

Between Shores: Geophilosophical and Psychogeographical Explorations of Belonging in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *by the Sea* (2001)

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Abstract

In Abdulrazak Gurnah's work *By the Sea* (2001), the complex notion of belonging emerges as a central concern, intricately interwoven with the cultural and geographic landscape of the Indian Ocean region. The novel weaves a tapestry of profound geophilosophical and psychogeographical implications, as its primary setting, the coastline, becomes a multifaceted metaphor for the complex human experience of displacement, identity, and the ever-shifting nature of borders, both physical and existential. The vastness and fluidity of the sea, juxtaposed with the solid but permeable shoreline, serves as a symbolic stage upon which the characters' journeys of self-discovery and grappling with their place in the world unfold. Using Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialization and smooth versus striated space, this research paper argues that the geophilosophical and psychogeographical aspects of Gurnah's *by the Sea* are expounded to reveal the disturbing undercurrent of colonization and its lingering effects on individual and collective identities in contemporary Africa. Through examining the characters' journeys of self-discovery against the backdrop of colonial history, the analysis illustrates how the fluidity of space and the complexity of belonging shape their experiences of rootlessness and alienation.

Keywords: Geophilosophy, Psychogeography, Space, Migration, Identity, Postcolonialism.

1. Introduction

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *by the Sea* (2001) has garnered significant scholarly attention, primarily centered on themes of displacement, identity, and the effects of colonialism within postcolonial contexts. However, the discourse surrounding Gurnah's work is rich and multifaceted, reflecting diverse critical methodologies and interpretations. One prominent area of focus is trauma, which has been extensively analyzed in Mustapha Kharoua's "Abdulrazak Gurnah's *by the Sea*: Unbelonging and the Trauma of Imprisonment" (2016). Using Michael Rothberg's notion of "traumatic realism" with Paul Gilroy's concept of "camp mentality", Kharoua contends that the main goal of the novel is to acknowledge and shed light on nationalist racism in both Zanzibar and

Britain, which are rooted in the same ideological frameworks that enabled colonialism and slavery. This theme resonates with Ahmed and Jonah's "Displacement and Inner Conflict in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Memory of Departure* and *By the Sea*" (2023), who define displacement as an ontological crisis, emphasizing the profound psychological implications for individuals such as Saleh Omar, who grapple with alienation and the loss of home. In "Travel, marginality and migrant subjectivities in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* and Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound*" (2017), James Ocita, as he writes in the abstract of his article, "explore[s] the ideas above drawing on Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001) and Caryl Phillips's *The Atlantic Sound* (2000) as narratives that represent long histories of cultural flows across the Indian and Atlantic oceans, with Britain as their point of both convergence and divergence" (p.298). He, furthermore, sees Britain as worth exploring for historical reasons. As a matter of fact, Britain has been known for being involved in slave trade, maritime invasion, and colonialism. Britain, however, is where diasporas emerge and articulate narratives of marginal subjectivities (*Ibid*). Nevertheless, Meg Samuelson's "Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fictions of the Swahili Coast: Littoral Locations and Amphibian Aesthetics" (2012) emphasizes the ocean as a dynamic space that facilitates cultural exchange and personal transformation, highlighting the importance of geography in understanding post-colonial identities. This perspective contrasts with more traditional readings that focus primarily on the psychological impacts of displacement without fully engaging with the spatial dimensions of experience.

Accordingly, for scholars, re-orienting Zanzibar in the Indian Ocean intends that Gurnah's fiction reflects the diverse cultural and historical interactions along the East African coast, challenging simplistic notions of nationalism and ethnicity. Namely, Tina Steiner's "Writing Wider Worlds: The Role of Relation in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fiction" (2010) emphasizes the importance of encounters across boundaries, suggesting that Gurnah's narratives redefine "Africa" as an intercultural space rather than a monolithic entity. Eventually, Steiner argues that Gurnah's work, specifically *By the Sea*, critiques colonial and nationalist discourses that promote exclusion and violence, advocating for a politics of relation that recognizes shared humanity. As for Keyvan Allahyari, his article posits that the ocean serves as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of lives and histories across borders. "The Global Refugee: Oceanic Border Thinking in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *by the Sea*" (2024) explores Gurnah's *by the Sea* as a critique of traditional notions of borders, particularly in the context of refugees. It introduces the concept of "oceanic border thinking," which emphasizes the fluidity and permeability of borders, contrasting with the conventional view of borders as fixed and prohibitive. The author situates the discussion within the broader historical processes of colonialism and postcolonialism, highlighting how these have shaped contemporary border politics. Ultimately, for Allahyari, the main characters of the novel represent different facets of the refugee experience, with their narratives illustrating the impact of borders on identity and belonging. Similarly, Sissy Helff's article "Imagining Flight in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *by the Sea*" (2008) examines *By the Sea* in the context of refugee representation in literary works and critiques the stereotypical portrayals of refugees and mere asylum seekers, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. Her work situates the characters' experiences within broader geopolitical changes, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, which affects their migration routes and identities.

Along with psychogeography and geophilosophy, this study adopts postcolonialism as a sub-theoretical framework. Our argument in this paper, hence, revolves around the fact that people construct different identities depending on the space they occupy. MSmooth from a 'striated' to a

‘smooth space’¹, therefore, involves a radical change; that is to say, a deconstruction of a person’s identity through the process of deterritorialization². While this social issue is to be found in the context of migration and exile, it, in fact, recurs in *By the Sea*. In his book on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Geophilosophy* (2014), Radolphe Gasché explains the concept of deterritorialization as simply “the departure from a territory in all its self-enclosedness and the opening toward an outside, or other, as a result of which one betrays and turns away from “the fixed powers which try to hold us back, the established powers of the earth” (p.19).

Deleuze and Guattari view the urban space as based on deterritorialization. When applied to literature, it means the moment of alienation and exile that character’s experience within the text. This research suggests a consideration of the narrative as a spatio-temporal dynamic that weaves together a set of events and existents and lines of flight. In general, space could be seen as a terrain for multiple operations and interactions including territorialization, and deterritorialization. As a matter of fact, “everything, from bodies to societies, is a form of territorialization, or the connection of forces to produce distinct wholes. But alongside every territorialization, there is also the power of deterritorialization.” (Colebrooke, 2002). In her *Understanding Deleuze* (2002), Clare Colebrook explains Deleuze’s concept of territorialization as a process of creating or furthering life by building connections between components of nature and settling territories to allow it to become what it is. However, deterritorialization happens when there is intensity in the process that allows any form of life to become other than it is. In theory, achieving becoming involves following “a chaotic root structure: connecting every point to every other point, moving in every direction, branching out to create new directions” (Colebrook, 2002). These new directions of escape are coined by Deleuze and Guattari as lines of flight³. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that such a term is translated from "Lignes de fuite". In French, the word "fuite" does not only cover “the act of fleeing or eluding, but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance” (Massumi, 1987). Conclusively, in *By the Sea*, the refugees⁴ movements can be seen as attempts to find new spaces where they can reconstruct their identities away from the constraints imposed by their colonial pasts.

In essence, contextualizing both the geophilosophical and psychogeographical approaches to *By the Sea* within the theoretical framework of colonialism and postcolonialism allows for a nuanced understanding of identity, affective and spatial relations. It highlights the complexities of refugee experiences while challenging rigid categorizations imposed by historical legacies.

Geophilosophical Reading of *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah (2001)

Deterritorialization in the Context of Colonialism

Gurnah's novel *By the Sea* delves into how individuals relate to the spaces they occupy. The story at its heart explores geophilosophy, with a focus on Deleuze's concept of deterritorialization. This philosophical idea describes how individuals become disconnected from their native land or territory. In the novel, the characters embody various forms of deterritorialization, as they navigate through the challenges of colonialism, exile, and migration within the narrative.

Gurnah's narrative unfolds as a profound exploration of characters grappling with the repercussions of their evolving connections to land and place. The novel serves as a powerful depiction of the enduring impacts of historical and sociocultural forces, portraying the characters' endeavors to uphold a sense of belonging amidst the turbulence of colonial impositions, exile, and transformative migration. The author's adept engagement with the concept of deterritorialization

underscores the profound psychogeographical ramifications experienced by individuals displaced from their homes and communities.

To historically contextualize Gurnah's *by the Sea*, it is important to refer to the colonial background of Zanzibar. On the one hand, Zanzibar has been a significant hub in the Indian Ocean trade, influenced by various cultures, including Arab, Persian, Indian, and European. On the second hand, the British Protectorate from 1890 to 1963 has shaped its political and social landscape. Additionally, the revolution of 1964 has marked a pivotal moment in the island's history, leading to the overthrow of the Arab-dominated government. This has resulted in widespread violence and the persecution of people of Arab descent, fundamentally altering the social fabric of Zanzibar. *By the Sea*'s characters' lives are deeply affected by the events surrounding this revolution, including imprisonment, loss of family members, and the struggle for identity in a post-colonial context. Omar's imprisonment and Latif's self-exile, for instance, reflect the personal traumas resulting from broader historical upheavals (Hand, 2010).

Gurnah's literary work prominently features the theme of "displacement." Aleksandar Hemon's perspective, as cited in Ahmed and Jonah (2023), defines displacement as an ontological crisis, where individuals are compelled to negotiate their selfhood amidst shifting existential circumstances (p.52). This perspective resonates with Gurnah's exploration of the impacts of colonialism, particularly in the African context.

Gurnah's work depicts displaced characters entangled with difficulties across various dimensions such as religion, culture, education, morality, and geography. The aftermath of colonialism manifests in alienation from deeply rooted cultures and traditions. Ahmed and Jonah (2023) state that "Alienation happens due to the existential crisis of a displaced person. Namely, Gurnah portrays the figure Saleh Omar as an alienated person in *By the Sea*. He lost his own house and had to leave another place as a refugee." (p.53). The catalyst for this displacement is the result of cultural exploration and exploitation, with migration and rootlessness emerging as apparent causes for the upheaval experienced by the colonized.

The concept of colonial displacement, stemming from European dominance, is a prevalent motif in Gurnah's narrative. The colonizers exercise political and cultural supremacy, appropriating everything from the colonized, including lands and shelters. This leaves a profound impact on the psyche of the indigenous people, resulting in their displacement from their homeland and causing both physical and mental upheaval. In *By the Sea*, the character Elleke's introspection encapsulates the essence of colonialism, wherein Europeans assert their entitlement to dominate, traverse the world, and lay claim to the land and resources of others:

"We were European. We could go anywhere in the world we wanted. You mean why did you choose to go and take what belonged to other people and call it your own and prosper on duplicity and force. Even fight and maim for what you had no right to. Isn't that what you mean? Well, because we lived at a time when it seemed we had a right to do all that, a right to places that were only occupied by people with dark skins and frizzy hair. That was the meaning of colonialism, and everything was done to persuade us not to notice the methods that made it possible for us to go where we wanted" (Gurnah, 2001).

The quotation "We were Europeans. We could go anywhere in the world we wanted" highlights the entitlement and imperialistic ambition of the European colonial mindset. It raises concerns about the morality of colonial actions and the use of deception and coercion. Elleke's response to the implied question provides historical context by stating, "Well, because we lived at

a time when it seemed we had a right to do all that" (*Ibid*). This acknowledgement highlights the mindset of the colonial era, where a perceived superiority and entitlement have powered actions which, in hindsight, are known as morally reprehensible. The justification for colonial actions is further clarified: "a right to places that were only occupied by people with dark skins and frizzy hair" (*Ibid*).

This racialized description emphasizes the ingrained racism that reinforces colonial ideologies, rationalizing the exploitation and domination of indigenous populations based on their physical appearance. The repetition of "That was the meaning of colonialism" strengthens the central theme of the quote. It concisely depicts the essence of colonialism as a system built on the exploitation of vulnerable populations and the proclamation of dominance by those with perceived superiority.

The story is constructed to emphasize how memories of visits with Elleke and Jan are influenced by the stories they tell. Elleke's experiences, especially her move to Dresden and her feelings about leaving Kenya are highlighted. Her story becomes more emotional when discussing missing Kenya and her ex-boyfriend Daniel. Elleke's decision to write a memoir during a period of "longing and disquiet" suggests that her narrative has a therapeutic or introspective purpose. Moreover, Elleke's parents significantly impact the story as they bring wealth to Dresden, signaling a change in fortune. Despite their affluence, the emotional toll of relocation is evident. Elleke's parents are shocked by the difficulties they face in Germany and share a yearning for Kenya, showing a shared longing for the motherland and implying that the uprooting from Kenya is an ongoing battle.

The development of Elleke's character through her personal journey in *By the Sea* embodies the novel's theme of belonging. As Elleke navigates her life, she grapples with her sense of self in a landscape marked by colonial legacies and personal dislocation. This struggle for self-definition is compounded by her interconnection with other characters, particularly Saleh Omar, whose own quest for belonging mirrors her own. Furthermore, the role Elleke plays in *By the Sea* ascertains the view that the term "refugee" should not be simplistically equated with a person of color who finds themselves at a border. Instead, seeking refuge arises from the violence perpetrated by governments, and it only transforms into a "crisis" when the aggression faced in one's home country is compounded by the harshness of the nation providing asylum (Allahyari, 2024). "Elleke discloses the story of growing up in the border town of Most, then a part of Austria, before residing in Kenya as a settler coffee farmer in her youth" (*Ibid*), and finally settling in Germany.

Gurnah's study on relocation and Elleke's memoir both delve into the feelings of migration and displacement, exploring identity, longing, and the psychological impact of displacement. Gurnah emphasizes how colonial history exacerbate this instability by establishing English as a language of authority. *By the Sea* highlights the believability of refugees who do not speak English fluently, and alienation is a major theme, representing the displaced people's sense of rootlessness.

Besides, Gurnah explores how the landscapes inhabited by refugees, such as England and Germany, are imbued with historical significance that influences their identities. The remnants of colonialism are evident in the physical spaces that these characters traverse. To demonstrate, there is this moment when at the Gatwick Airport Saleh internally responds to the officer's white nationalism, "Edelman, the name of the owner of Europe, who knew its values and had paid for them through generations. But the whole world had paid and didn't get to enjoy them. Think of

me as one of those objects that Europe took away with her” (Gurnah, 2001). This notion of sarcastically calling his white opponent as “the owner of Europe” underscores the Eurocentric perspective that often marginalizes the contributions and experiences of colonized peoples. This aligns with Gurnah’s postcolonial criticism which emphasizes how colonial legacies continue to shape global inequalities today. Chiefly, new destinations serve as reminders of past traumas while simultaneously offering opportunities for new beginnings. The interplay between memory and geography highlights how colonization has left an indelible mark on both personal and collective identities.

Finally, *By the Sea* explores the profound impact of geographic displacement on identity transformation. The characters struggle with their status as refugees or asylum seekers despite having a clear place in their home country. Gurnah highlights the displaced people's belief that they can no longer claim any land as their own. The novel delves into the psychological impact, exploring the dreams and nostalgia⁵ that influence the ambivalent mentality of those experiencing relocation. The fading hope of reclaiming one's identity emerges as a poignant motif. The displaced individuals are torn between longing for the past and regretting the present, trapped in a never-ending battle.

Analyzing Space

In most critiques of *By the Sea*, the focus is primarily on migration and asylum seeking. However, Meg Samuelson presents a thought-provoking and distinctive perspective. Rather than delving into geopolitical issues, Samuelson delves into the concept of narrative cartography, skillfully mapping Zanzibar's journey across the Indian Ocean. This innovative approach enriches our understanding of the book, encouraging us to perceive it as a dynamic space where numerous narratives intersect. In “Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fictions of the Swahili Coast: Littoral Locations and Amphibian Aesthetics” (2012), Samuelson underscores the novel's spatial and storytelling qualities, encouraging a more profound engagement with Gurnah's literary world.

The novel's title, which references the sea, signifies its pivotal role in the entire plot, making it the first focal point of examination. The story's opening unfolds on the island of Zanzibar spanning the 1950s to the 1990s. The protagonist's proximity to the water plays a central role in shaping his life. Residing on an island surrounded by the sea, Saleh's experience mirrors the instability of the people living in a perpetually changing environment. The novel portrays instability through various lenses, including the nation's history, Zanzibar's political system, and the dynamics among individuals. The sea's presence creates an aura of uncertainty, reflecting the turbulent nature of the characters' lives and the unpredictable socio-political landscape they navigate. The constant proximity to the ever-changing sea infuses the narrative with a sense of fluidity and unpredictability, echoing the overarching theme of instability that permeates the story from beginning to end.

Even though Saleh’s development before his immigration might seem almost linear or uncomplicated, his sense of self is always in movement. After all, he has grown up in a land that was colonized by the British and witnessed its independence. In his youth, his sense of identity has swung between the virtues of Islam and the teachings of English literature. After reaching a peak in terms of business and success, his life is transformed when he acquires Rajab Shaaban’s house. He is then persecuted, imprisoned for eleven years, displaced, dispossessed, and thus deterritorialized.

Saleh resists the injustice of Shaaban, false accusations by the people, and even the loss of his family and possessions. He refuses to leave Zanzibar and instead stays in his shop. It is only when Rajab Shaaban's son, Hassan, returns with the mission to persecute him that Saleh feels an immediate need to flee to England. Exile becomes his only way to reestablish himself. His life as a refugee is not what he has dreamed of, but it provides a multitude of opportunities.

The deterritorialized Saleh undergoes metamorphosis, or 'becoming' according to Deleuze. In other ways, the restrictions of exile drive him to adopt the mentality of *Bartleby the Scrivener*, a passive character who has separated himself from his body and mind. He develops resilience to withstand bigotry and injustice. As an asylum seeker, he is encouraged not to speak English for his own good, but silence becomes a defensive strategy. In other words, Saleh is not just pretending to be someone different; he is becoming something other. "The story only gives us this man, who says nothing about himself or his past, appears to make no judgment or analysis, desires no reprieve or forgiveness from us, and only wishes to be left alone" (Gurnah, 2001). This transition into a mute observer of his own life reveals the severe psychological effects of displacement and cultural constraints.

Saleh's journey is similar to *Bartleby's* in that both characters navigate life with stoicism and find peace in their inner resilience. Amid adversity, Saleh's silence acts as a shield, protecting him from the harsh reality of his situation while also allowing him to carve out a space of autonomy within a world that seeks to destroy his identity. In this state, Saleh overcomes the constraints imposed by society and becomes a symbol of silent resistance against the powers that aim to oppress him.

In his essay, Deleuze (1998) argues that *Bartleby* is a pure outsider who cannot be assigned to any social position (p.73). He embodies the parvenu, the wanderer, or the postcolonial expatriate. Gilles Deleuze points out the challenges that American writers encounter in achieving recognition, largely due to the dominance of British literary traditions, which positions the American writer as an outsider. He raises the question of whether the fundamental aim of American literature is to twist and reshape the English language through innovative techniques and deviations, likening it to a "schizophrenic vocation." Essentially, Deleuze argues that American literature carves out its distinct identity by challenging and reinterpreting the prevailing English language (Deleuze, 1998). This exemplifies Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor literature', which introduces another language within the dominant one to challenge its authority (Deleuze, 1998).

Melville has created for them an exotic, or deterritorialized, language, the whale language (Deleuze, 1998). This investigation emphasizes the ongoing conflict between cultural hegemony and the revolutionary potential of disadvantaged voices. *Bartleby's* status as an outsider represents a larger struggle against entrenched power structures, as he undermines old narratives and questions accepted conventions. Deleuze's investigation into the schizophrenic nature of American literature emphasizes the inherent inconsistencies in language and cultural identity, as well as the transformational power of linguistic subversion. Melville's invention of a deterritorialized language transforms the novel into a site of resistance, providing a platform for marginalized voices to dispute and reinterpret dominant narratives.

Subsequently, in postcolonial discourse, the challenge is to navigate between two types of spaces. Movements that seek to create smooth spaces can undermine the striated structures left by

colonialism, fostering environments where diverse identities coexist without being subsumed into a singular narrative but, rather, a collective one.

Smoothness Versus Striation: A Deleuzian Examination of Spatial Properties in *By the Sea* (2001)

Smooth Space

In *By the Sea*, the author delves into the concept that the spatial frame of reference is centered around the ocean rather than the land. The protagonist has been raised in an ocean-surrounded area, has been imprisoned on a small island, and has chosen a seaside location while migrating to seek asylum in Britain. The sea is portrayed as a continuous, open environment with no defined limits. It is characterized by flows, nomadic lifestyles, and the absence of strict institutions or hierarchies. This reflects Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "smooth space", which contrasts with the striated, structured spaces of colonial domination.

The sea is a place of opportunity for Saleh, where new connections, creative thought, and diversity can flourish. In the Island Detention Site, even though he is exiled, Saleh never feels displaced. He forms many ties with people, the environment, the past, and the future. During the day, the cells are open, and he and others are free to tour the island or swim. Saleh's experience on the island detention site demonstrates the mobility and adaptability of marine environments.

Despite being physically confined, Saleh finds solace in the boundless sea, where the horizon seems endless, inviting exploration and contemplation. The absence of defined boundaries mirrors Saleh's fluid identity as he grapples with the challenges of exile and displacement. Free from formal structures, Saleh embraces a newfound freedom, liberated from societal norms. The sea becomes a blank canvas for Saleh to reimagine himself, breaking free from his past and embracing the unknown. In this fluid realm, Saleh's connections with the world around him outweigh his circumstances. As he roams the island by day and swims in the expansive waters, he not only transcends physical limitations but also embraces the potential for growth and change.

In this way, *Gurnah* portrays the sea as a symbol of freedom and fluidity, challenging traditional concepts of restriction and displacement. Saleh's embrace of maritime landscapes allows him to reclaim control of his story and envision a future defined by limitless possibilities. The fluid space of the veranda along with Saleh's flat in Britain signify the potential for deterritorialization, offering flexibility and adaptability. These spaces also foster unity and share humanity among people from diverse backgrounds, exemplified by the connection between Saleh and the commanding officer in the veranda, and with Latif in his flat.

Striated Space

Striated space, which is characterized by clear boundaries and hierarchies, often restricts autonomy and creativity and is typically linked to rigid bureaucratic institutions. Those within it are constrained by defined roles and regulations, limiting their ability to deviate. Deleuze and Guattari explore these ideas in various contexts, showcasing the fluid relationship between smooth and striated spaces. This dynamic interaction illustrates the flexibility of power dynamics and resistance mechanisms within social structures. Throughout the novel, Saleh navigates these contrasting spaces, demonstrating the nuances of displacement and the potential for transformation.

The airport is an intriguing space to analyse, as it embodies elements from both the past and the present, epitomizing modernity and globalization. Its futuristic architecture and border-like functions encompass a wide range of values, knowledge, and interactions (Anzaldua, 1987). Martin Kimani sheds light on the challenges African travellers face in navigating airport security, revealing pervasive biases and prejudices. His portrayal emphasizes the systematic racial profiling within airport security systems, sparking conversations about identity and power dynamics (*Ibid*). Travellers passing through the airport not only undergo physical checks but also encounter a system that perpetuates inequality and discrimination based on race and ethnicity. It is a highly stratified space, and it is the first place we, as readers, explore in the very first pages of *By the Sea*.

It is equally important to note that Saleh has converted his property into an antique store following his father's death and before Zanzibar's independence, allowing him to pursue his passion. When Saleh experiences dispossession, displacement, and detachment, he seeks refuge in his store. The growth of the antique business reflects Saleh's personal experience of exile and renewal. The store's transition from a simple place that sells sweets to a safe space for historical items symbolizes Saleh's shift from being a passive onlooker of his environment to an active participant in determining his fate. The store offers a refuge for Saleh to regain control over his life, overcoming the limitations imposed by external forces.

The store provides a condensed version of Zanzibar's past, mirroring its political and social progress. As Zanzibar shifts from being colonized to gaining independence, Saleh's shop changes to mirror the resilience of the island. By transforming it into a collection of vintage items, Saleh safeguards Zanzibar's cultural heritage while also reinforcing his own sense of self. The shift from a rigid to a more fluid space illustrates Saleh's ability to adapt and embrace change. Within the confines of the store, Saleh surpasses time, linking the past, present, and future. It serves as a focal point for memories and potential, embodying determination and rejuvenation in the face of adversity.

In the volatile and intense atmosphere of the antique shop, Saleh is faced with the harsh realities of his life, exploring themes of identity, betrayal, and redemption. The business serves as a microcosm of larger social and political forces, where personal needs clash with societal standards. Amidst this turbulent environment, Saleh grapples with his own role in perpetuating cycles of violence and tyranny, compelling him to seek comfort and salvation elsewhere. Thus, the antique shop transcends its physical boundaries to symbolize the human condition, where individuals navigate power and agency in an unpredictable environment. It is a place of contradictions, where moments of success are often countered by periods of defeat. Despite the turmoil, Saleh gathers the strength to confront his challenges and pursue a new path forward, leaving behind the shop's familiar comforts in search of a brighter future.

The "line of flight" may be traced within his shop, where his desire to break free from Zanzibar's oppressive control is evident. The shop has become more than just a place of commerce; it is a haven where Saleh can plot his escape from societal constraints and mental limitations. Through his interactions with ancient objects, Saleh embarks on a journey of personal growth, venturing into uncharted territories and embracing the unknown. In this transformed space, Saleh transcends the boundaries of the past, the present, and the future, embodying the Deleuzian concept of "becoming." This ongoing process fluidizes his identity, allowing him to connect with customers and become a symbol of liberation.

Ultimately, the antique business, once rooted in tradition, now embraces experimentation and innovation. Saleh navigates life's unpredictability by seeking new opportunities and pursuing ambitious goals. The shop blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination, serving as a catalyst for creative expression and personal growth. Through this transformative process, Saleh discovers a renewed sense of purpose and agency, reshaping his narrative. What has previously been stagnant now inspires hope, motivating others to embark on their own journeys of change. Saleh's shop has become a symbol of resilience and evolution, reflecting the human spirit's capacity for transformation in the face of adversity.

Psychogeographical Reading of *By the Sea*

The opening pages of the novel prompt us to ponder the reasons behind the characters' departure from Zanzibar. As we delve into the intertwined narratives of the two protagonists, we come to comprehend the motivations that compel an elderly man to relocate. The assertion, "I am a refugee and asylum-seeker. These are not simple words, even if the habit of hearing them makes it appear so" (Gurnah, 2001), underscores the complex nature of the refugee experience. By the novel's end, we recognize that for refugees, the possibility of returning home is often nonexistent. For an immigrant, the act of moving forward holds significance for their survival. This phrase captures the refugee experience, challenging common preconceptions about displacement and migration. It serves as a reminder that each refugee or asylum-seeker bears a unique personal narrative and faces challenges shaped by forces beyond their control.

The sea evokes a myriad of complex feelings and aspirations within Saleh. It offers him a sense of freedom from everyday stresses and grants him peace as he watches the waves. The water represents new starts and endless opportunities, allowing Saleh to break free from his constraints and rediscover himself, pushing him toward a more promising future, and highlighting his desire to deterritorialize and reterritorialize.

Furthermore, the sea, akin to the forest, functions as a transformative space that blurs the boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical. Indeed, Saleh senses a greater presence than himself in the motions of the waves and the whispering of the wind, a power that transcends temporal and spatial constraints. While grappling with the challenges of his existence within the vast expanse of the ocean, Saleh experiences moments of profound contemplation and enlightenment. Notably, the lack of defined borders in island life heightens the islanders' affinity for objects from distant lands. The sea serves as a conduit for cultural exchange, bringing wealth from faraway regions and fostering a sense of community among the island's residents.

In this way, the sea becomes a symbol of collective consciousness, uniting diverse cultures through their shared experiences of exploration and discovery. Saleh's relationship with the sea extends beyond the physical to encompass rich emotions, desires, and aspirations. It is a place of refuge, transformation, and cultural exchange, allowing him to glimpse the boundless potential of the human spirit. "I have always had an interest in furniture. Furniture and maps. Beautiful, intricate things" (Gurnah, 2001). Indeed, Saleh's passion for travel pre-dates his meeting with the Persian trader Hussein. His interest in antiques and exquisites reflects his curiosity about the world beyond Zanzibar's beaches. However, Saleh and Hussein's bond is built on their shared curiosity with distant nations and exotic locales. "He was a man with stories to tell about distant lovely locations that were merely marks on a map to me, places that were beautiful because they were so far away and fabled [...]. The stories drew him in and made him feel like he was a part of the huge

universe" (Gurnah, 2001). Saleh is transported to faraway countries by Hussein's yarns, where the lines between fact and fantasy blur and the attraction of the unknown beckons

In Hussein's stories, Saleh meets a kindred spirit—a fellow lover of adventure and travel, united by a desire for the strange and unfamiliar. Their friendship blooms against the backdrop of these amazing stories, with each one functioning as a link between their worlds. Saleh not only broadens his horizons but also forges a stronger connection to the larger world through Hussein's storytelling, finding solace and inspiration in stories from faraway nations and cultures. Thus, Saleh's interest in furniture and maps extends beyond simply aesthetic appreciation, serving as a channel for his exploration of the human experience and the immensity of the universe beyond. Saleh discovers echoes of his own desire for discovery and adventure in the intricate designs of ancient furniture and the intricate lines of maps, leading him on a path of self-discovery and enlightenment. In addition to that, what sets off this idealized relationship is the language used in their discussions. Saleh relates, "he told me his stories with such intimate fellowship, and told them in English, intensifying our sense of mutual difference from the place where we were" (Gurnah, 2001). The quote emphasizes how language can both unite and underscore differences, creating a rich tapestry of understanding and intimacy that transcends geographical boundaries.

Despite being dubbed a "colonial stooge", Saleh's reading habits demonstrate his intellectual curiosity and tenacity in the face of adversity. Despite the disparaging words directed at him, Saleh remains resolute in his pursuit of knowledge, acknowledging literature's ability to transcend cultural and political borders. He acknowledges Rajab Shaaban's effect on his understanding of history, but he also grapples with the difficulties of colonial schooling, noting the inherent biases and distortions in the narratives promulgated by the colonial administration. Indeed, Saleh admits that "In their books I read unflattering accounts of my history, and because they were unflattering, they seemed truer than the stories we told ourselves" (Gurnah, 2001). demonstrating his knowledge of the colonial legacy.

Despite the discomfort of addressing uncomfortable truths, Saleh is unafraid to face his past, knowing that true development can only be reached through a candid reckoning with history. Far from having the conventional uncultured colonized mentality, Saleh is revealed to be a multifaceted and multidimensional figure capable of critical self-reflection and introspection. His recognition of the colonial nature of his schooling demonstrates his intellectual honesty and integrity as he grapples with colonialism's legacy and the long-term influence on his sense of identity and belonging. Gurnah's portrayal of Saleh defies conventional concepts of colonial subjectivity, emphasizing the tenacity and agency of persons living under colonial control. Despite the repressive forces placed against him, Saleh refuses to be converted to a passive victim of colonialism, asserting his autonomy and agency via a dedication to learning and self-discovery. In this way, Saleh's trip exemplifies the larger battle for liberty and self-determination in the face of colonial rule. His reluctance to adhere to stereotypes, as well as his unrelenting commitment to truth and justice, serve as a striking reminder of the human spirit's ability to overcome adversity.

Saleh's view on his education demonstrates a deep knowledge of the colonial experience and how it affects his intellectual development. Despite his limited exposure to other narratives in school, Saleh recognizes the importance of the knowledge provided to him by colonial authority. He acknowledges the role of British colonizers in granting him access to books and teaching him their language, which, while burdened with colonial ideals, also opens doors to new ways of thinking and seeing the world. Furthermore, Saleh's acquaintance with novels introduced by

British colonizers, such as works by Rudyard Kipling, Rider Haggard, and G. A. Henty, demonstrates his understanding of the colonialist ideals entrenched in colonial literature.

Saleh engages with colonial rhetoric, navigating internal tensions and criticizing societal barriers that impede progress. His frustration originates from a desire to see his people regain their history and narratives. Saleh's journey exemplifies a search for authenticity and collective liberty while confronting colonial oppression. Gurnah uses Saleh's experience to challenge colonial legacies and call for individual and community autonomy. Because Saleh has been exposed to multiple challenges with his society, he seeks refuge in books, and maps. In these lines, our protagonist articulates his 'psychogeographical' attachment to maps.

"I speak to maps. And sometimes they say something back to me. This is not as strange as it sounds, nor is it an unheard-of thing. Before maps, the world was limitless. It was maps that gave it shape and made it seem like territory, like something that could be possessed, not just laid waste and plundered. Maps made places on the edges of the imagination seem graspable and placable" (Gurnah, 2001).

After surviving the hardships of incarceration and solitude, Omar Saleh undergoes a remarkable metamorphosis, abandoning his previous preoccupations with material items in favor of a renewed feeling of resilience. Dispossessed of his house and family, Saleh is stripped of the trappings of his previous life and forced to confront the harsh truths of his existence. The harassment he experiences at the hands of Rajab Shaaban's accomplices eventually forces him to seek safety outside of his captivity. Psychologically, Saleh's resilience is frequently misinterpreted as a proclivity for sedentary behavior, as illustrated by Rachel, a social worker in Britain. Saleh interprets Rachel's criticism of his interest in maps as a reflection of her desire for him to demonstrate more "energetic interests" (Gurnah, 2001), signaling a preference for young hobbies over academic endeavors.

However, Saleh's fondness for maps conceals a geographical awareness and a brain that transcends physical limits. Despite his outward look of passivity, Saleh's narrations cross spatial and temporal boundaries, providing glimpses into both real and imagined realms. Saleh's storytelling navigates the memory and history, lacing different experiences into an insight that transcends his physical restriction. His passion for maps reflects his curiosity and quest for information, allowing him to discover new regions of thought and exploration despite his limited physical mobility. In this sense, Saleh becomes a metaphor of tenacity and flexibility, capable of finding comfort and purpose in the face of tragedy.

Besides, Saleh asserts that maps made the world limitless, and that "It was maps that gave it shape and made it seem like a territory, like something that could be possessed, not just laid waste and plundered. Maps made places on the edges of the imagination seem graspable and placeable" (Gurnah, 2001, 35). The phrase "edges of the imagination" suggests that maps not only represent physical space but also shape identities and cultural perceptions. In a postcolonial context, the way places are mapped influences narratives of belonging and identity for both colonizers and the colonized. For indigenous populations, colonial maps can erase cultural landscapes and histories, reducing their identities to mere coordinates on a map. This can lead to a loss of heritage and a sense of displacement.

Despite the difficulties he experiences, Saleh refuses to be defined by his circumstances, instead embracing the power of imagination and intelligence to overcome the constraints placed on him. Saleh's voyage reminds us of the eternal resilience of the human spirit and the limitless

possibilities that exist beyond our physical life. Saleh and Latif, correspondingly, have ancestral ties to Zanzibar and both have a strong connection to the island's past. Saleh's strong loyalty to his country contrast Latif's uncertain feelings about his heritage. It is the latter's encounters with Saleh that initiates a journey of self-exploration as he comes to terms with his identity and family background. Undeniably, despite his emotional distress, Latif seeks closure and understanding via introspection and communication.

Latif regards Saleh as a mentor, who inspires him to reconcile with his family, history, and self. Their friendship inspires thoughts on forgiveness and perseverance. Latif's new identity represents an escape from his tragic history, whereas Saleh's name indicates continued persecution. Both deal with displacement, religion, and location, which are typical of Zanzibar's postcolonial struggle. In this light, Gurnah's portrayal emphasizes the long-term consequences of colonization on identity and homeland.

In conclusion, Gurnah's novel *By the Sea* explores the psychological toll of colonialism, delving into themes of identity and alienation. Through the journeys of characters like Latif and Saleh, the novel serves as a powerful reminder of colonialism's enduring legacy on individual and communal identities. Gurnah urges readers to confront the ongoing challenges of post-colonial life and the fight for liberation and self-determination.

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Ethical Declarations

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of academic integrity and research ethics. Since the research did not involve human participants, there was no need for informed consent or other participant-related ethical procedures. However, all data sources and materials used in the research were handled responsibly and with due regard for intellectual property rights. The research process adhered to the principles of accuracy, transparency, and reliability to ensure the integrity of the findings.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets collected and analyzed during this study are available from the researchers upon request.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

- Nabila Khelil and Mahmoud Al-Shetawi conceptualized and designed the study, in addition to collecting and analyzing the data.

- The first draft of the manuscript was written by Nabila Khelil and Mahmoud Al-Shetawi.
- The researchers reviewed and edited the text and approved the final version for publication.

Consent for Publication

The researchers agree to submit this paper for publication and await the editorial decision after the peer-review process, agreeing to its publication. They also confirm that this work has not been previously published and has not been submitted to any other journal for consideration.

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¹ These concepts illustrate how different spatial organizations influence social interactions and cultural practices. Smooth spaces promote creativity and fluidity, while striated spaces enforce order and control. The smooth space is characterized by openness, fluidity, and potential, while the striated space is structured, organized, and often hierarchical.

² Deterritorialization refers to the process by which established social relations and contexts are altered or disrupted. Deleuze and Guattari describe deterritorialization as a movement that liberates elements from fixed positions within a given territory—be it conceptual, social, or

linguistic—and allows for the creation of new connections and territories through reterritorialization, which is the process of establishing new contexts for these elements.

³ Lines of flight represent the pathways or movements that emerge from deterritorialization. They signify escapes or departures from established territories, allowing for new possibilities and transformations to occur. Lines of flight are not merely physical movements; they encompass shifts in thought, identity, and social relations that challenge existing norms.

⁴ Refugees in question include the main characters such as Saleh Omar, Latif Mahmud, and Elleke.

⁵ “These are memories of lost things... When I think of those flowers now, it fills my soul with longing, and I don’t know what for” (Gurnah, 2001). This quote expresses Elleke’s memories of her childhood and longing for Most, a historical city located in the Ústí nad Labem Region of the Czech Republic. The city was previously annexed by Nazi Germany in the 1930s, then restored to Czechoslovakia after the WWII. As follows, the German population was expelled and the city was resettled by Czechs. Historically, the city has witnessed several changes, demolished and reconstructed due to mine coal from 1965 to 2020.