

# POSTCOLONIAL, INTELLECTUAL AND IDENTITY: THREE ASPECTS OF ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S NOVEL

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*Abstract: Tanzanian-British writer Abdulrazak Gurnah won the 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature, attracting global attention to African English literature. Starting from his own immigrant experience and mobile life, Gurnah puts the novel's text under the post-colonial society, and his novels formed the Messianic time view and dispersed narrative style. Gurnah focuses on the living conditions of African people from the standpoint of intellectual writing, and he dares to expose the reality of Africa influenced by the discourse of "mainstream narrative". Gurnah's novels focus on refugee identity and spiritual affiliation issues, with sympathy for African people oppressed by colonialism. Gurnah's literary creation not only has great literary value, but also has the practical significance of breaking the thinking set of post-colonial binary opposition and re-understanding Africa.*

## I. Introduction

The 2021 Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to the Tanzanian-British writer Abdulrazak Gurnah (1948-). The Swedish Academy's award speech to Gurnah accurately captured the purpose of his literary work: "for his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents."<sup>1</sup> Gurnah was born in 1948 on the island of Zanzibar in eastern Africa, off the west coast of the Indian Ocean. He came to England as a refugee at 18 and was a longtime faculty member at the University of Kent at Canterbury, where he focused on postcolonial theory. Gurnah has published ten full-length novels and several short stories. The full-length novel is the main genre of Gurnah's literary work, and he published his fiction debut, *Memory of Departure* (1987), which was followed by *Pilgrims Way* (1988) and *Dottie* (1990). His novel *Paradise*, published in 1994, is Gurnah's masterpiece. It was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize and the Whitbread Prize. Gurnah later published *Admiring Silence* (1996), *By the Sea* (2001), *Desertion* (2005), *The Last Gift* (2011), *Gravel Heart* (2017), *After Lives* (2020), and other full-length novels. Gurnah is a novelist, a literary critic, and a professor of postcolonial theory. Gao Xing summarizes the themes of Gurnah's novels in a pertinent way: "The state of migratory mobility and the imagined life in other lands become his interest. Migration, displacement, loss, frustration, and loneliness became constant themes in his writing." (Gao, 2022, 203) His novels mainly revolve around refugees who travel from Africa to Europe, pondering issues such as identity and spiritual belonging of refugees in the

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context of a postcolonial society. At the same time, he takes an intellectual stance. He treats the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on Africa coldly and rationally, and he reports great sympathy for the refugees who suffered from colonial persecution.

## II. "Dispersed Narratives" in the Post-colonial Context

Gurnah's immigrant experience shows that he is a diaspora writer, a definition of his identity in relation to native African writers. In *Keywords in Western literary theory*, The narrative style of Gurnah's novels is dispersed and disordered. Tong Ming points out that "from the new perspective of dispersion, nation, ethnicity, identity, and culture are not isolated concepts, but their semantics exist in the dynamics of transnational networks." (Tong, 2006, 113) Thus, dispersion characterizes the change in the writer's country and geographical location and the significance of spiritual orientation, cultural categories, and national historical dimensions.

Gurnah's life is in a state of dislocation and dispersion. On the one hand, there is a delay in time, i.e., he lives in the gap between the past and the future, and the time he belongs to the "present" is very short, and on the other hand, there is a change in space, as he is dispersed from Zanzibar in Africa to England. He became a true stranger to his homeland. Gurnah's novels have developed a "dispersed narrative" style in keeping with his identity. Gurnah's "dispersed narrative" is not only a rhetorical narrative strategy but is also rooted in the social reality of the people he writes about, i.e., the African society, including Tanzania. Therefore, in order to explain the "dispersed narrative" style of Gurnah's novels, we must go back to the cultural influences, social experiences, and historical contexts that he received and examine how various factors have jointly contributed to the formation of his narrative style. One is the history of Tanzania and Gurnah's own experience of exile. Gurnah's homeland, Zanzibar, has undergone several regime changes and has a long history of being colonized. Zanzibar is located on the eastern coast of Africa, adjacent to the Indian Ocean. Due to its naturally superior location, Zanzibar has gradually formed a trading area since the 5th-6th centuries BC. After a long trade period, Zanzibar's economy developed rapidly, and 16th-century Portuguese colonial expansion spread to Zanzibar. After that, the original inhabitants living in Zanzibar began a long and hard struggle against colonialism.

The landmark event in East Africa's history was Oman's expulsion of the Portuguese colonists from East Africa in 1698. The expansion of the powers did not stop there, and in the 19th century, Britain became the colonizer of Zanzibar. It was not until 1964 that Tanganyika joined the People's Republic of Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanzania. Gurnah left Tanzania in 1966. After a stay in Kenya, he arrived in Britain as a refugee in 1968. Gurnah's diasporic life and refugee status have led to his erratic existence in terms of time and space. It has influenced his novel to develop a dispersed narrative style. Secondly, it comes from Gurnah's reflection on postcolonialism. The postcolonial theory began in the 1980s, and its formation was marked by the publication of Edward Saïd's *Orientalism*. While postcolonialism is relative to colonialism, which oppresses a country or nation utilizing power politics and violence, postcolonialism

colonizes dependent countries through culture, ideology, and language. The dispersed narrative style of Gurnah's novel is influenced by postcolonialism. Tao Jiajun argues that postcolonial theory "accordingly reflects and inspires the ongoing resistance and critique of Third World peoples in their cultural and intellectual spheres.

For this reason, postcolonial theory is characterized by many features such as ponderousness, hybridity, uncertainty, and parasitism." (Tao, 2006, 209) Although Gurnah has publicly stated that he is not a postcolonialist, this does not mean he rejects the postcolonial theory research methods. He does so because he does not want to be labeled a postcolonialist. However, he uses his study of postcolonial theory to argue against the discourse advocated by Wole Soyinka and others in defense of a certain "true" African position. Gurnah's argument against Soyinka's view is that a new discourse, after refuting an existing one, creates a new colonial discourse on top of it: "one colonial discourse attempts to supplant another" (Chambers & Gurnah, 2015). He argues that postcolonialism is "not a part of identity, but a nice, tolerant term, that is so capacious that you can put it almost anywhere these days." (Chambers & Gurnah, 2015) The construct of postcolonial theory is the dichotomous path of thought whose mixed, uncertain, and dislocated reality acts on Gurnah's experience and influences the formation of his novel's dispersed narrative style.

Tanzania's unfortunate history and Gurnah's tortuous life experiences have led to the development of Gurnah's novelistic dispersion style in the post-colonial context. The protagonist's dispersion in Gurnah's novel "can refer not only to physical dispersion, but also to psychological dispersion, or both. Moreover, the dispersion may be both linear and circular." (Wang, 2007, 60) Gurnah's refugee status and experience of exile lead to a non-linear continuum of time, which in turn influences the narrative style of his novels, in which "fragmented stories that travel through time and space replace the traditional linear narrative, and this fracture appropriately represents the lives of characters in a dislocated, dispersed state." (Zhang, 2012, 15) In a sense, the fragmented narrative style of Gurnah's novel is a challenge to Europe's strict, classical mainstream narrative style. Gurnah is interested in "the dynamic condition of being migrant." (Chambers & Gurnah, 2015) Most of Gurnah's novels are written about societies under colonial oppression. For example, *Paradise* takes the life experience of the main character Yusuf as a clue to show that Britain and Germany invaded and colonized Africa.

Khalifa, the protagonist of the long novel *Afterlife*, returns to town a few months after the death of his father, where he is unaccompanied and alone, and he considers himself a useless man, living a worthless life in a town that is not his hometown, in a country where warfare never seems to end. Khalifa's life is parasitism, moving around and working for different bosses. He first studied with a private tutor, then worked as a small clerk in his banker brother's bank, and then worked for the merchant Biashara's trade. During this time, Khalifa married his wife Asha, but their married life was not as satisfactory as it could have been. Asha finds her husband Khalifa perfunctory about the pilgrimage. She even mocks her pious prayers, and Asha finds her husband Khalifa's silent mockery of these aspirations creates a deep sense of alienation. The characters Gurnah portrays are the most ordinary, smallest people in society who have the least sense of existence and live like ants in a colonial and economically depressed society.

Gurnah brings the novel's theme of dispersion to the forefront by showing the tragic fate of the small characters. Gurnah once said, "the notion of people trying to remember is a recurring theme for me." (Chambers & Gurnah, 2015) One scholar note, "This mode of narration navigates between recollection and imagination as both Pius and Rashid rely on memories and revised stories told to them by other characters as well as their own imaginative faculties to make sense of these pasts." (Patel, 2015, 25)

The short story "Mid Morning Moon" exemplifies Gurnah's fictional art form and stray themes. The novel's protagonist, Maalim Hassan Abdalla, has been living with a tragic memory. Through the descriptions of Maalim Hassan's behavior, demeanor, language, and living environment, Gurnah illustrates the loneliness of a stranger who has lost both of his parents, and the author speaks the prophetic words, "Solitude has made him ill." (Gurnah, 2011, 29) through the mouth of "my" mother. The room where Maalim Hassan lives is "like a government office than a living space, minimal and austere, the concrete floor bare, without mat or rug. His ud rested on a stand against the wall." (Gurnah, 2011, 26) Secondly, there was an anachronistic seriousness about him; his personality was withdrawn and heavily suspicious, even as he walked with his eyes downcast and rarely greeted anyone. There was also the fact that Maalim Hassan "When he spoke, his voice was thick and hesitant, as if he had not used it for a while." (Gurnah, 2011, 26) Maalim Hassan's strange behavior can be attributed to his loneliness, accompanied by an upside-down map. The title of this novel-Mid Morning Moon-is a metaphor and a symbol of Maalim Hassan's miserable fate. The moon was hand-drawn onto the map in Maalim Hassan's room, which records that his family was shipwrecked at sea. His father died soon after the shipwreck from a high fever, and his mother remarried. The moon itself, at ten in the Morning, is bleak, lonely, and eerie, and the moon also symbolizes Maalim Hassan's life in exile and the fate of refugees. As Lu Min and Wei Guomiao (2022, 44) point out, "Exile is one of the main lines of Gurnah's composition. Many immigrants and refugees were displaced from their homeland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the experience of separation and exile left people lacking a sense of belonging..." Gurnah places the characters in the novel in Africa, which suffered from colonial invasion and oppression. They endure the double blows from colonialism on their body and spirit, such as the deep they are like fish in a quagmire that cannot save themselves.

*The Wood of the Moon* is based on the story of my encounter with Kevin Edelman, the passport control officer at Gatwick Airport, and is told through a box of ud-al-qamari. The story of the ud-al-qamari from a Persian trader in Bahrain is written in a reminiscent way. This novel has Gurnah's usual storytelling style, i.e., the characters remember the past, and has a nested story narrative within a story. On the surface, the story of "I" and staff member Kevin Edelman's passport review is, in fact, a story of an old man in his sixties who is faced with various interrogations as he flees his country. "I" pretended not to speak English because "I" was told to remain silent no matter what the staff member said. "I" fought against the staff's scrutiny with a terrible and futile silence.

On the one hand, "I," like many refugees, had left my homeland, left my hometown, and went to another country in search of a place to live, "It is a familiar theme in our stories, leaving what we know and arriving in strange places,

carrying little bits of jumbled luggage, suppressing secret and garbled ambitions.” (Gurnah, 2001, 88) On the other hand, Kevin Edelman represents “the bawab of Europe, gatekeeper of the orchards in the family courtyard, the same gate that had released the hordes that went out to consume the world, and to which we have come sliming up to beg admittance.” (Gurnah, 2001, 112) *The Wood of the Moon* revolves around the key words “refugee” and “asylum,” which are naturally related to each other, i.e., the refugees’ demand for asylum. From “I,” we can see that the life of exile happens not only to young people but also to old people. An older man still has to face the life of exile, so one can imagine how unfortunate, helpless, and painful the people oppressed by colonialism were.

Gurnah placed the novel’s characters in a post-colonial textual context and thus gradually developed a dispersed narrative style to bring them closer to the novel’s textual scenario.

### III. The Position of Intellectual Writing

Gurnah’s novels, scholarly writings, and numerous interviews reveal the conscience, reason, and responsibility of his distinctly intellectual writing. He examines postcolonial theory with presence and a deep concern for the fate of African peoples. Edward Waeffie Said’s *Representations of the Intellectual* shows the writing stance of a true intellectual in terms of the dimensions of the group that intellectuals should represent, the position they should take, and the uniqueness of their identity. Therefore, intellectuals are the mouthpiece of the people. As representatives of justice and the disadvantaged and persecuted, they must make their positions and opinions known to the public, even in the face of hardship and danger. They must take a stand and express their opinions to the public despite hardships; their words and actions also represent/represent their personality, knowledge, and insight. Gurnah’s creative practice seeks to be close to the historical scene of colonized Africa. He speaks out for those persecuted people like Yusuf and Abbas, who were brutally treated by colonialism and had no way out, reflecting Gurnah’s reflection on his own life. First, Gurnah establishes an attitude of whom he writes for, thus establishing an intellectual stance on writing. Secondly, his fictional style reflects the situation and mood of the diasporic intellectuals.

Looking at Gurnah’s literary work as a whole, we can see that he took his hometown of Zanzibar as the center of the circle, radiated to East Africa, and then wrote for the entire African people. As an intellectual, he writes “to” and “for” the African people. In his Nobel Prize speech, he reflexively asked himself what he had left behind in his “sudden escape from his African homeland” (Gurnah, 2021), when he was too young to think about these issues. Gurnah’s claim that he never forgot his homeland, Zanzibar, wherever he was, is not an irrepressible flood of exile emotions but rather a “retrospective” reflection. This conscience is expected of an intellectual. After he fled to England as a refugee and settled down, he began thinking long and hard, incorporating these thoughts into his post-colonial theories. Later, Gurnah found that Africa forgot its past at an unprecedented rate, that its once unpleasant history was left untouched, and that it was “constructing a new, simpler system of history, changing or even erasing what had happened, and reconstructing it to fit the ‘reality’ of the present

development.” (Gurnah, 2021) In the face of two very different views of history, one of which is the restoration of “true” Africanness, as advocated by Soyinka and others, and the other is the abandonment of history and the reconstruction of the historical system to suit the present, Gurnah takes a negative view of both. Gurnah admits that his book aims to recreate African people’s lives and draw more attention to Africa. His change of perspective on African studies emphasizes the importance of not using the Western “ego” perspective to create a subjective narrative of Africa as the “other.” In this regard, Gurnah and Said are on the same page: “Far from encouraging a sense of aggrieved primal innocence in countries which had suffered the ravages of colonialism, I stated repeatedly that mythical abstractions such as these were lies, as were the various rhetorics of blame they gave rise to; cultures are too intermingled, their contents and histories too interdependent and hybrid, for surgical separation into large and mostly ideological oppositions like Orient and Occident.” (Said, 1996, xiii) Based on Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno’s theory of intellectual relevance, Said precisely targets the diaspora’s distinctive narrative style developed and explains the relationship between this narrative style and the writer’s experience. He argues that such works are “fragmentary first of all, jerky, discontinuous; there is no plot or predetermined order to follow. It represents the intellectual’s consciousness as unable to be at rest anywhere, constantly on guard against the blandishments of success” (Ibid., 57). At the same time, the time of Gurnah’s novel is not a conventional, air-conditioned, homogeneous linear view of time, but rather a messianic time similar to Benjamin’s, where the present is intertwined, entangled, and misshapen with the past and future.

Gurnah’s experience of exile influenced and shaped the messianic view of time. Colonialism’s invasion of Africa kept Gurnah from returning to his homeland for a long time. The disconnection and alienation caused by culture, language, and race exacerbated the tragic nature of his exile life. Gurnah’s short story “My Mother Lived on a Farm in Africa” is a metaphor for Gurnah’s personal experience of living in an environment that “rejects” the dominant narrative of Africa, which contrasts greatly with the behavior of Kati in the novel. Muna’s daughter Kati “brags” to her friends that her mother lived on a farm in Africa when she repeatedly tries to tell her otherwise. Muna recalls a story from her childhood when she lived temporarily at her Aunt Amina’s house, where Aunt Amina’s neighbor Issa fell in love with Muna. However, the adults felt Muna was too young and “too dangerous for her age,” and the supposed relationship was stifled. However, Kati’s repeated emphasis to her friends that her mother had lived on a farm in Africa is intended to make them “jealous,” which shows the vast difference in understanding of Africa between generations. Her mother is reluctant to discuss her life’s physical oppression and mental humiliation in Africa. Kati can only learn about the “processed” and “glorified” Africa of mainstream discourse through television programs.

In Gurnah’s earlier short story *Bossy*, the novel’s narrative time is more complex, with all the past events coming together in the present. The novel’s plot is also fragmented and incoherent, which in a way, implies Gurnah’s state of dispersion when he first arrived in England. To be an intellectual is to “exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments”

(Said, 1996, 49) Gurnah does not completely abandon his homeland Zanzibar in terms of spiritual aspirations, nor does he ever fully accept and identify with England psychologically, and this “dilemma of indifference” is always with Gurnah, which is evident in *Bossy*. The novel tells the story of Haji and Rashid (also known as Bossy), who go out to sea and come to the prison island. After playing on the island, when they are about to return home by boat, Bossy volunteers to swim back, leaving Haji drifting alone in the sea, so much so that he loses his way, and after landing in a strange land, Haji is beaten to death by anti-Muslims. The novel begins with the words “A long time ago that was,” which explains that Princess Margaret Pier, where Haji and Rashid are located, is a heavily colonized place and that “a day in 1956 when the good princess laid foot on our humble land. On the other side were four guns, riveted into the concrete and facing the sea. Ceremonial fire-crackers to bid the princess welcome.” (Gurnah, 1987, 49). Next, on “a beautiful morning in December,” Haji and Rashid travel to the prison island, where there is an interpolation of Rashid’s father, who died a few years ago. In fact, Haji and Rashid do not know each other’s whereabouts. Through the mouth of Haji, the author tells the misery of the people’s lives under the colonialist invasion. Haji says, “You too, you and I we would have watched while a neighbor turned beggar and sold his daughter for shark-meat. And we too would have laughed. All they taught us was how to be meek while they rode rough-shod. You and I, we had something...In this cold and often hostile place I often think of you. It was a morning in December that I first wept for you. But by then that heartless land had turned your blood to dust.” (Gurnah, 1987, 51) It reflects the indifference, the cowardice within the colonized. The narrative time of *Bossy* is misplaced, disorganized, and mixed, which reflects the racial discrimination, cultural clashes, and identity confusion that Gurnah faced while in England in the text. Gurnah also recognizes that colonialism in Africa and European racial discrimination are everywhere. However, the speed of forgetting is worrying, as the once “Dismissed or forgotten were the ravaged colonial peoples....Yet dismissed most often are precisely the infinite number of traces in the immensely detailed, violent history of colonial intervention—minute by minute, hour by hour—in the lives of individuals and collectivities, on both sides of the colonial divide.” (Said, 1993, 22) Gurnah’s writing is about uncovering the historical details that permeated the colonized lands and thus reflecting on the dangers of colonialism.

Gurnah’s fictional practice demonstrates an intellectual writing stance that dares to refute the subjective narrative’s imagining of Africa and resist the post-colonial violation of Africa by the official, authoritative discourse with a gesture of truth-telling. His series of novels on Africa put the fate of African people into the scene of historical occurrences, showing how they redeem themselves and their infinitely sinking fate. As Said points out, “the intellectuals’ task at the time, to unearth the forgotten, to make connections that were denied, to cite alternative courses of action that could have avoided war and its attendant goal of human destruction.” (Ibid., 23), Gurnah’s literary creations are “courses of action,” which has not only literary but also sociological significance. The stance of Gurnah’s intellectual writing attempts to give voice to the disadvantaged in the field of literature and to give attention and reflection to their fate, which is Gurnah’s appeal to academia with his own experience and his literary creation.

#### IV. Identity and Spiritual Belonging

Identity theory is linked to postcolonial theory. Identity is generally divided into individual identity, collective identity, self-identity, and social identity. The identity theory spawned by postcolonial theory is a more complex “hybrid identity” that basically covers the above four types of identities. Tao Jiajun (Tao, 2004, 40) points out that “postcolonial writing itself is a unique identity practice.” It connects the deeper connotations contained in postcolonial writing with identity. Gurnah spares no effort to write about the fate of exiles, such as Yusuf in *Paradise* and Hassan in *Memory of Departure*. These exiles “are concerned with issues such as national ‘collectivity’ and its identity, which are in fact particular issues of identity and identity in today’s cultural studies area in cultural studies today.” (Yan, 2006, 64). Their destinies seem to be similar as colonial oppression. Violent conflicts have caused a group of people to be dispersed and migrated worldwide. They share a common identity: refugees. Once they became “refugees,” their identity problems were revealed and brought a series of questions, such as how to find a suitable identity to survive in the fate of leaving their country, how to find a collective identity in an environment of racial and cultural segregation, how to maintain their independence in an alien social environment and how to How to maintain one’s independence in a foreign social environment and not be imprisoned by the ideology of the other. Gurnah’s treatment of these issues is, in fact, a reflection of the identity of his fictional characters. Gurnah’s novels are set in the colonized history of Africa, where the exiled characters are trying to find their own identity. Said sees storytelling as the novelist’s method of telling history, and “stories are at the heart what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history.” (Said, 1993, xii) Gurnah’s novel writes about the identity of its characters in three broad ways: first, by using individual Swahili representations; second, by constructing a spiritual homeland; and third, by reflecting on individual spiritual trauma.

Gurnah’s novels are interspersed with individual Kiswahili languages. The characters use language as an innate symbol of cultural memory to authenticate themselves while maintaining an identity of “independence” in an unfamiliar land. The scholar Ma Jun analyzes the language of Gurnah’s and Taha Husayn’s works and finds a commonality in their use of language: “When they first look back at the mother theme of ‘Africa’, they both choose Kiswahili, a cultural symbol established by the Tanzanian government. ” (Ma, 2022, 12) However, Gurnah and Husayn differ in that Gurnah only chooses Kiswahili as a symbol to use in his work, whereas Husayn works directly in Kiswahili. Gurnah’s occasional use of Kiswahili while writing in English reminds the diaspora not to forget their native language and that speaking Kiswahili is a way of their identity. In *By the Sea*, when “I” recalls meeting Hussein for the first time, Hussein speaks several Swahili words (Ah swahil, Ni-naweza kidogo kido-go tu). In *Paradise*, when Yusuf’s father warns him not to play with the “barbarians”, the Swahili word for “barbarians” is “washenzi”. Such examples are numerous in Gurnah’s novels. In *A Parting Memory*, “these linguistic elements from the East African homeland



are intentionally or unintentionally placed in the text by Gurnah to provide an anchor point of identity for the protagonist Hassan and his family.” (Ma, 2022, 13) By using Swahili, Gurnah also has the intention of constructing the self by distinguishing the other, as the characters in the novel identify and use the native African language to confirm that they belong to Africa or that they belong to the African “we,” which is the center and origin of the world, and then radiates to other This is the center and origin of the world, which radiates to other regions. It is the center and origin of the world, which radiates to the rest of the world. They understand the other based on a true understanding of the self.

Gurnah’s attempt to construct a spiritual homeland is not to recover the “real” African position but to show the real life of African people from a bystander’s perspective. His portrayal of the refugees has the characteristics of a group, a kind of spring and autumn writing that sees the big in the small and the small in the tube. Identity and spiritual belonging have a long history. In the course of time, Africans need to find identity within their communities and dialogue and communicate with other communities and countries on an equal footing. The construction of a spiritual homeland “requires a careful analysis of each Black ethnic diaspora and its similarities and differences with other diaspora groups to uncover the multiple histories implied by Black identity.” (Tao, 2004, 42) Gurnah’s novel spans colonial and post-colonial periods in time and two regions, Africa and Europe, in space. The spiritual homeland he wants to construct is not geographically spatial or temporally dimensional but a “paradise” in the sense of humanity and ethics: a utopia full of goodwill and free of colonization. Gurnah’s masterpiece *Paradise* is a masterful use of irony, contrasting beauty and evil, goodness and cunning, and other paradoxical relationships. Yusuf, a beautiful young man, is unknowingly sold by his father to his “uncle” Aziz as indentured labor to cover his debts. Yusuf’s beauty brings him luck and trouble at the same time. He sees a heavenly garden in Aziz’s house. He enjoys the beautiful natural scenery of Africa on his business trip, but behind all this lurks the scheming of his uncle and the deceitfulness of the businesspeople. In the end, the desperate Yusuf can only run to the German army with the attitude of a moth to a flame. Gurnah described, “in the novel *Paradise* is ironically presented, because it is overwhelmed and defeated. Furthermore, I wanted to show that this superficial *Paradise* of goodwill, courtesy, and the apparent ability to live together has ugliness below the surface in the shape of oppression of other groups. This particularly concerns baggage and property: women and children, who were suppressed by patriarchy.” (Chambers & Gurnah, 2015) Gurnah is deeply influenced by Islamic culture, and *Quran* appears many times in his novels; even the name of Yusuf, the main character in *Paradise*, is taken from *Quran*, which is Gurnah’s hope and trust for faith, goodness, and beauty.

Gurnah’s novels reflect on identity and spiritual belonging through reflections on the traumatic experiences of war and colonization. The characters he portrays experience “major historical trauma, and individuals are more likely to fall into the imagination of past identities, thus creating an absence of the real present.” (Han and He, 2020, 106) Whether it is Saleh Omar, who seeks refuge in England from Zanzibar in *By the Sea*, Yusuf in *Paradise*, or Abbas, the engineer in *The Last Gift*, they all experience physical and mental trauma. From a

longitudinal point of view, mental trauma has a greater impact on a person. The subject's identification with "identity" depends on a psychological feeling, a subjective psychological perception of the surroundings, "what the self 'feels' to be so, and therefore is better called 'a sense of uniqueness, continuity, belonging, sense of continuity, sense of belonging'." (Zhao, 2010, 7) Gurnah's characters are in the midst of a sense of rupture and tearing, gazing briefly between the past and the future, and their "sense of uniqueness, continuity, and belonging" to their self-identity is minimal, almost non-existent. However, this does not deny Gurnah's reflection on spiritual trauma and his tireless pursuit of the question of spiritual belonging. The question of identity necessarily deals with the relationship between the "self" and the "other." The "self" is single and inward, while the "other" is complex and outward. The "other" can be others relative to the individual or the social environment consisting of various factors.

In "Mid Morning Moon," if we look at Malin Hassan as the center of "self," Malin Hassan is the "other," and if we change the perspective to look at the relationship between them, Malin Hassan is the "other." If we look at the relationship between them, with Marin Hassan as the "self," then "I" and my brother Haji, my sister Randa, and Miss Fatma are all "others." There is not only the problem of the identity of "I," but also the identity of Malin Hassan, especially the latter is the focus of Gurnah's writing. The reason why Marin Hassan moves to the house next to "me" is not known, and his departure is also sudden and desperate. During this brief "stay," "I" get to know the traumatic experiences of Marin Hassan. He was a poor teacher who had moved to another country and had been living alone since he was a teenager, useless to others. He wrapped himself up tightly, rather like a cocoon of despair. He does not communicate with others and lives alone. Marin Hassan's relationship with all the "others" in his environment is tense, even antagonistic. His traumatized heart is also looking for a little comfort, and he wants to be loved by others. Marin Hassan wrote a letter to his Aunt Masoda, and if he could get a response, he could take a step forward in his identity. However, reality did not give him any chance, and when his letter to Aunt Masoda was made public, he had to run away. Marin Hassan's experience shows that "the transformation between individual identity and collective identity is not equivalent or logical, and the scattering of individual identity and the struggle for power in collective identity make the fictional discourse a game of rational and irrational will." (Han & Hu, 2018, 102) Gurnah takes the erosion and alienation of the subject's identity by war and colonization as the entry point to reflect on how the subject's identity is "legitimized" in the real society and how to obtain the identity of the "other."

## V. Conclusion

The Nobel Prize for Literature won by Gurnah, who is of Tanzanian descent, has again brought African literature under the public spotlight. The genealogy of African literature already includes pioneers such as Wole Soyinka and John Maxwell Coetzee and successors such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'O and Gurnah. Gurnah wanted to be a writer like Derek Walcott, to embrace everything that came before him in the "an enabling tradition." In a way, the "an enabling tradition" that Gurnah believes in comes from the nourishment of African

literature. Gurnee's novels take colonialism as the textual background and express the identity and spiritual belonging of the African people who were oppressed by colonialism and post-colonialism from the standpoint of intellectual writing, showing great sympathy for their sufferings. "On the other hand, the experience of African refugees in Britain is full of humiliation, struggle, growth and self-knowledge, with the helplessness of concealing the background and fabricating the past. The growth and self-knowledge of the African-American protagonists are acquired in the retrospect of their homeland." (Lu, 2021, 3) Gurnah's novel spans Africa and Europe in space and colonialism and post-colonialism in time. Starting from the current situation of the African people, he writes about the diaspora's quest for identity and spiritual belonging and shows his position of intellectual writing. What Gurnah does is "to let the long-suppressed histories, silent minority voices, distorted racial experiences, and various marginal identity issues in the text unveil themselves one by one and move from behind the stage to the front." (Tao, 2004, 43) Gurnah's fiction reflects the concern of an era for the underprivileged, highlighting literature's artistic appeal and social value.

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