

INTRICACY OF SELF-IDENTITY IN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S MEMORY OF DEPARTURE

P. Monisha* & Dr. C. S. Robinson**

Abstract:

This study involves with the works of the Zanzibari-born author Abdulrazak Gurnah whose fiction is devoted to the narrative of exile, migration and issues of self-identity. Gurnah uses inventive structures as an investigative frame to involve with his emotional topic. He depicts identity crisis through his narratives. Each of his works creates a diverse aesthetic appeal through historical contexts. The character narrates about the sense of frustration, identity crisis and homelessness that Gurnah himself most probably would have experienced as teenager in his life. It creates new path of struggle on which he travels to attain maturity as a protagonist in the novel. During the journey of life from childhood to adulthood, Omar as a protagonist is involved in the search for self-identity with the feeling of homelessness within own country during childhood and after migrating to other country. The first essence is concerned with the memory of exile represented through individual as well as collective experiences and the second essence is concerned with the memory of being a child of an Arab migrant. His multifaceted works which also allow the desire of carrying out this difficult but interesting task. This study explores the theme of self-identity in the novel Memory of Departure.

Keywords: Exile, Migration, Identity Crisis, Aesthetic, Frustration, Struggle, Maturity.

* Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English, St. Peters Institute of Higher Education and Research, Avadi, Chennai.

** Professor, Department of English, St. Peters Institute of Higher Education and Research, Avadi, Chennai.

The title of Abdulrazak Gurnah's debut novel *Memory of Departure* (1987) foreshadows many of the issues that will characterize his later fiction, namely the use and misuse of memory, the pain of exile, and the reassessment of family histories. However, in this article I propose to focus on the performativity of self-Identity have tended to be neglected by critics in detriment to the wider scenarios that analyses of cosmopolitanism and transnational identities bring to mind. Moreover, this novel like all of Gurnah's was Muslim cultural codes which demands that the production of meaning be unraveled from this starting point. Through the character of Hassan, the protagonist-narrator of the novel Gurnah provides a range of alternative ways of performing a more fluid understanding of gender roles, although departure from home and its socially rigid facade seems to be a necessary prerequisite.

Perhaps it would not be extraneous to ponder at first on the very title of Gurnah's debut venture. *Memory of Departure* as the two words 'memory' and 'departure' structure the thematic and contextual axis of the novel. This novel initiates the novelist's recurrent theme of revisiting the past by a compelling process of self-search through the vehicle of remembering and re-creating. Gurnah's novels offer a sense of emotional void which is characterized by bereavement of loss lament for up rootedness and impossibility of alliance. Recent critical thesis on memory study denies monolithic, simplistic and comprehensible link between memory and the process of remembering, memory and recording are the very key to existence becoming and belonging. The concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origin.

Though cognitive psychologists like Margaret memory as the process of retaining information overtime this store house metaphor has now been replaced by the notion that

memory is a dynamic process. In the novel under discussion the departure of Hassan from Zanzibar better not to be restricted on geographical level. It is a psychological departure from the quotidian experiences. The departure does not connote in this case an opportunist escape but desperation of leaving. More than relief it meets crisis. The memory automatically acts more than a connector and becomes an experience itself. Nation works in this tethering as a space of simultaneous longing and loathing.

Gurnah in this novel revisits his homeland Zanzibar almost twenty years after his migration to England by creating an authorial self to challenge the existing histories and beliefs through a concomitant process of recalling and retelling the past. He fled to England in the early 1960s because after the Revolution (1964), Zanzibar became a place of terror and unrest where the rule of autocratic leaders results in political betrayal after the country's independence from the British. However, his new country refuted cordiality and fellow feeling. His 'otherness' was always pointed at by look, sneer, words and gesture.

The departure however intensifies the attachment. He is haunted by the guilt of leaving the countrymen in the infuriating situation of Zanzibar. Out of this estrangement originates his identity which narrates the past simultaneously with a failure of proper remembering. In an interview he himself confesses. My writing then was about lived experience and the notion of people trying to remember is a recurring theme for me. To the categorization of Trinh Minh-ha, Gurnah too writes not about the self but from the self and his voluntary return to the past mutilates the margin of past and present- the present forms not just the sequence but an opportunity of epiphanic experience by which the novelist verbalizes and justifies the history behind his present diasporic status. Therefore, in his narrative, the problematic of remembering and forgetting becomes quintessential. Gurnah ventures to reclaim history through fiction. He

does not imagine Zanzibar but recollects it. Gurnah tends to have reflections on those broken mirrors- not from a hope for recuperation but an obligation of speaking the truth. The homeland is portrayed faulty hegemonic and brutal- as the diasporic identify here expects him to be critical and evaluative.

In this novel, he positions Hassan the central focalizer in the midst of the ethno-centric conflict between the Arab and the indigenous Africans aroused just after the very country matures to the status of independent nation. In his narrative the liberal and inextricably entwined relationship between history and memory facilitates Hassan, a critic of both pre independent and post independent Zanzibar's nationalist discourse. Any nation is conceptualized as the concretization of the hopes and aspirations of the nationalist community. As such the citizen expects of it to fulfill his/ her aspiration. However, with its denial and failure the citizen may lead to migration on the individual plume and unrest and revolution on the collective plume. Post-colonial third world nations because of their respective colonial past and multi- ethnic social form differ from the Eurocentric tactics and concept of nation. Discussion on nation axiomatically raises the question of nationalism, national identity and the enigmatic relation between the citizen and the given nation.

Roughly speaking nation was a geo-political territory having borders nationalism is the consciousness and commitment shared among the denizens of a nation, national identity is the official sign or approval of citizenship and lastly the enigmatic relation confirms that despite the consciousness and the approval the nation often fails to be a welfare state. Recent insights on the issues like globalization, migration, exile, diaspora, despite offering complicacy, indeed resurrect, transform and augment these nation- centric arguments more than ever before. The inclusive paradigm of globalization though aims to abate the socio-political religious difference

among the nation tacitly ratifies the innate virtual hierarchy. The migrated and diasporic individual's intrinsic estrangement between past and present was constantly reminded by the racism and chromatism they experience in the host lands.

As the nation's seldom provide them assurance and comfort they compromise and live even more pathetically a life of doubleness. National identity pre supposes the existence of independent nation. Whereas the western nations are formed out of an urgency of capitalistic ideology of imperialism the colonized states seek the formation in the political struggle with the colonizers in one level and in the cultural- linguistic-territorial uniformity in another level. Therefore, it is rooted both in the anti- imperialist politics and the myth of potential ethnocultural solidarity despite their visible diversity. Ironically in some cases especially in the African continents the political rulers follow and manifest the doctrine of colonial ideology one nation and one state in multi-ethnic social constructions. This calculative strategy and political aimed to privilege the quantitative majority than those who do not share a sense of common heritage. The first thing the independent nation witnesses is a hegemonic outcry on behalf of a particular race, religion or language.

The Idea of Nationalism, with his polarization between civic and ethnic nationalism splits the European civilization into two opposite continents by nationalism struggled to redraw the political boundaries in conformity with ethnographic demands. However, the classification between the civic and ethnic is subject to a country's law and literature. Interestingly validity of this distinction on the ground of generosity can be devalued as these two are actually exclusionary in nature and silhouette of one another. In the context of Zanzibar presently a semi-autonomous part of Tanzania, East Africa the ploy of civic and ethnic nationalism gets at once more vibrant and complicated. Historically an oasis of cross -cultural trade over centuries.

Zanzibar is a land of spice a vile centre of slave trade and most importantly a locale of heterogeneous and composite cultural heritage. The Bantu speaking immigrants from west-central Africa are counted as its first inhabitants. For the land's geographical location as a connector of Asia, Africa and Arabian Peninsula people from these lands throng here either for commercial success or for agricultural profit among whom the Arabs are majority. Zanzibar is controlled by the Sultans of Oman and even in 1832 Said bin Sultan makes Zanzibar City his capital.

The civil war from the history discussed and analyzed above can be termed as a clash between the civic Arab and the ethnic Africans. But the determinative and justificatory factors get shadow as the Arabs too tried to hegemonize their culture marginalizing the Africans from their legitimate ethnographic demands and economic privileges over decades. Though Wilson accuses colonial divide and rule strategy for this rive in the Zanzibari society the Sultanate regime cannot shirk the responsibility. The African revolts in order to change the oppressive social order with a progressive urge. But soon the euphoria of revolution and enfranchisement vanishes by the disappointing and anticlimactic terror, unrest, corruption and dictatorship it produces. The new power mongers with their blindly practised exclusivist strategy and nepotism repeat the vileness of autocracy. Ameir admits that the pursuit of Africanization left a deep scar in the progressive dream as the country was then governed by unskilled, undisciplined, unprincipled administration which bothered less about the collective welfare than personal benefit. Gurnah tries to project Zanzibar in particular and east Africa in general as a multiethnic cross cultural heterogeneous hub which undermines authenticity and purity of nation. Gurnah contours nation as a location of culture a vision, intentionally veiled by the racialized language which tried to scientifically encode.

In his journey he meets Moses, a double-dealer an ardent student with rudimentary progressive spirit of Africanis in disguise and an agent of corruption in reality. As later found out he is an agent who arranges menial pleasures for the Western tourists and thus becomes a subject to neocolonialist ideology. His uncle Ahmed represents the mercantile class emerged after the independence. His arid hospitality corners Hassan to such an extent that even the servant Ali begins to harangue the land. He hesitated again revulsion rising on his face. The Arab populated coastal areas become subject to sheer polarization by the in- land Africans.

This reflects two pejorative common approaches towards the Arabs as lethargic are fuckers immersed only in sexual pleasure in one hand and exploiter of African youths in another. The humiliation resists counter as historical memory again makes Hassan numb. But the prevalent racialist discourse makes Hassan equally suspect of the country progress towards perfection. After his humiliating return, he discovers more degradation in the family space which arguably serves miniature form of the bluster he confronts in the public domain. Despite his inclination to live in the country his mother and sister pursue his immediate leaving. The novel ends with his letter to Salma the fiancée with a promise of return a promise loaded with a possibility of non -return. The Memory of Hassan's departure is not diluted by any easy nostalgia for homeland either. The truth and reality of the historical heterogeneity of the east Africa with its self-identity and cultural split is asserted despite the official and manipulative construction regarding its uniformity and idyllic setting.

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