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EXPLORING THE THEME OF DISPLACEMENT: A STUDY OF ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S BY THE SEA

Dr. Deepak Lathwal

Assistant Professor (English) Govt. College, Sampla (Rohtak)

Email: dlathwal78@gmail.com



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Abstract

The present study discovers post-colonial displacement as presented in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By The Sea*. The paper presents the profound effects of displacement on human life. The name Abdulrazak Gurnah is well-accepted in the arena of contemporary literature. His sixth novel *By the Sea* is based on the upshots of human beings in the fingers of destiny, which twines are pulled by the colonialists. Imperialism has been a crucial involvement in history as it conducts several horrendous disputes. It squashes the identity of native people and their culture through its abject brutalities. The ensuing domination of the British on Zanzibar Island, and its extensive collisions with the homegrown inhabitants are the core of the novel. The causes of the tumultuous life that Omer, Latif, and many others had to undergo are a derivative of Postcolonialism. The novel is recounted in first person, partly by Omer and Latif individually. Displaced from their native country, the character Saleh Omer is an expatriate, an asylum pursuer in the United States in his later life. The novel inaugurates with Omer after his landing at the airport and inquiry by the security officer in charge. The rest of the narrative treaties with Omer's condition in the new place and his state of agreement and denouncement. A huge portion of the novel's plot covenants with the life of Latif Mahmud. Latif Mahmud is a professor who was established in the United Kingdom before Omer organized. Afterward, both the characters get to intermingle and intertwine a new relationship between them. Both pursue comradeship and cordiality with each other. The author has granted previews of their lives behind in Zanzibar. Both of them had their dilemmas which caused concerns such as identity crisis, empirical dilemma, and lack of physical and mental safeguards. A sense of existentialism strikes them from the moment they began drifting away from their own society. The predicament they survived with a shattered identity, repetitively trying to adjust to the surrounding atmosphere makes the novel astonishing.

Keywords: conflict, colonialism, displacement, home, language.

The demarcation of inner conflict in any literary piece fabricates an intricate web of versatile features. Interior conflict is a non-denominational concern of the human being for which they cannot anesthetize their attention upon any particular

entity. In conventionality with Robert Frost, it could be recited that "Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back" (Frost, 93). Thus, Frost cannot choose the right path for his uncertain mind. Correspondingly, Gurnah, in every

action, demonstrates the central conflict of different characters in his works. Furthermore, the portrayal of displacement flatters a central issue in the sphere of postcolonial literature. Hereafter, Gurnah's assessments of those concerns caused by displacement and the ludicrous realistic portrayal of his fiction are immeasurably commendable. In his novel, he scripts, "In the darkness I lose a sense of space, and in this nowhere, I feel myself more solidly" (By the Sea, 1).

At first glimpse, 'home' emerges to be a moderately uncomplicated concept, unpolitical yet, a type of unanimous value that humans associate with security and familiarity. This conception has been strengthened by humanitarian methodologies that conveyed the home as a pertinent support for the human subject. In postcolonial theory 'home' too has problematical reverberations, where it has arisen to be related to the exclusionary apparatus of nationalism. This is mutually in relation to postcolonial nation-building and the xenophobic rhetoric associated with anti-immigration feelings. Mobilizations of the idea of home in such contexts are often hegemonic or, at best, essentializing. Scripting *The Nation and its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee asserts that home is "not a complimentary but rather the original site on which the hegemonic project of nationalism was launched" (Chatterjee,147). Expressing more including multi-ethnic urbanite spaces in mind, Bidy Martin and Chandra Mohanty (1986) indicate that the deception of unity and security from outside accompanying the idea of home is essentially constructed on concealed chronicles of struggle and oppression, where those manifest as diverse have been kept out through numerous mechanisms over generations to uphold a sense of 'familiarity' for those that survive there. They construe that the finitude obligatory for a sense of home essentially only assists the powerful and, as a consequence, the notion of home must be excluded as intrinsically exclusionary.

Caren Kaplan's manuscript *Questions of Travel* (1996) drives the critique of the postmodern merriment of movement added, examining how it unsuspectingly reprocesses many of the imperialist conventions that underlined European modernism. She indicates in certain to the labour of Gilles

Deleuze and Felix Guattari, poststructuralist critics, critiquing their valorisation of displacement and what they verdict 'nomadic modes'. Notwithstanding their intended purpose to critique the power relations of Euro-American humanism, she reasons, such notions count on "an opposition between a central site of subjectivity and zones of marginality" while failing to account for the "transnational power relations that construct postmodern subjectivities" (Kaplan, 86). Precisely, she advantages the fact that in their precarious speculation in the nomad and other borderline statures like immigrants and gypsies, "the Third World functions simply as a metaphorical margin for European oppositional strategies, an imaginary space, rather than a location of theoretical production itself", fashioning the notable point that over-valorising marginal attitudes, 'becoming minor' in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, functions to liberate the positioned, 'at home' subject at the cost of historicized encounters of homelessness and displacement, for instance, refugees and asylum seekers.

Despite these glitches, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts have been enormously prominent for postcolonial literary critics and authors, markedly in an understanding of migrant and diasporic narrative. The practice and some possibly will say mishandling, of such critical scaffolds has underwritten what Revathi Krishnaswamy (1995) concerns to as the 'mythology of migrancy', in which displacement is identified as characteristically emancipatory and unaffected as well as artistically constructive. As by Deleuze and Guattari above, there is a disengage here between metaphorical dispositions of displacement or "homelessness" and the physical, historical familiarities of refugees who, across these theatrical moves, are hurled out of the aesthetic jurisdiction thoroughly. Though valorising a dodging off of home as an itinerary to innovative construction may fit an advantaged form of displacement, there is a prerequisite to re-assessment of home for individuals who have been persuasively displaced.

Saleh Omar, the aging protagonist of Gurnah's *By the Sea*, affirms at the inauguration of the novel, "I am a refugee, an asylum-seeker"

(Gurnah,4). With this declaration, Saleh asserts a specific kind of displaced identity, one which seems to incorporate any other identifications that may have been earlier to his migration. By constructing his novel over the occurrences of a protagonist who so overtly declares this identification, Gurnah provokes his critics to meditate on the peculiarities of this kind of migration surrounded by the aesthetic sphere of the novel appearance. Beyond its shocking stories of homelessness and reification, displacement in *By the Sea* is not simply an artistic image, but a material ailment that must be acceptable and assisted to. Through its speculation in storytelling over houses and the objects they comprise, *By the Sea* fabricates an unconventional migrant aesthetic means to the idiosyncratic “mythology of migrancy” cited above, and one which is deep-rooted in an internal domain rather than an advantaged denunciation of home.

Saleh Omar’s foremost home after commencing is the non-home of a refugee detention center, a key segment in the ‘accommodation’ of asylum seekers in this praxis. He describes that center by saying, “The sheds that accommodated us could once just as easily have contained sacks of cereal or bags of cement or some other valuable commodity that needed to be kept safe and out of the rain. Now they contained us, a casual and valueless nuisance that had to be kept in restraint.” (Gurnah,43). At this point, Omar’s association of the “accommodation” of himself and his companion asylum seekers to the protecting of unresponsive entities strengthens the form of the refugee as ‘non-person’ and the detention center as ‘non-home’. Moreover, the progressive transferral from “valuable commodity” to “valueless nuisance” and the semantic swing from ‘accommodation’ to ‘containment’ and afterward ‘restraint’ can be declaimed as gesticulating at the historical change from post-war economic relocation since the Commonwealth to EU-era refugee migration. While Commonwealth asylum seekers were supposed to esteemed merchandise that could subsidize an economy in requisite of striving at least for a time, the recent language of asylum-seeking leaves such fresh migrants as integrally “valueless”.

Conversely, notwithstanding the austerity of his background, the survival of at minimum specific companionship with other asylum-seekers condenses the detention center as a more agreeable place than the lodging house in which Omar is moved afterward. Though ceremoniously owning more homely potential, Omar’s involvement as a similar further disturbing non-home. This is owing in great part to the lingering presence of the owner Celia’s personal weights, which are symbolized as hypothetically perverse, both physically and psychically, reveals best in the lines from the text reads as, “The rug on the bed puffed up in a fine cloud of dust when I pulled it back. The bed sheets looked and smelled as if they had been slept in before. There were spots of blood in the pillowcase. The bed had the same smell as the upholstery downstairs: old vomit and semen and spilled tea.” And further added his inner conflict in his displacement, “I daren’t even sit on it out of an irrational fear of contamination, not just fear of disease but of some inner pollution.” (Gurnah, 56)

Even though Celia, the land owner stresses that the substances in the room “all have meaning for me, every one of them” (Gurnah, 55), for Omar they can only signify horror and humiliation in a new place. He expends the evening “going through Celia’s valuable memories ..., appraising and assessing them as if they were part of a house lot I had acquired at auction”, emphasizing that he “had felt no interest in these objects, even in my own mind, that I did not even speculate on how they were favourite to Celia, never even thought to suppose her life with them” (Gurnah, 56). This objectification of Celia’s ‘memories’ flatters a predicament for Saleh to contest their corrupt authority by dropping them to their mere economic value.

Omar’s indifferent construing of Celia’s possessions puts them in unambiguous disparity to the curve of the ebon table and the casket of *ud*, which obtain chronicle value far outside their substantial value as domestic kinds of stuff. Additionally, Celia’s proclamation of her narrative association with such objects sets Omar’s sagacity of homelessness into aid. The casket’s barely auxiliary is a stolen towel allowed to him by fellow refugee

Alfonso and the “invisible space” it caters to is Omar’s only refuge from the unsanitary atmosphere (Gurnah, 59). The sanctified place of sanitation formed by the towel turns out to be Omar’s only attaching point in this unacquainted and pervasive space, forming the towel as a kind of new artifact, but one that is born of the transitoriness and reification of refugee existence. Its chronicle is that of Rajab Shaaban the asylum-seeker, instead of Saleh Omar the furniture seller. Both of these non-homes, the detention centre, and the boarding house, epitomize a type of perpetuity in temporariness, or ‘dwelling-in-travel’, to arrogate James Clifford’s well-worn phrase.

Ultimately, Omar is shifted to his own home “by the sea” and, as observed above, it is here that permanence instigates to be re-established through the progression of storytelling. Michael Jackson stresses that, specifically for those who encounter the disturbance of brutality and displacement, storytelling becomes “To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one’s own imagination. ... Storytelling provides us a sense that though we do not exactly determine the course of our lives, we at least have a hand in defining their meaning” (Jackson, 15-16). In organizing to verbalize the language of the asylum-seeker, Omar’s narratives turn out to be channelled in the state apparatus, whereas he befalls a mere recipient of the descriptions expressed by the spokespersons of the state. It is only through his confrontation with the novel’s second central character, Latif, that Omar’s intervention as a narrator can be refurbished and, through this progression, a sagacity of home re-formed.

Whereas the narrative entities themselves are not farsighted existent, the new-fangled chronicles replaced by the two protagonists provide them additional layers of meaning despite their material privation. Though the valued ebon table is gone, though reiterated in the “low rectangular table of no refinement” (Gurnah,144) that convenes among them, its importance in the account of their lives is intensified as Latif unearths the enormous price Omar has waged for not returning it. This course of storytelling is intermingled with moments

of generosity, ranging in the figure of cups of coffee and tea, and these interpolations of domesticity assist to hyphenate the narrative and accede its most painful instants, regimenting the narratives of their past lives in a new area. The casket too is withdrawn, as Omar burns “lavender and fragrant gum” before Latif’s entrance, representing the filling up of this new space with the narrative poise of the lost *ud-al-Qamari* (Gurnah, 143).

Omar’s stories of displacement for Latif, employ an unambiguously renewing occasion, “...to make complete the absences and to utter the silences in his life” (Gurnah,146), such that his family’s withdrawal at Omar’s hands is fixed new meaning, relieving his anger and antipathy. Though, for Omar, the storytelling is entrapped as an end itself. He expresses, “I needed to be forgiven of the burden of events and stories which I have never been able to tell, and which by telling would fulfil the craving I feel to be listened to with understanding” (Gurnah, 171). All the way through the narration of such actions, Omar makes obvious locus to his part as a storyteller. Proposing his description of the associations surrounding Hussein’s pursuit of Latif’s brother, Omar insists, “This is the story, repeated in convivial exchanges over cups of coffee, and retailed with righteousness and relish”, suggesting that it is not only his account but also that it had been told several times before by many others (Gurnah, 160), specifying again at the variance between the responsibility of the author and that of the storyteller. Whereas the stories Omar must tell in his mandate to profit asylum indicate a loss of action to recount his life, here the course of storytelling converts in a way to construct new meaning out of painful procedures which transpired long ago, in an unusual place. Throughout this strenuous development of telling the stories of the past, the disagreement between the two families is lastly rested and a new bond of friendship is established between Latif and Saleh Omar.

Though there are two protagonist-narrators in the novel *By the Sea*, the foremost storyteller is a refugee, Saleh Omar. Omar regularly summons consideration to the renovated nature of his accounts by notifying his readers that he will “tell it this way” (Gurnah, 16) or secretarial for

amendments from the “original”. In the opening few pages of the text, Omar portrays “leaving what we know and arriving in strange places carrying little bits of jumbled luggage and suppressing secret and garbled ambitions” by way of a “familiar climax in our stories” (Gurnah, 4), towing our consideration to the pretence that contours. It additionally clues us to surprise who the “our” might incorporate. Is it an allusion to narrators in conventional or, more unambiguously, to narrators who tell chronicles of displacement, or to Gurnah himself, as one of the numerous fiction writers who have drifted from elsewhere? By edging Omar’s voice-over in this way, the author unveils too the uncomfortableness of the course of writing migration into fiction. Conversely, by incorporating a figure of storytelling above one of authorship, Gurnah emerges to be registering his displacement narrative in a more comprehensive purview, which analogizes significantly with the favoured individual of the expatriate writer, as represented by Edward Said and Salman Rushdie.

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