



**EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF SILENCE IN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S  
*ADMIRING SILENCE***

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**Abstract**

*This study analysis the dynamics of silence in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*, focusing on how silence operates as a mechanism of resistance, survival, and identity reconstruction in postcolonial and diasporic contexts. In Gurnah's narrative world, silence is not merely the absence of speech but a complex psychological and cultural expression shaped by colonial displacement and racial exclusion. The protagonist's displacement from Zanzibar to England exposes how silence functions both as a symptom of trauma and as a conscious strategy of self-preservation. Employing a qualitative textual analysis, the research draws upon postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories, particularly insights from Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Michel de Certeau, to explore three interrelated forms of silence – strategic, traumatic, and redemptive.*

*Through close reading of selected passages, the study reveals that silence in *Admiring Silence* serves dual purposes: it embodies the protagonist's internalized trauma and alienation while simultaneously offering a mode of resistance and emotional resilience. Ultimately, the analysis shows that Gurnah's depiction of silence challenges conventional associations of voice with power and speech with liberation. Silence becomes a space of negotiation where the fragmented self can endure, resist, and reimagine belonging. Further comparative research into Gurnah's later works may illuminate silence as a recurring motif of endurance and renewal across his postcolonial imagination.*

**Keywords:** Displacement, Identity, Resistance, Redemptive Silence, Strategic Silence, Traumatic Silence,

**Introduction**

Silence has several facets in East African literature. In the presence of a despotic ruler, silence often serves as a strategy to alleviate the repercussions of repressive governance since certain responses or actions may result in lethal outcomes. Likewise, colonial tyranny imposes silence on both men and women, alienating them from their customary lifestyles. Silence may also serve as a reaction from those harboring unpleasant narratives they choose not to disclose, even to those they love and value. In Abdulrazak Gurnah's oeuvre, silence serves as a major motif, encapsulating the challenges faced by disadvantaged groups. His Tanzanian characters experience considerable adversities, often opting for quiet as a survival strategy. A character, his route to London, bears the burden of anxiety and despair. Notwithstanding his efforts to establish a new and secure existence, he continues to be tormented by his history in Zanzibar – a history he fervently seeks to erase. Ultimately, he becomes both the personification and the casualty of silence, ensnared between two realms and incapable of wholly belonging to either (Kaigai, 2013, p. 137).

Gurnah employed silence as a literary technique to illustrate that both language and history are inadequate in adequately encapsulating the immigrant experience. Immigrants often have difficulties in expressing specific recollections, resulting in gaps in their narratives that others then fill based on personal interpretations. This disjointed methodology hinders the development of a wholly accurate historical narrative. Narrative silence facilitates



contemplation on the intricacies and difficulties of immigration, differing from one instance to another.

### **Background of the Study**

Nobel Prize laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah examines the motif of quiet in his writings. In 2021, he analyzed how some people choose for quiet in reaction to severe tyranny. This stillness epitomizes existence under a despotic regime, as human destiny is governed by brutality, oppression, and maltreatment. In these situations, quiet serves as a survival strategy, since voicing dissent may lead to disastrous outcomes. Nonetheless, Gurnah depicts silence as a detrimental force, particularly when it arises from the intention to conceal past or current secrets. Maintaining such secrets might result in personal ruin or the dissolution of a meticulously constructed family, especially after previous tragedy. Personal silence often stems from a profound apprehension over the repercussions of revelation (Fabris, 2012, p. 102).

*Admiring Silence* (1996) takes place in modern-day England and Zanzibar. The story chronicles a Zanzibari expatriate's journey between Zanzibar and England in pursuit of a fresh start. It examines topics of alienation and migration from colonial countries to Britain. The protagonist is a writer and educator in English literature who moved to England years before. After residing there for 25 years, he returns to Zanzibar for the first time in 17 years. He recounts the narrative while contemplating his upbringing and adolescence, presenting it from an adult viewpoint. His family in Zanzibar depends on correspondence from him in England for contact.

This narrative method enables him to progressively disclose aspects of his time in England. This intimate odyssey to his native nation uncovers his enduring quiet and his connections with Emma, his British spouse, and their daughter, Amelia (2013, p. 132).

Silence is experienced by people in a number of ways, whether as a component of their lived reality or as a reaction to specific circumstances. The novel's protagonists are influenced by the conditions imposed by others, which ultimately restrict their ability to control their own lives. Silence can serve as both a reaction and a form of resistance, as the protagonist employs it to confront those who regard him as the "Other." His silence is interpreted as a rejection of interaction with those who make discriminatory remarks. It functions as a refusal to tolerate maltreatment rather than as a sign of submission. "The Silence of Praise" is the title of the novel, which carries a dual significance. It reflects the character's premeditated decision to choose silence as a response and their struggle under a variety of imposed conditions (Rovine, 1989, pp. 47–48).

Gurnah employs the title of his novel as a metaphor for the oppressive forces that suppress and dominate others. It is indicative of the oppressive government of Zanzibar and the silence that has resulted from the populace's acquiescence of it. He also commends the hero for his deliberate decision to distance himself from individuals who harbor discriminatory attitudes. In order to alleviate his feelings of alienation, the protagonist generates these narratives. The protagonists' silence is underscored in these narratives, although readers may interpret the main character's message differently. Although silence is evident in the text, it serves to influence specific aspects of the narrative rather than monopolizing the entire narrative (Farooqi et al., 2025, p. 477).

The novel portrays silence as obstruction that is influenced by the complexities of race, family, and society through the theme of silence. It frequently highlights the social implications of silence by portraying Zanzibar as a community under authoritarian control. The conditions of the most vulnerable citizens are subtly determined by political and economic forces. Despite



the establishment of German and British colonial foundations, the quality of life for the populace has not significantly improved. Rather, colonial regimes prioritized economically dominant groups to serve the empire, particularly under British imperial rule. The novel provides a historical perspective on Zanzibar, emphasizing the power dynamics that have endured throughout history. This demonstrates the frequent omission of marginalized groups from historical narratives (Müller, 2018, p. 206).

British colonial policies fostered economic elites and centralized political authority. This change in power disrupted preexisting social structures, reinforced economic control, and facilitated the accumulation of wealth under British rule. To perpetuate this image, the British portrayed Zanzibar as an Arab state and ensured that Arabs occupied critical national positions. The economic establishment was dominated by wealthy Arab merchants who benefited from global trade networks. This made it simpler for the British to establish them as political representatives. After independence, Power structures have essentially persisted in Zanzibar. Ironically, the theme of silence is also present in the narrator's critique of Zanzibar's neglected infrastructure, which serves as a metaphor for the more extensive issues of systemic neglect (Omwenga, 2017, p. 13).

### **Research Questions**

- How does Gurnah depict silence as both a survival tactic and an internal struggle in *Admiring Silence*?
- What role does colonial history and migration play in shaping the protagonist's silence in *Admiring Silence*?

### **Silence, Identity, and Resistance: A Review of Theoretical and Critical Frameworks**

Silence is employed by postcolonial writers to emphasize marginalized voices and perspectives, thereby reflecting the challenges faced by individuals and communities in confronting the legacy of colonization. This intentional narrative omission emphasizes the intricacies of colonization and the pursuit of a genuine postcolonial identity. These authors encourage readers to contemplate the subtle interactions between fractured narratives, cultural loss, and the tensions between resistance and assimilation by leaving spaces in the narrative (Loomba, 1998). In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. contend that dominant literary traditions are prone to subversion. The examination of the disruptive strategies of postcolonial writers reveals the structures of power and the creative responses that challenge them (2002, p. 32).

Falk argues that in Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* (1996), the unnamed narrator navigates cultural displacement as a Zanzibari expatriate within Britain's hybrid cultural landscape. An additional dimension of multiculturalism is introduced to the narrative through his encounter with Emma, an Englishwoman. Praises Silence delves into the "effort to know through pervasive fear," which is the result of the development of a coherent diasporic self-narrative (Falk, 2007, p. 16). Hand (2010) contends that Gurnah's portrayal of colonial-era immigration provides a unique perspective, even though many immigrants writers address alienation and the home search. She observes that his depiction of "home" is not excessively optimistic nor rooted in triumph, but rather one of friendship and forbearance, which gives voice to the liminal experiences of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (p. 76).

Marco Ruberto (2008) identifies *Admiring Silence* as a prime example of a "returner" novel in



immigrant literature. He highlights the significance of the protagonist's brief return to Zanzibar after years of living in Britain, portraying it as a crucial moment in negotiating immigrant identity. The novel explores the complex process of reconciling past and present selves, showing how the act of return – temporary or otherwise becomes central to understanding cultural origins, belonging, and transformation (p. 36).

Compared to *Pilgrims Way* (1988), *Paradise* (1994), and *By the Sea* (2001), *Admiring Silence* has not been studied as much by critics. Most of the existing research focuses on the story's structure, especially how it uses unreliable narration and multiple points of view (Barasa, Remmy Shiundu & Makokha, 2015; Kaigai, 2013; Zhang, 2022) Some studies also look at silence and copying behavior (Han & Ren, 2021; Kaigai, 2013; Steiner, 2013). But there is still a lot more to explore, especially about how the novel deals with identity and the experiences of refugees.

Memory is very important for history and how society is run. It also helps shape who people are as individuals and as part of a group. When someone loses their memory, it becomes hard to form or understand their identity. In the story, the main character uses his mother's memories and what she tells him to piece together his past. But she doesn't talk much, which stops him from learning about his early life and who his real father was. Zhenzhao points out, ethical identities can be grouped in different ways, like those based on family ties, moral connections, or larger social bonds. Family connections are seen as the most basic and lasting type of ethical identity. However, the main character's struggle to find his family roots creates a deep worry about his identity tied to his bloodline (2024, pp. 278–279).

Steiner says that the setting in the novel is a complex place with many levels of meaning. The main character, who is a refugee from another country, moves through three different stages of changing places in the story. Each of these changes shows a big shift in how they see themselves and where they feel they belong. The first stage is when the main character moves from Zanzibar to Britain. This marks the start of their life away from home (2006, p. 304).

Arslan argues that people who leave their home country often take along things like memories, traditions, language, and values from their original culture. When they arrive in a new place with very different history, culture, and social rules, they often face difficult questions about who they are and how to fit in with the new society (2014, p. 5).

Readers who pay attention to the quiet moments in Gurnah's stories can learn a lot about the inner lives of his characters. These pauses between words tell us a lot like hidden worries, inner battles, and the struggle to come to terms with old hurts and the way things are now. In these silent spaces, memories quietly come back, showing us the experiences that have deeply influenced who these characters are. Falk says that Gurnah's stories show a world that connects the Indian Ocean to Britain. He shows how people are tied together through family and money, which affects how wealth and social status move around, shaping who people are. Gurnah uses silence in his storytelling on purpose, which makes readers think and try to understand the stories that aren't directly told. This helps show deep the emotional and mental effects of things like colonization, moving from one place to another, and being forced to leave home. His characters' sense of self comes from mixing their old heritage before colonization, the changes brought by colonial rule, and the struggles of living in a new place. Even though Gurnah's stories are part of the bigger story of British rule, they also show a deep and complex history that happened before Western influence came in (2007, p. 9). By looking at

these silent parts of his stories, readers can find out about history that's been overlooked, voices that have been silent, and how empire has affected both individuals and groups. In the end,



these quiet spaces in his work help us understand human life and the long-lasting effects of colonial history (Falk, 2020, p. 216).

Colonialism greatly affected how people saw themselves by making them forget or lose their original cultures, languages, and traditions. The colonizers introduced their own ways of life, which pushed out the native way. This made people feel disconnected from who they really were and stopped their cultures from growing naturally. There was a struggle between their old culture and the new one brought by the colonizers. People had to figure out who they were while living under the control of the colonizers. As R. Radhakrishnan observes in “Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity,” before colonialism, people lived within their own cultural spaces, guided by distinct histories and understandings of the past (1993, p. 752). In this new situation, the fight to define oneself became harder.

The colonized were often told they had to take on the ways of the colonizers to get jobs, money, or respect. But this made them lose touch with their own culture. As a result, people and groups had to deal with the problem of keeping their original identity while living under the rules of the colonial system. This ongoing struggle often caused problems within families and communities. As Hasan points out, “In a colonial situation, where the natives are forcefully colonized and any attempt to resist is suppressed violently, dominant language and culture can rigorously reshape one’s identity” (2012, p. 80)

The process of understanding silences is about finding deeper meaning through careful attention to the quiet moments in our shared human experiences. When we try to represent the voices that are often unheard, we must be very careful not to misunderstand or take unfairly from their stories. Exploring these complex situations helps us see the missing parts, the quiet voices, and the stories that haven't been told. These silences can lead us to discover hidden truths and make us rethink what we believe we know. Engaging with these silences isn't just about learning, it's also about doing the right thing, trying to give a louder voice to those who have been ignored or silenced. Edward Said reminds us that we should understand the East on its own terms, not through the ideas that Western culture has created about it. As Bhabha points out, “He rightly rejects a notion of Orientalism as the misrepresentation of an Oriental essence” (1994, p. 158).

Abdulrazak Gurnah's stories mix what people say with the moments when they don't speak creating a deep look at who they are. These quiet moments hold a lot—unspoken pain, memories that are kept hidden, and the lasting effects of being forced to leave their home. His characters often feel broken inside, because they've lost their homeland, their culture is fading, and they still feel the effects of colonial rule. As they try to live their lives, they are stuck between two worlds, dealing with both feeling connected and feeling left out. Gikandi says that Gurnah's novels “think carefully, like the best stories from people who live away from home, about being away from home, remembering the past, and living in a world with many cultures” (1998, p. 296).

### **Research Methodology**

This methodology outlines a structured approach to examining the dynamics of silences in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* (1996). It is primarily based on Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), with additional insights from postcolonial theories by Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This qualitative literary study uses close textual analysis to interpret silences as strategic practices within the postcolonial context of migration and identity. The methodology is interpretive and inductive, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the text while being shaped by the theoretical framework. This approach ensures a thorough and replicable analysis that highlights the complex roles of silence



in everyday life, aligning with the thesis's goal of exploring silence as an active, subversive mechanism rather than a passive absence.

This study uses a qualitative approach based on literary criticism, focusing on postcolonial and cultural studies. It is an exploratory investigation aiming to look at silences as active practices influenced by power, culture, and identity in Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*. The research is not based on data collection or numbers, but instead focuses on interpreting the text, which is common in literary studies. The research is built on two main parts: selecting the text and applying theory. The main text, *Admiring Silence*, was chosen because it deeply explores themes like migration, mixed identities, and hidden traumas. Supporting materials include works like de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), and other related academic articles. De Certeau's ideas about strategies and tactics are used as the main way to analyze the silences in the text, such as when characters intentionally don't speak or when parts of the story are left out. This theory is used repeatedly to connect with the text, allowing for a detailed and layered understanding that links the theory with what is written.

#### **Theoretical Framework: Rethinking Silence and Power in Postcolonial Discourse**

This theoretical framework uses Michel de Certeau's influential book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to explore the "dynamics of silence" in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence* (1996). Instead of seeing silence as just an absence or something passive, de Certeau's ideas help us understand it as an active and strategic part of daily life. In the context of postcolonial experiences, this approach is showing how silences become tools for resisting power, negotiating identity, and surviving in the uncertain situations of migration and colonial displacement. This framework gives a strong basis for analyzing the text, showing how things like not speaking up or making up stories can be quiet but powerful ways to take back control in difficult situations. By combining cultural studies and postcolonial criticism, it offers a broad way to understand the novel's themes of being displaced, finding a place, and dealing with the heavy impact of unspoken pain.

#### **Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life***

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau turns his attention away from the big structures of power, like governments or large companies, and instead looks at how everyday people manage and sometimes resist these powers in their daily lives. His main idea is the difference between strategies and tactics. Strategies are the plans and actions used by those in power – like governments or big organizations – to control how people behave and what is considered normal. These strategies create rules and set up a system that people are expected to follow. For example, policies about migration or the way people should speak in a certain place are part of this strategy. Tactics, on the other hand, are used by people who don't have much power or a strong position. These are more flexible and creative ways of dealing with the rules set by strategies. Instead of trying to completely change the system, people using tactics find ways to adapt and make use of the rules to create their own space for freedom. Simple things like walking through a city, reading a book, or speaking in a certain way can become acts of resistance and creativity (1980, p. 27).

De Certeau points out that these tactical actions are often ignored or not seen clearly because they aren't obvious or direct. He uses the metaphor of walking in a city to explain this. When people walk; they don't always follow the planned paths. They take different routes, creating their own unique way through the space. This shows how things like consumption aren't just passive or accepting people are actively using and changing what is given to them. When applied to literature, this idea helps us see how elements like silence can



be used tactically.

Silence isn't just the absence of sound; it can be a way for characters to move through rules and expectations without fully agreeing or disagreeing. It allows them to find new ways to deal with power and control in their everyday lives.

In Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*, the protagonist shows how Michel de Certeau's ideas apply to his life. He uses silence as a clever strategy. After escaping the political chaos of postcolonial Zanzibar, he creates a new story for his English girlfriend, Emma, and their daughter, carefully hiding his family and past. This silence is a way to deal with the expectations of British society, especially the pressure to fit in without showing any signs of being different. It helps him feel a bit more accepted, but at the same time, keeping things hidden leads to loneliness and sets up future problems. Through de Certeau's view, the character's return to Zanzibar becomes a way of breaking down these silences. This reveals his mixed identity—neither completely Zanzibari nor fully English.

### **Silence as Strategy: Negotiating Identity and Power in *Admiring Silence***

In *Admiring Silence* (1996), Gurnah skillfully incorporates silence into the main character's life, making it a key element that helps explore themes like exile, being displaced, and broken identity. Silence in the story isn't just about not speaking; it's a powerful and complex force that comes from different experiences such as survival, being involved in wrongdoing, resisting, dealing with trauma, feeling disconnected from one's culture, and wanting to withdraw. This silence shows the narrator's difficult position—struggling between Zanzibar and England, between telling the truth and keeping secrets, and between remembering and forgetting. By looking at specific scenes where silence acts as both a challenge and a way to cope, this analysis shows how Gurnah sees silence as a place where people can take control, feel vulnerable, and try to make sense of their situation in the world shaped by colonial history.

Moreover, the protagonist is made to stay silent because of trauma. The violence and chaos in Zanzibar are not spoken about, because they are too heavy with shame, pain, and being uprooted. In contrast, Emma's silence shows emotional distance and highlights the cultural and emotional gap between them. When he returns to Zanzibar, the silence of his mother and daughter says a lot expressing feelings of being cut off, betrayal, and wounds that words can't heal. Beyond the personal, the novel is filled with larger political and historical silences. The effects of colonialism and repression are always present, even though they are not directly mentioned. In the end, silence in *Admiring Silence* is not just the absence of words, it's a powerful and complex force. Whether chosen, forced, or protective, it helps the characters deal with love, loss, identity, and being displaced in the postcolonial world. There are three most important types of silence

#### **Strategic Silence**

Strategic silence, as theorized by Michel de Certeau, operates as a conscious and tactical form of resistance within oppressive structures of power. It is not a sign of weakness or submission but rather a deliberate choice to withhold speech as a means of survival and subtle defiance. In Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*, the unnamed narrator often employs silence to navigate the racial hierarchies and cultural prejudices he encounters in Britain. His decision to remain quiet in moments of humiliation becomes a strategy that allows him to maintain dignity and avoid confrontation in a society that positions him as inferior. Gurnah portrays this strategic silence in the following passage:



He didn't mean Afro-Caribbean people anyway. He meant darkies, hubshis, abids, bongo-bongos, say-it-loud-I'm-black-and-I'm-proud victims of starvation and tyranny and disease and unregulated lusts and history, etc. You know, my race. I could see he approved of my respectful silence, because he smilingly issued his prohibitions and instructions, wagging his finger now and then to warn me off naughty temptations. (1996, p. 10).

In this moment, the narrator chooses to remain silent in response to a barrage of racist stereotypes and degrading language. His "respectful silence" is not agreement but a deliberate act of self-preservation. By staying quiet, he avoids direct confrontation, protects his dignity, and navigates a power imbalance. The silence becomes a strategy—a way to deflect hostility without escalating the situation. It allows him to endure the moment without surrendering to it.

Another instance of strategic silence occurs when the narrator chooses not to reveal anything to his girlfriend, Emma, about his past life in Zanzibar, which Gurnah portrays in the following words, "The transformations of things I had known and places which I had lived with differently in my mind for years seemed like an expulsion from my past" (1996, p. 187). Here, silence takes on a more internal and emotional form. The narrator is confronted with the quiet, unsettling erosion of memory and belonging. The "expulsion" he feels isn't loudly articulated, it exists in what is no longer said or felt, in the unspoken distance between past and present. This silence reflects loss not just of place, but of identity and continuity. It is the silence of disconnection, of being unable to voice what has changed or what has been taken.

### **Traumatic Silence**

Admiring Silence embodies the instances of traumatic silence appears when the narrator recalls his painful childhood memories, marked by fear and emotional subjugation. Reflecting on his father's harshness, he confesses, "He hectored me about respect and obedience, when never in my life had I sought to challenge or thwart him. I lived in terror of him. Sometimes I cried as soon as I was in his presence" (1996, p. 45). This passage encapsulates the narrator's deep-seated trauma and lasting psychological wounds inflicted by paternal authority. His silence in adulthood particularly his inability to confide in Emma about his past stems from this early conditioning of fear and submission. Such silence is not merely an absence of speech, but a manifestation of trauma: a defense mechanism developed to protect the self from reliving past suffering. Yet, this very silence perpetuates his emotional isolation, hindering his capacity for intimacy and self-expression. As trauma theorists suggest, silence in such contexts becomes both a shield and a symptom – a means of survival that simultaneously reflects the narrator's fractured identity and unhealed wounds.

This instance occurs when the narrator reflects on his early days of exile in England, after being forced to leave Zanzibar behind. Stripped of familiarity, community, and identity, he finds himself adrift in a foreign land where even language and belonging seem alien. Gurnah captures this moment of psychological rupture through the narrator's introspective realization, "I was astonished by the sudden surge of loneliness and terror I felt... that I had lost everything" (1996, p. 137). This moment encapsulates the narrator's confrontation with displacement and emotional dislocation. His traumatic silence arises not from choice but from the paralysis of exile – a profound rupture between past and present, self and homeland. The inability to verbalize this loss signifies the depth of his psychic wound. In suppressing speech, the narrator unconsciously shields himself from the full force of his pain; yet, this same silence prevents him from reconciling his fragmented sense of self. Gurnah thus portrays silence as both a protective barrier and a manifestation of trauma, exposing how exile silences the voice

of the displaced subject while simultaneously testifying to their inner suffering.

A further instance of traumatic silence occurs when the narrator returns to Zanzibar after twenty years of exile. Expecting a sense of familiarity, he instead encounters a homeland transformed beyond recognition—its people, language, and rhythms of life no longer aligned with his memories. The return, rather than offering closure, intensifies his sense of estrangement and loss. Gurnah exemplifies this painful realization in the narrator's reflection, "I felt a sudden and overwhelming desolation, a recognition that everything I had left behind was gone forever, beyond retrieval" (1996, p. 239). This passage underscores the narrator's dislocation and the emotional fragmentation that exile has produced.

Another manifestation of traumatic silence arises through the narrator's experience of racial objectification and discrimination in England. As an immigrant and a man of colour, he constantly encounters subtle and overt forms of prejudice that render him invisible or "other." In one such moment, he notes how he responds to racist remarks with what he calls "respectful silence" (1996, p. 112). This silence is not a sign of agreement or submission but a defensive strategy born out of repeated humiliation and the fear of social retaliation. Continuous exposure to racism strips the narrator of the confidence to speak freely; he learns that expressing anger or protest may invite disbelief or further marginalization. His silence thus becomes both a survival mechanism and a symptom of psychological injury, reflecting how racism erodes one's sense of dignity and belonging. Gurnah portrays this state of enforced quietness as a form of traumatic silence, where speech is constrained by the emotional and social consequences of racial

exclusion. In this way, the narrator's silence articulates what language cannot—the pain of being persistently misunderstood, misrepresented, and silenced within a dominant culture that denies his humanity.

### **Redemptive Silence**

Redemptive silence differs from both strategic and traumatic forms in that it represents a healing and transformative engagement with silence. Rather than signifying suppression or fear, it marks a movement toward reconciliation and self-understanding. In *Admiring Silence*, this redemptive aspect of silence emerges most vividly through the narrator's use of storytelling as a means to reframe and endure suffering. As Gurnah reflects, "There were stories, in the first place, stories to fill the hours and the mind in the contest with life, to lift the ordinary into metaphor, to make it seem that the time of my passing was a choice in my hands... That is what stories can do, they can push the feeble disorders we live with out of sight" (1996, p. 257). This passage illustrates how narration itself becomes an act of redemption. By transforming pain into narrative and converting lived suffering into metaphor, the narrator reclaims a sense of agency over his fractured experiences. Storytelling thus becomes a form of therapeutic silence—not through direct confrontation with trauma, but through a selective articulation that offers emotional distance and aesthetic control.

Silence functions as a creative and restorative force. It allows the narrator to reshape his trauma into meaning, transforming wounds into words that soothe rather than reopen them. In doing so, Gurnah presents silence not merely as absence, but as a medium of renewal, a quiet space in which fragmented identities and memories can find coherence. Redemptive silence, therefore, symbolizes the narrator's gradual movement from pain toward understanding, from loss toward a fragile form of peace.

A further moment of redemptive silence occurs when the narrator admits,

"But I am so afraid of disturbing this fragile silence" (1996, p. 243). Here, the "fragile silence"

is not a symbol of repression but of protection and healing. Its fragility suggests that it is consciously and delicately preserved not merely out of fear, but as a means of sustaining an inner equilibrium that might otherwise collapse under emotional strain. For the narrator, maintaining silence becomes a way to guard a fragile peace against the turbulence of memory and loss.

Another revealing instance of redemptive silence appears when the narrator reflects on his long years of living in exile. “Living among strangers for such a time, I had long ago lost that casual assurance, that ability to lean back comfortably, scratch my moustache and chat” (Gurnah, 1996, p. 189). This reflection captures the narrator’s profound loss of ease, belonging, and self-confidence a disconnection from the spontaneous sociability that once defined him. The ordinary gestures of comfort and conversation now seem alien, replaced by a self-conscious restraint born of cultural displacement. In the void left by this loss, silence emerges as a coping mechanism, offering emotional protection against further alienation. It does not restore what has been lost, yet it provides a fragile sense of stability and self-preservation within a foreign environment.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

The study has analyzed the dynamics of silence in Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *Admiring Silence* through the lens of Michel de Certeau’s model of strategic silence within the postcolonial context of Zanzibar. Gurnah’s narrative reveals how colonialism leaves deep psychological scars that affect both male and female characters, shaping their identities and relationships through silence and trauma. Colonial rule not only dislocated the people of Zanzibar from their cultural and linguistic roots but also created enduring hierarchies of power that silenced native voices.

This inherited muteness extends into the postcolonial present, where silence becomes both a symptom of subjugation and a means of survival. For the unnamed narrator, silence operates as a strategic tool to navigate spaces of displacement and cultural alienation. In *Admiring Silence*, Gurnah presents silence as multifaceted, functioning differently according to each character’s social position and psychological state. Strategic silence, as theorized by Michel de Certeau, appears in the narrator’s deliberate withholding of his past from his English partner, Emma. His silence becomes a tactic of self-preservation, allowing him to negotiate power within an unequal, postcolonial relationship. Traumatic silence manifests in his inability to articulate the wounds of exile and the humiliation of colonial dependency; his speechlessness is not chosen but imposed by psychological fragmentation and loss. Redemptive silence, on the other hand, emerges in moments where silence offers restoration rather than repression – such as when storytelling allows the narrator to transform pain into meaning. This selective articulation enables him to maintain psychological distance from his trauma and regain partial control over his narrative. For the female characters, particularly the narrator’s mother and other peripheral women of Zanzibar, patriarchal silence operates as a tool of subjugation within the domestic sphere, reflecting how cultural norms suppress women’s voices and agency. Yet, within this suppression lies subaltern silence, a form of enforced muteness that reflects Spivak’s question of whether the subaltern can speak. These women’s silences, though imposed, also carry resistance – they communicate endurance, dissent, and dignity in the face of systemic marginalization.



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