

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. The Background of the Study

In 2020, Abdulrazak Gurnah, who would later win the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature, released a novel entitled *Afterlives*. This novel delved into the history of German colonialism in the late 19th century, followed by British colonialism in the early 20th century in East Africa. The novel was a unique narrative because, in literature, the story of German colonialism towards Africa was rarely explored. As Asghar et al. (2022) stated, the German colonization of Africa in literature needed to be developed. This statement aligned with what Naz et al. (2022) said, the history of Deutsch-Ostafrika (Germany-East Africa), which was Gurnah's main focus in this novel, was an under-reported story.

This historical context was crucial, as Tanzania's history of colonialism began in the late 19th century when it was colonized by Germany. German East Africa, which included present-day Tanzania, was colonized from the 1880s until 1919. After World War I, the League of Nations transferred the territory to the United Kingdom as a mandate, and it remained under British rule until its independence in 1961 (Rhodes, 2010). Postcolonialism in Tanzania, particularly after independence in 1961, was marked by significant changes in the administrative system and the country's political landscape (Piola & Usman, 2019). The colonial administrative system, which was characterized as oppressive, exploitative, and humiliating, was replaced by a postcolonial administrative system aimed at developmental governance.

Furthermore, *Afterlives* was about life after war. The cruel and brutal war was depicted as death, after which the characters in this novel, such as Ilyas, Hamzah, Khalifa, Afiya, and Ilyas Hamzah's son, had to fight again to find their place in life (Naz et al., 2022). In line with Gurnah's own goals as a writer, he revealed the impact of drastic incidents and colonialism on Indigenous peoples who faced what happened afterward and tried to reconstruct and live their lives according to their choices (Mbue, 2022). In short, *Afterlives* was a postcolonial literary work highlighting colonialism's impacts on the colonized.

In literature, postcolonialism is one of various existing studies or theories. Postcolonial studies aimed to scrutinize the colonial practices underlying multiple literary works, viewing them as the superstructure of colonial power (Elam, 2019). Literature was perceived to possess power, either shaping hegemonic power or countering it (Cere, 2020). This statement meant that literature and revolution could not be separated because revolution could give birth to literary works from authors agitated by environmental changes. Conversely, literary works could also give rise to a revolution in their readers (Cere, 2020).

Ashcroft et al. (2013) emphasized that in reclaiming and redefining cultural identity, the role of postcolonial literature was very necessary. Since colonialism was a migration event carried out by the colonizers, encounters with various other (colonized) cultures were inevitable. Varo (2021) also explained that the colonizers had tried to construct a colonial discourse towards a colonized with a different historical and cultural context. As a result, the colonized as a subject would identify themselves with other recognition. Then ambiguities and problems emerged on the subject, and finally, the dominant representational discourse became split. The

subject was then on the threshold (liminal) of culture. Bhabha referred to this condition as a liminal or third space (Shabrang & Karimi, 2020).

With the existence of a third space, Bhabha explained that other postcolonial concepts, such as hybridity, had emerged. Alkyam (2019) revealed that hybridity or cultural cross-breeding emerged between colonizers and colonies. Colonizers introduced their cultures, such as clothes, food, government rules, schools, markets, and languages to their colonized subjects. Through this act of hybridity mimicry developed. Mimicry was a condition where the colonized liked and imitated the colonial culture. Varo (2021) states that in Homi Bhabha's theory of liminality, mimicry was a strategy within colonial discourse that revealed ambivalence and unsettled the subject. Colonial "mimicry" must emphasize its differences to succeed, which Bhabha called "ambivalence." Ambivalence means presenting itself as something real but showing repetition and difference (Alkyam, 2019).

According to Bhabha's theory in literary works, postcolonialism has been widely studied. The research titled "Postcolonial Reading of Isabel Allende's *The Japanese Lover*," conducted by Shabrang and Karimi (2020) explored the issue of identity, which represented liminality in a colonial context in Isabel Allende's novel "The Japanese Lover." By applying Bhabha's theory of third Space, Shabrang and Karimi succeeded in revealing how the identities of the colonized characters in the novel "The Japanese Lover" had experienced a radical transformation through a third space that had been full of qualities such as ambivalence, stereotypes, mimicry, and unpretentiousness. In the end, this research revealed the third Space, a consequence of colonial discourse, where oppressed groups had experienced

radical changes in forming their identities and how they had been vulnerable to change and had tended to be unstable.

The representation of the postcolonial third space concept in the novel *Afterlives* will be examined and used in Bhabha's third space theory. As preliminary data for this research, the examples of a postcolonial concept that is contained in the novel *Afterlives* will be shown below:

*'I [...] pretending to be soldiers too. I joined them, thrilled by the display of the uniforms and the march and the band.'* (Gurnah, 2020, p. 39).

The passage above is Ilyas's expression to his sister Afiya when Ilyas told her about his experience of witnessing the German colonial culture firsthand. Ilyas openly expresses his interest in the culture of the German colonizers, so much so that he pretends to be like them. This passage aligns with Bhabha's concept of postcolonial mimicry in the Third Space, where Bhabha (2004) said, mimicry deeply and unsettlingly impacts the authority of colonial discourse. By 'normalizing' the colonial state or subject, the ideal of post-enlightenment civility estranges its language of freedom and generates an alternative understanding of its norms.

Postcolonial studies were developed to counter the remaining impacts of colonialism in an intellectual way. Apart from that, by understanding postcolonial third space concepts, a deeper understanding of identity issues that give rise to cultural differences and cultural diversity resulting from colonialism is expected. The novel *Afterlives* has also won many awards and good reviews from various reviewers. For example, this was the favorite novel of the former American president, Barack Obama, in 2022. Apart from that, The New Yorker reviewed this

as important reading material, and The New York Times called it the best book of 2022. Therefore, the research will be carried out and entitled 'Postcolonial Third Space Concepts in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives* Novel.'

#### **B. The Problems of the Study**

Related to the background of the study, the problems of the study were:

1. What were the concepts of postcolonial third space in the context of passages in the novel *Afterlives* by Abdulrazak Gurnah?
2. How were the concepts of postcolonial third space in the context of passages in the novel *Afterlives* by Abdulrazak Gurnah represented?

#### **C. The Objectives of the Study**

In line with the problems of the study, the objectives of the study were:

1. To identify the concepts of postcolonial third space in the context of passages in the novel *Afterlives* by Abdulrazak Gurnah.
2. To analyze how the concepts of postcolonial third space in the context of passages, were represented throughout the novel *Afterlives* by Abdulrazak Gurnah.

#### **D. The Scope of the Study**

This study analyzed the representation of postcolonial third space concepts in the novel *Afterlives* by Abdulrazak Gurnah. It used Homi Bhabha's postcolonial third space concepts (hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence) theory.

### E. The Significance of the Study

The results of the findings provided valuable input:

1. Theoretically, this study enriched the understanding of postcolonialism and postcolonial third space concepts, especially in literature. Because by better understanding postcolonialism, the impact of colonialism would be better understood. Apart from that, by understanding postcolonial third space concepts, a deeper understanding of identity issues that gave rise to cultural differences and cultural diversity resulting from colonialism was expected.

2. Practically, the findings were helpful for:

- a. Readers

This research provided readers with deeper insights into the concept of postcolonial third space, enriching their understanding of the narrative complexity in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Afterlives*. By exploring theories from scholars like Homi K. Bhabha, readers better understood the cultural and identity intersections depicted in the story. The research also helped readers recognize relevant social and political themes, such as migration, diaspora, and identity, enhancing their appreciation of the novel's nuances and deeper meanings. Additionally, the research encouraged readers to think more critically and reflectively about postcolonial issues in their everyday lives.

- b. Researchers

This research provided researchers with a deeper understanding of the concept of postcolonial third space, enriching the complexity of analysis and theoretical framework in future studies. By exploring theory from

scholars like Homi K. Bhabha, researchers expanded their insights into cultural and identity intersections in a postcolonial context. The research encouraged researchers to be more critical in analyzing literary works and other texts through a postcolonial lens. Additionally, this research opened opportunities for collaboration with other academics and contributed to the development of richer and more diverse literature. By focusing on social and political themes related to migration, diaspora, and identity, this research made their studies more relevant and impactful and promoted continuous reflection on the contemporary implications of postcolonial theory.

c. Novelists

This research provided novelists with a deeper understanding of the concept of postcolonial third space, enriching the narrative complexity and theoretical foundation of their literary works. By exploring theories from scholars like Homi K. Bhabha, novelists created more nuanced and diverse characters and settings that reflected the intersections of various cultures and identities. Additionally, giving voice to marginalized perspectives and continually reflecting on postcolonial theory led to more meaningful and powerful storytelling in their literary works.