Subverting colonial narratives: A reading of historiographic metafiction in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives*

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Abstract: A British novelist of Tanzanian origin, Abdulrazak Gurnah, attempts to rewrite the German cultural memory of colonialism through characters who are either victims or propagandists of the regime. Native resistances were brutally suppressed during the colonial period. Focusing on such suppression and later marginalisation via the concept of historiographic metafiction, this paper offers a close reading of Gurnah's anglophone novel *Afterlives* (2020), delving not just into the concept of colonial amnesia but also into the empire's ideological imperatives as reflected in the fictional lives of its characters. From this perspective, this paper seeks to explore the condition of native people and their relationship with the protection force for German East Africa. The colonial discourses highlight the exploitative marginalisation of native populations, emphasising the hierarchical structure of imperial power. By considering the interpretations generated by characters during and after the German colonial period, this study explores the native resistance vis-à-vis imperialism that reconstructs dominant historical discourses and their associated amnesia in the postmodern world.

Keywords: Abdulrazak Gurnah, German colonial empire, historiographic metafiction, resistance, power, marginalisation, *Afterlives*

Introduction
German imperialism has suffered from "colonial amnesia" (Perraudin and Zimmerer 2011, 1), not acknowledging its brutal exploitation of Africa, which is often described as absent, overshadowed, and forgotten with references to factors such as the "short period of German colonialism, its abrupt end, and the relative lack of postcolonial immigration to Germany" (Maricocchi 2024, 1). Jürgen Zimmerer denotes the concept of "colonial amnesia" to highlight how "the knowledge about Germany's colonial past had been forgotten, had

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been ignored" ("Between Forgetting and Supressing," 00:30 to 00:36), acknowledging that this is attached to the comparatively early end of German colonialism, which lasted for just over thirty years up until the end of World War I. Therefore, it predominantly aims at addressing the National Socialist past, which downgrades colonial history "into the background" (Ibid, 1:42 to 1:43). The construction of the totalised understanding of the German colonial and its internal forgetting of colonial history or remembering it in certain ways challenges the preconceived narrative of historical discourses. Germans believed that they had "nothing to do with the colonial exploitation of large parts of Africa, Asia or South America" (Perraudin and Zimmerer 2011, 1). They were not part of — so many believed — such devastations bestowed upon non-European countries. This sociocultural and political narrative of history was severely shaken in 2004, "when the centenary of the genocide of the Herero and Nama people confronted a wide German audience with German atrocities of a hundred years before" (Ibid, 1). Furthermore, Christiane Bürger and Sahra Rausch argue that the terminology of colonial amnesia denotes less to insufficient knowledge about colonialism than a lost or impaired as an "*erinnerungspolitische[s]* Instrument [tool of remembrance policy]" (2022, 272) in nationally-focused discussions on the cultural memory of Germany's colonial past. They also acknowledge that colonial amnesia is dependent on Eurocentric perspectives. This Eurocentric framework, as Rita Maricocchi points out in her essay, "is enforced by the continual reproduction of knowledge about German colonialism as exclusively white knowledge" (2024, 4). This both fails to take into account the collective memory of German colonialism in formerly colonised countries and, thereby, the "transnational entanglements of German colonialism, as well as it fails to consider the knowledge and memory work of Black Germans and Germans of Color throughout the twentieth century and into the present" (Ibid, 4).

In this way, the postmodern theoretical frameworks recontextualise the past within its own complex textuality, implying the teaching of historiographic metafiction. This problematises historical events, as Linda Hutcheon (1988, 106) argues, "its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here—just unresolved contradiction". Historical writing is not seen as a true account of events since they have used the techniques of fictional representation to create imaginative versions of

their historical, real worlds (Holloway 1953; Braudy 1970; Henderson 1974). Hutcheon (1988, 122) further argues that historiographic metafiction is a kind of postmodern novel that rejects projecting "present beliefs and standards onto the past and asserts the specificity and particularity of the individual past event." It also suggests a distinction between "events" and "facts" shared by many historians. Since the documents become signs of events which the "historian transmutes into facts" (Ibid, 122), as in historiographic metafiction, the lesson here is that the past once existed, but the historical knowledge of it is semiotically constructed or transmitted. Finally, historiographic metafiction "often points to this fact by using the paratextual conventions of historiography (especially footnotes) to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations" (Ibid, 123). In this sense, Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives* (2020) deconstructs the totalised history of German colonialism in East Africa by recontextualising the experiences of those "who lived through it" (Gurnah 2020, 91), naming particular events such as the "Maji-Maji uprising" (Ibid, 8) and the "Battle of Mahiwa" (Ibid, 91), and remembering colonialism as a brutal intersection. The cultural memory of German colonialism as "colonial amnesia" and the frameworks in which it is remembered are further deconstructed through counter-memory or counter-narrative within the rereading of the anglophone novel *Afterlives*, which contains and constitutes a transnational and multilingual German cultural memory of colonialism. The construction of historiographic metafiction within postmodern theoretical discourses reframes predominant conceptualisations of the colonial past, subverting its dominant representation in East Africa. Thus, the paper will analyse, in detail in the following sections, the native resistance, whose power shapes the more significant understanding of the culture in which power operates, of which *Afterlives* presents a concept of colonial amnesia and its unacknowledged suppression.

German colonialism in East Africa

German colonialism materialised only after its unification in 1871, "which replaced the thirty-eight sovereign German states with a unified nation-state under the leadership of Prussia and Chancellor Bismarck" (Conrad 2012, 1). With newfound unity in the late-nineteenth-century high imperialism, German colonialism influenced a common foreign policy and a bourgeoning fleet, yet it lagged behind

other European powers in colonial possession. The quest for new colonies was driven by global economic competition and the "hunt for raw materials and new markets for the industrializing countries, to global political conflicts between the European powers, and to the ideologies of evolutionism and Social Darwinism" (Ibid, 17). This global framework was a crucial component of the German imperial project, reinforcing the discourse of the Aryan race as superior to native Africans. German colonialism got its official start through the 1884-1885 conference of Berlin, known as "the Scramble for Africa" (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016, 1802); European powers divided Africa among themselves. During this conference, most of Africa went to the British and the French, some to Belgium, Portugal, and Italy, and a tiny bit to Spain. Germany also acquired a significant portion of the land in today's Togo, Cameroon, Namibia, and Tanzania (Conrad 2012, 1). The 1884 Berlin Conference led to the foundation of geographical demarcation and political exploitation at a time when Europeans had barely settled in Africa and had limited knowledge of the local conditions (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2016, 1802).

Germany joined the modern European scramble for Africa when the Bremen-based tobacco merchant Adolf Lüderitz (1834-1886) encountered problems due to his illegal trading of arms on the coast of south-western Africa. Further, his questionable dealings in diamonds and gold run into difficulties, he was "forced to sell his possessions and soon obliged the German government to step in, not least to avoid a serious loss of prestige" (Conrad 2012, 38). In order to rescue Lüderitz, "the Prussian navy finally sent three warships to the coast. Soon thereafter, and following a similar course, Cameroon became a 'protectorate' of Germany" (Osayimwese 2023, 2). In the following years, tensions between the two major local ethnic groups, "the Herero and Nama, made it easier for the Germans to establish power; both groups' leaders, Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi, attempted to make use of the German presence for their own purposes" (Conrad 2012, 38). The fact is that Germany faced many issues in Africa, one of which was several rebellions from the local native populations against colonial rule, leading to a pushback by the Germans and terrible consequences through evil actions against the native people. After Germany was defeated in World War I, its overseas empire was dismantled by Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June 1919 (Schilling 2011, 140). As a result, German colonies were transformed into League of Nations mandates and divided between

Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, and Japan, with the determination not to see any of them return to Germany (Neiberg 2017, 56). These colonies captured by Germans were built "a tale of slavery, plunder, war, corruption, land-grabbing, famines, exploitation, indentured labour, impoverishment, massacres, genocide and forced resettlement" (Gopal 2006), and their success was not just due to the discourse of pseudoscientific racial thinking and genocide as part of Nazi imperialism but the systematic exploitation of the Africans in an inhumane manner.

Colonial oppression and resistance

The novel *Afterlives* (2020) depicts the German colonial empire and its consequences for a disparate group of half a dozen colonial-era Tanzanians living in the seacoast village of Tanga. The novel tries its best to rewrite the German cultural memory of colonialism via the fictional account of characters with the actual events per se in East Africa, revealing the different layers of historical trajectories suppressed by the Germans since the end of World War I. The interplay of real historical events, such as the Maji-Maji uprising and the Battle of Mahiwa, with fictional characters is a pivotal point of historiographic metafiction, which seeks to blur the boundaries between history and fiction. The separation of the literary and the historical is now "being challenged in postmodern theory and art, and recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ" (Hutcheon 1988, 105). The rupture in the demarcation of historian and novelist, as Barbara Foley argues, arises due to influencing each other mutually: Macauley's debt to Sir Walter Scott was an overt one, as was Charles Dickens's to Carlyle in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1986, 170-171). In *Afterlives*, Gurnah's narrator addresses the historical setback of the German cultural memory of colonialism in East Africa, which results in brutal colonial wars "founded on a belief in cultural superiority and, later, on Social Darwinist theories." (Conrad 2012, 165) This unnamed third-person narrator unfolds the lives of characters Khalifa, Afiya, Uncle Ilyas, and Hamza (both *askari*), and later, Hamza and Afiya's son, Ilyas, who is named after his uncle.

Khalifa is a half-Indian boy who worked for ten years as a clerk for Indian brothers and later joined the merchant Amur Biashara. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, wars such as the Abushiri Revolt (1888-1889), Hehe Rebellion (1891-1898), Wahehe

Rebellion (1891-1898), Maji-Maji Rebellion (1905-1907), Kilosa Rebellion (1905) and the Battle of Mahiwa (1917) broke out, leading to the bloodiest resistance against German colonial rule in East Africa, highlighting the persistence of local opposition to foreign domination. Khalifa was raised amid this colonialism, witnessing a lot of brutal battles which resulted in public executions, sexual assault, forced labour, land appropriation, and resource extraction. The German colonial troops "had relied upon scorched earth policies against Africans" (Pesek 2011, 132), which certainly aimed to "subjugate and exploit the African population" (Conrad 2012, 163), resulting in widespread violence and repression towards those who resisted colonial administration and policies. The narrator of *Afterlives* is disillusioned by the disorderliness that the German colonial empire has brought to East Africa, creating a counter-narrative with an established understanding of the German cultural memory of colonialism. The narrator references the al-Bushiri uprising (1888-1889), "during which Arab and Waswahili coastal and caravan traders resisted the German claim that they were the rulers of the land" (Gurnah 2020, 5). This societal uprising, led by Arabs, Swahili, and caravan traders, marks the inception of sociocultural and political tension between Germans and the native people, highlighting the deep-rooted conflicts and power struggles. In this way, the narrator further outlines:

> The revolt was suppressed by Colonel Wissmann and his newly formed schutztruppe [armed forces]. Three years after the defeat of the al Bushiri revolt […] the Germans were engaged in another war, this time with the Wahehe a long way in the south. They too were reluctant to accept German rule and proved more stubborn than al Bushiri, inflicting unexpectedly heavy casualties on the schutztruppe who responded with great determination and ruthlessness. (Ibid, 5)

German colonial troops established the core of the *Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika* (armed forces for German East Africa). They were referred to by the Germans as askari, a term of Arabic origin meaning 'police' (Conrad, 2012, 74) and were crucial in maintaining colonial imperial policies in German East Africa. In the context of the German colonial empire, the askari symbolises the complex power structure between colonial authorities and the native population. Therefore, recruiting askaris from local communities serves multiple purposes for the colonial administration, including strengthening military presence, facilitating territorial expansion into remote areas, and enabling a sense of loyalty among native populations. The construction of the world by

the Germans in East Africa was an act of self-deception, not acknowledging the colonial past, which has inflamed political and public debates about memory. The historiographic metafiction seeks to concern itself with falsity and becomes a postmodern concern for the difference, the difference(s) relative to the specificity of culture and place. Gurnah's anglophone novel *Afterlives* rewrote history as a diverse field of literary engagement with the German colonial past that has received little attention. When other European power had to deal with the colonial past, "Germany had to deal with the Nazi past with the holocaust" (Zimmerer, "Between Forgetting and Supressing," 1:15 to 1:20).

Nevertheless, the reputation of the askari as a loyal military force of the German colonial empire was reaffirmed through their crucial role in subduing the Maji-Maji uprising. The cultural resilience and drawn-out resistance to the "[a]llied forces during the First World War, under the leadership of General von Lettow-Vorbeck, established the myth of the undefeatable and loyal askari that proved to be a powerful image for revisionist circles after 1918" (Conrad 2012, 74). The image of the askari as loyal defenders of the colonial order serves to legitimise imperialism in East Africa while also emphasising notions of racial superiority. In this way, the narrator showcases a German protection force, which was at this time "made up of disbanded Nubi soldiers who had served the British against the Mahdi in Sudan and Shangaan 'Zulu' recruits from southern Portuguese East Africa" (Gurnah 2020, 8). The quote highlights the exploitative practice of Western powers, leading to the formation of German colonial armed forces. It also plays with the dominant historical discourses that the coloniser sets to deconstruct the existing political narrative. This brings forward the problem of marginalisation in which the dominant class discursively produces ideological imperatives to facilitate the exploitation of native people, pushing towards the periphery via the idealised notion of Western civilisation. Hence, historiographic metafiction attempts to "demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, and it does so both thematically and formally" (Hutcheon 1988, 108). The colonial discourse in itself was constructed to determine the function of non-Western countries, concealing under the discourse of the so-called superiority of Western civilisation and the backwardness of African societies. It is essential to deconstruct this constructed myth or the ideological organisation of colonial governance. Further, it can

unravel the function of the power dynamic in the formation of askari and its psychological impact on African communities.

Through the experiences of Khalifa as a clerk for Gujarati bankers and later with Amur Biashara, the narrator outlines the everyday struggles encountered by native people under the German colonial regime. The fictional account of the history from the perspective of the natives sheds light on the ruthless and oppressive stances of colonialism, which sought to subdue "revolt in their *Deutsch-Ostafrika* [German East Africa]" (Gurnah 2020, 8). The German colonial empire brutally repressed any form of resistance from the natives, resulting in showcasing their victory through public executions against those who opposed accepting the colonial regime. By publicly hanging al Bushiri ibn Salim al-Harthi in 1889, the German militaristic forces aimed to impart a sense of terror and fear among native people and assert social hierarchy. This military aggressive attitude towards native people highlights the empire's refusal to accommodate any "pejorative racial difference" (Vick 2011, 16) that could threaten their perceived colonial expansion, which was central to German fascism. Therefore, the narrator suggests that the German colonial project not only perpetuated violence but also disrupted the actual cosmopolitan landscapes of East Africa. The imposition of imperialism marks a rupture in the existing structure of East Africa (present-day Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi), leading to heightened population-changing or -eradicating ethnic conflict — even genocide — in the German-speaking world. The German colonial rule was marked by oppression, bloodshed, exploitation, famines, massacres, displacement, land confiscation, and resistance movements, thereby highlighting the devastating impact of the empire, especially on non-Western European countries, as the narrator puts it in the following way:

> There was still much for [Germans] to do, though, and as they moved inland they encountered many other peoples who were reluctant to become German subjects: the Wanyamwezi, Wachagga, Wameru, and most troublesome of all the Wahehe in the south. They finally subdued the Wahehe after eight years of war, starving and crushing and burning out their resistance. In their triumph, the Germans cut off the head of the Wahehe leader Mkwawa and sent it to Germany as a trophy. (Gurnah 2020, 8)

This quote in-depth reflects the existence of different tribes in East Africa. These tribes — within their own construction of space — did not submit themselves to colonial rule, resulting in the widespread destruction of the place and its people. The resistance by these tribes to

colonial power highlights their resilience and determination to defend their land, culture, and autonomy against foreign domination. Nevertheless, the brutal tactics employed by the Germans to suppress these resistances — including starvation, warfare, and the deliberate destruction of communities — showcase the ruthless implementation of the colonial forces. The public execution of the native people by the Germans highlights the colonial mindset that views non-European people as inferior, reflecting the dehumanising nature of the imperial army. German administration brought "new regulations and rules for doing business" (Ibid, 9), which changed how people managed their business in Africa before colonialism. The sociocultural transformation marks the resilience among the native population, highlighting the political tension that leads to their suppression and exploitation. Gurnah tries to highlight these unacknowledged issues of German cultural memory concerning the actual historical evidence with a fictitious narrative. Postmodern novels like *Ratner's Star* (1976), *Lanark* (1981), *The Names* (1982), *Waterland* (1983), *Foe* (1986), *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), and *Gravel Heart* (2017), clearly assert that there are multiple truths, never one Truth, and there is rarely falseness per se, just others' truths. History and fiction are narratives differentiated by their structures, which historiographic metafiction first "establishes and then crosses, positing both the generic contracts of fiction and history" (Hutcheon 1988, 110). Postmodern fiction evokes that to re-present or to rewrite the past in history, and in fiction, is to expose it to the present, to prevent it from being teleological and conclusive. Hence, *Afterlives* recontextualises colonial amnesia to foreground the marginalisation of unacknowledged German atrocities.

However, the narrator talks about the Maji-Maji Rebellion, "the centenary of which fell in 2005—others have attempted to rewrite Germany's colonial past by emphasizing the exotic aspects of the German colonial undertaking, and by disconnecting the imperial past from the positive strands of German history" (Perraudin and Zimmerer 2011, 2). The Maji-Maji uprising — triggered by German colonial policies — brought famine, known as the *ukame* (great hunger), as *schutztruppe* (German armed forces) "burned villages and trampled fields and plundered food stores. African bodies were left hanging on roadside gibbets in a landscape that was scorched and terrorised" (Gurnah 2020, 15). This quote illustrates a horrific atmosphere during *Deutsch-Ostafrika* (German East Africa) that marks the savage and inhuman exploitation of the Indigenous population. Therefore, the

narrator claims that the "Maji Maji victory left hundreds of thousands dead from starvation and many hundreds more from battlefield wounds or by public execution. To some of the rulers of Deutsch-Ostafrika, this outcome was viewed as unavoidable" (Ibid, 16). It also led to the marginalisation of native people as the "forced labour regime was extended to build roads and clear roadside gutters and make avenues and gardens for the leisure of the colonists and the good name of the Kaisereich" (Ibid, 16). The colonies' urban planning helped the Germans ease their everyday activity in East Africa. It is done through the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) in East Africa, creating a binary organisation between the centre and margin, which is, in fact, ideologically produced at every moment in the class struggle. Louis Althusser (2014, 245) explains that "no class can hold state power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the Ideological State Apparatuses." The dominant bourgeois in the centralised ideological structure tends to reflect the subject position. This act of ideological interpellation or hailing points to individuals as subjects within a system of power to further presuppose the existence of hierarchical organisations. The RSA is supposed to consist of the police, the prison, and the judiciary. However, German colonial rule was much more aggressive and brutal, leaving no space for the judiciary and prison but rather the *schutztruppe askari* "aided by local recruits from among the defeated people" (Gurnah 2020, 8). It is not limited to RSA but is instilled into the minds of native people through the empire's ideology. In this manner, the narrator asserts that the German administration opens up "new schools" (Ibid, 16) and trains "Africans as civil servants and teachers" (Ibid, 16). Opening new schools was a significant medium in promoting a colonial ideology and its hegemonic practices among natives. Amur, a merchant who has embraced imperial influences, sends his son to one of these colonial schools. These schools were primary tools for propagating the ideology of the German Empire, including racial segregation and cultural superiority. The ideology further comprises the nation's militarism that legitimises controlling public opinion, including schools, textbooks, police, and the media in the more significant sociocultural landscapes.

During the German colonial regime, Ilyas is kidnapped by "a schutztruppe askari [armed forces] at the train station" (Ibid, 22). The armed forces consist of native soldiers governed by German officers, highlighting the power dynamics of colonialism and its impact on

native lives. Ilyas becomes a victim of this colonial ideological organisation. Despite his displacement, he receives an education in a German mission school. He learns to "read and write and to sing and speak German" (Ibid, 39). This statement reflects the hegemonic practices of the imperial empire, emphasising the imposition of the foreign language and its impact on the native population. The language of the colonisers plays an important role in colonising the mental space of individuals, enforcing preconceived notions of race (black versus white), nation, class, and gender. Ilyas is a fictional character created by Gurnah to showcase the actual condition of German East Africa, a reconstruction of the past in non-development terms. Through the string of narration provided to Afiya by Ilyas, she learns about her family, including her brother Ilyas, who ran away when he was only eleven years old. He wandered on the street, begging or stealing for food. Meanwhile, he witnessed "soldiers marching through the streets, music playing, heavy boots thudding on the road and a crowd of young people marching alongside, pretending to be soldiers too" (Ibid, 37). He followed them to the train station, and "[a] Shangaan askari pushed [him] on the train and held [his] wrist and laughed" (Ibid, 37). Ilyas arrived at the town with an askari, showcasing no sign of resistance because he had nowhere else to go. Ilyas is a hardcore supporter of the Germans. It is pretty visible in his understanding of the empire. During the conversation between Ilyas and others about the conflict between Germany and the British, Ilyas argues that the "Germans are gifted and clever people. They know how to organise, they know how to fight [...] and on top of that they are much kinder than the British" (Ibid, 41). This quote illustrates his act of self-deception concerning the colonial empire. His understating of the Germans — coming from the work he used to do at a German-owned farm — limits him from seeing the immediate concrete reality, as one of his friends counter-argues with him, saying that in the thirty years or so that "they have occupied this land, the Germans have killed so many people that the country is littered with skulls and bones and the earth is soggy with blood. I am not exaggerating" (Ibid, 41). The statement demonstrates the actual condition of East Africa during the colonial period. There is a lot of bloodshed and killings of local tribes, and Ilyas is unaware of the brutal consequences of the imperial armed forces.

The reference of historiography via intertextuality in fiction challenges the legitimacy of the presumed facts, the nature of their evidence, and their documents. Postmodern intertextuality is a "formal

manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (Hutcheon 1988, 118). Thus, Ilyas's blind support of the Germans recontextualises the colonial discourse when native people try to confront him. Upon the outbreak of World War I, Ilyas enlists in the *schutztruppe*, describing it to Afiya as a "protection troop" (Gurnah 2020, 43). The protection troops were German colonial forces used to recruit native people to fight against the British. Ilyas's enlistment in the war also creates a problematic situation for Afiya, leaving her no choice but to return to the family that treats her like a slave. Afiya is abandoned — this time by her brother — but fortunately , she is rescued by her brother's friend, Khalifa. From this point onwards, Ilyas never returns from the war , and there is no clue whether he is alive or dead. Esther Pujolràs-Noguer (2023, 171-172) points out in his essay that Ilyas is an "unresolved story that haunts the continuation of the narration owing to the fact that it intensifies Afiya's memory of loss and prevents her from *working through* her trauma of displacement". This is evident by the fact that Afiya cannot cope with this loss. She cannot make peace, always wondering what could have happened with her brother. The predicament that Ilyas's story poses is that "due to his enigmatic absence, the responsibility to give an account of his life will not fall onto himself, as was the case of Hamza and Afiya, but on another Ilyas, his nephew, Hamza and Afiya's son" (Ibid, 172). Afiya names her son after her lost brother, Ilyas, who comes to inherit his progenitor's trauma of displacement. Ilyas's story intertwines them all — Afiya, Hamza, and their son — in a complex structure, and their survival becomes intricately linked to decoding what happened to him. This decoding is more about unravelling historical layers of hegemonic practices on the individual mind by the German colonial empire , destabilising the so -called metanarrative of the prevailing discourses . In this sense , Jean-François Lyotard argues that the postmodern condition is a state of "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1979, 24). This condition endorses the idea that discourses no longer exist in totality; it celebrates differences and advocates the idea of multiple narratives within the discourse of history, politics, and culture.

However, Hamza provides a fascinating look at what it was like for askari to serve in German East Africa. There was a lot of recruitment from different tribes among the colonial troops. One of the recruits sings a song in Kiswahili, and others cheerfully, half-mocking themselves with their chest-thumping gestures: "We have joined the

German / We're ready!" (Gurnah 2020, 52). The lyrics of this song depict the psychological state of the native soldiers. The repetition of phrases like "we're ready!" (Ibid, 52) and "without fear!" (Ibid, 52) reflects the sense of determination to serve the colonial masters without hesitation. The askari army is believed to be known for its brutal acts and terrible war tactics, highlighting the importance of colonial armed forces in propagating violence, in which acts of bloodshed and aggression are not only disregarded but constantly encouraged. The narrator claims every "order was shouted and accompanied by abuse" (Ibid, 60). Despite the acts of terror associated with the colonial troops, the askari expressed a willingness to fight for the Germans. The colonial imperial armed forces were brutal in their practices, which manifested the tension between the coloniser and native people. Nevertheless, during World War I, Hamza was suspected of warning local soldiers about trouble, which angered the German officer, leading him to strike Hamza with his sabre. Hamza returned to his town, met Afiya, and, soon after, married her. She gave birth to a son named after her lost brother, Ilyas. When Ilyas-son was thirty-eight, he chose to work on the whereabouts of his uncle Ilyas. Ilyas-son tells her mother that Uncle Ilyas moved to Hamburg. He worked for the Nazi party organisation and marched carrying the schutztruppe flag and on platforms singing Nasi songs. He died in a concentration camp along with his son, Paul.

Conclusion

By depicting German colonial rule, its abrupt end during World War I and the relative lack of postcolonial immigration to Germany, Gurnah highlights — to a certain extent — the function of the *Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika* (the armed forces of German East Africa) within the ideological imperatives of colonialism, whose political function was economic exploitation and participation in the global economy for the benefit of the empire. Such suppression was severely shaken in 2004 by the Herero and Nama people, and the rereading of German cultural memory, therefore, became a rupture in the widely accepted perspective on German East Africa. By discussing Gurnah's anglophone novel *Afterlives* as a literary representation of the colonial past, this paper seeks to capture the brutally suppressed uprisings of the natives against the German colonial power. Within colonial history, the concept of colonial amnesia reconstructs/deconstructs the existing political condition, and Gurnah, by the fictionalised character with

actual historical events, successfully destabilises the dominant grand narrative of historical discourses. The askari — consisting of native African soldiers in German East Africa — contributed to the most violent suppression of the al-Bushiri uprising, the Maji-Maji uprising, the Battle of Mahiwa and many more.

Gurnah tries his best to question and revise the German cultural memory of colonialism from a perspective that challenges the totality of historical narratives. His work brings to light the experiences of colonised peoples, often marginalised in mainstream historical accounts. *Afterlives* engages with historical texts, documents, and other sources, incorporating them into the narrative. This intertextual approach enriches the story and highlights the interconnectedness of different narratives and histories. By portraying the long-term effects of colonial oppression and the struggles of individuals and communities to reclaim their identities and histories, the novel engages in historical critique that is central to historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction can be summed up in the understanding that history is nothing but modified fiction, and fiction is nothing but modified reality. It is a dream in the mind of humanity that is forever striving toward understanding

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