
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Postcolonial Poetics: *We Are All Birds of Uganda* (2021)

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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses all facets of post-colonialism in Hafsa Zayyan's *We Are All Birds of Uganda* (2021). The paper purports to delineate the analysis of identity conflict and racism in the novel using a postcolonial perspective. In this paper, the descriptive qualitative method was drawn upon. The postcolonial issues found in this novel are identity conflict, exile, ambivalence, alienation, racism, binarism, and marginalization. The study weaves together and examines the effects of post-colonialism on Indians in two major countries: Uganda and the United Kingdom. As a result, the article aims to examine the novel's marrow from a postcolonial perspective as well as give examples from the novel illustrating the use of postcolonial elements such as memory, identity, otherness, ambivalence, nationalism, space/place, diaspora, hybridity, unbelonging. The paper is significant because it invites Western societies to change their arrogant superiority beliefs based on racial rationales. This paper will explore all the tunnels of post-colonialism in Hafsa Zayyan's *We Are All Birds of Uganda* (2021). The themes concern identity conflict, racism, and hybridity. The results of the study show how racism and discrimination affect the formulation and perpetuation of postcolonial identity. The study recommends that instilling acceptance, tolerance, and love rather than hatred toward one another is the simplest way to eradicate racism.

KEYWORDS

Diaspora, Identity, Other, Postcolonialism, Racism.

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1. Introduction

In 2021, the fabulously sonorous *We Are All Birds of Uganda* was published. It tackles racism, identity conflict, and what it means to belong. It moves between two continents over the course of a tempestuous century. In this novel, Hasan and Sameer's lives are cleverly linked, with flashbacks to Uganda throughout the decades (Bari, 2021). Zayyan swings between two time periods: modern London and the 1970s Uganda (Bari, 2021).

According to Bari (2021), *We Are All Birds of Uganda* is a postcolonial novel. Postcolonial literature is often associated with concepts like fragmentation, alienation, and exile. Imperialism, it goes without saying, played a significant influence in instilling a sense of alienation and instability in the countries where imperialists reigned (Quayson, 2020). Cultural dominance, racism, search for identity, and inequality are all prevalent themes in postcolonial work (Heath, 2019). A number of theme-based conceptions related to both the phrases "colonizer" and "colonized" were commented and demonstrated by the majority of postcolonial writers (Ashcroft et al., 2005). White Europeans have long emphasized racial discrimination as a source of superiority over conquered peoples (Ashcroft et al., 2005).

Post-colonialism refers to the past and present repercussions of colonialism, locally and globally (Quayson, 2020). Abormealeh (2020) proposed that the native land's culture, language, and education are inferior to the colonizers' culture and governmental institutions due to colonial conditions. Such cultural suppression and endorsement of the imperial other cause an identity crisis in the postcolonial protagonist, prompting him or her to seek a genuine and positive image of self. To begin this quest for the self,

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the protagonist's identity is split, resulting in sheer alienation. Saleem (2014, pp.67-76) proposed that the alienation of the body is a person's estrangement from his original homeland, his hometown, and his home that contains the memories of his childhood, his family, and his loved ones. And that he lived in a barren desert of all the hopes he sought and all the feelings he desired. Most important of all is the cultural criterion and its impact on both sides (incoming and outgoing), which is clearly manifested in the identity and culture of the rising generations in the receiving countries. The immigrant who left his country of origin under various circumstances (political, security, economic, social, environmental, etc...) does not mean that he has abandoned his identity and cultural origins. Despite his keenness to adhere to his original identity and culture, he is also open to the culture of the receiving country. In spite of the substantial socio-economic contributions of immigrants, xenophobic feelings have led to cases of prejudice, dogmatism, bias, xenophobia, and even acts of vicious terrorism toward immigrants. The immigrant's tie-up makes him face the question of the genuineness of his identity, a question that indicates a real crisis for the immigrant, which chiefly arises because of his incapacity to form a strong tie-up with the future country at a time when the ties with the land of birth are vanishing.

1.1 Problems of the Study:

Using postcolonialism, the paper examines colonialism and racism in the novel. The problems of the study can be summarized as follows. First, investigate how non-Western civilizations are discriminated against and marginalized based on ethnic rationale. Second, demonstrates how literature tends to reveal the repercussions of colonization and discrimination. Finally, highlights the importance of cultural difference, diversity, multiplicity, and plurality.

1.2 Objectives of the Study:

After organizing the study problem, the author examines many objectives. First, the paper aims to identify the literary rebuttals that postcolonial works make to classic, mainstream English works. In addition, the study seeks to explore ambivalence, unbelonging, homelessness, and diaspora in the case of Sameer and Hasan. More and above, the study aims to highlight the discrimination that Sameer and Hasan face because of ethnic reasons. Last but not least, the paper purports to place this literary work in broader cultural settings.

2. Review of Related Literature:

Post-colonialism has been a topic of discussion in literary genres and throughout all spheres of society since the eighteenth century. As an unavoidable outcome of the British empire, colonialism's effects are strongly felt in English literature. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989), post-colonial refers to the aggrandizing imperialism of countries. Examining *We Are All Birds of Uganda* from a postcolonial perspective has given way to more thorough evaluations. The first one is an article written by Shahidha Bari in 2021. According to Bari (2021), post-colonial culture is characterized by turbulence. The novel explores how black Africans and exiled Asians are hooked between the British Colonization in the past and the Chinese progress in the future. The article entitled "Book Review: We are all birds of Uganda by Zayyan" (2021) investigates whether and how racial/ethnic identity is related to racism: "Despite spanning different decades, Hassan and Sameer's stories are both about identity, belonging, heritage and racism." The concept of race is intrinsically linked to Zayyan's novel. According to Sylvain Durand (n.d), the story is about blind discrimination based on skin colour.

3. Materials and Methods:

The paper addresses colonialism, racism, and identity conflict in the novel through the lens of post-colonialism. The theme of *We Are All Birds of Uganda* is colonial expansion, which is inspired by ideas of the superiority of Western culture. According to Mambrol (2016), post-colonial writing aims to ravage phraseologies that support colonialism, such as myths of power and classifications of races based on dependency. Post-colonialism examines gender based stereotyping, identity crisis, discrimination, perspicacity, and hegemony. The descriptive qualitative method was used in this investigation. There are two sorts of data sources in this method: primary and secondary data sources. The novel itself is the primary data source, whereas secondary data sources include other materials linked to the subject.

4. Main text

4.1 Results and Discussion

4.1.1 Exile and Diaspora

Zayyan takes an imperturbable path to the labyrinths of estrangement, exile, and exclusion. The study will examine the perplexities faced by immigrants who have gone through diasporas, as well as the complications they face in formulating their identities. Sheoran states that one of the most important themes in postcolonial literary works has been the identity conflict experienced by aboriginal people (Sheoran, 2014, p.1). The native land's culture, language, and education are inferior to the colonizers' culture and governmental institutions due to colonial conditions (Léglise&Migge, 2007). Such cultural suppression and endorsement of the imperial other cause an identity crisis in the postcolonial protagonist, prompting him or her to seek a genuine and positive image of self. Exile and alienation are alike as the person does not feel rooted. Exiles are bilateral persons that are ruptured between the past and the present. Exiles in this situation try to keep themselves attached to their homeland, but they also try to assimilate

with the new community. Individuals trying to assimilate into society are fronted with the hybrid perception of encompassing a new identity while keeping their original one, giving rise to the hybrid identity (Braziel, J. E. & Manuur, A., 2003). As the title suggests, the narrator is like a bird as a result of colonialism's forced exile: "You can't exactly stop birds from flying, can you? They don't recognize borders – they go where they will ..." Sameer shivers: the AC has been enthusiastically cranked up by Paul; it feels sub-zero. 'In a way, I suppose, we are all birds of Uganda,' Mr Shah chuckles" (pp. 159-160). The title provides a method of how the exiles cross all borders. Diaspora is a direct result of colonialism; it is declared in the novel:

She does not say anything, and so he carries on talking, telling her that his ancestors were brought here from India by the British, that his father and his grandfather were born here, and that they ended up in Britain through no choice of their own. She doesn't say much but eventually offers, 'We have all been affected by British colonialism. (p. 177).

4.1.2 Identity Conflict

In Zayyan's novel, *Sameer*, a 26-year-old Cambridge graduate and a successful lawyer in a famous London company, is introduced (Birdy, 2021). The author divulges some biographical information about her protagonist. Sameer is successful in the United Kingdom according to all accounts: "He is twenty-six years old, living in the center of London. He's good at his job and – what's more – he likes it. He earns the kind of salary that allows him to spend money without thinking about it; he has everything he could need" (p. 6). The novel's identity conflicts are evident from the start, and they are significant for Sameer as he is torn between two contrasting societal mindsets, one that of his family and the other of the host country:

He does not tell his father that he had tried to join the Indian society, but they were all from India and were nothing like him. He does not tell his father that he had tried to meet other Muslims by attending the Islamic society, but the boys there expected him to agree with them that it was haraam to look a woman in the eye. He does not tell his father that, in the end, he did what he knew best and joined the football society. He does not tell his father that the boys in the football society spiked his Coke with vodka for a laugh, and before he knew it, he was drunk for the first time in his life. (p. 50)

As a kid of immigrants, Sameer is pressured to integrate with his British peers. It was fascinating to watch the conflict between personal independence and familial responsibility. His identity has been reduced to that of an 'other.' According to Tyson (2006), the "Self" is associated with the colonizer subject, and the "Other" is associated with the colonized object. The terms "Self" and "Other" appear to be Post-colonial creations. Accordingly, Sameer feels alienated in the society in which he spent his innocent childhood and youthful days as well as the school where she used to learn, so he is fixated on the prospect of relocating: "And he is ready to leave the UK: that is what he had been planning in any event, just to Singapore, not Uganda" (p. 282). He is a transmigrant who is halfway through a ceaseless shift process. Unfortunately, his story deviates in the wrong direction when he makes the unanticipated and somewhat out-of-the-way decision to travel to Uganda.

Sameer's unfaltering endeavours to put together the pieces of his identity are both heartrending and meritorious: 'If you don't understand where you've come from, you'll never really understand who you are or where you're going, don't you think?' (p. 182). In Uganda, he finds the love that he has craved, so he considers it his home: "- It is England that now feels like the foreign country; perhaps because his family has rejected him, his reasons for calling it home exhausted. In Uganda, Sameer has found family in Maryam – and in Mr Shah" (p. 335). In Uganda, Sameer thinks he has found his identity. However, after Sameer gets married to Maryam, the Ugandan girl with whom he has been in love, he starts missing Britain: "They had never talked about England, but she could be happy in England. He would make her happy; he could be enough. England would love to have her – just as it accepted his family after they were expelled from Uganda. He's rambling now, but he can't stop" (p. 345). Sameer is ambivalent as to which country he should belong to. According to Mercer (1990), identity only becomes a problem when experiences of doubt and uncertainty replace something that was once believed to be fixed, logical, and stable (p. 43). Zayyan tries to show the colonial ambivalence and its effects on Sameer, which creates a duality that provides a split in his identity. Being a postcolonial novelist, Zayyan explores the liminal state of belonging. According to Alsalmim and Sanif, an identity crisis is caused by the situation the latterly liberated people encountered in their attempt to formulate their identities" (Alsalmim & Sanif, 2020, p.1). Despite the fact that the novel seems to be about love between Sameer and Maryam, it actually addresses a sense of loss following the events of colonization. The characters are unsure about who they are; they are victims of double consciousness. As a result, the story is concerned with bilateral identity and culture.

The novel goes back to 1945 till Idi Amin's ejection of Asians from Uganda (Bari, 2021). We read about prosperity and camaraderie but also about how persecution and Idi Amin's policies led to the evacuation of many Asians from Uganda in the 1970s. Hasan also suffers from the diaspora. He declares: "Shall We be Africans of Asian origin" (p. 108). After the coup, the Indians were expelled from Uganda: "Amin said that it began with divine command – that Allah came to him in a dream and told him to expel us from Uganda; to seize our money, our property, our businesses, because we were sabotaging the economy" (p. 208). At one point, Hasan is deprived of his Ugandan citizenship, and he does not have British citizenship, so he starts to suffer from diasporic sense

again:" If you do not have Ugandan citizenship, and you do not have British citizenship, then you have no citizenship at all, and you are a 'stateless' person, as I found myself to be" (p. 213). While in Britain, Hasan longs for Uganda. Despite having spent his whole life outside of Uganda, Hasan remains profoundly anchored in his past, as his history was the source of his identity. According to Hall (1990), diasporic identities are not unchanging and can only be retained through the possibility of going back, but they are ever-changing (Hall, 1990, p. 235).

4.2 Racism and Discrimination

As the past and current narratives conjoin the experiences of the Asian population in Britain and the Asian-African racial conflicts in Uganda, racism is a duplicative theme. The tension between African and Asian Ugandans during the 1970s is paralleled by Sameer's encounters with racism in the United Kingdom. Both Sameer and Hasan suffer from discrimination in Uganda and Britain. Since childhood, Sameer has suffered from discrimination: "The white kids would call us "the Paki bus kids." Of course, most of us were not Pakistani – we were East African Indians from Kenya, Tanzania, and, of course, Uganda" (p. 49). Chris tries to intimidate Sameer by objecting to his fasting throughout Ramadan: "Chris does not seem to care that Sameer is trying to observe Ramadan while working. He organizes a lunch with the client for those working on the deal despite the fact that he knows that Sameer is fasting and will not attend. In fact, he telephones Sameer and asks him to make the booking" (p. 66). The theme of discrimination is heightened when Rahool, Sameer's friend, suffers a physical racial attack that puts him in a coma: "It was obviously racially motivated"(p. 72). Sameer feels alienated when his coworker starts making comments about 'tokenism,' hinting that Sameer only received the Singapore position because he is South Asian, and he credits his success to "quotas": "Ryan claps Sameer on the back, hard. 'They've got quotas to fill, haven't they (p. 20). According to Ashcroft (1989), it is necessary to depict the Other as fundamentally distinct from the self in order to maintain control over the colonized (p. 103).

The novel's tapestry allows for a thorough examination of racism's various aspects. There are perspectives from both the tyrannizer and the tyrannized. It becomes clear that, depending on the place and historical context, these stances can be overturned. Despite being discriminated against both in Uganda and Britain, Hasan refuses to marry his daughter to a non-Muslim, although Farah insists that he will convert to Islam: "Papa,' she said, still crying, 'he will convert to Islam. We have talked about it, and he is willing to convert.' I looked at her wide eyes, and I slapped her hard across the face"(p. 56). It is ironic that despite being racially and religiously discriminated against, Hasan discriminates against the Christian other. He mimics what he has been suffering from. Although Sameer's family has suffered the repercussions of discrimination, they object to Sameer marrying a Ugandan girl for the mere fact that she is black: 'They're just being racist.' Zara does not respond to this, so Sameer continues, 'You do realise the only reason they don't like her is that she's black"(p. 319). The contradicting discrepancy between the descriptions of the white protagonist and the description of the black Maryam provides a convincing example of otherization. "The question of the Other" became an important issue (Pieterse,2002, p. 22). Humans were formed with physical qualities that differ according to genetic factors so that they could appreciate and live in harmony with one another. However, the variations in physical attributes are highlighted in the novel. Some people use this as a justification to discriminate. In the novel, Zayyan highlights the objection of Islam to racial discrimination: " He reads on to verse 22: "And of His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and your colors; indeed, there are Signs in this for those who are wise"(p. 271). This verse indicates that what matters most is that we are noble and truthful before God, not how we look on the outside. In the end, Allah does not notice color because we are all part of the same human race. The marriage between Sameer and Maryam is a call to hybridity. Bhabha used the term "hybridity" to describe the merging of the old and new identities (Bhabha, 1994, p. 34). Not only in Britain, Sameer suffers from discrimination, but he also suffers from discrimination in Uganda. Sameer is mockingly referred to as a Muhindi (p. 180) (Indian) and a Muzungu (p. 184) (white person). Said (1993) believed that

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which, if followed into actual experience for only a moment, are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, Black, Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. (p.336)

Hasan suffers from discrimination in Uganda as a result of Amin's coup. After the coup, discrimination against Asians amplified:

People here treat us as if we are no different from the karias: black, brown, or yellow – as long as you are not white – there is no distinguishing between any of us: we are all 'coloured.' I have been called a black bastard and a nigger; words shouted at me across the street as I walked home from the pub; words spat at me on the bus. When a shop sign reads: 'No Blacks. No Irish. No dogs' it means no Asians, too."(p. 303)

Hasan highlights the issue of Asiophobia after the coup: " Previously diametrically opposed political parties had united to defeat a mutual enemy – the non-African – and in the sphere of commerce in particular: The Asian" (p. 103). Said's *Orientalism* reveals that

Europeans showed themselves off to be in sharp contrast with the Orientals as being primitive and uncivilized others" (p.3). During Idi Amin's ascent to power in Uganda, tensions between South Asian settlers and native Ugandans intensified, and most Ugandans of Asian origin were forced to give up their houses and goods. In Uganda, the Asians were considered intruders: "Then, the very next week, the boycott was declared by the leader of the newly formed nationalist movement: all trade was to be put into the hands of Africans. No African was to enter a non-African shop"(p. 104). The discrimination that Hasan and his children were exposed to is based on race: "My children are coming home from schools where they are not wanted, bruised and bleeding because they have been attacked for no reason other than that they are brown. And there is nothing I can do to protect them"(pp. 303-304). We arrive in modern civilization when skin tone has become a weighted symbol of identity and worth. In Britain, where there is such a diverse population, race still matters, and color does as well. Because of deep-seated prejudice in this society, black skin is condemned, and light skin is rewarded. When immigrating to Britain, Hasan and his wife were rejected to attend a celebration of the Queen's coronation:

Hiccup. The sobbing began in the car on the way home, amongst muffled half-sentences: the shame, treating us like dogs, I thought he was your friend. It was a mistake – a foolish, stupid mistake – to think that we might be permitted to join the club, even if only for one night, even if only to celebrate the Queen's coronation. (p. 83)

According to Karagic (2013), postcolonial literature depicts non-Westerners as a monolithic group that is characterized by all of the negative human traits. They are depicted as violent, belligerent, and cryptic, as completely being different from the Westerners (Karagic, 2013).

5. Conclusion

A monumental work, *We Are All Birds of Uganda*, is an unrestrained novel covering decades and continents with two attached love stories at its heart. The consequences of Idi Amin's expulsion of thousands of South Asians from Uganda in 1972 are discussed in Zayyan's story, which also deals with colonialism, identity, and diaspora. Discussions on intolerance, bigotry, and family intercommunication are all cross-examined.

Fragmentation, alienation, and exile are common terms associated with *We Are All Birds of Uganda* as a postcolonial novel. The concept and conundrum of diaspora are intrinsically interwoven in the novel. Postcolonial critique is a looking glass, a method of reading, a perspective, and an ideology that employs a variety of classifications and traits of resistance that are sometimes described as the camouflaged rhetoric of numerous different forms of criticisms into one (Muñoz-Larrondo, 2008). The novel critiques colonialism and analyzes Sameer and Hasan's identity crises and their fight to overcome them in a world where they are excluded by race and religion. Despite spending their entire lives in the host country, the insiders' memories of their previous identities never vanish. Exile is a metaphor for alienation and a quest for one's own identity. In postcolonial fiction, alienation is usually portrayed as psychological. As the title suggests, the exiled are like the birds that have the power and freedom to fly over the skies and traverse the world. Another major issue in postcolonial fiction is the blending of cultures, which is frequently explored in the context of constructing identity. Identity formation and belonging are two important topics that have received a lot of attention in *We Are All Birds of Uganda*. The novel fights the labels of particular ethnic identities, often classified as 'Asian' or 'Muslim,' as oppositional to the concepts of Westerner and Christian.

The novel delivers the message that the simplest method to eliminate racism is to teach acceptance and understanding and to teach love rather than hatred toward one another. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are enhanced by love for all coloured people with different faiths, genders, ages, and abilities; therefore, it has no labels. Love is the most potent force in the fight against prejudice, bigotry, and racism.

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