



**BEYOND THE COLONIAL WOUNDS: INTERGENERATIONAL SUFFERING IN GURNAH'S
AFTERLIVES**

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Abstract

*This research aims to analyze the postcolonial perspective of trauma in *Afterlives* (2020). The omniscient third-person narration reveals the characters' intergenerational trauma before, during, and after the World Wars. The textual analysis of the novel seeks to find out the impact of colonial and war atrocities on the lives of Khalifa, Bi Asha, Ilyas, Afiya, Hamza, and Ilyas Jr. The textual interpretations highlight the collective, inter and transgenerational traumatization of these individuals. Relying on the framework presented by Craps in *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (2013), the basic objective of the study is to explore the intergenerational traumas and analyze how Gurnah challenges the traditional trauma narratives through his portrayal of colonized Africans. Craps' framework, living up to the promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement, not only contests the Eurocentric model of trauma theory but also highlights the marginalization of traumas of non-Western and minority strata and defies the universal validity of Western definition of trauma. Pivoting around this framework, this qualitative research explores the psychological dimensions of trauma within the novel, contributing to the broader discourse on postcolonial trauma studies.*

Keywords: *Afterlives*, intergenerational trauma, colonial marginalization

Introduction

Intergenerational trauma can be defined as a process by which the future generations inherit emotional and psychological distress from their ancestors without having a direct experience of their traumatic past. Cultural practices, narratives, collective memory and family dynamics are few of the various channels which can bring about such a traumatic transmission. The causes for the occurrence of intergenerational trauma that leave lasting impressions on individuals, families, and communities and create a continuous cycle of trauma that is transmitted across multiple generations are violence, abuse, oppression, and neglect. Though the fundamental goal of intergenerational theorists was to observe the children of Holocaust survivors, recent studies have observed a sort of sudden change in the theoretical approaches and the contemporary studies have also shown that other oppressed groups have expressed significant signs of this kind of trauma as well. For instances, several studies have observed a 300% overrepresentation of the children of Holocaust survivors in psychiatric referrals, with selected participants having at least one parent or grandparent who had survived a sufficient amount of trauma.

Initially, intergenerational trauma research focused on the descendants of the Holocaust survivors and Native Americans. However, it has expanded since to include Aboriginal Australians and Canadians, families of Vietnam War veterans, and other oppressed groups. Craps (2013) highlights the shortcomings of trauma theory and all of its subfields because of its Western-biased ideology. He highlighted that trauma theory has miserably failed to uphold its promise of cross-cultural solidarity. Craps criticizes the traditional model of trauma theory based on the works of Caruth and other theorists with the similar ideology.

Gurnah has depicted the terrible consequences of the colonial dominance of European powers on multiple occasions and almost all of his writings contain the recurring theme of

refugee disruption. Born in 1948, Gurnah left Zanzibar in 1968 and migrated to the United Kingdom due to the great chaos and persecution resulting from the 1964 revolution. The tragic incidents of this revolution and continuous persecution of the supporters of the Arab regime during his teenage were the cause of his migration and later the same things fueled his literary creativity which reflected through the themes of traumatization, destruction, displacement, and exile in his works.

Afterlives (2020) portrays a complex and ambivalent relationship between the colonizers and the colonized and highlights the historical, collective and intergenerational trauma of almost all the characters portrayed in the novel. The novel narrates the story of a distinct group of six characters in the seacoast village of Tanzania (East Africa) at a time when Germany was the sole controller of a large part of East Africa. Through this historiographical fiction, Gurnah has realistically described the colonization of East Africa from the beginning of the twentieth century till the end of the Second World War by different colonizing forces. The author through distinct characters like Khalifa, his wife Asha, Hamza, Ilyas, and Afiya (the orphaned siblings), depicts how traumatic effects transmit from the older generation of Khalifa to the younger generation of Afiya and Hamza and subsequently to the third generation of Ilyas Junior, son of Afiya and Hamza. Craps' new model of postcolonial trauma theory is another unexplored domain of the field. His notion of bridging the gap between the Holocaust and Colonial atrocities to highlight the historic, collective, intergenerational, and transgenerational traumas is fundamental in understanding and interpreting the latest work of Gurnah. Craps' theory challenges the Western beliefs in trauma and highlights the hegemonic and imperialistic impulses underneath the traditional trauma theory.

Literature Review

The term "trauma" describes the abrupt entry of new and unforeseen knowledge into a person's mind, typically resulting from a sudden encounter with violence or death which results, according to Koocher et al. (2008), in the loss of control over one's body. Balaev (2018) examines traditional trauma model of Caruth to point out that she has explained trauma as an event which not only disrupts consciousness but also defies direct linguistic expression. Caruth's model highlights that trauma permanently damages the psyche by causing the profound psychological pain and suffering.

Roger (2014) studies six novels of the late twentieth century to analyze the relationship between narrative and trauma. She uses a multidisciplinary framework consisting of different fields like social studies, literary fiction, psychoanalysis and historiography and with the help of this framework, she explores a complex interplay between representation of traumatic experiences and storytelling. The dual role of the narrative serves as the central paradox of her research. On one hand, it facilitates the recognition and processing of trauma, while distorting the events all together on the other. The author highlights that in order to fully navigate the complexities of representing trauma, it is crucial to acknowledge these inherent limitations of plot depictions. The protagonists in these six novels have a common arc of experiencing trauma, crafting subjective narrative and finally finding ways to cope through their traumatic experience. The focus of her analysis is less on singular traumatic event which effects the psyche of the protagonist and more on the pervasive influence of living within a traumatic reality.

There is an intriguing relationship between identity and trauma. Immensely traumatic experiences alter and impact the lives of the individuals. Khan et al. (2021) analyze Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) and examine this intriguing relationship. The research effectively shows the lingering nature of trauma that constantly scares the main characters,

Naheed and Rohan, causing them to sway between past and present. The repetitive visions and images coupled with the loose plot grip the readers and make them feel the stress, fear, ambiguity, and trauma of the characters and evoke many questions in their minds. The plot of the novel is non-linear just like the blurry and unclear dreams and recollections of the characters. The article specifies that the unintentional decision-making is surely the result choiceless choices of the characters which establish the novel as a trauma narrative. For instance, Rohan's journey to Peshawar with the bird Pardoner and his return as a blind man after helping the prisoners; Neheed's search for Mikel without the knowledge of anyone, and Mikel's murder of two American soldiers are all Oedipus' choices that define the novel as a traumatic tale.

Intergenerational trauma is a continuous process by which psychological and emotional distress is passed from one generation to the next even when the later generations did not directly experience the original traumatic event. This kind of transmission can take place through various channels like cultural practices, narratives, collective memory, and family dynamics. The causes for the occurrence of intergenerational trauma that leave lasting impressions on individuals, families, and communities and create a continuous cycle of trauma that is transmitted across multiple generations are violence, abuse, oppression, and neglect. The depriving mental health and much higher rates of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance abuse are the direct and significant effects of intergenerational trauma. As far as physical health is concerned, it also leads to long-lasting diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and multiple heart problems as well.

Memory plays a crucial role in the transmission of history. Waterman (2015) offers a unique interpretation of Khan's novel *Noor* through his exploration of art and intergeneration trauma. The backdrop of the novel is the 1971 cyclone and war in East Pakistan, modern-day Bangladesh. The novel unfolds the writer's memories and personal experiences of Pakistan's intricate sociopolitical scenarios of 1971 and that is the reason the novel serves as a reminder of history for those deeply connected to the second partition of the subcontinent within a century. Waterman (2015) suggests that memories play a crucial role in the transmission of history and Khan has achieved this transmission with the help of magical realism which allows the readers to immerse in a fantastical world of the 1971 partition where they can visualize and empathize with the sufferings of characters. The protagonist acts as "the passeur" (p. 198) or simply the translator of the trauma, transmitting it from one generation to another. *Noor* has a deep and uncanny understanding of both individual and collective psyches of her mother's generation. This psychic perception, mixed with her artistic abilities, permits her to create paintings that bring to light the memories and traumas of familial tragedies.

Mengiste (2020) reviews Gurnah's *Afterlives* as a postcolonial novel that deals with themes of war, colonial brutality, violence, refugees, and wider colonial discourses. The novel maintains a firm postcolonial focus on the experience of East Africa under Germany's colonial rule. Moreover, *Afterlives* revolves around the characters within colonized East Africa, depicting a forgotten land where the social and psychological spaces are shaped by the Colonizing Empire. According to the reviewer, the author of the novel explores the generational impacts of war and colonialism, urging the readers to be firsthand witnesses of the brutalities endured by these natives after such widespread devastation.

Afterlives stands as a poignant postcolonial work that reveals the bitter and horrific realities of German colonization and WWI in East Africa. Naz et al. (2022), examine *Afterlives* through the lens of postcolonial critic, Fanon. Their analysis highlights Gurnah's anti-eurocentric historical worldview. The researchers argue that the Eurocentric discourse will

never allow or grant the true identity of Africans because as colonists, they see themselves as the creators of history. The natives are not salvage or primitive, as depicted by the German colonists. The article concludes that the characters experience intense psychological and physical trauma and yet they find joy in simple moments, seek ways to heal, and try to rebuild their lives with a new start.

Muhammad and Ahmad (2022) analyze the physical, emotional, and psychological abuse of children in *Afterlives*. The research examines the arrival of German troops in Africa and its prominent impact on children's lives. The German exploitation of African resources for their troops led to food shortages resulting in the malnutrition of African children. The researchers delve into the effects of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Physically, children suffer irreversible and unbearable pain and damage. Emotionally, they feel unworthy and lonely, just as seen in the case of Afiya in the novel. Psychologically, they experience fear, terror, and nightmares which permanently impact their psyche. As far as education is concerned, the researchers explain that the abused children find it very difficult to learn new things and comprehend new knowledge as shown in the novel by Hamza's difficulties to learn German. Abbas et al. (2023) conduct a brief exploration of trauma in Gurnah's *Afterlives*. The limited focus of research is the complex depiction of haunted memories and nightmares that linger and affect the lives of characters throughout the novel, explaining the profound psychological impacts of colonialism and displacement. The researchers analyze that these nightmares vividly depict the grasp of trauma over a character. They explain that these episodes serve as a reminder that memories of a traumatic event never truly fade; they transform and invade one's dreams and turn those dreams into nightmares. The research concludes on the point that trauma is a universal human experience and can affect the psyche of anyone, irrespective of their identity or background. They further suggest that coping with trauma needs solidarity, kindness, and empathy. These qualities enable individuals to look for hope and resilience even in the darkest and most tragic times.

There is not doubt that western trauma theory has played a vital role in understanding and explaining psychological trauma. The problem here is that its applicability to non-western contexts such as the colonial experiences depicted in Gurnah's *Afterlives* is not only limited but also problematic. Western trauma theory has a potential to overlook the traumas within the context of colonized communities or it offers a limited understanding of the marginalized Aborigines. By addressing this research gap, this article can contribute to a holistic and subtle understanding of the complexities of postcolonial intergenerational trauma and its implications for resilience, identity and agency within the novel as well as broader postcolonial discourse.

Research Objectives:

- 1) To explore the transmission of trauma from colonized subjects to their descendants in *Afterlives*
- 2) To examine characters' resistance against inherited legacies of colonial subjugation
- 3) To analyze the socio-psychological fractures in post-independence African communities

Research Questions:

- 1) How does Gurnah portray the transmission of trauma from colonized subjects to their descendants in *Afterlives*?
- 2) How do characters in the novel resist the inherited legacies of colonial subjugation?

- 3) How does the novel link the colonial violence to the socio-psychological fractures in post-independence African communities?

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Different sources from books, journals and digital publications are consulted in this qualitative research to answer the research questions. The basic sources for this research are the text of the novel *Afterlives* (2020) by Gurnah and the major work of Craps which is *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bounds* (2013). The other sources include the already exiting research papers and articles written on *Afterlives* and critics' opinion about both novel and postcolonial trauma theory. The qualitative method is most suitable to highlight the hidden layers of meanings in the text. The researcher analyzes the text from a postcolonial perspective to unveil the different colonial aspects of the novel. Concepts like intergenerational trauma, collective and cultural traumatic history, and colonial and war atrocities are explored in Gurnah's novel.

A close reading of the selected text helped the researcher to observe different statements that can be interpreted through the lens of post-colonial trauma. The characters of the novel seem to struggle with non-stop traumatization and victimization by the oppressing group. The older generation is worried about the financial problems caused by the war between two European colonizers. These small-town folks have nothing to do with this war but they are inevitably facing the consequences. The younger generation is somehow part of this barbaric event and is directly traumatized by war. Apart from this, the researcher has also explored and read several literary works, articles, comments of different critics, and other relevant material to enhance his understanding.

The article is a critique of the existing model of trauma theory because the researcher believes that these traditional models are inadequate to analyze and understand the traumas of colonized Africans completely. After all, these traumas are infinitive and an analysis of a single traumatic event is not enough to understand its psychological impacts. Craps criticizes the traditional model of trauma theory based on the works of Caruth and other theorists with the same ideology and this critique is based on four fundamental points:

- i. The first point of critique revolves around the open marginalization of minority and non-Western traumas. According to Craps, the main and fundamental focus of traditional trauma theory is to highlight the traumas of people of wealthy and hegemonic regions and nations of Western Europe, United States, Australia, and Canada. It sheds no light on the traumatic experiences of members of non-Western cultural traditions.
- ii. The second point of critique negates the supposed and concocted universality of Western-defined terms of trauma. Craps believes that these hegemonic definitions are exclusionary and culturally insensitive and need to be revised and expanded to properly address the psychological pains suffered by disregarded, overlooked, and disenfranchised groups of non-Western communities.
- iii. The third point around which Craps' critique of trauma theory revolves is the normative trauma aesthetics on which the traditional theory is based. Craps explains that the aesthetics mostly support the avant-garde and high-brow texts of Western writers and create a very narrow canon of trauma literature. He argues that "it should be open and attentive to the diverse strategies of resistance and representation that these contexts invite or necessitate" (p. 05).
- iv. The fourth point of Craps' theory highlights the unexplored relationship between the traumas of the first world and the third world. Craps argues that trauma theory has to include and acknowledge the traumatic colonial histories. To achieve this goal, Craps (2013) tries to

construct a bridge between the traumatic events related to the Holocaust- a barbaric atrocity that was committed in Europe, against Europeans, by Europeans, and other modern calamities. The reason behind bridging the gap between the Holocaust and colonial atrocities is that the traditional models of trauma theory focus a lot on Holocaust memory and neglects the colonial barbarities altogether. As intergenerational trauma connects the pains of one generation to the other, Craps argues that we must connect the pains of these two different but most terrifying phenomena to understand the holistic picture of world history.

This article analyses Gurnah's *Afterlives* in the light of the guiding principles of Trauma presented by Craps.

Analysis and Discussion

Afterlives depicts a tale that is traumatic throughout its course and the characters can't catch a single sign of relief. The novel delves into the emotional and mental wounds left by wars and colonization in East Africa. The novel portrays the journey of small-town Africans through German and British colonial rule, World Wars, and the Apartheid regime of oppression, periods marked by displacement, violence, trauma, and deep-rooted oppression. Through the depiction of its characters, Khalifa, Bi Asha, Amur and his son Nassor, Ilyas, Afiya, Hamza, and Ilyas Jr., Gurnah vividly portrays the lasting effects of these historical traumas throughout the novel. The researcher has divided these characters into three different generations to analyze their traumas completely and the transmission of these traumas back and forth among these generations. The first generation consists of older characters of Khalifa, Bi Asha, Amur and Nassor. Their traumas are largely domestic and financial in a colonial-ruled town because "the German administration was bringing in new regulations and rules for doing every business" (p. 06). This generation shows the domesticity of the oppression and the financial problems created by German colonial rule and "whatever was required, they were willing" to survive (p. 07).

The second or the middle generation consists of some of the novel's main characters like Hamza, Afiya, and Ilyas (Afiya's brother). Most of the novel's plot revolves around this generation because somehow, they are the center point of almost every action. Other than a few exceptions, all chapters of the novel feature at least one character from this generation or the discussion about them. The characters from this generation have their individual traumas but they also represent an overall picture of the collective traumas of colonized Africans as well. The third or the younger generation consists of Ilyas, Afiya and Hamza's son. This generation represents the trickle-down effect of trauma and its transmissive nature. Although trauma transmits among all these generations back and forth, the younger generation is its ultimate receiver and that is the reason Ilyas Junior has so many nightmares and episodes of possession throughout his childhood. The article meticulously analyzes the transmissions of traumas of the characters throughout the course of the novel.

The First Transmission

Khalifa as a member of the older generation suffers from trauma caused by the social, cultural, and economic upheavals brought about by colonial control. Khalifa is a small worker for a local merchant in a fast-evolving colonial setting who is frequently torn between conflicting cultural norms and allegiances. His trauma is characterized by a feeling of helplessness, invisibility, and the struggle to preserve his identity and dignity in a society that is gradually excluding him but still "seemed too fastidious and proper to be a menace" (p. 120). The idea of a universal trauma aesthetic that anticipates overt displays of distress is challenged by Khalifa's trauma, which is mostly internalized and transmitted in indirect ways. His decisions, actions, and the quiet ways he deals with living under colonial control all reflect his pain. For instance, his emotional control during all the miscarriages of Bi Asha, his tendency

to avoid conflict with the merchant, and his quiet endurance of pain at the death of Asha. "It is so final, that is surprising, what I did not properly understand, he said, that this person (Asha) is gone forever" (p. 200). These are all suppressed indications of his underlying trauma. He discovers that the best way to live in a colonial setting is to take a cautious negotiating stance, which involves maintaining a low profile and refraining from openly opposing the colonial or any other sort of authority. But this survival tactic also betrays a weakened life characterized by hopelessness, dread, and an underlying sense of loss.

Khalifa's trauma is transmitted to Hamza, who belongs to the middle generation, through the former's persistent engagement in survival strategies, adaptation, and coping mechanisms. Hamza receives shelter from Khalifa, who also acts as a mentor of sorts for him, "it's not safe to sleep in the streets, he said, I have an outside store in my house that you can use for a few days" (p. 129), although Khalifa's teachings are based on the trauma of being invisible and powerless. Along with Khalifa's tenacity, Hamza also inherited his pain of being on the fringe and unable to completely express his individuality. In contrast to the trauma aesthetic that is universal, which emphasizes the violent or painful spectacle, Khalifa's trauma and Hamza's experience of it are more subdued, entangled with the day-to-day battle for survival and the silent perseverance of adversity. Through this process, Hamza is gradually exposed to the trauma that Khalifa embodies, which strengthens the narrative of caution and fear that governs the younger man's relationships with the outside world.

Khalifa teaches Hamza not only the tactical aspects of survival but also an emotional discipline that prioritizes resilience, numbing one's suffering, and avoiding direct contact with one's past trauma. Hamza is a character who is scared by the war trauma because whenever "he dozed he was unsettled by dreams: falling through dark emptiness, crawling over fallen bodies, hectored by a face twisted with implacable hatred. There were shouts, blows and distant hills overflowing with translucently red viscera" (p. 127) and this war veteran is somehow turned into a small-town family man with the tutelage of Khalifa. In sharp contrast to the Western understanding of trauma, which frequently depends on clear articulation and dramatic depiction, the transmission of trauma from Khalifa to Hamza shows how trauma can be communicated through indirect, non-verbal ways. Hamza's psychological terrain is shaped by Khalifa's guidance and he silently and unknowingly inherits his traumas. Now Hamza's war horrors have been replaced by domestic and financial hardships which are the traumas of almost every colonized African living under colonial rule. "Hamza had begun to think of Khalifa as a sentimental bearer of crimes, someone who took a share of responsibility for other people's trouble and the wrongs done in his times: Bi Asha, Ilyas, Afiya and now Hamza, people he quietly cared about while disguising this unexpected concern with outspoken brashness and persistent cynicism" (p. 171). **The Second Transmission**

Bi Asha, stands in for the pain women experience in a colonial setting when patriarchy and colonial brutality collide to produce a complicated structure of misery. Her trauma involves negotiating a patriarchal environment where her voice is routinely stifled in addition to loss and suffering amid the upheaval of colonialism. "She was self-contained and reluctant... she merely tolerated him (Khalifa) and submitted to his ordour and embraces dutifully at best (p. 14). Bi Asha's trauma is evident in her silence because she "miscarried three times in the early years of the marriage" (p. 14) and has protective tendencies; she frequently decides to keep up difficult facts from the younger generation to spare them more anguish. Bi Asha, is a symbol of a type of pain that is connected to the larger socio-cultural changes caused by colonial disruption, but also extremely intimate. Her trauma is a result of losing loved ones, upsetting customs, and living in a place where violence and instability are a constant concern. Bi Asha,

a woman living under colonial control, suffers on many levels and she is anxious about navigating a world in which outside forces are always undermining her security, status, and function.

Afiya inherits Bi Asha's trauma, primarily through the latter's silence and the emotional distance that results from it. Although Afiya is aware of the misery and pain around her, she gets contradictory information from Bi Asha, which makes her uneasy and anxious. This silent transmission of trauma represents a suffering that is just as destructive, if not more so, than what Western trauma aesthetics could suggest. This suffering is not as blatantly dramatic. As a result of internalizing this trauma, Afiya becomes careful, and protective of her loved ones, and harbors an underlying fear of losing everything. She confesses to Hamza, "I am so terrified that I will lose you one day. I lost my mother and father before I knew them... Then I lost my brother Ilyas who appeared like a blessing in my childhood. I could not bear to lose you too" (p. 190). The lived experience and shared environment play a larger role in the transmission of trauma from Bi Asha to Afiya than explicit narration or overt emotional outbursts. Through her upbringing, Bi Asha's trauma affects Afiya's life, manifesting in her heightened awareness, cautious attitude to making ties, and muted optimism that characterizes Bi Asha's outlook on life. Bi Asha teaches Afiya to be prepared for loss and adversity, to control her emotions to prevent pain in the future and to find strength in endurance and quiet. Afiya's sense of self and connections with the outside world are impacted by this trauma inheritance, which makes her emotionally cautious and profoundly influenced by a heritage of misery she did not directly experience but feels intensely.

The life histories of both of these are also almost identical and so does their traumas. They both (Asha and Afiya) lost their parents at a very young age, both were brought up by their Uncles in a very poor environment and both lost the people they loved deeply in their lives. Asha's uncle married her to Khalifa who "knew that the Merchant was making him a gift of her" (p. 09) to get rid of her because the merchant always considered her a burden. Afiya on the other hand, was treated like a slave by her uncle and his family. She was a servant for her aunt to do the household chores and a toy of amusement for her children. She lost her parent at a very young age, "she did not remember her mother but it still made her sad to think of her. When she tried to imagine her she could only see one of the village women" (p. 26). As a result, Bi Asha's suffering becomes a silent legacy that molds Afiya's emotional environment because she spends most of her life under the same roof as Bi Asha which gently affects how she behaves and handles her difficulties. By demonstrating how trauma can be transmitted through disguised, culturally particular means through the very fabric of everyday life and the silent endurance of suffering rather than through apparent emotional expression or dramatic narrative forms, this transmission of trauma complicates the idea of a universal trauma aesthetic.

The Third Transmission

In *Afterlives*, Ilyas (brother of Afiya) presents a complex portrait of trauma constructed by the horrors of colonial occupation, compelled displacement, and the breaking of cultural and familial ties. He was a child in a terrible condition, he described his condition to Afiya "I must have looked very dirty. My clothes were nothing but rags, shorts made of sacking and a torn old shirt I did not bother to wash anymore" (p. 32). When Ilyas was brought up at a German farm, they put him through a rigorous education and integration procedure. His early years are changed by this event, which also causes him to lose contact with his community and culture and he suffers an identity crisis that scars him for life. Due to his early detachment from his

heritage, he develops a shattered sense of self and finds it difficult to reconcile the opposing ideas that his colonial masters forced upon him with his background. This shattered identity urges him to leave Afiya and join the war to prove his loyalty to the Germans who fed him and gave him some nice clothes.

Through a complicated web of silence, absence, and inherited fear, this deeply ingrained trauma is unintentionally transmitted to Ilyas Jr. Ilyas does not personally raise Ilyas Jr., he does not even meet him throughout his life. Still, his trauma has a big impact on his nephew's life. Within the family, Ilyas' psychological wounds and unsolved identity dilemma leave a legacy of secrecy and silence. Ilyas' terrible experiences cast a long shadow over the family, affecting how members interact and communicate as well as the emotional environment in which Ilyas Jr. is raised. When Ilyas Jr. asked to join the Second World War, Khalifa "vociferously opposed" the idea, "this is nothing to do with you, he said to Ilyas. Isn't it enough that your father and your uncle were stupid enough to risk their lives for these vainglorious warmongers?" (p. 228). This is a direct case against the so-called universal aesthetic of trauma theory that trauma can only be transmitted from father to son or mother to daughter. Ilyas Jr. never had the chance to witness the terrible circumstances of his uncle's survival in the war but he is still possessed by those thoughts that psychologically make it impossible for him to grow his own identity.

The transmission of Ilyas' trauma to Ilyas Jr. demonstrates the complex ways in which trauma can travel across generations, not only through direct experiences of violence or oppression but also through the subtle, often invisible dynamics of family life. The emotional voids, quiet moments, and unsaid anxieties that define Ilyas Jr.'s upbringing are a legacy of Ilyas' suffering. His silent nature and introversion are not merely personal qualities; they are the psychological manifestations of the unresolved traumas which are being inherited by him. This illustrates how trauma aesthetics are not universally consistent but are instead influenced by historical, cultural, and familial contexts. His journey to Germany in search of his uncle showcases his dilemma and his thrust to find the answers that his parents denied. He finally finds the answers about his uncle who was killed by German authorities for disobeying the Race Law of 1935. Ilyas Jr. wrote in a letter to his parents that "Uncle Ilyas was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp outside Berlin and his one surviving son, who was called Paul after the General in the Ostafrika war, voluntarily followed him there" (p. 237). Ilyas also wrote in his letter that Uncle Ilyas was not alone in his last moment and "someone loved Uncle Ilyas enough to follow him to certain death in a concentration camp to keep him company" (p. 237).

The Ultimate Recipient

The ultimate victim of all these traumas across generations is Ilyas Jr. Through stories, silences, and fragmented narratives, Ilyas Jr. absorbs these traumas indirectly, unlike his elders who all experienced and dealt with their traumas in separate situations. "It seemed he must have inherited something from his forefathers" (p. 231). His extreme introspection and silence are a result of the compounding impacts of these various but related traumas, which he symbolizes. Through a pervasive sense of emotional disengagement, dislocation, and isolation rather than apparent symptoms or dramatic occurrences, his character embodies the overall impact of many generations of suffering. Unlike the Western concept of trauma aesthetics, which frequently emphasizes visible signs and cathartic expressions of suffering, Ilyas Jr.'s trauma is revealed by his quiet demeanor, his incapacity to communicate the sorrow that consumes him and his serene temperament. This type of trauma calls into question the trauma aesthetics' purported universality by showing how, in a postcolonial setting, trauma might be

more about the silences, the knowledge gaps, and the unsaid legacies that mold a person's life. This form of trauma challenges the supposed universality of trauma aesthetics, demonstrating that trauma in a postcolonial context can be more about the silences, the gaps in understanding, and the unspoken legacies that shape an individual's life.

In *Afterlives*, the generational transmission of trauma emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend trauma in the context of its particular cultural and historical background. The experiences of Khalifa, Bi Asha, and Ilyas are molded by the unique characteristics of colonial and postcolonial Zanzibar, where trauma is a social and political phenomenon in addition to a psychological and personal one. In this setting, the aesthetic of trauma combines historical injustice, cultural loss, and individual suffering, all of which are transmitted to the next generation in various ways, such as silence, broken memories, or changed behavior. Ilyas Jr.'s experience shows how trauma is received and reinterpreted by each subsequent generation, often becoming more diffuse and less visibly dramatic, but no less profound. His trauma reflects not only the cumulative suffering of his forebears but also the continuing impact of living in a postcolonial society that still bears the scars of its colonial past. This challenges the idea that trauma can be universally understood or represented, emphasizing instead the need to consider trauma within its specific socio-cultural and historical context. His trauma is a reflection of his ancestors' collective suffering as well as the ongoing effects of residing in a postcolonial society that is still plagued by the remnants of its colonial history.

Conclusion

The article has analyzed the novel *Afterlives* (2020) by Gurnah by exploring the postcolonial perspective of trauma to understand the generational transmission of suffering. The article has employed Stef Craps' understanding and critique of the traditional model of trauma theory to analyze the cultural, historical, and socio-psychological factors that shape the expression of trauma among colonized subjects and their descendants. The questions focus to explore the portrayal of the transmission of trauma from colonized subjects to their descendants throughout Gurnah's narrative, characters' navigation of inherited legacies of colonial subjugation and socio-psychological fractures of post-independence African communities.

Gurnah portrays intergenerational trauma in *Afterlives* as a pervasive and enduring force that affects the lives of colonized Africans for many generations. Through the lives of his characters, Gurnah skillfully demonstrates how the harsh realities of colonialism, violence, forced labor, displacement, and cultural deterioration, lead to profound psychological and emotional scars that are inherited by succeeding generations. The story illustrates how colonial violence impacts both individuals who experienced it firsthand and those who are born into a society that has been influenced by its aftermath. The painful legacies of colonial experiences such as forced labor during German rule, the severing of familial relationships, and the loss of cultural identity have an impact on the lives of the descendants. The protagonists inhabit a world in which the ramifications of colonization like economic hardship, social marginalization, and cultural disruption are pervasive and show up in every aspect of their identities, relationships, and actions. Gurnah challenges the idea that the scars left by colonialism fade with time by illustrating the ongoing nature of trauma and how it grows and deepens across generations.

Gurnah carefully documents the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next by concentrating on individual characters who navigate the inherited legacies of their ancestors. The analysis in the previous section demonstrates how the trauma of one generation is subtly passed down to the next, emphasizing the interdependence of individual and societal trauma experiences and the cyclical nature of suffering.

Gurnah portrays the height of socio-psychological fracture in post-independence African community through the character of Ilyas Jr. and his journey to the Germany. In addition to his personal experiences, the collective tragedies of his ancestors have influenced his character. His manner is a reflection of the emotional scars inherited from his parents, as well as those who came before them. Ilyas Jr.'s struggle to find his place in a world that has repeatedly marginalized and subjugated his identity is a stark reminder of how colonial trauma does not simply dissipate but evolves, affecting new generations in profound ways.

It may be concluded that Gurnah's *Afterlives* is a profound exploration of never ending trauma accompanying catastrophic events of war and colonization. Times change, events end but the scars they leave are transmitted from one generation to the next to create deeper connections between violence, memory and cultural identity. This research contributes to promote empathy and suggests how significant is to address the issue of intergenerational trauma for individual and collective well-being. Interdisciplinary future researches may help to explore psychological dimensions of subjugated characters and the coping mechanisms they adopt in response to trauma, offering valuable insights into resilience and pathways towards a sustainable living across diverse global contexts.

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