


Yusuf in The Well: Contemporary Prophet and His Self-Search in Abdulrazak Gurnah's Paradise

Yazar(lar) / Author(s)

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Mahmut Akar 
Muş Alparslan Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat
Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Muş-
Türkiye.
e-mail: m.akar@alparslan.edu.tr
(Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding author)

Makale Bilgileri/Article Information

Tür-Type: Araştırma makalesi-Research article
Geliş tarihi-Date of submission: 01. 01. 2024
Kabul tarihi-Date of acceptance: 30. 04. 2024
Yayın tarihi-Date of publication: 31. 05. 2024

Hakemlik-Review

Hakem sayısı-Reviewers: İki Dış Hakem-Two
External
Değerlendirme-Rewiev: Çift Taraflı Kör
Hakemlik-Double-blind

Etik/Ethics

Etik beyan- Ethical statement: Bu çalışmanın
hazırlanma sürecinde etik ilkelere uyulmuştur.
Benzerlik taraması- Plagiarism checks
Yapıldı-İntihal.net-Yes-İntihal.net
Etik bildirim- Complaints
ictimaiyat@alparslan.edu.tr
ictimaiyatdergi@gmail.com

Çıkar çatışması-Conflict of interest

Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.
The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no
conflict of interest

Finansman-Grant Support

Herhangi bir fon, hibe veya başka bir destek
alınmamıştır.
No funds, grants, or other support was
received.

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Atıf- Citation (APA)

AKAR, M. (2024). Yusuf in The Well: Contemporary prophet and his self-search in Abdulrazak Gurnah's paradise. *İctimaiyat*, 8(1), ss. 17-28. <https://doi.org/10.33709/ictimaiyat.1364580>

Abstract

It cannot be denied that art and works constitute an important part of life. Artists are master individuals who hold a mirror to life and create their works by distilling the essence of life into them. Artists are responsible individuals who do not turn their backs on the realities of the society they live in but transform those realities into art by using their ability to re-construct it. For hundreds of years, they have been inspired by the religious and cultural codes of the societies they live in and use them as raw materials for their art. One of these master artists, African-born Abdulrazak Gurnah, who is also one of the contemporary British writers, is one of those who masterfully fictionalizes reality like his previous generations of writers. The author fictionalizes, in Paradise, the Qur'anic story of Prophet Yusuf and creates a contemporary prophet. In the novel, the author, who centers his narrative on themes such as completely homelessness, slavery, and marginalization, highlights the problems that African societies are subjected to. In this study, the real-life story of Prophet Yusuf and the African Yusuf, who is a fictional character, will be examined in the context of religion and fiction, and the difficulties faced by Yusuf during his identity formation and self-development will be examined.

Keywords: Identity, otherization, fiction, reality, slavery.

Kuyudaki Yusuf: Abdulrazak Gurnah'ın Cennet Adlı Romanında Çağdaş Peygamber ve Kimlik Arayışı

Öz

Sanat ve edebiyatın hayatın önemli bir bölümünü meydana getirdiği kaçınılmaz bir gerçektir. Sanatçılar yaşama ayna tutan, eserlerini hayatın özünü damıtarak meydana getiren usta bireylerdir. Sanatçılar yaşadıkları toplumun gerçeklerine sırtlarını dönmeyi değil, o gerçeklikleri kurgulama yeteneklerini kullanarak sanata dönüştürmeyi ödev bilen sorumluluk sahibi bireylerdir. Yüz yıllar boyunca birlikte yaşadıkları toplumun dini ve kültürel kodlarından esinlenerek onları sanatlarına ham madde olarak kullanagelmislerdir. Bu usta sanatçılardan biri olan çağdaş İngiliz yazarlardan biri olan Afrika kökenli Abdulrazak Gurnah da kendi öncülleri gibi gerçeği ustaca kurgulayan yazarlardan biridir. Yazar sahip olduğu İslami gelenekten ve Kur'an-ı Kerim'den esinlenerek kaleme aldığı Cennet adlı romanında Yusuf Peygamber ve kendi hayal ürünü olan Yusuf karakterini bir anlamda özdeşleştirerek gerçek bir peygamber kıssasından kurgusal bir çağdaş peygamber meydana getirir. Çalışmada, anlatısının merkezine yersiz-yurtsuzluk, kölelik ve ötekileştirilme gibi temaları alan yazar Afrika toplumlarının maruz kaldığı sorunları kurgusal olarak ele almaya çalışır. Bu çalışmada Yusuf Peygamber'in gerçek hayat hikayesi ile bir kurgusal karakter olan Afrikalı Yusuf karakterinin yaşadıkları din ve edebiyat bağlamında incelenip Yusuf karakterinin kimlik ve benlik gelişimi sırasında karşılaştığı zorluklar incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, ötekileştirilme, kurgu, gerçeklik, kölelik

1. Introduction

Literature is a branch of art that includes everything about the past, present, and future of human beings and can use everything related to it as a raw material. While we get information about the past through literature, we also make predictions about the future. With the facts that the author adds to his fiction, the reader can observe both the art and the facts attached to the art at the same time and can make inferences according to his own taste and opinion. When we consider the fact that “The subject matter of the writer is humanity, and humanity is above race a nation” (Burgess, 1974: 9) we can see that the authors associate and use all kinds of subjects with human beings. The artist can sometimes use his work as a tool to raise awareness in the reader and sometimes to entertain. One of the first and most important written works of Medieval English literature and the most important one, *Canterbury Tales*, provides us with a really good example of how a literary work can convey lifestyles and manners of even distant periods. We can observe the period and the life and lifestyle of the people who lived in that period very well. In this context, it is possible to claim that the literary work actually undertakes the task of a mirror. For example, in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, which is one of the most interesting of these stories and which is still being studied today, we can see what kind of lifestyle women had in the conditions of the day, what they desired and what kind of jobs they were engaged in (Chaucer, 1965: 301).

A literary work should not be viewed as a mere fiction or entertainment tool, since most works can be narratives inspired by the artist's own life story and skillfully including elements of fiction. The artists can produce masterful works based on themselves, their own experiences. If we accept it as Sigmund Freud put forward, we can state that nothing is pure fiction, and that all creations are actually based on experience. Freud claims that the author is able to disguise himself skillfully in an autobiographical work that he writes using his own experiences. Stating that Goethe concealed himself very skillfully in his works, Freud says, “Goethe was not only a great confessor, but on the other hand, he was someone who meticulously concealed himself despite the many self-living explanations in his works” (2013: 37) . From this expression, we can understand that every artistic product written is actually inspired by the events that exist in the artists' subconscious.

When we investigate the foundations and sources of inspiration of Western literature, the first thing we come across is the holy texts, the Bible. The Bible is not just a holy book for writers, but a history book at the same time because of the stories of the prophets and saints it contains; a geography book because of its verses about the earth and its formation; it is accepted as a philosophy book and more because it is a work that explains the purpose of creation of man and questions and examines his responsibilities to God. Western literature still makes narrative use of the Bible and scriptures. The Bible is still a precursor to literary works. It is not possible to limit this issue only to the Bible in Western literature. It is possible to see the influence of different religious texts like Qur'an, and in Western literature nowadays, as the world has acquired the status of a global village. With the increasing immigration in the century, we live in, there is a serious migration wave from East to West. These immigrants take their own culture and civilization with them to the countries they migrated to. Eventually, the West begins to meet new beliefs and works of art inspired by those cultures.

In Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Paradise*, which we will discuss within the scope of this article, the artist deals with the story of Yusuf, who was given a pledge by his family to a rich merchant

in return for his father's debt, inspired by the story of the Prophet Yusuf told in the Qur'an. *Paradise* becomes an influential novel for not only relating Yusuf's story, but also for setting it in the time of the World War I and the Berlin Conference, both of which become turning points in the destiny of Continental Africa. Gurnah describes the Arab slave trade on the Swahili coasts and further inland, and the spiritual and physical destruction caused by the Western colonial forces, by identifying them with the story of Prophet Yusuf in the Qur'an.

2. Biographical Background

The kind of culture and belief transfer explained above is brought to life in the works of the Tanzanian writer Abdulrazak Gurnah, who was awarded the 2021 Nobel Prize in literature. Abdulrazak Gurnah was born in 1948 in Zanzibar, an East African country. Gurnah immigrated to England at the age of 18 in order to get rid of internal turmoil and complete his education during the years when his country continued its struggle for independence. In 1982, Gurnah successfully completed his doctorate at the University of Kent, where he worked until his retirement. Gurnah's academic interests are in colonial and post-colonial discourses associated with African, Caribbean, and Indian literature. The main topics that Gurnah deals with in his works are concepts such as identity, immigration, marginalization, and completely homeless. In fact, Gurnah is a writer who reveals himself and his background to the reader by fictionalizing them in his writing. In an interview, he expresses that he enjoys getting rid of the troubled states and negative emotions that occur in his inner world by using the art of fiction, which he skillfully uses (Nobel Prize, 2022). In the same interview, he states that he pays attention to the fact that they are 'acceptable' while fictionalizing them and that he tries to present well-organized fictional facts to his readers whilst writing. As Terry Eagleton has stated, there is no work of art independent of the time it was created (2014: 74). Living in England as an immigrant from a young age, Gurnah tries to shed light in his narratives as a person who personally experiences the identity crisis of the people of exploited societies, who are excluded because of their skin color, the marginalization they experience, the deadlock and troubled situations they fall into due to the condescending attitudes of the colonizers. Stendhal's claim that "A novel is a mirror being walked along the road" (2005: 74), applies to Gurnah's case, who in a way tries to hold a mirror up to the life of the third world people. As Mehmet Güneş states, unlike other black and Indian writers, Gurnah holds a mirror to the society in which he lives, with an objective point of view, without taking sides. Gurnah, who sees the post-colonial writers' evaluation of what happened during the colonial period only through the eyes of people belonging to their own nation as partisanship, shows that he does not look at the world from a window, but from a wide window, as an interpreter of the oppression suffered not only by the people of the place where he was born, but also by the people of hundreds of tribes (2015: 146).

3. Yusuf's Artificial Paradise and Reality

Abdulrazak Gurnah takes his readers on a journey filled with legends, real events, and religious texts with his novel *Paradise*. In this novel, the author describes the African Continent from the perspective of a small child who is in struggle for growing up and survival. Yusuf, who is given as a pawn to a merchant named Aziz because of his father's debt, becomes a completely homeless boy who has left his homeland at the age of 12. Yusuf, who starts life as a salesclerk in a shop run by Uncle Aziz, gradually comes to the point of going on long commercial trips. Yusuf's life experience turns out to be a sad one during which he witnesses the conflict between

the Christian and the Muslim, the African and the European, the poor and the rich. All these sad experiences and pain, as well as his uncertainty about his future, drag him to a severe identity crisis. Yusuf goes through uncertainties about the future that drag him into an identity crisis which puts him into more difficulty. According to James Hodapp, the first critical studies of the novel are based on the postcolonial dichotomy of the exploiter and the exploited, although the novel explores the tumultuous influence of Islam as well as the troubled and asymmetrical relationships of Swahili, Somali, Nyamwezili, European, Arab, and East Indians with each other (2015: 94). Abdulrazak Gurnah tries to shed light on the visible and invisible political, sociological, and economic problems of the African Continent with the true and fictional story of Yusuf. He tries to parallel Yusuf's story with that of Prophet Yusuf as revealed in the holy *Qur'an* in order to acquire a spiritual dimension to little Yusuf's troubles and miseries. Sacred texts, the *Bible* in Western Literature, for example, have always been very important sources of reference and inspiration for artistic production. As we try to explain above, the *Bible* is still used in Western literature, and it is considered as the primary source of inspiration. When we handle the historical development processes of the narrative, we can see that the first narratives were instructive texts addressing to gods. When we examine the Classical Period works such as *King Oedipus* written by Sophocles, we see that these works are texts that aim to teach and guide people about loving and fearing gods. Even today, in an age that religion has lost its former grasp, artists still refer to sacred books for artistic purposes, like Gurnah does in his work under consideration. He is inspired by Yusuf, the Qur'anic Prophet, while developing his character's, Yusuf's, problematic existence. Envied by his brothers, the child Prophet Yusuf is thrown into a blind well until he is rescued by a caravan passing by, he is then sold as a prisoner in the slave market in Egypt. "They (in Egypt) sold it for a few dirhams for nothing. They did not value him anyway" (Yusuf, 12/ 20). Züleyha, the wife of the King of Egypt who buys him, cannot help admiring his beauty then falls in love with him as he grows up. As the Prophet Yusuf grows older, Züleyha cannot restrain her desires for him and one day she invites the Prophet Yusuf to her own room. Meanwhile, Prophet Yusuf realizes Züleyha's feelings for him and wants to leave the room. This event is narrated in the *Qur'an* as follows: "The woman he was with wanted to be with him. She closed the doors tight and said, 'Come on!'. He said, 'I seek refuge in Allah! Your husband is my benefactor, he did me a favor and opened his house. The truth is that the wrongdoers will not prosper!" (Yusuf, 12/ 23). However, since Züleyha does not want to let Prophet Yusuf out of her grasp, she attacks him from behind and causes his shirt to tear from behind. But then Züleyha raises a fuss as if Prophet Yusuf had attacked her. Unable to accept such disrespect, Züleyha's husband throws Prophet Yusuf into the dungeon. And he is forced to stay in prison until he becomes ruler of Egypt. Gurnah describes this scene in his novel, similar to the incident in the *Qur'an*:

"Yusuf wasn't sure what she wanted from him, but it was clear that she had a passionate, longing expression on her face. The lady pressed her own palms to his chest and then stood up. She shivered as she placed her hand on Yusuf's shoulder. He withdrew, and the lady followed him. He turned to run away, but Mistress caught him by his shirt, and Yusuf realized that his shirt had been torn and remained in his hand." (2022: 264).

In *Paradise*, Gurnah's Yusuf, inspired by the Prophet Yusuf, shares the fate of the Prophet Yusuf in some aspects. The female characters smile invitingly and welcome Yusuf to their home. For this reason, they send young girls to him with small gifts and inappropriate offers:

“Come to me this afternoon while my husband is sleeping. Shall I wash you with my hands? Do you have a place you want me to scratch? Sometimes they would whistle and laugh at him, and every time one of the old women passed him, he would blow kisses and shake his hips. The girl who brought him food was sitting a few feet away from him while he was eating, staring at him without embarrassment. The girl spoke to him nervously, frowning from time to time. Yusuf averted his eyes away from her almost exposed breasts. The girl, on the other hand, was drawing Yusuf’s attention to the beads she had wrapped around her neck, slightly lifting her necklace to win his appreciation.” (2022: 191).

Like the chaste Prophet Yusuf, the hero of the novel, Yusuf, tries to maintain his modesty and manages to keep women who make such immoral proposals away from him as much as he can. When we examine this situation, we can see that Gurnah’s work, inspired by the sacred text, has masterfully weaved the fiction-fact balance. Müge Günay expresses her thoughts on this issue as follows:

“Gurnah tells Yusuf on the basis of the story of Prophet Yusuf (including the part about Züleyha) mentioned in the *Qur’an* and the *Torah*. Like Prophet Yusuf, he draws attention with his beauty, was bought and sold as a slave, something is known to him in his dreams, he is loved by everyone. Thanks to these features, he is not treated like an ordinary slave during the caravan journey, and it takes time to understand the nature of the slavery relationship, but in the end, he cannot escape from this reality. Unlike Prophet Yusuf, who became the sultan of Egypt after suffering great pains, Yusuf was not rewarded at the end of his captivity.” (2022: 8).

The common point in both Yusuf’s experiences is their being forced to live a life far away from their families since very young ages. Consequent to long years of completely homeless and harsh turmoil, Yusuf in *Paradise* undergoes a personal crisis, which makes him set on a quest for self-realization. We can observe that the character of Yusuf in the novel *Paradise* embarks on a quest of identity due to the identity crisis resulting from completely homelessness. In the pre-Islamic period, which is described as the Age of Ignorance in Islamic history, girls were buried alive because they did not have a respectable place in society. When they were asked if they would like to visit their uncles, these innocent girls would say ‘yes’ to this question without knowing that they were actually going to die. Gurnah reminds this taboo while referring to Yusuf’s experience with pledge as a “trip”. His father sends Yusuf to his new life, that is slavery, by saying that “Would you like to go on a short journey, my little octopus?” (2022: 29).

He does not have a family or social infrastructure on which to build his identity. Travels that he takes with his Master or Uncle Aziz are a kind of search for self to Yusuf. This struggle, however, does not last long as he is too much distanced from his family and childhood memories. The only thing that reminds him of his family is the rosary his mother gave him as a souvenir when he left home. Gurnah reveals this scene as follows: “He took with him two shorts, a *kanzu* that is still new since it was bought last Eid al-Fitr, a shirt, the *Qur’an* and his mother's old rosary” (2022: 30). Unfortunately, Yusuf loses this rosary on his first journey, which in a sense means that Yusuf’s only ties with his family and hometown are lost. His only bond with his family is Uncle Aziz, with whom he now has to live as a hostage. The person he stays with is neither his uncle nor exactly his master. At the very first stage of his life, Yusuf constantly enters and is exposed into such dilemmas. In the novel, Halil, who is another pawn given by his family to Aziz before Yusuf, tells this bitter truth to himself as follows: “As for Uncle Aziz, for one thing, he is not your uncle. This is very important for you. Look at me *kifa urongo* (living dead). He is not

your uncle” (2022: 37). Despite all these bitter facts, Yusuf takes it upon himself to do the work of his Uncle Aziz properly. The narrator justifies Yusuf’s self-contained attitude with his work as that “Even though Yusuf did not know all the details, he could not see anything wrong with his working for Uncle Aziz to pay off his father’s debt” (Gurnah, 2022: 38). Yusuf’s devotional attitude in relation to his master, comes up as another allusion to a Qur’anic story, that of Prophet İbrahim and Prophet İsmail. This situation reminds us again a story in the *Qur’an*, that Prophet İsmail’s father, Prophet İbrahim, tries to slaughter his son in response to his promise to God, by stating that “If I have a son, I will sacrifice him for Allah” (Saffat, 37) and that Prophet İsmail gives his consent with full surrender in response to this order. The story goes as that “When the child was old enough to work with his father, his father said to him, ‘My child,’ I dreamed that I had sacrificed you; think about it, what will you say to this?’ He said, ‘Daddy! Do as you are commanded; I hope you will find me as one of the patient ones” (Saffat, 102).

We can liken the Merchant Aziz to the Western societies that exploit the African natives under the pretext of missionary and so-called civilization, and for this reason they try to spread Christianity and teach them the *Bible*. As it is known, in 1963 President of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta says that “When the Missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and the Missionaries had *the Bible*. They taught how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had *the Bible*” (2024, 15 February). Aziz also gives gifts and money to Yusuf whenever he visits his father while Yusuf was still a child, and therefore Aziz is an important and civilized figure for Yusuf. Uncle Aziz’s positive influence on Yusuf’s family is defined in detail:

“Yusuf was always happy with his coming. His father said that the visit of such a wealthy and well-known merchant, a *tajiri mkubwa*, was an honor to them. However, Uncle Aziz was more than that, but his visit always honored them. Every time Uncle Aziz would come by, he would surely give Joseph a ten- coin *anna*. Yusuf didn’t need to do anything, he just needed to be present at the right time. Uncle Aziz would look for him, smile and give him the money. Every time that moment came, Yusuf wanted to smile at him too, but he restrained himself, sensing that it would be inappropriate to do such a thing. Yusuf admired Uncle Aziz’s radiant skin and enigmatic scent. Even after he left, his scent lingered for days.” (Gurnah, 2022: 16).

Aziz, in time, evokes Yusuf’s interest in himself with these small gifts. In fact, Aziz secretly admires Yusuf like other characters of the novel. And perhaps he wants to present Yusuf as a commodity, which he sees as a means of superiority over other people. Güneş comments on the nature of Uncle Aziz’s interest in Yusuf as follows:

“Before Yusuf was given to him as a pledge, he appreciates his Uncle Aziz because he lived a wealthy life and was respected by the people around him, so he wants to live with him. Just as the Europeans confiscated everything, they owned by giving the *Bible* to the Indians, who were the natives of the continent during the discovery of America, Aziz gives some money to Yusuf every time he visits, seducing him and dragging his identity and values into a great impasse.” (2015: 148).

It is completely ironical that Gurnah calls this novel ‘paradise’, since in the novel, none of the Eastern Societies are satisfied with the way they are in. As Güneş (2015: 147) states, *Paradise* has an impressive style in which the identity is broken, lost over time and cannot reach its former naturalness again due to factors such as enslavement, exile, suppression due to external reasons, and the restriction of freedom. Steiner, on the other hand, refers to Gurnah’s

criticism of western culture as that “Offering counternarratives to myths of nation, land, and language, Gurnah’s fiction points out precisely the lack of freedom such discourses and politics can produce” (Steiner, 2010: 125). When we look at the novel in general, most of the characters are completely homeless slave individuals who are far from their homes and families. As exemplified by Yusuf and his predecessor Halil, they are thousands of kilometers far away from their hometowns, lacking the freedom to master themselves in their miserable lives. The narrator defines their miserable existence as that “They were all in the same situation, here and there in a stinking place, yearning and comforting in dreams of lost integrity” (2022: 199). There is constant mention of Arabs, Hindus, African Muslims, and indigenous tribes in *Paradise*. Perhaps the only people considered to be civilized here are the Germans, who come there to exploit underground and above-ground resources but believed by the natives to be fearless and able to do whatever they want, and not effected by dipping their hands into the blazing fire (2022: 19). Gurnah emphasizes, through some chain of events in the novel, that the slightly developed societies conceive the less developed people as the other, as uncivilized. Elizabeth Maslen comments on these dynamics as follows:

“Often in the course of the novel the terms ‘civilized’ and ‘savage’, for instance, confront each other, but never given priority to difference of colour: ‘civilized’ refers to the speaker and to those who practice his ways of life, ‘savage’ refers to those who do not, or whom the speaker wishes for the moment to distance from himself. Yet in the end, by their repetition in different contexts, such terms are deconstructed; they only function in each given context as identifying self and other, that are highly debatable as authoritative descriptions of actual ways of life.” (1996: 55).

Homie K. Bhabha takes this one step further and argues that the insidious White man takes different approaches to create dichotomies between people of the same race - in order to divide and rule them easily. The perception of difference that Bhabha mentions occurs in the focus of the black man and the negro. The author expresses this situation as follows:

“The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (food bearer); the black is the embodiment of rampant sexuality, yet innocent as a child; the Negro is mystical, primitive, simple-minded, yet the worldliest and the most successful liar and manipulator of social forces.” (2011: 170).

Gurnah develops the theme of how the concept of other is formed with reference to the prejudice of Yusuf’s hotel manager father against the natives as follows: “Accustomed to playing alone, the silence and gloom of the lumberyard did not bother him. His father didn’t like it when he played away from home. We are surrounded by savages” (2022: 19). Of course, the Indians, another group that receives the approval of his father, do not show the expected affectionate approach and exclude Yusuf contrary to his father’s expectations: “His father preferred that Yusuf play with the children of the Indian warehouseman living in that neighborhood, but when Yusuf tried to snuggle with them, the Indian children pushed him away and made fun of him” (Gurnah, 2022: 19). This exemplifies that marginalization and being marginalized move from bottom to up and from top to down across social strata. Even Halil, who was given a pledge to Aziz in exchange for his father’s debt before Yusuf, takes his place in this hierarchical pyramid and marginalizes Yusuf as his inferior. When people ask who Yusuf is, who is given to do errands in the shop, he says, “This is my little brother, he has come to work with us. He looks very weak and frail, because he has just come from that wild area behind the hills” (2022: 35). He describes Yusuf and the place he came from as wild.

Westerners have developed different perspectives and discourses, most notably orientalism, to prove and reinforce their superiority over the 'other'. "The Orientalist perspective has become one of the most important factors in the formation of the Western perception that constitutes the justification for modern colonialism, the ideological basis of which is capitalism and imperialism" (Çelikel, 2011: 194). Edward Said expresses the white man's belief in their superiority in *Culture and Imperialism* as such, "We westerners decide who is good native and who is bad native, because all natives exist because of our recognition. We created the natives, taught them to speak and think, when they revolt, they at best justify us as being stupid children deceived by some of their western masters" (2010: 21). Westerners study the Eastern societies with the aim of proving that their civilization is superior to the Easterners, they create, thus, a foreign, a primitive as their 'other'. Rather than a scientific effort or a humanistic mission, their main target is to find new and rich resources. This has been a Western habit which is run under the disguise of missionary efforts of spreading civilization to the so called 'primitive people' in the name of God. "What is visible is the necessity of such governance, justified by moralistic and prescriptive ideologies of reclamation, which are seen as the civilizing task or responsibility of the White man" (Bhabha, 2016: 171). Gurnah defines this unceasing hunger of the colonialists as that "Like a locust invasion, there is no limit or discipline to their appetite" (2022: 89). He goes on as follows:

"Now wherever they went, they witnessed the Europeans arriving before them and stationing their soldiers and officials, telling the people that they had come to save them from their enemies, who had no other purpose than to turn them into slaves. The traders spoke with amazement of the Europeans, with awe in return for their savagery and ferocity. They take the best lands without paying any money, they cheat and force people to work for them." (2022: 89).

According to Bhabha, for colonialists, colonial space is unexplored territory, territory that belongs to no one; it is empty or wasted territory whose history has not yet begun, whose future progress must be ensured within modernity (2016: 433). The colonialists achieve their goals gradually by, to start with, massacring the elite of the countries they occupy. With the same purpose of achieving all natives have, above and below the ground, including people in the back of their minds, they commit all kinds of tyranny. Gurnah asserts the seriousness of these exploitations through his characters as follows:

"I'm afraid of the coming period, Hussein said quietly, and Hamit sighed wearily. Everything became turbulent. These Europeans are very determined and in their fight for the welfare of this land, they will crush us all. It would be naive to think that they are here to do something good. It's not trade they're after, it's the land itself. And everything that lives in it... including us." (2022: 105).

Indigenous people are quite well aware of the colonizers' malicious intentions beyond their claims at civilizing them against their will. Moreover, they are aware of the fact that non-ending operations and interferences of the colonizers will destroy and corrupt their native culture in the end. Especially future generations, they fear, will alienate from their culture, which would end up in self alienation. At this point, they consider themselves luckier than future generations for being still a part of their native culture. They believe that sometime in future, the colonialists will impose their own laws on them and expect them to live according to these laws as if they were holy books. Eventually, the situation will become so inextricable in Gurnah's words, that "Even slaves advocate slavery" (2022: 106). Gurnah highlights the future of coming

generations under the Western tyranny as that “But there will be no more travel, as European dogs are spread everywhere. When they are done with us, there will be no holes left in our bodies. We will become unrecognizable. We will be worse than the shit they feed us. All kinds of calamities will befall us, people from our blood” (2022: 212).

Gurnah does not deal with his subject matter only from a religious perspective in his novel, which he alludes to the story of the Prophet Yusuf, whom he describes as “The Prophet Yusuf, who saved Egypt from famine” (2022: 102). Even though the novel can be examined from different perspectives, the main theme, in fact, is related to Yusuf character and his allusion to Prophet Yusuf. In other words, Yusuf who is in search of a paradise, fails when compared to Prophet Yusuf who manages to become the King of Egypt in the end. Prophet Yusuf is thrown into the well by his brothers, as their father, Yakup, is showing more interest in him, in the consequence of which he is sold as slaves in Egypt by the merchants. This event is explained in the *Qur’an* as follows: “When his brothers said: Yusuf and his own brother are more valuable than us in our father’s eyes. However, our number is greater. Undoubtedly, our father is clearly in error!” (Yusuf, 12/8). His brothers cannot draw their father’s love for Yusuf and Bünyamin, because both brothers are beautiful and pure-hearted. His brothers are so overcome with jealousy that one of them claims that they will kill Prophet Yusuf and then they can repent and continue their lives in remorse. These egocentric brothers are mentioned in the *Qur’an* as follows: “Kill Yusuf or throw him to a distant place so that your father’s favor will be left only to you! After that, you will be good people by repenting!” (Yusuf, 12/ 9). The things that cause Prophet Yusuf and the protagonist Yusuf to move away from their families may seem completely different. Although it seems like the jealousy of the older brothers in one and due to the family’s lack of livelihood in the other, it is actually similar in essence. The brothers of the Prophet Yusuf want to distance him from them because they are jealous of him and do not like him. We can say very clearly that if Yusuf’s family had loved their son as Prophet Yakup loved his son Yusuf, they would never have taken him away from their eyes, and they would never have given him as pledge in return for their debts. In this context, we can say that Gurnah skillfully grounds the issue of lack of love and weak family ties in the subtext of the novel, as a result of Yusuf’s being given as a pledge to a merchant without mercy in exchange for their debts and expecting a material benefit from it.

In *Paradise*, Gurnah states that, the individual does not have much any value in Eastern societies in the eyes of people and can be bought and sold like an object, and he wants to emphasize the lives of characters who are far from human value judgments. One of the issues he wants to convey in this work, which he wrote inspired by the story of a real Prophet that lived centuries ago, is that destiny of some societies does not change despite the passing time. The fact that Yusuf and Halil, the characters in the novel, as well as the people of Indian and Arab origin, cannot maintain their sense of belonging to their own culture in the places where they have to migrate and begin to adopt the lifestyles of the places they go, is a result of monachopsis.

“Characters who are far from their homeland are characterized as diasporic identities who cannot feel like they belong to their place due to separatist, marginalizing attitudes. Being slaves and not being able to reach a respected position in society due to their father’s debts are the factors that pave the way for Yusuf and Halil to be referred to as the other in society.” (Güneş, 2015: 149).

The heroes of the novel, just like Prophet Yusuf, have to live as slaves due to some worldly ambitions, even though they actually belong to a free family. In this way, they are obstructed from gaining a respectable place in society.

The author narrates in his work that this marginalizing and devaluing treatment that Prophet Yusuf was exposed to when he was a child in African societies is shown to another Yusuf with the same beauty who was fictionally born centuries later. Reflecting the existence of these inhuman attitudes to the reader, Gurnah deftly acts on the plane of fact-fiction with an intertextual approach. Prophet Yusuf is treated like an ordinary person by being thrown into the dungeon without any respect after Züleyha slanders him. The character Yusuf experiences a similar attitude when he arrives at his master's house. We can see how the ongoing class distinction between Africans comes to surface on the social ground with the condescending approach Yusuf experiences as soon as he steps into his master Aziz's house. The people of the house, who see Yusuf as a slave, deem him worthy of the ground floor of the house. Yusuf is now a slave who comes when he is told to come and goes when he is told to go. He is someone who is not asked what he wants and only decisions can be made on his behalf. As stated by Güneş, in African societies, in commercial activities, people are pledged or even sold as a commodity in return for debts, which can cause the identity and personality of individuals to be torn apart (2015: 149). Yusuf, who is forced to participate in commercial journeys under the leadership of his Master, Aziz, feels himself worthless for not being asked whether he wants to go to this journey or not. People's marginalizing and devaluing attitude towards each other begins, in fact, from people at the bottom to people at the top or vice versa. Halil, Yusuf's predecessor, treats Yusuf as if he is his master, although he and his sister Emine, like Yusuf, are held hostage to Aziz in return for their father's debt.

At the beginning, Yusuf is not accepted to Aziz's house at all, which causes a sense of alienation in him. He is allowed to help an old servant in the garden, where Yusuf tries to establish a refuge, a paradise for himself. "Yusuf and Halil talked about the garden and its beauty as they lay on the earthen terrace in front of the shop. Although Yusuf never said anything whilst they were chatting like this, his only wish was to be exiled to that quiet garden for a long time" (Gurnah, 2022: 57). Kearney highlights the positive influence that the garden has on Yusuf as that, "Ironically too, although the garden is a very restricted environment, Yusuf has far more emotional freedom there than on the journey" (2012: 136). Both male and female customers who come to the shop cannot help admiring Yusuf's beauty as follows, "The female customers immediately warmed to Yusuf, they mothered him at every opportunity, and they laughed with delight at his small acts of kindness and cuteness" (Gurnah, 2022: 44). Among them, Ma Ajuza, who cannot hide her emotions and expresses them shamelessly, described by Gurnah as, "One of them, a woman whose skin was radiant black and whose facial expression changed with the slightest movement, had a crush on him" (2022: 44) She calls Yusuf as 'my husband' and goes on moreover, as defined by Gurnah, addressing to him as that, "My husband, the master of my heart" (2022: 44). Then, she flatters him with compliments and promises, seduces him with sweets and says that if he comes to her house, she will make him experience pleasures he cannot imagine. (2022: 44). In a way parallel to that of Prophet Yusuf, who attracts all women around him, Yusuf in *Paradise* attracts all those around him with his beauty and innocence.

He alludes to Qur'anic Yusuf not only for his physical merits, but he also shares Prophet Yusuf's strong hold on dreams, the symbolic world beyond which he interprets with great skill. Those around him are aware of Yusuf's merits, which work even upon his master Aziz. They ask him that, "Do you know why he loves you? Because you are quiet and persevering, and at night, things are known to you in your dreams that are unknown to any of us, and you cry. Maybe he thinks he is a blessed person" (Gurnah, 2022: 197). In the face of a serious problem, they encounter on a commercial trip, thus, one of the caravans tells Yusuf to talk to Aziz on their behalf. These kind of approaches to Yusuf remind us of Prophet Yusuf's knowledge of dream interpretation. One of the main elements that brings Yusuf to the fore in these travels is undoubtedly his physical beauty, whereas Jack Kearney considers his beauty as the source of exploitation as that, "On account of his male physical beauty, he is also a lure to be subtly exploited during Aziz's trading journeys" (2012: 132).

As it is known from the story in the *Qur'an*, the Prophet Yusuf stays for a long time in the dungeon where he is unjustly thrown. He meets some people here, and two dungeon mates at that time tell him about their dreams. Prophet Yusuf interprets the dream of one of them as that he will be executed and that his body will be eaten by vultures, which happens as interpreted by him. He interprets the other's dream as that he will be released from the dungeon and will serve in the palace as the king's servant which also comes true. Even though, Prophet Yusuf asks the second prisoner to remind him to the king, due to Divine providence, he forgets about Prophet Yusuf for many years, until king needs to have his dreams interpreted. One day, the king sees in his dream that seven fat cows eat seven thin cows, and seven plump ears of wheat eat seven skinny ears. The second prisoner remembers Prophet Yusuf's skill in interpreting dreams, when king's astrologers fail, and tells king about him. The event is narrated in the *Qur'an* as follows:

"After getting out of prison and remembering Yusuf's admonition after all this time, the young man said, 'I will tell you the interpretation of this dream; 'Send me now,' he said. (Coming to the dungeon) 'Joseph! O true word friend! Comment for us on the seven fat cows and seven green and equally dry ears, which were eaten by the seven raw cows seen in the dream. 'I hope that I can come back to people with this information and hopefully they will know what to do,' he said. Yusuf said: 'You will sow for seven years, as you always do. Then leave the harvested produce in its ear (keep it like this), except for a small amount for food. Then, after that, seven years of famine will come, and those years will devour what you have accumulated, except for a little (seed) of what you hide.'" (Yusuf, 12/ 45-46-47-48).

Yusuf in *Paradise*, as mentioned above, who owns the same gift with the Prophet, helps Aziz by interpreting his dreams whenever he is in trouble. Yusuf, to whom Aziz consults in all troublesome occasions, is Aziz's main support. Aziz, who is in trouble, asks Yusuf questions about how they can be saved by commenting on dreams as follows, "You hear the men complaining. What do you think we should do? Maybe you had a dream at night, and you can attribute this dream to our release, just like the other Yusuf did, said Uncle Aziz with a smile" (Gurnah, 2022: 187). However, Yusuf's features attributed to him will not be able to protect them from the sad events that will happen to them on this trade journey.

4. Conclusion

In writing his *Paradise*, Abdulrazak Gurnah seeks to shed light on the atrocities and hardships suffered by his own racial compatriots. By making use of the spiritual values he believes in, he sheds light on the life of his fellows with an impartial approach. By the *Qur'an*, he ascribes the characteristics of the Prophet Yusuf to the protagonist of *Paradise*, created in the light of the story of the Prophet Yusuf. Themes such as slavery, being held hostage in return for debt, alienating those who are the 'other', and completely homelessness, which were common in ancient times, are masterfully handled in the novel. All of these are tackled as events that bring the characters of the novel together. When Yusuf was a small child, he was pledged to Aziz in return for his father's debt. Yusuf tries to create fake and artificial paradises to feel safe from the sense of estrangement. It is believed that he will know the future because of the dreams he sees. Because of his outstanding beauty, he receives the same attention that the Prophet Yusuf receives from people. Issues such as the fact that Yusuf's sense of belonging and identity do not develop due to being separated from his family at a young age, and that he has an identity crisis, can be instrumental in evaluating the novel from different perspectives and holding a mirror to the societies that Gurnah puts at the center. Although Yusuf is at the center of the novel, Gurnah actually reflects the problems of an entire African society and is successful in this regard. Yusuf, who is destined to be separated from his family at a young age, cannot become the sultan of Egypt, unlike the Prophet Yusuf, and he is condemned to disappear and be the 'other', which is the destiny of all the others- the completely homeless people of African origin. After looking one last time at the doors of the hidden paradise, which is closed on his face at the end of the novel, Yusuf moves towards an uncertain future to live his destiny, a destiny that has always been drawn by others.

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