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Critical Perspectives Of Racism And Displacement In Abdulrazak Gurnah's Novels

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the study of racial discrimination against native Africans. Abdulrazak Gurnah is a Tanzanian writer. As an African refugee, his ideas are influenced by the issues of racial discrimination, identity crisis, memory, and displacement. This paper provides an overview of the characters in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels. The characters in the novels face colour discrimination, longing for their homeland, feelings of guilt, and reminiscence, and the paper explores how they try to overcome these challenges. The colour discrimination presents various perspectives among Black people and also addresses their materialistic lives. The issue of racism is a painful experience that is at the root of inequality in British society. Though he is an African-born British writer, he always tries to express his concerns through his writing. Social development is not achieved by a single person; it comes from society as a whole.

Keywords: racial discrimination, refugee, identity memory, African.

Introduction

Abdulrazak Gurnah is a Tanzanian-born British writer. His first language is Kiswahili. He has written ten novels: *Paradise*, *Admiring Silence*, *By the Sea*, *Desertion*, *The Last Gift*, *Gravel Heart*, *Afterlives*, *Pilgrim's Way*, *Dottie*, and *Memory of Departure*. His novels are highly acclaimed all over the world. Longing for the homeland, multiculturalism, cultural barriers, quest for identity, and forbidden love are the central themes of his works. Gurnah places his characters in situations where they are highly affected by society. His ideas and personal experiences reflect how people suffered in their migrated countries. After the independence of Africa, there were no political changes on the East Coast of Africa. The country is occupied and highly dominated by native people. Most people left their own country because of social conflict. After so many decades, there is still no political improvement in Zanzibar. Gurnah tries to overcome the complexity of racial discrimination among whites. Initially, his characters accept their challenges, but after some time they cannot live with this complexity. This paper discusses the drastic suffering of racial discrimination faced in British countries.

Racial Discrimination

One is made into a certain kind of 'African' so when you ask the question 'What is an African?' an African becomes somebody 'who looks like me'. Not someone who has some kind of citizen rights to the place. So these two things made me uncomfortable with some of these fictions. ... Making it seem that a citizen could be described in terms of their appearance or in terms of their claimed or, in some cases, foisted ancestry. (Gurnah 2005: 360)

By deliberately presenting characters of mixed races, Gurnah hopes to problematize the easy classification of characters according to their skin color and represent Africa as not only a confluence of cultures but also of colors where "black" is only a shade among the different shades that exist. Gurnah, in his novels, delves into the unusual and less known terrains of the African experience to provide new perspectives on fictional writing. Gurnah's novel *Admiring Silence* features an unnamed narrator who suffers greatly because he is African. His mind is fully occupied with his unfulfilled desire and longing for the homeland. Every migrated person intentionally hides their own identity because of their inner complexity. This is not self-imposed; it is because of domination. In postcolonial times, there is still an impact of discrimination among people. Some people left their own homes and belongings; some even left their own families. People leaving their own country is not a minor issue. Every person takes a bundle of dreams and hopes with them from Zanzibar. They have a beautiful vision of it. Once they migrate from here to there, it is not easy. Gurnah beautifully expresses his perception through his writings.

Tanzanian-born novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah splendidly weaves together themes of alienation, treachery, and despair. His books are impressively quiet works that address important themes with intelligence and empathy. His book *By the Sea* narrates the story of a 40-year-old man who disguises himself under the name Rajab Shaaban. He borrowed this name for reasons that soon become clear. His

real name is Saleh Omar. He arrives in England seeking asylum and claims not to speak English. With the help of Latif, he is able to live in England. Most asylum seekers face language barriers. Due to this reason, they cannot function independently. Some depend on others for survival. Depending on others is not easy in a migrated country. If native people do not like the migrants, they immediately create various problems. There is no way to escape from this pathetic situation. Some intentionally lose their identity. Even after independence, they struggle for basic needs. Most importantly, they all face and continue to face the problem of racism. It resembles a Holocaust. Many people died because of it, and many still live as slaves. Gurnah illustrates the issues of racism in all his writings.

Gurnah's characters are highly affected by mental disorder and impulsiveness, like Saleh Omar, Abbas, Yusuf, Rashid, Salim, and the unnamed narrator. His novel *The Last Gift* gives a clear view of discrimination. Abbas, the protagonist of the novel, migrated from Zanzibar to England. Now he is 60 but still wants to go back to his homeland because of his longing. Usually, women suffer more than men, but Gurnah's perspective is slightly different. He tells the story from a man's viewpoint because men suffer both personally and professionally. They lose their identity because of their families. They never live for themselves; they always sacrifice their desires and goals. Abbas does the same. He faces many hurdles. In the beginning, he hides himself. He never tells anyone he is African. After he gets married, he wants to raise his children like whites. But no one accepts his change. Even though we live in the modern age, people's minds have not changed. Personally, Abbas is affected by racial discrimination initially. He never shares his loving memories with anyone because of fear. He keeps his feelings and emotions to himself. This leads to drastic changes in his mind. Displacement is a central theme narrated by the author, and though he describes the feeling of guilt, the characters are beautifully placed in all his novels. *The Last Gift* is a perfect example of racial discrimination. The protagonist, Abbas, is an aged man who wants to establish his life in England. But reality is worse than the dream world. He tries to overcome his inability. As a father of two children, Abbas shifts from reality to fantasy, loss to gain, guilt to hope.

Gurnah demonstrates that his characters recollect their past. He illustrates the characters' mindset; the feeling of suspicion between natives and Europeans is mutual so that each group constructs the image of the "other" in their own way. The novel *Desertion* shows the use to which recollection and recreation of the past can be put to explain the present. *The Last Gift* also explains Abbas's recollection of his story in his native Zanzibar. Imagination is a major tool used by him throughout the novel. Sometimes it could be a real-life story, but not always. Readers can easily relate to their past, present, and future. The first generation faced discrimination but did not want to show it in front of their children. The thirst for identity is like a forbidden fruit. Once we taste it, we encounter other kinds of problems. Everything carries both positive and negative aspects. Colonialism and postcolonialism have different perspectives. His novels switch between these two theories.

Abdulrazak Gurnah has been a sharp observer of colonialism and the effects of postcolonialism on the social life of Africa. The depiction of colonial East Africa during the First World War shows a precarious situation for African refugees and immigrants who had taken shelter in the country during the

ongoing implications of the war. With the ongoing impacts of the First World War, it was evident that East Africa was ripped apart in terms of its political and economic structure (Helff 2015). The war's impacts led to a disruption in social infrastructure, displacing thousands of people and causing suffering from dissonance and loss of social identity.

The sense of dislocation and abandonment is predominant in the novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah, wherein he depicts protagonist characters who represent the sense of loss and lack of social identity and acceptance. His focus is on the issues of exile, displacement, colonialism, and the homesickness of refugees, as well as migration, effacement of identity, and racism. The dominant theme in Gurnah's novels is that of migration, of characters attempting to construct the idea of a home away from home. This reflects the perspective of the African intellectual who is forced to move from his own country to find better living conditions in England, where it is difficult for him to feel at home. The motif of arrival, the feeling of nervousness, difference, and estrangement of the foreigner faced by characters mirrors the personal experience of the author.

Conclusion

The theme of racism in this discussion has been deeply explored through this writing. The diasporic awareness emphasized by Gurnah offers the basis for the re-imagination of the family as a network with the potential to generate better modes of social existence. It also includes a series of historical reflections on the British Empire and its postcolonial effects on East Africa. The ethnic, cultural, and linguistic hybridity, and the interaction between natives, settlers, and traders created a complex, unsafe world. His personal experience shapes the setting of his writings throughout his novels.

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