



**IMPACT OF COLONIALISM IN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S AFTERLIVES**



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**ABSTRACT**

*The novel Afterlives (2020) is the story of Hamza, Ilyas, Afiya and Khalifa, set during the colonial period of Germans and Britishers in the Eastern coast of Africa. The Germans were always engaged in the war with Britishers and due to this they had created a Schutztruppe which is a band of askari where native people were employed and their lives were sacrificed in the war; Hamza and elder Ilyas were the part of askari. Elder Ilyas had a positive attitude towards the German rule because he was brought up in the German farm and was educated*

*and at the end of the novel, we get to know that he died in Germany campaigning to have the Nazi government back. Hamza was the victim of Oberleutenant's anger who had beat him to death and his survival and marriage with Afiya later his connection with Frau in Germany to find out the information about his wife's brother Ilyas are briefly discussed. The novel is interwoven within the four characters and each character has different view about colonialism and the we find the impact of colonialism in their mind and behavior throughout the novel.*

## RESEARCH PAPER

Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Afterlives* (2020), presents the colonial effects of the pre-colonial German, it is set in East African coast. It revolves around the life of Ilyas, Afiya, Hamza and Khalifa, who lives in the East African coast and experience the colonial effects that devastated their lives. The East African coast was being colonized by the Germans when Khalifa being his tuition by a private tutor in the nearby town where he was taught mathematics, book keeping and English vocabulary. During those periods, the Germans had claimed that they were the rulers of the land and to resist this there were some traders and uprisings, for instance; Al Bushiri uprising which was Arab revolt against the German traders in the East African coast but it was suppressed by the Colonel Wismann and his newly formed Schutztruppe. Khalifa was an Indian boy who was later on sent to work with Gujarati merchants in Africa by his father. Khalifa says, "he was living a useless life in a town that was not his home, in a country that seemed to be constantly at war, with reports of yet another uprising in the South and West" (Gurnah11). Though Khalifa moved to different country for work he didn't have that attachment with the country and he was longing for his own country. He was married to Asha who was the niece of his merchant and settled down in East African.

Khalifa became friend with Ilyas who had ran away from his home and was brought up by the German man in a coffee farm and was educated in the Christian school. Ilyas after completing his education had come to the East coast for employment and brought his sister Afiya back to live with him who was suffering in the hands of her caretaker aunt and uncle where she was treated like a slave. Ilyas taught her to read and write and after a year Ilyas announced that he would be joining the German army as an Askari and asked his sister to go back to her aunt as she wouldn't be staying alone in his absence and later her uncle broke her hand after he got to know that she could read and write. After this incident Afiya wrote letter to Khalifa asking him to help her so Khalifa rescued her from her cruel uncle and aunt and brought her back to East African coast and she began to live with them.

Ilyas was raised in the German coffee farm and as he was in the farm a man saw him and said that, "he was too young to work, that he should go to school. The Germans didn't come here to make slaves, he said" (Gurnah39), then Ilyas was sent to school. Ilyas had a positive attitude towards German rule than the Britishers, he said, "the Germans are gifted and clever people. They knew how to organize, they know how to fight. They think of everything... and on top of that they are much kinder than the British" (Gurnah41). But in reality, the Germans had occupied the land and had killed so many people of the country and they have littered or gifted the skulls and bones to their country and the land they have occupied has soaked in blood.

Later on, we see Hamza's training as an Askari and these Germans praised themselves as they have come to civilize the indigenous people i.e., the natives need to be civilized by the foreigner, "you don't even know what mathematics is, do you? We have come here to bring you this, mathematics and many other clever things that you wouldn't have without us. This is our ziviliserungmission" (Gurnah69). Hamza was assigned as the officer's personal servant, his batsman. The officer was good to Hamza as the officer taught him to read and write in German. As the war broke out all the natives who were appointed as the askari were taken to the battle field along with their family as a camp follower. The German officer said that they were dealing

with backward and savage people and the only way to rule them is to strike terror into them and their vain, Liliputmajestat sultans and pummel all of them into obedience. The schutztruppe were the instrument to bring discipline and obedient among the people.

As the war came to an end, the Britishers imposed the Royal Navy blockade of the coast where no trade was possible with Zanzibar or Mombasa or Pemba and overnight there was a shortage of supply and the prices of the goods increased and the native Zanzibarian people suffered due to this blockade and thus the native people didn't think of money for a while and they exchanged the goods using other things or material, even the jewelry was exchanged to get the food grain. It was during this time that Hamza returned to the Eastern coast after he was injured in the war and was in search of job. He met a merchant named Nassor Biashara and got a job in his warehouse along with Khalifa. Though their first meeting was not so impressive but later on became best friends and it was Khalifa who gave Hamza a house to stay and provided him some money when he was hungry. But Hamza didn't tell anyone that he was injured in the war and he was an Askari. Under Nasoor Biashara he trained himself to be a skilled carpenter and earned his living. He was a very religious man and visited the mosque often to pray. Hamza fell in love with Afiya and it was for the first time that Hamza told Afiya that he was injured in the war and the reason to join the war. Even Afiya tells him the story of her brother Ilyas who joined the schutztruppe and was never heard again. Hamza and Afiya got married and began to live with Khalifa and Asha.

The native people were ready to accept whatever the foreign rulers imposed on them whether Germans or Britishers, they just wanted to live a peaceful life without any suffering which may be regarded as acceptance of the dominate culture, "The native people were exhausted by the rule of the Germans and their wars and the starvation, disease that followed and were now willing to obey without defiance so long as they left in peace" (Gurnah238). The British administration took over the rule after the Germans and they framed the policy of the business in such a way that the policy were to be accepted by the indigenous people without any resistance and even the British administration gave more importance to education and public health, Just like any other colonized country, the colonizer wanted to educated the natives to create a second class clerk so that they would work on their behalf and with these clerks they would be closer to the natives and also by understanding the weaknesses of the natives they could easily make rule and regulations in such a way that the natives would follow them without any resistance and they would have dominance over the indigenous people. The Britishers even distributed the information over the leaflets and conducted tours by the medical teams to instruct people on diseases and childcare. Though it was a good move by the Britishers but they wanted to impose restrictions on the people in the name of the civilization. We also see the effects of marginalization or otherness of the natives where Britishers were at the center making rules and regulation and imposing it on the native people and these native people were marginalized who accepted and obeyed the rule and regulations of the center just to have a peaceful life.

Hamza and Afiya had a son called Ilyas, who was named after Afiya's brother and this Ilyas had a hallucination of a woman speaking to him who was enquiring him about Afiya's brother Ilyas as he had not returned back from the war. The native still believed in the traditional method and had called a Shekhiya who said that the Ilyas was possessed by a lady and she just wanted to enquire about uncle Ilyas. Shekhiya said, she would perform a ceremony to cure the child. Hamza tried his connection to find out the information about Ilyas and wrote a letter to

Frau whom he met during the war and later Hamza was called to the police station as he had received the reply for his letter from Frau who was currently living in Germany and as there was war going on between Britishers and Germans, it was suspicious to have any connection with Germany so he was called to the station where he was questioned about the letter and his connection with the people living in Germany. Ilyas completed his school education and wanted to study further and he joined the war as a Kar in Dec 1942 where they were promised that the soldiers would be given scholarship for higher education and he was sent to Gilgil in the highlands in Kenya colony for training and was posted to Das e Salaam for garrison duties with the coastal regiments for the rest of the war and after the war as he was promised he was sent for further studies to become a school teacher. Ilyas began to write stories and articles for the newspaper in Kiswahili language. Later on, the British colonial administration was retreated and they got independence. Ilyas was awarded a scholarship by the Federal Republic of Germany to spend a year in Bonn, learning advanced broadcasting technique and while living in Germany he found out about his uncle Ilyas who had changed his name to Elias Essen and stayed in Germany as a singer and he even participated in the Reichskolonialbund, a Nazi party organization where Nazis wanted the colonies back and uncle Ilyas wanted to Germans back, so he appeared in the marches carrying the Schutztruppe flag and on the platform singing Nazi songs and the death of uncle Ilyas was not recorded who was seen last in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp outside Berlin along with his son Paul.

Thus, colonial rule was boon in one way i.e., by providing education, medical facilities and introduction of the radio to the natives, these all helped the native people to think about themselves and to fight against the oppression that was being imposed on them by the foreign ruler but the natives suffered due to the colonial rule i.e., it was for the native peoples land the wars were fought to have their control and the innocent native people used to participate in the war to fight among their own land and were killed in the wars and in some instances the natives land were torn and distributed among the foreigners. As the time passed the natives began to adopt the ways of the colonizer to live peace and happy life. There are some instances in which the Germans said that they had come to civilize them which implies that the colonizer believed they were superior to natives and they are more civilized and these natives needed the help of the colonizer to civilize and educate them, they began to impose rule on the natives and wanted the natives to accept those without any resistance through this they wanted to show their superiority over the natives. The fate of the four lives were mainly tied with the colonial rule where Hamza escaped the bounded labor to find himself in the war and Afiya lost her brother Ilyas in the war. In one or the other way the natives had a deep impact due to colonial administration.

### Work Cited

1. Gurnah, Abdulrazak. *Afterlives*. Bloomsbury Publication, 2021