Negotiating Past and Present in the Construction of New Identities in Gurnah

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Abstract

Abdulrazak Gurnah, a Nobel Prize-winning author, explores themes of migration, displacement, and identity in his novels. Pilgrim's Way (1988) and By the Sea (2001) feature protagonists—Daud, Saleh Omar, and Latif Mahmood—who struggle to balance their past with their present as they search for belonging in unfamiliar places. These characters construct cultural identities by grappling with memory, adapting to new environments, and confronting social challenges. Their identities remain fluid, shaped by the constant interplay between past experiences and present realities. Drawing on postcolonial theory and literary analysis, the discussion focuses on how exile and migration compel individuals to reshape their sense of self amid alienation, racism, and loss. Gurnah's characters demonstrate resilience as they navigate fractured identities and rebuild a sense of belonging. This analysis engages with broader scholarly conversations on migration and postcolonial identity to contextualize Gurnah's work within diasporic literature. By studying these novels, this paper offers a deeper understanding of how the past and present interact in shaping new identities in the context of exile and migration.

Keywords: Migration, Displacement, Cultural Identity, Postcolonial Literature, Abdulrazak Gurnah.

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Introduction

Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels *Pilgrim's Way* (1988) and *By the Sea* (2001) explore how individuals negotiate between memory and present realities to construct new identities in the context of migration and displacement. In this study, identity refers to a sense of self shaped through personal experience, memory, and social interaction, particularly within migratory and postcolonial contexts. As Stuart Hall argues, "identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think of it as a 'production" (225). Exile here indicates the condition of being physically or emotionally distanced from one's homeland, often accompanied by a sense of loss, dislocation, and longing. Edward Said explains that "exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (186). Gurnah's protagonists confront racism, cultural isolation, and political exclusion as they attempt to reconcile their past with their present. In doing so, Gurnah illustrates that identity in postcolonial settings emerges from a continuous process of negotiation, adaptation, and resistance—highlighting that identity is not fixed but fluid and constantly evolving, shaped by historical trauma, cultural dislocation, and the challenges of exile.

The term postcolonial refers to the cultural, political, and psychological conditions resulting from the aftermath of colonial rule—especially the lasting effects of imperialism on formerly colonized peoples. According to Stuart Hall, identity is not something fixed but a process that changes with history, memory, and social conditions (225). Similarly, Homi Bhabha's idea of *hybridity* explains that migrants live between two cultures, shaping identities that are flexible rather than fixed (8). Hybridity, as used here, describes the blending of cultural elements from both the colonizer and the colonized, often leading to new, mixed forms of identity that defy singular definitions. This paper engages Bhabha's related concept of the Third Space—a liminal, in-between zone where cultural meanings and identities are constantly negotiated. In this space, migrants like Gurnah's characters resist binary oppositions (home/host, past/present) and instead forge hybrid identities that reflect the complexities of displacement. The Third Space, therefore, becomes a crucial context for understanding how Gurnah's protagonists navigate their fragmented realities and reconstruct their sense of belonging.

In a similar vein, Salman Rushdie's idea of *Imaginary Homelands* (1991) helps explain this struggle between past and present. Rushdie argues that migrants never fully belong to either their original country or their new one. Instead, they exist in a mixed space where their identity is shaped by both past experiences and present challenges. He explains that exiles often recreate their past through memory, imagination, and storytelling, leading to a "partial" or "imaginary" homeland instead of a fixed identity (Rushdie 10). This idea applies to Gurnah's characters, who, like Rushdie's exiles, struggle with fragmented identities.

Further supporting these theoretical perspectives, many scholars have examined how migration and displacement shape identity in postcolonial literature. Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, reflects on the psychological impact of exile, writing: "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (186). This idea of a divided self—caught between the past and present—is crucial to understanding how displaced individuals negotiate identity. Similarly, Bill Ashcroft and his co-authors argue that "post-colonial identity is a constant process of negotiation between the past and the present, and between different cultural influences. It is never fixed but always shifting, shaped through memory, resistance, and transformation" (34). Such a view explains how colonial histories continue to influence migrant identities long after physical relocation. In

the context of Gurnah's fiction, Simon Gikandi points out that "the identity of the colonial subject is always overdetermined by the racial and political structures of the society in which he or she is located," highlighting how structural forces affect both self-perception and social belonging (140). Salman Rushdie, in *Imaginary Homelands*, adds another dimension, suggesting that "writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back... but the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (10). Together, these insights offer a rich framework for interpreting the dilemmas faced by Gurnah's characters, who grapple with cultural, political, and ethnic identity while navigating the dislocations of migration.

Identity Formation: Cultural, Political, and Ethnic Dimensions

In *Pilgrim's Way* and *By the Sea*, Abdulrazak Gurnah explores how identity is shaped by cultural roots, migration, and the struggle to adapt to unfamiliar environments. Stuart Hall says that cultural identity is not fixed or single, but something shaped over time by history, memory, and experience (225) This fluid concept of identity helps illuminate Gurnah's characters, who must navigate between their inherited traditions and the pressures of living as migrants in foreign societies. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin also note that postcolonial identities often emerge from a tension between cultural origin and the demands of a dominant culture, resulting in hybrid or fractured selves (34). Daud, the main character in *Pilgrim's Way*, feels lost in England, where racism makes him feel like an outsider. He is deeply connected to his East African roots, but the society around him treats him as different (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 112). At one point, Daud reflects, "They always looked at you as if you were something else, as if you didn't belong here, no matter what you said or did" (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 110). One important moment in the novel is when a group of white men insult him, calling him a "bloody foreigner" and making him feel like he does not belong (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 87). This experience makes him wonder if he will ever be accepted. He says, "I didn't think I would ever get used to the looks, the voices calling out in the street, the feeling that you are always being watched" (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 89). His struggle with identity is also seen in his relationship with Catherine, a white English woman. Despite their bond, Daud knows that racial differences and social prejudices stand between them (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 146). He tells himself, "She can never really understand where I come from, what I've been through" (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 144). This shows how personal relationships are also influenced by wider cultural issues. Similarly, in *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmood deal with life away from their homeland, Zanzibar. Saleh, an old asylum seeker, holds onto his memories of Zanzibar to maintain his identity. He remembers "the scent of cloves in the air, the colors of the market stalls, and the warm, heavy evenings by the sea" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 45). However, these memories also bring sadness, as he realizes he can never return. He reflects, "What is the use of these memories when they bring only pain? They remind me of what I've lost, not what I have" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 47). Latif, on the other hand, tries to adapt to Western culture while still feeling connected to home. During a tense conversation, he tells Saleh, "You think I have forgotten, that I don't care, but I remember everything. I just had to live differently" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 121). This shows his inner struggle—although he has adjusted to his new life, his past still influences him. Elsewhere, he admits, "Even when I was speaking their language and eating their food, I was not one of them" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 123). Both characters show that cultural identity is always changing, shaped by personal experience and external pressures (Gikandi 140).

Politics also plays a big role in shaping Gurnah's characters. As being migrants, they must deal with legal systems and government policies. In *Pilgrim's Way*, Daud faces racism and

political exclusion, which affect how he sees himself. He is always on the margins of society, unable to fully participate in public life. His experience shows how race and immigration policies determine where he belongs (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 132). This is clear when Daud applies for a job but is rejected because of his foreign background, despite having the right qualifications. His frustration reflects the struggles immigrants face in a system that keeps them outsiders. Similarly, in *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar's status as an asylum seeker shows the struggles of displaced people. His identity is shaped not only by his past but also by the legal system that controls his life. The political forces that forced him to leave Zanzibar continue to affect him, making his sense of self even more complex. He is caught between the political turmoil of his homeland and the strict asylum policies of his new country (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 104). In one powerful moment, Saleh reflects on his situation: "Here I was, a man who once owned a home, land, a life, now reduced to numbers and papers, pleading for a place to stay" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 89). This shows how deeply political displacement can affect a person's identity.

Ethnic identity is another important theme in Gurnah's novels. His characters must constantly negotiate their ethnic backgrounds in societies that do not fully accept them. In *Pilgrim's Way*, Daud's East African heritage is both a source of pride and a reason for his alienation. He wants to hold onto his roots, but society sees him as different. One moment in the novel captures this well—when a co-worker asks him where he is "really from," showing how others always see him as foreign (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 178). This highlights how ethnic identity is often defined by others rather than by the individual (Loomba 210). In *By the Sea*, Saleh and Latif deal with their ethnic identities in different ways. Saleh remains closely connected to his Swahili and Arab heritage, but this also makes him feel isolated in England, where his background is not understood or valued. Latif, in contrast, tries to distance himself from his ethnic roots and adopt aspects of Western culture to fit in. However, no matter how much he tries to integrate, people still see him as an outsider (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 91). In one emotional scene, Latif expresses his frustration, "No matter how much English I speak, how much I learn, they will always see me as different" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 132). This highlights how ethnic identity is shaped both by personal choice and by how society views individuals.

Overall, Gurnah's novels show that identity is not simple or fixed. Whether cultural, political, or ethnic, identity is shaped by personal experiences, history, and the challenges of migration. Through characters like Daud, Saleh, and Latif, the novels explore how individuals constantly negotiate their past and present to define who they are.

Role of the Past in Cultural, Political, and Ethnic Identity Formation

The past plays a crucial role in shaping cultural, political, and ethnic identities in *Pilgrim's Way* and *By the Sea*. Abdulrazak Gurnah illustrates how personal and shared histories influence his main characters, making it harder for them to adjust to new and unfamiliar places. Their memories of home, cultural traditions, and past suffering shape their identity struggles and complicate their experiences of exile and displacement (Ashcroft et al. 29). However, the nature of this influence varies from character to character. For some, the past is a heavy burden; for others, it is a fragile connection to a lost world or a tool for survival in new surroundings. This variation reflects the complexity of memory in shaping identity across cultural and political lines.

In *Pilgrim's Way*, Daud's identity is deeply affected by the violence of colonial rule and the personal losses he suffered in East Africa. His past stays with him and influences his interactions in England, where he faces racism and exclusion. He remembers his childhood under British colonial rule, especially the fear and shame imposed by the authorities, "We learned to bow our heads, to nod when spoken to, and to obey without question. But the scars of those

lessons never truly faded" (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 94). These memories not only shape his emotional world but also act as a filter through which he views British society. The racism he encounters in England echoes colonial hierarchies, reinforcing a deep-seated sense of inferiority. His struggle to maintain his self-respect in a society that sees him as inferior highlights how colonial history shapes a fractured, insecure sense of self (Loomba 202). While Daud resists complete assimilation, he also remains emotionally tied to a past that never offered him full dignity—making his identity conflict especially acute.

Similarly, in *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar's identity is shaped by betrayal, political persecution, and forced migration, reflecting how larger historical events impact individual lives. Forced to leave Zanzibar due to political conflict, Saleh finds his political identity bound to colonial and postcolonial power struggles, while he navigates an asylum system that strips him of his independence. He laments, "In my own land, I was a man of means. Here, I am reduced to a nameless applicant, waiting to be judged" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 89). Unlike Daud, who responds to exclusion with quiet resistance, Saleh retreats into memory as both escape and resistance. His recollections of Zanzibar provide emotional strength, but they also heighten his sense of alienation in England. In contrast to Saleh, Latif Mahmood's relationship with the past is marked by conflict and complexity. His resentment toward Saleh over a family betrayal shows how memory can divide rather than unite (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 67; Said 188). Unlike Saleh, who finds solace in the past, Latif is burdened by it—suggesting that even shared histories can fracture identities when interpreted differently.

Ethnic identity is also closely tied to history, as Gurnah's characters struggle with how their ethnic backgrounds are misunderstood or rejected by society. In *Pilgrim's Way*, Daud's East African roots make him different in England, where he is seen as "the other" (Said 332). His ethnicity becomes both a source of pride and a cause of marginalization. He recognizes this struggle when he says, "No matter how well I spoke their language, no matter how I dressed, I remained what they saw me to be—a foreigner, an intruder" (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 178). For Daud, ethnicity is not just an internal marker of identity—it is also imposed from the outside. The way others read his race and culture becomes more powerful than his own sense of self, echoing the colonial logic of labeling and controlling subjectivities.

In *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar clings to his Swahili and Arab heritage viewing it as central to his identity. His sense of ethnic belonging is nostalgic, shaped by the customs and language of Zanzibar. However, this ethnic pride also isolates him in England, where few understand or appreciate his background. Latif, in contrast, attempts to assimilate by distancing himself from his roots. His struggle reveals another dimension: the pressure to erase one's past in order to belong. His frustration is clear when he asks, "How much do I have to change for them to see me as one of their own?" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 132). While Saleh resists cultural erasure, Latif represents a generation more willing to compromise—but neither strategy guarantees acceptance. This contrast shows how ethnic identity, shaped by historical and personal memory, is also constantly reshaped by the pressures of migration and social perception (Bhabha 22).

Gurnah's novels emphasize that identity is constantly evolving—it is shaped by both past and present experiences, influenced by cultural heritage, political struggles, and ethnic awareness. Yet, crucially, he shows that the *way* the past shapes identity is not uniform. Daud, Saleh, and Latif all engage with their memories differently: one resists them, one embraces them, and one negotiates with them. Their journeys demonstrate that memory and history are essential to identity, affecting their experiences of exile, migration, and displacement. Whether they

embrace, reject, or attempt to alter their past, they cannot escape the historical forces that continue to shape them (Hall 225).

Challenges in the Present Context

The main characters in *Pilgrim's Way* and *By the Sea* face a difficult and often unfriendly present that is influenced by cultural displacement, political exclusion, and ethnic discrimination. Abdulrazak Gurnah shows how their efforts to form new identities are affected by racism, exclusion, and the challenges of migration. The past continues to have an impact, but the present brings its own challenges, making identity formation an ongoing process of adjustment. The problems faced by migrants in their new countries are not just personal struggles, but are tied to larger social and political systems that decide who belongs, who gets opportunities, and who is recognized culturally. Even though migration might seem to offer a chance for a new life, it often leads to a different type of limitation, defined by race, language, and legal status (Gikandi 135). As Stuart Hall suggests, identity is a continuous process, formed and reformed in relation to lived experience, and this is particularly true in diasporic contexts where individuals are forced to negotiate who they are across different cultural frameworks.

In *Pilgrim's Way*, Daud faces both obvious and hidden racism in England, which makes him feel even more disconnected. One upsetting moment happens when a man spits at him on a bus, calling him racial slurs (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 152). These everyday acts of hostility make Daud more aware that he doesn't belong, showing how racism is part of daily life. The isolation Daud feels is not just social, but also mental, as he is constantly reminded that he is an outsider. Even at his job, where he hopes to advance professionally, he is passed over for chances because of racial prejudice, showing how discrimination is built into the system (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 178). His attempts to fit in are often blocked by how society views his race. The constant experience of being treated as "other" leads Daud to adopt protective behaviors, like isolating himself and detaching from others, making it even harder for him to build a stable sense of identity. Daud's distancing becomes a strategy of survival—a negotiation of space where silence becomes resistance, echoing Bhabha's notion of the "third space" in which hybridity and partial belonging emerge as new forms of identity (55).

Similarly, in *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmood face political and legal challenges that shape their position in their new country. Saleh, as an asylum seeker, deals with suspicion and laws that take away his freedom. His story shows the tough reality for many exiles, where legal status decides their identity and limits their freedom and chances. In one painful moment, Saleh describes the humiliation of the immigration process: "They look at you like a beggar, as if asking for refuge is a crime" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 104). This moment shows how immigration laws turn asylum seekers into mere numbers, not seeing them as real people. Yet, storytelling becomes Saleh's tool of resistance—his way of reclaiming agency in a system designed to erase his narrative. As Bhabha suggests, cultural identity is formed through the negotiation of meaning, and Saleh's act of storytelling enables him to assert his presence within an alien structure. Latif, although more accepted in Western society, is still judged by his ethnic background, showing that fitting in doesn't always mean complete acceptance. Even though Latif is well-educated and speaks English fluently, people still ask him about where he's from, showing how race continues to define him. At a university event, a colleague, even though he knows Latif's qualifications, introduces him by mentioning his "exotic" background, turning his identity into a stereotype (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 132). His frustration shows how even people who try to fit in can't escape being seen through the lens of race. His adaptation, like Daud's detachment, becomes another survival strategy—his identity is rearticulated through compromise

and selective assimilation, aligning with Hall's view of identity as "becoming," never fully "being."

Ethnic identity remains a big issue for both characters. Daud, with his East African roots, struggles to balance keeping his cultural heritage while living in a society that defines him by racial stereotypes. His ethnicity is not only a reminder of his past but also a sign of difference in his present. The pressure on migrants to act according to the expectations of their new country puts Daud in a tough position—he must decide whether to try to fit in or hold on to his difference, even if it causes problems. Saleh's strong connection to his Swahili and Arab background is both a source of pride and loneliness in England. His memories of Zanzibar are a way to stay connected to his past, but they also make him feel distant from his present. On the other hand, Latif tries to distance himself from his ethnic roots, but he can't escape the racial identity that society gives him (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 91). This experience aligns with Bhabha's idea that identity is shaped within a "third space" of negotiation and contradiction, where the migrant is never fully accepted (22). His experience shows the contradiction of fitting in: no matter how much he adapts, he's never fully accepted. This illustrates Hall's and Bhabha's arguments that identity is always in flux, never essential, and often contested in the spaces where multiple cultures intersect.

Both novels show how the past and present come together in the formation of identity. The challenges of being displaced, facing racism, and political exclusion prevent the characters from truly belonging to their new homes. Instead, they are caught in an in-between space—neither fully at home in their homeland nor their adopted country. This struggle shows how identity is built through constant negotiation, where past experiences and present challenges are inseparable in defining who they are. Gurnah's works show that identity is not a fixed thing but a constantly changing process, shaped by outside forces, personal memories, and ongoing social interactions. As the characters try to deal with the challenges of exile, they find that identity is not something they can control—it is always being reshaped by the forces around them (Ashcroft et al. 41). This in-betweenness reflects Bhabha's notion of hybridity, where identity is negotiated and recreated in the liminal space between cultures.

Negotiating Past and Present

The balance between past and present is key to shaping the identity of the main characters in *Pilgrim's Way* and *By the Sea*. Abdulrazak Gurnah's characters do not completely leave their past behind when they move to a new place. Instead, their memories, cultural background, and historical experiences continue to shape their present lives. The past remains important, affecting how they see themselves and how others see them. However, adjusting to a new country forces them to constantly redefine who they are. This struggle is clear in how the characters try to maintain their sense of self while dealing with cultural, political, and racial challenges in their new environment (Hall 225). This tension between past and present requires what Bhabha refers to as a "negotiation of cultural difference," where identity is neither fixed in the past nor fully integrated into the present, but is constantly rearticulated in response to shifting circumstances **(**2**).**

In *Pilgrim's Way*, Daud is stuck between his painful past in East Africa and his difficult life in England. His experiences of colonial violence, personal loss, and migration shape how he sees himself and how he interacts with others. In a deeply personal moment, Daud remembers watching as colonial officials took his father's land, "They came with their papers, their pens, their laws. And in a day, everything that had been ours was no longer ours" (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 94). These painful memories make him resist fully adapting to life in England because he

does not want to erase his past. However, his inability to move beyond these memories also prevents him from building a stable new identity. He is caught in an in-between state—neither fully connected to his homeland nor fully accepted in his new country (Gurnah, *Pilgrim's Way* 112). His struggle becomes a negotiation between belonging and resistance—his silence, detachment, and refusal to assimilate represent forms of protest against cultural erasure.

Similarly, in *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar's identity is closely tied to his memories of Zanzibar, especially the betrayals and political conflicts that forced him to flee. His past is painful, but it also keeps him connected to his culture. However, as an asylum seeker, he is in a vulnerable position where governments and laws define his identity. In a moment of quiet reflection, Saleh says, "I carry Zanzibar in my bones, in my tongue, in my memories. But England looks at me and sees nothing of that" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 104). This shows how political systems play a role in shaping identity, as Saleh must navigate between his personal identity and the labels given to him by others. Yet, Saleh's storytelling—his deliberate act of narrating his own version of history—becomes a powerful survival strategy. It allows him to reclaim authorship over his life and resist being reduced to a passive victim. Bhabha's concept of the enunciative space, where the subject speaks back to dominant narratives, is evident in Saleh's narrative control.

Latif Mahmood, in contrast, tries to separate himself from his past and fit into Western society by adopting new cultural habits. However, no matter how much he tries, he is never fully accepted, as people still judge him based on his ethnic background. His struggle highlights the challenges of shaping identity—adapting does not always mean belonging (Bhabha 22). When talking about his life in England, Latif bitterly says, "No matter how much I learn, how well I speak, they will always ask me where I am from" (Gurnah, *By the Sea* 132). His words show the painful reality of exile—where the past and present cannot be separated easily. Latif's strategy of distancing from his cultural past is a form of negotiation, yet it results in internal conflict and alienation. He reflects the tension Hall identifies in diasporic identities—constantly positioned between multiple cultural locations, yet belonging fully to none.

In *Pilgrim's Way*, Daud builds his identity through memories of East Africa, even as he tries to find a place for himself in England. His longing for home is not just about physically returning but about holding onto an imagined past that gives meaning to his current life. Similarly, in *By the Sea*, Saleh and Latif represent Rushdie's idea of the divided self. Saleh clings to his past for survival, while Latif tries to merge his Western education with his cultural heritage. Both characters show how displacement creates a sense of separation, supporting Rushdie's statement that "exiles look at the present through a cracked rear-view mirror" (12). Gurnah's portrayal of these characters highlights the struggle between nostalgia and adaptation, showing how identity is shaped by both memory and migration. Their fragmented sense of self reflects the hybridity Bhabha discusses—where identity is constructed in the overlaps, contradictions, and negotiations between cultures. In the end, *Pilgrim's Way* and *By the Sea* show that identity is never fixed but is always changing. The struggle between past and present is central to Gurnah's exploration of exile, migration, and identity. His characters must constantly redefine themselves as they face both the challenges of their past and the struggles of their present.

Conclusion

Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Pilgrim's Way* and *By the Sea* reveal that identity in postcolonial and migratory contexts is shaped through a constant negotiation between memory, displacement, and present realities. The protagonists in these novels undergo more than physical relocation—

they experience an ongoing struggle to reconcile their past with their present. Their identities are shaped by personal histories and cultural backgrounds, yet they must adapt to new environments where they are often seen as outsiders. This tension places them in an in-between space, where they are neither fully connected to their past nor entirely accepted in their present. Their former lives, marked by colonial legacies, political turmoil, and personal loss, influence their sense of self, while their current realities present further obstacles like racism, isolation, and rejection. Gurnah shows that identity is a fluid and evolving process, shaped not only by internal reflections but also by external pressures. His characters do not passively carry their past; they actively try to make sense of it in relation to the world around them. This process creates a space where mixed identities take form, where individuals like Saleh Omar preserve dignity through storytelling and Latif Mahmood navigates survival by reshaping his past. Identity in these novels is not only personal but deeply political, as it is affected by systems of power, historical injustice, and societal perception. Gurnah connects individual experiences to broader political contexts, showing how structural forces continue to shape how migrants are seen and treated. Yet, his characters are not merely victims; they resist, adapt, and assert themselves. Through their voices and choices, they challenge the roles imposed on them and rebuild identities in thoughtful, resilient ways. Ultimately, *Pilgrim's Way* and *By the Sea* demonstrate that identity is not fixed but always in motion. Gurnah's portrayal of exile and migration highlights that forming a sense of self is not about reaching a conclusion, but about continuously navigating the emotional, cultural, and political struggles of being caught between worlds. His novels emphasize that migration is not just a physical journey but an emotional and psychological one, and they celebrate the quiet strength of those who keep reinventing themselves despite the forces that seek to define or confine them.

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