

Ubiety, Belonging and Silence in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Dottie*

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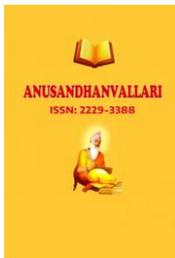
Abstract

This paper examines refugee identity and the fragile limits of belonging in *Dottie* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. The novel shows Dottie Badoura Fatma Balfour as a storey that was influenced by the racial marginalisation, cultural anxiety, and seeking of acceptance in England. Although Dottie was born and raised in Britain, she remains positioned as an outsider. Her struggle reveals that belonging is not guaranteed by birth or residence but regulated through race name and social recognition. Refugee and migration studies, this paper argues that *Dottie* presents ubiety as a contested space. Ubiety here refers to the desire for a lived place of safety, attachment, and recognition. *Dottie* attempts to construct this space through education, naming, and emotional restraint. However, repeated experiences of racial humiliation and social exclusion prevent stability. Silence becomes a survival strategy. It protects her from open confrontation but deepens psychological isolation. The novel also foregrounds the politics of naming and filiation. Dottie's anxiety about her name reflects her fear of being without identity and place. Her desire to be accepted exposes the limits of British multicultural belonging. Gurnah portrays refugee consciousness not only among migrants but also among racialised subjects within the nation. Dottie thus expands refugee literature by revealing how unbelonging can exist even without physical displacement. Identity remains unsettled, and belonging remains conditional.

Keywords: Refugee identity, Ubiety, Belonging, Race, Silence, Naming, Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Dottie*

Introduction

Refugee literature has traditionally focused on forced migration, exile, and border crossing. In recent years, this field has expanded to include experiences of unbelonging within the nation. Racialised subjects who live in the host country yet remain excluded occupy a refugee-like condition. Abdulrazak Gurnah addresses this



complex form of displacement in *Dottie*. The novel shifts attention from physical exile to psychological and social marginalisation. It examines how race naming and silence shape identity in a society that claims inclusivity while practising exclusion.

Dottie narrates the life of Dottie Badoura Fatma Balfour, a Black British woman born and raised in England. Despite her citizenship, she is repeatedly treated as a foreign presence. Her experience exposes the limits of national belonging. Gurnah presents belonging as a negotiated and fragile condition rather than a stable right. The life of Dottie is a series of events whereby she faces racial bias, social alienation, and loneliness. These experiences form a refugee consciousness, not based on migration, but based on exclusion.

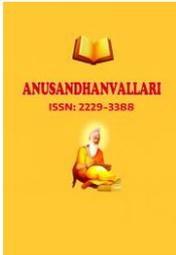
The novel predicts the significance of naming in identity. The entire name of Dottie is full of cultural and religious pasts, which disrupt the mainstream British customs. Her fear of giving her own name indicates a greater fear of not being recognised. Social legitimacy is associated with identity. The name itself is used to mark ubiquity. Ubiquity in this case implies experienced place and presence. In the case of Dottie, this feeling is precarious. She is safe nowhere. Gurnah also develops the politics of belonging in the context of ordinary interactions. These scenes show that belonging is controlled by race, but not residence. Social acceptance is pegged on adherence to white standards. Dottie tries to change her communication speech and expectations. She is taught that to accept, one has to remain silent and restrained. Open opposition provides the danger of further exclusion.

In the novel, silence serves as a major technique. Dottie seldom comes out to oppose racist statements. She internalises fear and humiliation. Silence shields her from a confrontation, but it has long-term psychological impacts. She knows that protest can make her known as threatening. This consciousness determines her attitude towards herself. Silence, in this context, becomes both a way to survive and a source of loss. It allows the stammering and eliminates the voice. Gurnah, therefore, associates the silence with refugee consciousness, whereby survival is built on upheaval more than opposition. Another place of testing belonging is in education. Dottie is made aware of the hierarchy and marginalisation in academics. Education ensures mobility but strengthens difference. She knows that it is not knowledge that can break racial lines. Her uneasiness is a mood on the strain of fitting in without the assurance of being accepted. The idea of filiation and affiliation is also involved in the novel. Filiation means inherent kinship and origin. Affiliation is a voluntary social affiliation. Loss and instability characterise the filiation of Dottie. Her family background is also broken. She tries to find belonging in education, friendship, and fantasies. But such attachments are feeble. She is constantly reminded that she is a stranger to the mainstream social system. She is under the influence of this tension.

The description of race by Gurnah does not have a showbiz aspect. Racism manifests itself in an informal statement of jokes and assumptions. Such events become a long-lasting trauma. Dottie is aware of the irrationality of these fears, only to be powerless to avoid their impacts. Her self is a result of the perception people have of her and not her own perception. It is claimed in this paper that *Dottie* redefines the concept of refugees beyond the cross-border displacement. It shows the state of unbelonging as a state created in the country. With the help of ubiquity naming silence and racial politics, Gurnah reveals the emotional price of conditional belonging. The life of Dottie shows that even citizenship does not help to get accepted. Being a member is still precarious and incomplete. This study is by analysing Dottie in terms of refugee consciousness, where Gurnah enriches the literature on refugees. He also discloses that exile is not necessarily on the move. Even at home, identity is unresolved. The novel provides a critical reflection on modern versions of exclusion in which limits are substituted by silence and an outsider is no longer an exception.

Ubiquity Naming and the Formation of Refugee Consciousness in *Dottie*

This chapter focuses on the way Dottie builds refugee awareness based on the concepts of ubiquity,



naming, and social recognition. Abdulrazak Gurnah also introduces displacement, but not in border crossing, but rather in racial exclusion in the country. The case of Dottie reveals that the sense of unbelonging is not necessarily a result of immigration. This is an identity that is developed under pressure to prove that she has a right to be in England. Ubiquity means a sense of place and presence. It is the conglomeration of the here and being known now. This sense does not steady itself in the case of Dottie. Despite being born and brought up in England, she is constantly brought back to the fact that she is considered foreign. Her need to be ubiquitous is manifested in mundane behaviours like education, self-discipline, and naming. These efforts show how she desires to be accepted instead of being rebellious.

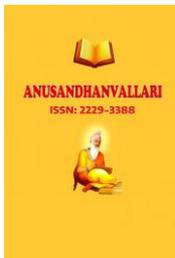
Of primary importance in this process is the politics of naming. The complete name of Dottie holds cultural and religious backgrounds that disturb the hegemonic British identity. The relationship between the naming and social legitimacy is revealed in her anxiety about being nameless. On her mother's deathbed, Dottie cries out in shame and confusion, asking, "I don't even have a name, Bilkisu would cry. How can I go back to Cardiff without a name?" (Gurnah 23). It is at this point that we realise that a name is not just some personal thing. It is a marker of belonging. Not to have a name is not to have a place and not to have a name.

Researchers observe that names are usually the locations of negotiation on the part of a racialised subject. Dr Pratyusha Narra observes that for "immigrants, refugees and their children the choice of names often encourages conformity to white norms as a strategy for acceptance" (Narra 156). This pressure is absorbed by Dottie, and it is not openly opposed. Dottie does not renounce her name, but she is afraid of its social outcomes. Her anxiety is indicative of the weight of being different in a sameness-oriented society. Gurnah also exposes this struggle in the education of Dottie. At Morley College, she misreads her teacher's name and later realises her mistake: "Stella Hoggarth turned out to be Estella Hoggar, as she explained to them with a smile when she introduced herself on the first day" (Gurnah 295). This scene might seem insignificant, yet it reveals the strong element of class and racial tension. Education guarantees mobility, but also strengthens hierarchy. When Dottie finds herself in a space, she knows too painfully that she is getting into a space related to white middle-class authority. Her restlessness is an indication of her frail ubiquity. She is there, yet she does not know whether she has the right to be there.

The major reaction to this ambiguity is silence from her. Dottie does not often deal with prejudice. Rather, she retires and watches. She gets to know that protest will further marginalise her. When she hears a remark, "I think foreigners have much more interesting names than we do, anyway" (Gurnah 137). She feels the urge to respond, but restrains herself. She wants to assert "I'm not a foreigner, she thought, but she did not say anything" (Gurnah 138). Yet remains silent. This confinement is an act of survival and not passivity. Silence shields her against instant danger and strengthens inner turmoil.

The novel gives a repeated indication of the influence of racial stereotypes on the environment of Dottie. She sees the excessively dangerous and criminal Black bodies with which they are linked. She reflects that "she did not see where these fears of the black men turning to criminals come from." (Gurnah 62). Such perceptions generate an atmosphere of suspicion. Dottie is taught that she has to be restrained to be accepted. Her ubiquity is conditional. She is only a part of the world when she does not go against the mainstream expectations. This struggle is further intensified by the conflict between filiation and affiliation. Filiation is a term that means hereditary family and origin. Affiliation is selected social affiliations. The loss, fragmentation, and silence characterise Dottie as filiated. Her family background does not provide much emotional stability. She thus aims at identification by way of education, fantasising futures, and societal penalising. But still, these affiliations are weak. She learns that she cannot feel socially acceptable with effort alone.

The condition is explained by Edward Said in his idea of filiation and affiliation. According to Said, the current subjects tend to substitute the lost affiliative ties with the affiliative networks to survive social



discontinuity (Said 16). Here in Dottie, this substitution is incomplete. Affiliative attempts by Dottie are not comprehensive enough to cover racial ostracism. She has a disrupted sense of ubiety. The emotional cost of this instability is also revealed by Gurnah. Dottie is deprived of her girlish essence since society shapes her into a well-mannered and reserved person. She realises that “In reality, the circumstances of her life had turned her into Dottie long before she was in any condition to protest, long before it might even have occurred to her to think otherwise” (Gurnah 5). This change is an indication of the internalisation of exclusion. Refugee consciousness emerges not from movement but from repeated denial of belonging. The novel further complicates ubiety by linking it to desire and prohibition. Dottie’s childhood game represents a space of personal freedom. She learns to suppress her desire to remain safe. Ubiety turns into an imagined and not a lived experience.

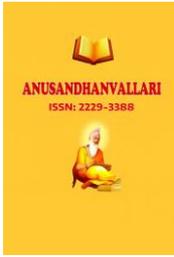
These experiences on the part of Dottie help her to demonstrate that belonging is not an impartial state. It is created by race force and identification. The identity of Dottie is created on these parameters. She is there in England but never ever recognised. The silence is a sign of endurance and loss on her part. Ubiety naming and silence are central to the formation of refugee consciousness in *Dottie*. Gurnah presents unbelonging as an everyday experience shaped by social structures rather than legal status. Dottie’s struggle demonstrates that identity remains fragile when recognition is withheld. Refugee consciousness emerges even at home when belonging is conditional and incomplete.

Race Belonging and the Politics of Everyday Exclusion in Dottie

This chapter examines how race structures belonging in Dottie through ordinary encounters, social language, and institutional power. Abdulrazak Gurnah presents exclusion as routine rather than exceptional. Dottie’s life shows that unbelonging is produced through daily practices that appear normal yet leave a lasting psychological impact. Race determines how she is seen, heard, and judged. Belonging remains conditional and reversible. Such conditionality reflects what Nira Yuval-Davis defines as the politics of belonging, where inclusion depends on social recognition rather than legal status (Yuval-Davis 3). Dottie repeatedly encounters racialisation in public and private spaces. These encounters rarely take the form of open hostility. They appear as jokes, assumptions, and casual remarks. Their cumulative effect is damaging. She observes how Black people are imagined as dangerous or criminal. She reflects that “she did not see where these fears of the black men turning to criminals come from” (Gurnah 62). This seemed absurd to her. Such awareness makes one vigilant at all times. Dottie learns to monitor her behaviour to avoid attracting attention. Belonging becomes linked to self-control. This aligns with Sara Ahmed’s argument that “racialised subjects are marked as out of place even within familiar spaces” (Ahmed 21).

Language plays a crucial role in this process. Racial terms are used to mark difference and establish hierarchy. When a wounded boy is described through violent imagery, the racialisation of language becomes visible: “weren’t joking, he just dumped the bike and scarpered. Like a streak of greased black lightning he was” (Gurnah 112). Such descriptions reduce Black bodies to threat and spectacle. Dottie witnesses these moments without protest. Silence again becomes her response. The politics of belonging also operate through national nostalgia. Dottie hears idealised accounts of England as a peaceful and orderly place before racial others were blamed for decline: “England was an earthly paradise then, my friends...a policeman strolling quietly... couldn’t imagine anything horrible happening in England. None of this rioting and rape and strikes as we have now” (Gurnah 111). These narratives present racialised subjects as the source of disorder. Dottie recognises the injustice of such claims yet feels their pressure. She is positioned as an intruder in her own country. Such nostalgic exclusion echoes Yuval-Davis’s view that belonging is often defended through imagined national purity (Davis 17).

Silence and compliance fail to protect her. Race becomes an excuse for humiliation and exclusion. This



is an indication of structural racism that still prevails in the day-to-day labour space. The way selective acceptance works has also been revealed in the novel. Certain figures praise racialised communities while denying them full belonging. One-character claims that “West Indian people like Dottie were all right, he told her” (Gurnah 250). Dottie rejects this classification. She insists on her belonging to England. The need to repeatedly assert her place reveals the insecurity of recognition. Acceptance is offered only when difference remains contained. This mirrors what Amit Bhattacharya describes as unbelonging produced through partial inclusion rather than outright exclusion (Bhattacharya 3).

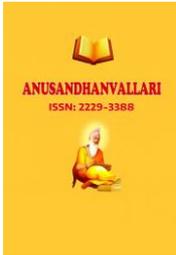
Racial exclusion begins early in Dottie’s life. She recalls how her peers mocked her through performative racial spectacle when they “at night, they dressed her in mocking finery and made her into their dark queen” (Gurnah 44). This moment introduces her to the dangers of visibility. She learns that attention invites ridicule. From childhood onward, belonging is linked to restraint. Such early encounters shape long-term identity and emotional response. Education does not erase these boundaries. Although Dottie enters academic spaces, she remains aware of class and racial hierarchy. At Morley College, she experiences discomfort when she realises that “Stella Hoggarth turned out to be Estella Hoggar, as she explained to them with a smile when she introduced herself on the first day” (Gurnah 295). This moment highlights her awareness of authority and difference. Education offers aspiration but not security. Knowledge cannot dissolve racial borders. This confirms migration scholars’ view that institutional access does not guarantee social acceptance (Moslund 5). Fear discourse also circulates within racialised communities. Dottie hears claims that hostility is unavoidable and must be resisted through strength when it is said that “white people hate us. They’ll do anything to keep us down, unless we fight back and protect ourselves” (Gurnah 95). Such statements reveal how exclusion shapes identity from all sides. Belonging becomes framed through conflict rather than comfort.

Through these everyday encounters, Gurnah reveals that belonging is not stable or guaranteed. It is continuously negotiated and frequently withdrawn. Dottie’s identity forms within this uncertainty. She is present yet never fully acknowledged. Her ubiety remains incomplete because recognition is always conditional. This chapter has shown that Dottie exposes the politics of everyday exclusion through race language and power. Unbelonging is produced within ordinary life rather than at borders. Silence emerges as a response to unequal power rather than weakness. Gurnah demonstrates that refugee consciousness can develop without migration. Dottie’s experience reveals how exclusion operates within the nation and shapes identity over time.

Conclusion

Dottie offers a strong comment on belonging in society, which proclaims inclusivity and positively engages in exclusion. The story about Dottie Badoura, Fatma Balfour, and Abdulrazak Gurnah reveals how a refugee-like consciousness is developed through the name of the race and silence in the country. The novel questions the belief that the displacement must be physically transferred to a different country. Rather, it indicates the possibility of unbelonging that may arise in the daily social practises. This paper has revealed that ubiety is at the core of the struggle that Dottie goes through. Ubiety as an embodied sense of being and appreciation never sets her down. Though born and brought up in England, she is constantly labelled as being foreign. The attempts to establish space by means of the education discipline and the emotional restraint are not guarantees of acceptance. Individual belonging is contingent. It is based on adherence to the dominant norms as opposed to cohabitation or service.

Naming is one of the important points of anxiety and negotiation. The fear of having no name by Dottie is a manifestation of fear of having no identity and location. Her name bears some histories that destabilise dominant British identity. Instead of being empowered, it is an object of vulnerability. The naming is very political, as evidenced in the novel. It defines the legitimacy of visibility and group membership. To be deprived



of recognition by naming is to be deprived of ubiety.

Silence is brought out as one of the key survival mechanisms. Dottie is told that protest is more welcome than exclusion. She controls the emotionality of speech and desire to have safety. Such silence shields her against direct damage but leaves permanent psychological scars. The novel does not display silence as the sign of weakness, but as a reaction to unequal power. The consciousness of refugees is developed by restraint instead of resistance. Voice becomes costly.

In the novel, everyday life is organised by race. The exclusion comes up as jokes, assumptions, and casual remarks, and not pure violence. Such experiences add up to trauma. Dottie lives in terror and paranoia. She gets to know how to reduce herself in order not to attract attention. This experience confirms that it is based on race and not citizenship that one is governed on whether to belong. Racial boundaries can not be erased even by intimacy and education. The contradiction between filiation and affiliation is another thing that makes Dottie's identity even more complicated. The blood relations that she has inherited are characterised by death and disintegration. She is trying to find belongingness in social institutions and future fantasies. These affiliations are weak, however. They are unable to substitute the rejection by society. This process is an unresolved negotiation of her identity. Dottie highlights the everyday exclusion, and this is why it widens the refugee literature. It unveils the existence of unbelonging without migration. The novel undermines triumphant stories of multiculturalism. It demonstrates how inclusion usually requires silence and erasure of self. Gurnah refuses resolution. Belonging is temporary and is subject to reversal. Finally, Dottie introduces refugee identity as a state that is predetermined by race, power, and recognition. Home is a problematic place. Identity remains in process. The novel, through its silent pathos, reveals itself as having called up the financial price of conditional belonging. It is one of the outstanding contributions to the genre of refugee writings since it depicts the way in which exile may be found in a native place, and the silence is the language of livelihood.

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