

<p>Institution: University of Kent</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: Abdulrazak Gurnah: Influencing policymakers, cultural providers, curricula, and the reading public worldwide via new imaginings of empire and postcoloniality</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Abdulrazak Gurnah’s research, mediated through his novels and short stories, enriches and reshapes public understandings of empire and its consequences on an international scale. By challenging previous assumptions about empire, colonialism, migration, and diaspora, Gurnah’s writing has influenced educators, educational policymakers, broadcasters and other cultural providers. Since the publication of <i>Paradise</i> (1994), his creative work has led to a paradigmatic shift in post-empire geography and history through which Indian Ocean studies and a global Islamic narrative have become newly visible. Festival organisers, students at all levels, and the international reading public have had their horizons expanded by his vision.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Gurnah has researched and reimagined histories of empire and the colonial encounter since joining the University of Kent in 1985 (Professor 2004-). A special issue of <i>English Studies in Africa</i> devoted to Gurnah (56:1 [May 2013]: 141) shows how his work refuses to deliver the ‘expected colonial theme’ or ‘act out the predictable postcolonial “story” of European colonialism’, in Susheila Nasta’s words. His politically charged characters, settings, and histories result in writing with ‘a staying power that belies its quietness’ (<i>The Nation</i>, 08/09/2005; http://www.thenation.com/article/love-and-betrayal-colonial-africa#ixzz2V9MzY2dV). One of the prevailing concerns of Gurnah’s work is to narrate the complex trajectory of British imperialism in relation to Asian and African empires. <i>Paradise</i> (1994) was shortlisted for the Booker, Whitbread, and Writers’ Guild Prizes, awarded the ALOA Prize for the best Danish translation, and translated into 10 other languages. The novel refuses the reading of the European imperial narrative of colonialism as a humane intervention, and also refuses the paradigmatic counter-narrative of African order disrupted by colonial intervention. Instead it reads the East African coastal world as interpenetrated by several Indian Ocean cultures and languages whose mode of existence was division and negotiation. Here Gurnah uses his own intimate knowledge of this region and its cultures and languages, which he augmented by fieldwork on the coast shortly before he began the novel, interviewing people and travelling to locations that were relevant to the account he proposed to write. He studied oral accounts of travellers whose testimonies in Kiswahili offered a ground-level perspective not available to colonial explorers themselves. He also researched the global narrative of the Islamic world, which is predominant on the coast, and integrated it into the novel.[3.1]</p> <p><i>By the Sea</i> (2001) was longlisted for the Booker Prize, shortlisted for the Los Angeles Times Fiction Prize, and awarded the 2007 Temoin du Monde Prize in French translation. The novel investigates the condition of the asylum seeker in modern Britain while exploring the interconnected cultures of the Indian Ocean littoral, and the kinds of arrangements that have linked these locations into a world-view. Preparing a 40-minute programme for BBC Radio 4, ‘Scenes from Provincial Life, 4’ (15/01/1998), Gurnah researched the experiences of Roma asylum seekers who were then under relentless media scrutiny. He interviewed asylum seekers in their government-provided accommodation, spoke to their advisers and representatives from the Refugee Council, and studied the historical and cultural context for what seemed a new phenomenon of immigrant experience. <i>By the Sea</i> combines this research with wide reading in Islamic inheritance law.[3.2]</p> <p><i>Desertion</i> (2005) was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize. One of the main themes of the novel is the gendered and sexualised legacy of empire, shown through parallel narratives of colonial past and postcolonial present, exploring encounters between colonizers and colonized that refuse stereotypes. Questions of sexual rebellion and migration are addressed simultaneously with formal issues of narrative construction. The research for this work involved</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

extensive reading of post-war migration fiction, as well as colonial and settler writing from the early years of the 20th century, especially in Kenya where the novel is set.[3.3]

Gurnah's research into new experiences of migration and diaspora in the post-9/11 moment is manifest in his most recent novel. *The Last Gift* (2011) is grounded in research on migrant dislocations and multi-generational experiences of displacement and social marginalisation. The novel draws on specific research concerning 1950s English law regarding foundlings, adoption and fostering practices. It also employs research into the revival of interest in Islamic traditions since July 2005, when a group of Muslim young men carried out suicide bombing attacks in London, creating a sense of generational impasse. Several of the young men had a secular upbringing, perhaps intended to help them integrate into British society. They saw this as a deprivation of knowledge and affiliation they had a right to and which as adults they actively sought. What their parents had done in the interests of assimilative solicitude generated an impulse of violent outrage against British actions in the Muslim world. *The Last Gift* addresses this generational rift by exposing the corrosive power of untold stories, including family secrets.[3.4]

Two recent short stories exhibit the fruits of Gurnah's research by reconfiguring or interrogating received wisdom regarding geographies of empire. The first story demonstrates how Fra Mauro's Mappa Mundi (1448-1453), one of the earliest maps to imagine the Indian Ocean as open waters rather than closed in by a southern land-mass, represents the Indian Ocean as thoroughly knowable and interlinked, a world connected.[3.5] The second story investigates the ethics of displaying colonial specimens in metropolitan museums.[3.6]

3. References to the research

1. **Abdulrazak Gurnah**, *Paradise* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994). Pp. 247. ISBN 0-241-00183-8. RAE 2001.
2. **Abdulrazak Gurnah**, *By the Sea* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001). Pp. 245. ISBN 0-7475-5280-0. RAE 2008.
3. **Abdulrazak Gurnah**, *Desertion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005). Pp. 262. ISBN 0-7475-7756-0. RAE 2008.
4. **Abdulrazak Gurnah**, *The Last Gift* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011). Pp. 279. ISBN 0-7475-9994-4. **REF2 output 1.**
5. **Abdulrazak Gurnah**, 'Mid-Morning Moon', *Wasafiri* 66 (Summer 2011): 25-30. ISSN 0269-0055. DOI 10.1080/02690055.2011.557489. **REF2 output 2.**
6. **Abdulrazak Gurnah**, 'The Photograph of the Prince', in *Road Stories*, ed. Mary Morris and Di Robson (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), 75-90. ISBN 0-9549848-4-7. **REF2 output 4.**

4. Details of the impact

Gurnah's research has brought about a reimagining of the British empire and its subjects through his portrayal of a network of Indian Ocean cultures that preceded and survived the colonial encounter. His work has had impact upon cultural providers, upon curricula and the visions of educators, including those with policymaking capability, and upon reading publics worldwide.

Collaborating with cultural providers

The reach and significance of Gurnah's research can be seen in invitations from cultural providers addressing mass audiences to present his research on the Indian Ocean, Islam, slavery, and migration in the UK and abroad. For example, Gurnah presented a highly successful programme in the BBC Radio 4-British Museum series 'The History of the World in 100 Objects' (16/12/2009), reported by the Museum's Director Neil MacGregor as heard 'by millions of people both in the UK and around the world'.[5.1] Gurnah was also invited by *Independent* columnist and presenter Yasmin Alibhai-Brown to deliver a programme on slavery in Islam in the series 'Heart and Soul' on BBC Radio 4 (17/07/2009) (BBC 4 audiences are 10.8m), and by Joy Keys to appear on internet radio out of Atlanta, Georgia (06/08/2011). Gurnah's 'The Father Instinct', exploring postcolonial African creativity and fatherhood for BBC Radio 3's 'Essay' programme (27/04/2011) (BBC 3 audiences are 2m), presented by Lou Stein, was so successful in audience response that it was chosen for Pick of the Week on Radio 4.[5.2] The success of these programmes led to an

invitation from RichMix, a UK arts and culture outreach organization, for Gurnah to launch the third issue of 'SCARF' magazine, speaking on immigration and African-ness in the 21st century (22/05/2013) to an audience of 380.[5.3] Concrete international reach is shown by a recent interview in Nigeria in which Gurnah is described as 'Zanzibar's most famous native son'.[5.3]

Changing educational content and influencing policy-minded educators internationally

Although Gurnah downplays comparisons with the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe [5.3], his novel *Paradise* has begun to replace Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* on postcolonial curricula, such as the Open University's 'Twentieth-Century Literature: Texts and Debates' module [5.4] and Birmingham's postgraduate module 'African Fiction and Its Critics'. That his work is changing the content of education in postcolonial studies internationally is evidenced by his novel *Paradise* being taught in Paris's Lycée Balzac, English section, as part of their International Baccalaureate.[5.5] Further international reach is demonstrated by the teaching of *Paradise* or *Desertion* in the USA at Oklahoma, in San Francisco State's 'Contemporary Culture' module (blog <http://analepsis.org/2013/03/16/paradise-hum415/>), Northwestern's African Studies program, and Rhodes University's 'Transnational Literature' module. In Africa his novels are taught in the Congo, Zanzibar, and in South Africa at Cape Town and the University of Stellenbosch ('The Immigrant Genre' module). Gurnah's educational policy advice has been solicited by educators and education ministers in Zanzibar, including at a special conference at the National Library on the reading and use of literary texts, attended by educational policymakers, teachers and school children, and then televised in full on Zanzibar's Star TV (14/04/2011).[5.6]

Because Gurnah has significantly led a paradigmatic shift in understandings of post-empire geography and history, in which 'Indian Ocean Imaginaries' have been made newly visible, his work serves as the central reference point in the major German research project, with policy applications beyond the academy, the Goethe University's 'Africa's Asian Options: Frankfurt Inter-Centre Programme on New African-Asian Interactions' (AFRASO). The project is intended to set the agenda for 'the reconceptualization of Area Studies in a globalised world' and for 'policy advice with regard to Germany's interactions with Africa.' It has been specifically funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) because of its public outreach and relevance to policy design; these are preconditions for all BMBF funding. The project started in February 2013 with an overall sum of €3.9m. Aimed at analysing 'transnational, transcultural and transregional dynamics' in order to 'provide policy advice with regard to German-African relations in an increasingly multipolar world', it promises significant post-REF impacts. Gurnah, who was first invited to read at the Goethe University 15/05/2004, and gave a keynote and reading 22-25/02/2011, has been 'of prime importance in the formulation of [the] research programme and continues to be a major focus of [the project's] ongoing research' because social and cultural transformations are taken to be central to a full assessment of these relations. *By the Sea*, for example, provides an 'invaluable perspective' for 'targeting Africa's role in a multipolar world' because of its 'dual focus on African migration to Europe and Arab migration to Africa' and "decentred" vision of an Indian Ocean World that has for centuries produced intricate (and often conflicting) interactions' with 'the legacies of Europe's colonial past'. The 'research design of the AFRASO project' is thus a direct 'impact of Prof. Gurnah's fictional and academic work'. [5.7] Gurnah has changed the content of what is understood, taught, and used to formulate policy on the part of educators and policy-minded researchers as well as students.

Enriching the understandings of reading publics worldwide

Gurnah receives many unsolicited testimonials in the blogosphere; for example, 'Melissa' reported on goodreads how her understanding of the world changed after reading *Desertion*: the novel 'gave me another view of the world, different from the European one; and it made me rethink concepts and things that we western people think as common and usual but may not be usual and common to other cultures'. [5.8] Gurnah's international reach is also shown by his work appearing in translation in 11 languages, including Turkish and Bahasa-Indonesian, and by frequent invitations to give readings, lectures, and interviews to widely mixed audiences at international literary festivals; for example in Paris (Musée Quai Branly [19/11/2011]), [5.5] Palestine (PalFestival of Literature [22-29/05/2009]), and the Congo (Etonnants-Voyageurs in Brazzaville, the Congo Republic [13-17/02/2013]). [5.8] At Brazzaville, Gurnah participated in what the *Independent* reported as 'high-quality debates that forged a rare bridge between literary stars

of the English-speaking continent (such as Helon Habila, Andre Brink and Abdulrazak Gurnah) and their Francophone peers'. [5.8] His global significance is shown by his being selected to present at one of the world's largest literary festivals, the Melbourne Writers Festival, Australia (25-29/08/2011), delivering a 1-hour event 'In Conversation' as well as panel discussions to audiences of 250. At the another of the world's largest, the Brisbane Writers Festival, Australia (07-11/09/2011), Gurnah was interviewed by Australian Broadcasting Corporation's 'The Book Show' (08/09/2011; broadcast on 23/09/2011); he presented another 1-hour event, also entitled 'In Conversation', which was filmed by ABC TV [5.8].

The impacts of Gurnah's research are demonstrably international in that his novels have affected and influenced the views of cultural providers, educators, festival audiences, and reading publics in the UK and abroad. His work's significance can be measured by its changing of the postcolonial curriculum in the UK, USA, Europe, Africa, and beyond. Gurnah's work has provoked reconsiderations of the legacies of empire, and informed and enriched people's cultural understanding of difference, diversity, and Indian Ocean and Muslim imaginaries on a global scale.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. **Corroborating impact through collaboration with cultural providers (radio and museum):** Neil MacGregor, 'History of the World in 100 Objects', BBC Radio 4 (16/12/2009). Letter 2/11/2010; website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00sqw6k> **RSS Source 1.**

2. **Corroborating impact through collaboration with cultural providers (radio):** 'The Father Instinct', 'The Essay', BBC Radio 3 (27/04/2011); Pick of the Week on Radio 4. Email from Lou Stein 28/04/2011; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b010gnnq> **RSS Source 2.** Joy Keys, Atlanta, Georgia (06/08/2011): <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/joykeys/2011/08/06/joy-keys-chats-with-author-abdulrazak-gurnah-1>

3. **Corroborating impact through collaboration with cultural providers (arts and cultural outreach):** RichMix and SCARF Launch (22/05/2013) website: <http://www.richmix.org.uk/whats-on/event/abdulrazak-gurnah-scarf-launch/>; Sarah Cartledge, 'Diasporic Dilemmas: Tanzanian Novelist and Academic Abdulrazak Gurnah on the Eternal Quest for Home', *Fifth Chukker Magazine* (May 2013), <http://www.fifthchukker.com/>

4. **Corroborating impact through educational and curricular change:** Susheila Nasta, 'Abdulrazak Gurnah: *Paradise*', in David Johnson (ed.), *The Popular and the Canonical* (Routledge and Open University, 2005), 294-343 (module textbook). Letter 29/07/2013. **RSS Source 3.** Jean-Pierre Orban, Quai Branly, Paris; email 08/11/2011. **RSS Source 4.**

5. **Corroborating impact through educational and curricular policy advice:** <http://www.zanzinews.com/2011/04/mhadhara-wa-profesa-abdulrazak-gurna.html>

6. **Corroborating impact on programme with policymaking objectives and capability:** Frank Schulze-Engler, Co-Project Leader, AFRASO. Letter 30/07/2013; website: www.afraso.org **RSS Source 5.**

7. **Corroborating impact through enriching understanding of reading publics worldwide:** Melissa (19/05/2013): <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/77817.Desertion>; press coverage from the *Independent* on Brazzaville: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/boyd-tonkin-beside-the-congo-too-a-festival-can-flower-but-is-it-just-windowdressing-8505185.html>; information on the event and subsequent publication: <http://www.etonnants-voyageurs.com/spip.php?article10693>; Australian Broadcasting Company Radio, 'The Book Show' (23/09/2011): http://www.search.abc.net.au/search/search.cgi?form=simple&num_ranks=20&collection=abcall&query=gurnah