

Transnationalism And Slave Trade In Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*

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Abstract

Transnationalism implies a weakening of the control a nation-state has over its borders, inhabitants, and territory. This paper examines the increase in immigrant populations in developed countries as a result of global economic development, leading to the formation of multicultural societies where immigrants maintain connections with their cultures of origin. This paper focuses on the increased global mobility and access to instantaneous worldwide communication technology, boundaries dissolve and territorial control imposed by the traditional nation-state became less relevant. This paper examines the East African slave trade or multicultural slave trade and how it has changed over time especially since Africans were sent to the Middle East, to the Indian Ocean islands and later to America.

Keywords: Transnationalism, Multiculturalism, Post colonialism, Abdulrazak Gurnah, East African community

Abdulrazak Gurnah is a Tanzanian-born British writer. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2021 for his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of refugees in the gulf between cultures and continents. His forced migration from Zanzibar to the UK in 1968 was one of the aspects of his biography. The trauma of his experience has fed much of his literary imagination and the wellspring of his novels of loss and displacement. His novels revolve around refugees who travel from Africa to Europe and contemplate issues such as the identity and spiritual belonging of refugees in the context of post-colonial society. He treats the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism coldly and rationally through his writing and he gives an account of great sympathy toward refugees who suffered from colonial persecution. The study has adopted the qualitative methodology. The paper deeply delves on descriptive textual analysis of Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*.

Transnationalism pertains to the interactions and exchanges that occur across national boundaries. It acknowledges the multi-geographical reality of immigrants who originate from one country but live their lives in another. The transnational slave trade means the transportation of between 10 to 12 million enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to America. The Swahili Arabic trading system and its Indian Ocean infrastructure declined in the nineteenth century under the influence of European imperialism, focusing local Africans, Arabs, and Indians to reposition themselves in a regional economy now operating in a global context, which is the historical account of a pivotal turning point in east African history in the early 20th century. The novel reveals a rich tapestry of intertextual references that includes the Bible, The Quran and a post-colonial critique of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

East African region is composed of nations which have cultural, political and climatic variations. However, economic and political disputes are the main cause of the ongoing degradation of the natural environment. East African people used to speak in the Swahili language especially those who live in Kenya, Uganda, The United Republic of Tanzania and Malawi. African Countries became dependent by introducing a mono-cultural economy for the territories. Due to colonialism African traders and labour force were dehumanised. It forced the African people to work in colonial plantations at very low wages and displaced them from their homelands.

Transnationalism limits a broad range of economic, social cultural and political cross-border activities and practices. This modifies the people's sense of belonging to places, affects their citizenship and nationality, and could find changes in the everyday life of their aspirations and decisions. Transnationalism relates to diaspora, Migration, globalisation, multiculturalism, post-migration effect and internationalism. This also examines the East African slave trade of Zanzibar. Slavery existed in Africa before the settlers came to the continent of Africa. Particularly in East Africa, ethnic groups such as Yao, Makua, and Marava had conflicts with each other and especially people within the continent started trade. Graziella Bertocchi's article mentions that "over the five centuries running from 1400 to 1900, the slave trade classified into trans-Saharan, Indian ocean, red sea, and trans-Atlantic slave trades" (2).

Paradise is considered to be a breakthrough work of Abdulrazak Gurnah. It is a coming-of-age novel and it focuses on a child or teenager's transition from childhood to young adulthood. According to Sophy Kohler, "In *Paradise*, the seemingly incompatible states of mobility and immobility overlap in the protagonist, Yusuf, whom we first meet as a young boy living in the fictional town of Kawa in colonial East Africa" (275). As a 12-year-old boy, Yusuf was sold to his uncle, an Arab merchant by his father. "His visits were brief and far between, usually accompanied by a crowd of

travellers and porters and musicians. He stopped with them on the long journeys he made from the ocean to the mountains, to the lakes and forests, and across the dry plains and the bare rocky hills to the interior” (Gurnah 3).

Because he couldn't repay his debt to him. Yusuf's experiences include journeying to the interior parts of East Africa and looking at how the conventional way of life has been transformed by the impingement of colonialism. At the coast, Yusuf's mobility is restricted for some years before he joins Aziz's caravan party, which is travelling to the interior. Yusuf could find freedom when he was involved in the trading parties and he achieved it through servitude and dependency. The displacement of Yusuf made him remain in his previous life. “Yusuf was allowed to carry his little bundle: two pairs of shorts, a kanzu which was still new from last aide, a shirt, a copy of the Koran, and his mother's old rosary. She wrapped all but the rosary in an old shawl, then pulled the ends into a thick knot” (Gurnah 17). Yusuf lost his brownstone rosary that he got from his mother. This represents the loss of his mother's love and care. This led to dispossession. This trading town helps to exchange more stories when traders pass through When Yusuf was left behind Hamid and Maimuna. “Many traders passed through the town, and if they were coast people or Arabs or Somali, they stopped at Hamid's house for a day or two while they sorted out their affairs and rested” (Gurnah 71). Those stories bring bravery and adventure to them beyond the constraints of place and circumstance. “The travellers brought news with them and incredible stories of daring and fortitude on the journeys” (Gurnah 71).

The chapters in the story portray the heterogeneity of the region which includes the creation of the migratory labour groups, the Indian Ocean maritime migratory flows, and the local flows of various coastal networks. The East African society has brought social and economic relationships between African, Arab, Indian and European peoples; between Muslims, Christians and Hindus; between men and women; between colonizers and colonized individuals; between free and unfree individuals. In the context of the caravan trade, we could find the multilayered space at the time. From the end of the eighteenth century, the development of the East African economy has increased mainly through investment and the trade activities of Arabs, Africans, Indians and Europeans which connects the region to the world economy. Slave trade and ivory trade became predominant in the first half of the nineteenth century and plantation production most commonly cotton and clove growing in Zanzibar and Mamba boomed in the second half of the nineteenth century. As trade in East Africa flourished, trade in West Africa experienced a decline. Yao, Makone, and Nyamwezi traders from the interior regions managed the supply of ivory and slaves to the coast and Zanzibar. During this period, Arab and Swahili traders were only marginally accepted in the interior. It was through their access to long-term commercial credit and the growing political influence of Zanzibar along the coast that they eventually overcame their African competitors. Fawzia Mustafa mentions “Europeans faced off the entrenched but challenged forces of the caravan trade's institutions of labour from its financiers (usually Indian), to its porters, both coastal and Nyamwezi (from the interior), all of whom historically also served as the logistical arm and transport for many, if not all, of the multiple European expeditions to the interior” (17-18). Over the years Zanzibar-based and other coastal traders dominated the caravan trade and this novel portrays the brittle position of Arab and Swahili traders towards their trading partners from the interior part of trade.

Gurnah's Narrative allows us to experience East African society from the perspective of an individual who led a precarious life. We can see that Yusuf's decision presents a dilemma to the readers and which reflects the contradictory nature of the conditions in which lives. The various research on African literature enhanced our understanding of the African economy which was the central to the novel *Paradise*. For instance, salaried labourers were also popular in the nineteenth century. Slavery was especially on the plantations, but the image portrayed that the African enslaved people were forced to carry ivory though it has variations in the caravan trade and it doesn't show off the practices of the caravan economy. The establishment of the colonial economy and opportunities for salaried labourers has increased the space in caravan agencies. Many aspects have resonated with the story of paradise. Here we could see Aziz who was an Arab merchant salaried the porters working in the caravan. Even though they were salaried not free from him. This represents slavery. In East Africa, African institutions are mostly interlaced with Islamic traditions and slavery. Islamic slavery was a complex one and varied from plantation slavery in the Western world and other institutions of slavery across time and space. Slaves were legal persons and their social status had separate rights and duties. According to social mobility, military and domestic slaves and agriculture workers should have different rules and duties. This novel exposed the persistent pervasiveness of slavery and economic dependency in the pre-war period of East Africa. According to Nina Berman “The boundaries between Swahili, Arab, Indian, and African communities are fluid, and much of the novel describes intimate interaction between members of various ethnic and religious communities, and exposes the knowledge they have about each other” (55).

Yusuf, a central character was self-emancipated and his choice might be inspired by his interaction with salaried workers in the caravan. German colonized a large part of the society, notably poor, enslaved people and economically independent individuals. Along with the Askaris, the ruga ruga, the Wapagazi and farm labourers got opportunities from German colonizers. “Yusuf went to explore the debris of the encampment. He approached carefully sniffing as if he expected the

askaris to have left an acrid mark of their passage.” (Gurnah 247). An askari means a local soldier who was working for the armies of the European colonial powers in Africa. In that period the European colonial powers in Africa recruited soldiers named as askaris and they were employed by Portuguese, Italian, German British and Belgian colonial armies. They played a vital role in the colonialism period and served as internal security forces. During the war time askari units served outside their colonies, especially in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Here we could see the opportunity provided by Germans that was recruiting African people. They also indulged in forced migration, desertion and violent transgression which became a colonial reality.

According to the novel, we would get information on German colonies. The colonial armies of Germany employed the native troops with European officers and NCOs in its colonies. Ruga-Ruga were irregular troops in East Africa. They serve as mercenaries along with the regular Askaris. They were trained by European colonial officers. And mostly ruga from tribal warriors during the conflict. At the end of the novel, Yusuf like other soldiers picked out for employment with the Germans. From this observation, we could see both positive and negative consequences. The slave trade was used for the development of African countries. Otherwise, the African country can have an average level of income as compared to the other developing countries. Slave trade still prevailed and it has remained static during these years in which many governmental organizations have attempted to abolish slavery.

Millions of Africans and people with African ancestry have been killed by this operation i.e., the trans-Atlantic slave trade throughout its inception, its prosperous years, and up until its known end. The slave trade is unquestionably a crime against humanity when taking into account the historical realities of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and analysing the international standards for categorizing crimes against humanity. One of the dangerous annals of human history was the trans-Atlantic slave trade and it has never been resolved.

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