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**"Shattering its Pregnant Silences":
Silence, Memory, and History as Healing Powers in
Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea***

MA Dissertation

Author: Aina Maria Díaz Llabrés

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Monnickendam

Department of English and Germanic Studies

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I cannot thank her enough, next to my lovely friends and partner who have always been reassuring.

Abstract

The novel *By the Sea*, written by Nobel prize winning author Abdulrazak Gurnah, depicts the lifelong story and feud of two Zanzibari men, Latif and Omar, whose lives intertwine. Their connection and conflicts are the essence of this novel, while their generational feuds are being discussed in the novel, the reader is presented with lifelong family feuds surrounded by silence, issues of betrayal, guilt, memory, and eventual forgiveness. Latif and Omar share long walks, cups of tea, and quiet evenings where they attempt to resolve their past family's enmity and find companionship and alliance in their new home, ironically located in the center of the British Empire, London.

I argue that silence can be occasionally necessary and empowering in a situation of forced or illegal migration. Nonetheless, eventually striving away from it is equally necessary. Latif and Omar's generational trauma undergoes a healing process by the act of breaking their silence. Moreover, this silence can only be broken with the perspective provided by temporal and geographical distance. Eventually, their personal narratives challenge traditional history and allow the protagonists to experience a healing and empowering effect when navigating their individual and shared memories.

Keywords: *By the Sea*, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Silence, Generational Trauma, Memory, Narrative Gerontology, Home.

Introduction

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001) depicts themes of diaspora, migration, and history, exploring the complexities of diverse contemporary society. *By the Sea* resonates with present concerns of dislocation, racism, and memory, highlighting the urgent need for these issues to be addressed, which Gurnah does through fiction. In this opening section, I will embark on an in-depth discussion of the novel's contents, significance, and the profound impact it has on the readers.

For those unfamiliar with the novel's plot, Gurnah's sixth novel, *By the Sea*, portrays the memories held by Latif Mahmud and Saleh Omar, as they uncover their shared past in Zanzibar during its years of revolution and independence¹. The novel begins when Omar befriends Hussein, a Persian merchant, to whom he lends a large sum of money that is never repaid. Due to this, Omar has to use the security document that Hussein gave him in order to ensure he gets his money back. Eventually, this initial connection evolves into Omar acquiring Latif's family home, which was Hussein's deposit. This triggers a long-lasting enmity between the two families. Latif's mother organizes a campaign to dishonor Omar and put him into prison, with the help of her extramarital partner, the Minister. Due to this enmity, Omar will spend eleven years in prison and lose his passport. By the time Latif's brother comes back from his years of mysterious trade and commerce, Omar is already a senior. Nonetheless, Omar's advancing age does not stop Hassan —Latif's brother— from acquiring his old home. In order to avoid the possibility of another prison sentence, Omar flees Zanzibar using the birth certificate of Rajab Shaaban's —Latif's father— in order to enter Britain as a refugee; here, he will meet Latif once again.² The novel *By the Sea* showcases the cruelties and fears of aging, aggravated by the anxieties of

¹For essential dates regarding Zanzibari history, and the years prior and after revolution see Appendix.

² Based on: Hand, Felicity. "Abdulrazak Gurnah". *The Literary Encyclopedia*. 2012. Updated in 2022.

feeling diasporic and foreign. Latif and Omar, bound by their intertwined histories, share long walks, cups of tea, and quiet evenings in which they attempt to reconcile their family's past enmity and find companionship and solace in their new found home in London. Their profound connection, intermingled with conflicts, is the essence of this novel. While their generational conflicts are being discussed, the reader is introduced to issues of silence, history, memory, and the transformative power of eventual forgiveness. These three main concepts overlap, they are intricate. In this dissertation, I analyze silence as an element that has been highly present in both the national and individual level of postcolonial history. When silence is broken, memory comes into play, and through the act of re-telling individual and historical memories, history can be rewritten.

Gurnah (1948-) is a novelist and critic born and raised in Zanzibar, a former British protectorate. As a 20 year-old, he migrated to Britain seeking political asylum from the revolution in Zanzibar (Hand 2021). It is crucial to recognise that Gurnah follows a thematic line regarding displacement, memory, and historical narratives with the specific aim to shed light and discuss the issues faced in the coastal region of East Africa, mostly Zanzibar. His works skillfully depict the contrast between the collective and the individual versions of history in order to create an honest and exhaustive representation of the transformative years marked by revolution and independence in Zanzibar, while also challenging and deconstructing historical narratives.

Gurnah's *By the Sea* has been analyzed by a number of scholars. Notably, according to Nisha Jones (2008) *By the Sea* explores the profound experiences of migration and displacement (37). This novel is a very intimate narration of Zanzibari history in which the reader is able to thoroughly appreciate the lingering presence and power of silence within the lives of these two

men shaped by their generational disputes. *By the Sea* can be considered a fictional example of the healing powers inherent in the process of aging and narration, the two protagonists reflect on their life events after finding each other in England in their later years. They eventually let go of silence and the process of re-telling and a process of healing starts.

On another note, many scholars tend to focus on its unreliable narrator, Saleh Omar, when analyzing the presence of silence in this novel. For example, Dave Gunning (2011) explains that “the language that defines the situation of illegal immigrants may be not only unacceptable but also unworkable, necessitating a mode of expression through silence” (143). Gunning’s observation showcases the complexity of Omar’s character, who, despite his fluency in English, is advised against speaking the language with the authorities. By maintaining silence, Omar seeks “to protect himself from a more complete assault on his selfhood. Silence is defence” (145). Gunning extensively focuses on Omar’s illegality, his use of silence, and the power of language, overlooking the character of Latif, a man who has chosen to remain silent most of his adult life. In this case, Latif resides in silence as a coping mechanism or a protective shield against his own experiences of trauma. They inhabit different forms of silence, but both Omar and Latif’s silences seem to converge as a prelude to a shared journey of therapy and healing, one they embark upon together.

In turn, Charne Lavery (2013) traces a connection between narrative authority, silence and the field of Ocean Studies in Gurnah’s *By the Sea*. Lavery conducts an analysis on how the novel utilizes thematic and formal silences to portray the gaps present in the history of the Indian Ocean. This exploration showcases the significance of silence and history, two crucial themes that align closely with my research. By embracing these elements, the novel *By the Sea* holds the potential to give voice to personal accounts of Zanzibari individuals that might have otherwise

been overlooked, creating a thorough representation of its history. Moreover, Lavery sheds light on a notable development in the narrative: the eventual willingness and desire of the two protagonists to break the silence and embrace the opportunity to be heard, as much as the inherent need for expressing themselves and the potentially liberatory effects it has (122). Actually, Omar states that he looks forward to hearing Latif talk in order to find mutual relief. I believe that Gurnah's deliberate decisions regarding the narrative structure of *By the Sea*, wherein the story is told from two different perspectives, allows the reader to slowly fill the gaps, doubts, and silences that abound in this novel and experience a transformative experience alongside the two protagonists, as they gradually shed their emotional barriers and expose their vulnerabilities, attempting to find relief and healing in each other's narration of events.

As I delve into the works of other scholars, I frequently encounter the idea of the foreign land as a "unifying force". Among those is Felicity Hand, who states that "Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud [...] gradually develop an unexpected friendship inspired by a kind of ethnic solidarity, of the type that can only develop in a foreign land" (Hand 2010, 75). The idea of creating a stronger bond in a foreign land is deeply present in most transnational works, and it can be a moving force to create friendships and connections between those who feel diasporic. Without attempting to refute this perspective, I argue that the bond forged between Omar and Latif is not only attributed to the foreign land itself, but rather to the symbolic distance that it represents. Both geographical and temporal distance have allowed these characters time, space, and perspective to accept and understand many shared traumatic experiences, as well as dismantling generational lies. Omar and Latif sit down to untangle their individual stories and traumas thanks to the distance established between a tarnished past and a safe present, which was only possible through the passing of time and a journey over the sea. Additionally, Esther Pujolràs (2021)

analyzes the power of narration from the perspective of narrative gerontology³. Her work led me to believe that the aging process plays an active role in this novel. Without it, the protagonists would not be able to gain the distance and maturity necessary to discuss such challenging topics. Moreover, Pujolràs discusses the larger effect of life narratives, supporting the idea that this story has healing effects while also enriching and challenging historical accounts.

Likewise, the narrative form of this novel deserves a close look and significant attention. As a modern novel, Gurnah's *By the Sea* exhibits distinct elements that deviate from conventional writing, signifying a departure from traditional literary forms. In *The Modern Novel* (2004), Jesse Matz shares a thorough analysis of the formal aspects that create a modern work. Matz claims that in order to convey a sense of reality, fictional plots and techniques had to be artfully reshaped, while its characters demanded a fresh approach that explored the foundations of selfhood (45). This is exactly what Gurnah does in his work. He takes the reader into the inner world of the two protagonists, skilfully creating a sense of depth and authenticity within their narratives. This deliberate approach aligns with what Matz classifies as an anti-hero, an essential component of modern works: "Nothing is more characteristic of the literature of our time than the replacement of the hero by what has come to be called the anti-hero" (46). What we find is a break from classic heroes and an introduction to anti-heroes who inhabit an unheroic world, whose authenticity, inadequacy, ordinary acts of survival, and battle against the system are admirable and authentic to our times. There is a disassociation from society, which has become "impersonal, mechanistic, and oppressive" (Matz 2004, 47). Gurnah's characters —Latif and Omar— become immersed in their personal truth and draw away from an oppressive society. This is noticeable in the narrative form of the novel, Gurnah opts for perspective and emphasizes

³ Narrative gerontology can be understood as an insightful approach to aging as a process. It explores life "as a story" (Kenyon and Randall 1999). This term will be fully discussed later.

personal truth instead of attempting to be objective. The reader receives Omar's and Latif's thoughts without a mediator. Matz remarks that the modern writer wanted to erase the omniscient narrator, since it is considered limiting.

Alternatively, perspective is emphasized (51). Gurnah does exactly that, the analyzed novel consists of a two-perspective narration, where PPOV —personal point of view— is the center of the narration, the reader receives Latif's and Omar's thoughts with no mediator or interruption. Actually, Gurnah takes it a step forward, in his work *By the Sea*, in which he deliberately instills a sense of uncertainty and doubt in readers throughout the initial stages of the reading process, through purposeful information gaps and formal silences. This intentional approach prompts readers to actively engage and create their own perspective of events, inviting them to become active participants in the narrative. Therefore, by involving the reader in the process of narration, Gurnah amplifies the principles of authenticity and multiple perspectives within the work. In line with this, Matz proposes two very powerful ideas: "Personal truth outdoes received wisdom", "the flawed perspective became the hallmark of truth" (50-51). What is found in these two quotes is an analysis of truth through an opposition of history and memory, the latter being considered closer to truth and authenticity. This is exactly what we find in Latif and Omar's personal accounts. Even though history is perceived as set and unchangeable and memory as personal, subjective, or even flawed, modern writers consider memory to be closer to the truth. Therefore, the purpose of memory in modern works is to challenge the notion of objectivity while simultaneously challenging imposed historical accounts of history. The writing of memory through multiple perspectives and a personal point of view depicts unmediated experiences, while imposed history seems to silence these very experiences. This might explain

why writing, speaking, and being heard is a powerful act of rebellion for minorities, and eventually becomes a source of healing for our protagonists.

Taking into account the previous considerations, the aim of my dissertation is to reveal that Latif and Omar's generational trauma undergoes a healing process by the act of breaking their silence. Moreover, I contend that the action of re-telling past experiences and sufferings is only possible after a certain temporal and spatial distance has been established. Latif and Omar create their own narration of events by drawing upon their memories, thus challenging imposed historical narratives while also experiencing a healing and empowering effect. Their shared recollections and stories from their past and original home forge a unifying bond within their current existence in an alien space.

In this dissertation, I am to address the following pivotal questions in order to look deeper into these themes and their implications. This dissertation will attempt to address the following questions. First, *what is the role of silence in this novel, and what is the consequence of drawing away from silence?* And second, *how is geographical and temporal distance useful in the process of remembering one's experiences and history?* The dissertation begins by discussing the role of silence in the novel as means of survival, while also commenting on how silence is represented in this particular text and what its formal manifestations are. Moreover, my analysis will encompass an exploration of consequences that arise when diasporic individuals step away from silence, examining its impacts at both individual and collective levels. The subsequent section will closely examine the function of geographical and temporal distance in shaping memory and the act of re-telling. Lastly, I will touch on the unifying power of shared memories and stories from their past and original home, illuminating how these elements forge a sense of unity and connection between the characters in their current location in an alien space.

When the word silence is used, it is based on Gunning's findings. Silence can be perceived as a refuge or a defense for illegal immigrants, it allows them to protect themselves "from a more complete assault on their selfhood" (145). What is more, the language in the situation of a refugee might be unacceptable and unworkable, which leads them to looking for a way to express themselves through silence (143).

In turn, the concept of history is clearly very wide and complex, therefore, I discuss this concept based on Pujolràs' definition: "The conflation of "history" and "story" [...] A collection of individual memories, fragments of stories and historical accounts that merge the individual and the collective, thus dismantling the unified discourse of the colonial history of the Indian Ocean" (83). In other words, a fusion of both individual and collective notions of history and memories which challenge the conventional understanding of "History" from a traditional Western perspective.

Lastly, memory is approached from the viewpoint of Jan Assmann in his work on communicative and cultural memory. Memory is the faculty that allows us to create an awareness of identity on a personal and collective level (Assmann 2008, 109). Memory is divided in three different levels, *inner* level, *social* level, and *cultural* level. The first makes reference to personal memory, our own awareness of past events. The second presents memory as a tool for communication and social interaction, it "enables us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory" (109). Lastly, cultural memory inhabits "the realm of traditions, transmissions, and transferences" (110), it can be transferred and transmitted (111). In other words, memory inhabits and influences every sphere of our lives. Individual memories have the potential of building a community when they

are shared. Moreover, the shared and common memories can alter how the collective memory is passed on.

In order to ensure that the reading of this paper is productive, I will define the keywords that are essential to my research. First, the notion of “silence” is an ongoing theme in Gurnah’s work, and the novel *By the Sea* is no exception. Gunning explains that silence escapes the limits of Western logocentric thought and that it can sometimes serve as a form of defense (2011), and an alternative way of communication. Silence is present in both of Gurnah’s protagonists, Latif and Omar. Second, a significant aspect of the novel is the presence of “generational or intergenerational trauma”. This field of study encompasses trauma that transcends from one generation to the next, leaving a lasting impact on displaced individuals and their families. In this novel, both protagonists bear the burden of shared trauma that permeates throughout their respective families. The effects of their trauma can be seen in their language, actions and life decisions, which is what will be discussed in this dissertation. Third, memory plays an essential role in the process of re-telling and remembering personal experiences, reshaping historical accounts and re-defining national memories. Through Latif and Omar’s memories, a new narrative of events can be constructed, enriching the historic understanding of the East African region and challenging Western-centric historical perspectives. Furthermore, memory serves as an essential component of the healing process, allowing for the acknowledgement, processing, and eventual resolution of generational trauma. At the same time, memory serves as a necessary component for a healing process in which generational trauma is acknowledged, processed, and ideally cured. Next, an important critical approach present in this dissertation is “narrative gerontology”, which could be defined as a lens through which aging and narrative can be understood and approached. It allows us to perceive human beings as emotionally-constituted

bodies, while keeping in mind the multifaceted aspects that create an individual's life story. When analyzing the life and stories of the protagonists in Gurnah's *By the Sea*, the framework of narrative gerontology will allow for a meaningful and complex approach to aging. At the same time, it gives importance to personal accounts of history and challenges Western established history. The last keyword is "home", which is not easy to define, so I will use Marangoly George's words in *The Politics of Home* (1996), "Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place. It is a community" (9). In *By the Sea*, home is presented as an element of dispute for the protagonists. It is tied to very specific memories that will be discussed throughout this dissertation. In due course, Latif and Omar create their own sense of "home".

Silence: “I knew the meaning of silence, the danger of words.”

In this first part of the analysis, research will be conducted around the issue of silence. As previously stated, silence is a key theme throughout the entirety of Gurnah’s works; it is present in most of his characters and their story. The analysis will take a close look at the expression of silence in the characters as well as in the narrative form of the novel *By the Sea*. In turn, the effects of stepping away from silence will be examined as well as the relation between silence and trauma, and why the former is used to express and deal with disturbing events. I will attempt to answer my first research question: *What is the role of silence in this novel and what is the consequence of drawing away from it?*

In this first section, attention is paid to the literary strategies to represent silence in the narrative form of this work. Gurnah purposefully uses an unreliable narrator as the protagonist of the novel, while also introducing multiple perspectives to the narration of events, thus creating a sense of uncertainty. All these aspects combined force the reader to have an active role in the narrative process. In modernist works, the omniscient narrator was quickly erased with the intention of creating a recount of events without any sort of mediator, allowing for a more individualistic and direct method of narration, more authentic even (Matz 2004, 51). This is exactly what is found in Gurnah’s unreliable narrator, Saleh Omar. Omar clearly states that his narration of events is not completely adhered to the “truth”. Instead, he admits to forgetting certain details of his story:

It is difficult to know with precision how things became as they have, to be able to say with some assurance that first it was this and it then led to that and the other, and now here we are. The moments slip through my fingers. Even as I recount them to myself, I can hear echoes of what I am suppressing, of something I’ve forgotten to remember, which then makes the telling so difficult when I don’t wish it to be. (Gurnah 2001, 2)

The fact that in the first chapter of the novel, Saleh Omar informs the reader that his account of events might be imperfect immediately alerts the reader, who has to assume an active role in the narrative process in order to fill the gaps created by silence or omission. In this case silence is “a mode of signalling and instantiating dialogue between the reader, the text and its context” (Kaigai 2013, 129). Here starts an ongoing sense of uncertainty or fragmentation that characterizes this work. Saleh Omar’s memories are unreliable, which creates in the reader a sensation of constant uncertainty. This uncertainty relies on the idea that there is always a missing piece of information, a detail we lack to completely understand the events. This narrative structure evokes a form of silence. Moreover, as explained by Kimani Kaigai, selective remembering is also a form of narrative silence (136). Logically, by omitting information the narrator creates gaps in his storytelling. What is more, these narrative gaps can be a representation of the historical gaps created by Western accounts of history, where information is altered and manipulated to fit into an hegemonic and colonial discourse. Lavery argues that the historical gaps in the Indian Ocean are reflected in the novel’s thematic and formal silences (Lavery 2013, 118). Certainly, this could be understood as Gurnah’s tool to connect narration to history. Gurnah’s task of focusing on the individual experiences of our protagonists creates a more realistic and authentic retelling of Zanzibari history, by authorizing individual experiences, concretely that of Omar and Latif. Their memories, worries, and questions are not exclusively theirs, but are shared by a larger community in Zanzibar.

Another narrative tool to replicate formal silence and accentuate the sensation of fragmentation is the use of multiple perspectives. *By the Sea* is narrated by two different protagonists, Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud, who are connected by their family’s long-lasting and undiscussed enmity. Saleh Omar presents himself by stating “I am a refugee, an

asylum-seeker. These are not simple words” (4), immediately putting forward his condition as an illegal immigrant. Meanwhile, Latif Mahmud is a solitary academic who has been living in England for most of his adult life. Although the novel is primarily narrated by Omar, the instances where Latif shares his story and version of events enable a deeper understanding of the occurrences among the families and its individuals.

At the same time, this maintains the aforementioned atmosphere of uncertainty, especially when their narration collides. As Lavery illustrates, “their not-entirely-overlapping narratives maintain throughout the sense of irreducible uncertainty” (121). The novel’s structure translated the spatial and temporal displacement of the characters, producing “a similar sense of disorientation in the reader” (122). The reader is presented with both stories, in these two versions some aspects coincide. However, other details and occurrences showcase the inescapable gaps between the two stories as well as within each of the accounts (122), meaning that both Omar and Latif purposefully leave out details that they simply do not want to share, or are not completely aware of. Again, silence abounds in their story-telling.

On a similar note, within the narration there are constant jumps in time which contribute to creating an unsure feeling to the narrative account. Since the story is not linear, we initially meet Saleh Omar in his sixties as a refugee. Immediately after, Omar starts his narration of past events that link him to Latif Mahmud’s family, while introducing Hussein, a sea trader who had shady deals with both Omar and Latif’s father, Rajab Shaaban Mahmud. At this point, the reader is presented with a variety of characters and events at various points in time, which keeps the ongoing sensation of fragmentation alive. The constant flashbacks and unsureness feed into the formal silences that characterize Gurnah’s work.

Moreover, the two narrators have very different voices and tone, as a consequence, the reader has to read between the lines of the character's tone since they refrain from speaking openly at first. On the one hand, Omar speaks with no rush, his tone could be classified as "quiet, meditative, philosophic" (Lavery 2013, 121). This can be appreciated when Omar breaks silence after being recommended not to admit to speaking English to the authorities. Omar finds himself silent in a neglected state and tells Rachel⁴, "'I don't think I need an interpreter,' I said. I was silently gleeful as I said this, of course" (64). At that moment, Rachel confronts Omar, to which he calmly answers, "I preferred not to" (65), replicating "Bartleby the Scrivener". Omar remains composed and collected even in situations where his selfhood is being negotiated. Logically, Omar must feel fear in this complex and delicate situation, but this does not translate into his manner of speaking. Since the narration is told from a personal and partial perspective, the reader has the duty of filling in the silences that our protagonists utter.

On the other hand, Latif Mahmud is slightly "quicker, angrier, more direct" (Lavery 2013, 121). Latif carries plenty of anger and grief, so this is portrayed in his tone, "'Why did you take my father's name?' [...] 'After everything you did to him, why did you then take his name?'" (145). Latif's anger is noticeable in this passage, he is reproaching Omar's actions, he speaks with frustration and sorrow over the memories he carries of Omar "hurting" his family. Even though Latif does not say "I am angry with you, I condemn what you did to my family", it is implicit in his tone and his very direct question, but never openly stated.

As Matz states, "the flawed perspective became the hallmark of truth" (Matz 2004, 51). In *By the Sea's* multiple and unreliable narration, the reader is shown an exclusively personal point of view, which logically comes with limitations, emphasizing Matz's flawed perspective. Matz explains that these stories are limited "to some haphazard, incomplete, mistaken, or limited

⁴ The legal adviser that works with the refugee organization and is responsible for Saleh Omar's case.

point of view” (51). In this case, the limitations are visible in the silences that are part of our protagonists’ voice and tone, which leave details and information up for the interpretation of the reader. However, there is no need for the “whole” truth, partial perspective feels more realistic. Gurnah recreates the silences and doubts that determine colonial history by only presenting a partial and personal truth. Thus, Gurnah accentuates the active role of the reader in a story filled with silence and gaps. At the same time, it creates an accurate representation of the truncated colonial discourse, connecting narrative and formal silence to historical silence.

In the second section of this analysis, focus is placed on how silence is represented through the characters of the novel and their lived experiences. An aspect regarding the main characters that seems striking is the fact that they have two names, which creates a form of silence. Illustrated at first with Saleh Omar, who is using the name of Latif’s father, “And my name is Rajab Shaaban. It is not my real name, but a name I borrowed for the occasion of this life-saving trip” (41). Omar is forced to hide his true identity in order to enter Britain, seeking safety. From the beginning of the narration, there is silence around Omar’s real name in order to ensure his well-being. As articulated by Gurnah himself in a video discussion⁵, many refugees are held in an unnecessarily authoritarian situation, in which they become completely dependent on the state. In this situation, a very hostile environment is created, one in which the survival and safety of the refugee is primordial (Georgetown University, 2021). Due to this, Saleh Omar takes shelter in silence, a source of protection for illegal immigrants going through a situation where they are at the mercy of an unjust system. In Omar’s condition, Gunning’s definition of silence as refuge is present, Omar relies on silence with the intention of avoiding an even greater violation of his selfhood (2011, 145). Omar and Latif change their names and use silence for different

⁵ For Georgetown University, in Qatar. A discussion led by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Professor Coilin Parsons, and Professor Rugaia Mustafa Abusharaf, for the Indian Ocean Working Group.

reasons. The former looks for security in a new and quiet identity, attempting to overcome the difficult and dehumanizing process of seeking asylum.

Regarding Latif⁶, he rejects his given name when he is younger, “I had decided on the plane. I would not use the name I had been given, but would be Latif, for its gentleness and the softness of its modulations, God’s name [...] My given name was Ismail Rajab Shaaban Mahmud” (133). Regarding Latif, I believe he lets go of his given name in an effort to distance himself from his traumatic past and disconnect his identity from his family. I argue that Latif establishes a relationship of silence with his family, responding to the dynamics of his household while he was growing up. For instance, his father never spoke about his drinking, his mother never admitted to having lovers, and his brother never explained what was going on between him and the seatrader, Hussein. One of the expressions of Latif’s silence is his decision to change his name, attempting to create some anonymity in his new life and identity in England. Latif explains this to Omar as they walk next to the sea:

When I escaped from GDR [East Germany], I never wrote to them, and I guessed that they would not know where I was so they would never be able to write to me. I wanted nothing to do with them, and their hatreds and demands. Their hatreds of each other, the hatreds that made him rage and mumble and fall into that corrosive silence of his. I know you’re not supposed to be able to say that about your parents, but it was a bit of luck, being able to escape from the GDR into a kind of anonymity, even to be able to change my name, to escape from them. To be able to start again. You know that fantasy? (Gurnah 2001, 239)

In this case, the ocean represents geographical distance, but also a form of silence. In the sense that once Latif has crossed an ocean and changed his location, he is able to "reinvent" himself in the eyes of others. Therefore, his identity is surrounded by silence, by what the others do not know about him. Thus, displaying the duality of his identity. Latif, as a subject, can choose how much of himself to expose and how much to hide. With this, the ocean, understood as

⁶ Latif describes his name as God’s name “for its gentleness and the softness of its modulations” (133), a name we would take “with respect, meaning no outrage or blasphemy” (133). The significance of his name relies on the fact that it is another aspect that draws him further from his family’s turmoil, it is connected to the new identity he has created as a quiet man.

geographical distance and a physical separation from his original home, constitutes a form of silence.

Silence becomes necessary in a situation where one's humanity is being reduced and attacked. Gunning claims that momentarily accepting the refugee's truncated humanity allows the individual "to protect himself from a more complete assault on his selfhood. Silence is a defence" (145). Saleh Omar finds himself in an incredibly delicate situation once he arrives in England seeking asylum, while being interrogated by an official named Kevin Edelman. He is recommended not to speak "They will ask you your name and your father's name, and what good have you done in your life: say nothing" (5). It is safer for Omar to completely erase his identity and not intervene, remaining silent is his protection. He explains that he is used to officials who mistreat and humiliate you, simply because they feel entitled. Therefore, Omar admits: "I played dumb" (6). Saleh Omar is completely aware of his limitations and the fact that he is at this man's mercy, it is noticeable in several statements: "Do with me what you will, O Kevin" (7), Omar surrenders to the figure of authority, because he is aware that it is best for his safety. This is yet another important declaration:

His manner made me feel that I was a tiresome and stupid prisoner he was interrogating [...] I reminded myself, needlessly, to watch out for a surprise attack. Needlessly because his options were many and I had only one: to make sure that Kevin Edelman did not become angry and contemplate something brutal. It must have been the tiny room and the duplicitous courtesy with which he was speaking to me that made me feel I was a prisoner. (Gurnah 2001, 9-10)

Omar claims that he feels like a prisoner due to the treatment received and the fact that he is treated almost as if he was a criminal, while also being reprimanded by Kevin. However, he is aware of his position in this situation, he is helpless. Omar has to surrender to Kevin Edelman in order to have a small chance of being accepted into England. This represents the complex reality

of the migrant person, one in which silence becomes an alternative way of self-articulation (Kaigai 2013, 129). The hostility of such a situation leads Omar to find cover in his silence.

Nonetheless, only reading his silence as protection would be an oversimplification. Behind Omar's silence, there is empowerment as well. Kaigai offers an interpretation to the narrator's silence, stating that the narrative invites the reader to focus on the lingering imperial setting and the motivations that inspire the narrator's silence by forcing the narrator to remain silent when speaking is expected (132). The interrogation led by Kevin as an official representing the law of England presents a situation charged with imperialistic politics and principles. Moreover, since Kevin is a European refugee, he plays the part of the "good immigrant", the immigrant that *deserves* to be there. In this encounter, Kevin Edelman shows his ignorance and underlying racist and imperial mindset:

Mr Shaaban, why do you want to do this, a man of your age? [...] How much danger is your life really in? [...] There is nothing moral in it, just greed. No fear of life and safety, just greed. [...] I know something about uprooting yourself and going to live somewhere else. My parents were refugees, from Romania. [...] I know about the hardships of being alien and poor [...] But my parents are European, they have a right [...] People like you come pouring in here without any thought of the damage they cause. You don't belong here, you don't value any of the things we value, you haven't paid for them through generations, and we don't want you here. We'll make your life hard for you, make you suffer indignities, perhaps even commit violence on you. (Gurnah 2001, 11-12)

Without the narrator's silence, the reader would be unaware of Kevin's questionable morality. This is a very intelligent and efficient way of changing the narrative focus through the use of silence. The reader becomes interested in Kevin's speech, Gurnah utilizes Kevin's remarks to highlight the intolerance of imperial discourse and how it intrudes on some of its people's ideals. The use of the silent narrator allows Gurnah to escape "a reactive sermon against the English" (Kaigai 2013, 132) and instead let the character make his own statements, openly disguising his ignorance. The consequence is the use of silence as an empowering tool for the narrator (132). In this scene, Omar is unable to answer back, but that puts him in a higher position, demonstrating

that Kevin's speech is simply inaccurate, cruel, and narrow-minded. As previously stated, empowerment can also be found in Omar's silence. The power and significance of silence is very well summarized in a sentence uttered by Omar himself "I knew the meaning of silence, the danger of words" (12). I believe this powerful sentence expresses the use of silence for illegal immigrants in a nutshell, sometimes words can be dangerous and silence is a more effective option.

Even though silence is necessary in certain circumstances, there is a need to break away from silence and start a conversation in order to commence a process of healing. Pujolràs explains that the memoirs and re-tellings of the protagonists become acts of self-definition and resistance against the exile and oblivion they face (83), even though this might be considered a rather optimistic approach, memory is certainly a tool for resistance in such cases. Being able to revisit the experiences Omar and Latif have undergone, allows them to assert their identity and their personal truth. Especially for Latif, who has been actively avoiding facing his memories and connecting with anyone who might remind him of his past, precisely because he is highly disconnected from it. Thus, the act of telling one's narrative and achieving a better understanding of the individual's story is a way to maintain one's integrity while negotiating the ongoing evolution of one's identity, this can lead to "fulfillment and happiness" (Pujolràs 2021, 81-2). Clearly, the identity of a migrant is bound to go through a process of change, while the person adapts to a new reality. Based on a previously mentioned video discussion with Gurnah, the experience of refugees is that of "creating a home out of a strange, unknown space" (Georgetown University, 2021). I argue that Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud start creating their sense of home through narration, while at the same time seeking recovery in their conversations.

An aspect that makes the conversations between the protagonists relevant for our contemporary society is that Gurnah's decision of portraying dislocation through the direct narration of a refugee (Saleh Omar) and a migrant (Latif Mahmud) "challenges discourses of tabloid sensationalism" (Masterson 2010, 412). Thus, presenting their situation from a humane point of view, as opposed to one that is romanticized or magnified. Gurnah's decision to emphasize dialogue allows Latif and Omar's voices to become the central part of the story.

The need to break silence is introduced when Omar and Latif meet in England for the first time. Latif finds out that someone is using his father's name to enter Britain and decides to meet the person, presuming that it would be Saleh Omar. Immediately, Omar narrates that he finds conversation absolutely necessary:

And even if I was sinful and wicked before, it is a function of mature years, to give redress and receive understanding. I had an accounting to give, and I could not have wished for a more suitable shriver, for he too needed to know what I knew, to make complete the absence and to utter the silences in his life here in the middle of nowhere. (Gurnah 2001, 145-6)

The refugee feels compelled to give his version of events in order to gain understanding after finding himself in an unknowing circumstance and confronting his prior choices. Gunning mentions that for the refugee, verbal enunciation becomes absolutely necessary to achieve any sort of prospering (2011, 143). The objective is simply to assert oneself after having undergone a process of dehumanization. In this case, Omar is seeking sympathy and hopefully resolution when he starts dialogue.

When conversation begins, Omar and Latif face the difficult task of remembering hurtful, traumatic, and even hidden memories. Logically, this is no easy task, and at first it is faced with irritation and anger. Though their conversations remain challenging, as time passes they leave anger aside. Dialogue becomes productive and more understanding. The ideal objective of their

task is to find healing together, which is quite difficult. Nonetheless, they do find relief, which is close enough.

One evening, Latif arrives at Omar's house and tells him: “‘It’s very good of you to let me come again,’ he said. ‘I thought I tired you last week, and made you talk about difficult things, and I was unpleasant and rude’” (207). To which he continues saying: “I feel worn out and raw, livid with sores” (207). In these short lines, an attitude change in Latif can be appreciated. He is less reactive, he apologizes for being unpleasant towards Omar and is open to being vulnerable and honest with him. Kaigai affirms that in this novel, the knowledge of the self for the characters “is built on the dialectic between dialogue and silence; story-teller and listener” (137). Initially, Latif avoids remembering his past life and resides in silence. But there is a shift in which he becomes a story-teller and a listener, and starts accepting his dual self. Thanks to commencing dialogue openly, Latif is able to find relief in telling his account and listening to Omar’s: “You must know that feeling [...] how worn out I am after all these years of knowing and not knowing, of doing nothing about it and how it can’t be helped. So I was looking forward to coming here, to hear you talk, for both of us to find relief” (207). To which Omar answers: “Yes, to find relief” (207). Both of them find relief in having someone to tell their story to, knowing that the other person is actually listening. Therefore, breaking away from silence can have therapeutic effects for these characters.

The last aspect to discuss in this section is the relation between silence and trauma, and the necessity for traumatic events to frequently be expressed through silence. Based on Geoffrey Hartman’s words, trauma can be defined as the result of an experience that becomes part of the person without actually being experienced, processed, nor passed into consciousness. It is considered a “foreign body” in our minds (2003, 257). Logically, trauma affects the formation of

words, and the way in which words deal with trauma is a technical process in which the brain is involved (Hartman 2003, 257). Therefore, if trauma is an experience that has not been processed nor passed into consciousness, the mind struggles to put it into words. This could be interpreted as one of the reasons why silence is a tool used to express trauma. Michelle Balaev asserts that based on contemporary literary trauma theory, “trauma creates a speechless fright” (2008, 149). The difficulties of processing a disruptive event can lead to remaining silent. What is more, the brain, as the carrier of coherent thought and in charge of encoding and processing information, is unable to do so with disruptive and traumatic events (Balaev 2008, 151). Due to this, traumatic experiences become unrepresentable (151). I argue that silence is a prelude to therapy or healing, and a necessary step for the protagonists before immersing themselves in productive dialogue.

On a similar note, the concept of expressiveness can be approached through two different values. Hartman states that expressiveness can be understood as the value of clearly expressing ideas with the intention of mitigating mental confusion or “the value of unburdening the heart with the aid of innovative signs” (257). In other words, finding new forms of expressing and navigating one’s disturbances. In *By the Sea*, many instances are filled with the protagonists’ silence, which could be interpreted as an innovative sign through which the process of unburdening one’s heart starts with. Omar and Latif oftentimes find tranquility in each other’s company, without the need of verbally addressing past issues. The feeling of safety found in silence might be another reason why it is used when dealing with trauma. Nonetheless, literary verbalization is necessary, since it “remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible” (Hartman 2003, 259). This points out why, even though silence is needed, breaking away from it becomes productive and healing for Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud.

Memory and History: “Signals of a story I hoped to convey.”

In the second and last section of my analysis, I will address the topics of memory and history. Initially, I introduce the idea of writing from memory, with the intention of discussing the effects it might have among collective memory and history. The next step will be approaching geographical and temporal distance as essential elements to the process of remembering and re-telling. Lastly, I am going to assess the unifying nature of memory and history for the protagonists in *By the Sea*. All with the intention of answering my second research question: *How is geographical and temporal distance useful in the process of remembering one's experiences and history?*

Gurnah explains that he started writing casually through a desire of “saying more” and due to feeling overwhelmingly strange in England (Gurnah 2004, 26). His concerns are clearly transported into the main characters of *By the Sea*, who are navigating their duality and strangeness in England, while wanting to convey their own stories. Moreover, Gurnah became aware of the fact that he was actually writing from memory; his memories were incredibly vivid and overwhelming (26). Gurnah's memories are an essential part of his fiction, and clearly a driving force in his narration. He depicts what he remembers from his “lost life” and “lost place” (26). Logically, Gurnah is concerned with issues of displacement, migration, marginality, and difference on a personal and collective level. He addresses these issues in his work, and raises questions regarding such topics. Even if these might initially seem personal, they are actually collective: “The questions I am raising are not new [...] they are firmly inflicted by the particular, by imperialism, by dislocation, by the realities of our times. And one of the realities of our times is the displacement of so many strangers in Europe. These questions, then, were not only my concern” (28). In other words, Gurnah's fiction addresses collective questions, doubts, or

worries. He gives voice to memories shared by a larger group, memories that contest Western postcolonial history. Memory is necessary to erase the silence that abounds in postcolonial discourse and instead give voice to personal accounts of history.

For the most part, migrants bring with them baggage, containing things and items that are useful, and items that represent the memories of their former lives, these objects carry symbolic meaning (Levin 2003, 716). This is illustrated by Omar's ud-al-qamari, an antique mahogany casket filled with rare incense. Omar had acquired the ud-al-qamari from the Persian trader, Hussein, from whom he would buy many special items. This little incense holder is Omar's main connection with his origins, past, and subjectivity (Pujolràs 2021, 85). It represents his past, and it is connected to memories of his former life and the people he knew, but mainly it represents his story: "It was not my life that lay spread there, just what I had selected as signals of a story I hoped to convey" (*BTS* 8). Memory is found in certain objects that are part of the individual's story. This casket is directly linked to Omar's past profession as an antique dealer, a man who carefully selected special items as a living, clearly chose a special one to accompany him in such a dangerous and life-altering journey. The little casket "contains his true self, as opposed to his identity as Rajab Shaaban" (Pujolràs 2021, 85)⁷, it depicts who he truly is in a circumstance in which his identity and well-being are being negotiated. Moreover, he claims ownership of the object and the stories within it, "which means ownership of the stories contained in the object, [this] becomes an act of historical responsibility" (Pujolràs 2021, 85). Let us discuss the relation between the ud-al-qamari, memory, and history.

In brief, Omar was the owner of an antique shop, he would buy, restore and sell all the carefully selected items, "where my passion for the business lay, was in acquiring auction lots of

⁷ Omar's ud-al-qamari is introduced in the narration when he is at the airport, waiting to be accepted into England as an asylum-seeker while using Rajab Shaaban's identity and passport.

house contents and then picking out the valuables and the antiques” (*BTS* 19). Omar would navigate objects that contained memories and repair them. He explains that “if any restoration work was necessary I did it myself” (20). I argue that Omar’s profession represents a larger metaphor for his work as a story-teller in this narration. Omar navigates his own and Latif’s memories with the intention of addressing them and giving them back the value that they have. Omar takes into his own hands the chore of telling his story and the responsibility of attempting to restore his own memories as well as Latif’s. Pujolràs sheds light on this idea: “Where History fails, Saleh Omar’s life narration succeeds. Not only will his narration give meaning to his own life but to the life of Latif Mahmud [...] with whom he becomes emotionally attached” (88). In other words, Omar and Latif share memories that are connected, and his story-telling gives significance to those memories, forging a bond between the two men.

All things considered, Omar’s story-telling has the potential of addressing and representing the individual and collective history of Zanzibari communities. His memoirs consist of individual memories, stories, and historical accounts that link the individual and the collective, “thus dismantling the unified discourse of the colonial history of the Indian Ocean” (Pujolràs 2021, 83). As seen in the novel, this is highly necessary since certain ideas that are characteristic of colonial discourse in the area of the Indian Ocean are highly prevalent and present in written historical accounts: “In their books I read unflattering accounts of my history [...] I read about the diseases that tormented us, about the future that lay before us, about the world we lived in and our place in it. It was as if they had remade us, and in ways that we no longer had any recourse but to accept” (18). Certain manipulated ideas that form the traditional colonial discourse dangerously infiltrate education and books, shaping the perception of events in detriment to those in a position of lesser power. Due to this, personal and authentic memories of

history become undeniably important in the task of dismantling imperialistic values that affect Zanzibar. Admittedly, Omar's experiences resonate among other migrants, particularly East-African refugees, as well as the people who are part of the history of the Indian Ocean and share similar memories. History is slowly rewritten through individual life stories that are merged with collective experiences. Saleh Omar's narration contests colonial discourse and gives voice to East-African memories and history.

Conveying a story of displacement, generational feuds, and traumatic experiences is no easy task. There are two aspects that facilitate the re-telling of all these memories: temporal and geographical distance. Let us begin discussing temporal distance, meaning the role that aging plays in the ability of remembering and facing traumatic or difficult memories. Pujolràs puts it clearly: "as we grow, mature and age in time we gradually form and reform ourselves and the stories we tell about ourselves" (81). Usually, age and maturity go hand in hand and maturity allows our protagonists to approach their memories from a more accepting position. Speaking about wisdom, it is argued that a person becomes wise when this person is able to see his or her life as an evolving story (83). Even wiser if they are able to create distance between the story and themselves, and contemplate it from multiple perspectives (83). Being able to separate past memories from one's current identity makes the task of revisiting them easier, but to do so, maturity and distance is essential. This is clearly illustrated in Omar:

Many of them [events] are difficult to speak of without drama, and some of them fill me with anguish, but I crave to utter them, to display them as judgements of my time and of the puniness of our duplicitous lives. [...] I have had many years to think about them and to weigh them in the scale of things. (Gurnah 2001, 212)

Even if the memories still ache when they come to the surface, Omar has had time to consider them, give them the importance they truly have. But most importantly, temporal distance, age, and maturity have given him perspective in order to be able to address traumatic and anguishing

memories. As illustrated by Levin, memory can be approached as a connection between the past as it took place and the present moment in which they are told (717). In other words, our memories from the past are highly influenced by the moment in which they are discussed. Equally important is the time that has passed between creating the memory and disclosing it, a time that allows balance and acceptance. Omar balances the importance of these past events that are part of his memory and life on the basis of his current life and the challenges he has been through. As a result, he is able to consider his life story from different perspectives, facilitating dialogue around it.

A similar thing occurs to Latif, who as a younger man perceived Omar as the person who had ruined his family, blaming him entirely for his family's misfortunes. Time, perspective, and maturity show him otherwise and he recognizes it: "One of my self-gratifying fantasies, wishing you into the man of malice we knew you as in our house of hatreds" (243). Latif recognizes that the idea of Omar as the only one to blame was really a fantasy, an escape from a harsher reality and truth that he could not have faced as a child. Nonetheless, as an adult and with the help of time he is able to accept the actual role of Omar in his family's misfortune, which is actually blameless. This might be due to the fact that "our experiences belong to the past, but they are continually reconstructed in the present" (Levin 2013, 716). Thus, showing the need for temporal distance and perspective in order to approach memories in a new light. Moreover, Latif was unaware of the "complete" story, his family had created mystery and silence around the occurrences of their past. Latif needed to hear Omar's account to gain perspective. Without temporal and geographical distance, Latif might have never exited a reality filled with manipulative silences.

With this in mind, let us discuss the role of geographical distance in revisiting one's memories and history. In Gurnah's *By the Sea*, both protagonists migrate from Zanzibar to London, each in different situations. Latif goes to London when he is still very young, attempting to escape a life filled with silence and secrets. In contrast, Omar leaves Zanzibar in his sixties to seek safety and political asylum after losing everything. It is only through distance and space that Gurnah's characters are able to face and retell their traumatic but shared experiences. Similar to temporal distance, space allows for perspective: "traveling away from home provides distance and perspective, and a degree of amplitude and liberation" (Gurnah 2004, 27). Gurnah's words show that geographical distance might alleviate the burdens carried by the individual and this facilitates addressing such burdens. Gurnah explains that to write about such painful occurrences, it was necessary to leave his homeland: "So to write in the bosom of my culture and my history was not a possibility" (27). In the case of our protagonists, addressing traumatic experiences was also not possible while living in Zanzibar, hence the need for geographical distance.

Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud have had to cross an ocean at least once in their life-time in order to find themselves together in London, the center of the British empire, a place incredibly charged with historical and colonial meaning. Even though the ocean can be understood as a physical border between Zanzibar and London, it works as a unifying element between our two main characters. Without the distance it provides, they might have never connected. As illustrated by Balaev, in trauma novels there is an interplay between language, memory, history, and place (149) and the role of place has the function of depicting the effects of trauma through metaphorical and material methods (149). Moreover, the place connected to traumatic experiences and memories "situate the individual in relation to a larger cultural context that contains social values that influence the recollection of the event and the reconfiguration of

the self” (149). Keeping this in mind, one might think that if they had stayed in Zanzibar, the family feuds would prevail over them, and prevented their connection from happening, eliminating the possibility of addressing traumatic experiences with the intention of recovering from them, even in the slightest amount. Therefore, geographical distance and their shared memories and history have united these two men.

Revisiting all these memories is not an effortless task, it is daunting for our protagonists and it weighs on them, as illustrated in a meaningful discussion shared in the kitchen of Omar’s home:

I rose carefully, so that I should not stumble in my weariness and let him think me feeble, and went to the kitchen. I put the light on and avoided glancing at the cadaverous shadow of a man reflected in the window-panes [...]. I drew the curtains with my face turned away, and then stood staring into the sink, trembling uncontrollably, feeble after all, overcome by memories which never seem to dim [...] When I turned to him [Latif] I saw that his eyes were large and luminous, glistening with hurt. (Gurnah 2001, 193)

In Omar’s inner dialogue, the reader can appreciate how draining revisiting their traumatic experiences can be, his inner dialogue is filled with hurt and exhaustion. Yet they find strength to do it while taking care of each other: “‘I have tired you,’ he said gently. I struggled not to weep at the respite he offered me, even if for the moment. [...] ‘It must have been very unpleasant.’” (193). In acknowledging each other’s feelings while being hurt themselves, they are creating a new narration, one in which there is emotional responsibility, contrary to what they experienced in their past homes. They have created a connection through their retelling of memories: “‘I’ve been here too long already today. I’d better go now.’ I turned back and grinned at him. ‘I don’t think you’ll ever go,’ I said. [...] ‘I’ll have my tea and go. But then I’ll be back. If I may. After all, we’re related it seems.’” (194). They actively seek each other and want to take care of the connection they have established in a “strange land”: “And we are in a strange land. That would more or less naturally make us related, or so people tell me when they ring to ask me for a

favour” (195). With humor and irony, they hint at the idea that migrants are connected in a strange land simply by sharing a place of origin. In this case, it is partially true since the past they shared in their homeland has drawn them together in their new home.

As a closing remark, the geographical distance provided by crossing an ocean and changing continents has also brought them separation with the past family affairs that had created rivalry and disputes among them, as Omar explains: “I don’t want recriminations, all this family business, all this muttering that stretches further back all the time. Have you noticed how the history of Islam is so tied up with family squabbles?” (Gurnah 2001, 195). They are able to let go of family rivalry and enmities that had positioned them as enemies in their homeland. This would have been less likely to happen if they had stayed in the place where these traumatic events took place, but distance and perspective have provided the protagonists with strength to face and retell these experiences and events.

The last section of this analysis deals with memory and history as unifying elements for Omar and Latif in *By the Sea*. Even though their shared homeland might be an essential reason for their connection, I argue that the aspects that truly make these protagonists bond is their shared memories and history. As illustrated by Alon Confino, memory consists of the different forms in which a sense of the past and a specific event is constructed among people (1386). When dealing with our protagonists, they are united by both a general sense of the past, but also the memory of certain events. These specific events are the uprising, revolution, and persecution they had to witness and experience. Such life-altering and historical events link memory with history, these become part of the collective memory. The collective simply makes reference to “the commonality of memories held by the members of a society” (Hirst and Ecterhoff 2008, 187), meaning the memories that are shared by a rather large group of individuals. Due to this,

the individuals, in this case Omar and Latif are connected, “collective memory is an exploration of a shared identity that unites a social group” (Confino 1997, 1390). This supports the idea that our protagonists are united by shared memories of their history. What is more, not only are these characters united, but their personal retelling of events connects to a larger group. This is due to the fact that collective memories are the result of societal and individual forces interacting (Hirst and Echterhoff 2008, 187). Through the conversations led by Omar and Latif there is transmission and convergence of memory and history which are “critical parts of the process by which a collective memory is formed and maintained” (188). Their individual memories have initially bonded them while also addressing worries and memories that are part of a larger group, challenging postcolonial discourses and emphasizing individual accounts of history through retelling.

Conclusions and Further Research

The analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *By the Sea* in this dissertation has centered on two main aspects, those being the role of silence in the novel as well as the necessity for geographical and temporal distance in the process of remembering. These have been approached from a postcolonial perspective, focusing on memory and trauma. Here I will highlight the main findings.

Gurnah is a professor of English and Postcolonial Literatures and his work is highly intertextual, a strategy he tends to use throughout his novels. In the process of examining *By the Sea*, we come across a direct reference to Melville's story of Bartleby as well as certain subtle hints to Shakespeare's plays, specifically *King Lear*. The intertext and allusion to these works hints to a depiction of worries and issues that have become universal and are present in modern literature, which has become a tool that covers works from very and many different cultures and circumstances. It is a way of stepping back from ideas of "national literature" and specific issues concerning only certain regions and instead speak about literature as a universal tool that depicts concerns and issues that have become common and general to the experience of humanity.

The presence of Herman Melville's modernist short story "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" is latent and essential since it resonates with some of the issues that Gurnah puts on paper. Foremost, the work of Bartleby introduces the concept of limited knowledge of the story, "What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, *that* is all I know of him" (Melville 1856, 1). An idea illustrated in the first section of my analysis, where an ongoing silence initially permeates *By the Sea*'s narrative form and the characters' lives and limited stories. Not only does the mention of Bartleby give Gurnah's text a sense of universality, but it also links common

worries present in modern literature. What is more, the mention of Bartleby foregrounds bigger questions regarding alienation and communication, two essential issues in Gurnah's *By the Sea*.

Bartleby's widely known statement "I would prefer not to", equally uttered by Saleh Omar immediately connects their shared sense of alienation, as well as the failure of discourse. They choose not to cooperate, but the difference lies in how far they take it. Regarding Bartleby, he remains stubborn, which leads him to be cut off from society, rejected, and eventually destroyed (Radu 2016, 10), as he dies in prison. In this case, Bartleby falls into a spiral of alienation by which he ends up ruined. Nonetheless, Latif and Omar strive away from that by breaking their silence and choosing to gain control over their lives and step away from the isolation and alienation they have experienced. I have upheld the idea that the two protagonists seek recovery and relief in their conversations. At that moment, discourse does not fail them, instead it becomes productive and potentially healing.

The focal point of the second section of the analysis has been memory and the repercussions it might have on history. I argue that the process of remembering traumatic experiences is highly challenging for Latif and Omar, but there are two aspects that facilitate it. These aspects are temporal and geographical distance. Regarding geographical distance I contend that it was essential for the protagonists to connect, which would have been impossible had they remained in Zanzibar, due to the mentioned family feuds. Moreover, it was necessary in order to feel safe when addressing their shared historical memories. When it comes to temporal distance, we can draw our conclusion using Shakespeare's famous words uttered by Edgar in the play *King Lear*, "Ripeness is all"⁸. Meaning that at times it is important to wait for the proper moment, allowing time to put things into perspective. What is more, with ripeness or maturity,

⁸ In William Shakespeare's play *King Lear* (1606), Act V, Scene II.

the value and importance of prior events is altered and approached differently, in a more tranquil manner, even if these are greatly hurtful.

All in all, silence, even though necessary or occasionally empowering for Latif and Omar in certain situations, can lead to Bartleby's failure of discourse and estrangement if it is pushed too far. Therefore, breaking away from it is essential to find relief and connection in their shared stories. Following this, geographical and temporal distance combined brought them perspective to understand and begin accepting their prior life events. Once Omar and Latif share their memories and history they become less alienated and find union in each other, commencing a process of healing.

As expected, this dissertation comes with limitations. Considering that Abdulrazak Gurnah has written several works following a similar line of concerns, the clearest limitation is to solely focus on one of his novels. Throughout his work there are plenty of similarities among his male protagonists, depicting a shared sense of displacement and alienation in the UK as well as an ongoing presence of silence within families —such as Salim in *Gravel Heart*—. I believe it would be interesting to shed light on the relationship that the male protagonists' have with family silences and how some of them eventually decide to take into their own hands their healing process by engaging in difficult conversations. It seems that by doing this, they are collectively setting aside matters of hegemonic masculinity and honor prevalent in Muslim cultural norms, which would be an interesting idea to examine.

Another aspect that I would have liked to delve into is the topic of verbal violence and the underlying power of language and how these can oftentimes accentuate the feeling of otherness and alienation. Omar and Latif speak the language of a former imperial power, as many migrants do. However, there are plenty of racial connotations in this language that can be

used to enforce verbal violence among migrants. Latif Mahmudd is called a “blackamoor”, which leads him to think: “This is the house I live in, I thought, a language which barks and scorns at me behind every third corner” (*BTS* 2001, 73). I believe it would be interesting to further examine the idea of verbal violence and language being defining elements in the sentiment of otherness and estrangement.

In essence, I believe this dissertation begins to shed light on how the novel depicts the generational and historical trauma undergone by Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud through the use of silence. These two first find refuge in silence but eventually realize they need to draw away from it. The action of re-telling one’s events starts a slow but necessary healing process for Omar and Latif.

Appendix⁹

1890: The British and Germans signed a treaty that gave Britain colonial control over Zanzibar, making it a formal British protectorate.

1890s: Development of a plantation system, underpinned by an Arab landowning class and an African laboring class, deeply affected the relations of production on the island, as Zanzibar operated as a slave society.

1897: The British ended slavery but British colonial policy allowed the Arab heritage minority to continue to exploit the African majority.

1950s: A political storm was starting as anti-colonialism spread across Africa.

1963: Zanzibar became an independent constitutional monarchy under Sultan Jamshid Bin Abdullah. The formal declaration of Zanzibari independence by the UK, however, exposed long-simmering racial, cultural, and economic tensions on the islands.

1964: The African majority rose up in rebellion. African insurgents, led by John Okello, overwhelmed the nation's small police force and overthrew Sultan Abdullah. The uprising touched off reprisals against Arab heritage and South Asian residents. An estimated 17,000 people were killed and thousands of refugees fled to other nations.

1972: Abeid Karume, the President established after the revolution, was assassinated after dissatisfaction with the government. This was followed by weeks of fighting between pro and anti-government forces.

1993: A multi-party system was eventually established with the intention of alleviating violent outbreaks.

2010: The formation of a Zanzibari government of national unity between CCM and the main opposition party on the islands, the Civic United Front (CUF) ensured a peaceful ballot after elections had been characterized by violence.

2012: The secessionist group *Uamsho* ("Awakening") was accused of inciting riots in the historic Stone Town district of Zanzibar city.

⁹Based on two websites: "The Zanzibar Revolution of 1964" and "Remembering Zanzibar's Revolution and its Bloody Aftermath", both can be found in the list of works cited. It is important to mention that I have come across several temporal gaps in the history of Zanzibar, which is why there are big jumps in time in this historical timeline.

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