

BURDEN OF THE PAST: POSTCOLONIAL SILENCE AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN ABDULRAZAK GURNAH'S *AFTERLIVES*

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Abstract

*This paper examines the role of postcolonial silence in shaping intergenerational trauma in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives* through Judith Lewis Herman's trauma theory. It explores how historical violence and the colonial legacies of Germany and Britain shape the social and psychological realities of characters such as Khalifa, Ilyas, Hamza and Afya across generations. Through diverse characterizations, Gurnah highlights distinct types of silence – strategic, traumatic, and redemptive – while also tracing the characters' journeys toward healing from postcolonial trauma. The study argues that colonial legacies, alongside personal and historical trauma, disrupt the lives of the characters, guiding them to navigate and reshape their fractured identities. Drawing on Herman's trauma recovery model, this research examines how characters struggle and expatriates process their traumatic experiences, providing a space for identity reconstruction. Using a qualitative approach, the study closely analyzes patterns of silence, historical trauma, and inherited memory. The findings reveal that silence in *Afterlives* is not merely an absence but an active force that sustains intergenerational trauma while simultaneously offering pathways to resistance and healing. Ultimately, the paper highlights the enduring weight of historical trauma and how the past continues to shape individual and collective identities in postcolonial contexts, with silence remaining central to these negotiations.*

Keywords: Colonial Legacies, Fractured Identities, Intergenerational Trauma, Postcolonial Silence, Trauma Healing

Introduction

Since the early 20th century, literature and fiction have seen a notable shift from conventional narratives to trauma narratives, transcending regional and national borders. This transformation is also apparent in postcolonial literature, especially within African tales. While trauma differs across geographical and cultural contexts, individuals endure many manifestations of pain and mental turmoil. Frequently, people see themselves ensnared by their situations, forfeiting both resilience and autonomy. War trauma often interrupts their life, while the persistent legacy of colonialism afflicts the people of Africa, eroding their contentment.

Colonialism and its enduring impact have influenced the lives of individuals throughout the African continent, especially on Zanzibar Island, for centuries. Three successive generations, including precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial, are influenced by it. For the last eight decades, it has been an essential component of the narrative, with authors endeavouring to illustrate the terrible impacts on the lives of people. The narrative transitioned from war trauma to postcolonial trauma, becoming a fundamental concern in postcolonial discourse in Africa after independence in 1963. Migration and displacement are prominent issues of postcolonial tales that have adversely affected people, causing considerable suffering. According to Stuart Hall and Salman Rushdie, migration and



displacement are critical challenges, more severe than any form of violence or the catastrophic consequences of the World Wars.

Postcolonial literature has drawn considerable interest from academics and authors specialising in postcolonial studies and trauma. Their writings have transformed the literary landscape by establishing a unique ambience, separate from that of white writers. Their representation mostly illustrates colonial individuals from an African viewpoint. Among these writers is Abdulrazak Gurnah, whose works depict the lives of East African individuals with realism and intensity. He views colonialism mostly as the primary agent of oppression and, hence, a story of painful events. Abdulrazak Gurnah's novels convey the anguish of the colonial heritage and emotional dimensions, particularly in *Afterlives*, which depicts the historical and communal agony of colonialism.

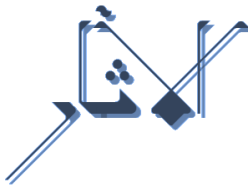
The research investigates silence and intergenerational trauma caused by colonialism, along with their aftereffects on individuals – particularly within the Zanzibar community – to underscore the importance of rehabilitation in overcoming traumatic experiences in postcolonial contexts. Drawing on Judith Lewis Herman's seminal work, *Trauma and Recovery* (1993), we examine the historical and collective trauma of Zanzibar society through the protagonist. The paper also analyzes the representation of colonialism and its enduring effects on Zanzibar society. This perspective enables us to explore the characters' struggles with pain and their journey toward reconciliation, ultimately embracing social harmony while preserving fundamental human ideals.

Reimagining the Past: The Exploration of Silence and Intergenerational Trauma in Postcolonial Narratives

This research examines the portrayal of silence and intergenerational trauma in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives* (2020), focusing on its impact on the protagonist, Hamza. The story illustrates the enduring effects of personal and historical trauma on Hamza's identity and perseverance via recollections and flashbacks. It utilizes trauma studies frameworks to examine silence, disruption, intergenerational trauma, and the psychological and cultural ramifications of colonialism. Set in postcolonial East Africa, *Afterlives* explores how relocation, family conflicts, and colonial legacies influence the politics of belonging. This research emphasizes Gurnah's intricate depiction of individual and communal histories, providing insights into the interconnections of identity, memory and the lasting effects of colonialism.

The legacy of colonial rule significantly influenced African societies, particularly Zanzibar Island, as effectively depicted in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives*. Colonialism affected the lives of both pre-colonial and colonial generations, leaving lasting wounds on the post-colonial generation and fragmenting social, cultural, and economic systems. Gurnah examines the lasting effects, such as Intergenerational trauma, cultural disruption, silence and the quest for reshaping identities in a postcolonial context through the experiences of characters such as Hamza, Ilyas, and Afiya.

The paper depicts how colonialism demolished cultural structures and imposed a fragmented sense of belonging, leaving people trapped between their ancestral legacy and the harsh reality of the rule of colonialism. In *Afterlives*, the erosion of identity and the intricacies of hybridity are important to the characters' experiences. Hamza exemplifies the physical and psychological repercussions of colonial brutality, whilst Afiya's narrative underscores the gendered aspects of generational trauma. Gurnah analyzes the socio-economic and political instability caused by colonialism, illustrating how these systemic problems sustain cycles of displacement and misery throughout generations. The depiction of silence is



ultimately the result of colonialism, and silence works as a potent metaphor for the unexpressed suffering and fortitude of those who experienced colonial persecution, rather than only representing a passive lack of speech. The novel illustrates that the pain of colonialism and intergenerational trauma extends beyond history, influencing the present and necessitating an acknowledgement of its lasting effects.

Trauma and silence occupy key roles in postcolonial studies since they provide a deeper comprehension of the experiences of colonized and marginalized communities. Both conceptions serve as emblems that reflect and underscore the psychological and emotional wounds inflicted by colonialism and its aftermath, as well as how these memories form and impact communal identities, cultural narratives, and historical comprehension. In postcolonial studies, trauma is defined as a reaction to the violence, displacement, and oppression endured by colonized populations. Colonial regimes imposed physical, psychological, and cultural damage on people and communities, the effects of which persist over generations.

The interaction of silence and trauma in postcolonial narratives provides new avenues for comprehending the profound experiences of colonized and marginalized groups. The dichotomy is problematic as it illustrates the emotional and psychological wounds inflicted by colonialism and its aftermath, influencing personal and social identities, historical comprehension, and cultural narratives. In postcolonial studies, trauma arises from the exploitation, brutality, oppression, and coerced displacement inflicted upon colonized populations. Individuals and groups endure cultural, physical, and psychic damage that resonates through generations.

In this paper, we analyze the impact of intergenerational trauma on individual and collective identities, resulting in alienation, fragmentation, and displacement. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* examines psychological trauma and its effects on oppressed populations. Gurnah's mesmerizing text, *Afterlives*, is a profound investigation into silence, trauma, and the quest for reconciliation, encompassing both its difficulties and potential. Against the background of Zanzibar's colonial past, Gurnah intricately constructs a detailed tapestry of the characters inside Zanzibar culture, illustrating lives influenced by individual and collective traumas. Gurnah invites readers into a study of the intricacies of resistance, forgiveness, and healing under oppression, suffering, and injustice.

Afterlives encapsulates the intricate essence of trauma, examining its lasting effects on personal and collective emotional states. It illustrates the emotional and psychological effects of trauma, revealing the processes that construct and reconstruct personal identities, engendering troubling sensations of displacement and a pervasive sense of oppression and loss. Gurnah's characters exemplify personal traumas that persistently afflict their current existence, exacerbating the difficulties they have in coping with the weight of their past and pursuing a route to recovery. Through the challenges of individuals like Ilyas and Hamza, *Afterlives* illustrates the personal and historical aspects of trauma, with their pursuit of recovery symbolizing reconciliation. Gurnah confronts individual trauma alongside communal trauma in Zanzibar, striving to depict the interplay of trauma within the framework of colonial injustice and the desire for healing.

In postcolonial literature, silence symbolizes trauma since they are interconnected and subject to many interpretations. Silence has significant implications; it is sometimes used to obscure personal identity, at times as a form of resistance, and most often as a tactic to challenge the prevailing colonial narrative. Occasionally, it is used to express despair, trauma, and deep sorrow. It conveys emotions of shame, humiliation, subordination, and fear. In an



interview with Nisha Jones, Gurnah expresses the importance of silence in the following words:

When migrants come to Europe, they're diffident about their language if they're on their own, and they're also diffident about English, say, because they're not sure if they can speak it properly. So, remaining silent is a way of preserving dignity and, at the same time, not putting yourself in harm's way? Silence is ambivalent. It is also powerful and can be far more eloquent. (2005, pp. 37–38)

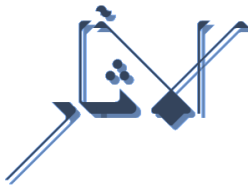
Anne Ajulu Okungu underlines the importance of silence as a storytelling technique in depicting migrant experiences, especially in articulating what language fails to communicate (2016, p. 105). A distinct study highlights silence as a tactical method for obscuring identities in the hybrid setting of *By the Sea*, where the protagonist, Saleh Omer, maintains silence upon his arrival at the airport. Throughout his expedition, he is instructed to only use the words 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' (Farooqi & Jamil, 2022).

Abdulrazak Gurnah, a prominent writer from East Africa, was born in Zanzibar in 1948. He sought refuge in England in the late 1960s as a political refugee owing to the turmoil in his own country. He attended Christ Church College and subsequently obtained a Ph.D. from the University of Kent in 1982, where he was appointed Professor of Literature in 2004. Gurnah has written 10 novels and a short story collection, concentrating on themes of migration, displacement, and exile. Although Swahili is his native tongue, he chose to write in English, noting the lack of Swahili literature in Zanzibar. His study examines African, Indian, and Caribbean literature in colonial and postcolonial settings. He has authored works on Salman Rushdie, Wole Soyinka, and V.S. Naipaul and has edited *Essays on African Writing*. His highly regarded work explores cultural displacement, identity, and migration (Thakur, 2015, p. 2).

The paper seeks to analyze the interplay between silence and intergenerational trauma inside hybrid environments, along with its effects on the characters in *Afterlives*. It also emphasises the process of healing from traumatic events and, eventually, reconciliation with the community. Employing ideas from Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, we analyze how postcolonial trauma affects the characters and the importance of recovery in reconstructing fragmented identities within hybrid environments. The insight promotes the process of healing, social unity, and the value of love and harmony within society. It sheds light on the characters' development after their recovery from severe wounds and experiences within the Zanzibar community. Using Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in a postcolonial framework, we underscore the psychological trauma and its impacts on the lives of the Zanzibar community. This paper aims to analyze how the protagonist Hamza in *Afterlives* embodies psychological and historical trauma, navigates traumatic experiences toward a new space, reshapes his identity, and overcomes the lasting effects of colonialism.

Postcolonial Trauma: The Lingering Echoes of Colonial Oppression and Intergenerational Trauma

As researchers, we analyze a unique perspective on postcolonial trauma and its relevance to the selected text. Postcolonial trauma studies deal with the psychological violence and oppression inflicted by colonial rulers upon marginalised communities during colonial rule. This paper explores the lingering legacy of colonial oppression and its lasting effects on the Zanzibar community. The effects of colonialism continue to shape the lives and psychological states of the characters. The contemporary age is marked by several social, political, cultural, and geographical conflicts. As a result, psychological trauma has become increasingly prominent in the lives of characters portrayed in contemporary fiction. Thus,



modern and postmodern fiction incorporates narratives of traumatic experiences, feelings, and emotions. Therefore, literary texts have been employed to represent the psychological effects of such incidents, as well as survivors' memories and testimonies. Moreover, literary texts not only portray the psychological effects of trauma on characters but also inspire other forms of art, such as painting, theatre, and other creative expressions, to represent trauma and its emotional impact (Stahl & Williams, 2010).

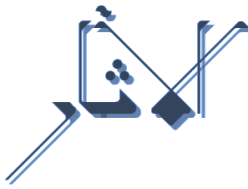
Readers exhibit empathy and comprehension when interacting with literary depictions of traumatic situations, often developing critical viewpoints and personal judgments. Vickroy emphasizes the role of trauma in literary works, elucidating how it deepens our comprehension and facilitates the exploration of our own painful experiences and their relevance in literature (2015). He contends that literature exposes profound and harsh truths, enabling marginalized persons to articulate their experiences and histories (2002, pp. 221–222). Whitehead emphasizes the overlooked, disregarded, and nonsensical literary works that include traumatic pain (2004, p. 82). This study finds a gap in the relevance of the chosen work, contending that it offers literary proof of pain and conflict stemming from colonialism. This study also examines prior research that emphasizes the connection between trauma studies and literary works.

The study integrates criticisms from other academic works to underscore the significance of Gurnah's *Afterlives* as a pivotal text in this paper. Anna Branach-Kallas examines a distinctive viewpoint on the representation of colonialism and war as interrelated factors, scrutinising the diverse choices and motives of Askari across numerous situations, including before, during, and after World War I. The protagonist, Ilyas, represents the fractured continuity of violence between the camp and the community. At the same time, Hamza's intimacy with the German ruler emphasizes the emotional intricacies between the Askari and their colonial masters. Furthermore, she investigates the pain and tensions associated with postcolonial warfare (2022, p. 473).

A prominent study of the chosen text is an eco-critical analysis in which Hazrat Abbas et.al, aim to re-contextualize the interplay between colonialism, historical conflicts, and their ecological ramifications, as shown in the text. He emphasizes the exploitation of natural resources and imperialistic ambitions, illuminating the lasting impact of colonial invaders on human existence and the environment. The tale examines fragmented human history and shattered communities, illustrating the intrinsic connection between colonial powers, environmental degradation, and identity conflicts. The study utilizes environmental factors and human experiences to enable readers to explore the intricate interconnections of colonialism, environmental justice, and warfare (2023, p. 454).

Another study investigates how colonialism disrupted East African communities during World War I and World War II. In this paper, Hina Naz explores the psychological impacts of colonization and how war and violence influence the process of decolonization. She demonstrates how violence is used as a weapon to maintain power equilibrium. The analysis shows that the indigenous people attempt to survive in such conditions, although their encounters with identity crises and violence push them into severe psychological distress. The protagonists, such as Afiya, Hamza, and Ilyas, indicate their strong determination in the face of violence, war, and torture. They also embody love and harmony, which helps them preserve their souls in a postcolonial context (2022, p. 553).

Lemay-Hebert & Jerrems investigate the notion of afterlives by analyzing the agenda of failed governments and their several stages. They examine four pivotal iterations: its inception during the decolonization period, its consolidation in the early 1990s, its crisis and



the advent of resilience rhetoric, and ultimately, the creation of the fragile city agenda as an extension of the failed states framework. To substantiate our argument, we examine two discrete 'fragments' that illustrate the enduring impacts of coloniality: the pathologization of fragile states and cities via binary classifications (civilised/barbaric, strong/dysfunctional, resilient/vulnerable) and their tangible repercussions, alongside the visual representation, mapping, and colour-coding of fragile states and cities, which underscore both the persistence and contradictions inherent in the failed states agenda (2024, p. 267).

Another significant study on the chosen work is authored by Varadha P. Nair, who examines themes of optimism amidst violence and combat. In this article, Varadha analyzes identity crises, displacement, and resilience. She underscores the plurality of hope and its profound influence on the individuals' identities, their relationships, and their destinies throughout the story. He utilizes postcolonial feminist theory to analyze the roles of male and female characters and their expressions of optimism amid oppression and violence (2024). Siundu analyses how these motifs function as instruments of control over the colonized, eventually influencing both individual and social relationships. He offers profound insights into the intricacies of identity and belonging, analyzing how Gurnah's characters navigate and challenge societal standards. Furthermore, he emphasizes the persistent importance of dignity in Gurnah's writings, especially on the enslavement of the Zanzibari people under colonial domination (2013).

Many kinds of research have been undertaken about trauma stemming from violence, warfare, and other types of conflict. This study identifies research deficiencies in both theoretical frameworks, such as trauma theory, and literary works, such as *Afterlives*. While Herman's trauma model and its representation in literary works are crucial for examining psychological experiences, the wide area of African fiction remains mostly unexamined. This research analyzes the repercussions of colonialism, focusing on its psychological impacts and the rehabilitation process from trauma.

Methodology

This research paper offers a postcolonial trauma analysis, using trauma theory, particularly Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, with postcolonial theory, specifically Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. We explore *Afterlives* as the primary text to investigate the traumatic events of characters stemming from colonial oppression. It examines the characters' struggles with trauma, resulting in the persistent impacts of colonialism, including prolonged silence and intergenerational trauma. Employing *Trauma and Recovery* as a theoretical framework, we want to analyze how *Afterlives* depicts silence and intergenerational trauma through textual study. The secondary sources include African journals, archives, online resources, magazines, and East African literature. Employing a qualitative research methodology, we rigorously examine textual instances together with their stylistic and narrative techniques to perform an in-depth examination. Through interpretative analysis, we investigate the devastating impacts of colonization and how characters reconstruct their identities and reestablish connections with their society.

Theoretical Framework: Employing Herman's Trauma Model to Analyze Healing in *Afterlives*

This paper borrows Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* as a theoretical framework to examine the traumatic experiences of characters within Zanzibar culture. Herman proposes a trauma rehabilitation framework that analyzes both individual and social trauma, highlighting the disruptions and fractures within the Zanzibar community. This model investigates the



post-war and postcolonial generations who endured psychological trauma perpetrated by the colonial authority and the aristocratic class in Zanzibar. Herman primarily concentrates on groups and communities in Zanzibar that have been displaced from their native lands. This study aims to explore methods for addressing traumatic experiences and the repercussions of colonialism.

The term trauma derives from the Greek τραῦμα (traûma), meaning 'wound' or 'penetration of the skin.' Sigmund Freud subsequently used the notion of trauma in psychology, defining it as an abrupt, unforeseen emotional shock that disturbs mental functioning. Trauma studies originated as a field in the last decade of the 20th century, profoundly influenced by Cathy Caruth in her seminal work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. She contends that trauma transcends the horrific event, including its enduring psychological effects. The enduring characteristics of trauma are evident in intrusive memories and flashbacks, which may undermine an individual's sense of identity. By the late 20th century, scholars had broadened trauma studies to include both individual and communal historical trauma. Modern trauma research emphasizes comprehending these experiences and investigating avenues for psychological rehabilitation.

This research utilizes Judith Lewis Herman's trauma recovery paradigm from her seminal work, *Trauma and Recovery*. Her phases of trauma recovery are establishing safety, remembrance and mourning and reconnection (1993, p. 3). This paradigm assists traumatized individuals in healing from catastrophic experiences, including the enduring impacts of colonialism, war trauma, and other sad occurrences. Her paradigm has three phases: the establishment of safety, the processes of recollection and grief, and the reintegration into society. Utilizing Herman's trauma recovery model to analyze characters such as Hamza and Ilyas in *Afterlives* underscores their path to recovery from the devastating impacts of colonialism.

We employ instances from Abdulrazak Gurnah's other works to underscore the importance of trauma studies and the rehabilitation process. Previous research, including *Trauma and the Dialectics of Repercussion in Abdulrazak Gurnah's By the Sea*, highlights the resurfacing of a forgotten past. *By the Sea* examines trauma and its dialectical effects, demonstrating how the recollection of previous events aids in the reconstruction of identity and the resolution of unsolved problems. The text utilizes the concept of migrant displacement to analyze traumatic experiences and traumatic family history while also investigating dialectical relationships as a method of healing. Throughout their recuperation, both characters grapple with reconciling their pasts while establishing a new bond with one another (Goddard & Goddard, 2022, p. 5).

Jacinta MATHEKA examines trauma in *Gravel Heart*, illustrating how the narrative portrays migrants' displacement and dispossession while also demonstrating how the protagonist reflects the painful experiences of migrants in both form and substance. I contend that Gurnah employs a literary framework that intensifies the protagonist's agony of dispossession and migration. The author, by narrating from the migrant's viewpoint, highlights the narrator's vulnerability while also showcasing his resilience in environments designed to suppress him (2024, p. 41).

Reclaiming Voices: Silence as Resistance in the Line of Oppression and the Legacy of Colonialism

Afterlives portrays characters who become mute as a result of the enduring effects of colonization, war, and intergenerational trauma within Zanzibar society after its

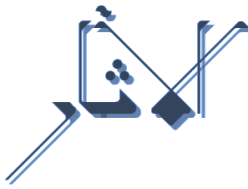


independence in 1964. In the post-colonial era, the novel investigates the effects of colonialism, conflict, displacement, and migration on the East African people. It demonstrates the importance of overcoming trauma to promote progress by depicting familial conflicts and the historical legacies of colonialism under German and later British rule across generations. Moreover, it underscores “the redemptive power of stories” (Unluonen, 2021) amid coercive forces that suppress Indigenous people, particularly those who have been victims of violence and injustice.

Gurnah's fiction is deeply connected to postcolonial critique and revolves around issues of silence, displacement, belonging, identity, and refugee destiny. Gurnah exposes the myriad meanings contained in his characters' experiences through the use of narrative silence. The profound silence sometimes magnifies the characters' internal conflicts and the burden of their pasts that they experience as a result of their fight with their fragmented identities. Gurnah's use of silence sheds light on its complex function in the transformation of people's identities, collective memories, and relationships. In postcolonial literature, silence is frequently portrayed in a negative light, serving as a means to highlight the marginalized and repressed condition of female agency. Nevertheless, Gurnah effectively employs silence in his literary works, using it to illustrate both positive and negative attributes. Through his characters, he skillfully unveils the intricate complexities of different postcolonial situations. Silence, paradoxically, allows him to amplify the forgotten voices and repressed histories of the Indigenous people of Zanzibar Island.

Gurnah's literary works thoroughly explore postcolonial silences, illuminating hidden histories and the underrepresentation of Zanzibar society. His investigation of postcolonial silences covers a wide range of significant categories, such as strategic silence, traumatic silence, and redemptive silence. The novel analyses several facets of silence through its characters, demonstrating how the historical narrative of East African individuals is silenced by the persistent repercussions of German and then British rule over the region, especially in Zanzibar. The chosen text uses all sorts of postcolonial silences. Sometimes, the protagonists use strategic silence to establish safety for themselves, hide or alter their identities, or function as survival tactics that challenge colonial narratives. For instance, “Ilyas told Khalifa about how he had run away from home as a child and wandered around for several days before he was kidnapped by a *schutztruppe* askari at the train station and taken to the mountains” (Gurnah, 2020a, p. 17). Ilyas demonstrates strategic silence by refraining from discussing his past experiences or the violence he has witnessed upon his return home after years of absence. His identity is fractured by this dimension of silence. To remain hidden and protected and to reshape his identity, Ilyas, the protagonist, uses strategic silence. Khalifa is another character who employs strategic silence as he does not challenge the colonial system but survives within it, knowing well when to speak or be silent to avoid conflict. He is pragmatic and realistic, and seems to ensure his survival in the post-colonial era.

The second type of silence is traumatic silence, which shows how the characters' pain affects their capacity to speak, particularly in situations involving postcolonial trauma. In this way, Gurnah's works capture the layered complexity of the characters' experiences with trauma. The personal experiences of the indigenous people of Zanzibar Island are interwoven with the communal experiences of the island in these tales, which also reflect the ongoing consequences of colonial legacies. The native inhabitants of Zanzibar Island endured enormous hardships due to the impact of colonisation. Gurnah, an Arab, attempts in his writings to depict the raptures, traumatic sufferings, and atrocities endured by three generations: the pre-colonial, post-colonial, and diaspora. For instance, Hamza's traumatic



experiences and feelings shows in the following, “There were eighteen recruits in their group, weary and sweaty and silent now in the cramped cell. Hamza was numb with hunger and exhaustion, his heart racing with a distress he could not control”(Gurnah, 2020b, p. 48). Hamza, the protagonist, is recruited as an askari in the German army and experiences severe psychological trauma and emotional wounds. His silence reflects symptoms of PTSD, highlighting how war disrupts his identity and renders him unable to speak about his past traumatic experiences. Thus, Hamza suffers from traumatic silence.

Last but not least, the category of postcolonial silence that he depicts in the selected work is redemptive silence. Silences interspersed throughout the protagonist's quest for self-discovery in the novel allow him to process his troubled history and the nuances of his refugee identity. Redemptive silence is portrayed in the connection between Hamza and Afiya, who both achieve a deep self-awareness and mutual understanding at the end of the story. The protagonists can face and counter their inner struggles by remaining silent, strengthening their connection, awareness, and self-realisation. Silence is an essential place for healing and reconnecting.

Intergenerational Trauma: Paths to Forgiveness and Healing

Afterlives signifies intergenerational trauma as the burden of the past through the characters Hamza, Ilyas, Afiya, and Khalifa within a postcolonial setting. Ilyas, Khalifa, Hamza, and Afiya exemplify the enduring impact of postcolonial trauma and its psychological ramifications across generations. Herman's trauma recovery model delineates avenues for healing from the profound psychological effects of German and British colonialism on the East African people, especially the people of Zanzibar. The paper aims to examine intergenerational family trauma experienced by the characters as a result of colonial violence and oppression and to confront these ingrained concerns, which are essential for healing and promoting post-traumatic development and resilience.

Intergenerational or historical trauma refers to trauma passed down from colonial and postcolonial generations to the diasporic generation, exemplified by the tales of Uncle Ilyas, Hamza, and Afiya. Trauma in postcolonial settings, such as Zanzibar, may emerge from systemic oppression and brutality under German and British colonial control. Uncle Ilyas assimilates colonial culture and implements them in colonial peripheries, despite opposition to imperial hegemony. Hamza and Afiya carry the weight of history, absorbing tragic accounts of pain and violence through generations. Judith Herman's trauma recovery model underscores the need to establish safety as the first step towards healing and forgiveness.

The path to healing begins with a sense of safety for the characters in the selected novel. Uncle Ilyas ensures safety by remaining silent about his experiences at the missionary college after his return. Ilyas asks Khalifa, “You won’t say anything to anyone if I tell you, will you?” (Gurnah, 2020, p. 21). This highlights the psychological effects of German colonial dominance on Ilyas. At the outset of the novel, Gurnah underscores colonial rule through Uncle Ilyas, who adopts Western culture and strives to disseminate imperial ideology inside the periphery, much to the Babu. Khalifa exemplifies African culture and customs, opposing colonial influence by engaging with East African ideologies. By maintaining silence, Uncle Ilyas safeguards his security, which is the first phase of recovery and wellness.

Similarly, Khalifa ensures his safety by relying on economic and social strategies amid the terror of colonialism and World War I. Working as a clerk for Amur Biashara, he steadily strengthens his financial position. To maintain his safety, Khalifa takes on various responsibilities in the merchant business. “He kept the books, made calculations, and saw to the everyday affairs of Amur biashara's business. He did what was required of him, no more,



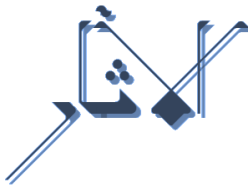
no less” (Gurnah, 2020, p.127). By protecting others from the horrors of the German War and the atrocities of colonialism, he implicitly demonstrates nuanced opposition in favour of the East African people, especially those of Zanzibar Island. Another character, Hamza, successfully ensures his safety after fleeing the war. He served as an askari and voluntarily engaged in World War I. Although he was a bonded labourer or slave, his father sent him to a merchant to settle a debt, the amount of which remained unknown, parallel to the tale in the renowned novel “Paradise,” when Yusuf journeys as a slave into the depths of East Africa.

The second stage of trauma healing, according to Herman, occurs when individuals recollect their experiences and face the concealed, anguished narratives of their history. Khalifa carries the burden of his history, expressing his sorrow with the statement, “The war took everything from me – my family, my home, my sense of self” (Gurnah, 2020, p. 47). This remark emphasizes how colonial hegemony deprives people of all home, family, and identity, resulting in profound emotional wounds that often manifest in their dreams. At another point, he remembers the horrific recollections of war and the damage it inflicted on their life. He admits, “I am tormented by the spectres of the past – visages of the deceased, the echoes of gunfire” (Gurnah, 2020, Chapter 8). These horrific recollections are profoundly embedded in the protagonists' psyches. Khalifa expresses, “At times, I sense that I remain confined in that location, repeatedly experiencing the same nightmares” (Gurnah, 2020, p. 213).

The protagonist, Hamza, exemplifies another instance of catastrophic suffering, becoming ensnared by dread and the enduring repercussions of World War I. The conflict, along with German colonial dominance, ravaged the socio-political, cultural, and religious structure of Zanzibar society. Afterlives compellingly demonstrates the profound effects of German colonization on its protagonists, notably Hamza, Ilyas, Afiya, and Khalifa. Hamza articulates his trepidation and distress with the statement: “I'm haunted by the memories of what I saw, of what I did” (Gurnah, 2020, p. 43). This comment highlights his persistent battle with the war's catastrophic impacts, as he is unable to overcome his sorrow. Hamza, the protagonist, is compelled to serve a merciless trader after his father concedes to him as restitution for a debt. Ultimately, he escapes and aligns himself with the Askari during World War I. As a witness to the war's destruction, he is unable to express the atrocities he has seen, resulting in the trauma being profoundly ingrained in his consciousness for years.

On another occasion, Hamza expresses the atrocities of war in these words, “The war took everything from me. My innocence, my sense of self, my ability to trust (Gurnah, 2020, p.189). This displays the significant and enduring influence of World War I and German colonization on individuals and society. Zanzibar, an island with significant historical and cultural heritage, saw profound turmoil as a result of colonial exploitation, forced military service, and the extensive socio-political disturbances resulting from German colonial hegemony. Hamza's fading innocence and identity reflect the collapse of Zanzibar's ancient structures due to colonial domination. German empires undermined local administration, cultural identity, and economic stability, resulting in people such as Hamza grappling with their disjointed reality. The conflict displaced young men from their residences, compelling them into harsh military duty as askari. Numerous individuals, like Hamza, experienced both bodily and psychological anguish, becoming witnesses to brutality and persecution that transformed their worldview.

His distrust reflects the betrayal and disappointment experienced by several Zanzibaris under colonial rule. Colonial officials often violated their assurances of stability and security, resulting in uncertainty and risk for the people. Hamza's pain transcends the



personal, representing the broader historical injuries inflicted upon Zanzibar, where colonial subjugation deprived communities of autonomy, security, and faith in their social institutions. Hamza's experiences in *Afterlives* depict the enduring impact of war and colonialism on Zanzibar, influencing the collective memory and endurance of its inhabitants.

The third stage of trauma healing, as articulated by Herman, is exemplified in the experiences of characters like Khalifa, Ilyas, Hamza, and Afiya. Following the death of his parents, Khalifa looks for a sense of belonging to recover from the trauma of German domination and World War I. He finds work for minimal wages under Amur Biashara and thereafter marries his daughter, Bi Asha. Notwithstanding his tragic history, Hamza has a profound and positive awareness of life. Demonstrating this resiliency, Gurnah articulates, "I'm trying to find a way to make amends, to make things right again" (Gurnah, 2020, p. 202). This emotion embodies Hamza's individual will as well as the collective social struggle to reconstruct and re-establish order after war and colonial subjugation.

Hamza aims to reintegrate into society, asserting, "I'm starting to see that there is a way forward, that I can rebuild my life and find a sense of purpose." (Gurnah, 2020, p. 249). This statement aligns with Herman's third phase of trauma recovery, which stresses the integration with society to rebuild the track of one's life. Hamza's desire to reshape identity reflects his struggle to regain agency. His struggle reflects the vision of postcolonial struggle, where individuals and societies move forward on the track of healing and reshaping their identities after the enduring effects of war and colonial domination. *Afterlives* demonstrates how trauma heals, how the restoration process can unfold at individual and collective levels and how survivors can reshape their lives and reconsider the meanings regardless of hardships and historical loss.

Conclusion

The paper has analyzed various types of postcolonial silence, such as strategic, traumatic, and redemptive silence, as well as intergenerational trauma, through the characters Khalifa, Ilyas, Hamza, and Afiya. *Afterlives* demonstrates the effect of German colonial dominance and the repercussions of World War I, revealing how these historical events disrupted the lives of East Africans, especially those on Zanzibar Island. The novel also encapsulates the weight of history, characterized by silence and intergenerational trauma, trapping several individuals, such as Khalifa, Ilyas, and Hamza, in cycles of agony as they struggle to transcend historical trauma. These characters embody silence and intergenerational trauma across generations. Some characters, such as Bi Asha and Afiya, fail to heal from their traumatic experiences, whereas others, like Hamza, strive to manage their fractured identities. Some characters, such as Ilyas, assimilate into Western culture, while others, such as Khalifa, seek to maintain Indigenous customs. Many characters find themselves caught between cultures and continents, belonging to neither the East nor the West. Rather, they look forward to new opportunities, exploring pathways beyond colonial and postcolonial boundaries.

Afterlives portrays the psychological suffering and tormenting feelings caused by German domination and warfare, especially within the Zanzibar community. The protagonists – Khalifa, Ilyas, Hamza, and Afiya – experience deteriorating conditions, burdened by silence and intergenerational trauma. Gurnah illustrates how these inherited traumas disrupt the lives of characters like Hamza and Ilyas, impacting them socio-politically, culturally, and spiritually. Consequently, the characters grapple with both personal and historical trauma, resulting in ambiguity regarding their identities and fortune. The novel further analyzes how Khalifa, Ilyas, Hamza, and Afiya struggle with intergenerational trauma, carry the burden of



their past, and attempt to overcome their suffering. Ultimately, they foster a collective comprehension of their history and, therefore, reconnect with society and attempt to reshape their fractured identities.

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