



# Trauma Of Migration And Racial Discrimination In Abdulrazak Gurnah's Pilgrims Way

Abhay Singh Rana<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Sandeep Kumar Sharma<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral Research Scholar of English, Lovely Professional University.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Lovely Professional University.

**Citation:** Abhay Singh Rana et al. (2024), Trauma Of Migration And Racial Discrimination In Abdulrazak Gurnah's Pilgrims Way, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(4), 6545-6548, Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i4.2420

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Human migration is a socio-political phenomenon that refers to the movement of one person or persons from one place to another. Migration occurs in search of better opportunities to study or join family. Migration also occurs because of unrest in societies to escape conflicts, human violations, and compulsions of circumstances. Immigrants from poor cultures often suffer from an identity crisis, racial conflicts, exploitation, insults, and violations of human rights. Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Pilgrims Way* (1988) undertakes an exploratory journey into the circumstances and reasons that force a person to migrate and the trauma and racial torture that an immigrant faces in a new land. In the writings of Abdulrazak Gurnah, most of the characters immigrate from one culture to another because of political reasons or unrest in the societies they belong to. Because of immigration, the characters of Gurnah's novels suffer from identity crises, cultural conflicts, and racial conflicts. This paper states that because of uncertainty in society and the desire for a better future, the protagonist of *Pilgrims Way*, Daud, migrates to England, where he experiences racism and the trauma of migration. This displacement to a new land leads to mental trauma and the agony of being able to do nothing for himself and his family.

**Keywords:** Abdulrazak Gurnah, migration, unrest, racial conflicts, trauma

## Introduction

Most of the works of Abdulrazak Gurnah focus on migration that originates from the colonial past. When we study the life of Gurnah, we realize that his life is similar to the lives of the characters of his novels, and he has written his experiences and life story through his characters. Born on 20th December 1948 in the Sultanate of Zanzibar, present-day Tanzania, Abdulrazak Gurnah moved to the United Kingdom as a refugee during the Zanzibar Revolution. As a refugee from Zanzibar, Gurnah knows the pain of leaving one's homeland and adjusting to a new society. The life of Abdulrazak Gurnah wasn't different from that of other refugees. In the United Kingdom, he faced poverty and lived an isolated life. His life as a refugee was full of confusion and uncertainties. His refugee experiences made him realize he could speak through his writings. The writings of Gurnah have themes of displacement, racial conflicts, the trauma of migration, distress, and identity crises. Though Gurnah's characters have mostly come from East Africa, the themes and presentations of all his novels are different. During his interview with Nisha Jones, Gurnah states that "one book doesn't necessarily follow the last one logically, although it does come out of the same pool where all the books have come from. There are several different starting points for the novel. On the one hand, it was a way of taking a more extended look at why things are the way they are now. Most of what I have written about has not only been concerned with Zanzibar but with other small places along that coast." (Jones 37)

*Pilgrims Way* (1988) is the second novel of Abdulrazak Gurnah. This novel reflects how migration traumatizes the immigrant, and the immigrant doesn't live in the present; he lives in the past and keeps thinking of his family and the situation back home. His past and the expectations of family members keep on haunting the immigrant, and he lives in fear and guilt for not being able to fulfill the wishes of his family members. Jopi Nayman describes the plight of immigrants, "Suffering from guilt and estrangement, they are often unable to communicate with their families and prefer silence to contact." (Nayman 4)

### Exploration of Migration and its Trauma in Daud's Life

Abdulrazak Gurnah, through his novel *Pilgrims Way*, shows that a migrant comes to the land of his dreams with much hope, but it is not the end of his life's sorrows. Staying at his native place gives him the pleasure of staying with his family and loved ones, but migration takes away even this happiness from him. Most of the migrants come from poor financial backgrounds, and their family members spend their life savings sending them to the land of dreams, and at the land of dreams, migrants are forced to do odd jobs. While thinking of his father, Daud murmurs, "The only good thing about what I'm doing is that I can see the avenue of chestnuts from here. The trees are full of leaf at the moment. It would have pleased you to see them. The work is dirty, and my position is humble. I bet you never thought I would be doing this kind of thing when you handed over your life's savings to me." (Gurnah 67)

Most people come to foreign lands with lots of hopes and the ambition to be successful in life, but the struggle of life in a foreign land where they know no one and where it's challenging to get any help from anyone, financial or emotional, in most of the cases they become bitter as a person and end up becoming nothing in their lives. Daud, the protagonist of Gurnah's *Pilgrims Way*, while going through the same state of mind, says to himself, "others who had come to conquer the world and ended up as car park attendants and account clerks." (Gurnah 89) Daud's dreams had also fallen like a castle of cards. He had come to England as a student to study and have a bright future, but he became a little-appreciated hospital orderly. Felicity Hand understanding of the plight of immigrants states, "Gurnah's work deliver into the experience of less fortunate migrants, of those who have migrated for economic, political or emotional reasons but who fail to live up to the expectations they – and their families – had imagined for themselves." (Hand 39).

Daud's colonial upbringing in Zanzibar convinced him that Britain was where all hopes were fulfilled and all dreams became true. Still, after reaching England, he faced a different reality and all that he had expected: The United Kingdom failed to deliver. In Zanzibar, Daud had a house and a family, but in England, he had no family and inadequate shelter, which had broken windows and rotten and smelly wood. Catherine found his house terrible when she entered it for the first time, "It's awful,' she said when they were back downstairs. It's damp and dirty and stuffy. The furniture looks as if it's been salvaged from a dump. Finger-marks down the walls! The kitchen and the bathroom are just too squalid for words." (Gurnah 132)

Migration is always challenging. It is not easy to leave one's family, nor easy for the family to say goodbye. Migrant keeps on missing his family; he misses his family when there are bad moments when there are happy moments when there are birthdays, and when there are festivals. Sometimes, migrants become full of sorrow and remorse for leaving their families. Daud feels the same guilt while talking to Catherine and states, "I remember saying goodbye to my parents, how my father held my hand as if he didn't want to let me go. How my mother said nothing but watched me as if incredulous at my departure. I remember those things. I don't even know whether she was incredulous, but as time passes these things become true, because I think that's how she would've felt." (Gurnah 137) Migrants are also fearful of losing their loved ones. The fear of being unable to meet them again this lifetime kills them. Daud had the same fear when he remembered his parents. "He shook his head, not knowing what to say, not sure that he should begin at all. 'I don't think I'll see them again,' he said, beginning at the end, then sitting silently while guilt and failure overwhelmed him." (Gurnah 141-142) Daud was under the grip of his miseries and was fighting emotional battles inside him, and he became emotional while discussing his family. "Inner conflict happens when the characters undergo an emotional battle." (Ahmed and Jahan 54)

Leaving a place where one is brought up, leaving friends with whom one has seen happy and sad moments, fills a person with sorrow and a secret terror of leaving everything behind. Edward Wadie Said, in his book "Orientalism," states the mental condition of a person who goes away from his place. "When one travels in Judea, at first a great ennui grips the heart; but when, passing from one solitary place to another, space stretches out without limits before you, slowly the ennui dissipates, and one feels a secret terror, which, far from depressing the soul, gives it courage and elevates one's native genius." (Said 173) Daud receives a letter from his childhood friend Karim, who reminds him of their days together. Daud also gets information about Amina, the sister of his friend Rashid, who passed away in an accident. Karim says that she has become a prostitute. The same is the story of all the societies who struggle; when the man of the family is no more, the women of the family do everything for two end meals, and here, in this case, his friend Rashid's sister had become a prostitute after her brother's death. Daud feels guilty for her becoming a prostitute, "Dear Marehemu, one of our friends from the past has written with all the news from our dead homeland. He tells me your sister is a prostitute ... because you were not there to care for her." (Gurnah 155) Daud was grieving for his friend Rashid, and more than that, he was grieving for Rashid's sister, who had become a prostitute. He was also sorrowful because he was not in his country to care for his friend's family. According to Freud (qtd. in Nayman), "mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on." (Nayman 5)

Daud remembered all he did to leave his place and come to England, the land of his dreams. He told Catherine "how he had left his home, about the forged passport, the bribes, the bogus health certificates. He described the suspicion of the immigration officials at the airport, the terror of the machine-gun turret on top of the airport control tower, the long walk across the tarmac to the steaming aircraft. He told her how he had expected a bullet to end that endless journey." (Gurnah 235-236) He had come to England after many efforts, but

England remained cold to him like its weather in every sphere of life. Zanzabari Daud had come up with a dream of becoming something big, but he failed and started working as a cleaner in a hospital.

### **Examining Racial Discrimination in Pilgrims Way**

Since his arrival in England, Daud faced racial discrimination. He felt that there was a lot of discrimination; natives and whites didn't like the presence of black people in places they used to go, and if some black-skinned man went to a pub, he was poorly treated. Daud remembers one of the incidents during his early days in England: "At one time, he was refused cigarettes and matches he had gone in to buy. To begin with, he thought the barman was mad, a character who was going to shame him by some act of perversity. Then he saw the grins all around the pub and understood." (Gurnah 2). This incident hurt him a lot, and he wanted to abuse the white man there, but he couldn't because he was fearful of being beaten by the people there. Emad Mirmotahari, in his research paper, states Daud's plight, "His days are marked by racial hostility as he is chased out of pubs, menaced by skinheads on the street, and even seemingly benign symbols and signs become instruments of racial torment to him." (Mirmotahari 17)

Daud had known a different progressive England that treated everyone equally and where people had rights, and that's why he had come to England to shape his future and his life. But he forgot that he is an immigrant and that he is a black one. Robert Ferguson states, "Every immigrant experiences this alienation from a new reality. The receiving world has no reason to make room, and its rhythms remain indifferent to the latest perceiver of them. All of the struggle to understand, all of the adjustments to belong, all of the effort to be understood must be made by the new arrival." (Ferguson 258) When the number of immigrants increases in a place, the natives feel insecure. They think that the immigrants are taking away what belongs to them. This situation leads to hostility, and the natives start treating immigrants poorly. "A group of burghers had chased him out of another pub with their stares and angry comments, incensed that he had invaded their gathering and ruined their pleasure." (Gurnah 3)

The treatment given to black immigrants and white immigrants is different. "This hostility and disparaging attitudes to the foreigners is neither uniform nor unbiased. Race, ethnicity, skin colour and geographical locations of the foreigners are determining factors and essential conditions of the treatment they are going to receive." (Banerjee 871) Daud had given shelter to a Norwegian couple for a night as they didn't have a place to go. This Norwegian couple never faced any discrimination in England as they had white skin even though they were also foreigners. Even when this couple took Daud to their place, he was offered nothing, probably because he was black. Catherine, the love of Daud's life, told her mother about Daud. Her mother couldn't digest her daughter going away with a black man. "Then I told her that you were black. She asked me why I was going out with someone black, as if I was doing it deliberately, as if it was a principle. I said that I liked you. That you were no one else I had ever met. She didn't say anything ... and then exploded with all these things. She called me disgusting, told me I'd always been filthy." (Gurnah 128) Catherine's mother wouldn't have objected had Catherine been in a relationship with a white-skinned person. Daud, along with Catherine, went to Lloyd's house on invitation. Catherine was treated well, but Daud was ill-treated because of his ethnicity. Mr Marsh, Lloyd's father, says to Daud, "After all we invited you to our house. But there are just too many of your people here now, and we don't want the chaos of all those places to be brought to us here." (Gurnah 245) The tussle of racial superiority, just based on color, is not fair, but the influx of migrants makes people believe that the migrants are destroying their country and their culture. Natives also like to think that the refugees or immigrants are their subordinates and are never treated equally. "The inevitable racial struggle and immediacy of identity formation problematise the relationship between the residents and refugees. The subordinated marginal status of the migrants in the alien land intensifies the pain." (Banerjee 871)

Racial discrimination also leads to racial conflicts. Daud had a friendship with Karta, a black university student, and Lloyd, an English man who came to Daud as he had no social circle. When he came to England, Karta was a lively man and used to crack jokes, but within a few months of his stay in England, he was bitter and intolerant towards English and English culture. It was the result of the discrimination he faced. Karta never liked Lloyd's presence and left no stone unturned to taunt him whenever it was possible, and this taunting led to a verbal fight between Karta and Lloyd. Karta's anger grew with time, and he was angry with Lloyd because Lloyd was an English man, and English people had done many atrocities to wogs. After facing racial discrimination in England, Karta remembered everything. "Fifty million black people, fifty million Africans were kidnapped from their homes,' he raged at Lloyd. God knows how many others were slaughtered because they were too old or too young or too thin or too fat. Can you grasp that, you arrogant imbecile? Can you even begin to understand what you left behind you? You took only the best and the healthiest. You didn't want any weakling to cut your cane and pick your cotton, and produce your bastards. Can you imagine the havoc your little business left behind?" (Gurnah 47) Karta said to Lloyd. Inside his heart, Daud used to feel the same way Karta said to Lloyd. "The basic social processes invoked by the term race, racism, and discrimination are quintessentially social psychological phenomena; sociologists ignore or downplay this basic insight at the discipline's peril. These concepts concern the meanings of social groupings and how those meanings come to guide patterns of relations among individuals recognized as members of particular groups." (Bobo & Fox 319) The discrimination faced by Daud and Karta makes them friends and a team, and when Karta beats Lloyd, Daud doesn't interfere and remains a silent spectator. "He hit Lloyd again and again, as hard as he could, following him round the room as he barged into furniture and crashed into Daud. In the end Lloyd toppled to the floor, slobbering with fear

and pain, his face covered with blood. (Gurnah 190) "Lloyd screamed, and called again for Daud. Karta glanced round to see if Daud would stop them. When he did not, he swung the bar again, aiming for Lloyd's buttocks. Lloyd was sobbing frenziedly now, abandoned and in agony." (Gurnah 190)

### Discussion and Conclusion

Pilgrims Way deals with migration, exile, identity issues, racial discrimination, conflicts, and resentment. Gurnah's Pilgrims Way is the story of survival, the survival of a person who migrated from Africa to pursue a better future for himself and his family. He ends up taking the job of an orderly. Abdulrazak has portrayed British Society as Racial. At the beginning of the novel, we get introduced to the racism of blacks in the hands of whites, "At another pub, the Seven Compasses, he was told that the spaghetti advertised on the menu was finished when he could see hot, steaming plates being passed over the counter." (Gurnah 2) it reminds of the colonial rule in India where it was written, "No dogs or Indians" used to be the sign outside British establishments during the Raj (Dhillon). The way racism and the treatment of immigrants are drawn into the hands of Britishers, we get a pessimistic tone. We gain hope when Catherine, a white lady, and Daud, a black Muslim immigrant from Africa, fall in love and decide to live together, but the hope is dashed, "They beat him, calling him names and taunting him with questions that did not need an answer" (Gurnah 275) Catherine is also beaten for being in the company of a black, "one of them knocked the stone out of her hands and punched her full in the mouth, sending her toppling backwards. You stupid bitch! He said, standing over her, hands on hips." (Gurnah 275-276)

Migration is never easy for the migrant. Abdulrazak Gurnah has depicted the plight aptly. Migrants don't live in the present; they keep thinking of their past, their family, and where they belong. And this trauma keeps on hunting them. When Catherine asks Daud about his family, he can't control his emotions. "He raised his eyes to her and she saw that they were liquid with a pain he was trying to subdue." (Gurnah 88).

Pilgrims way is a story that portrays the challenges of sorrow and adversity through migration and racial discrimination. The desire to have a better future pushes a person to get out of his place and move to a place full of opportunities. Sometimes, this desire to have a better future affects adversely and leads to mental and emotional trauma.

### References

1. Ahmed, Iftakhar & Jahan, Nusrat. "Displacement and Inner Conflict in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Memory of Departure and by the Sea." *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2023, pp. 49-60.
2. Banerjee, Debayan. "Damned for Difference: A Study of Xenophobia in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Dottie." *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2018, pp 869-873
3. Bobo, L. D., & Fox, C. "Race, Racism, and Discrimination: Bridging Problems, Methods, and Theory in Social Psychological Research." *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2003, pp 319-332. <https://doi.org/1519832>
4. Dhillon, Amrit. "'No Dogs or Indians': Colonial Britain still rules at India's private clubs." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2017, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/no-dogs-or-indians-colonial-britain-still-rules-at-indias-private-clubs-20170630-gx1vtk.html>. Accessed 12 Dec. 2023
5. Ferguson, Robert A. "The Immigration Plight/Immigration Law: A Study in Intractability." *Columbia Journal of Race and Law*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2012, pp. 241-266
6. Gurnah, Abdulrazak. *Pilgrims Way*. Bloomsbury, 2021.
7. Hand, Felicity. "Becoming Foreign: Tropes of Migrant Identity in Three Novels by Abdulrazak Gurnah." *Metaphor and Diaspora in Contemporary Writing*. Palgrave Macmillan London, 2012
8. Jones, Nisha. "Abdulrazak Gurnah in conversation." *Wasafiri*, vol. 20, no. 46, 2005, pp. 37-42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02690050508589982>
9. Mirmotahari, Emad. "From Black Britain to Black Internationalism in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Pilgrims Way." *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2013, pp 17-27. doi:10.1080/00138398.2013.780679
10. Nayman, Jopi. "Reading Melancholia in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Pilgrims Way." *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2013, pp. 4-16
11. Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books, 2003.