. This was not the intellectual challenge of school and college life, but an emotional challenge. Nasra's screaming became unbearable, and Fauzia had the fear of passing her 'falling sickness' on the baby. Worse, an unsympathetic Karim, absorbed in career ambitions, started getting desperate and annoyed by the screams. This was the first hint of a strain in their relationship, later fractured with the appearance of Geraldine, who had come from the UK, on behalf of the EU to digitize government records, who seduces Karim into a casual relationship. Fauzia decides to leave Karim when on one particular evening Karim, in a fit of rage, picked up the baby by the neck and lifted her in the air.

Fauzia did fear that love had ultimately deserted from her life. But with the passing months she got back her usual composure. She could appreciate the feeling Badar had for her all along which he did not show out of respect for her conjugal life. It was also something of a near miracle that Nasra had invariably stopped screaming whenever Badar caressed her affectionately. It takes Hawa, her comrade of school days, still unfailing in her love for her friend, to bring Badar and Fauzia together by the sea. In the novel *Theft* (2025), Gurnah draws the attention of the readers to a happy ending-

> She was playing with Nasra on the water's edge while Fauzia and Badar strolled along the beach. Then without saying a word, she took his hand, and they walked like that all the way to copse of tidal palms that fringed the sea. They stopped there and embraced and then walked back towards Hawa and Nasra. (p. 246)

Fauzia is a new woman, who unlike her comrade, Hawa, refuses to respond to the glitz of Western culture, and yet responds to western education that allows her to find an identity – a teacher which has been her ambition all along, not a doctor as suggested by her mother, and by Hawa. Her "falling sickness," is a metaphor for a nation emerging from the slough of decolonization but negotiating the threat of neo-colonialism. She shows a quiet courage in leaving her trauma of illness behind and deciding to have a child. She faces the pitfalls with stoicism as must the nation. In taking the hand of Badar she once again asserts her individual identity as she had done earlier in choosing teaching as a career and in having her child.

Karim's story: Childhood:

Karim's story runs parallel to that of Badar and Fauzia. It is in fact the other way round, at least at the beginning of the novel. As with Badar and Fauzia, so with Karim, his 'bildungsroman' is structured in the traditional manner – childhood, adolescence and maturity. Like Badar, his childhood is marred by the absence of his father whom his mother Raya had divorced when the

boy was still a child. He grows up in the town of Zanzibar with his grandparents because his mother soon starts living separately in another locality of the town after leaving her husband. And when Karim is still in school, she marries a pharmacy shop owner from Dar es Salaam, Haji Othman, and leaves Zanzibar for the big city. But unlike the orphaned village boy Badar, who is treated as a servant in a house, where he is adopted out of pity and ill-treated, Karim gets a proper education in a good school in the town, and he is smart and intelligent to the boot.

Adolescence:

As he grows up, he is taken care of in his adolescence by his half- brother Ali and his wife, Jalila, who are more than supportive towards him, and takes pride in his academic success. Later, when he wins a government scholarship and goes to Dar es Salaam, his mother, Raya, to make up for her guilt, invites him to stay with her and her husband. Her husband Haji Othman is equally welcoming to this bright boy. It must be noted that in a changing society, embracing modern values, the younger generation, men and women like Ali, Jalila, Haji Othman, Karim, are more supportive and sympathetic towards the deprived than older people like Uncle Othman. Karim divides his time between his campus accommodation and staying with his mother in a way so that his study does not get hampered. His academic success ensures him a job in government office immediately after graduation.

Adulthood:

An absent father and a supportive brother shape his character so that he develops an immediate liking and sympathy for Badar who too, Karim finds, has a mystery about his parentage. When Badar is wrongly accused and forced to live in Dar es Salaam, it is Karim who takes him to Zanzibar and uses his good offices to provide a job to Badar at the Tamarind Hotel. However, Karim's 'bildungsroman' is a fractured one. For Gurnah, Karim represents the pitfalls of the growing nation. Neo-liberalism has brought a lot of foreign investment to Zanzibar - from the UK, the USA and other capitalist countries. It has opened up the economy, brought employment opportunities through tourism mostly from the West. Karim himself is entrusted by the government to lead a team which would oversee the development projects in Zanzibar/Tanzania. For that he must take a training at Copenhagen. But caught in the vortex of development and personal ambition, Karim loses his moral balance and enters into a casual relationship with a white woman, Geraldine. Karim's fall from a man of integrity symbolizes the dangers of a nation, itself caught in the vortex of neo-colonialism which it cannot wish away either. He becomes a complex character typifying the complexity and challenges that characterizes nationhood. The words Khadija, Fauzia's mother says, sum up these dangers of a young nation succinctly in Gurnah's *Theft* (2025) – "What do these people want with us? Why do they come here? They come here with their filth and their money and interfere with us and ruin our lives for their pleasure. …They should stay in their own country and do their goodwill there" (p. 230). Fauzia's reply underscores the dilemma of the young nation; "Anyway a lot of people make a living out of tourists Fauzia said. It seems ungrateful to compel complain" (Gurnah, 2025, p. 230).

Khadija's lament is a harking back to pre-colonial era; but the clock cannot be turned back. Badar and Fauzia's moral stand serves as a challenge to the threat from an alien culture. For Gurnah, faith in life, endurance, ethics and morality are the bedrock of the new nation. Since the 1990s, Tanzania, once Zanzibar, has been taking a pro-western stance. Amrit Wilson observes how Tanzania was becoming the "darling" of western donors. She quotes US charge de affairs Michael Owen that during the era of neo-liberalism Scandinavia brought the biggest development assistance projects in Tanzania, followed by the UK, Netherlands, Germany and Japan, and that Canada was to follow suit.

Gurnah's *Theft* charts this economic and social change in his homeland of Zanzibar.

There are references to cafes, star hotels, tourists, beach resorts, old buildings, deserted by rich Arabs and Indians, turned into heritage hotels and restaurants. Maria Caffrey, Geraldine Bruno, Tina Derrick, Edna, all come to promote and oversee projects regarding development in health, in education, and other infrastructure investment. Some are also tourists. Interestingly, none of these white women are presented in positive light. Mary has a superiority complex and looks down on the local population; because of Edna a false charge of stealing is brought against Karim. Geraldine is a seducer. There is reference to another tourist woman at Tamarind Hotel trying to entice Badar into casual sex, and disappointed in her attempt, later gives a bad rating to the hotel under a different name.

Development, a sine qua non for a fledging nation coming out of the slough of colonialism, slavery, and genocide, has thus its dangers and pitfalls. It is ethically charged. Karim's fractured 'bildungsroman' is a metaphor for those inherent dangers. For Hirsch a 'bildungsroman' is a critique of the self and the society. Karim fits into the frame. His idea of a nation, his nation, is different from Badar's. He tells Badar, "I have learned to take my life in my own hands, to look to the future without fear" (Gurnah, 2025, p. 240). Badar has learned to 'endure'. Marianne Hirsch in her scholarly article, "From Great Expectations to Lost Illusions: The Novel of Formation as Genre" (1987), argues that maturity does not come without some suffering. Suffering gives clear understanding of life in relation to the community where the protagonist grows. Both Fauzia and Badar suffer in the story in a way Karim does not.
In his book *The Way of the World* (1987), Merotti (1987) writes –

> it is not sufficient for modern bourgeois society simply to subdue the drives that oppose the standards of 'normality.' It is also necessary that, as a 'free individual,' not as a fearful subject, but as a convinced citizen, one perceives the social norms as one's own. One must internalize them and fuse external compulsion and internal impulses into a new unity until the former is no longer distinguishable from the latter. This fusion is what we usually call 'consent' or 'legitimation.' If the 'bildungsroman' appears to us still today as an essential, pivotal point of our history, this is because it has succeeded in representing this fusion with a force of conviction and optimistic clarity that will never be equalled again. (p. 16)

Conclusion:

A classic example of 'bildungsroman,' *Theft* does offer a definite closure through the story of Fauzia and Badar. While accepting and accommodating economic liberalism and western culture as necessary evil and a threat to indigenous culture, the text underscores that abiding universal values like faith in life, patience, community-feeling, love and affection, and endurance remain panacea for the ills of society. The anxiety that Karim would emerge as a future Minister of the State suggests an unending battle, but the battle has to be fought and on one's own terms, on one's own soil.

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Bio-note

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