



**Pilgrims Way: Gurnah's Penning of Xenophobia, Memory, and Nostalgia
in the Gulf between two Geographies**

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Abstract:

Abdulrazak Gurnah is best known as 'master story teller', who got Noble Prize in literature, in 2021. Tanzanian born Gurnah had to migrated to Britain during 1968 due to Zanzibar Revolution, when he was just 18. This paper examines the representation of xenophobia, memory and Nostalgia in Gurnah's 'Pilgrim's Way'. In this paper researcher aims to examine the clash of identities, expectations v/s reality, crave for homeland, and role of memories on the ground of Diaspora. It precisely discusses the effects of colonialism and post colonialism on African society.

Key Words:

Abdulrazak Gurnah, Xenophobia, Race and Migration, Memory, Nostalgia, Diaspora, effects of Colonialism, Post colonial challenges.

Introduction:

This research is interested in the study of 'Pilgrims Way' (1988), one of the eight fictions by Abdulrazak Gurnah. It explores the representations of xenophobia, race and migration,



struggle for identity, expectations v/s reality, crave for homeland, and role of memories on the ground of Diaspora. It further discusses the impact of colonialism and post-colonial challenges in Britain.

In 2021, Noble Prize Laureate, Abdulrazak Gurnah, a Tanzanian born British Novelist also known as ‘master story teller’; successfully brings out the struggle of his characters and their fight for the survival in the alien environment. Having moved to England at an early age and experienced displacement and the pain of non- belonging, Gurnah presents characters whose experiences mirror his own. Gurnah’s characters are presented like tangents branching off his own personal life. It is not a wonder therefore that he is able to present details of the characters’ experiences the way he does in his entire oeuvre. (Okungu)

Gurnah’s second novel Pilgrims Way (1988), a story of the hospital orderly call Daud, a Zanzibari migrant lives in Britain in the 1970s. The novel has tone of ‘melancholia’ in the context of race and migration. This paper focuses on Daud’s attempts to negotiate his position in conditions of migration and race. The ill- treatment he receives from the people in his surroundings remains big challenge for him to deal with. Along side he also lives his colonial past from East Africa, there is imaginary creation of letter writing to various real as well as fictional characters take place in the narratives; is the most significant attempt by Gurnah gives way to the stream of thoughts to be vocalize. There is also the reconstruction of Daud’s identity takes place by the end of the novel and it takes shape slowly throughout the novel in terms of his attachment to Catherine. (Nayman, 2013)

Diaspora as a concept:

Migrations have resulted in building up a diasporic community which shares a common sense of rootlessness, pain and agony of homelessness in a new land. All diasporic discourses are shaded by the ideology of post- colonialism. (Laxmiprasad, 2020)

All diasporic communities established outside their birth territories concede that their own native land always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions. The diasporic people often find themselves managing, across cultural identities. They have to create various cultural, ethnic and political identities to meet the challenges from their native lands and their adopted homelands. (Laxmiprasad, 2020)



Diaspora discourse speaks about people who reside in one place but passionate for another place. Another aspect of diasporic discourse is the search for selfhood in the world between two cultures that of homeland and embraced land. In migrating from one nation to another, the migrant quests for setting up home in a new land. But they are unable to identify the new place as their home. (Laxmiprasad, 2020)

Gurnah's writing:

Gurnah is a writer of conviction, a brave storyteller who does not follow the literary fashions but the lives of his poor, invisible army of characters. (Lall, 2021)

The Nobel committee's citation noted Gurnah's "Uncompromising and passionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents". (Lall, 2021)

"Uncompromising" here is a euphemism for the truth-teller, the literary straight-shooter. Gurnah draws word pictures of immigrants unlike the ones embraced by both Left and Right of the political spectrum. The immigrants in his novels are neither particularly handsome, moral or gifted. Nor are they especially ugly, wicked or unskilled. They are as lovable and as flawed as anyone, of any race, ethnicity or nationality. Readers may not like all of Gurnah's characters, but they will recognise them as real people. In making the migrant an authentically ordinary person, Gurnah lays down a marker and establishes humanity as the basis for respect. (Lall, 2021)

The fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah invites investigation for a myriad of reasons. First and foremost, even though a prolific writer of eight highly acclaimed novels. Gurnah's works have been studied in the West where they are published and in South Africa universities, an engagement with his works in the rest of Africa and especially within East Africa which is his region of origin remains negligible. (Okungu)

Gurnah employs narrative strategy in order to depict the various avenues through which power comes into play in diverse areas of human interactions. Though Gurnah, in his fiction, does not deny the existence of political power and oppression, but rather chooses to shift on focus from them, to zoom on the micro-dealings as a way of rediscovering the ordinary. (Okungu)



In looking at issues such as patriarchy and racism, Gurnah does not present the colonizer/colonised binary where racial discrimination always originates from the white colonizer and is directed to the colonial subject, nor does he present conventional views of patriarchal power which is always characterised by powerful father figures who in the real sense represents political powers. He provides his readers an opportunity to take a place of judgement without privileges of colonial interferences, to delve into the lives of the characters and draw conclusions about the experiences of the characters. (Okungu)

A remarkable feature of Gurnah is his ability to provide detailed descriptions of the experiences of his characters as they relate with one another. One strategy that he applies successfully is that of the application of a variety of narrative voices. (Okungu)

In doing a critical reading of the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah, one is first and foremost drawn to the sentiments he expresses in his appraisal of Ngugi's work referring to the fact that fiction is multilayered, operating below the visible surface to create a complex world (1993). (Okungu)

‘Pilgrim’s Way’: Foreignness and Xenophobia:

“As Foreign as a Drop of Oil in Water.”

There are different forms of foreignness. There is the foreignness of the newcomer- of one who has yet to familiarize himself with a new environment. And then there is the foreignness of oil in a pail of water. This is more than a temporary state. It is the true existential form of foreignness: something insoluble. (Valk, 2007)

This kind of foreignness is typical of Abdulrazak Gurnah's protagonists. These are people who are plainly marked by their skin colour, foreign in the country they live in. And they will remain foreign, because this is the role that is assigned to them all over again every single day. (Valk, 2007)

Daud, who lives in a small town somewhere in Britain, sometime in the seventies. In novel, for long time little is mentioned about his origin, past, and family.

In the very first lines, however, one learns that he is a “wog”. A black. A nigger. That is what “distinguishes” him in the true sense of the word, both with regard to the way he is treated by



the people around him and to the strategies he develops for dealing with this constant stereotyping. Daud has lived in England for nearly five years, working as an assistant nurse in a hospital. He senses danger everywhere. And he encounters it too. (Valk, 2007)

“...He avoided the darkest alleys. Who knew what might jump out of them? Who would hear his screams for help?” (Gurnah, 2021)

‘Subtle’ forms of Humiliation:

It takes the form of physical assaults, insults, or mere looks, depending entirely on the location: on the streets he is in danger of being beaten, while at work more “subtle” forms of humiliation await him. Yet the most harrowing aspect of his situation is not the actual violence, but rather the fact that by being marked as an outsider, Daud is robbed of his own story. The society he lives in is not interested in his past. It supplies him with a new identity. He is one of many. Even his name is ultimately unimportant. He is a black, an oversexed, uncultured. Lazy “wog”. Daud does not try to fight against the myriad of prejudices. Instead, he reacts to the role assigned to him by playing it to a radical degree. (Valk, 2007)

Playing the Role of the “nigger”:

He gives people what they expected from him. He plays the “nigger”- a bitter parody of the role his environment has “written for him”.

Daud sees no way of feeling at home in the society he is living in. There is no acceptance by the people around him, rather he is forced to live an implied identity. As it is inconceivable for him to return to his family in Tanzania. Since dropping out of university he has not dared to contact his parents. (Valk, 2007)

The concept of “Depersonalization”:

“If at a certain stage he has been led to ask himself whether he is a man, it is because his reality as a man has been challenged... the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonial native, robs me of all worth, all individuality”. Depersonalisation is a psychological disorder which Sierra and David (2004) have defined as, an experience as in which the individual feels a sense of unreality and detachment from themselves.” (Okungu)



This causes psychological trauma, anxiety, panic, depression and schizophrenia to the character who undergoes the situation and remains the part of a dystopian homeland.

Bildungsroman: Identity takes shape:

When his situation seems utterly hopeless and inescapable, a young English woman named Catherine comes into his life. It is not Daud's first affair with a white woman, but it is the first time that he has met someone who questions his cynical, self-pitying role as a failed "wog". Catherine probes him. She does not want to hear "stories" from him- she wants to know his story, just as she demands that Daud learn hers.

With a delicate touch, Gurnah lets his characters take shape. Very gradually, characters who previously seemed nothing but reflections of socially- assigned roles become people with unique stories of their own. Gurnah does not propagate any naïve illusions about the power of love thing racial barriers. Discrimination and prejudice persist to the last, as does Daud's tendency toward self-pity and cynicism. But that also reflects the true strength of the novel. (Valk, 2007)

Conclusion:

The Pilgrims Way does not demonstrate a cure, a resolution. Instead, the novel shows that "progress" will not be possible until the radically "foreign elements" are allowed to go on existing in their unique individuality. It is not enough to surmount a barrier once. Rather, what counts is the willingness to acknowledge this barrier, yet cross it repeatedly.

"Fate could have dealt you such a body blow too, and you might have found yourself as unfortunately miscast as I, chased from one haven to another, wretched and despised."

(Gurnah, 2021)



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