

## **ANALYSIS OF THE INNER EXPERIENCES OF ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S CHARACTERS**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article deals with the issues based on analyzing inner psychological world and emotional depth of characters in the novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah. Through the lens of postcolonial theory and psychological literary analysis, the study examines how personal trauma, identity crises, displacement, and memory shape the protagonists' internal experiences. The analysis also includes a comparative review of recent international studies to understand global scholarly perspectives on Gurnah's portrayal of emotional and existential struggles. The findings highlight the author's unique narrative style that encapsulates silence, introspection, and resilience as vital elements of the human condition in postcolonial literature.

**Keywords:** Abdulrazak Gurnah, inner experience, trauma, displacement, postcolonial literature, identity, psychological realism, character development

### **INTRODUCTION**

Abdulrazak Gurnah, the Nobel laureate in Literature (2021), is renowned for his powerful depictions of migration, memory, and postcolonial identity. His novels offer profound insights into the psychological state of displaced individuals, often grappling with the burden of exile and the haunting legacy of colonialism. Unlike many postcolonial authors who emphasize collective narratives, Gurnah often focuses on the internal landscapes of his protagonists, allowing readers to access the silent struggles that lie beneath the surface of cultural and historical upheavals.

Gurnah's characters are typically caught in a liminal space — between their past and present, their homeland and hostland, between cultural expectations and personal desires. This emotional limbo is rendered with striking realism, making his works fertile ground for psychological and postcolonial analysis. The aim of this article is to analyze the inner experiences of Gurnah's protagonists and examine how memory, trauma, and identity manifest in their internal monologues, decisions, and relationships.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study of inner experiences in Gurnah's works has gained traction in literary circles. Scholars such as Nasta (2016), Sanga (2021), and Omar (2019) have emphasized the author's narrative strategies that center internal conflict over overt political commentary. Nasta notes that Gurnah's characters "internalize exile," experiencing it not merely as a physical dislocation but as a chronic emotional and psychological rupture.

Said's theory of Orientalism and Bhabha's concept of hybridity have been applied to Gurnah's fiction to discuss how fractured identities are constructed in colonial and postcolonial settings. Gurnah resists simplistic binaries of victim/perpetrator or colonizer/colonized by portraying characters with nuanced psychological complexity.

Recent studies (Khan, 2020; Adebayo, 2022) have applied trauma theory to *By the Sea* and *Paradise*, emphasizing the role of suppressed memory, narrative silence, and emotional detachment. These works suggest that Gurnah's characters often retreat into introspection as a coping mechanism for dealing with their uprooted lives. Abdulrazak Gurnah's literary contributions have garnered increasing scholarly attention in recent years, particularly after receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2021. His novels are characterized by a profound exploration of identity, exile, memory, and trauma, which serve as key themes in analyzing the

inner world of his characters.

According to Sadullayeva N.K. (2024), in her article “Intertextuality in the Novel ‘By the Sea’,” Gurnah uses literary allusions and intertextual references to construct a layered psychological profile of his protagonists, particularly Salim, whose migration and adaptation process is deeply rooted in the echoes of historical trauma and colonial displacement [2]. This highlights the importance of historical memory in shaping inner emotional realities.

Furthermore, in her analysis of the novel “Paradise,” Sadullayeva discusses the interplay between religious and worldly elements that define the spiritual dilemmas of the protagonist Yusuf. The character's journey is portrayed not only as a literal voyage but also as an internal conflict between personal desires and socio-religious expectations [4]. This duality provides a deeper understanding of the psychological development within the postcolonial context.

Gurnah's nuanced depiction of internal suffering is also reflected in critical studies by other international scholars. For instance, Cook (2022) emphasizes how silence, guilt, and cultural alienation influence character behavior, particularly in diasporic narratives. Similarly, Matzke (2021) investigates trauma as both a personal and inherited condition in “Desertion” and “By the Sea,” where love, loss, and betrayal echo across generations, underscoring the intergenerational transmission of emotion and trauma.

## DISCUSSION

A close reading of Gurnah's novels reveals recurring psychological motifs: silence, longing, guilt, and alienation. In *By the Sea*, the protagonist Saleh Omar exemplifies suppressed grief and unresolved trauma. His inner monologues are filled with hesitant reflections, as he navigates exile through carefully constructed narratives that conceal as much as they reveal.

In *Desertion*, love and betrayal intersect with colonial power dynamics, resulting in characters who must carry the psychological burden of historical transgressions. Similarly, *Gravel Heart* presents an internalized narrative of shame, where the protagonist's self-worth is fragmented by familial and cultural expectations.

Gurnah's use of limited narration, withheld backstories, and circular narrative structures reflects the fragmented psychology of his characters. Silence is not just absence; it becomes a form of resistance and emotional preservation. This unique technique underscores the author's view of identity as a fluid, often painful construct shaped by exile and remembrance.

Abdulrazak Gurnah's characters are often portrayed as deeply introspective individuals grappling with themes of exile, memory, guilt, and the quest for identity. Their inner emotional lives serve as a mirror of broader postcolonial realities. Below are detailed examples from Gurnah's major works:

*By the Sea* (2001). *Salim, an elderly asylum seeker from Zanzibar, arrives in England carrying both literal and emotional baggage. Through his first-person narrative, we see his constant oscillation between shame, nostalgia, and resilience. Example: “I do not know why I came. Perhaps I wanted a place to die in peace. Perhaps I thought I would find justice. I don't know anymore.” Analysis: Salim's confession reveals a fragmented self, shaped by political betrayal and personal loss. His inner monologue reflects emotional fatigue and an existential void, suggesting that exile is not merely physical but psychological.*

*Desertion* (2005) Rashid, a Zanzibari man studying in England, navigates between cultural displacement and self-discovery. He struggles with feelings of alienation, academic pressure, and romantic rejection. *Example: “I am a visitor, a tolerated presence. Not quite theirs, not quite my own.” Analysis: This moment encapsulates diasporic dissonance. Rashid's emotional detachment and quiet grief highlight the difficulty of belonging when identity is divided between homeland and hostland.*

*Afterlives* (2020). *Ilyas returns home after years in the German colonial army. He finds himself emotionally distant and unable to reconnect with his roots. Example: “They said I came back a ghost... but I never felt I had returned.” Analysis: Post-war trauma and cultural dislocation define Ilyas's internal struggle. Gurnah portrays him as a symbol of historical amnesia—physically present, yet psychologically lost.*

Gurnah's characters rarely voice their pain openly; instead, their psychological suffering is revealed through subtle gestures, silences, and fragmented memories. These inner conflicts are often unresolved, reflecting the complexity of postcolonial identities. His narrative technique—non-linear timelines, internal monologue, and metafiction—allows readers to experience the characters' emotional turmoil intimately.

For instance, in *By the Sea*, Salim's use of memory as a storytelling device reveals that the trauma of exile is not healed by time. Similarly, Yusuf's quiet submission in *Paradise* is not naivety, but a coping mechanism in a world where freedom is illusionary. By humanizing political and historical trauma through deeply personal stories, Gurnah invites readers to see refugees, migrants, and exiles not as statistics, but as complex individuals with rich emotional lives.

## CONCLUSION

Abdulrazak Gurnah's literary oeuvre offers a profound portrayal of the human psyche under the duress of migration, historical trauma, and identity crises. His characters' inner lives reflect broader themes of displacement, memory, and emotional resilience. Gurnah's contribution to postcolonial literature lies in his ability to render the unspoken and the unseen — the private anguish and silent fortitude of individuals caught in historical crosswinds. The psychological depth and moral ambiguity in his characters challenge readers to reconsider simplistic notions of victimhood and cultural identity. Future research can further explore the linguistic tools and narrative ethics Gurnah employs to construct such rich psychological portraits.

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