

Contextualising Abdulrazak Gurnah's Migrants and Their Mental Constructions

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Salman Rushdie's concept of "imaginary homelands" (1991) helped to explain how migrants (re)create the past they have left behind, avoiding the strictly material dimensions of their migration, and idealising or embellishing their places of origin. Avtar Brah (1996) and Vijay Mishra (1996), among others, have also emphasised the idea of those imagined communities as fundamental for the survival of diasporic subjects. Other migrant writers have opted however for alternative, cruder mental constructions of their experience, presenting their readers with invented worlds that reflect their anxieties, fear and hopes, belonging not only to their past but also projecting onto their present and future. Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels illustrate this trend very well, because in addition to the depiction of the physical aspects of migration, some of his narratives also portray the temporal and imaginary spaces those migrants create for themselves and their closest relatives. Fictionalised accounts of their lives, if not mere fabrications, can be found in the tales told by the migrant protagonists of titles such as *Admiring Silence* (1996), *Desertion* (2005), *The Last Gift* (2011) and *Afterlives* (2020), spanning more than twenty years of writing and a diversity of locations, cultures and times. Some of those fictional constructions can even be viewed as mental or psychiatric disorders, along the lines of Frantz Fanon's 'abandonment neurosis' syndrome in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). This paper is an attempt to unravel and contextualise those expressions of migration in their temporalities, inner exiles and spiritual and affective concerns.