



**SETTLER COLONIALISM THE GRADUAL EXTERMINATION OF THE NATIVES:
ASSIMILATION, CULTURAL DESTRUCTION, DISLOCATION OF LAND, FORCED
RELOCATION REPRESENTED BY GURNAH IN THE NOVEL *AFTERLIVES***

Ishfaq Ullah

*Lecturer, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, University of Lakki
Marwat, KP.*

Email. ishfaqullah125@gmail.com. (Principal Author)

Zahid Kamal

*Student, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of
Vienna, Austria.*

Email. zahidkamal1993@gmail.com.

Haris Bari

*Student, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, University of Lakki
Marwat, KP.*

Email. harisbari2664@gmail.com.

Abstract

*The present research paper focuses on the ways in which the portrayal of settler colonization through the subtle and devastating means is discussed in the novel *Afterlives* by Abdulrazak Gurnah (2020). The focus is on the numerous strategies employed by settler colonial states in an attempt to dominate indigenous populations, such as displacement, cultural genocide, and dispossession, and assimilation. This article takes a closer look at how such gradual, yet violent acts dissemble the indigenous people, in this case, the process of destroying the culture and severing them off their ancestral lands is done systematically using the novel as a sample. The example of the long-term impact of such colonial activities on the existence of people and the historical memory of the collective as a whole is movingly offered by the story of *Afterlives*. This paper aims to give insight into the symbolic effects of settler colonizing, by analyzing their life and the socio-political context of the characters.*

Keywords: *Settler Colonialism, Afterlives, Displacement, Cultural Genocide, Disposition, Assimilation.*

Introduction

Genocide scholar across the world mainly focuses on frontier violence and Genocide. However, the slow violence and assimilatory policies of settler colonial powers are also analyzed and explored by scholars in the genocide context. Scholars analyzed that settlers used indirect and slow violence processes of indigenous elimination for long-term settlement in the native lands. My article is based on the concept of genocide and oppression in the settler colonial setting of Africa in the 20th century. I will analyze the slow or attritional mode of collective destruction of Africans through different assimilatory policies. Such as cultural genocide, child abduction, religious conversion, mission schools, and forced imposition of foreign language, are the colonial policies committed by Germans in Africa. These tactics of settler colonialism were imposed gradually by Germans upon the native Africans which harm the native Africans both physically and mentally within the settler colonial project. Moreover, these strategies are directly linked with one another, which also affect the native economic, political, and social lives of the people. These slow violence

tactics were no less than physical destruction and genocide. Gurnah (2020) suggesting the following:

According to Wolfe (2006), cultural assimilation programs in settler colonialism directly impact the survival of colonized people, making the concept of cultural genocide problematic. Veracini, (2011) adds that settler colonialism involves a critical third element: the disappearance of the colonized. This deliberate enterprise develops complex narratives and practices that erase the humanity of indigenous people, potentially leading to genocide through means such as homicide, miscegenation, land titles, citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, and reprogramming through schools (Tuck & GaztambidFernandez, 2013). Boarding schools, like the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, were notorious for their ability to make a tribe disappear while its members remained (Wolfe, 2006, p. 397). In his widely cited text *Settler colonialism and the transformation of anthropology*, Wolfe (2006) defined “settler colonial invasion as a structure, not an event” (p. 324). Considering Wolfe's definition of settler colonialism as a series of ongoing processes to radically alter the social, economic, and political foundations of a given group, it follows that one of its essential features is the breakdown of the kinds of relationships both familial and communal—through which national identity is passed down from one generation to the next. Settler policies of forced Native relocation, child abduction, and policies of targeted sexual violence, education, language, imposing settler ideology, and destruction of native culture, religion, and lands are paradigmatic examples of this type of social and political transformation.

Literature Review

Cultural genocide is a term frequently used by scholars and organizations to describe the intentional actions taken by states to destroy the social, economic, and political institutions of a specific group, with the goal of weakening their communal ties and facilitating settler domination (Davidson, 2012; Kingston, 2015; Paquette, 2020; TRC, 2012; 2015). According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), cultural genocide occurs when policies are enacted to eliminate the structures and practices that enable a targeted group to continue to exist as a distinct culture. The commission further explains that this process involves the systematic degradation of “the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life” (Kingston, 2015, p.65). In the context of settler colonialism, cultural genocide is often achieved through the seizure of land and the forced removal and relocation of indigenous peoples, the violent prohibition of indigenous languages, and the destruction of cultural artifacts, as well as the persecution of spiritual leaders (TRC, 2015). Education is also used as a significant method for cultural disintegration, as exemplified by the residential school policy in Canada, where children were taken from their families and sent to boarding schools with the explicit aim of *killing the Indian in the child* (TRC, 2015) and assimilating them into settler culture. Similarly, in the United States, charter schools are viewed by some as perpetuating neoimperialism and neocolonialism by encouraging students to assimilate into dominant cultures and benefiting from ongoing colonial projects (Stern & Hussain, 2015). In this study, the concept of genocide is viewed as a process rather than a singular event, and is closely linked to settler colonialism as a primary theoretical framework. As Wolfe (2006) notes, the insatiable desire for territory, as seen in the conversion of traditional public schools to charter schools, is a hallmark of settler colonialism. Colonial schooling has historically been used as a means of disciplining the minds and bodies of the colonized for imperial profit (Shahjahan, 2011).

Furthermore, the ideological underpinnings of settler colonial politics often serve to justify the decline, elimination, or assimilation of indigenous populations (Pearson, 2001; Veracini, 2007; Wolfe, 1999). In conclusion, the history of settlers' physical violence against Africans people is a tragic and shameful part of human history. From massacres to forced removal, sexual violence, and forced labor, settlers have used physical violence as a means of control and domination over native people. While progress has been made in recent years towards recognizing and addressing the ongoing challenges faced by indigenous communities, it is clear that much work remains to be done. We must continue to acknowledge and confront the legacy of violence and exploitation that has shaped our world, and work towards a more just and equitable future for all people.

Discussion and Analysis

Settler colonialism strategic use of education and language policies Portrays in *Afterlives*.

Settler colonialism utilized education to assimilate and control colonized populations. This has been achieved by forcing the colonized to adopt the language and culture of the colonizers and by teaching a biased version of history intended to justify the colonization. Some Indigenous children have been forcibly removed from their homes and enrolled in boarding schools, where they are not permitted to speak their native languages or engage in traditional cultural practices. The need to “civilize” and assimilate Indigenous peoples justified their colonization and forced relocation. The settler colonial states use education extensively as a means of legitimizing their land-grab and assimilation’s policies. Locke's terra nullius theory held that native peoples couldn't possibly dominate their new territories, so it was assumed that they couldn't educate their own children either. It is undeniable that settler education systems, directly and indirectly, contribute to the genocide of the natives through memocide and to the maintenance of the settler Indigenous power dynamic. When children are educated from a settler perspective, it can lead to a decline in their ability to maintain a sense of national identity and cultural pride. While education was used in every settler society for the subjugation and assimilation of the native people.

In my research article, I am going to analyze the settler colonial policy of education implemented by Germans in Africa presented by Gurnah (2020). In order to fully comprehend the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Africa, it is crucial to recognize the pervasiveness of settler colonialism within societal structures. Settler colonialism is a structural process designed to replace the local population with the settler population (Wolfe, 2006). Settler-colonial ideology was employed by settlers to legitimize their exclusive control over the dispossession and exploitation of Indigenous lands, which was further institutionalized through societal structures aimed at replacing Indigenous peoples and communities (Glenn, 2015; Patel, 2016).

Education is one such structure that perpetuates and reinforces colonial ideology through its curriculum, policies, and practices, both historically and in the present day (Leonardo & Singh, 2017). This work explores the role of settler colonial ideology in education and how educational structures and practices intentionally diminish or erase Indigenous peoples. Throughout history, settler colonialism has played a significant role in education by serving three primary functions: reducing the power of Indigenous nations (Brayboy, 2005), forcing assimilation and adoption of western-dominated thinking (Steinman, 2015), and perpetuating narratives of erasure at multiple points. An instance of this can be observed in the implementation of off-reservation boarding schools, where Indigenous students were taken away from their families and subjected to physical abuse, forced labor, and restricted communication with their loved ones, all in an attempt to erase

their Indigenous identity (Adams, 1995). The education system, in many ways, continues to be utilized as a means of eliminating Indigenous cultures and peoples, as demonstrated by the historical and ongoing oppression within educational institutions (TRC, 2015). So, my research is based on the analysis of the primary text *Afterlives*, which provides the elements of native subjugation through education.

This study is based on the character analysis presented by Gurnah (2020) in his novel. These characters represented the experience of the whole African people during the colonial invasion. Gurnah (2020) characterizes the narrative of Africans through different characters such as Ilyas, Hamza, and Afiya. Ilyas was kidnapped by Schutztruppe and forcefully admitted to a missionary school. He was also compelled to change his religion. Ilyas narrated his story to Khalifa by stating that "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. There he was freed and sent to a German school, a mission school". When Khalifa asked Ilyas "did they make you pray like a Christian?" Khalifa asked. Ilyas answered him "Ilyas was quiet for a moment, his lips clamped together uncharacteristically. 'You won't say anything to anyone if I tell you, will you?' he asked. 'They did'" (p. 26). The exchange between Khalifa and Ilyas suggests the context of colonized conversion, which refers to the process by which colonial powers imposed their religious beliefs and practices on colonized peoples. In this case, it seems that Ilyas, who was likely a member of a community that was a Muslim, had been forced to adopt Christian religious practices as a result of colonial rule. The practice of imposing Christianity on colonized peoples was common among European colonizers in Africa and elsewhere, as they believed that the spread of Christianity was a key part of their civilizing mission. This often involved the establishment of missionary schools and the use of coercion to force colonized peoples to convert to Christianity. According to Wolfe's (2006) theory of settler colonialism, the settlers don't come to kill the people or make them slaves but the main aim of colonialism is to acquire the land of the colonized. They use several strategies to settle in their native lands, education is one of these. Gurnah's (2020) portrayed that "The Germans did not come here to make slaves, he said. Then I was allowed to attend church school, which was for converts" (p. 43). Gurnah (2020) demonstrates the religious aspect of colonization, as the colonizers sought to impose their religion on the indigenous people. The church was used as a tool of assimilation and control over the natives, and attending church schools was a way to reinforce this control. Settlers in Africa brought education for their own eliminatory purposes. They use education as a tool of exploitation. The tactics of education change the mind and bodies of the colonized children. They have brainwashed and created hate for the national culture and ideology in indigenous children. The practice of colonized conversion had a profound impact on the colonized peoples, as it involved the imposition of a foreign religion and cultural practices on them. This practice also resulted in the erasure of indigenous beliefs and practices, and the loss of cultural identity. Julius was brainwashed by colonial education and he was proud of his missionary education and the Christian religion, "He told Hamza about his mission education in Bagamoyo but chose to be imprecise about how long he had been in school" (p. 71). Julius looked pityingly at him. He considered Hamza unfortunate in many ways and told him so, not least because of his lack of mission education and his backward religion. The same is the case of Ilyas, who is brainwashed

and become in love with German culture and people. He was always in praise of German people and culture.

Gurnah (2020), tactically presented the notion of brainwashing of native children through the character of Ilyas. On one hand, the aged people of Africa are against German exploitation and invasion. In the contrast, Gurnah (2020) presented the character of a brainwashed child, Ilyas, who always praise Germans. Ilyas praised them by saying “The Germans are gifted and clever people. They know how to organize, and they know how to fight. They think of everything ... and on top of that they are much kinder than the British. 'I have met with nothing but kindness from them. Germans are honorable and civilized people and have done much good since they have been here” (p. 43). He was socially dead because he has no culture of his own, no identity, no language, and no religion. He was accultured and looking at his success and future in a colonial mentality. He joins the German askari to gain status and protection. He left his little sister to fight for the Germans. Thus, it provides the notion that colonial education inflicts the colonial mentality in native children and used education for the normalization of colonialism. The policy of education is presented by a settler as a benevolent force that brought civilization and progress to the colonized people. This hides the reality of the violence, exploitation, and oppression that was inflicted on colonized people. Settlers implement the policy of language on the native people to erase the culture of indigenous people. This process typically begins with the suppression of the colonized people's native language. Settlers may actively discourage the use of indigenous languages, prohibiting their use in schools, government institutions, and other public spaces. This can lead to a loss of intergenerational transmission, where younger generations may no longer learn or value their native language due to the pervasive use of the colonizer's language. At the same time, the dominant language of the settlers is often presented as a necessary tool for success and advancement in the colonial society. This creates a strong incentive for the colonized population to abandon their native language and adopt the language of the colonizers. This shift can further entrench power dynamics and cultural domination, as the colonizers maintain control over the language and can use it as a means of exerting power and control over the colonized people. Gurnah's novel *Afterlives* (2020), presented the notion that settlers used the strategy of implementing language on the Africans. In the novel, one of the officers tries to convene Hamza to learn the German language. In the afternoon time, officers called Hamza to come to learn German. However, this effort is not carried out with the intent of facilitating communication or cultural exchange, but rather as a means of maintaining power over the colonized. Sometimes he amuses him in front of other officers with wrong pronunciation. As Gurnah (2020) pinned: “the officer called Hamza in and taught him, German, probably to amuse himself at first but also because Hamza proved to be such a willing learner. Hamza was so responsive and quick”. (p. 73) The issue of language suppression provides an intriguing point of comparison between the settler colonial education practices of German in Africa and the tactics employed to eliminate Indigenous cultures. In the case of residential schools, settlers imposed a ban on Indigenous children speaking their native language, aiming to force assimilation into the colonizer's dominant culture (TRC, 2015). Gurnah's (2020) portrayal of language imposition reflects the wider historical reality of colonialism. The imposition of European languages on colonized peoples was a common practice that served to perpetuate the dominance of European cultures and ways of life. The practice of child abduction has historically been utilized by settlers as a means of eliminating Indigenous

peoples (Cook et al., 2004; TRC, 2012; TRC, 2015; National inquiry, 2019; Wolfe, 2006; 2013). Through this method, settlers sought to assimilate Indigenous children into their own dominant culture. Abducted children were admitted in the mission school. The aim of child abduction was to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children into settler societies and to erase Indigenous cultures and identities. Children were often subjected to physical and emotional abuse, as well as forced labor and neglect, in these institutions. The trauma caused by this practice has had intergenerational impacts, with many survivors and their families experiencing ongoing mental and emotional distress. The same Gurnah (2020) protagonist Ilyas was abducted from his parents and admitted in a German education school. Where he was trying to Christianize and civilize. He doesn't have any knowledge about his religion, nor he know, how to pray. Although he was born in a Muslim family. He was brainwashed, that colonized are good-hearted and better for the land. On different occasions, he praises the Germans, that they are kind and good-hearted people and better for the land. On one occasion when khalifa asked him if they ever try to convert you, he answered that yes, they did. Later he joined German askari and fight for them. Through the character of Ilyas, Gurnah (2020) shows the tactics of abduction of Indigenous children and how it proves to be a key tactic of settler colonial domination and genocide. Another power tool settler has adapted to control Indigenous peoples had used of propaganda. One common strategy of colonial propaganda has been to promote the idea of the *civilizing mission* of the colonizers. This idea asserts that the colonizers are bringing civilization, progress, and modernity to the *uncivilized* people they are colonizing. By positioning themselves as saviors and educators, the colonizers sought to justify their presence in the colonized lands and their actions towards the colonized populations. The use of propaganda has been a powerful tool for settler colonialism, allowing colonizers to shape public opinion and secure support for their actions both at home and abroad. It has also played a role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes and legitimizing acts of violence and oppression against colonized populations.

Gurnah's (2020) novel represents that, Germany use settler propaganda against the Africans by saying that they bring civilization and modernism and that native needed enlightenment and subjugation. In addition, Settler also used propaganda, in order to legalize the colonization and invite their own people to Africa. They used books, newspapers, manuscripts, radio etc. Gurnah (2020) describes, "In the 1950s the colonial administration introduced a new radio service. It aired news and music programs and features on improvements in health, agriculture, and education" (p. 239). Radio was a powerful tool for the colonial administration to disseminate their ideas, values, and agendas to the colonized population. One of the German officer's gifts, Hamza the books of German history and poetry. He points out that these sources frequently offered a one-sided and distorted perspective on the colonized people as well as the process of colonization. Settler exploit native economically by using force to deprive people and taken their wealth and resources. This exploitation can occur in a variety of ways, such as labour exploitation, resource extraction, the imposition of trade regulations and monopolies, and the destabilization of established economies. Economic exploitation has had a devastating effect on the native populations, resulting in poverty, inequality, and marginalization. The effort to address and combat economic exploitation remains a critical challenge for communities and countries all over the world. It is a complex issue that has been the focus of much discussion and criticism.

Gurnah (2020) in his novel *Afterlives* has highlighted extensively about the economic exploitation of native populations through settler colonialism. In his work, Gurnah (2020) explores the ways in which colonialism and imperialism have been used to extract wealth and resources from native communities while also exerting control over their economies and labor. The novel features characters who are struggling to come to terms with the economic exploitation by the settlers. Throughout the novel, we see characters working in various low-wage jobs and struggling to make ends meet. This mirrors the exploitation of native labor that was common in many colonial contexts, where settlers profited from the labor of others without providing fair compensation. In the novel when Ilyas narrate his story to his sister Afiya. He told her that he has worked for the German man in his farm. "He took me back to the farm and gave me work in the animal pen..... that was why the rough German took me there, because they needed people to work" (p. 41). Gurnah (2020) describe the forced labor by the colonizers through the characters. His use of the phrase "they needed people to work" highlights the fact that forced labor was a common practice during the colonial period. Many colonizers relied on the forced labor of indigenous peoples to maintain their farms, mines, and other industries. This system of exploitation often involved violence, coercion, and dehumanization, as the colonizers viewed the indigenous peoples as mere sources of labor rather than as human beings with rights and dignity. The novel touches upon the ways in which colonial powers exerted control over the economies of native communities and the impacts of this control on people's lives. Settlers have imposed new laws for doing business in native lands. "At that time, the German administration was bringing in new regulations and rules for doing business" (p. 41) The German colonial government in Africa has a monopoly on trade and commerce, which limits the opportunities available to native populations and perpetuates inequality. Hamza was in caravan trade and German want to end that one. "The merchant was in the caravan trade, and Hamza knew later that the Germans wanted this trade to end, and wanted to be in charge of everything from the coast to the mountains" (p. 169). The German have controlled the coastal of east Africa to get more benefit from here. When Germans lost from the British, the British also brought their people from the Kenya and India to do business here in Africa.

Conclusion

Gurnah (2020) represents the exploitation of native populations through settler colonialism. Through his characters and their experiences, Gurnah (2020) sheds light on the lingering effects of colonialism and the ways in which it has shaped people's lives and communities. The effects of economic exploitation have a long-lasting and contribute to poverty, inequality, and economic marginalization on the lives of Africans. It is an important issue that continues to have significant impacts on communities and individuals around the world. These various strategies of settler colonialism, such as the use of language, education, economic exploitation, propaganda, and diseases, have been used by the Germans in Africa and it have had a profound impact on colonized populations throughout history. Gurnah (2020) in his novel *Afterlives* (2020) represented these strategies which have been used to exert control over the lives of Africans people, to suppress their culture and identity, and to maintain power and control over them.



References

- Card, C. (2003). Genocide and social death. *Hypatia*, 18(1), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2003.tb00735.x>.
- Curthoys, N., & Docker, J. (2008). Defining genocide. In A. Dirk Moses (Ed.), *The Historiography of Genocide* (pp. 81-104). Berghahn Books.
- Gurnah, A. (2020). *Afterlives*. Bloomsbury.
- Huseman, J., & Short, D. (2012). "A slow, industrial genocide": Tar sands and the indigenous peoples of northern Alberta. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 32(2), 211-226. Doi: 10.5474/cnns.2012.32.2.211.
- Kallas, A. K. (2022). Askari, colonial encounters, and postcolonial war commemoration in *Afterlives* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2022.2059210>.
- Kauanui, J. K. (2016). A structure, not an event: Settler colonialism and enduring indigeneity. *Lateral*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.25158/L5.1.7>.
- Lemkin, R. (2008). *Axis rule in occupied Europe: Laws of occupation analysis government, proposals for redress*. (2nd ed.). The Law Book Exchange.
- Naimark, M. N. (2017). *Genocide: A world history*. Oxford University Press.
- Rashed, H., Short, D., & Docker, J. (2014). Nakba memoricide: genocide studies and Zionist/Israeli genocide of Palestine. *Holy Land Studies*, 13(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.3366/hls.2014.0076>.
- Tuck, E., & Fernandez, R. A. (2013). Curriculum, replacement, and settler futurity. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 29(1), 72–89.
- Veracini, L. (2011). Introducing settler colonial studies. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 1(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2011.10648799>.
- Wolfe, P. (2006, December 21). Settler colonialism and elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387-409. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.