



**COLLECTED MEMORIES AND RESOUNDING REALITIES  
IN ABDULRAZAKGURNAH'S *AFTER LIVES***

Ganga Parameswari, T  
Assistant Professor of English,  
V. V. Vanniaperumal College for Women,  
Virudhunagar, Tamilnadu,  
India.

Corresponding author: gangaparameswari@vvvcollege.org

**ABSTRACT**

This article tries to connect the collected memories of the five characters, Khalifa, Bi Asha, Ilyas, Afiya and Hamza amidst the colonial atrocity in *After Lives* written by Abdul Razak. *Afterlives* is set in East Africa before, during, and after the First World War. Though the characters suffer heavily at the backdrop of the war and the colonial atrocities their aspirations to have a good life remains a reality. It has also collected the unforgotten memories of the author Abdulrazak who weaves the storyline very deftly in a highly readable and convincing manner.

**Keywords:** stories, memories, war, atrocities, rituals, anskari, merchant, orphans

**INTRODUCTION**

*After lives* is about an unsecured life of people of Tanzania. At that time Tanzania was under the complete control of Germany. The novel also captures the severe German Colonial Army. The life of five characters, Khalifa, BiAsha, Ilyas, Afiya and Hamza amidst the colonial atrocity has been

depicted by Abdul Razak, one of Africa's greatest living writers and a Nobel prize winner, 2021 in the book *After Lives*.

**RETELLING THE COLONIAL  
HISTORY OF TANZANIA**

*Afterlives* is set in East Africa before, during, and after the First World

War at a time when Germans, the British, the French and the Belgians divided up the continent. This period and the events that took place are described as a forgotten piece of African colonial history. In the settlements that followed the end of the First World War, Germany was dispossessed of her colonies, which came under the administration of the newly-created League of Nations. The territory the British took over and renamed Tanganyika, is now called Tanzania.

The novel registers the greatest fatalities of the Africans who died from hunger and the violent consequences of the war which could never be forgotten. The Germans made Bagamoyo as the terminus and port after hanging al Bushiri in 1888. They have also captured Wahehe after eight years of war, “In their triumph, the Germans cut off the head of the Wahehe leader Mkwawa and sent it to Germany as a trophy” (8).

'Effortlessly compelling storytelling ... Gurnah excels at depicting the lives of those made small by cruelty and injustice ... A beautiful, cruel world of bittersweet encounters and pockets of compassion, twists of fate and

fluctuating fortunes ... You forget that you are reading fiction, it feels so real' - Leila Aboulela (in the blurb)

### **MIGRATED MINDS AND ESTRANGED SOULS**

The novel opens with the story of Khalifa, 26 years old, who begins his life as a clerk at Amur Biashara. Khalifa has got his own bundle of sorrows and powerlessness that he encounters in his life. Khalifa is home less and parent less as the story begins:

Khalifa felt alone in the world, an ungrateful and worthless son. The feeling was unexpected. He had lived away from his parents for most of his life, the years with the tutor, the years with the banker brothers and then with the merchant, and had felt no remorse for his neglect of them. Their sudden passing seemed a catastrophe, a judgement on him. He was living a useless life in a town that was not his home, in a country that seemed to be honestly a war, with reports of yet another uprising in the south and west. (11)

Yet the education he had because of his father helps Khalifa to think beyond anormal order. When Amur Biashara offers Bi Asha to him, he considers it as a responsibility shoulder on him. Except Bi Asha's religious rituals there has been a strong hold between them both. Through the story of BiAsha, Khalifa understands the hypocrite behavior of Amur Biashara. Khalifa is noted for his extreme kindness. He encourages Bi Asha to ask for the property as Amur Biashara is her uncle, he refuses to grant any form of property except a rent less home for their living. The home of Khalifa plays a major role in the story as it has been the power houseof many orphans and strangers and at last it has been altered to receive such people in future expecting Ilyas's return from the Army service.

Ilyas, another character created by Abdulrazak who has changed the chore of the story yet unexplored are the stories of him. Ilyas has been stolen away from their parents when he is a little boy. Ilyas as directed by Habib settles in the town with Omar Hamdani. He is frequented by Khalifa and they become good friends. Khalifa advised Ilyas to visit his family in the village. His journey towards his village is a nice tour to recollect his past memories. "It

was not much of a village, a straggle of thatched houses with small cultivated fields behind them" (26).

Ilyas's reentry to his village findsanother character, his sister Afiya, who was left by her mother for other people. Afiya is under the control of aunt Malaika, uncle Makame, their son Issa and daughter Zawadi. She has a tough time at their house: "Sometimes they beat her very deliberately, not because shehad done anything to provoke them but because they liked to do it and she could not stop them" (30). They made her feel small and a stranger in this world. Afiya has not been born when Ilyas left the home. The heroic entry of Ilyas to redeem his sister from the cruel members of the uncle's family is very lively to proceed with further development of the story. The oddities that Afiya encounters as an orphan bonded at the uncle's family is more severe than the askaris suffering at the German camp. It is Afiya who is the linking thread of all the characters and who is the reason for the movement of the story too.

Ilyas once again volunteers himself to schutztruppe- German protection troop for the sake of his sister Afiya. Missed for long years, uncle Ilyas is found to have

changed his name as Elias Essen and settles in Berlin with his wife and three children.

Hamza is another character of the novel who joins the thread of strangers. The novel has been much devoted to the life of Hamza at the German hands. Hamza's stay and his consequent shifting of places and positions and the atrocities done to him have been very pathetically portrayed by the author. His last phase as an askari is very touching until he is helped by a European pastor, Pascal. Heavily wounded and unable to move himself as attended and advised by the Pastor Hamza comes to the village of Khalifa, unable to see or find anybody to be recognized as his known people. Hamza once again begins his life joining Khalifa's family and as a carpenter at Nassor Biashara.

Hamza broke fast with Khalifa on the porch where in the traditional way they shared a few dates and a cup of coffee and were then called inside to the modest feast Bi Asha and Afiya had prepared and which they sat down to eat with the men. It was not the quantity but the variety of dishes that made it into a feast, and they talked about the food and praised its preparation as they ate. Even Bi

Asha was more mellow than she had been in the past and found teasing words to say to Hamza about his growing skills as a carpenter and his newfound fame as a reader of German.' (195)

Khalifa's slow acceptance of Hamza, following the members of Khalifa, Bi Asha on small errands and an extended invitation of Afiya in the absence of Bi Asha are very real. Hamza weaves the bond with Afiya in a very live and careful manner and Khalifa makes it more meaningful by arranging a marriage between the two. Hamza translates Schiller's poem for Afiya from German acquires new resonances. Hamza is initially tutored by his German commanding officer to read German and is gifted Schiller's *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1798*. He then goes on to transcribe and translate some of these poems for her: "He wrote them out on the piece of paper he had stolen from Nassor Biashara's office, trimmed it so that it was only just big enough for the verse, then folded it so it was no wider than two fingers. He knew how it would look if this scrap of paper were intercepted" (192).

Bi Asha has been pictured with utmost care of a perfect womanhood. She

attends the need of all the characters crosses her life, at the same time she slightly expresses her villainy towards Afiya. It was through the unveiling of Afiya's it is understood. The author has rightly hides the minute details considering the decency of writing as well as left to the imagination of the readers. Bi Asha is a dutiful wife and a perfect mother who accompanies Khalifa in all his adventures of receiving the helpless. Khalifa has invited a responsibility to render his support towards bringing up Afiya, BiAsha too does attend to Afiya with utmost care from her childhood till she gives birth to a child. The author has also recorded the sufferings of women especially with repeated miscarriages and the longingness of motherhood.

Afiya and Hamza name their son Ilyas in memory of Afiya's brother Ilyas who is not found in the pages of the novel and in the real world. Afiya's hope is visualized in the minds of Hamza and after so many searches Ilyas's stay in Berlin is found to give happiness which got the reconstruction of the home of Khalifa expecting his return.

Khalifa is the Baba not only for Afiya but also for Ilyas, Hamza, Bi Asha and the newborn Ilyas too. Khalifa is a

matured character, a rounded and a perfect personality who could perceive the suppressed and unexpressed feelings and emotions of all the remaining characters of the novel. His home is a home for all the homeless and the people less.

### **THE TRIO**

The novel captures the loaded memories of Khalifa, Aafiya and BiAsha very deftly to arose sympathy from the readers as it is a clearer expression of reality. Whenever Khalifa retells his story with the new comers of his home it resonates his longing for a family as he missed his mother and father. The child Ilyas is a mystery for the villagers as he goes alone for a long walk and talking to himself. Yet Afiya and Hamza tackles the situation very friendly. The novel pictures the low standard of the people of Tanzania, the rituals of the Muslim community and their selfless attitude to console and comfort people in their miseries and desertedness. The collected memories of BiAsha resonates the treachery of her uncle Amur Bashir, whereas the repeated stories of Khalifa express his longing for a lost family.

### **CONCLUSION**

The three Phases of Afiya, first at Uncle's house in village (childhood), at

Khalifa's custody (adolescence) and the last as a wife of Hamza (woman)-- recollects the author's memories of expectations and aspirations of the Tanzanians amidst the cruelties of the upper class people and the political instability prevails in the nation during the war period. It's a reality captured of the lost pages in the history of German East Africa.

Abdulrazak has also concentrated on the importance of education in a clear manner through the voices of the people. All the characters who seek development in the novel tries hard to learn German and excels in it, especially Afiya's slave life transforms

into a liberated life because of her skill in reading and writing.

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