

Untangling Stories and Healing Rifts: Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*

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ABSTRACT

Abdulrazak Gurnah's sixth novel *By the Sea* (2001) addresses two major issues in studies of current African writing. First, the novel delves into the in-roads of how memory works and how it informs historical narratives. The tension between individual perceptions of history compared to collective consciousness is explored through the conflicting narratives of the two main characters, Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmud. Second, it provides insights into the role of Islamic cultural modes in the shaping of national identity in Zanzibar, both before and after independence and the 1964 revolution. This article argues that Gurnah's work needs to be read with its Muslim heritage in view as Islamic cultural modes form the framework of the novel. Thus the novel is written *through* but not *about* Islam and projects Zanzibari Muslim practices as the glue that binds society together but which can be oppressive if stuck too closely.