



Exploring Female Agency in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*: A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis

Kamran Farooqi

PhD Scholar, Department of English, GIFT University, Gujranwala, kamranfarooqi10@gmail.com

Dr. Taimur Kayani

Professor, Department of English, GIFT University, Gujranwala

ABSTRACT

This study examines the portrayal of female agency in post-independence Zanzibar, as depicted in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *By the Sea*. Specifically focusing on the characters Asha, Bi Sara, and Bi Maryam, the study employs Gayatri Spivak's theoretical framework to analyze the interactions and responses of these characters in the face of oppressive forces and marginalization. The research sheds light on how these female characters navigate power dynamics, confront their lower social status, and resist oppression through nuanced strategies, particularly using silence. Through a detailed exploration of the characters' experiences, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the agency and resilience of marginalized women in colonial settings. Ultimately, this research aims to underscore the significance of silence as a tool for resistance and endurance, highlighting its role in challenging prevailing narratives and advocating for women's rights in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: Abdulrazak Gurnah, colonialism, female agency, postcolonial feminism, Patriarchy

This work is licensed under Creative Commons — Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International

— CC BY-NC 4.0



Introduction

Over the last five decades, there has been a significant transformation in the position and portrayal of women, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, nationality, or skin colour. This change also applies to African women. Although the situation of women may vary throughout different countries, women certainly experience various forms of oppression and domination. Women from a majority of countries have experienced other forms of oppression and persecution. However, the emergence of feminist movements has led to a decrease in the discrimination and neglect faced by women in particular marginalized societies. Conversely, African women have seen a reversal of fortune as Indigenous women, who had a specific level of living standards in the pre-colonial era, have lost their present social standing after colonialism. They are confined to their residences, losing their independence, personality, and speaking ability. The turning of Indigenous women into muted characters is a prominent feature of the patriarchal framework, particularly in male-dominated communities. Silencing serves as a means of exerting control over women. Silence represents, as Almeida suggests, “the historical suppression of women within the powerful social system known as patriarchy, where males hold power and relegate women to an inferior status” (1). The feminist scholar Bell Hooks also contends that “patriarchy grants men a sense of superiority by silencing women and teaches them that their self-worth and identity lie in their ability to dominate others” (70).

African women encountered comparable circumstances, compounded by the dual forces of colonialism and patriarchy. They have been portrayed in Orientalist depictions with stereotypical roles and situations. The primary emphasis was on colonialism, but women of colour are also oppressed by patriarchy and their communities. Early postcolonial works did not pay much attention to or extensively examine the concept of 'double colonialism.' Notably, Gayatri Spivak shed light on the idea of 'double colonialism' experienced by women in colonized societies, emphasizing the significance of the subjugated. Spivak contends that “the impact of biological differences on Indigenous women is more significant than on males” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 83–85). African women, who have been silenced and repressed, have endured the unjust control of the colonial empire and patriarchy, resulting in the enduring suffering and long-lasting effects of double slavery. Despite the widespread coverage of their struggles and pleas for assistance in mass media, the writings of postcolonial writers have had a uniquely powerful impact.

Postcolonial literature has attracted significant attention from professors and writers who specialize in postcolonial studies and feminist perspectives. Their works have revolutionised the literary landscape by introducing a distinct atmosphere, diverging from the works of white authors. Their portrayal mostly depicts the colonial people from an African perspective. Among these authors is Abdulrazak Gurnah, whose writings portray the lives of East African people realistically and intensely. He regards colonialism primarily as the foremost perpetrator of oppression against African women. In Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *'By*

the Sea, the female characters experience oppression and marginalisation as they struggle with life's difficulties. Occasionally, silence is used as a deliberate technique or serves as a form of resistance within the context of postcolonial literature. They challenge expectations, disrupting established power dynamics. These women show resilience as they cope with the complexities of being displaced from their culture due to colonial history. They adapt to new environments while struggling to lose their cultural roots. In this process, they fight for their empowerment and agency amid the social and political challenges of the postcolonial setting. The intersection of race, class, and gender shapes their identities, revealing the layers of their experiences. The impact of colonial history echoes in their relationships, affecting family dynamics, romantic ties, and community bonds (Helgesson 15–19). This highlights the significant influence of colonial history on women. Despite facing trauma and losses from the colonial past, these women exhibit emotional strength, emphasising the lasting psychological toll of historical injustices.

This study aims to explore the transformation in the position and portrayal of African women, particularly the silenced voices of Indigenous women in postcolonial settings, and to underscore the significance of feminist movements in challenging prevailing narratives and advocating for women's rights. Borrowing insight from Spivak's seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", we examine the portrayal of how colonisers marginalise and subjugate characters, particularly women. Employing conceptual tools, such as Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar's study of silence, voice, and agency, in the postcolonial setting, we elucidate the resilience and challenges encountered by female protagonists, emphasising their important roles in negotiating and opposing repressive colonial discourse.

Reimagining Agency: The Representation of African Women in Postcolonial Narratives

The portrayal of women has evolved throughout the years; however, stereotyped depictions of women continue to endure. Typically, women are depicted based on how men see them, but African women are specifically portrayed through the lens of both colonialism and patriarchal viewpoints (Neimneh 50). The perception of an African woman being objectified from the male perspective is often influenced by her conduct and the societal expectations imposed upon her. When examining different portrayals of African women, the prevailing picture often focuses on their sexuality and perceived vulnerability (both emotionally and psychologically) to males. Portrayals of African women have traditionally depicted them as lacking power, voice, and agency and as victims in comparison to Western white women. Nevertheless, Gurnah tries to portray the subjugation of female characters under the impact of colonisation and the patriarchal system as both oppressively treated the female.

Gurnah's stories mainly occur on Zanzibar Island, the central location throughout his formative years. Providing a concise historical context is crucial for comprehending the

intricacies of the post-colonial society shown in his works. Zanzibar, an island along the Eastern coast of Africa, has seen colonisation by many dominant forces, such as the Portuguese, Omani Arabs, and British. This historical subjugation has significantly shaped the cultural fabric of the region (Ingrams 19–21). The enduring presence of Western and Arab cultural legacies is seen in the enduring conventional gender roles and disparities that remain in several facets of local life. While African women have gained improved access to education and employment compared to men, societal expectations continue to confine them to roles defined by modest attire, and families are still expected to provide dowries for their marriages. Zanzibar's post-colonial feminism stands firm in highlighting the profound impact of colonialism and entrenched patriarchal customs on the lives of women. Its mission is not only to acknowledge and validate the diverse experiences of women but also to actively empower them and advance gender equality. By confronting the enduring legacies of colonial influence and the pervasive norms imposed by Arab and Western cultures, this movement boldly confronts patriarchal practices, aiming to foster meaningful societal transformation in Zanzibar.

By the Sea portrays the enduring persecution and marginalisation of its female characters under colonial rule. The text highlights their subordinate status and elucidates their strategies for navigating their relationships with their neighbours within the oppressive contexts of patriarchy and colonialism. Female characters use silence as a deliberate form of resistance against both colonial and patriarchal oppression. This strategic use of silence challenges authority and establishes their agency, revealing their strength and adaptability in a postcolonial context. The research examines the protagonist's ability to endure and overcome problems influenced by socio-political factors, such as familial abandonment, significant family obligations, and the hardships of childcare in adverse conditions. The protagonist's choices are influenced by several factors, such as the need to compromise her virginity and the economic difficulties of managing home affairs.

Postcolonial Feminism: Amplifying Marginalized Voices and Challenging Colonial Narratives

As researchers, we emphasize the importance of Postcolonial feminism and its relevance to the novel *By the Sea*. Postcolonialism is a comprehensive concept that spans various interconnected subjects, including religion, anthropology, politics, feminism, literature, and beyond, focusing on the enduring impacts of colonization. Emerging in the 1980s as a continuation of feminism, Postcolonial feminism arose in response to mainstream feminism's predominant focus on women's experiences from white cultures. Numerous scholars integrate postcolonial feminist theory into their literary analyses. I draw upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential work, particularly her international exploration of women's marginalization and oppression in colonial contexts. In her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Spivak critiques colonialism and patriarchy's systematic suppression of marginalized

voices, underscoring the need for researchers to amplify these voices within feminist discourse to challenge prevailing narratives. This research examines complex agency, representation, and power dynamics within academic and cultural contexts.

Postcolonial feminism diverges from the gendered narrative of colonialism, highlighting how the history of colonialism mostly involves the exploitation of women who are non-white or non-Western. Mohanty introduces the concept of “double colonialism,” where women experience both colonialism and patriarchy simultaneously (57). These women have the dual challenge of resisting the dominance and authority of colonizers, as well as confronting gender-based discrimination. Postcolonial feminism challenges preconceived notions by amplifying these women’s narratives, affirming their existence, and embracing their authentic selves, irrespective of the expectations or limitations imposed by mainstream feminism. Postcolonial feminism challenges Western feminism's notion of women's “universality” and advocates instead for the importance of particular experiences and battles of women of color. It emphasises women's representation in formerly colonized regions and Western countries (Tyagi 45). Abdulrazak Gurnah's work emphasises the profound adversity endured by women under the rule of invaders. *By the Sea* was included on the longlist for the Booker Prize and made it to the shortlist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize.

In this research, we also draw upon previous scholarly studies to contextualize the significance of *By the Sea* as a research subject. In this research, we also draw upon previous scholarly studies to contextualize the importance of *By the Sea* as a research subject. In “Homelessness and the Refugee”, Lucinda Newns examines the themes of displacement and identity in Gurnah's novel. She argues that Gurnah challenges romanticised notions of exile by portraying refugees' harsh realities. Newns examination reveals that Gurnah's characters' experiences of homelessness and displacement deconstruct idealised views of migration and settlement. Her analysis emphasizes the psychological and emotional impacts of displacement, emphasising the loss and trauma accompanying the refugee experience, ultimately, underscoring Gurnah’s critique of global narratives that often overlook the complexities of forced migration (506).

Another significant study on *By the Sea* is Godwin Siundu's analysis of the influence of honour and shame on the identities and social interactions of the characters in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels. Siundu examines how these themes serve as ways of exerting control and establishing distinctions, impacting individual and collective interactions, and interacting with factors such as ethnicity, migration, and race. He suggests that Gurnah's characters negotiate and defy social norms, providing valuable insights into the intricate nature of identity and the sense of belonging. Siundu's research highlights how Gurnah's writings portray the Zanzibari people's subjugation and submissiveness under colonial control while emphasising the enduring notion of honour as individuals encounter obstacles stemming from their socio-cultural origins (106).

Luke Brown provides a meticulous analysis of how disability is depicted in the Indian Ocean littoral, in particular tales related to migration and travel. He analyses the novels *The*

Cat's Table by Michael Ondaatje and *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah to draw attention to the lack of connection between the Indian Ocean and disability studies. He argues for a more unified and comprehensive approach. The author emphasises employment disability as a framework to examine colonial oppression, confinement, and opposition, questioning the prevailing Atlantic-focused viewpoint in disability studies. He emphasises the need to redefine disability beyond a symbolic representation of postcolonial encounters. It advocates for adopting new research approaches influenced by Indian Ocean studies to comprehend better the intricate relationship between disability, colonial past, and postcolonial sense of self (61).

Buse Şimşek analyses the issue of language and identity in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Both works depict individuals enduring a sense of hopelessness and uncertainty due to their relocation after colonial rule. In the film *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar, an asylum-seeker from Zanzibar living in England, refuses to speak English, which leads him to go on a joint voyage with Latif Mahmud. This journey reveals their traumatic history in Zanzibar. In contrast, in the novel *Brick Lane*, the character Nazneen moves to England due to her marriage and initially adheres to her limited home responsibilities. Nevertheless, her meeting with Karim ignites a profound change inside her, compelling her to strive for liberation and reinvent her sense of self. It establishes a connection between the development of the characters' identities and their difficulties in language and culture, providing a detailed examination of postcolonial subjectivity (2).

By the Sea depicts the intense psychological distress caused by forced migration in postcolonial Africa, with the story predominantly taking place in Zanzibar and Britain. It provides a thorough analysis of incarceration as a widespread outcome of displacement and the feeling of not fitting in inside postcolonial African civilisations. Gurnah's investigation examines the long-lasting effects of colonial influences, namely the racial distinctions that are continued via nationalist discussions in Britain and Zanzibar. The book challenges the intellectual systems that historically supported colonialism and slavery by combining Paul Gilroy's idea of "camp mentality" with Michael Rothberg's concept of "traumatic realism." *From the viewpoint of a Zanzibari writer in the diaspora, By the Sea* seeks to document the long-lasting impact of nationalist racism. It aims to question the limitations on marginalised identities and promote a narrative beyond the divisions created by historical and modern racial ideologies (Kharoua 126).

In his article "Postcolonialism: Edward Said & Gayatri Spivak," Praveen discusses Gayatri Spivak's mission to dismantle the binary oppositions entrenched during the colonial era. Spivak's analysis intricately connects the colonizers with the colonized, challenging the established power dynamics. Drawing on the insights of Foucault, Derrida, and Gramsci, Spivak emphasizes the pivotal role of literature and language in shaping these narratives. Foucault and Said, in agreement, argue that depicting conquerors as superior and the colonised as inferior perpetuates structures of resistance. She contends that Spivak empowers subalterns by raising awareness of their rights and confronting injustices faced by women and

marginalised groups in the Third World. By amplifying the voices of suppressed subalterns and advocating for the recognition of women authors historically overshadowed by male counterparts, Spivak aims to restore dignity and challenge hegemonic narratives (47–48).

Although several studies have explored Gayatri Spivak's idea of the subaltern and its portrayal in literature as a potent literary element in countering hegemonic opposition, the rich site/area of African fiction/literature remains underexplored. Therefore, this research aims to analyze *By the Sea* to trace the female role as an agent of resistance and resilience.

Methodology

This research delves into postcolonial feminist studies, drawing theoretical insights from postcolonial theory, particularly Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?". We use *By the Sea* as the primary text to examine how women resist and endure challenging circumstances. The selected novel explores the effects of colonialism on the indigenous population of Zanzibar culture, with a specific focus on the dual oppression experienced by female characters. Using "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as a theoretical framework, we aim to depict the subjugation and oppression of female characters through specific words, lines, phrases, and paragraphs in *By the Sea*. My secondary sources include research journals, non-fiction works, East African literature, various types of East African Journals, and contemporary African writers such as Ben Okri, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, etc. Employing a qualitative research approach, we comprehensively investigate the selected text, meticulously analyzing its stylistic techniques to provide a detailed review. Through interpretative analysis, we seek to uncover the latent significances hidden beneath the surface of the text, revealing deeper meanings and insights.

Theoretical Framework: Applying Spivak's Lens to Women's Exploitation in Zanzibar

In this study, we employ Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as the theoretical framework to illustrate the exploitation of women in Zanzibar society. Spivak presents a viewpoint that examines the historical and ideological elements that contribute to the disadvantaged status of certain groups, including minorities, women, the inhabitants, and slaves. Spivak adopts a postcolonial feminist perspective and is a prominent figure in "Subaltern Studies," which examines the experiences of marginalised Indigenous people, such as displaced people, impoverished farmers, daily wage workers, and women, considered subalterns. Spivak's primary emphasis on subservient females provides a critical lens through which we analyze women's subjugation and oppression in Zanzibar. Her concept of the subaltern revolves around the idea of "othering," when the dominant ego seeks to exert control over and marginalise those seen as different, excluding them from important elements of life. By adopting Spivak's perspective, we aim to uncover the intricate dynamics of power and marginalization that shape women's lives in *By the Sea*, revealing their struggles and resistance within a postcolonial context.

Spivak focuses mostly on examining the historical subjugation of women and the process of internalising conventional narratives. *Subaltern Studies* argues that the woman should not be seen as a passive victim of incorrect beliefs, rejecting a simplistic ideological interpretation (“Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography” 4). We draw upon Spivak's argument that if the subaltern could communicate significantly to dominant groups, their voices would not be marginalized. The word “subaltern” specifically refers to the segments of the population that have experienced oppression, marginalisation, and domination. Through this framework, we explore the inequitable stratification of society depicted in *By the Sea*, where women lead marginalized lives and their voices remain suppressed. Spivak analyses the role of women in a postcolonial context and argues that the subaltern, who lacks a documented history, cannot express their own experiences. She links this marginalisation to the significant influence of colonisation on marginalised individuals, particularly women, who face dual colonisation (279). According to Spivak, the woman's presence is erased due to the dominance of patriarchy and imperialism. She is not completely erased but rather subjected to a violent movement between being an individual and a commodity. This is particularly evident in the case of the 'third world woman' who is trapped between the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity (306).

Both post-colonial and feminist theories aim to disrupt these suppression structures to establish equitable societies that acknowledge and appreciate the perspectives and encounters of all individuals, irrespective of variables such as colonial or gender past. Post-colonial feminism is an analytical approach that seeks to examine how the combination of gender, race, and colonialism influences the lives of women in nations that have undergone colonisation (Mohanty 63). Post-colonial feminist theories aim to analyse the effects of colonialism on women's lives and identities, as well as their efforts to fight oppressive institutions during and after colonialism (Ashcroft et al. 5). It is the fusion of feminist and post-colonial theory, revealing the structures of domination and oppression in society and their specific effects on women.

The Intersection of Colonial and Patriarchal Oppression in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*

By the Sea by Abdulrazak Gurnah depicts female characters as oppressed and marginalised within the context of Zanzibar Island after gaining independence in 1964. The story explores the family disputes among the Indigenous community of Zanzibar, demonstrating the dual oppression and marginalisation faced by female characters from both colonists and their own culture. These women are seen carrying out conventional household duties like caring for children, cooking meals, and entertaining visitors, which demonstrates their reliance and social positions. Gurnah, a Zanzibar Island native, effectively portrays the challenges faced by these females. Due to his profound knowledge of society, he can depict female characters' hardships, emphasising their strength and ability to persevere in the face of

challenges. In this novel, *By the Sea*, Gurnah illuminates the intricate experiences of women in Zanzibar, highlighting their resilience and determination in systematic injustice.

By the Sea portrays several female characters, such as Latif's mother, Asha, Bi Sara, and Bi Maryam, whose hardships are greatly emotional. The narrative mostly centres on the subjugation and exclusion of these women, with a special emphasis on the protagonist, Asha. The story presents a perceptive analysis of the conventional duties of women in a society dominated by masculine rule and influenced by colonialism. The narrative explores common preconceptions and patriarchal portrayals, resulting in the marginalisation of female characters. Gurnah's depiction emphasises the resilience and agency of these women as they manage the intricacies of their cultural positions and the wider causes of oppression.

The narrative showcases two forces that oppress the female characters: Rajab Shaaban and Uncle Hussein. Rajab Shaaban symbolises the male-dominated social structure, while Uncle Hussein embodies the exploitative nature of colonialism. Collectively, they exercise dominance over the feminine characters in all facets of life, including finance, society, and politics. The narrative portrays the harmful impact of dominant male perspectives that reinforce imperial narratives by subjecting female characters to exclusion and violence. These perspectives categorise women based on stereotypes related to their wiles, body and sexuality, household responsibilities, and sometimes their vulnerability to deception. In addition, women's stories are suppressed by prevailing patriarchal discourses, and if they are acknowledged, it is only within the confines of certain themes. Out of Gurnah's ten novels, only *Dottie* is told from the viewpoint of a female narrator. Consequently, the female characters' voices are disregarded to support the masculine storylines.

Female Characters as a Subalterns

The protagonist, Asha (Latif's mother), epitomizes a true subaltern identity, enduring marginalisation from both the patriarchal system and the colonial Empire. The narrative begins with depicting the subjugated female roles, such as Latif's mother, Asha, Bi Sara (Latif's aunt), and Bi Maryam (Saleh's stepmother). Asha, Latif's mother, became a subaltern as a result of enduring several forms of physical and psychological violence inflicted by colonialism and the patriarchal culture. Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" provides a critical framework for understanding Asha's marginalization, highlighting how colonial and patriarchal discourses intersect to silence and oppress female characters. The protagonist experiences psychological abuse due to her husband's gay affiliations in Zanzibar society, as well as the failure of her family's obligations.

Moreover, the oppression and marginalisation took place at two levels. Firstly, the patriarchy allows the colonial plunderer to exploit the female characters socially, economically, and sexually. Secondly, Uncle Hussein, representing the colonial plunderer, socially and psychologically tortures Asha's family by playing the role of the colonial plunderer. Uncle Hussein employs the English language as a tool for destroying the unity and harmony of Asha's family. Gurnah illustrates this dynamic through the scene where Uncle

Hussein imposes English lessons, signifying his attempt to impose colonial values and undermine indigenous cultural integrity. Gurnah writes, “then returned to Uncle Hussein for his English lesson. It was Uncle Hussein's idea, the English lesson” (89). With great pride, my father informed us of Uncle Hussein's acknowledgment of Hassan's exceptional skill. On the next day, Hassan's eyes displayed profound distress, perhaps arising from feelings of shame or guilt. Quietly, he turned his eyes away and continued (91). This act of humiliation exemplifies the vile attitude of the colonial rulers. After that, Asha scolded Hassan in raging words, “You child of sin” (194) because she knew the illicit relationship between Hassan and Uncle Hussein.

By the Sea portrays the concept of linguistic hegemony through the character of Uncle Hussein. He uses English as a tool to assert authority and influence, reflecting the larger colonial tactic of establishing dominance. The compulsory English lessons serve as a justification for illegal interactions, as seen when Uncle Hussein brings Hassan's mattress downstairs for “additional English lessons,” a euphemism that has dark implications (Gurnah 92). The use of language in this manner not only aims to exert control but also to induce moral decay, as seen by Hassan's later reaction to his mother, which is characterized by feelings of alienation, persistence, and agitated conduct. The English language in this situation emphasizes how language transforms into a mechanism of coercion and exploitation rather than an impartial means of communication. It reinforces the hierarchical power structures and psychological effects of colonial governance.

Through the examination of *By the Sea*, it has been shown that black women are subjected to sexual abuse. Their bodies are exploited for sexual pleasure. An example of sexual exploitation emerges from the unlawful connection between Asha and Uncle Hussein. Gurnah illustrates this, “Do you want me to come in? She walked past him into the room, and he followed behind her and shut the door” (94). He established a sexual connection with Asha while making sure not to participate in any sexual activity with his son Hassan. However, he could not do so since Hassan quickly followed him as he left the place. This demonstrates his aptitude for deceit and consistent efforts to manipulate Asha and her family in both social and sexual contexts. As Uncle Hussein emulates the colonial authority's dietary habits, speech patterns, and lifestyle, he embodies its representation.

Gurnah discusses the subjugation imposed by the Indigenous ruling class on female characters such as Asha. Therefore, he depicts the violence shown by both the Eastern and Western factions on the indigenous people, with a special focus on female characters—another instance of a financial and sexual interaction between Asha and the education minister. The minister engages in a sexual connection with Asha to reward her with a scholarship for her son, Latif. “In any case, the Minister's official car came for her and waited at the end of the lane from the little house we moved to after my father lost our first house. Then my mother, unhurried and unafraid, almost fastidious in her refusal to be secretive, came strolling out, looking like a beautiful woman going to meet her lover” (Gurnah 108). Gurnah has highlighted the corruption of female characters by using female bodies and agency under doubly colonized women. Asha gets a scholarship for her son by using her body and agency to

highlight the commodification of women in the Zanzibar community. This interaction underscores the pervasive nature of patriarchal and colonial exploitation, revealing how women's bodies and agency are commodified within these oppressive structures.

Gurnah illustrates the sufferings of other female characters as well. This can be seen in Rajab Shaaban's avaricious behavior when he attempted to take possession of the residences belonging to his relatives, Bi Sara and Bi Maryam. Hailing from Zanzibar Island, Gurnah strives to portray the sad and oppressive reality of his civilisation and its residents. Following the demise of her third spouse, Bi Sara shows compassion towards her relative Rajab Shaaban and extends an invitation for him to reside in her home, stating that "She invited Rajab Shaaban Mahmud, his beautiful wife Asha, and their two children to live with her" (Gurnah 183). He intends to take possession of the home after Bi Sara passes away. Another example of exploitation can be observed at the event of Bi Maryam's death (Saleh's stepmother and Sara's deceased sister). Rajab Shaaban often visits Bi Maryam's residence due to his status as her blood relative and legal inheritor of the property (Gurnah 187). These episodes demonstrate the avaricious disposition of the Indigenous people towards female characters.

Saleh's family, including his wife and daughter, are also one of the victims of colonisation. They serve as striking illustrations of the systematic oppression and marginalisation faced by women. His wife experiences social and political upheaval, which mirrors the wider challenges females encounter in postcolonial cultures. Her narrative highlights women's limited control and significant responsibilities, as they are often tasked with maintaining stability within their families and communities, even in times of turmoil. Latif's mother exemplifies the stoic endurance of women. Her experiences exemplify the wider influence of colonialism and immigration on women, who often endure the main consequences of relocation. The story emphasises how these women manoeuvre through restrictive systems, often relinquishing their aspirations and goals to prioritise their families and communities (Gurnah 147-148).

The first part of the postcolonial feminist analysis has discussed the subjugation and marginalisation inflicted upon female characters such as Asha, Bi Sara, and Bi Maryam by the colonial rulers and the Indigenous ruling class. These female characters remain mute about their suffering due to their awareness of their complicity in both the patriarchal and colonial systems. However, silence is very important and communicates a message to the Zanzibar society. This research draws upon the insights provided by Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar's study of silence, voice, and agency to comprehend the significance of silence.

Thus, "Rethinking Silence, Voice, and Agency in Contested Gendered Terrains" provides a conceptual tool in postcolonial literature to analyse how marginalised characters, particularly women, use voice and silence to traverse and challenge oppressive power systems. This approach highlights the many functions that silence may perform, not just as an indication of being oppressed but also as a tactical instrument for challenging prevailing narratives and exerting one's agency. Authors like Malika Mokeddem and Abdulrazak Gurnah use silence as a potent tool for female characters to establish areas of defiance within

patriarchal and colonial settings. These works demonstrate the power of silence as a kind of resistance, a means of maintaining one's self-respect and independence, and a strategy for safeguarding cultural heritage from obliteration. Postcolonial literature questions conventional dichotomies and explores the intricate tactics used by women to resist and transform their societies, making significant contributions to discourses on gender, power, and resistance in both global and local settings (Parpart 13–19). By exploring the intricate relationship between speech and power, the analysis reveals how marginalized individuals like Bi Maryam confront and endure suppression.

The narrative voice in *By the Sea* embodies issues of agency and authority, giving priority to viewpoints that emphasize the protagonists' defiance. Agency, which is often understated and intricate, encompasses ordinary actions of resistance. Gurnah's female characters, such as Asha and Bi Sara, demonstrate perseverance by consistently remaining silent and adhering to traditional rituals, so showcasing their ability to exercise autonomy within the limitations imposed by gender norms. An analysis of how gender intersects with race, class, and colonial history allows us to comprehend how individuals navigate through many forms of oppression. Bi Maryam's crucial alliances with other women are essential for her survival and defiance. The display of solidarity among these characters demonstrates the collective empowerment they possess. Through the analysis of silence, voice, and agency, scholars may reveal how the female characters in Gurnah's work defy oppression and exhibit resilience. This method provides a more profound comprehension of individuals' lived experiences and the consequences of their subtle but influential actions of resistance.

Conclusion

By the Sea demonstrates how female characters like Asha, Bi Sara, and Bi Maryam serve as catalysts of resistance and resilience within a postcolonial context, revealing the complex aspects of their silence and agency. Through the lens of postcolonial feminist theory, we understand that the silence of these female characters is not a passive absence of voice but rather a powerful method of resisting the dual oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy. Thinkers such as Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak illustrate how strategic silence enables the marginalized to navigate and undermine prevailing power structures.

The silent resilience of Asha, Bi Sara, and Bi Maryam emphasizes the intricacies of their encounters, demonstrating how African women, who are often ostracized and mistreated, discover means to express their autonomy and oppose systematic injustices. These characters experience substantial oppression, suffering, and marginalization, confronting both gender discrimination and the lingering impacts of colonial exploitation. Their silence, instead of indicating compliance, manifests as a purposeful and powerful strategy to challenge and undermine the forces that aim to destroy their sense of self and independence. The theoretical insights of Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar underscore the transformative potential of silence, voice, and agency. They argue that silence may be a deliberate and forceful strategy

for survival and resistance. The experiences of Asha, Bi Sara, and Bi Maryam exemplify the wider challenges faced by African women who, although being systemically oppressed, use their silence as a means of resistance and self-protection. Gurnah's tale defies conventional notions of silence and agency, prompting a reassessment of our comprehension and admiration of the roles of female characters in postcolonial literature. By emphasizing their ability to bounce back from adversity and their refusal to give in, *By the Sea* not only magnifies the perspectives of Asha, Bi Sara, and Bi Maryam but also fosters a deep understanding of the challenges they face and the qualities that enable them to overcome them. It highlights the need to protect their basic rights and recognizes their valuable contributions to the wider discussion on resistance after colonial rule.

This study seeks to add to the continuing discourse on the empowerment of African women and their continued struggle against the two-fold oppressions they experience. It advocates for a more just and equal society. In advocating for a more just and equitable society, this analysis of *By the Sea* aligns with broader feminist and postcolonial efforts to dismantle oppressive structures and champion the rights and autonomy of women. It calls on scholars, policymakers, and activists to continue their efforts in addressing the specific challenges faced by African women, ensuring that their voices are not only heard but also respected and valued. By doing so, we move closer to a world where all individuals, regardless of gender or background, can fully participate in and contribute to the collective human experience.

Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 1995, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ywcct/mbt009>.
- Brown, Luke. "Disabled Movement beyond Metaphor in Michael Ondaatje's *The Cat's Table* and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1781682>.
- Gurnah, Abdulrazaki. "By the Sea." *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 6(11), 951–952., 2001.
- Helgesson, Stefan. "Subject and History in Selected Works by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Yvonne Vera, and David Dabydeen , by Erik Falk ." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.2979/ral.2008.39.4.161>.
- Ingrams, W. H. *Zanzibar: Its History and Its People*. FRANK CASS AND COMPANY LIMITED 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN, 1967.
- Kharoua, Mustapha. "Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*: Unbelonging and the Trauma of Imprisonment." *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2016, pp. 126–41.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Mohanty under Western Eyes Feminist Scholarship and Discourses 1988.Pdf." *Feminist Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1988, pp. 51–80.
- Neimneh, Shadi. "Postcolonial Feminism: Silence and Storytelling in j. M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2014, pp. 49–55, <https://doi.org/10.7813/jll.2014/5-2/7>.
- Newns, Lucinda. "Homelessness and the Refugee: De-Valorizing Displacement in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 51, no. 5, 2015, pp. 506–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2015.1070007>.
- Parpart, Jane. "Rethinking Silence, Gender and Power in Insecure Sites: Implications for Feminist Security Studies in a Postcolonial World." *Review of International Studies*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2019, pp. 315–24.
- ŞİMŞEK, Buse. *Ambivalence and Unhomeliness in By The Sea By Abdulrazak Gurnah And Brick Lane By Monica Ali*. no. 0, 2021.
- Siundu, Godwin. "Honour and Shame in the Construction of Difference in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Novels." *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2013, pp. 105–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2013.780685>.
- Spivak, G. C. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 1988, pp. 271–313.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 1988, pp. 271–313, http://www.mcgill.ca/files/crlaw-discourse/Can_the_subaltern_speak.pdf.
- . "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 1988, pp.

3–35, <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781475802504-i>.

Tyagi, R. “Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories.” ” *International Journal of Language and Linguistic*, vol. 2, 2014, pp. 2374–8869.

V. Praveen. “Postcolonialism: Edward Said & Gayatri Spivak.” *Research Journal Of Recent Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 8, 2016, pp. 47–50, www.isca.me.