

## Original Paper

# A Study of Gurnah's Memory Narrative and Diaspora Identity

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### **Abstract**

*The Nobel Prize for Literature has been won by 70-year-old Tanzanian novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah for "his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugees in the gulf between cultures and continents". "Refugees" highlights the issue of identity, while the transferring of cultural continent highlights diaspora, and memory narrative is a characteristic of his writing, which can be adopted to explore the symptoms of identity exfoliation and diaspora. This paper, by focusing on the theories of memory and diaspora identity from the perspective of Gurnah's memory narrative, aims to explore the racial identity, focusing on the antagonism and hatred between races in the post-colonial context, the hybrid identity in the context of family diaspora, the social identity in the context of group culture, and the female identity in the development of individuality. Memory is an important texture that underlines Gurnah's writing and his perception and deep thinking on identity provides a multidimensional entry point for the international literary world with unique personal characteristics and humanistic care in the global context. Racial identity, focusing on the antagonism and hatred between races; hybrid identity, the impotence of immigrants, unable to establish their own identity; social identity, the alienation of marginalized people and the young generation's powerless sense of colonial culture; female identity, women's weightlessness under gender pressure.*

### **Keywords**

*Abdulrazak Gurnah, memory narrative, diaspora, identity*

## 1. Introduction

The Nobel Prize for Literature was won by 70-year-old Tanzanian novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah. As a “dark horse”, a used-to-be unknown elected nominee, the news that Gurnah became the eventual star-picker caught everyone by surprise. The day after the announcement, internet was flooded with interviews and introduction to him. Gurnah’s works have been well received abroad, and have even been praised as “masterpiece” by many reviewers, though previously his novels used not to be sold as well as his editors had expected and his works were not popular with many readers. After the Nobel Prize announcement, publishers all over the world joined the battle fighting for the entitlements to publish Gurnah’s works. Simultaneously, the studies on African English literature in China again become prospering and flourishing.

This thesis analyzes and discusses Gurnah’s writing style and artistic expressions by which his important themes are conveyed: from the perspective of his memory narrative, the thesis examines his profound thinking on the identity exfoliation and diaspora. This paper takes “memory” and “diaspora identity” as the central perspectives to explore Gurnah’s typical short stories and novels, especially *Cage*, *Bossi* and *Dottie* to investigate the post-colonial African key issues ranging from colonization, race, ethnicity, identity, immigration etc.

## 2. Overview

Before Gurnah won the prize, few readers and critics at home and abroad had appreciated him and less began to study some of his works. After he was nominated for the prize, both domestic and international critics flood to investigate into his writing, and several of his outstanding features have been discussed and researched in depth, including diaspora literature, refugee life and identity crisis.

### 2.1 Brief Introduction to Gurnah and his Literary Writing Features

Born in 1948 in Tanzania, Gurnah moved to Britain as a refugee in the 1960s. He received the Bachelor of Education from The University of London in 1976 and taught at Astor High School in Dover, Kent. Between 1980 and 1982, Gurnah returned to Africa to teach at Bayer University in Nigeria while studying for a doctorate at the University of Kent. He received the degree in 1982 and served as the professor of English and postcolonial literature at the university of Kent in Canterbury in 1985 until his retirement. He has been teaching “Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse” and studying postcolonial literature related to Africa, the Caribbean, India and other regions (Wang, 2021). He is a patient and calm teacher. He motivates his students and encourages them to explore new ideas and search for better forms of expression in writing.

Gurnah has been a contributing editor of *Wasafiri Magazine* since 1987 (Wang, 2021). He edited two volumes of *Essays on African Writing* in 1993 and 1995 and published a series of essays on contemporary postcolonial writers and their works, including Naipaul, Soyinka, Rushdie, Tiango and

other immigrant writers, they are all his research objects, and his research has led to global recognition in literary circle of their “diaspora writing”. He viewed Naipaul critically and argued Naipaul’s views on Africa, Islam, Iran, Pakistan and other Muslim countries are not so much entirely accurate that Naipaul’s writings lack analysis and his understanding of Islamic issues remains stagnant (Wang, 2021).

Perhaps it was due to his identity as the critic that he is more critically while observing issues. Gurnah did not intend to be a writer initially, but it was the exile in Britain that prompted him to put his thoughts into writing. From then on, homesickness and the anguish of being alone in the foreign land made him reflect over a series of issues that he hadn't touch upon before. He found himself on a mission to record what he had seen and experienced, and some grievances and regrets needed to be appealed. Through his writing, he endeavored to bring awareness of the diaspora life to the people and to exposes the colonization to the public. In 1987 Gurnah published his first novel *Memory of Departure*, and since then, he has published nine novels, including *Pilgrim Ways*, *Dottie*, *Paradise*, *Admiring Silence*, *By the Sea*, *Desertion*, *The Last Gift*, *Afterlives*, etc. One of the most representative works is *Paradise*. In his works, Gurnah cares much of Africa, especially the negative impact of colonial history on African people, and his dissatisfaction with the reality of Africa is reflected in his crusade against colonial evilness. Most of his works centered on refugees, and focuses on identity, ethnic conflicts and history writing, and his portrayal of living is considered to possess the social significance to a great extent. Having experienced colonial ruling, the socialist revolution in Zanzibar, and exile in a foreign lands, Gurnah’s literary works are closely related to his own experiences (Lucinda, 2015). His works revolve around the legacy of colonial ruling, mainly focusing on refugee identity and cultural distortion, with particular emphasis on identity and the living conditions of people. Most of his works are descriptions of stories based on a memory, just as the official comment of the Nobel Prize for Literature: “Memory is always an important theme in Gurnah’s writings”.

## 2.2 Research Status and Representative Ideas

A certain number of studies on Gurnah in English and American literary circles have been conducted at home and abroad and naturally most of researches focus on his typical writing of identities.

### 2.2.1 The Studies at Abroad

Foreign studies on Gurnah’s literature are more timely advanced and updated since the initial studies can be traced back to the 1990s. Furthermore, the research perspectives are broader, the paradigms more diversified, and the results more abundant.

Researches have been concentrating on Gurnah’s works in view of refugee diaspora, post-colonial identity construction and other issues, cosmopolitanism, homogeneity and his narrative method etc. Firstly, in view of refugee diaspora, Sissy Helff published *Illegal Diasporas and African Refugees in Abulrazak Gurnah’s By the Sea* in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* in 2009, which reproduced

the suffering of the African refugees and the illegal refugees in Gurnah's typical novel *By the Sea*. This article adopts Kauss's concepts of the illegally separated person and unconditional hospitality. As for post-colonialism, some scholars focus on the colonialism and racist ideology of gender oppression and racial discrimination against women. Esther Pujolras-Noguer proposed Gurnah resisted Western colonialism through gender writing and revealed the nature of imperial colonization and racial discrimination. "Abandonment" subverts the white and male imperial duality and counteracts the ideal imperial masculinity inspired by colonial literature. As for cosmopolitanism, the researchers examine imperial evilness and colonial legacy from a global context. Using relational theories developed by Martin Buber and Édouard Glissant, Tina Steiner emphasized the importance of crossing borders, It is argued that Gurnah's novel attempts to redefine "Africa" by focusing on the relational space in order to get rid of dystopian rejection of politics and violence caused by nationalism and ethnic ideology" (Hand, 2010, p. 124); And Shanti Moorthy surveyed current thinking in regard to cosmopolitanism in Indian Ocean studies and examined how Gurnah contests depictions by Indian Ocean scholars of apparently idyllic pre-modern East African societies (Shanti, 2009). Next, in view of homogeneity, Kate Houlden published in *English Studies in African* 2013 "*It Worked in a Different Way*": *Male Same-Sex Desire in the Novels of Abdulrazak Gurnah's*" and after close reading of *Paradise* and *By the Sea*, Houlden found a pattern of sophisticated old men hunting innocent young boys, and pointed out Gurnah emphasizes the corrosive influence of trade and colonization on east African sex economy. Lastly, in view of Gurnah's narrative, Charne Lavery studied Gurnah's works and found he used the exploration of space to express literature. His novel depicts a unique east African coastal space that connects the shores of the Indian Ocean through travel, trade and culture (Charne, 2013). While Felicity Hand focuses on the role of cultural modes in shaping identity in colonial countries, Hand explored the tension between individual perception of history and collective consciousness by studying the characteristic of Gurnah's writing: memory influences historical stories (Hand, 2010, p. 124). His popularity skyrocketed after he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2021. By 2022, almost a dozen of academic papers have been published, and most centered on the post-colonialism and identity, "Rejection of Victimhood in Literature: by Abdulrazak Gurnah, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Luis Alberto Urrea" compares and analyzes the commonalities of several writers who have been increasingly opposed to adopting refugees, exiles, immigrants and their descendants as symbols of victims (Lucinda, 2015). "Askari, colonial encounters, and postcolonial war commemoration in *Afterlives* by Abdulrazak" published by Anna Branach-Kallas discusses that the war and colonialism as interconnected factors (Anna, 2022). Foreign scholars will dig Gurnah's works deeper on the basis of the previous.

### 2.2.2 The Studies at Home

Domestic researches on Gurnah's works have been increasingly conducted in view of translation of Gurnah's major works. Among his 10 published novels, several short stories and essays, *Bossi* and *Cage* have been translated into Chinese as representatives of East Africa in the *Anthology of African Short Stories*. Before Abdulrazak's award, only two published studies could be found in China: *Walking between Center and Edge—Abdulrazak's Concept of Diaspora Writing* (Zhang, 2012) and *Review and Prospect of the Study of Abdulrazak Gurnah* (Jiang & Sun, 2017). Zhang Feng analyzes the relation between Gurnah's diaspora experience and his works, and the diaspora literature style runs throughout his 8 typical novels. Jiang Xueshan began studying Gurnah's works in 2016, joking the time she spent studying Gurnah as a graduate student was the closest to winning the Nobel Prize for Literature (Jiang & Sun, 2017). In her report in 2017 she summarized the research status of Gurnah at home and abroad, and found Gurnah had attracted certain attention abroad at that time, due to his uniqueness, novelty of writing and diversity of topics. In the end, it is concluded Gurnah's perspective and diverse themes have made great contribution to both African literature and immigrant literature.

After the prize winning, Gurnah's works were finally brought to the world's view, and domestic research ideas were gradually expanded.

Chinese academic studies turned their attention to the thematic analysis of *By the Sea* (Zhu, 2022), identity construction and cosmopolitanism (Huang, 2022). After 2021, many more studies coming out focusing on memory writing. *Memory, Language, Heterogeneity, and Locality in Postcolonial Literature: A Review of Abdulrazak Gurnah's Thought on Writing and Criticism* (Zhang, 2022) discusses the unique value and contribution of Gurnah's ideas in the context of post-colonial literature studies from memory narrative and reshaping history, post-colonial writing, African cultural nationalism and reflection and transcendence of post-colonial and world literature.

### 2.3 Research Issues and Ideas

To sum up, we can see presently both domestic and foreign studies have focused on Gurnah's literature to a great extent and have deeply analyzed and discussed several of his prominent characteristics. However, deeper examination of his memory narrative and identity is still the center of academic concern. As we can see from his ten works, he has been concerned with the identity of Africans in diaspora. It is also the profound influence of contemporary society on Gurnah's works. Based on the study of memory narrative, this thesis aims to analyze Gurnah's reflection on immigration identity, and taking memory as the approach to interpret the elements of different dimensions in Gurnah's articles—race, society and gender, as well as his concern for the fate of refugees and his uncompromising firmness in the current of the times.

### 3. Memory Narrative and Diaspora Identity Theory

Memory narrative is not only the narrative mode and literary theme, but also possesses the aesthetic significance and cultural connotation. This chapter adopts the memory carrier in memory writing to deeply understand the uniqueness and artistic charm of the writer's memory writing by analyzing the present Gurnah's memory narrative and diaspora identity.

#### 3.1 Theory of Memory

The memory concept can date back to Plato in 4<sup>th</sup> Century B. C. He compared our mind to a wax tablet, everything we see, hear, feel, and realize is imprinted on wax, leaving an imprint, as if with a seal ring (Theaetetus, 1992). Then Aristotle came up with a more scientific concept at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. He argued that few of the functions of the brain that we think of today were thought of primarily as functions of the heart, which he realized were pertinent to blood and memory is based on the blood flow. In fact, Amnesia occurs mainly as a result of reduced blood flow. In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the "associationism" school of psychology represented by Hobbes and Locke appeared in Britain. The first systematic experiment on memory in the history of psychology is the famous German psychologist Ebbinghaus.

The research on memory cognition theory has been gradually improved over time. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is considered that memory is the recognition, retention and reproduction (recall and recognition) of an individual's experience. As people's cognition of the world becomes more and more profound, philosophy advocates to see the world from the perspective of dialectics and diversity rather than from a single, one-sided and systematic perspective. Therefore, the theory of multiple memory structure emerges at the historic moment.

Later, after the theory of collective memory was put forward, memory involved not only psychology and pedagogy but also social, religious and cultural environment. Habwah's *On Collective Memory* also presents his thoughts on this. In his opinion, memory is collective, and the generation, awakening, inheritance and continuation of memory all occur in groups. Moreover, group culture and religion are collective consciousness, which is an external dominant feature of the crowd. When the concept of collective was put forward, many scholars criticized the singleness and one-sidedness of individual memory, and even completely denied individual memory, believing that the development direction of individual memory is determined by collective memory. But we can't separate collective memory from individual memory.

#### 3.2 Theory of Diaspora

The word "diaspora" originated from Greece that refers to the dispersal of seeds by the wind. In the *Old Testament*, it specifically designates the diaspora of the Jewish people who had no place to settle. Therefore, "diaspora" refers to people who have been persecuted and scattered to different parts of the world (William, 1991). In the mid-1960s, "diaspora" was gradually adopted by western academic

circles to refer to contemporary international immigrants who cross national boundaries and maintain ties with their ancestral countries.

Due to the changes of politics, economy, culture, war and other factors in the history of human society, the word “diaspora” will not always be the exclusive appellation of the state of Jewish wandering and diaspora (Li, 2008). The conquest of war, the change of dynasties, the advancement of science and technology, and the exploration of the unknown world by human beings will all lead to the migration and exchange of different races, the concept of diaspora is no longer a single plane, but a more diverse one with more factors and perspectives. The migration trend caused by various reasons, such as the great nautical discovery, the African slave trade, the overseas export of Chinese workers, and the process of globalization, have greatly expanded the living space of the global diaspora and increased the number of diaspora groups. The concept “diaspora” refers to the status of various immigrant groups, and it has been changed from specific to general. Diaspora phenomenon has become a focus that cannot be ignored. Diaspora goes from proper noun “Diaspora” to “diaspora”, and the lower-case word diaspora has changed from a specific reference to the Jewish diaspora to a group of people globally. Diaspora is a derogatory word at the beginning, and later transformed into a neutral word.

With the increasing number of diaspora groups in the world, attracting academic attention, the translation of the word “diaspora” in China has also undergone a complex process. The concept of science, anthropology and other disciplines, the process of expanding from a narrow sense to a broad sense, which also refers to the internal reason for the diaspora’s translation diversification, and the four translation methods and usages of “live scattered”, “dissociation”, “diaspora”, “fly apart” occupy the vast majority (Yang, 2016).

Diaspora literature has gradually become popular with the emergence of diaspora phenomenon. Diaspora writers leaving away from their native land have taken up their pens to write about the exotic customs and sentiment of missing of their homeland. Simultaneously, they also adopt their own special marginal identity to reflect over their diaspora experience. Their special writing group communicate with the local culture at the cultural level depends on the location of the foreign diaspora, and analyzes the cultural identity, identity anxiety and culture shock from the third perspective.

### *3.3 Conceptual Interpretation of Identity*

Erikson is the founder of the theory of self-identity and a key figure in introducing identity theory into the field of psychological research. He believes that the formation of self—identity is to confirm a psychological process. As the essence of personality, self—identity includes commitment to ideology, role and values.

Social psychologist Teifer believes that identity is a part of an individual’s self-concept, including knowledge, values and emotional meanings that derived from his/her membership in the social group to which he/she belongs. Individuals improve self-esteem by gaining and maintaining positive social

approval. Much of this positive identification comes from comparisons between in-groups and relevant out-groups.

To sum up, identity is a person's cognition of his or her own identity. People's identification with themselves, dependence on family, belief in religion, confidence in culture, continuation of tradition and identification with the country constitute identity in various aspects.

But once set in the colonial background where the social system is challenged, the social structure is reconstructed, the collective subject identity changes with the change of the social collective consciousness, so individuals in the group will suffer from a great spiritual tribulation and ideological division in pain and confusion for existence and their own value.

Exactly as emigrants leave their homeland to live in a foreign country, the change of geographical space and the living environment, the strangeness of cultural traditions will make people feel at a loss. When they encounter with these problems, they will have identity anxiety and identity confusion. Therefore, diasporas are often associated with issues of identity.

### *3.4 Gurnah's Memory Narrative and Diaspora Identity*

Memory, whether explored from the individual's perspective or collective level, ultimately forms the capacity for self-awareness (identity). Identity, in turn, is related to both time and memory. Human self is a diachronic identity established through the "time object". Past memories stitch together and form a complete image of a person, and people's cognition of themselves comes from this memory. Writers record these memories, weave real reflection and time-consumed memory together to write in the article, trace back those historical stories, and perpetuate these memories in the form of paper, such a special narrative is memory narrative.

Memory narrative always focuses on the vivid experience of individuals or groups in historical time and space, conveys an invisible voice and breaks the monopoly of grand historical narration. Literature should not only focus on the facts seen by people, but also take the responsibility to dig out the facts that are thought not to exist because they are hidden. It provides readers with "multiple memories" of a single historical narrative through language description. Simultaneously, the literary writing of individual or collective memory in the oppression of historical events also makes researchers reflect on the possibility of studying memory beyond the paradigm of sociology, which may be a new research path from collective memory and individual memory provided by literary creation for memory theory. Memory narrative is not only the composition of the plot content of the novel, but also the approach of the author's self-expression and ethical thinking. The French critic Maurice Blanchot believes that memory has a certain positive power on the writer's creation, and Chinese writer and critic Yu Dafu believes all novels come out of the author's "autobiography". From a certain point of view, writers' writing records what happened and so that it is the summary of "absence". Gurnah's memory narrative exerted an important internal connection on his life experience.

Memory is an essential element of identity, and identity is an external manifestation of memory. It is precise because memory narrative makes those memories continue that collective memory will also be superimposed, memory narrative connects the past with the present, and directly participates in people's identity construction. Gurnah's special identity and personal experience give him the ability to look back onto the past and compare the pain of reality in his warm memory. It can be said that memory narrative is a way and channel to acquire identity, and he records his sense of wandering loneliness and weightlessness. Gurnah uses memory writing to extend external experience and performance, and uses the family memory framework to reflect the inheritance of memory, psychology and behavior against the background of colonial inter-generational influence; and his personal memory description reflects the sense of weightlessness and wandering from a personal perspective.

Born in Tanzania but educated in Britain and brought up in an English-speaking environment, Gurnah, as an immigrant writer, is more sensitive to refugee issues and more attuned to the identity conflicts of the diaspora. As a wandering individual, he writes about his own hardships and pain. As a bystander of his hometown, he used words to express his reflection and helplessness on colonial issues. He saw the exclusion and hatred between different races, the separation of identities that could not establish their own identity, the social nobodies drifting on the edge, and the tininess and fear of women in the patriarchal society. He passed down these memories and feelings into his own writing.

#### **4. Memory in the Historical Background—Racial Identity**

Most of Gurnah's stories take place in the post-colonial period, an indelible historical memory passed down from generation to generation, and its consequences are brutal and profound, and one of the most prominent problems is hatred and exclusion between different races.

##### *4.1 Hatred and Exclusion between White and Other Races*

"Identity" is formed by individuals in the continuous development of society, and it is an indispensable part of individual spiritual construction (Zhang, 2021). When black Africans were a relatively closed society, they had few opportunities to communicate with the outside world due to their dependence on groups with natural conditions, and they also did not need complex social labor system. However, when western society breaks their peace, the internal tranquility of the original ethnic group was broken, and they had to contact with the external social relations, and gradually became a part of the formation of this relationship.

Whether black or white, when different ethnic groups come into contact, ethnicity will show its exclusivity. In *Dottie*, people of all races meet together in Britain, and contradictions between the black and the white exist everywhere. White Britons regard colored people as dirty "rubbish", and gratuitous discrimination and humiliation are intolerable. Therefore, hatred between races is endless and

comprehensive, but the ideology of binary opposition will eventually be reflected on everyone, which exerts a great impact on individual life.

The animosity between them took the form of racial hatred. Like Taymor's experience, he settled in Cardiff, a community of colored people, where he felt relatively safe. Actually, he still underestimated the anger of New Yorkers against blacks, who were picking quarrels, rioting, beating color people. Such acts of violence and injustice are motivated by racial hatred. This phenomenon, as a collective memory, runs through colonialism and racism, inflicting double racial trauma on both white perpetrators and African victims.

#### *4.2 The Identity and Status Gap between Black and White*

Accompanied by xenophobia, white people think themselves the most superior race, so the status of black people is naturally low. In Hall Stuart's opinion, cultural identity is "not permanently fixed in a certain essential past, but subject to the constant 'play' of history, culture and power". It is a kind of "production" that never ends and is always in process (Hall, 1996). In Britain, it is due to race, family, cultural background etc. that the black people cannot obtain the legitimate social status. Under such long-term strong oppression and violence, black people could hardly resist. They lost their identity recognition in such a wide gap of identity status, and gradually split and lost themselves under the force of cruel social environment.

In such a social situation, there is a huge gap between the status of black and white people. One of Gurnah's masterly ways of dealing with the plot is that in handling Bilkisu's problems with her off springs, he deliberately allows Bilkisu to conceal the family memory, since "she did not want her children to worry about such things". She lived with the name Sharon, denying all memories of the past. The distortion of an individual's memory does not affect the collective memory and may even lead to family tragedy. The children never know their origin, and they suffered both psychological and physical torture at the bottom of the society. Where there's no family memory, there is no home and no anchor. When Sharon died of a serious illness, the children had no support, suffered from mental pain, and they had to find a place to live immediately. They suffered from the discrimination of white people, and any action they took was wrong in the eyes of white people. In this inferior status, their identity cognition was severely distorted.

The younger brother, Hudson, began to interact with white teenagers and distance himself from his sisters. In order to resist the shackles of status, Hudson's many practices: skipping classes, fighting, taking risks, being misled into drug addiction, forced to sell their own body... All of these actions are the reactions against his unconscious loss of self in the midst of the huge status gap. Hudson finally died in the Hudson River in the United States, which proves that his way of defiance and resistance to the society is unworkable and symbolizes the complete collapse of a Utopia.

## 5. Diaspora Memory—Hybrid Identity

The diaspora groups in a foreign country are like the boats floating over the sea without a lighthouse. Filled with fear, they try to find their own spiritual shelter in the crevices of their own country and other cultures, expecting their wandering soul to reach the shore. Being deeply influenced by the memories of their parents and families, it becomes a big problem for the vagrants to choose and deal with their identities in the face of the motherland culture and the foreign culture.

### 5.1 Identity Confusion as Immigrants

Charles Taylor once pointed out in the *Politics of Recognition* that “one’s identity is to some extent created by the recognition of others. If it is not acknowledged by others, or acknowledged by others in a gentle way, it can affect one’s identity” (Zhao, 2009). This is to say that lack of recognition or just distorted recognition can be harmful. It can be a form of oppression, which can keep people imprisoned in a false, distorted and derogatory way of being.

Dottie’s confusion of self-identity recognition is caused by the diaspora of the whole family. Dottie’s family history is a process of constant migration, which started with her grandfather’s settlement in the UK. Later her mother left home to live alone, deliberately blurring out her memories of her family. Dottie has no clear idea of who she is or where she comes from.

Dottie’s alienation from the African race in time and space as well as her indifference to British culture in consciousness and reality are two emotions that confused her in the dual identity and dual consciousness, wandering in the gulf between the two races. Dottie is not clear about her own identity and genus. Such confusion of self-identity recognition is caused by the diaspora of the whole family.

In establishing Dottie’s “past”, Gurnah adopts a nonlinear narrative strategy of fragmentation and disorganization, which is actually in line with the development of individual memory. Specifically, there are two main sources of Dottie’s memory fragments: one is the narration of her mother Bilkisu, and the other is the arrangement and construction of her own memories.

Dottie was christened Dottie Badoura Fatma Balfour. This name came from a Chinese princess, and this story is taken from “One Thousand and One Nights”. Dottie’s mother, Bilkisu, liked the story so much that she added it to her daughter’s name to express her longing for love, and her best wishes for her daughter. But Bilkisu spent most of his days in sickness and confusion, and Dottie did not know why her name was so long, how it had been acquired, or what it meant.

Clearly, Dottie loved the beautiful, unusual, exotic name, and often dreamed of romantic stories to explain it. As Dottie became curious about her name and began to search for its meaning, she gradually got a certain picture of her birth and family behind her name. The glorious history of her maternal grandfather, the cultural background of her immigrant family, and the memories passed down from generation to generation all enabled her to have a deeper understanding of the black culture and traditions rooted in her own.

Gurnah adopts the name as an image to carry the weight of memory, from personal memory to family memory, which truly reflects the feeling of powerlessness and weightlessness standing in the flood of time under the colonial background.

### *5.2 The Sense of Crisis in Multiple Identities*

Nie Zhenzhao considers that an ethical dilemma is the irresolvable contradiction and conflict that ethical confusion in literary texts brings to the characters. When people choose to deal with a certain ethical issue, they will make their determination according to two reasonable but conflicting values: the choice of characters faces a kind of paradoxical dilemma that both are wrong (Huang, 2022). The crisis of multiple identities comes when people are caught in an ethical dilemma.

Dottie's complicated family background and social atmosphere give her multiple identities. Identity is complex because identity is not static, since it is constructed through one individual interaction with another individual or group and it is not fixed at birth, as people grow up, the changes of social status and family relationship, the superimposed identity give the meaning of individual or group of people. In the text of *Dottie*, Dottie's ethical dilemma is obviously caused by the identity confusion in by her acting as a mother but actually in position as an elder sister. She is unable to coordinate the contradictions and conflicts brought by these two identities, especially when her individual ability alone is not enough to support the whole family.

Dottie is burdened with different responsibilities and tasks, and is under the endless pressure and exploitation. Dottie ignores her own personality needs and blindly satisfies others. Dottie's multiply identities satisfy the needs of others and lead to alienation of personal responsibility and identity crisis. She wants to be herself, but responsibility gets in the way and the weight on Dottie's shoulders leaves her breathless. She must find a balance between her multiple identities and her essential self.

## **6. Memory of Group Culture-Social Identity**

The content of cultural memory is the past shared by a social group. In a white-dominated society, immigrants are marginalized as a minority. They are often ignored by the mainstream, and it is also difficult for them to break out of their inner shackles.

### *6.1 Social Marginalization of Immigrants*

Diaspora is a cultural position that wanders between the center and the edge. It neither depends on the center nor sticks to the edge. In the words of Homi Bhabha, "third dimension" (Homi, 2009) characterized by "promiscuity" implies an epistemological advantage, a dual perspective of "inside and outside", which provides a creative and subversive writing space. Originally referring to the relationship between the former colonial periphery and the imperial center, the term marginality has been used to define the mental state of diaspora writers who are being both in and out of the part: in the encounter of the self and the other, the emigrants can be simultaneously in double externalities, and he

or she belongs to both cultures. But they don't identify with either of them. Individual circumstances vary, but there is a common edge. Gurnah is particularly adept at dealing with this sense of marginalization in his work. In a white-dominated society, immigrants act as a medium of intercultural communication, hovering between two cultures to form a specific group. They are insignificant and unacceptable existence relative to the mainstream group, and they are marginalized to form a stable but simultaneously changing circle. They have absolutely no sense of belonging in the mainstream group, and they can only feel a little reassured by shrinking in a safe space, which is reflected in *Cage*.

Harden vaguely remembers when Fajir took him to the mosque, the old man would go to the market to teach him about those colorful vegetables. But since the old man was too sick to move, he never stepped out of the supermarket. He was afraid of the swamp, and the darkness outside the supermarket. Harden can only move within the range that they are most familiar with in this city, and he never dares to take a step forward outside. The only times when Harden appears out of his comfort zone without fearing are deeply recollected as a way for Gurnah to highlight the fear and marginalization of immigrants in a group culture.

Living in two confronting cultures, but hardly belonging to either, the immigrant group seriously lacks a sense of belonging (Zhang, 2012), so the only way out is that they shrink into a the corner amid divisions and lack of self-confidence, no longer communicates with the outside world, and no longer seeks fresh food, by defaulting he will not be accepted. They were unable to separate the influence of their own nation and unable to integrate into the new environment, and gradually became separatists on the edge.

### *6.2 Feebleness of Young Generation*

After a long period of colonization, the colonies suffered all the hardships, and there was no way out and no direction forward. Due to the cultural output and mind controlling of the strong, the colonized did not possess a strong sense of resistance, but were not completely disillusioned, so they were born at a loss. Generation after generation, the youth of colonial descendants are meaninglessly deprived and alienated during despair and inaction.

"Bossi" is filled with invisible cries. Every character has his or her own characteristics. For example, Eunice, his brain is full of sailing knowledge, even those sailors call him the captain, but he never applies this knowledge to make a living, but was just immersed in his own world and determined to build a boat to go home. Bossi is an excellent swimmer and has strong sailing skills. He is an all-around young man, but he uses all his ingenuity to make fun of Eunice. These meaningless actions seem ordinary but are actually a kind of unconscious dissolution. They are forced to accept Western systems and education in a lifeless social environment. They know that they do not belong to the West at all, but their own family has no education to speak of, nor their own cultural identity, not to mention cultural self-confidence, which can only dispel their anxiety and doubts from unconscious actions.

The novel is narrated from a first-person perspective, the main character witnesses the ongoing issues, and experiences the matters as a participant. It is this kind of witness and participation that brings the feeling of powerlessness to the fullest. When "I" and Bossi went on an adventure to Prison Island, he swore that his mother and sister would not be left alone, but he was submerged in the sea on the way home, all promises came to nothing, and he missed a lot of cruelty things. He didn't help Haji, who couldn't sail or deal with the wind and waves. He missed Haji being beaten as an Arab and missed Karim's letter and didn't know his own younger sister had become a prostitute, he missed a lot... Bossi missed everything, just like the author Gurnah himself set off far away from his own land, lonely and sad, witnessing his homeland suffering so much but couldn't do anything except recording it in dismay. His repetitive calling back of the past ceaselessly reminds him of the familiar or the strange continent. But his internal heart is like Haji, desperate and helpless, seeing others trample his hometown, ravage the spirit of the residents but can't do anything. Gurnah is both a bystander and a participant of hesitance and powerlessness.

## **7. Personality Development in Collective Memory-Female Identity**

In the post-colonial world, the status of women cannot be ignored. Gurnah reflects the dilemma of female identity from the life experience of women and their mental state description. In the patriarchal society, how to survive, and how to extricate women themselves from the predicament of identity and find a way out is a long and arduous process.

### *7.1 The Issue of Objectifying Female*

French sociologist Jean-Creud Kaufman divided the woman's body into three types: the first is the general body, the second is the erotic body, and the third the aesthetic body (Anneh, 2017). In such a post-colonial period, the female body was regarded as the "erotic body", usually considered as a symbol of desire, and the role of women was to satisfy such desire in male's gaze.

In white-centrism and colonial society, women have always been at the bottom of the oppression and exploitation, especially black women. They were not only oppressed by white people for granted, but also by men of their own race. Squeezed by race, class and gender, they occupied no place in society. Social resources were in the hands of men, and if they wanted to obtain resources, they had to exchange benefits, while they had nothing but their bodies. Therefore, in the context of that era, women could only use their bodies as bargaining chips to price themselves for things they needed.

In *Cage*, the problem shifts from the society objectifying women to women objectifying themselves. When problems cannot be overcome and new problems arise, it is unavoidable for individuals in the overall social environment. Suggestions are given to individuals under the influence of collective memory. When the beautiful girl Rukia came to an unfamiliar town, she was coveted and molested by men. It can be seen that in this colonial context, women themselves have been "ideologically

colonized”, and they have been subtly objectified, which had a huge impact on the deformed female identity at that time.

The objectification of women is a basic phenomenon in society. As long as it involves gender and living conditions, this phenomenon will definitely be mentioned. Therefore, every novel of Gurnah reflects such point. As he expressed, stories are the way to describe the world, and when things that people take for granted gradually form a social convention and continue to perpetuate in the collective memory, then everyone is not a bystander (Wang, 2021). Gurnah is in this society and sees that it is not only a problem of the past tense, but also a problem of the present tense. It will still be passed down with memory and habits. The only thing he can do is to write these stories out for the public to read and comprehend this problem.

### 7.2 *Female under the Control of Patriarchy*

While being objectified by men, women have tacitly regarded as appendages of male, they cannot have their own thoughts and actions, and they are to be attached to men. Just as white people are above all skin colors and all species, men also oppress women with power. Such an unequal patriarchal society is not a natural attribute, but a result of the development of social productive forces. Women, as a vulnerable group, struggle to survive under oppression.

Gurnah described Dottie’s struggle and self-redemption vividly in *Dottie*. Facing the default rules of social groups, she sensed that it was inappropriate and tried to confront them, and found herself and improved herself in female education. Dottie’s quest for independence is mainly reflected in two things: the first is to buy a house, a house of her own in the UK. Second, she changed her job and gained professional status as an office typist by taking secretarial courses.

But Dottie couldn’t afford to buy on her own, so she didn’t say no when Patterson offered her help. Patterson provided a spacious accommodation when Dottie and Sophia were living in their squalid and cramped house. Patterson did help Dottie solve her anxiety about living space and material problems, but he tried to take full control of Dottie’s life with the help of male dominance and wanted to juggle the two sisters at the same time. As Hillis Miller said, “Dislocation of community means that the link and joint are broken and cannot maintain the original union state.” The contrast between Patterson and Dottie suggests that in her journey towards independence, she could not rely entirely on men as companion (Huang, 2022, p. 52). The patriarchal society functionalizes women, believing that the role of women is to satisfy men’s desires, but also to imprison and objectify women.

After being oppressed by society for a long time, women begin to try to escape, and this process is also the manifestation of women’s awakening. The days of being controlled by her body and her mind were unacceptable. Finally, Dottie stepped out with the encouragement of her good friend Estella and found a job by her own efforts. Gurnah finally arranged a perfect love for Dottie, which also indicates that under the oppression of power, women must keep a sober head like Dottie, constantly receive new

education and knowledge. The process of Dottie's independence is the process of a woman finding her own identity under the oppression of male power.

### **Conclusion**

Memory runs throughout the life, since a series of impressive moments including parting, scattering, settling etc., are sealed in memory. Gurnah's mission is to offer those migrants an opportunity to record in their own particular experiences what they saw, heard and felt in their own way. They will naturally pay more attention to the fate of refugees, and will be more delicate and multi-faceted when looking at issues. With an uncompromising and compassionate vision, he provides insight into the impact of colonialism and refugees living in the gap between different cultural continents' fate.

Those international migrants living outside their homeland are separated from different social cultures, have difficulty adjusting their chaotic identities, and encounter an identity crisis. Of course, this is only a social status quo at the spiritual level. Only when they have the ability to live can they pay attention to the spiritual level. And more refugees are mixed with both physical and psychological crises. They have no education, no skills, and it is difficult to create value with their hands. Refugees who can support themselves will also be treated extremely unfairly. This series of problems is seen by Gurnah. He focuses on the displacement and mental trauma of this group. He runs through memories and brings deep feelings. He uses diaspora literature to arouse the attention of immigrants themselves to seek self-identity.

The generalization of the phenomenon of diaspora has accelerated mankind into the era of globalization, but the antagonism and conflict between races have always existed. The colonizers used a hegemonic attitude to suppress the exploited, and they forcibly exported their own culture. Africa was educated by white people and rule, following their rules and regulations. When Western civilization was introduced into Africa, the order of the African ethnic groups set into the chaotic. Conflicts and violence began to arise within them. Under the notice of power, they gradually alienated and divided themselves.

As a writer of African race, Gurnah saw a nation divided by racial discrimination as a bystander. They closed themselves under a narrow space and could not see their own needs, but they were divided from each other under the manipulation of racism and resent each other. Gurnah understands and presents Africa as an African, warns his compatriots from a profound perspective, and also opens up the world's thinking.

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## Notes

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