Chapter 4

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4.1 Understanding Solidarity:

In the selected novels by Toni Morrison, Amy Tan and Abdulrazak Gurnah, one can trace the trajectory from subalternity to agency through different standpoints, a major among them being solidarity. The oppression felt by the colonized, natives, lower classes, women and diasporic characters in the selected novels affects them as a community. In fighting off oppression, then, they form social collectives that strengthen them and become guiding principles in their struggles towards agency. In the present chapter, insights provided by Rene Descartes, Marx and feminist theorists including Chandra Talpade Mohanty and bell hooks, will throw light on the workings of solidarity in the lives of various subaltern characters in the selected novels of Morrison, Tan and Gurnah. The major concerns dealt with are: what the different forms of social bonding and solidarity are that develop in traditional and modern societies, how the individual relates herself to different forms of community, what role do norms and culture play in the development of the subject, and how economy and colonization affect solidarity. In the background of these philosophical queries, the general question that is, the role of solidarity in subaltern struggles and in the trials of individual subjects towards agency will be studied. Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández in his essay “Decolonization and the Pedagogy of Solidarity” asks vital questions about solidarity: “Does solidarity require while also challenging, inherited political and social categories? Does solidarity require similarity, shared interests or a common destiny, or can it work in a context committed to an incommensurable interdependency? Does solidarity imply a hierarchical relationship between those in solidarity or against those that are the target of solidarity activity?” (49). This chapter seeks to analyze the texts from the standpoint of how solidarity is important in struggles towards agency and such questions can enrich the study.

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines solidarity as, “support by one person or group of people for another because they share feelings, opinions, aims,
etc.” (460). The word has etymological roots in French “solidarité” (1841) which means “a communion of interests and responsibilities, a mutual responsibility” (Harper). The word solidarity also has historical significance, and was the name of a political party in Poland that was formed in 1980 by Lech Walesa. Solidarity was an anti-bureaucratic movement that demanded civil rights for the working force in Poland through its resistance to the then government. Initially, the movement was repressed by the ruling party, but it succeeded in its efforts when it made the government acquiesce to partially free elections in 1989, which they won. Over time, the Solidarity party deteriorated and lost the initial public fervour that they had generated. Such movements as these, rely on social unity and organization.

Kurt Bayertz in the “Introduction” to his book *Solidarity* (1999) contends that solidarity refers to a mutual relation between individuals that flourished on two factors, namely the “common ground” and their “mutual obligations to aid each other” (2). Groups usually function on the precept of a common identity and mutually tied interests. Solidarity, as a concept, however, is multivalent as it has several different strands to it. It is something that is informed by aspects of economy and culture.

In discussions of decolonization and agency through forming social bonds and making social collectives, Marx’s conceptualizations of solidarity are seminal. They can be re-appropriated to understand other forms of resistance like struggles for the rights of women, homosexuals and students, among others. Marx called for the workers to unite against the bourgeoisie and thereby laid the foundation for a theory of class struggle. He attempted to draw workers within the vortex of the revolution and to unify them not just because he wanted them to attain a collective goal that was of merely national or communal relevance, but because each one of them would benefit individually from it. In a letter to his comrade Sigfrid Meyer he writes: “Emancipation of Ireland is not a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment but the first condition of their (the proletariat’s) own social emancipation” (Marx, “Selected Correspondence” 223). Thus, according to Marx solidarity meant a coming together that is fostered by the stakes the individual held in the outcomes of class struggle. It means that the liberation of the individual is closely linked with that of community. In group formations individuals feel it worthwhile to subdue their
individual selves, to enter into a larger union for ends that are of collective importance since these also go on to empower them.

Capitalism, according to Marx, shattered certain ways of social bonding butengendered a new form of unity among the proletariat. Struggles against capitalism are possible only after the workers unite. The unity among classes, however, is not just of seminal importance to class struggle but is also an outgrowth and happy consequence of it:

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruits of their battles lie not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and place workers of different localities in contact with each other. It was just this contact that was needed to centralize the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. (Marx and Engels, “Communist Manifesto” 19)

Marx referred to brotherhood and fraternal feelings in several of his writings. Most critics believe that his communism seeks to unify all individual interests into class interests minimizing internal conflicts and therefore also individual concerns. Marx considered struggles against oppression as a crucial factor in building a thriving struggle for emancipation of the lower classes. He realized that all social struggles call for a unification of interests under one umbrella, even though they may be culturally varied. Marx in a lecture delivered at the General Council of the International Working Men’s Association (the First International) in 1866 contended:

Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its complete emancipation. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction... They must convince the world at large [French and German texts read: "convince the broad masses of workers"] that their efforts, far from being narrow -- and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions.” (Marx and Engels, Selected Works 158)
Struggle against oppression was considered by Marx as a form of class struggle. This does not mean that every form of oppression is ultimately based on economics, but that this incorporation broadens the very meaning of struggle of the classes. He called for a union of not only workers but of humans at large who suffered other forms of oppression as well.

The concept of solidarity has been variously interpreted by several philosophers and sociologists. The most important work on social solidarity is that of Émile Durkheim. He elaborated this idea primarily in his book, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893). Durkheim differs from Marx in a vital way. Marx is a theorist who talks about conflict and revolution. His focus is on the factors that lead to the disruption of society. Durkheim is a theorist, who unlike Marx, focusses on the modes of social cohesion.

Durkheim’s importance in studies dealing with oppression arises from the fact that his theories focus on the stability, rather than disruption of the world. He formulates his theory around what binds the world together. Being cognizant of the oppression and the binaric divisions that separate the world that we inhabit and experience as jarring, Durkheim gives us a framework about social unity, integration, social regulation and all the cultural forms that bind society together.

According to Durkheim, society is not integrated by common aims, since aims are only rationally binding. Rather, society is held together by social norms, values and rituals which he calls collective consciousness. Solidarity, he contends, is formed from morality, which he defines as, “everything that forces man to take account of other people, to regulate his action by something other than the prompting of his own egoism” (331). Solidarity, therefore, is natural and long lasting, and not a fleeting social contract. Durkheim distinguished between mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity develops between people based on their similarity and homogeneity. This is the solidarity that emerges in traditional societies. In societies where mechanical solidarity develops, people share a common consciousness. Durkheim says that a common consciousness “envelops our total consciousness, coinciding with it at every point. At that moment our individuality is zero. In such a society, the individual does not belong to himself – he is literally a thing belonging to society” (84). The concept of mechanical solidarity if understood through Marx would
correspond to a pre-capitalist society. Durkheim also defined another form of solidarity which he termed organic solidarity. He says that organic solidarity:

…is possible only if each one has a sphere of action which is peculiar to him; that is, a personality... Society becomes more capable of collective movement, at the same time that each of its elements has more freedom of movement. The solidarity resembles that which we observe among the higher animals. Each organ, in effect, has its special physiognomy, its autonomy. And moreover, the unity of the organism is as great as the individuation of the parts is more marked. Because of this analogy, we propose to call the solidarity which is due to the division of labour, organic. (131)

Thus, in modern societies solidarity arises not out of similarity and equivalence but through interdependence. Here mechanical solidarity is replaced by organic solidarity to fill in the moral vacuum formed due to the disappearance of traditional ties. In his book, *Solidarity in Europe: The History of an Idea*, Steinar Stjerno defines organic solidarity as, “the factual interdependence in modern society where occupational differences create complex interdependence between the activities of different producers” (34).

Another important concept that was put forward by Durkheim is that of anomie. Anomie in general parlance means normlessness. In the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity there is a fissuring of the individual’s belief system. A rift is created in her world view and in her relations with society and culture. In modern societies, where social ties based on shared culture have been weakened or replaced by ties of co-dependence, organic solidarity can become precarious. This results in abnormal forms of division of labour, pathological society, and anomie. Durkheim observes: “…if the division of labour does not produce solidarity in all these cases, it is because the relations of the organs are not regulated, because they are in a state of anomy” (368). Anomie is a condition arising out of individualism that causes the subject to have little regard for social norms and regulations, including those laid down by law. The strain of individualism in these societies is so strong that morality gets subverted. At the same time arises a dire need of mores that dictate what is right and wrong to maintain order in society. The individual lacks both reference points to acceptable behaviour and an overt seer, a greater outside figure who or which can judge his actions. Anomie, in a society where division of labour exists, is
the result of improper regulation among the various organs of society. Another form of pathology is one that results from over regulation. While in the former one feels one can do anything and does not know what to do with oneself; in the latter one feels one cannot do anything. In the second scenario which is also called fatalism one has a vision of what one can do but in the first one there is a nothingness and therefore endless possibility. The questions that arise then are how such societies can become normal again and what form of solidarity has to evolve from pathological societies. An answer to the latter question is that solidarity and building of identities has come about based on common professional organizations. Individuals have found a way to belong through professional aggregation.

The very mechanisms of capitalism tend to make individuals self sufficient. Allen Myers writes about the relation between capitalism and individualism:

Individualism as an ideology arose with the beginnings of capitalism. The idea that each of us is unique and should be free to do as we like (as long as we don’t injure another individual) corresponded to a society of market relations, in which people are connected with one another only through buying and selling. In the market, everyone is free to make their own decision about what to buy and sell, without any outside input.” (1)

As it advances, capitalism becomes increasingly shock absorbing. The stronger capitalism becomes, the more is the number and variety of substances it produces and at the same time necessitates their purchase and use. Substances replace interpersonal relationships and solidarity takes a back seat. The subject becomes autonomous and self-sufficient in a world where all needs are fulfilled by an invisible capitalist force. Capitalism pushes the other to the background with its focus on the individualistic self.

However, even in individualistic societies the need for cohesion is always there. Solidarity in capitalism becomes a safety valve to let out the pressure that being alone creates. Solidarity comes to exist superficially in clubs and unions. On the other hand, solidarity being a raw human need becomes a loop-hole in the capitalist agenda. About the role of solidarity in resistance against capitalism, Myers says:
Successful resistance necessarily rejects in practice the priority of the isolated individual. It unites the greatest possible numbers on the basis of their common exploitation or oppression and their common determination to end it. Within such resistance, different ideologies are merely different ideas about how best to make our collective effort successful. Restricting their expression would only mean restricting our ability to resist… Paradoxically perhaps, collective resistance can also be a path for the free development of each individual. This is what capitalist individualism promises but fails to deliver. (1)

In globalized societies, the difference among individuals is lessening as the developing nations absorb the cultural values of the West. Nevertheless the world remains divided and fissured on the basis of class, caste, race, gender, culture etc. In such a scenario, one wonders if global solidarity is possible. In the wake of all the disturbances operative in the world this question of solidarity becomes all the more important. Marcin Lisak in his essay, “Global Solidarity Mission Impossible in Sociological Perspective” contends that the idea of global solidarity:

…is based on non-denominational ethics. Global solidarity, if it is achievable at all, presupposes human fellowship. Many scholars have argued that on the basis of some essential values like mutual respect…1) every human being must be treated humanely, 2) What you wish done to yourself, do to others, or rather: Do good to others as you would like good to be done to you. Both ethical principles are founded upon golden rules of humanity within various religions.” (ed. Owczarski and Cremasco 21)

Thus, in Lisak’s view, solidarity can include a coming together of not only particular communities but the whole of humanity can be unified by their common fate.

Groups are made on the basis of solidarity by excluding certain subjects and otherizing them to focus on their own subjective needs. Solidarity and membership of groups affects individual identity in that through the fulfilment of the needs of the group the individual’s needs are also fulfilled. As Tajed Pirc states, “Identity certainly cannot be self sown. Identity is always, in every contextual frame, established on the
basis of difference in binary oppositions within different contexts” (ed. Owczarski and Cremasco 53). In this sense solidarity is needed in the formation of subjectivity.

Identity is formed through membership of particular groups. In the globalized world where there are not just intra-group associations, but also inter-group associations, it becomes highly necessary to understand how several interlinked groups are grappling with questions of identity. Such a call was given by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in some of her feminist writings. In her essay “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles,” she calls for a feminism that takes into account the differences between women’s situation across the globe. She writes in this regard:

In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders.” (505)

Knowledge of the particularities and peculiarities of their varying situations can help build stronger ties and solidarity among women across the globe. Rather than building a feminism that is universal, Mohanty contends that feminists should unite by considering cultural borders. No doubt, these borders are separative but they are parchments that allow infiltration and osmosis (523). Also, Mohanty observes that globalization is “an urgent site for the recolonization of peoples.” There is a need for an “anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and contextualized feminist project” (515). Resistance must be seen as an all-encompassing project that works by inclusion of localized forms of dissent across the globe and understanding that all resisting communities have a distinct place in this project. The communal instances of dissent need to be given a clear place in the larger emancipatory projects. Mohanty writes: “Rather than formulating activism and agency in terms of discrete and disconnected cultures and nations, it allows us to frame agency and resistance across borders of nation and culture” (523).
bell hooks takes another course to the idea of solidarity. bell hooks is an African American feminist, author and political activist. She writes about the interconnections among capitalism, race and gender and how oppression operates through these standpoints. She also relates gender to culture. Whereas Mohanty stresses on the importance of solidarity among feminist intellectuals against a capitalist backdrop, hooks focuses on a more grassroots solidarity among women from all walks of life and cultures. She urges women to shed ways of behaving that patriarchal discourses condition them in. She says in this regard:

We are taught that women are ‘natural’ enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning and value of Sisterhood.” (43)

hooks further stresses on the need to develop a solidarity that is based on shared strengths. She encourages a bonding that is based on positive strengths. hooks writes in this regard: “It would be psychologically demoralizing for the women to bond with other women on the basis of shared victimization. They bond with other women on the basis of shared strengths and resources. This is the woman bonding feminist movement should encourage. It is this type of bonding that is the essence of Sisterhood” (45). She speaks of the need to form bonds among women from different cultures by developing “strategies to overcome fears, prejudices, resentment, competitiveness etc” (63). There are, however, roadblocks in the route towards solidarity. These include cultural and economic differences. hooks states: “One factor that makes interaction between multi-ethnic groups of women difficult and sometimes impossible is our failure to recognize that a behavior pattern in one culture... may have different signification cross-culturally” (56).

Solidarity among different communities is in a sense, always present in that humans are dependent on each other for their survival and their social organization is necessary for agency. Solidarity that is politically generated is mostly impermanent in that it exists only temporarily till the goals for which the group came together are met. Often, solidarity based on politics changes also breaks up. This very instability which
is a part of its structure, causes solidarity to grow and open up possibilities to change into other structures.

Hence, it is clear from the discussion about solidarity that it can be understood in diverse ways. However, one thing is common to all the ways in which it has been understood. Solidarity is an important pre-requisite for group identity which helps individual group members to attain agency. Now is the time to see how various characters in Morrison, Tan and Gurnah’s novels negotiate agency through solidarity.

4.2 Oppression, Trauma and Bonds of Solidarity in Morrison’s *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

Solidarity and camaraderie are ambivalently related to freedom in Morrison’s *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Morrison refrains from taking a one sided and simplified view of freedom and solidarity. The reader comes to understand through her novels that solidarity necessarily calls for the individual freedom to take a back seat for a collective cause. In this sense, racial unity occurs at the expense of individual freedom. Solidarity, however, sometimes becomes an impossible end to achieve because of the trauma experienced by the slaves. It not only fissures their psyches but also their ability to form inter-personal relationships. Mina Karavanta’s critique of *A Mercy* can put this into some perspective. She observes: “*A Mercy* demonstrates Morrison’s sustained preoccupation with the history and stories of communities formed counter to the dominant imaginary and the discourses of community. She questions the exceptional politics of the national community that operates at the expense of the marginalized” (725). Communities do not exist in vacuum but their difference from other communities is tantamount to defining them. The dominating community makes its own culture central and tries to reconfigure or abolish the stories of the oppressed. Thus a recording of these stories becomes all the more important. For maintaining such records, stories must be passed on through communal interaction and it necessarily requires solidarity and bonding.

Denial of some kind of solidarity may be symptomatic of madness. In societies where people have control over how they bond and who they bond with, psychological distress is less as compared to societies where people have only partial control over their interpersonal bonding and relations. In African-American slave societies, for example, the basic solidarity between family members was disrupted. In
Beloved. Baby Suggs says to Sethe: “I had eight. Everyone of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased… My first-born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that’s all I remember” (Morrison, Beloved 6). The institution of family becomes subservient to the economics and politics of slavery. In the face of such disruptions, love and emotional bonding become a liability.

When Paul D and Sethe speak of Sweet Home, we find they belong together. A sense of belongingness to another human is the beginning of solidarity. This form of belonging develops by sharing time and space. The slaves have shared memories of the farm which connect them even when they are scattered far and wide, like Sethe and the other Sweet Home slaves are. This belonging is like a life force in the midst of oppression. When Garner dies and School Teacher takes over the farm, he traumatizes the slaves who in turn resolve to flee from the farm. This collective resolution is not just a way of escaping oppression but is, at another level, an expression of collective action and solidarity.

The name “Sweet Home” makes one believe that the place is really a sweet home — with all the positive emotions which the word “home” connotes — for the slaves who live there; they do feel as if they belong there. However, this bonding is only ephemeral because the slaves have no permanent place as their home. The slaves in Sweet Home belong to it and are unified to each other. Nevertheless, this unity is short lived. In the space of slavery, bonding was not stable because men and women were not established in any single place. Thus, the comfort of Sweet Home too is ephemeral. What happens to the slaves when School Teacher arrives can be predicted fairly easily. It seems as if he has always been on his way to Sweet Home. Their unity initially ruptures and each one is on his/her own. School Teacher makes it a point to segregate them on the farm. African slaves were always segregated by being sold off without any consideration for the ties that they had amongst them. They were moved around like checkers. Morrison expresses in Beloved:

It made sense for a lot of reasons because in all of Baby’s life, as well as Sethe’s own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone love, who hadn’t run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up… What she called the
nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. (Morrison, Beloved 28)

Several characters in Beloved feel threatened by entering into relationships. This is perhaps most strongly articulated through Paul D’s perpetual movement. He has become rootless and displaced. He is a perpetual traveller who runs away from forming relations. He cannot stay with a woman for more than a couple of months and, in that, is completely incapable of long term commitments to people or places: “he didn’t believe he could live with a woman- any woman-for over two out of three months. That was about as long as he could abide one place” (Morrison, Beloved 39).

Sethe too shuns any form of unity with community when she disregards all bonding with her neighbourhood. Also, she befriends Beloved and becomes a slave to her whims. Denver understands the relation between them: “Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it… Yet she knew Sethe’s greatest fear was the same one Denver had in the beginning—that Beloved might leave” (Morrison, Beloved 295). Sethe’s trial then is to gain freedom by disassociating herself from the binding ties to Beloved, or metaphorically, from her memory and guilt and also establishing healthy bonds with community. Sethe and Beloved’s relation is expressed by Andrea O’Reilly as:

Most critics read this relationship as highly problematic if not pathological. According to psychoanalytic interpretation, Sethe and Beloved are trapped in the pre-Oedipal mother-daughter symbiosis where differentiation between self and other is not possible: Sethe overidentifies with her daughter and does not allow her psychic individuation. (85)

She is haunted by Beloved and controlled by her. Theirs is a one-sided relation and Sethe in it, is a reactant and not a responder. Sethe’s relation with Beloved is that of guilt and dependency and is not an authentic bond. To develop as an agent Sethe must accept her past.

There is an event in Beloved where shadows of Sethe, Denver and Beloved are holding hands. It is metaphoric of the developing unity among them as women, but it is also indicative of something mysterious and ominous lingering in the shadows. A shadow can be considered an extension of the body. Shadows are created by light and
also distortions of the shape of the body. They reveal to us both more and less than the body does. They are bland and dull but move like the body. This image of the three holding hands is shrouded in mystery. It is a symbol of women’s solidarity, a metaphoric coming together of the mother and the daughters. But it is also a coming together that is inauthentic and imaginary. The bond between Sethe and Beloved can only become authentic if Sethe accepts her act of murder and integrates it within her sense of self. It is a fulfilment that can only be temporary, because as we already know Sethe has committed the ultimate breach of this relation through infanticide. Sethe reads into it Beloved’s return, which is itself mysterious.

When Sethe and Denver come together against all odds that the haunted house throws for them, what Morrison calls the “outrageous behavior of that place,” (Morrison, Beloved 4) they have entered into solidarity. Their joining hands, is not only a simple act of resistance against the unwanted intruder, but also a united effort to come to terms with their history: “They waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of that place… Sethe and Denver decided to end the persecution… So they held hands and said, ‘Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on’” (Morrison, Beloved 4). For Sethe, fighting off the ghosts of slavery, and the ghost of her own daughter’s massacre needs helping hands. When Denver goes to ask for help for her mother from the neighbourhood, Janey Wagon — a neighbour — thinks, “This Sethe had lost her wits, finally, as Janey knew she would — trying to do it all alone with her nose in the air” (Morrison, Beloved 299). As the novel progresses, we come to understand that Beloved’s murder is inassimilable into Sethe’s memory. It can only be accepted through Sethe’s acceptance by and assimilation into society. Mary Jane Suero Elliott’s observations in this regard throw light on this. She writes, “Attempts at self liberation fail when they are not founded on mutual trust between individuals or support from community. Furthermore, decolonization is not only an individual process within a communal context but also a collective occurrence” (2). When the women of the neighbourhood come together, Beloved is exorcised from their home, but we still never know if it is possible to extricate her from their memory and history. Solidarity can help them at a basic level, but the marks that trauma leaves on their psyches are indelible. Their lives can only be, to a limited extent structured by solidarity.
Ordinarily speaking, the neighbourhood in *Beloved* is a space where mechanical solidarity thrives. There are norms and traditions which tie people together. Sethe’s act of infanticide falls within the circle of what is unacceptable in accordance with these social norms. Nevertheless, it is a form of social grouping which is complex and cannot be considered in its entirety from this limited perspective. It is a grouping of people who have experienced both trauma and lack of control over their lives. This coming together to cohabit is their attempt to sort out the rejection because of the xenophobic attitudes of the colonizers and thereby to live fulfilling lives. This solidarity originates from the understanding of the lack of control they have experienced in their past. They can understand that others like them have also been both victims and fighters.

Colonization engenders bonding and solidarity for resistance but also in many ways, inhibits it. Bonding has an emotional element; trauma dulls emotions and so it also dulls bonding. Baby Suggs’ emotional instability occurs ironically out of the lack of bonding. She tries to make up for this lack of bonding experienced by her in the past by associating with her community and becoming their mentor: “Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing… She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more… She only told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine” (Morrison, *Beloved* 102). She passes on several lessons of unity, love, self confidence and most importantly self love to the community. Self love is accordingly the path to true social relationships. The love of the other is possible only when one has truly accepted oneself as a human and loves oneself. Baby Suggs articulates her negritude and strengthens bonds of solidarity through it. She knows when people accept and love themselves they will be able to form bonds of solidarity within society.

In this sense, Sethe’s fissured sense of self that cannot assimilate certain incidents of her past affects how she relates to community. She cannot accept the community because she cannot accept her past. On another level, the neighbours are unacceptable because they commit a breach of trust when they do not inform Sethe about School Teacher’s arrival that leads to Beloved’s murder. The cause of this breach is envy and comparison of the self with other group members, which ultimately leads to the break of solidarity between Sethe and the community. Baby
Suggs becomes the envied giver after she throws a party, generating antagonistic feelings within the community: “124, rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when?” (Morrison, Beloved 161). Thus, solidarity changes to envy and then revenge when people get affected by a show of excess. Mary Jane Suero Elliott observes, “Morrison, however, does not portray a simplistic image of communal perfection. She writes instead about the warped codes of morality that eventually cause a collective desertion of Sethe when she most needs support” (4). What the colonized must understand is that their emancipation can only come about if they engage in strong communal ties and accept their differences.

Belonging, which can engender freedom, can also be discarded in dire situations where freedom is urgently needed. Baby Suggs and her partner have a pact that they would keep freedom above being together. The throes of slavery, that they have both faced, are the reason behind their making such a pact. Togetherness, therefore, for them is not an end but a means to an end, “The two of them made a pact: whichever one got a chance to run would take it; together if possible, alone if not, and no looking back. He got his chance, and since she never heard otherwise she believed he made it” (Morrison, Beloved 169).

Women’s solidarity is reflected between African and white women too and the reader understands that it is not restricted by race. A white girl helps Sethe in birthing Denver. This connection is not just biological or psychological but cultural too since they both belong to the economically dependent labour class. Their relation comes about from their common victimization, but also their common strength. They are both slaves, but they are also both runaways on their paths to freedom. They are united in their quest to be agents. Both find solace in their sorority. This sorority among women also becomes visible when Baby Suggs tends to Sethe’s wounds, or when Sethe, Denver and Beloved enjoy togetherness and feel unified so strongly that they become self satisfied and self reliant, needing no male in their lives. Elliott points out about communal ties that they, “negate the effects of an oppressive discourse on Sethe’s life… it is as if Sethe has been reborn outside of the confines of a limiting ideology and within an alternate empowering communal discourse” (11).
Necessity brings diverse people together and creates a common ground for their connection. In case of the women on Jacob’s farm, the common oppressor comes in the form of nature; in the wake of it their racial difference takes a backseat: “They became friends. Not only because somebody had to pull the wasp sting from the other’s arm. Not only because it took two to push the cow away from the fence. Not only because one had to hold the head while the other one tied the trotters. Mostly because neither knew precisely what they were doing or how” (Morrison, “Mercy” 51). Jacob’s farm is a melting pot of diversity based on race, class, ideology, character etc. Rebekka is an upper class white, Lina a native American, and Florens is a teenaged African with little ideologies of her own. Here, they not only cohabit, but form bonds of solidarity also.

Alone, the slaves in Morrison’s texts are unimportant and marginalized, but together they can give at least some kind of meaning to their lives. The women’s self dependence and similarity of situation brings them together. Their bond is further strengthened by the exclusion of Sorrow and her avowed difference from them. Sorrow and nature’s dissociation from them bring them in a stronger inter-personal association. Sorrow is a sinister presence in the novel, an unwanted character whose life has no meaning in her eyes and the eyes of others. However, she too, begins to belong when she becomes a mother. Another unwanted character in A Mercy is Widow Ealing’s daughter who has a squint in her eye. She is unwanted in the Christian world that labels her evil. For her mother, however, she is precious. She only belongs in the world through the belonging that motherhood engenders. She forms bonds of solidarity with Florens who is also doubted by the Presbyterians to be evil. She deals with her trauma by taking on the physical torture that awaited Florens because she was abnormal due to her race. Her sheltering comes from the belonging that she feels for Florens. It is not a simple act of sharing trauma but an act towards emancipation too. Solidarity gives meaning to her suffering that is now less irrational than before. Both are connected through their victimization but it would be wrong to say that this is their only connection. They are also connected through their strengths in dealing with this victimization. Taking on the suffering of another who is like oneself is a sign of strength. Both Florens and Jane alleviate one another’s suffering and ease dilemmas. For Florens too, this support from Widow Ealing and her daughter is a source of guidance in her journey. Her very journey is triggered by an...
urge to belong. She is sent on an errand of getting Blacksmith to their home since the
mistress is ill, but she herself also wants to meet Blacksmith because she is strongly
attracted towards him.

There is a strong element of bonding and possession in Beloved; be it the
possession that Beloved feels over Sethe, the possession of Sethe by her guilt, the
varying possessions of School Teacher and Garner over slaves, the possession of
homes by ghosts, or the possession of minds by Baby Suggs. Beloved’s lines “I am
Beloved and she is mine,” (Morrison, Beloved 253) are reiterated time and again and
voice her need to possess Sethe. People have multiple and distinctive ways of relating
to one another, as is expressed through the various characters. Florens feels she
possesses the Blacksmith and cannot share him with his son. Her sense of belonging
to him leaves her incapable of letting him belong to someone else, at the end of A
Mercy, Morrison voices the idea, to give dominion over oneself to another is an
immoral act and compels one to think as to why it happens. Is it wicked because it
makes one weak and strengthens the oppressor, thereby establishing exploitation more
strongly? A Mercy goes on to prove that positive linkages among different races are
ultimately possible. This is iterated in Beloved too. Mr. Garner has a strong emotional
bond with the slaves on his farm. He understands his connection with the slaves at the
human level. The solidarity that he feels with them overlooks difference and finds
positive humanitarian linkages with them. Garner says, “‘Y’all got boys,” he told
them. “Young boys, old boys, picky boys, stroppin boys. Now at Sweet Home my
niggers is men, every one of em. Bought em thataway, raised em thataway. Men every
one’” (Morrison, Beloved 12). Nevertheless, the farm remains an oppressive space in
both Beloved and A Mercy. It is a space where the slaves find themselves oppressed or
in anomie. They are in disharmony with the farm. Their lives are regulated from the
outside and oppressive norms are imposed on them by the power of the colonizer.
Though Garner feels a sense of belonging with his slaves, he fails to secure their lives.
Sweet Home becomes a space of anomie when School Teacher takes it over.

Jacob as a master in A Mercy is humane and is against slavery. A critic, Justin
Allen Holliday, observes in this regard: “A Mercy proves that, in the quotidian
interaction, there is a wide variety of attitudes towards difference, ambivalence
predominating” (5). Through his image and its contrast with men like D’Ortega, the
author makes us think about true civility as distinguished from the one operating on
surface level or hypocritical civility. D’Ortega, in the novel, leads a seemingly civil life but it is evident that he mistreats his slaves and considers them lesser humans if not altogether non-human. He leads a life of appearances. Jacob, on the other hand — the emblem of mercy in the novel — is truly civilized and connected to humanity. He stands out as a pure being who feels sympathy for others, both humans and animals. Morrison writes: “Few things angered Jacob more than the brutal handling of domesticated animals. He did not know what the sailors were objecting to, but his own fury was not only because of the pain it inflicted on the horse, but because of the mute unprotesting surrender glazing its eyes” (Morrison, “Mercy” 26). Nevertheless, Jacob too has his separation from nature. He becomes disjointed from nature as a colonizer and capitalist. As a business man and a constructor of houses he is the image of an expansionist. Thus, he becomes different from nature in being cultured and an expansionist, despite being sympathetic towards its creatures.

Jacob’s oneness with nature is ruptured when he cuts trees to reclaim more land for his farm. Lina, even though she tends to the farm and moulds it, maintains an emotional bond with nature as her ancestors did. Her relation vis-à-vis nature does not change even while living in the white farm space. This is an act of belonging not only with nature but also a belonging with her people and past. She sees the same soul existing in herself and nature. Morrison writes: “Solitude would have crushed her had she not fallen into hermit skills and become one more thing that moved in the natural world. She cawed with the birds, chatted with plants… and opened her mouth to rain” (Morrison, “Mercy” 46).

When Florens is given away by her mother and her obligations towards her daughter have been obscured by the exigencies of slave life, Florens’s belonging with her mother fades. Kelley’s observations on the lack of love can throw light on how solidarity and belonging are abated in certain societies. Kelley observes, “A Mercy as a whole, is overshadowed by what Morrison calls “the opposite of love”, betrayal. Betrayal she says… is the ultimate pain these characters feel. Each experience of it redefines these characters in a powerful way. In fact, the betrayals can be marked as the key events in the intertwined history of these people’s lives” (1). Florens becomes dissociated from her mother because of this betrayal and throughout the novel is silent about her, till she is deserted again, this time by Blacksmith. Her mother’s pain that was dormant and ties of motherhood remain latent till they manifest in her answer to
Florens’s queries. Understanding Florens’s development, Justin Allen Holliday observes:

Before she reclaims herself, Florens undergoes a search for the affection she craves as a consequence of her perceived rejection, motivating her actions for the rest of the novel and leading to further unstable, even brutal results that open her identity to a new level of abjection. She first transfers her need for love to Lina, who attempts to act as Florens’s surrogate mother... Morrison buttresses the need for their connection by construing it as a biological need that moves under the skin and encompasses the whole body, not merely the mind or a metaphorical heart (16).

The familial bonds in most societies are a permanent source of belonging; they, however, become uncertain in a slave society. In colonized societies, dislocation and dissociation becomes a standardized practice and this impairs bonding, belonging and solidarity. Trauma too damages the individual’s ability to bond with others. Humans, however, plod towards some form of belonging even in the direst of circumstances, as Sethe, Baby Suggs, Paul D, Florens and Sorrow do at some point in their lives. Morrison’s focus in her writing is on how life and bonding become unnatural in slave societies. She takes on the task, however, to instil patches of hope in the mottled twilight of slave life through faint glows of solidarity and belonging.

4.3 Mother-Daughter Relations and Belonging in a Hybrid World in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*

Amy Tan’s novels like Morrison’s can be analyzed by referring to the idea of bonding and solidarity. The bonding and solidarity that become visible in a study of Tan’s works is both the intra community bonding within the Chinese community as well as the mother/daughter bond. Whereas in Morrison bonding is a means towards emancipation from trauma and oppression, in Tan the concern of its immediate impact on the development of subjectivity is important.

Tan sees the mother/daughter relation as the most basic bond. The generation gap between mothers and daughters, in her novels, exists because of the different spatial and temporal spheres that they inhabit. Whereas the daughters cannot
understand the problems faced by their mothers, mothers can, however, foresee what is to happen in the lives of their daughters and ready them for it. The stories of the two novels chosen for the present study seem to be moving towards the daughters’ acceptance of their mothers’ wisdom. This acceptance engenders between them a belonging that can guide them in their endeavours towards identity formation and becoming agents.

The texts also reveal the impacts of living in diaspora and experiencing lack of belonging in it. Ian Chambers in his book *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, observes that diaspora is a “means to conceive of dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures” and the very idea of home changes where people exist “sustained across encounters, dialogues and clashes with other histories, other places, other people” (4). Like home, the self in diaspora also becomes diffuse. It, then, has to be reconstituted through establishing bonds. These bonds grow to influence individual subjectivities and fill in the gaps in their existence. In Tan’s texts, diasporic existence not only necessitates bonding, but authentic bonds form naturally, almost instinctively. At the most basic level, these bonds are formed within the family. Among these, the mother/daughter bond is of special interest to Tan. Like most diasporics, mothers and daughters experience a lack of belonging. They are neither Chinese nor American. This lack of belonging with the land is a cause of their subalternity. The daughters move towards becoming complete beings on acquiescing to their Chinese heritage. When Suyuan Woo comes to America it becomes a place much like Kweilin. Kweilin is a metaphoric heaven that takes away her family and past from her. America too is a paradise for which Suyuan pays a price. She loses her culture and her children whose lives and values are very different from the ones she had hoped them to have.

Ruth is unable to understand her mother because she lacks definite viewpoints about life. She has not inherited any set world views or norms from society because she feels that she has a dangling existence and cannot align herself solidly with any single way of life. There is an immense space of nothingness that beckons her as she grows up in a society where social connections are fleeting and there exists what Durkheim calls, anomie.

The traditional Chinese society to which the mothers belong has mechanical solidarity. They have a set system of thinking and norms. One finds that the mothers
have a stable wisdom and a clearly established moral code. The daughters, on the other hand, come to consciousness in the American culture and inhabit a society that has organic solidarity. Their relations with other people are not based on a shared past, so much so that their relations even with their mothers are tense.

The stories in these novels move towards the daughters’ acceptance of their mothers’ wisdom. This acceptance engenders between them a belonging that can guide them both. Regarding Ruth’s relationship with her mother, Tan observes, “In an odd way, she now thought, her mother was the one who had taught her to become a book doctor. Ruth had to make life better by revising it” (Tan, “The Bonesetter’s” 47). The relation between Ruth and her mother is initially marked by Ruth’s matrophobia (fear of being like her mother), and a continued dissatisfaction with Ruth on LuLing’s part. Here, insights provided by Adrienne Rich can become useful to examine the changing facets of the relationship between mothers and daughters. In her book *Of Woman Born* (1976), she writes about how the mother/daughter bond is dialectically empowering and transforming, as well as restraining and constricting to the development of healthy subjectivities. She observes how cultural forces and patriarchal structures strengthen, weaken or fracture the mother/daughter bond. What Rich writes in this regard can throw light on how Ruth is motivated by, "the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free" (236).

Rich’s observation that the mother/daughter bond is characterized by dichotomies can help us in understanding LuLing and Ruth’s relation. Dichotomies are fairly evident in the relationship of Ruth and LuLing. One initially comes to see that the mothers and daughters live in a complex matrix of experiences where multiple forces play their role in moulding their lives and consciousnesses. Their bond is not only a personal relationship but is influenced by cultural forces, patriarchy, their diasporic experiences and the geographical spaces they have inhabited. These experiences must be negotiated if the daughters are to establish strong relationships with their mothers. Goh Vern Ann writes about the mother/daughter bond, “In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, the daughters have to confront secrecy and cultural barriers in their quest to make peace with their mothers” (37). In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* mothers and daughters are torn apart by their cultural conditioning and are brought together by the revelation to the daughters of a history of their mother’s struggles. When the history of these struggles is revealed to Ruth, she finds not only respect for
her mother, but also an acceptance of the Chinese culture, something that her migration to America had restrained her from accessing and comprehending. Ruth realizes that she must go back to the relics of the past if she is to understand her mother and through it, understand her own self.

There exists, at one level, a distance between the mothers and their second generation diasporic daughters. The cultural divide is apparent and it results from the differing cultural spaces they inhabit. Gloria Shen’s observations throw light on the origins of the complex relation between mothers and daughters. Shen observes, “the mothers’ wish for the daughter to live a better life than the one she had back in China is revealed in the conversation between the Chinese woman and her swan on her journey to America in the novel’s first prologue. Ironically, this wish becomes the very source of the conflicts and tensions in their relationship” (Ed. Bloom 8). The very narrative structure of *The Joy Luck Club* is a testimony to this divide. The mothers’ and daughters’ stories form different sections in the novel, but there exist links between them. The mothers’ stories complete the daughters’ stories. The daughters’ stories, in turn, complement those of their mothers. The daughters’ stories are steeped in confusion about their subjectivities. The mothers’ stories, on the other hand, indicate towards some form of closure and are dictated by set norms and ways of behaving. Shen observes, “The sharing of cultural experiences between mothers and daughters through the device of storytelling transforms structurally isolated monologues into meaningful dialogues between mother and mother, daughter and daughter, and more importantly mother and daughter and coalesces the sixteen monologues into a coherent whole” (ed. Bloom 6).

At a deeper level, one understands that simply living in a family structure is not enough to create belonging. There are several forms of exclusion that women experience while living in the joint family structure. In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, Bao Bomu lives with her deceased husband’s family that fails to consider her a valid member because the link between them—that is her husband—is no more. She and her daughter are unwanted additions to the home and are eventually expelled from it. When Bao Bomu dies, she is denied even a burial and her body and existence pass into oblivion. The only thing she leaves to the world is her daughter and her autobiographical notes which she passes on to her. She leaves her life’s story for her daughter who will in turn leave her story for her own daughter. Through these memories, the mothers exist in their daughters’ minds, long after their death and
continue to affect them. It is as if their spirits are still alive as a guiding principle. They exist as a consciousness in their daughters’ lives. The mother/daughter bond is essential not only to carry on familial and social legacies, but to disrupt the very functioning of patriarchy. Marianne Hirsch’s views can inform this discussion. She writes, “The story of female development, both in fiction and theory, needs to be written in the voice of mothers as well as in that of daughters…. Only in combining both voices, in finding a double voice that would yield a multiple female consciousness, can we begin to envision ways to ‘live life afresh’” (161).

The mother/daughter bond in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* is not without a sense of guilt. The daughters, when they think they have failed their mothers, experience guilt. The mothers have high expectations of their daughters which they are not always able to fulfill. Ruth feels this guilt as a young girl when LuLing reprimands her and she begins to write angrily about her mother in her diary:

Later, over sobs of righteous indignation, she began to write in her diary, knowing full well her mother would read the words: “I hate her! She’s the worst mother a person could have. She doesn’t love me. She doesn’t listen to me. She doesn’t understand anything about me. All she does is pick on me, get mad, and make me feel worse.” She knew that what she was writing was risky. It felt like pure evil. And the descending mantle of guilt made her toss it off with even more bravado. (Tan, “The Joy Luck” 146)

The daughters also feel guilt when they realize that their mothers cared for them but they failed to understand their feelings. This guilt arises out of the sense of heightened expectations of the mothers from their daughters. LuLing feels this affinity with her mother after she dies. She goes to find her corpse that was never buried and her inability to find it leaves her feeling culpable, “I searched for her until dusk. By then, my eyes were swollen with dust and tears. I never found her. ... For five days I could not move. I could not eat. I could not even cry. I lay in the lonely k’ang and felt only the air leaving my chest” (Tan, “The Bonesetter’s” 222). LuLing’s guilt makes her finally accept her mother who in turn guides her. On losing her mother and becoming an orphan, the only guidance left to her is the memory and autobiographical notes of her mother. M. Marie Booth Foster writes about the daughters’ relation to
their mother’s histories and how these inform the development of the daughters’ psyches. She observes, “She [Tan] presents daughters who do not know their mothers’ ‘importance’ and thus cannot know their own; most seem never to have been told or even cared to hear their mothers’ history. Until they do they can never achieve voice” (ed. Bloom 32).

In *The Joy Luck Club*, belonging becomes a way of bridging gaps in existence and in personal history. In this sense, solidarity and belongingness come in when something is amiss in life. A chain of experiences and history develops in the novels as the mothers pass on their experiences to their daughters. Belonging depends on mutual understanding for its fruition. Once the daughters can visualize the world like their mothers, their feelings of belonging become stronger. This belonging develops out of the coalescing and overlapping of their consciousnesses. The mothers are always aware of this coalescing because of their relatively enlarged perspectives. As the daughters develop their own viewpoints, they begin to see the value of their Chinese heritage. Initially the daughters are reluctant to consider their Chinese heritage as a part of their selves. They do not spatially belong in China but it nevertheless remains a major mover in their lives.

The idea of familial bonding is voiced in the relation between LuLing and GaoLing. They have a cold tussle and a sense of competition in their relationship with each other, but at a deeper level they also feel a sense of affinity. LuLing gives up her initial chance of migrating to the United States so that her sister GaoLing can emigrate from the war torn China. Their belonging, then, becomes a life changing act for the sisters because it helps them to survive in a challenging world. In later life, when the two sisters have problems, irrespective of their material differences, they are psychologically connected and can fall back on each other. It is a bond where one shares what one has irrespective of what one gets in return. It is not a bond that requires practical reasoning but is strongly emotional in content.

When Ruth celebrates the Chinese Thanksgiving, the guests who attend her get together include everyone who is important to her personally. The assembly of people, she feels connected to seems to be a simple organization but also points out multiple levels of belonging from familial to workplace, extended family and friends.
It also showcases the relations between fellow diasporic Chinese. This meeting is symbolic of the belonging that she feels with her guests.

In “The Moon Lady,” a story from The Joy Luck Club, Ying-Ying St. Clair comes to understand the importance of family when she gets lost. When she falls into the sea, she is symbolically free-floating. Her only wish from the Moon Lady is to be found by her family. Family belonging is her link to reality, to her own self and the outside world, “And tonight, on the fifteenth day of the eighth moon, I also remember what I asked the Moon Lady so long ago. I wished to be found” (Tan, “The Joy Luck” 83).

When LuLing becomes a part of an orphanage, she begins to understand bonds of solidarity in a completely new way. The girls at the orphanage are not only codependent but also responsible for each other’s lives. Their very existence depends on solidarity and belonging. Being orphans, their existence is determined by their bonds of solidarity and without this solidarity their lives would fall apart. Their dependence on the orphanage is a vital feature of their lives but so is the strength arising from the self-reliance and ideologies that the orphanage imparts to them.

Ruth as a ghost writer has to feel a sense of belonging with her clients. Ruth as a diasporic tries to belong to the world in multiple ways. As an author, she tries to form bonds with the readership by understanding it. She must understand the motivations of the general public and must be in tune with them if she is to write effectively since most of the books she helps write are self-help books. Ruth’s act of writing for another author is a form of transliteration. She has to create a text from someone else’s ideas. Solidarity is, in this sense an extension of one’s consciousness to accommodate the other’s understanding of the world.

The very idea of forming the Joy Luck Club speaks volumes of how important the idea of belonging is particularly in the time of turmoil and in oppressive scenarios. Suyuan Woo and her friends form the Joy Luck Club come to terms with the poverty and oppression of war torn China:

What was worse, we asked among ourselves, to sit and wait for our own deaths with proper somber faces? Or to choose our own happiness? So we decided to hold parties and pretend each week had
become the new year. Each week we could forget past wrongs done to us. We weren’t allowed to think a bad thought. We feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories. And each week we could hope to be lucky. (Tan, “The Joy Luck” 25)

This getting together, is nevertheless a wish fulfilling activity and ceases once the war gets worse. Later, when Suyuan Woo migrates to America, she carries on the tradition of the Joy Luck Club in reminiscence of her Chinese life and as a way of coping with diasporic existence. It is a way to uphold the Chinese heritage, as a defining feature of her selfhood. When she dies, her daughter keeps alive the tradition by taking up her place at the mah jong table. It is a trope to carrying on the family heritage and expresses her belonging with her family, community and heritage. Jing-Mei Woo by taking on her mother’s place, in a way, pays her debt to her Chinese past. When Jing-Mei Woo goes to China to look for her half sisters, she feels a renewed attachment with China and Chinese people. She feels one with her sisters and sees a part of herself and her mother in them:

My sisters and I stand, arms around each other, laughing and wiping the tears from each other’s eyes. The flash of the Polaroid goes off and my father hands me the snapshot. The grey surface changes to the bright colors of our three images, sharpening and deepening all at once… together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish. (Tan, “The Joy Luck” 288)

The daughters must situate themselves in their Chinese past too, like Jing-Mei sees herself in her mother when she meets her sisters. Gloria Shen’s views in this regard reveal the complex psychological gap between the mothers and daughters. Shen writes: “Only when she has reached maturity is she able to close the geographical gap and come to terms with her ethnic, cultural, and racial beackground. In doing so she transcends the psychological gap that had alienated her from her mother and herself” (ed. Bloom 15). The mothers’ and daughters’ stories are diverse. On the face of it, there is no connection in these stories. Looking deeper into the background, we realize that the relics of the mothers’ past stories have Chinese wisdom that the daughters can draw upon to simplify their lives.
An-Mei Hsu’s mother is excommunicated from the family and loses all ties with them. She is, as it were, deleted from her family history. She loses belonging, but certain bonds cannot be broken. What she cannot let go of are her ties with her daughter and she comes back to take her along to her new home. The permanence of the mother daughter bond is explicated in An-Mei’s story when she follows her mother to another home:

My mother did not say anything… she was crying with her mouth closed. And I began to cry in the same way, swallowing those bitter tears… And my mother, her head still bowed, looked up at me and saw my face. I could not stop my tears from running down. And I think seeing my face like this, my mother changed… She held her hand out to me and I ran to her. (Tan, “The Joy Luck” 218)

Despite the fact that the family considers An-Mei Hsu’s mother an outsider, she tries to re-establish her bonds with her family. She engages in a ritual to treat her mother by feeding her, her flesh. She metaphorically gives away a part of herself and re-establishes a bond with her, asserting that she ultimately belongs in the family despite her expulsion:

And then my mother cut a piece of meat from her arm. Tears poured from her face and blood spilled to the floor. My mother took her flesh and put it in the soup… This is how a daughter honors her mother. It is shou so deep it is in your bones. The pain of the flesh is nothing. The pain you must forget. Because sometimes this is the only way you remember what is in your bones. (Tan, “The Joy Luck” 48)

There is a difference between the stories of mothers and daughters. Their memories intersect despite being spatially and temporally diverse. Ordinarily children’s memories overlap with the memories of their parents. The change in landscape is like switching over to another mode of consciousness. The parents and children experience a generation gap because of the gulf between their memories. Community becomes, in Tan’s writing, an important guiding principle for the development of subjectivities. Magali Cornier Michael observes that Tan in her novel illustrates, “the interdependence of individual and community and thus the communal aspects of agency,” and they present “a whole that is greater than its parts but that
nevertheless depends on those parts” (ed. Bloom 140). Ties with community become tantamount to putting into place the dishevelled lives of diasporic daughters who face chaos of existence. In the scenario of fissured selves and confused consciousness, community comes as a medium that gives some form of shape to the half-baked selves of the daughters.

4.4 Belonging as Paradise, and the Route/Root to Fulfilment in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s Paradise and Desertion

Morrison, Tan and Gurnah’s novels are replete with concerns of solidarity and belonging. Unlike Tan, Gurnah does not cater to the form of solidarity limited to family or merely community, but takes it further to the level of inter-racial bonding based on shared humanity. He also writes about how living in diaspora causes a breach of belonging. Gurnah’s experiences as a diasporic in United Kingdom gave him a closer look at the experience of disconnection and nostalgia that arises from the lack of belonging. Most life forms, including the human species, are linked to habitat and their lives are related to the conditions of the environment. In case of humans, the relation with habitat is complex and multivalent. The habitat itself has multiple layers which include the ecological, social and cultural aspects. The lives of several characters in the two novels of Gurnah, chosen for this study, are disrupted from the habitat. Rehana, Amin, Rashid and Farida in Desertion are disjointed from the social and political setup of Zanzibar. Yusuf in Paradise lacks the very ability to make sense of his world. Somehow, these characters grapple with their disjunction from the social and political landscape by connecting themselves to something else. This finding of connection is itself not readily plausible and their efforts to belong remain incomplete and sometimes ineffective. They become agents only partially. The lack of belonging inhibits their efforts towards becoming agents. Sometimes, differing perceptions within a group deter the formation of solidarity. These differing perceptions are harbingers of borders too. To become united, the subjects first have to cross these internal borders. Anne Ajulu-Okungu’s observations about Gurnah can bring this aspect into relief:

The experiences of the individual (which) are used as pointers to the experiences of the wider community. He deviates from the usual East African writers’ (re)presentation whereby focus is fixed on the larger
community, effectively shifting focus from the individual. Gurnah chooses to take an approach that is different from his predecessors.

(42)

In both *Paradise* and *Desertion*, the representation of the protagonists’ lives vis-a-vis the community is important in understanding the effects of colonization on the community.

*Paradise* iterates the fact that solidarity among different strata of people can be fissured and malformed. Yusuf and his family might feel belonging and solidarity with Aziz, but in the end, he remains a benefactor only in a limited sense. He never aligns himself with those below his status. There are however, several layers and modes of existence which can even connect people who are otherwise diverse, at some level. Solidarity to take roots does not depend on nationality. Rather, it depends on other, more elaborate signifiers like traditions, norms, culture, common victimization and similar interests. Similarity and the existence of a common enemy too are the sources of solidarity. Khalil in *Paradise* says, “We are the same like this. They are our enemies. That’s also what makes us the same. In their eyes we are animals, and we can’t make them stop thinking this stupid thing for a long time” (Gurnah, *Paradise* 87).

The very realization in people and groups that they are connected by instinct and their humanity, sometimes, tends to generate bonds of solidarity among them. In *Paradise*, when the Arab merchants encounter the slaughter of an African village, they take on the responsibility of burying them in consideration of their human ties. They feel that they owe this to the African tribe as a species: “We are their brothers, from the blood of the same Adam who fathered all of us,” Simba Mwene said. Mohammed Abdalla grinned with surprise but did not speak. ‘What is your concern?’ Uncle Aziz asked. ‘For the decency of the dead,’ Simba Mwene said, glaring” (Gurnah, *Paradise* 127).

In *Paradise*, the troop of travellers comes together for an economic task. They appear to be linked by their journey, but in the end, with their goal achieved they must part ways. Moreover, perfect synchronization in any group does not exist. The troop of merchants erupts into several disputes over the span of their journey. This brings the realization that for humans to exist in harmony, they must push back their personal interests and enter into common territory.
The very depiction of the British, Arabs and Africans as cohabiting in the same territory raises several questions related to solidarity. What commonality exists amongst these people, besides time and space, is cultural, although culture itself is political in nature and their cohabitation is not without differences and problems. All the three groups are fighting for dominion. Domination itself is relative, with a possibility of the exchange of positions of dominator and dominated. The dominator can also become the dominated in another situation.

As an impressionable child and teenager, Yusuf relates the idea of paradise to belonging with other people. He attaches himself with a multiplicity of persons, ranging from his family, Aziz, the beggar Mohammed, Khalil and some women. Later on, however, he realizes that human ties are temporary. Khalil tells Yusuf that Aziz is not his uncle but his employer and changes the way Yusuf relates to him. Yusuf, over time, comes to know that relations of solidarity and belonging are class determined. Yusuf also comes to understand that bonds of belonging require proficiency in language. He learns through Khalil that language is his link to other people. It is a prerequisite for making his existence in Aziz’s home relatively comfortable. Khalil tells him, “You must learn Arabic, then he’ll like you more” (Gurnah, Paradise 25).

Solidarity comes about and is strengthened in Paradise through the exchange of personal history and stories. Stories are an attempt to know and pass on to others what belongs to one. One draws into one’s mental and emotional map the other and makes her/him a part of one’s social circle. Stories are also a way of creating wonder and an attempt to deal with chaos. When Khalil and Yusuf exchange stories, they allow one another into their consciousnesses. Belonging is also engendered between the two boys through shared experience. Their intersecting memories create solidarity between them through a heightened understanding of their situation.

Lack of belongingness and a solitary life in the novel is equated with madness. Mohammed thinks that his life, when he still had family, was full of happiness. His life as a wanderer gives him freedom, but without belonging, his life ceases to have any meaning. Yusuf too feels alone in the absence of his family and has a dire need to belong. His journeys shape up his life and he finds acceptance and praise but they fail to fill up the gaps in his existence. He knows that detachment cannot give him contentedness. He must get attached. He must pursue and run after something, as he practically does at the end of the novel, when he runs after the German army. Thus
belonging and solidarity become significant to life. It is like a root that keeps one connected to other people and allows one to grow.

Belonging in *Paradise* becomes warped due to lack of economic resources. Yusuf ceases to belong in his family because of economic reasons. At the most basic level, family is a source of belonging that fends off oppression and helps the subject deal with her repressions and suppressions. Yusuf feels helpless in the face of his situation as a slave because he does not have a family. When familial ties become weak, the colonizer’s work becomes easier. It is the Africans who sell off their fellow men and make slavery possible. Without their consent, their brethren would not become slaves: “there were enough people eager to sell their cousins and neighbours for trinkets. And the markets were open everywhere, down in the south and on the ocean islands where the Europeans were farming for sugar, in Arabia and Persia, and on the Sultans new clove plantations in Zanzibar” (Gurnah, *Paradise* 131).

While Yusuf’s belongingness with his family is broken forcibly, for Rehana, it is a conscious choice. Rehana understands that her existence has become stagnant and will remain so unless she undertakes the challenge to take control of her life. Her life seems to have become purposeless and driven by anomie since she ceases to be a part of social structures. She refuses to accept social traditions and becomes detached from their workings. She exists as a figure of change:

Perhaps she thought she had nothing to lose, that all that remained for her was a lifetime in that bright yard behind the shop, making clothes for women who only paid her a pittance, or only offered her affection and promises in return. That does not sound so intolerable really, not for a woman who had lived her whole life in the back of a shop in that town and who was used to women’s lives such as hers. (Gurnah, *Desertion* 118)

Rehana, after Azad’s desertion, begins to be less and less concerned with what people think of her life. She flouts social rules and has strength enough to exit social bonds when she feels that they bind her. Her divorce from Pearce, once more, leaves her largely alone and she has nowhere to go and no one to turn to. We come to know, over the course of the novel, that she manages to survive and has generations after her who carry her lineage. She and her predecessors, however, are denied a place in
society. It is as if they do not belong anywhere. The ordinary social setup tends to exclude her and the generations of women after her.

Familial belonging is expressed remarkably well through Rashid's family. It exemplifies how family support is central to individual growth. Rashid and his siblings gain both support and motivation to excel, from their family. Rashid, Amin and Farida have had very secure childhoods and this gives them strength in later life to pursue creative and critical work. Family bonds have healing properties and help the subjects deal with trauma.

When Rashid goes to England for his higher studies, he loses connection with his family and the support that he got from them. He, therefore, finds it difficult to deal with his life as an adult. He starts bonding with other people in England but realizes that his racial difference from the whites renders him incapable of forming fulfilling bonds with them because he is rejected as an outsider.

Amin feels that he belongs with Rashid and sends him his memoir. He feels he can share with him his story. Rashid, on the other hand, feels responsible for understanding and passing on Amin’s story. The story compels him to do something about it, to share it further and to derive meanings from it. He feels an internal compulsion and a duty to undertake this task. When he writes a research paper on Rehana’s story as told by Amin, he is re-establishing a bond with his brother, family and the Arab society back home in Zanzibar. His links with these spheres of his life had got submerged on migrating to England. Their pull, no matter how weak, had always bothered him. This writing gives him a chance to reconnect with his past life in Zanzibar in multiple ways.

Colonization and totalitarianism often become tools to deconstruct and dismantle solidarity and belonging among citizens in the war torn Zanzibar. People are denied social relations. Since the political pressure does not allow them to unite they become disjointed from each other; fruitful social relations cease to exist and revolution becomes subdued. The policy of divide and rule is employed by not only the foreign colonizers, but is also exercised by the elected government of the decolonized nation when they incite internal insurgency and civil strife. This breaking of solidarity is symptomatic of systematic silencing and is a force that deters revolt. Amin and Farida, when they write and smuggle their writings outside their country to
Rashid, are countering their voicelessness and engaging in an authentic existential act. They are engaged in a form of cross-border belonging and become agents in their own right.

The mechanical solidarity and belonging that exists more in the eastern societies than in the individualistic West, is shown in the beginning of *Desertion* through the social bonds that Hassanali has with his neighbours. When a white man needs help, they all come forward to help him. Hassanali himself is very social and it is on regular basis that he and his neighbours meet each other. They lack economic resources but attempt to fulfil this lack by being of use to each other.

Women in *Desertion* form bonds of solidarity to share their common despair as being subjects oppressed by patriarchy. There are particular festivities which they engage in and which allow them to give vent to their repressed emotions. Social bonding, in this sense, becomes emotional outlets and a resourceful act by which they find answers to their problems. In these ceremonies, they enjoy a women’s sphere where men are not allowed:

Rehana herself had no ear for remembering melodies, although when the women went wild at marriage celebrations she was as frenzied in her singing as everyone else. It was not really the words and the melody that mattered at those times, but the noise and the laughter and the dancing. No men were allowed to be present, altogether some young man was sure to peep over a wall or through a crack in the window planks. (Gurnah 55)

Gurnah’s texts give us multiple insights into solidarity. The various characters establish bonds of solidarity with others to become agile subjects and establish a solid sense of self. Their bonds, in themselves, are of various types depending on the social structures they inhabit. There are, however, also instances when certain characters disentangle themselves from social structures to assert their own subjective views, becoming agents in their own right.

**4.5 Conclusion**

In studying Morrison, Tan and Gurnah from the standpoints of solidarity and belonging, several trajectories come to view. These are the trajectories from
subalternity to agency, victimhood to self assertion, lack of voice to articulation, unstable and confused worldviews to self realization etcetera. There are several characters in the selected novels, for whom, solidarity and belonging become a means to an end, but on another level, are also the end in themselves. Freedom is achieved through solidarity, but the fight for emancipation also generates life long bonds among subjects who unite to fight for a common cause.

Solidarity, in the texts taken for study, becomes an important factor in becoming agents. The three authors, however, deal with different aspects of solidarity. Solidarity in Toni Morrison’s selected novels is interrupted because of the trauma of slavery. It seems to be a goal that is difficult to attain, but is important if the slaves and ex-slaves are to live fulfilling lives. In Tan’s selected novels it was found that family ties, particularly the ties between mothers and daughters, become very important in guiding the daughters in their existence in their hostland—America. Solidarity and the mother/daughter bond become guiding principles for the daughters. Gurnah also explores familial bonding through several characters. In his novels solidarity becomes an important factor for the characters’ identity formation and for living authentically rooted lives. He focusses on how subjectivities develop in tandem with social relations. Thus, in the novels by the three authors, solidarity has been variously dealt with.