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Essay: ”THE OTHER HAND”

The Other Hand, also known as Little Bee, is a novel written by Chris Cleave. The author hopes to challenge the reader's thinking about the way asylum-seekers and other immigrants are treated in the UK. His goal in writing the novel is to shed some light on this dark theme, so that it might be examined.

In the excerpt from chapter 1, the story is set in an immigration detention centre in Essex, England. That is where the protagonist spends two years, from 2005 to 2007.

In this first part the only characters we find are the Nigerian girl, known as Little Bee, her sister Nkiruka and the duty officer at the detention centre. Everyone has a specific role in this story. The main character is Little Bee, who tells us her experience as an immigrant in UK. Secondly there is her big sister who the protagonist cares for and often refers to. She still lives in Nigeria and can hardly understand life in Great Britain, that is why she seems quite naive even though she is older. The last character we meet in this excerpt is the detention officer, who has just a minor role in the story. He seems rather bored and indifferent to Little Bee and the other girls at the detention centre.

Little Bee wishes she was a British pound coin instead of a Nigerian girl. Unlike her, coins travel freely and safely. She is told that if she wants to survive in England she has to learn the Queen's English. Even though English is the official language of her home country, she finds it very difficult because the one spoken in Great Britain is more formal while the Nigerian one has other African languages blended in it. Furthermore it is not grammatically correct and it seems more a sort of slang. But it in an immigration detention centre where she is locked up for two years she learns English.
Throughout story she keeps thinking about her sister and imagining her reactions towards the way of life in England.

The story is narrated by Little Bee, that is, in first-person. The writer has chosen this type of perspective because it is much easier to understand the real feelings and emotions that the writer wants to transmit us. He could have decided to write the story describing all the events in chronological order instead of using flashbacks, but this would have changed the story making it become less enchanting and captivating.

The book is inspired by the fact that Chris Cleave worked as a casual labourer over the university summer vacation for three days in the

canteen of a detention centre for asylum-seekers. He noticed that the conditions there were most distressing. He became deeply upset to see how the inmates were treated. That is why he decides to write about it, because he wants to show what the refugees feel. So the main theme is about people who leave their home country hoping to find a better life in UK, and about all the problems they have to face.

The themes treated in this novel are rather serious and tough, but the author manages to make them seem funny, hopeful and entertaining at the same time. Nowadays immigration is a big problem because there are a lot of people who want to escape from their own countries as a consequence of the difficult conditions that they have to bear in their everyday lives. In my opinion they do not always find the life they are looking for, because they are held in detention centers where sometimes they might have to accept a hard treatment with the possibility of being sent back home. Furthermore they risk their lives during their journey to reach the country that can offer them the hope of a better life. It is very difficult for me to put myself in their position, as I cannot imagine their feelings and, therefore, I do not know what I would do if I were them.
Although the situation described by Little Bee is quite sad, I find funny the way she makes comments about her sister's reactions to English habits and customs. At the same time behind this irony, there is a very sad and dramatic reality, and I think that sometimes this can be more impressive than a story narrated in a serious way.
I believe that life is precious, whatever its country of origin. That is why every single individual should be treated with humanity.