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## “MIGRANTS” TRAUMA AND TEXTURE OF SURVIVAL IN ABDUL RAZZAK GURNAH’S FICTION

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**Abstract:** This study has been undertaken to learn about the difficulties of residents and migrants due to colonialism and imperialism. How the blacks survived The main stream of African literature – West African literature is a combination of literary, educational and political developments. The West African literature is widely produced in the novel form. The technique of writing a novel is achieved by a wide reading of novels and understanding of the intricacies of characterization, plot, language, social and psychological insight. The serious reading of novels in West African began with the emergence of grammar schools, which provided the best opportunities to the students to achieve the talent to start their careers as writer. The novel in West Africa was pioneered by its middle class.

### INTRODUCTION:

Africa is made up of people with different languages and with a variety of approaches to cultural expression in the verbal arts. Every part of the continent has long-standing oral traditions, while some countries, like Egypt, have long established written traditions as well. The oral tradition is the back bone of African arts and letters. It is a living tradition that spans ancient and contemporary periods and all aspects of African life. It contains verbal and nonverbal forms such as poetry, oral narratives, riddles, proverbs, songs, festival drama, music and dance, sculpture, and different kinds of artwork made from various materials. Each of these forms can survive without language. For example, the narrative tradition relies on proverbs, riddles, songs and chants, while the festival drama relies on all the other forms for its richness. This is because African culture sees as by the world is interconnected; a view that inspires and sustains the call-and-response approach is evident in most African art traditions.

Even in African tradition emphasizes the role of communities in social construction and the maintenance of human rights and dignity, they also call attention to the ubiquity of creative power. Narrative performance is an informal activity throughout Africa, narrative traditions are formal and ritualized. This means that the different forms can be changed only within certain boundaries and must be precisely taught. However, recognizing the social and political import of the oral traditions and colonizers' efforts to denigrate African cultures and traditions, contemporary writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and others began to include proverbs and the roles and functions of local traditions and customs in their works. By focusing on specific aspects of the narrative traditions, they were able to introduce African narrative techniques and themes into written and contemporary African literature, especially the short story and the novel.

The main stream of African literature – West African literature is a combination of literary, educational and political developments. The West African literature is widely produced in the novel form. The technique of writing a novel is achieved by a wide reading of novels and understanding of the intricacies of characterization, plot, language, social and psychological insight. The serious reading of novels in West Africa began with the emergence of grammar schools, which provided the best opportunities to the students to achieve the talent to start their careers as writer. The novel in West Africa was pioneered by its middle class. It is the education at background and social circumstances which gave rise to the novel in West Africa. Another major influence responsible for popularity of the novel is the upsurge of popular pamphlet literature in the market town of Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria, at the end of Second World War. The factors that gave rise to the popular pamphlet literature in Onitsha were the location of the town and its market (the largest in West Africa), the Post-war growth of the number of literate people there the growth of the urban population, the spread of locally owned and operated printing presses.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON ABDULRAZAK GURNAH

**Abdulrazak Gurnah** was born in Zanzibar, Tanzania, in 1948. He is a reputed novelist and academic. Like most of the protagonists in his novels, he made England his home when he migrated in 1968. He came to England to pursue a university education. Gurnah was also, in part, driven out of Zanzibar to escape the civil unrest, whereby the sustained violence against the Arab population in the country made it an unwelcoming and uncomfortable home space for them. He received his PhD from the University of Kent, where he was later a professor in postcolonial literature. Gurnah documents the British migrant experience, the troubled experiences of individuals living in postcolonial Zanzibar, and how individuals residing in the two cultural spaces find routes into their subjectivities by undertaking philosophical and subjective journeys. Gurnah has written nine novels, and his career as an author span over three decades, with his earliest book being *Memory of Departure* (1987) and the latest one being *Afterlives: By the winner of the Nobel prize in literature 2021* (2020). His most acclaimed novels

are *the last gift* (2011), *Desertion* (2005), *By the Sea* (2001), *admiring silence* (1996), *paradise* (1994) (won Whitbread award) which were shortlisted and longlisted for the Booker Prize, respectively. *Desertion* (2005) was shortlisted for a 2006 Commonwealth Writers Prize.

Before embarking on a full-length study of Gurnah's novels, it is viable to state his position as an artist *vis a vis* society, world literature, and art itself. Gurnah's function as an artist, and as an originator playing with meaning in his literary universe must be understood. He is aware that his role as a writer is not that of an originator of sense but as a seeker of meaning. He understands that his art of writing helps him decipher a complex world where a few people wield power and oppress others.

The current study seeks to understand Gurnah's work beyond the labels of postcolonial writing or world literature. Though he is generally described using such terms, Gurnah is aware of the reductionism of such terminology. He considers these terms useful, only in so much as they are helpful for organizational purposes. He says in this regard, in an interview with Fabienne Roth et al.:

I would not use any of those words. I wouldn't call myself a writer of any kind. In fact, I am not sure that I would call myself anything apart from my name. I guess, if somebody challenges me, that would be another way of saying "Are you a [...] one of these...?" I would probably say "no". Precisely, I don't want that part of me having a reductive name. On the other hand, it depends on how this question would be asked; for example, if a journalist asks in an interview, "Are you a world literature writer", what is he going to put down when he goes away from here? But I am not that. I'm a complicated something of that .

The present study helps one understand how the subject traverses the rugged terrain of oppression that is operative in the hotspots of postcolonial societies, in the lives of women, lower classes, and children, in Gurnah's novels. Subalternity and non-representation are operative far and wide in several forms, and encumber the individual psyche. Such a study of Gurnah's novels is called for, since it examines the operations of power and how individuals and communities find ways to counter it, through resistance, revolt, assimilation, articulation, and recording and passing on stories and histories, through various dimensions like morality, archiving, space, etc.

At the core of the theory of subalternity lies the desire for subjecthood and its expression. Subjectivity is a much-talked-about notion in literary and cultural theory. The subject is at the core of most human endeavors. Subjectivity as an issue and a concept cannot be pinned down to a singular meaning; we must grapple with it and understand ourselves to find meaning in our lives. There are four ways in which the word subject, which is not interchangeable with the self, can be employed: as the subject of grammar, the politico-legal subject, the philosophical subject, and the human subject. This book studies how the characters in Gurnah's novels come to terms with their subject positions and subjectivity. Subjectivity must subsume some agency. Conditions of

oppression are such that they either ultimately subdue the subject, or reinforce in them a will to become an agent. Subalternity includes agency as its practical, proactive component. Agency exists, not in individuals alone, but in communities too, because no individual has a solitary existence or identity, typically. Agency comes from the realization that we can change something about our world and can be conscious contributors to our life. Our experiences have an essential role to play in the extent to which we can be agents. Agency, like subjectivity, is not already existent, but is nurtured. Moreover, agency does not merely mean overcoming situations, because that would again suggest that those very situations are driving us. Agency, in its real sense, comes about when a subject acts beyond a prevailing situation or the environmental constraints. The concepts of subalternity, subjectivity, and agency are dialectically related. The boundaries of these categories overlap. This study delves into subjectivity, how it becomes problematic for the subaltern, and how the subaltern relocates himself/herself in the dominant discourse, thereby becoming an agent.

Gurnah seeks to unearth several dimensions of existence, ranging from the historical to the innermost psychological lives of his characters. He traverses the emotional lives of his characters while history presides from a far-off horizon in the background. He does what history does not, which is to reach into the recesses of lived experience. He brings forth into consciousness what is either never published in historical accounts, or enters oblivion as a small-column news story in a newspaper. Gurnah has a passion for recording these stories. He fights against the forgetfulness that is a characteristic of human life, whereby stories pass into the night. The human mind has an intuitive way in which tales of survival are inscribed on the mind - that is, the collective unconscious, as well as remembering their mythical pasts - that is, the cultural memory.

Nevertheless, historical events find little space in his novels. The fact that history is very sparingly included in his novels tends to draw attention to the difference between historiography and novel writing. The novel tries to do what the social sciences cannot. Gurnah uses historical references only to shed light on the characters' situation in society and to define their social struggles. While history is limited to a specific space and time, the novel works to unearth being, and therefore transcends space/time. Gurnah thinks about literature as a field of artistic expression that seeks to develop the community as a totality in some way. At the same time, he is aware that different kinds of literary works impact individuals with varying life experiences in different ways. Literature challenges specific ideas and practices by recording their impact on the lives of subjects. In an interview with Rothetal., he asserts:

The role of literature in the world is to progress the community, but it might vary, dependent on the specific community. One might say writers need to challenge ideas within the community. This challenge can be to the ideas of respectability, to the ideas of family or appropriateness, sexual morality, and so on. On the other hand, people might also see that as indiscipline, unnecessary, and destructive. The role of writers can be judged only by their readers. It is difficult. You need to leave it to the writer before you can make your assessments.

Gurnah iterates in the above interview that he writes about things that are of concern to him, and which he is grappling to understand. Writing for him is a way of understanding situations that typically defy understanding. Through the space of the novel, Gurnah analyzes life situations and grasps social structures. Reading Gurnah is like making a series of discoveries in Africa and the West. He leads the reader into journeys with his characters. The journeys they make are overt, as well as inherent. The outside journeys of his characters are always a passage into the self. Thus, it seems as if the postcolonial novel is ultimately a tale of the subjects' route inwards into subjectivity. In the current globalized, postcolonial world order, the themes of fictional works are usually political struggles between the oppressor and the oppressed. Gurnah's novels, however, explore these struggles in manifold ways through their implications in class, space/place, morality, control, memory, solidarity, archiving and memory, and resistance. His broad canvas throws the postcolonial world into perspective, while also understanding inner drives, instincts, personal relationships, and motivations. His various novels take the reader into starkly distant realities, whereby they seem like time travel. The reader traverses through full channels of imagination between the East and the West, yet these regions seem to be only superficially distant. In Gurnah's texts, one usually finds characters which Gurnah represents as being divided into different social categories.

On looking carefully into the text, the reader realizes that Gurnah's fictional world is peopled by humans who are alike in their drives and struggle to actualize their dreams. One is aware of connectedness between different places and times. In an interview with Shane Creevy, Gurnah states, "Well sure. The past is present. The past is present because we live in our imaginations as well as in real life, so the past that is part of our imaginative landscape is still alive for us. It's never over, in that sense, I think" Gurnah tends to thin the already fine line that distinguishes between different times. For him, the past is always at hand, not just as memories but as a reality that makes people themselves. Individuals must accommodate their personal histories to their subjectivities to be agents. Gurnah brings a supple intelligence to the revelations of the essence of human lives. He seeks to understand the very being of humans, which one tends to forget in novels that are social commentaries, where the narrative seems to be thinned and reduced to history. The spirit of the time is with him, as is the understanding of being. Gurnah complicates things that would otherwise seem simple. It is not to say that Gurnah provides easy-to-grasp answers as the reader explores situations and people in his novels. The spirit of his narratives lies in their traversal of time. They oscillate between the past and the present. Gurnah, in his fiction, explores the enigma of subjectivity, meanings of life, and the depths of the psyche.

There are several dimensions of seeking in his novels. One finds characters trying to forge deep, inner ties to the soul, while also maintaining links to society. There are several ways in which characters seek subjectivity in Gurnah's texts, beginning from Hassan and Dottie, siblings who want to exit their life in crime-infested neighborhoods, to Daud, who seeks acceptance from whites, Salim, who seeks deliverance from the dead weight of his family history, Yusuf, who tries to be educated and actualize his dreams, Rehana, who seeks a partner, and Abbas, who seeks respite from his memory. All these ways of finding identity are curiously related to the inner subjective world and social life of his protagonists. Gurnah seems to reveal that seclusion and exclusivity are

rarely possible. Even when individuals seek to reach subjectivity through inward journeys, they can only find it through social interaction.

Gurnah's protagonists are not invincible heroes, but characters who have their share of weaknesses. They struggle to overcome these weaknesses throughout the novel. In *Pilgrims Way*, for instance, Daud's seeming weakness ultimately comes about as his strength. His silence and non-violent attitude are assertions of the power of his subjectivity in the face of racism. The characters in Gurnah's novels grapple with their pasts or dilemmas related to identity. Thus, all struggles, including those between the oppressed and an oppressive system, are struggles of identity, and operate personally.

The antagonists in Gurnah come about as hard characters who are usually devoid of feelings and empathy. In *Paradise*, the will of the colonizer seems to be pure irrationality. Aziz, who is a relation of Yusuf's, appears to the world to be a genuine and generous being. Only those people he oppresses know his inner, brutal dimension. This brutality does not thrive on economic or emotional fulfilment, but is driven by his irrational urge to wield power over others. Such motivations are why an individual becomes a "gravel heart", synonymous with the title of Gurnah's 2017 novel. In *Gravel Heart*, he reveals power structures, and explores the connectedness of different kinds of such systems, and how this integration seeks to silence and subalternize people. The novel records the corrosion of individualities and the eroding of faith in life and family, as the subject finds himself/herself caught within binaric social configurations. The assertion, "I think therefore I am", which has been made defunct given the developments in philosophical thought in the past century, seems to have been further challenged by Gurnah's texts, as unconscious and ideological forces take sway in his fictional world. Gurnah's texts are rife with battles between discourses and counter-discourses.

At the Centre of every novel by Gurnah is the enigma of the self. From one perspective, Gurnah tries to explore the self and identities, and the struggles of the protagonists as they exist in corrupt or racist societies, their romances, and relationships, and most of all, their efforts to reach authentic subjectivities. Despite the similarities in their struggles, each protagonist in his fiction is unique. It is each protagonist unto his universe. It must be emphasized, however, that Gurnah understands that the quest for subjectivity is an ongoing process. Subjectivity is forever being sought, made, and remade.

Gurnah breaks certain long-standing pacts between writers and their art of characterization. He does not describe his protagonists' physical being. His revelation of characters' lives happens through a description of the places that they inhabit. His characters, as it were, derive their identities from geographical sites. There appears to be a dialectical relationship between person and place, whereby people make spaces into places by giving them a distinctly human character, but these also define human lives. In some of Gurnah's novels, such as *By the Sea*, the geographical place itself becomes a living and breathing unit. In his texts, one comes to fathom places and people as a singular formation.

Gurnah is aware of the fact that existence is an unlimited possibility. His characters are enigmas that the reader cannot grasp entirely. Their futures remain uncertain, and the novels do not have definite closure. Gurnah seems to iterate, through the endings of his novels, that the seeking and formation of subjectivity are ongoing processes. The characters in his books see in the end what they want, but not what they are. He explores existence more than personality. Gurnah's narratives are replete with a constant inquiry. Gurnah's novels are not certainly conclusive, and the reader, as well as the characters, continue to discover realities. Even when his characters act with surety, there exists for them the element of an uncertain future.

In Gurnah's descriptions of situations, one sometimes sees a cause- effect equation that describes these events. There remains, however, in parts of his novels, a disjuncture between an exact cause and effect. In novels like *By the Sea* and *Paradise*, evil and corrupt forces exist without reason. They simply are. There are times when logic goes silent, and things just are as they are, and this in itself, is the high logic in Gurnah's fiction.

Born in 1948 in Zanzibar, Abdulrazak Gurnah came to Britain in 1968 with his brother, in a "semi-legal way, as asylum seekers" escaping in part from the political turmoils of the 1960s in Zanzibar. In most of his novels, those turmoils make up a background for the characters' past together with the familial crises in their lives. Through his main characters, Gurnah also focuses on inter-ethnic relationships between different social groups who occupy the Indian Ocean littoral. Above all, he reflects the destructing effects of European colonial rule (especially in Zanzibar) on the characters' lives, which later continues in the form of racial and cultural discrimination in contemporary Europe where East African characters emigrate. Migrancy and its side-effects such as displacement, alienation and in-betweenness are important themes that Gurnah employs in most of his novels. He presents immigrant characters coping with their feelings of isolation and lack of sense of belonging in their re-construction of an identity and a home for themselves. While doing this, he suggests storytelling as a tool by which his characters negotiate their past and present to build up a future for themselves.

Gurnah's oeuvre covers eight novels, a two-volume-work of literary criticism titled *Essays on African Writing* (1993), and the edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* (2007). Also, he is the associate editor of *Wasafiri* a journal for writers of colour in England. Seven out of Gurnah's eight novels are about departure, the main theme and a part of the title of his first novel being *Memory of Departure* (1987). Leaving his homeland behind the protagonist of *Memory of Departure* goes to Nairobi which becomes a country of disillusionment for him. He compensates his loss of home with memory and storytelling. Gurnah's following novels *Pilgrim's Way* (1988) and *Dottie* (1990) scrutinize racism and inter-racial marriage with a focus on migrancy in present day England, themes which resonate in Gurnah's 1996 novel *Admiring Silence*. As it is later demonstrated in the third chapter of this thesis, it is the story of an unnamed Zanzibari immigrant leading an unhappy life in England with his English partner Emma. In the novel migrancy is not something celebrated for the protagonist who escapes the politically suffocating atmosphere of Zanzibar; but it creates further conflicts in his life compelling him to get through discrimination by some white English people and the feeling of isolation. Gurnah's most recent novel *The Last Gift* (2011) is a sequel to *Admiring Silence* in that it tells the story of Abbas, the unnamed protagonist's

father in *Admiring Silence*, who leaves his children in England a record of his memories about his life in Zanzibar that uncovers his secret story of his first marriage. Gurnah's sixth novel *By the Sea* (2001), the other novel to be discussed in this thesis, concerns the issue of starting a new life in England with the idea of home in mind as experienced by Saleh Omar, a sixty-five-year-old man again from Zanzibar. Only two of Gurnah's eight novels, *Paradise* (1994) and *Desertion* (2005), are mainly set in East Africa. Both novels deal with the communal relationships in colonial East Africa.

Gurnah lays much emphasis on narration in his novels. Storytelling is an important part of characters' lives in helping them cope with their troubles and in expressing themselves to the reader while making it easier to find themselves in life. On the other hand, Gurnah's novels are also much related to what the characters cannot, do not or refuse to say. The characters' silence expresses more about them than their utterances, thus becoming more important than articulation in the novels. However, Silence is not a much-debated issue by the critiques of Gurnah's work. Issues discussed in relation to Gurnah's novels are mainly legal or illegal migrancy, diasporic life in a European country, dislocation, memory and ideas of home, and the limits of hospitality which arouses the questions of racism and otherness in Europe and especially in Britain. Among the related studies on Gurnah fiction, Sissy Helff's "Illegal Diasporas and African Refugees in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*" (2009) and John Masterson's "Travel and/as Travail: Diasporic Dislocation in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*" (2010) take the condition of being a refugee as their central theme questioning the exclusivist point of view of the Westerner and the place of the African within the borders of the host country. Helff's article touches upon the "terms of hospitality" (Helff 68) and announces that it is the discourse of national identity that prevents that of hospitality, and therefore creates and consolidates the concept of the Other.

Masterson's, on the other hand, is a chrono topical study that mainly focuses on transgression of the national borders which he illustrates through "regulatory spaces" ) like the boarding house in *By the Sea* which hosts people from different cultures such as Saleh Omar or the elegant restaurant in *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) in which Indian workers serve American clients. Through his microcosmic spatial exploration, Masterson highlights the political and economic factors that layer people and "forestall any hope of transnational solidarity" ). Another issue that some of the recent works on Gurnah's fiction address is the role of the multiculturalism of Zanzibar in Gurnah's works. Tina Steiner's article "Writing Wider Worlds": The Role of Relation in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction" (2010) underlines the picture of heterogeneity of East African coastal regions that make up a background for many of Gurnah's characters. Accordingly, she purports, Gurnah place's relational identity produced through the "network of relations without a sense of entitlement to filiation or projected territory" against the root identity thus resisting both the hackneyed image of the African and the precolonial pictures of the homogeneity by post-independence nationalist politics of identity. Referring to such a "shortcoming of both a Euro-centric and an Afro-centric historiography" ) and its representation in Gurnah's texts, Maria Olausson's article "The Submerged History of the Indian Ocean in *Admiring Silence*" (2013) draws attention to Gurnah's narrative of heterogeneity



and difference through its emphasis on the stock narratives of the colonial discourse repeated by the main character. In so far as Olausen's study emphasizes, the stories that the protagonist makes up mocks the ironical optimism of the times before colonialism and the artificiality of the colonial past. It is the power of stories here and in many of Gurnah's novels that enables his characters to convey their ideas even if their efficiency is disputable. In her comprehensive discussion on the role of storytelling in Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea*, Tina Steiner regards storytelling an act of translation between characters' past and present lives that helps them establish a future ("Mimicry or Translation?")

In addition to these studies and with a different focus and technique than theirs, this thesis aims to explore Abdulrazak Gurnah's treatment of silence in his novels *Admiring Silence* (1996) and *By the Sea* (2011) with a narratological approach mainly in the light of Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1983). It will be argued that in *Admiring Silence* (1996) and *By the Sea* (2001) silence is emphasized both as an effect of the oppressive power and used as a strategy that gives power to the oppressed. Furthermore, this thesis explores the treatment of migrancy in these novels in connection with silence. Thinking on the basis of social, material and textual constraints imposed by Britain in the post-colonial period on migrants from its former colonies, Gurnah opposes the tendency of fixing migrants as stereotypes through undifferentiated generalizations unrecognizing the "other's" consciousness and right to speak for him/herself. That is why the stories of his characters are characterized by their individuality and multi-directionality in contrast to stereotyping. Employing migrants as his characters, each having an ambiguous personality and a specific traumatic case, Gurnah points out the heterogeneity of migrant experience, which is another means of challenging the process of silencing in "history". In his article "The Idea of the Past", in which Gurnah focuses on the issue of writing of the African past, he states that I understood that the idea of the past which had become the legitimate African narrative of our times, would require the silencing of other narratives that were necessary to my understanding of history and reality. Other narratives Gurnah mentions are the Western ways of defining Africa, its culture and history, which, he suggests, should be silenced in order to understand the African past. In the same way, understanding the characters in the novels requires silencing of the Western stereotypes paradoxically through focusing on their silence which undermines the authority of the discourse of the West.

In line with this purpose, the first chapter centers on the theoretical background and methodology to be followed by the analysis of the novels. The theoretical basis will help me define where the novels stand, that is, explore what concerns they are fraught with as postcolonial pieces. Considering the importance of the narratives in the novels, some narratological terms to be used in this study will be explained in detail to diagnose lacunas, gaps and emphatical parts in the novels.

The following chapter concerning *Admiring Silence* compares the power of silence with the power of speech examining the unnamed narrator's stories on the basis of Genette's narratological approach. In this chapter I question the efficacy of speech through the stories which the narrator makes up in order to mock the stereotypical European discourse and underline the points where the speech fails. In the cases where he is exposed to such a discourse by the English characters around him, the narrator just keeps his silence, but imparts his derisive

monologues at the same time. Except for these monologues, on the other hand, he is not an articulate person due to the fact that he has had some traumatic experiences in Zanzibar before and that he cannot find solace now in England. While the existence of two focalizers in *By the Sea* increases the reliability of the narrative, the unnamed narrator's continual circumlocution of some parts of his story decrease's reliability and necessitates again a narratological exploration, which the second chapter undertakes.

Finally, the third chapter of this thesis focuses on silence in Abdulrazak Gurnah's another novel *By the Sea* examining Saleh Omar's and Latif Mahmud's stories in the light of narratological techniques as defined by Genette's, Rimmon-Kenan's, Mieke Bal's and Gerald Prince's works. Considering silence as a result of oppressive power, it will demonstrate how the narratological observations reveal the ideological dimensions in the novel. It is through external analepses, for instance, that the reader catches a glimpse of the colonial, independence and post-independence periods that prepare the ground for the narrators' traumas and ensuing silences. Exploring these two characters' relationship with people in England, the question whether they are really silent or not is also answered in this chapter. Saleh Omar's reticence in the face of British officials' efforts to communicate, but his confessions to Latif Mahmud indicates that he is not silent at all, which demonstrates the other dimension of silence, in that, it functions as a tool of resistance against British officials' discriminatory approach and the stereotypical notions. The fact that there are two narrators in the novel raises the question of the narrators', especially Saleh's reliability. Through focalization it is displayed how Latif Mahmud's account fills in the gaps where Saleh Omar keeps his silence or vice versa.

Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *By the Sea* (2001) is a compelling narrative of the trauma of displacement in postcolonial Africa. Set mainly between Zanzibar and Britain, it brings into focus the trauma of imprisonment as a defining feature of dislocation and unbelonging in postcolonial African cultures. The work critiques the forces of separation bred by racism in nationalist discourse, forces that act as the legacies of colonialism that limits the freedom of the oppressed colonial Other. This article supplements Michael Rothberg's notion of "traumatic realism" with Paul Gilroy's concept of "camp mentality". I argue that the novel's underlying purpose is to bear responsible witness to nationalist racism in Zanzibar and Britain as a holdover of the same ideological structures that made colonialism and slavery possible. As a bystander of the trauma of postcolonial displacement, the diasporic Zanzibari writer's narrative seeks to break free from the discursive and literal restrictions of a world marked by the racial division of subjectivities into "units of camps".

Quite a raft of critical work in postcolonial studies has focused on the posttraumatic aftereffects of colonialism and slavery. The contributions bring into light the need to unmoor trauma studies from their Eurocentric harbors. However, not enough consideration has been given to displacement as a bequest of a painful past in postcolonial African cultures. Under the assumption that the same ideological structures that made colonialism possible still exist, this article argues that writing displacement breaks the boundaries between past and present, making the anxieties of unbelonging expressed in postcolonial literature intimately link the postcolonial to the posttraumatic.

In Gurnah's exilic experience, a rereading of the past first and foremost attests to the lack of freedom imposed by racial politics as a legacy of colonial hegemony. As he is determined by the critical imperative to free writing from the shackles of racial politics, his novel *By the Sea* (2001) (hereafter referred to as BTS) can be read as one example of the redemptive narrative for which "historical responsibility" is of paramount significance.

It is thus crucial to refer to writing as one way of "bearing witness" even if the writer is spatiotemporally at a distance from the events of the past. Living in England, Gurnah may have spoken from a relative safety vis-à-vis the terrorizing events that have marred the history of Zanzibar since the colonial encounter. However, his belonging to the posttraumatic, or postcolonial, culture implicates him post-generationally to bear responsible witness.

Using Zanzibar's postcolonial culture as an example, I seek to argue that when writing African diasporic subjectivity is confronted with the repercussions of displacement as a posttraumatic effect of colonialism, it links traumatic realism with morally engaging demands. Such claims entail "the survivor, who attempts to document a documentable experience; the bystander, who feels impelled to bear an impossible witness to the extreme from a place of relative safety; and the latecomer or representative of the 'post memory' generation, who [...] inherits the detritus" of a violence culturally writ large.

I thus deploy a trauma-based reading to argue that the novel solicits responsible witnessing through the overarching notion of the "implicated subject". This subject needs to bear witness to events s/he is spatiotemporally distant from. The first section of this article refers to Gurnah's biography to illustrate the way in which he identifies in fictional terms with those left behind during the eruption of racial violence in post-independence Zanzibar. A theoretical investigation is employed to discuss the literal and discursive "encampment" that locates Gurnah in the restraining space between Zanzibar and Britain. Second, I will discuss how, by relating the micro-politics of dwelling to the macro-politics of home and belonging, the text breaks the boundaries between the extreme and the everyday in order to illustrate the insidiousness of trauma on a daily basis. The stories of the two refugee narrators take further dimensions as their everydayness runs parallel to the broader documentation of the extreme, violent history of post-independence Zanzibar. Third, I read Saleh's story of imprisonment as a redemptive narrative that seeks to break the victim/perpetrator and inside/outside binaries. This transgressive act of telling aims to bear witness beyond the boundaries inflicted by nationalism's gate-keeping industry.

## **Introduction: Locating Gurnah and his World**

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell, all of which are reworked in that story of our own lives that we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, but virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and re-assessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. The narrative impulse is as old as our

oldest literature; myth and folktale appear to be stories we recount in order to explain and understand where no other form of explanation will work.

In this author study of the novelistic oeuvre of the Zanzibari-born, UK-based writer, Abdulrazak Gurnah, this quote from Peter Brooks underscores the power of narratives to mediate the way we make meaning of reality. The thesis explores how the author, in his eight novels, deploys literary aesthetics to speak to and illuminate representations of migrant life as generated by the long history of human contact, cultural exchange and commercial connection on the East African Indian Ocean littoral both before and after the independence of Zanzibar in 1961. By exploring how these connections involve various forms of migration and journeys to strange lands (away from the characters' original places of domicile), the thesis investigates how Gurnah's craft engages with the broader issue of migrants' search for sociable spaces in differentiated socio-political contexts.

All of Gurnah's narratives are migration stories. In a globalizing world that enables the movement of people, goods and ideas, but in which hostile and inhospitable tendencies are on the rise, his fiction offers a window for understanding how migration affects peoples' interactions in lived, embodied experiences. The narratives therefore contribute experiential and affective perspectives to debates on migration and social relations in East Africa and the world at large that, for instance, non-literary forms of representation may not provide. This thesis investigates how Gurnah's fiction sheds light on the limitations that migration and consequent encounters with stranger's place on human relations. The study illustrates how in Gurnah's novels, different outlooks and forms of negotiation represent alternative social imaginaries that allow glimpses of hospitable encounters in the course of navigating complex local and global conditions. By engaging with his complete oeuvre, the study investigates how the narratives use linguistic and stylistic choices to represent the movement of people, ideas, and goods across the Indian Ocean and the Eastern African region and beyond (specifically, to the UK where most characters settle). The aim is to gain an understanding of Gurnah's cosmopolitan vision and how this vision is impacted upon and often curtailed by inhospitality, by notions of nationalism, and by cultural fundamentalism.

Gurnah is the author of eight novels to date: *Memory of Departure* (1987), *Pilgrims Way* (1988), *Dottie* (1990), *Paradise* (1994, short-listed for the Man Booker Prize), *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion* (2005) and *The Last Gift* (2011), all of which engage with migration and its attendant themes. Apart from the eight novels, Gurnah is also known for his critical works. He has edited several volumes of literary criticism, *Essays on African Writing: A Re-evaluation* (1993) and *Essays on African Writing: Contemporary Literature* (1995) and *The Cambridge Companion to Salman Rushdie* (2007).

Though Gurnah is "one of the most prolific and refreshing figures in the field of East African writing" (Gikandi, *Encyclopedia of African Literature* 295), various critics have bemoaned the relative critical neglect of his work. For instance, Khaing O'Okwemba observes that East Africa critics mainly focus on "canonical Swahili authors such as Said Ahmed Said, Mohamed Said Abdullah, Shaban Roberts [sic] and Kezilahabi [while] the outstanding Tanzanian English [writer] Abdulrazak Gurnah . . . passes more or less unnoticed". Sally-Ann Murray also notes that despite the complexity and literary depth of Gurnah's fiction, the focus by critics on Tanzanian authors who

write in Kiswahili renders Gurnah “a virtual non-entity”. By engaging with Gurnah’s complete oeuvre, this thesis hopes to help redress the relative critical neglect that some of his novels, in particular his earlier texts, have suffered. In “Critical Perspectives on Abdulrazak Gurnah”, Tina Steiner and Maria Olausson observe that “Gurnah’s work deserves more attention than it has received to date”. My intervention therefore aims not only to add to the available scholarship on Gurnah, but also to add to the body of existing knowledge on Tanzanian Anglophone fiction, “which remains quite a neglected area of literary study” .

There is a specific focus on Zanzibar as the setting for most of his fiction. Of his eight novels, only two are solely set in Britain. Gurnah was born in Zanzibar in 1948. In 1968, the aftermath of the Zanzibar revolution, which was followed by what he describes in *Memory of Departure* as a “heady atmosphere of intrigue and politics and revenge . . . that the independent government had brought” , he was forced to “run away to Britain” . Due to his Yemeni/Kenyan heritage he was among those who left Zanzibar because of the terror which the revolutionary government visited on people not considered “African” enough.

His arrival in the UK in the late 60s coincided with Enoch Powell’s racist and xenophobic “Rivers of Blood” speech which was part of a “demonic campaign against immigration. The social atmosphere at the time of Gurnah’s arrival in the UK, and which significantly informs his work, is captured succinctly in his own words in “Fear and Loathing”:

What a shock it was to discover the loathing in which I was held: by looks, sneers, words and gestures, news reports, comics on TV, teachers, fellow students. Everybody did their bit and thought themselves tolerant, or perhaps mildly grumbling, or even amusing. At the receiving end, it seemed constant and mean. If there had been anywhere to go to, I would have gone.

This atmosphere of hatred in the UK, together with the circumstances of Gurnah’s departure from Zanzibar, forms the main context of his fiction. It is his concern with “people dislocated from their place of origin” that crystallizes Gurnah’s major themes: migration, trade, and hospitality. These themes are explored across his works of fiction, which are set in various distinct yet interconnected temporal and spatial localities: the pre-colonial Indian Ocean world and the Swahili coast (*Paradise, Desertion*); the time of German colonization (*Paradise*) and British colonization (*By the Sea, Admiring Silence, Desertion*); post-independence nationalist Zanzibar (*Memory of Departure, Admiring Silence, Desertion, By the Sea*), Britain (*Dottie, Pilgrims Way, The Last Gift* ); and there are settings that traverse both Africa and Europe (*By the Sea, Admiring Silence, Desertion*). Thus, Gurnah’s fictional universe, as Nasta observes, involves “moving words/worlds across cultures and transporting the imagination beyond the maps of narrowly defined borders” (“Introduction” 5). For Gurnah, time shifts, from “before the beginning of time”, as in his short story “Bossy” (56), to the internet age in *The Last Gift*, provide the temporal frame and span of his work. As Gurnah’s narratives constantly show, individuals and their stories can be a fertile zone for reading the past, since individual lives are shaped by the larger social configuration, which is complicated by a multiplicity of factors, such as class, gender, religion and race. Zanzibar, with its strategic location near the Indian Ocean East African coast, offers the perfect geopolitical location to engage with the issue

of hospitality and its limitations because of its long maritime history of cross-cultural trade. Research has shown that as early as 3000 BC one could find “communities that were permanently settled, domesticating animals and probably crops, and trading with other ancient cultures”. This trade was local, but also extended “to the interior of the main continent all the way to the Nile Valley”, and even across the Indian Ocean: there is credible evidence that there was “early contact between Asia and Africa”. The cultural, historical and economic significance of Zanzibar may be better understood if one investigates the main actors in the Indian Ocean trade over time, and there have been many: “the Assyrians, Sumerians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Indians, Chinese, Persians, Omani Arabs, Dutch, and English all have been there at one time or another” Yet, none of these people, as Gurnah’s *By the Sea* demonstrates, came away empty handed:

They brought with them their goods and their God and their way of looking at the world, their stories and their songs and prayers, and ... and a glimpse of their learning ... they brought their hungers and greed’s, their fantasies and lies and hatreds, leaving some among their numbers behind ....

Focusing on this history of trade, Johan U. Jacobs’ “Trading Places” explores how Gurnah’s *Paradise* “thematizes trade in Africa from the Indian Ocean coast and fictionally recreates the last of the Great Arab and Swahili caravans into the region around the Great Lakes”. Through the life of Yusuf and other characters in *Paradise*, the work re-imagines the history of slavery in the “East African World” and its connections to the global economy. Building on Jacobs’ work and Jacqueline Bardolph’s study of *Paradise*, I explore familial and trade relationships that are imagined through East African lived experiences, and at the same time problematized by the presence of ethnic and political hostilities.

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