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ON THE THIRD WORLD'S SUFFERING AND RESISTANCE IN *PARADISE*

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ABSTRACT

Paradise is a novel written in English by British Tanzanian author Abdulrazak Gurnah and published in 1994. This book challenges the mainstream impression of Africa in the western world and shows people a more real side of Africa and the people living on it. It describes the East African continent during the colonial rule of Germany. The story develops from the perspective of Yusuf, a boy born in that land, and records his growth influenced by colonialism. The colonists and colonialism have brought dual physical and spiritual trauma to the local residents of East Africa. From the protagonist Yusuf, people can see the confusion and loss of the people of the third world in the pervasive oppression. However, in this novel, Gurnah also skillfully describes how these "silent" aborigines face the life of having to lose their homes and freedom, as well as their resistance to oppression through their own ways, which are precisely the parts that people ignore when reading this book. In this paper the author will analyze the persecution brought by German colonial rule to the East African local people, and meanwhile reflect how the people of the third world make a series of active action to resist those oppression for their survival and life and what kind of postcolonial writing strategy Gurnah uses to recall the local culture, national culture and Swahili civilization.

Keywords: *Paradise*; Post-colonialism; Abdulrazak Gurnah; Resistance.

Introduction

On October 21, 2021, British Tanzanian author Abdulrazak Gurnah was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Swedish Academy of Arts commented on this author and his works as follows: "for his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents"(The Swedish Academy of Arts).As the fifth African writer on the list of the Nobel Prize for Literature, Gurnah once again draws people's attention to the land of Africa and the civilization generated on it. Gurnah writes his works in English, which makes him gain a wider audience. Through the presentation of these works, people once more turn their eyes to that weathered land and its people's lives and wills.

Paradise is the fourth novel written by Gurnah, and it was published in 1994. This novel has been nominated for the Booker Prize and the Whitberry Book Award. In this book, Gurnah, as always, represents the

lands of East Africa, which were colonized by European imperialist country such as Germany. The background of this novel is set in East Africa before the First World War. In that era, the slave trade prevailed, and Yusuf, the protagonist, was sold to a rich Arab businessman Uncle Aziz as a slave by his father as a mortgage. The strange environment and the upheaval of life brings a huge blow to Yusuf. He is cruelly exploited as a slave, and has to follow Aziz's caravan anywhere to see the cruel events that have taken place on the African continent. At the end of the story, in order to get rid of despair and shame and regain some dignity, he runs away and chooses to join the militia recruited by the colonists. This book challenges the mainstream impression of Africa in the western world and is considered as a multi-level story, which is violent but beautiful.

Since *Paradise* was published, scholars have taken different perspectives to analyze this novel. At present, the main research on this book focuses on the following aspects: the intertextuality of it and other works such as *Heart of Darkness*, the impact of colonialism on East African countries, the male homosexual desire in this novel...(Zhou 96). And in this paper, the author is devoted to analyzing the East Africa in the shadow of colonialism and people's actions and behaviors in the third world to resist those oppressions by their special means. Moreover, postcolonial theories in book *The Empire Writes Back* helps better in this paper to analyze how the people of the third world make choices in the face of colonialism and how these people resist oppression. Meanwhile, the author analyzes the strategies Gurnah adopted to write about the resistance of the people of the third world and what Gurnah made to recall his and their own culture and civilization.

Post-colonialism and *The Empire Writes Back*

In 1978, Said published *Orientalism*, which revealed the third world of the East in the imagination of western scholars. Later, Spivak presented in her book *Can the subaltern speak?* that the colonized were actually deprived of the right to speak. Then, the scholar Homi Bhabha emphasized that the colonized who were deprived of power had "deformation" in the process of imitating Westerners, thus creating another space.

These three great scholars have made great contributions in the field of post-colonialism research. However, the important figures of post-colonialism theory are far more than these scholars. In fact, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, these scholars revealed the term "postcolonial theory" for the first time in their work *The Empire Writes Back*. They defined the scope of post-colonialism, that is, from the beginning of colonization to today, it belongs to the postcolonial period. This definition completely changed the postcolonial concept since World War II (Zhao 2).

The defect of Said's research is that the orientalism he studied does not actually involve the East itself. As a supplement, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, they focus their analysis on colonial literature and discuss how these colonial literature develop themselves in the shadow of colonialism. In their researches, they uncover the heavy political and historical veil covered by colonial literature, and examine these abundant and self-cultural literature from a unique perspective, in which people can find the resistance of these literature to colonialism in order to defend for their own existence, their literature and their culture.

Ashcroft and others have studied the strategies and theories of the misappropriation of colonial literature, the resistance to the English language of the suzerain, as well as the language problems encountered in post-colonial writing. In postcolonial writing, the cancellation of the imperial center and the active diversion of the central culture and language in the text are effective strategies to resist colonialism (Ashcroft 6). What's more, the representation of the local culture of the third world countries is the most direct reflection of colonial resistance.

Authors born on the African continent must have conveyed more profound meaning in their works when writing about their hometown. In *Paradise*, Gurnah writes about the tough growth and choice of a little boy influenced by European colonialism, but to large extents, he dispels the voices of imperialism and colonialism, which is also why this book is called a novel of de-Europeanism. He writes about the ordinary and humble people in face of oppression, and how they made their voices and efforts for their own life.

The Third World in the Shadow of Colonialism

Paradise tells the story of the nobodies in history, and the life of the people of the third world in the suffering African continent in the influence of colonialism and imperialism. Unlike European writers who wrote about Africa, Gurnah, who came from Africa and immigrated to Britain, presented different views and images of Africa in this work, helping people to understand this land and its culture more comprehensively and deeply (Zhang 71).

Paradise is developed from the perspective of the little boy Yusuf. Yusuf's father runs a hotel and owes a lot to a rich Arab businessman Aziz. Yusuf is pawned to Aziz when he is young to repay his father's debt. At the beginning of the story, Yusuf begins to feel nervous when he is still with his parents. The rich and interesting uncle who often comes to visit them this time makes Yusuf feel scared. "Uncle Aziz gave off a strange and unusual odour, a mixture of hide and perfume, and gums and spices, and another less definable smell which made Yusuf think of danger (Gurnah 3)." This uneasiness indicates that he will be sold as a slave to mortgage his father's debt. The change of Yusuf's family and the bankruptcy of his father's business were closely related to the plunder of the colonists on this land.

In *Paradise*, there is no direct description of the brutal colonial and war scenes, as well as the tragic scenes of the colonized areas. The story took place five years before the beginning of the First World War, which was the last few years of German colonial rule (Berman 54). The Germans do not appear frequently in their hometown from beginning. The protagonist's direct contact with the Germans actually only took place twice in this book. One is in Chatu's town and then is at the end of the novel when the officer and his askaris recruit soldiers in his town.

Although the lives of these native inhabitants are not often filled with colonists, the influence of colonialism is still penetrating and imperceptible for the local people. Colonial conquest often first controls the land and treats the aboriginal people living on it as willless puppets that can be manipulated at will. As conquerors, the colonists master the current means of communication, making the aborigines become vagrants who are forced to lose the concept of "home" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 79). It is with such power that the protagonist Yusuf in this book loses his home and freedom.

When Yusuf is eight years old, he comes to Kawa with his parents. And his father runs a hotel there. And "They came to Kawa because it had used it as a depot for the railway line they were building to the highlands of the interior. But the boom passed quickly, and the trains now only stopped to take on wood and water.....Sometimes Yusuf heard his father say that the whole town was going to Hell" (5).

The German colonists grasp the economic lifeline of Kawa town at that time. With their arrival, this town has a temporary and illusory prosperity but when they leave, the whole town is in a state of ruin. They change the normal life of people who live in Kawa. Yusuf's father accumulates huge debts due to these drastic changes, and thus has to sell his son to pay the debt. Yusuf has to leave his home and his parents, and becomes a slave of Uncle Aziz.

Another character in the text, Khalil, has the same fate as Yusuf. Because of his father's debt, he is sold as a slave of Aziz and can only work for him day after day. Therefore, in those years, the pressure of colonialism on people is often not direct and brutal. On the contrary, it will bring some so-called but illusory prosperity and beauty, and then make the poor local residents fall into a more difficult life.

What's more, colonialism brings local people the more serious internal trauma for the people who are forced to lose their home. When Yusuf first comes to the store of merchant Aziz, he cannot fall asleep all night. The stray dogs wandering and drooling in front of the door scared him made him go into a trance. Dog is the most animal metaphor in this novel. In the native Islamic culture, this animal represents evil and incomprehension. Here, however, it is the metaphor of colonialists and oppressors.

These vicious dogs have become lingering nightmares in Yusuf's mind. When he sees them, he can only feel his cowardice. And in his minds, he thinks that he may be killed by these vicious dogs if he doesn't pay

attention to them. At the end of the novel, the real German colonists come with these vicious animals. On that land, the suffering of Yusuf is also the suffering of many local residents, who endure the plunder of their homes by the invaders and the constraints on their freedom, and have to face a kind of spiritual colonial trauma.

Resistance from the Third World

The influence of colonialism is pervasive in this East African continent, and it has permeates all corners of the lives of residents. In *Paradise*, It directly causes Yusuf and Khalil to lose their homes and relatives. Because of their father's debt, they lost their freedom and were sold to the merchant Aziz as slaves. The experience of these two characters is only a microcosm of the lives of countless people living on that land. They can't get rid of the influence of colonialism and completely get rid of this oppression. However, the characters in the author's works have not completely lost themselves and become slaves who will only depend on and submit to hegemony. Their resistance to oppression is reflected in trivial daily words and actions. At the same time, in this book, Gurnah also adopts creative strategies to show the resistance of people from the third world to colonialism and the recalling of these people to their own culture.

Life choices under oppression

The sudden identity change and strange environment makes Yusuf difficult to adapt, and his life seems to fall into a tangle that is hard to break away. When he first comes to work in the shop of Uncle Aziz, Yusuf often cries in his sleep. He is afraid of stray dogs wandering at the door of the shop at night, because he could see his cowardice from these vicious animals.

Compared with his reaction, Khalil, who has the similar identity and experience with Yusuf, seems to know better how to get along with these suffering. When Yusuf is overwhelmed by the dogs, Khalil comes in time to scold the animals in Arabic. The vicious dogs in the article are metaphors for colonial oppressors. Their different attitudes towards colonial oppression also produced different effects (Zhu and Zheng 69). Yusuf refuses to learn Arabic and expresses his resistance to colonialism with silence. Khalil, on the contrary, has become an active submissive, fighting for some rights for his own survival.

"As for Uncle Aziz, for a start he ain't your uncle. 'he told him. 'This is most important for you. Listen to me, hey, kifa urongo. He ain't your uncle'"(23). *"If you cry at night and have those frightening dreams...You must learn Arabic, then he'll like you more"* (25).

Khalil is very clear about his life situation and knows how to make his life less difficult. He is willing to accept his slave status and learn the slave owner's language, and meanwhile he persuades Yusuf to learn Arabic. He always appears as an active "submissive". Gurnah's design of letting Khalil disperse these fierce dogs in Arabic in this novel also incorporates his own thinking about the anti-colonial way, that is, it is not enough to remain silent in the face of plunder and oppression. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth is the better way for oppressed people to gain their vitality.

In the end of the story, Yusuf's choice is staggering but provides new thinking to all readers. He has been fighting against colonialism, but finally chooses to join the German colonial militia.

"He glanced around quickly and then run after the column with smarting eyes" (247). Yusuf sees that the colonists who come to their homes to collect militia left excrement on their land at will, while the nearby dogs are covetous and regards it as treasures. This is obviously a metaphor. For Yusuf, it is difficult to return to his original home. In order to avoid becoming a dog without self-conscious, he choose to join the column of colonist. Only by understanding the enemy can people deal with them. This arrangement of Gurnah provides a new way of thinking for exploring the post-colonial trauma(Zhu and Zheng 70).

Although Yusuf and Khalil have different attitudes and choices in the face of colonialism, they still have similarities, that is, they are not fierce and extreme opponents to colonialism. Even sometimes, they conform to oppression and power. However, this obedience does not mean that they have alienated and lost their self-consciousness and thinking ability because of the influence of colonialism. What Gurnah shows in *Paradise* is the more realistic response that the people of the third world can make in the face of oppression.

Gaze back to the colonists

In the book *Orientalism*, Said describes the face of the third world countries in the East in the eyes of Westerners, who believe that the East is full of barbaric, ignorant and threatening things. However, this judgment from the Western colonialists is biased and prejudiced. In a broad sense, their prejudice applies to any third world country in the world. They despise the culture of the East and even more colonial countries worldwide so as to better control and plunder them. In *Paradise*, the perspective of this gaze is reversed and is finished by tiny people from the third world.

Such groups of people often appear in Gurnah's books. They are residents who grow up in the colonies and come from all walks of life. They often get together in the evening after work, on the seat in front of a store, or at the door of someone, and talk about all kinds of news, whether it is the war around the world or the world economy with drastic changes, all can become their topic. They are idle and insignificant people in the third world. However, in the portrayal of Gurnah, the words and imagination of these people have become important weapons of resistance, even though they have not realized it.

Paradise shows these tiny but imaginative people who live in pressure. These groups of people even take their own actions before really realize the danger and threatening of German colonist, that is, the observation and comment to European invaders, like what westerners do in the work *Orientalism*. Even if these actions are insignificant, they are also meaningful. What Gurnah writes about the local people's action actually is full of sarcasm, because in this book those who are gazed and judged are not the people from the East or from any third world countries, but are the Western colonists. The two positions have been reversed at this moment.

The colonists who boasted of civilization and elegance never realizes that they are so unbearable and brutal in the eyes of the local people. *"The traders spoke of the Europeans with amazement, awed by their ferocity and ruthlessness. They take the best land without paying a bead, force the people to work for them by one trick or another, eating anything and everything however tough or putrid. Their appetite has no limit or decency, like a plague of locusts. Taxes for this, taxes for that, otherwise prison for the offender, or the lash, or even hanging.....They wear clothes made of metal but do not chafe their bodies, and they can go for days without sleep or water..."*(72).

In the eyes of local residents, colonists are like species from another world. They have unlimited imagination of these colonists from other countries. Those conversations are often exaggerated, which comes to a demonized dimension: Germans are said to be immune to fire (7), to eat metal (170), to have heads of iron and other various supernatural powers (Berman 54).

"One of the traders swore that he had seen a European fall down dead once and another one come and breathe life back into him. He had seen snakes do that too, and snakes also have poisonous spit. So long as the European's body was not ruined or damaged, had not started to rot, another Europeans could breathe life back into him" (72).

"There lay a dead man and another European lay down beside him, breathed in his mouth, and the dead one shuddered and woke" (73). These traders imagine those Europeans as a snake in human skin. They have supernatural powers like demons.

Almost in the whole novel, European colonists are gazed and observed by these imaginative local residents as marginal groups and others, and in their eyes these outsiders are mysterious and even demonized. Thus, in their talks, the provisions centering on imperialism have been eliminated. This perspective has reversed the examination to colonized countries in *Orientalism* and made the colonized in the third world a truly self-conscious group. Furthermore, It reverses the iconography of colonial fiction in which Africans were the source of the tall tale, from the insulting to the wondrous (Callahan 58). The African natives described by Gurnah are dynamic and able to judge the situation. Through their own examination and observation, they can find the true face of the brutal colonists who invaded their homes. This observation and examination of the invaders, although insignificant, also formed a kind of resistance of the local people. The author also completes a wonderful irony here.

Cultural Resistance in the Third World

Post-colonial writing comes from the non-colonial struggle against colonial power, that is, the struggle about language, culture, nationality, race, and body, voice, expression and writing (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1). For colonization, language and culture are the main positions, and play an important role in the construction of individual identity. Thus, the annexation of language and culture directly means the extinction of self-consciousness (Zhu and Zheng 70). The author Gurnah himself left his hometown when he was young. He grew up in a complex cultural background. When he came to Britain, he came into contact with foreign languages and cultures, and later wrote in English for a long time.

On the premise that the influence of English writings have greater influence than that of African native language, the act of writing in English can be said to be a good choice, which is the most effective means to use colonial language to resist colonialism. The display of self-culture is the most powerful action against colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 6). In *Paradise*, Gurnah fully demonstrates this point in both the exquisite design of characters and plots and the using of language.

Gurnah often uses allusions with ethnic or religious meaning to solve the problem of identity in his works (Victor 65). What people read in *Paradise* of the protagonist and his experience actually remind people of *the Koran*, which is revered by Islam. Gurnah recalls his cultural identity by quoting *the Koran*. In this novel, two important figures, Yusuf and Mohammed, are actually quoted from this muslim classical work. At the same time, the story and fate of characters are rewritten. Yusuf in the Koran finally ushers in a happy ending, while Yusuf in *Paradise* joins the ranks of the colonists with uncertain future. In this way of borrowing and rewriting the classics, people can see that Gurnah's exploration of reconstructing cultural identity shows that he attempts to explore the issues of colonizing and being colonized, constructing and being constructed from the perspective of religious cultural identity (Zhu and Zheng 72).

In addition to reflecting the construction of his cultural identity as a third world people in the design of the text, he also recalls his own culture from the aspect of the use of language. Post-colonial texts often use some strategies of language diversion to express their separation from colonial power (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 4). One of these strategies is to focus on the original local language and maintain a state of "untranslated words". This misappropriation of language enables the third world language and culture to be delivered from oppression, while fully showing the differences between different cultures.

This novel retains a large number of local Swahili language texts. The use of untranslated language just clearly shows that the language to be conveyed by the novel is actually the language of others (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 62).

"...he was such a rich and renowned merchant, -*tajiri mukubwa*" (3).

"*Washenzi*, who has no faith in God and who worship spirits and demons which live in trees and rocks" (6).

"Let *seyyid* pass, *waungwana*" (20).

"Hey, *kifa urongo*! Look at this poor boy" (24).

"The *mnyapara wa safari*, the foreman of the journey, would be waiting for the expedition somewhere in the interior, Khalil told him" (32).

In the continuous dialogue in the text, people will guess and understand the meaning of these untranslated words through the context. The importance of such untranslated words lies in that they constitute special symbols of postcolonial texts (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 61). This lack of translation has a special interpretive function in the overall context. People can gradually explore their meanings in the whole text. At the same time, these words can reveal the cultural identity of the characters in the novel, and in the book *Paradise*, they also present the author Gurnah's cultural identity.

In this book, the author profoundly and implicitly presents those local cultures. Although in a constrained background and an oppressed context, those local cultures still show their features and vitality like ground-breaking spring buds. It is this display of its own culture that expresses the strongest resistance to colonialism.

Conclusion

Although Gurnah is in Britain, his works always focus on his hometown, telling African stories and reflecting African problems. His works bring people's attention to those lands and those civilizations again. In *Paradise*, people can see the more authentic side East Africa in the shadow of colonialism, whereas many local residents lose their home and their freedom. Colonialism has a penetrating impact on the lives of the people of the third world countries. They not only have to endure physical pain caused by oppression, but also suffer from colonial trauma in spirit. To look into the future depends on the mirror of history. These persecution and suffering will remind people nowadays that never ignore the pain and evil caused by colonialism, especially for the people in the third world colonies.

What's more, people can also realize the efforts made by the local people for their life and see how these people recreate a special way to resist oppression and defend themselves in Gurnah's *Paradise*. They resist in the non-colonial way but still meaningful and full of wise and vitality. Gurnah allows people to see this group of people from a more detailed perspective, and find out their ability and strength. People should always remember how those living in oppression defending their own existence of, as well as the defending for their civilization.

As for the Gurnah himself, an author born in the land of the third world countries, he also recall the own culture though the delicate design in *Paradise*, which becomes a very powerful culture resistance to the brutal colonialism. He recall the local people beliefs in East Africa by quoting The Koran in this novel, and recall the the Swahili civilization by retaining untranslated native language. In *Paradise*, the characters and author have completed a conspiracy. They have fought back and resisted colonialism in their own ways, whether in terms of culture and ideology.

People should always remember the pain and sufferings brought by colonialism, and should always treat history as mirror. And moreover what is more worth remembering shown by this novel is that these people's actions for defending their own existence and their homeland civilization, as well as the energy and wisdom they burst in resisting oppression. People should not ignore the efforts made by those small people, although those actions have never been recorded in history books.

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