

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.86

ISSN0976-8165

THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

14 Years of Open Access

Vol. 14 Issue-II April 2023

Bi-monthly Peer-Reviewed e-Journal

DR. VISHWANATH BITE

Editor-In-Chief

DR. MADHURI BITE

Managing Editor

www.the-criterion.com

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

A Feeling of Otherness Amongst African Migrants in England with Reference to Gurnah's Selected Writings

Kanika Mahajan

PhD Research Scholar.

&

Dr Manjinder Kaur Wratch

Assistant Professor in English,

Desh Bhagat University,

Mandi Gobindgarh (Punjab).

Article History: Submitted-10/04/2023, Revised-27/04/2023, Accepted-28/04/2023, Published-30/04/2023.

Abstract:

“I think it is my fate to live in the wreckage and confusion of crumbling houses.”

If this quotation from Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001) seems strange to us, it is true for some people. Immigrants have to go through the feeling of otherness once they are out of their homes. This research paper sets out to investigate the experiences of Salim, Saleh and Daud, Zanzibar- born Africans, who moved to England in search of a new home and faced uprootedness from their culture and family. Peter J. Aspinall in *The African Diaspora Population in Britain* discusses the elements that contribute to thoughts of hostility and otherness among African migrants and how migrants' lives revolve around search for new identities in diasporic countries as they face feelings of otherness amidst their chaotic lives.

Keywords: Immigrants, Otherness, Uprootedness, Hostility, African Diaspora.

A significant body of critical work within the field of postcolonial studies has focused on the traumatic and racial effects experienced by immigrants living in foreign lands. These studies explore how immigrants are made to feel like outsiders, or 'others,' within the dominant culture of their new home, often as a result of discrimination or prejudice based on their race or ethnicity. Many of these studies have highlighted the particular challenges faced by non-white immigrants in societies that have historically been shaped by colonialism and white supremacy. These challenges may include being treated as second-class citizens, facing barriers to education and employment opportunities, or experiencing discrimination in daily life. As a result of these experiences, many immigrants may develop a heightened awareness

of their own difference and a sense of insecurity about their place within the social hierarchy of their new country. They may question whether they are truly equal to white men and whether they will ever be fully accepted as part of the dominant culture. This feeling of 'otherness' can have significant psychological effects and can shape the ways in which immigrants navigate their new surroundings and interact with others.

In Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels *Pilgrims Way* (1988), *By The Sea* (2001) and *Gravel Heart* (2017) the main characters, who are African migrants in England, experience a sense of 'otherness' as they navigate through their new life in new surroundings. They are often seen as outsiders who struggle to find a sense of belonging in their adopted country. Gurnah's own exilic experiences add a reality touch to them. This feeling of otherness can also be seen in the experiences of African diaspora populations in Britain, as discussed in Peter J. Aspinall's work *The African Diaspora Population in Britain*, which investigates the struggles faced by African migrants in England and focuses specifically on the impact of racism, discrimination and social exclusion in their lives. Peter Aspinall's work provides a comprehensive analysis of the African diaspora in Britain and covers the historical background of the diaspora, its socio-economic profile, and its cultural contributions to British society. His extensive research focuses on the experiences of African immigrants in Britain and sheds light on the challenges they face in terms of assimilation and racism. Aspinall speculates that structural and institutional racism are major obstacles to the integration of African immigrants into British society. Another important point highlighted in his work is the significant impact of historical and contemporary migration patterns of the African diaspora in Britain. Aspinall discusses the history of African migration to Britain, including the experiences of West African soldiers during World War II and the subsequent arrival of Caribbean immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s. His work also highlights more recent migration trends, such as the arrival of Somali refugees in the 1990s.

Abdulrazak Gurnah is a Tanzanian-born British author known for his novels about the effects of colonialism, the refugee experience, and displacement in the world. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2021. Through his characters, Gurnah portrays the prejudices and discrimination Black Africans face in their daily lives and their everyday struggles highlighting the inescapable nature of these challenges. Immigrating to a new country can be a challenging and overwhelming experience, especially when faced with racism and discrimination. The novels *Gravel Heart*, *By the Sea*, and *Pilgrims Way* offer poignant and insightful portrayals of the complex experiences of immigrants in England. These novels shed light on the struggles faced by protagonists Salim, Saleh, and Daud, and the obstacles they encounter as they attempt to navigate a new and often unwelcoming environment.

Gravel Heart, explores Salim's journey from his early years in Zanzibar to his struggles as an immigrant in England. Through a quietly paced narrative, the novel exposes the harsh realities of living in a foreign land, where racism and prejudice often hinder acceptance and assimilation. Similarly, *By the Sea* delves into the experiences of Saleh, who adopts a changed name and remains silent despite knowing English, out of fear of being sent back and not being accepted as an immigrant. *Pilgrims Way* explores the hardships faced by Daud, a fellow African migrant in England, where he encounters discrimination and biased opinions in regularity. The novel offers a poignant portrayal of his experiences, which include being chased away like a dog on many occasions. The novels *Gravel Heart*, *By the Sea*, and *Pilgrims Way* offer a nuanced and sensitive portrayal of the immigrant experience and highlight the challenges and obstacles that immigrants face, including discrimination, racism, and prejudice, and provide insights into the psychological impact of these experiences on the individual. These novels provide a powerful commentary on the difficulties immigrants face as they strive for a better life in a new and often unwelcoming environment.

Otherness as a Central Theme

As highlighted by Aspinall, the experience of feeling like an outsider due to race, ethnicity, and cultural background is a central aspect of the lives of African diasporic populations in Britain (17). This theme is also evident in the novels of Gurnah, where characters such as Daud, Saleh and Salim struggle to adjust to their new surroundings and feel alienated despite the limited job opportunities available to them. For instance, Daud works as an orderly in a hospital, which he perceives to be a low-status job that does not reflect his intelligence. He admits on many occasions about his unhappiness due to this low job. Similarly, Salim works as a waiter in a restaurant despite his passion for literature. The other character Saleh isn't even able to provide for himself because of the low wages he gets from his work. Every character's experiences of being 'othered' due to their race and cultural background restrict them from realising their full potential and getting good jobs for them. These examples from the novels of Gurnah illustrate the prevalence and impact of otherness on the lives of African diasporic populations in Britain.

In *Gravel Heart*, Salim's move to London was met with unforeseen challenges, as he struggled to assimilate into a culture that saw him as the 'other'. This sense of difference, or 'otherness' affected not only his ability to navigate the city and its social boundaries but also his relationships, including a heart-breaking betrayal from his love interest who rejected him due to his non-white identity. This highlights the damaging effects of racism and discrimination

on the lives of immigrants who face barriers to acceptance and belonging in their new homes. The concept of otherness is a product of the dominant discourse of whiteness, which positions non-white individuals as the 'other' in relation to a normative white identity (Aspinall 63). He was not prepared for the boundaries and restrictions that awaited him as an immigrant. Upon arrival, Salim was confronted with a multitude of obstacles, including his uncle's resistance to accepting his chosen academic path. Despite his fervent passion for literature, Salim was coerced into studying business, further reinforcing his feelings of 'otherness' and intensifying his inner struggles. As an individual in a marginalised position, Salim found himself disempowered, unable to advocate for his own aspirations and instead forced to rely on the decisions of others. This rendered him powerless and exacerbated his sense of being an outsider in a foreign land.

In *Pilgrim's Way*, the protagonist Daud is plagued by a profound sense of alienation and the persistent feeling of being an outsider. Despite his best efforts to assimilate and integrate into his surroundings, Daud is continually met with discrimination and exclusion. The opening scene of the novel illustrates this sentiment, as Daud sits alone in a bar, acutely aware of his difference from the predominantly British patrons. This experience is a testament to the heightened sense of 'otherness' that individuals in marginalised communities often experience. Daud's experiences are further exacerbated by instances of discrimination and hostility. He recalls being chased by a dog, which he perceives as being sent by the native residents of England to enforce his 'outsider' status. In another instance, Daud was denied entry to pubs due to his race, as his skin colour did not conform to the dominant culture's norms. These incidents not only reflect Daud's struggles with 'otherness,' but also highlight the broader issues of systemic racism and its insidious nature.

Even when Daud is permitted entry into certain pubs, he is subjected to the whims of the owners and patrons, who can arbitrarily change their attitudes towards him based on his race. The experience of otherness can have significant negative impacts on the mental and physical health of African diasporic populations, who face daily micro-aggressions and discrimination. (Aspinall 92). This experience emphasises the fluid nature of 'otherness,' as individuals in marginalised communities are often subject to the ever-changing and subjective standards of those in power. Ultimately, Daud's experiences underscore the deeply entrenched nature of systemic discrimination and the challenges that individuals in marginalised communities face when seeking to integrate into society.

By the Sea portrays Saleh's struggles with racism and discrimination as an immigrant. He is faced with the same sense of 'otherness', that Salim and Daud experienced

in Gurnah's works, and his experiences reveal how he is not readily accepted as an immigrant but is subjected to mental abuse because of his race. For instance, at the airport, he is robbed of his Mahogany box by an English officer who assumes he has the right to take his belongings without permission, simply because Saleh is Black and different from the dominant culture.

Aspinall explores the ways in which African immigrants have resisted and challenged their marginalisation, highlighting the resilience and agency of these communities. He argues that the experiences of African immigrants in Britain can be understood in the context of the broader history of the African diaspora and that the struggles and experiences of these communities are connected to the broader struggles for racial and social justice. Aspinall's theory is based on the idea that African migrants in England often face discrimination and prejudice based on their race, ethnicity, and national origin. This can result in social, economic, and political marginalisation, which can limit their access to resources and opportunities, and contribute to feelings of alienation and otherness. Furthermore, African migrants may also face discrimination and prejudice based on their immigrant status, which can exacerbate their sense of otherness.

Assimilation Challenges in Another Land

Aspinall highlights the structural and institutional racism that makes it difficult for African immigrants in Britain to assimilate into society. In Gurnah's novels, characters such as Salim, Saleh and Daud struggle to navigate their new environments and fit in with the dominant culture, leading to isolation and displacement. Assimilation challenges refer to the difficulties faced by immigrants in adapting to a new cultural and social environment. Institutional racism and discrimination contribute to the sense of otherness experienced by African immigrants, who face significant barriers to inclusion and social mobility in British society (Aspinall 45). It involves the process of adopting the norms, values, and practices of the host society while maintaining one's own cultural identity. Immigrants may face difficulties in assimilation due to cultural differences, language barriers, discrimination, prejudice, and other factors that make it challenging for them to fully integrate into their new environment. Salim, Saleh and Daud experienced these kinds of challenges.

In *Gravel Heart*, the main character Salim is faced with formidable challenges when it comes to assimilating into British society after emigrating from Zanzibar. One of his greatest challenges is the pressure he experiences from his uncle, who imposes his own expectations and standards of success on Salim, while simultaneously attempting to strip him off his cultural identity. Salim's uncle and aunt's attempts to force him into a specific mould

are evident from the outset of his arrival in Britain, as they choose clothes for him that do not fit his body properly, and demand that he looks after his siblings while his parents are away. These actions undermine Salim's autonomy and a sense of self, forcing him to abandon aspects of his identity that are important to him. Achieving greater inclusion and social justice for African immigrants in Britain requires a concerted effort to dismantle the systemic barriers that perpetuate otherness and promote the values of equality and diversity (Aspinall 121). Despite all challenges, Salim's attempts to assimilate into his new environment included reaching out to Billie, his lover, but unfortunately, her family rejected him based solely on his skin colour. Despite his efforts to befriend them and assimilate into their culture, Salim was met with prejudice and exclusion, highlighting the difficulties faced by individuals who attempt to assimilate into new cultural settings. However, his efforts are fraught with internal conflict, as he struggles to balance his own desires and needs with the expectations placed on him by his family and society. This sense of internal discord highlights the complexity and difficulty of assimilation, particularly for individuals who are forced to give up elements of their own culture and identity in order to fit into a new environment.

Salim also faces challenges with language and communication, as he is not fluent in English when he arrives in London. This makes it difficult for him to connect with others and fully participate in British society. Additionally, Salim experiences discrimination and racism from some of the British people he encounters, which makes it even more difficult for him to assimilate and feel accepted. These challenges contribute to a sense of otherness and alienation for Salim, highlighting the complexities and difficulties of assimilation for immigrants.

In *Pilgrim's Way*, the assimilation challenges faced by the main character, Daud, are primarily related to his cultural and religious background as a Muslim from Zanzibar. Daud struggles to find acceptance in the predominantly White and Christian British society, where he feels like an outsider. He faces discrimination and racism from some of his colleagues and neighbours, and his attempts to assimilate are met with resistance. He tries to adjust to his surroundings. In one incident Daud tells us when he gets an invitation to a party and how when he tries to mingle with ladies from West Indies, but is simply rejected because he was an outsider. In another incident the parents of his lady love Catherine, reject him merely because he was Black. Incidents like these develop feelings of being 'others' as immigrants and constantly remind them of their differences.

Uprootedness from the Culture in Gurnah's Novels.

In Gurnah's novels *Gravel Heart*, *By the Sea* and *Pilgrims Way*, the theme of uprootedness from one's culture is a central focus. The main characters, Salim, Saleh and Daud, are second-generation immigrant who struggle to reconcile their British upbringing with their Tanzanian heritage. This sense of displacement is further complicated by their fraught relationship with their loved ones, who embody the traditional values of their ancestral culture. Throughout the novels, Gurnah employs rich imagery to evoke the tension between Salim's, Saleh's and Daud's sense of belonging to their adopted country and their longing for a deeper connection to their roots.

Moreover, Gurnah's exploration of the theme of uprootedness is not limited to Salim and Daud alone but extends to the wider community of African immigrants in England. Through his nuanced portrayal of the characters' experiences, Gurnah highlights the complex ways in which cultural identity can be both a source of pride and a cause of alienation. Ultimately, these novels offer a poignant commentary on the challenges and complexities of navigating the terrain between two cultures. Through his evocative language and vivid imagery, Gurnah captures the profound sense of dislocation and longing that is at the heart of the migrant experience.

Aspinall also emphasises the importance of uprootedness in understanding the experiences of African migrants in England. His theory is supported by other research and various studies in the field, such as *The African Diaspora in Britain: Black and Ethnic Minorities, Racism, and Identity* by James E. Back, which provides a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of African migrants in England, including the ways in which they may be impacted by discrimination and prejudice, and the role of literature and research in understanding their experiences.

The novel, *Gravel Heart* provides a fictional portrayal of Salim's challenges, which aligns with Aspinall's theory about feelings of alienation and otherness among African migrants.

Aspinall's work is based on extensive research and draws on a variety of sources, including interviews with African immigrants, government reports, and statistical data. One of the key themes that emerges from his research is the idea that African immigrants in Britain are often seen as 'other' or as outsiders in relation to mainstream British society. Aspinall argues that this feeling of otherness is reinforced by the discrimination and marginalisation that African immigrants experience in areas such as education, housing, and employment. Aspinall also emphasises the importance of literature and research in understanding the experiences of

African migrants in England, which is well-understood in Gurnah's novels. The novel provides a fictional portrayal of the emotional and psychological experiences of African migrants, which can provide insights into the ways in which discrimination and prejudice may impact their lives.

The novel also highlights the feeling of alienation and otherness that not Daud but his friend Karta also experiences in form of discrimination and prejudice. Aspinall contends that factors like these can contribute to feelings of alienation and otherness among African migrants, and this is evident in Karta's feelings of isolation and disconnection from British society. He is always on the verge of fighting because he cannot tolerate this 'otherness' anymore. His edgy behaviour is quite obvious and the reason is again that he is a Black. Aspinall also emphasises the importance of literature in understanding the experiences of African migrants. As in *Gravel Heart*, Gurnah uses Salim's narrative to give voice to emotional and psychological experiences of African migrants, which allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they face.

Another aspect of Aspinall's thesis that is represented in the novel is the discrimination and prejudice that African migrants may face based on their immigrant status. Daud, who is a Black immigrant, narrates his challenges because of his status, he tells when once he went to have dinner with his English girlfriend Catherine he was cornered, threatened and abused. He was too shaken by the incident that his friend Catherine had to come forward to save him from those bullies. Incidents like these exacerbate his sense of otherness. His experiences of discrimination and marginalisation make it difficult for him to form close relationships with others, which is consistent with Aspinall's argument that discrimination and marginalisation can limit the social connections of African migrants. It also leads to his sense of disconnection from his own cultural heritage. Aspinall's research highlights the ways in which discrimination and marginalisation may lead to the loss of cultural identity among African migrants, which is evident in Daud and Salim's struggle to maintain a connection to their own culture.

There are a number of writers who have offered critical perspectives on Peter J. Aspinall's theory of the African diaspora population in Britain. David Dabydeen, in his book *A Harlot's Progress: Notes on the Study of the Black Diaspora*, argues that Aspinall's theory does not sufficiently account for the complexity and diversity of the experiences of African migrants in Britain. Dabydeen contends that Aspinall's theory tends to homogenise the experiences of African migrants, ignoring the ways in which factors such as class, gender, and sexuality can shape their experiences. Zine Magubane, in her article "The Transnational Politics of Black

Women's Hair," critiques Aspinall's theory for its lack of attention to the ways in which gender shapes the experiences of African migrants in Britain. Magubane argues that Aspinall's theory fails to take into account the ways in which African women migrants may experience discrimination and marginalisation in ways different than the African men migrants.

In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy critiques Peter J. Aspinall's theory of the African diaspora population in Britain by suggesting that it only examines the experiences of African migrants in England and does not fully consider the transnational aspects of the African diaspora. Gilroy believes that a broader perspective is needed to fully comprehend the complexities of the experiences of African migrants in Britain.

African migrants in Britain experience feelings of otherness and marginalisation due to discrimination and prejudice, which can be seen as implemented in the novel *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. When Saleh Omar arrives at the British airport he was expecting kindness and hospitality but rather the treatment was biased where his belongings were thoroughly checked and his best asset was taken by the English officer. Being marginalised subjects them to racism and biasedness. The officer tried his best to pursue Saleh to go back to his hometown and abused him merely because he was an African migrant.

In all the three of Gurnah's novels, the theme of a feeling of otherness amongst African migrants in England is a prominent one. The main characters are African migrant living in England who struggle to find a sense of belonging in their new homes. Throughout the novels, they are made to feel like an outsider, as they are differently seen by the White British people around them.

The novels ultimately suggest that Saleh Omar's and Latif Muhammad's experiences of otherness and marginalisation are not unique, but are rather part of a far-reaching outline of discrimination and marginalisation experienced by African migrants in England. Gurnah's novels thus provide a powerful exploration of the experiences of African migrants in England and the concept of otherness.

A similar example can be seen in their experiences at work. Their colleagues often make racial remarks and exclude them from social activities. This discrimination is further reinforced by the fact that they are not able to speak English fluently, which exacerbates their feelings of isolation and marginalisation. In Gurnah's novel, the characters Daud, Salah, and Salim experience a deep sense of otherness as refugees, both in terms of their race and nationality and their legal status. Gurnah dexterously conveys the characters' feelings of estrangement and isolation through vivid imagery and symbolism. The pervasive imagery of

racism serves as a powerful symbol of the dislocation and disorientation experienced by these characters, highlighting their sense of rootlessness and detachment. The characters' reluctance to move out of their houses reflects their profound sense of alienation and fear of the unknown. They prefer to silently suffer in their current situation rather than risk further isolation and dislocation. This feeling of 'otherness' also engenders a sense of fear and aloofness, as racism looms behind them at every turn, causing them to retreat further into their shells.

Thus, Gurnah's use of imagery and symbolism powerfully conveys the characters' experiences of otherness, highlighting the pervasive impact of racism on their lives and their reluctance to venture beyond their current circumstances. The novels ultimate message is one of universality, suggesting that Daud, Saleh and Salim's encounter with otherness and marginalisation are not unique to them alone, but rather are emblematic of the broader patterns of discrimination and marginalisation that is faced by African migrants in England. By exploring the concept of otherness in such depth, Gurnah provides a compelling analysis of the migrant experience, offering a poignant commentary on the often-overlooked challenges and complexities of life as an outsider in a foreign land.

Gurnah offers a powerful and empathetic exploration of the experiences of immigrants, through the characters of Salim, Saleh and Daud in *Gravel Heart*, *By the Sea* and *Pilgrims Way* shedding light on the systemic barriers that prevent many from achieving their dreams and living a life of dignity and respect. Aspinall's work and the writing of authors like Gurnah provide important insights into the lived experiences of African immigrants in Britain. Their research and writings amplify the voices of marginalised communities and shed light on the institutional barriers that hinder progress towards greater equality and social justice.

Works Cited:

- Adejunmobi, Moradewun, and Carli Coetzee. *Routledge Handbook of African Literature*. Routledge, 2019.
- Aspinall, Peter J., and Martha J. Chinouya. *The African Diaspora Population in Britain: Migrant Identities and Experiences*. Springer, 2016.
- Banaji, Mahzarin, et al. "Systemic Racism: Individuals and Interactions, Institutions and Society." *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-021-00349-3>. Accessed 7 Mar. 2023.
- Dabydeen, David. *A Harlot's Progress*. Random House (UK), 1999.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard UP, 1993.

Gurnah, Abdulrazak. *By The Sea: By the Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 2021*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022.

---. *Gravel Heart: By the Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 2021*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

---. *Pilgrims Way: By the Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature 2021*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.

Migration Studies, no. 4, 2011, pp. 587–602. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23012765

Zine, Magubane. “Gender and Society.” *The Transnational Politics of Black Women’s Hair*, vol. 12, 1998, pp. 121-140.

.