

## THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

# Tracing Lines in the Trauma of Displacement: Slavery in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and *Afterlives*

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From the sea, the town seemed the luscious heart of paradise. Come nearer and you have to turn a blind eye to the slimy gutters and the house walls that have been turned into open-air urinals. Come nearer so we can see whether you are dark or fair, friend or foe.

—Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Pilgrims Way*

Finally I make my way uphill to my host's house—all the time the long slave traders' road to Bagamoyo on my mind. How to respond authentically at this remove in time; yet the image persists, demands.

—M. G. Vassanji, *And Home Was Kariakoo*

## Introduction: Trauma, Slavery, and the Indian Ocean Imaginary

M. G. Vassanji's travel memoir, *And Home Was Kariakoo* (2014), delineates the author's journey to East Africa, where his Canadian citizenship is subordinated to an "emotional reclamation" of the African land as his home (2). The front cover features a stirring photograph: a path flanked by two lines of huge trees leads the eye of the beholder toward an immensurable horizon. The sight is beautiful, and yet the peaceful aura that envelops it is counterbalanced by the ominous feeling that there is something terrible lurking behind it. The placidness that the image exudes is undermined by the horrifying realization that "this then, is the slave road, planted periodically with mango groves where the caravans rested" (197).<sup>1</sup> The photograph was taken by Vassanji himself while he was in Bagamoyo, a town on the coast of Tanzania that holds the dubious honor of having

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been one of the most influential locations in the caravan slave trade. By positioning this image on the front cover of his travelogue, Vassanji places slavery at the core of his emotional quest and thus foregrounds the caravan slave trade as the origin of the trauma of displacement that shapes the East African subjectivity that he is claiming for himself.

I read *origin* not as the locus of a definitive root from which the trauma of displacement grows but as one of the many lines that make up the expanding connections of a rhizomatic structure. I am using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizomatic model in thinking about origin to accentuate how African Indian Ocean traumatic experiences of displacement in the present invoke memories of the caravan slave trade. Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that "there are no points or positions in a rhizome . . . only lines" (7) reverberates with Michael Rothberg's apprehension of memory acts as "knotted" ("Between Memory and Memory" 7), as manifestations of historical and cultural and, I may add, emotional entanglements. Both the mass of roots that shapes the rhizome and the knots of memory that conjure up the past in the present trace lines of narration in the shaping of the displaced Indoceanic subject that crisscross with the histories of uprootedness endemic to slavery.

By selecting the cover image of Vassanji's memoir as my starting point, I am singling out slavery in the Indian Ocean as a key component of the configuration of East African identities. Traumatic bondage lies at the heart of the Indoceanic literary paradigm that Vassanji's work shares with the fiction of Abdulrazak Gurnah, the 2021 Nobel Prize winner. The experience of displacement that molds the lives of Gurnah's exiled characters is undoubtedly the most salient feature of his oeuvre, and I contend that these characters' deep sense of loss and unsurmountable sadness, which Edward Said identified as the onus of deracination, is connected with the powerful specter of slavery. Although their exile is the direct outcome of the Zanzibari Revolution, the physical and psychological dislocation that assaults Daud in *Pilgrims Way* (1987), the unnamed narrator of *Admiring Silence* (1996), Latif Mahmud and Saleh Omar in *By the Sea* (2001), Rashid in *Desertion*

(2005), Abbas in *The Last Gift* (2011), and Salim in *Gravel Heart* (2017) demands a historical reexamination that will eventually recognize slavery as constitutive of the collective memory that crosscuts their individual biographies. The multidirectional dimension of a memory that "takes on meaning precisely in relationship to other memories in a network of associations" spurs my reading of Gurnah's novels as a single tapestry that displays a singular Indian Ocean imaginary relationally constituted (Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* 14). Gurnah's Indian Ocean imaginary explores the sub-imperialisms that surface from an early, pre-European cosmopolitanism; inscribes Africa within the Indian Ocean world (Lavery); investigates Islam as a simultaneously unifying and fragmentary cultural tool (Hand); and conceives a contemporary form of cosmopolitanism singularly attached to the exile (Hand and Pujolràs-Noguer). In short, Gurnah's fiction complicates the Indian Ocean world (Hofmeyr) in its exhibition of "wider worlds" (Steiner) wherein "coastlines, hinterlands, sea routes and port cities" (Lavery) are connected in such a way that a unique "amphibian aesthetics" emerges (Samuelson, "Abdulrazak Gurnah's Fictions" and "Coastal Forms"). In that sense, Gurnah's entire oeuvre should be interpreted as an exercise in building up a Gramscian inventory of "the infinity of traces" (Gramsci 324) that the historical process has deposited in the individual self, resulting in the creation of a complex and compelling Indian Ocean imaginary that brings to the fore the trauma encoded in Vassanji's arresting image of the slave traders' road, an image that, as Vassanji puts it, "persists, demands" (201).

Slavery, as Vassanji purports, "is not an easy subject to deal with" (197) and many are, in Rothberg's terminology, the implicated subjects (*Implicated Subject*). From "the Indian creditor in Zanzibar, the Arab—and Swahili—trader in the interior, the African tribesmen who captured and sold each other, the freed slave who became a trader himself" to "the European explorer who heartily condemned [slavery] in his writings" and notwithstanding "relished the hospitality of the trader," an intricate web of histories of violence and inequalities unsettles the binaries victim/perpetrator, colonizer/colonized, present/past (Vassanji 197). Therefore,

the exilic sojourn of Daud, Latif Mahmud, Saleh Omar, Rashid, Abbas, Salim, and *Admiring Silence*'s unnamed narrator is intimately linked to the ordeal of Yusuf from *Paradise* (1994), who resurfaces as Hamza in *Afterlives* (2020). Looked at from a historical perspective, Gurnah's novelistic mosaic recognizes slavery as the primal generator of the racial undertows that triggered the Zanzibari Revolution and examines how European imperialism writ large intruded on the power distribution of the sub-imperialisms at work in East Africa. Set in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I, *Paradise* captures the menace that Europeans posed to maintaining the local societal organization of the East African region in its depiction of one of the last journeys of the caravan slave trade, whereas *Afterlives* probes the actual consequences of European colonialism. Otherwise expressed, in Gurnah's latest novel imperialism has inserted itself into the lives of East Africans, leaving, as Antonio Gramsci would put it, traces on their individual selves. *Paradise* ends with Yusuf's potential recruitment into the German Army, and *Afterlives*, published twenty-six years later, rescues Yusuf and, remodeling him as Hamza, relates his experience in the German Army and the harrowing effects of a life of continuing bondage. Ultimately, *Paradise* and *Afterlives* invite readers, in the manner expressed by Daud in *Pilgrims Way*, to dissect "the luscious heart of paradise" that Zanzibar appears to be from the sea and to disclose "the slimy gutters" that reek of race. As Daud puts it, "come nearer, so we can see whether you are dark or fair, friend or foe" (154).

The territory of Zanzibar, once the hub of a great maritime empire, was dramatically reduced to the two islands of Unguja and Pemba by the time it gained its independence from Britain in 1963. Seyyid Said's decision in 1832 to turn Zanzibar into the capital of the sultanate of Oman was crucial in establishing the archipelago as a major Indoceanic post, but it also exacerbated the already existing hostilities between the people of Arab descent, who were aristocrats, urban bourgeoisie, or members of the planter class, and the African population, who made up the bulk of the labor force (Othman; Pearson; Sheriff; Campbell, "Slave

Trades"; Kresse and Simpson). The arrival of independence reinforced the Omani Arab hegemony, and so, eleven months later, after decades if not centuries of racial oppression, the indigenous black populace in Zanzibar revolted, giving rise to what Vassanji calls "the bloodiest revolution in the continent" (271). The uncertainties and complexities of a revolution rooted in racialized politics nurture Gurnah's fiction, and yet the historical reconstruction that Gurnah undertakes is not delimited by the geographic frontiers of today's Zanzibar; rather, he deliberately traces an Indian Ocean world in which the Zanzibari Revolution is a pivotal episode. Although the Zanzibari Revolution is not the focus of either *Paradise* or *Afterlives*, the lives of Yusuf and Hamza are determined by the racial hierarchy that resulted in the insurgency of the indigenous black population. In this view, the Zanzibari Revolution in *Paradise* and *Afterlives* is to be read as the presence of an absence, as the fuel that feeds the construction of an inventory of Indoceanic selves traumatically bonded by slavery.

### Troubled Memories and the Survival Drive

Slavery in the Indian Ocean region has not received the same amount of scholarly attention as its Atlantic counterpart. Among the reasons for this, Abdul Sheriff points out, are the facts that "the annual volume of the Indian Ocean slave trade never rivalled that in the Atlantic during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (217) and that the plantation system that consolidated the Black Atlantic slave trade, with the exceptions of the sugar plantations in Natal (South Africa) and Mauritius, did not proliferate in the Indian Ocean area. Edward A. Alpers notes how the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean lacks a literary tradition documenting the hardships of slavery at first hand like the one in the Black Atlantic (84). Slavery in the Indian Ocean also differs from the Atlantic slave trade in its connection with Islam. Highlighting this connection, however, betrays a Eurocentric perspective that Sheriff resents when he insightfully remarks on the terminology used to designate slavery in this area—namely, the "Islamic slave trade"—in

contradistinction to the more generic “Atlantic slave trade,” a denomination that makes no reference to the Christian world. Islam, Sheriff proceeds, “did not invent slavery, and like other monotheistic religions, it did not try to abolish it” (219).

Ironically, the Islamic name of the Koranic Yusuf in *Paradise* evokes the tale of the biblical Joseph, vindicating Sheriff's observation that monotheistic religions took a similar ambivalent position toward slavery. The choice of Yusuf as the protagonist of *Paradise* is telling, since the Koranic story reveals that he was a slave. In a way, the name itself bears the stigma of slavery. References in *Paradise* to “the other Yusuf” abound (83–84, 95–96, 164), and the plot of *Paradise* often coincides with that of the Koranic story: the beauty of the boy (30, 47, 157), the prophetic import of his dreams (124, 164), and even the seduction of Zulekha, his master's first wife (235–39), help shape Gurnah's secular narration.<sup>2</sup> What is more, the story of Yusuf in *Paradise* should be inscribed within the slavery framework of the original Koranic story, in which Yusuf's brothers, envious of their father's favoritism toward him, throw him into a well thinking that he will later be rescued by one of the caravans that carry slaves and, in turn, be made a slave. The family in this story fails to fulfill its protecting function and instead becomes the instigator of displacement, stamping slavery with sinfulness, making it an aberration of the natural laws that define human relationships.<sup>3</sup> Gurnah's Yusuf is a *rehani*, taken as a servant by the rich merchant Aziz in repayment for a debt his father owes.<sup>4</sup> The inability of Yusuf's father to protect his twelve-year-old son from servitude initiates a narration in which a coming-of-age story is infused with the profound sadness of a permanent displacement. The opening line is meticulous in its simple relation of the unique bildungsroman unfolding before us: “The boy first. His name was Yusuf, and he left his home suddenly during his twelfth year” (1). Nobody told Yusuf that his family was surrendering him into slavery, but, endowed as he is with the special sensibility of his Koranic counterpart, he reads “the tears in his mother's eyes” as “his first foreboding” that he might not be returning (13). The sadness that

engulfs him while on the train that will take him from the interior to the coast is the materialization of “the thought that he had left home” (18), and later he describes feeling “homesick and abandoned” (39). Homesickness and abandonment generate the pervading feeling of homelessness that defines Yusuf's life as a slave. A life marked by homelessness can only lead to destruction and, ultimately, death. Nonetheless, Yusuf's story, and Hamza's for that matter, surprisingly embedded as they are in slavery and, therefore, social death, counteract the Freudian compulsive self-destructiveness that guides human lives and emerge as persuasive accounts of survival. Sigmund Freud's death drive metamorphoses into a survival drive.

Yusuf's individual development entails an understanding that his Uncle Aziz is, in fact, his master, as Khalil, the other boy the merchant owns repeatedly reminds him: “As for Uncle Aziz, for a start he ain't your uncle” (23). The knowledge he gains growing up is concomitant with the recognition of his condition as a slave and later his apprehension of what being a slave means. Uncle Aziz's wealth comes from the trading expeditions he organizes from the coast to the interior that follow the caravan routes. *Paradise* details Aziz's caravan journey through the eyes of Yusuf, who is ordered to join the expedition. This journey to the interior functions as a rite of passage for Yusuf, a crucial chapter in his realization that he is indeed a slave, Uncle Aziz's property. The episode involving Chatu, a sultan in Marungu with whom Aziz wants to do business, is particularly enlightening since he confronts Yusuf with the humiliation of being a servant: “He [Chatu] wants to know if you are a servant to the merchant or if you are his son,” to which Yusuf responds, “savouring the humiliation,” “[a] servant” (157). Chatu's question pinpoints one of the underlying social distortions of slavery—the equivocal apprehension of one's master as one's family. Before the caravan journey, Uncle Aziz becomes “the centre and meaning” of Yusuf's life as a slave; consequently, “it was around him that everything turned” (37). The master conditions the life of the slave; as a slave, Yusuf has internalized his dependence on the master. After the

caravan journey, the crude reality of slavery unfurls before his eyes when he falls in love with Amina, Khalil's adopted sister and Uncle Aziz's second wife. Desire, a persistent feature of the journey toward adulthood, assails Yusuf so violently that, for the first time in his life as a slave, he seriously considers freedom and plans his elopement with Amina. Yusuf's articulation of his desire for freedom is contingent on the disclosure of slavery as intrinsically sinful. Taking Amina away from Uncle Aziz is justified by the sinfulness inherent in owning people: Yusuf reflects, "I want to take her away. It was wrong of you to marry her. To abuse her as if she has nothing which belongs to her. To own people the way you own us" (241). Unfortunately for Yusuf, freedom cannot yet be attained. The premonitions of disaster that his recurrent nightmares foreshadowed are finally realized by the arrival of the German *Schutztruppe*.

The interrupted search for freedom that Yusuf consciously embarks on in the last pages of *Paradise* continues in *Afterlives* through Hamza. It is unclear whether Hamza is actually Yusuf or whether Hamza and Yusuf furnish the same novelistic Lukácsian literary type, but either way, both novels are constitutive of each other.<sup>5</sup> What is more, when viewed from a multidirectional perspective, Yusuf and Hamza are expressions of the same memory tapestry that embodies Gurnah's African Indian Ocean imaginary. The elusive promise of paradise that *Paradise* exhumes is dramatically denied to Yusuf. The last two paragraphs in *Paradise* anticipate the ordeal that Hamza in *Afterlives* will endure in the *Schutztruppe*. The famished dogs that inhabited Yusuf's dreams are now physically standing before him. The "squalid recognition" that ensues categorizes Yusuf as a fellow "shit-eater." This recognition recalls the beginning of the novel, "the birth of the first terror of his abandonment" (247). *Paradise* stages the end of the caravan slave trade while sketching the impending narrative of European colonialism that will flourish in *Afterlives*. Yusuf's and Hamza's experiences are entrenched in narratives of enslavement. While in the *Schutztruppe*, Hamza is subjected to the same kind of bullying that Yusuf endured,

and like him and in tune with their Koranic correlate, their good looks save them. In a manner that evokes slave markets, Hamza is thus "picked up" by the German officer (*Afterlives* 51)—the *Oberleutnant*—to be his personal assistant because his dreamer looks remind the officer of his younger brother (119). The German officer's protection extends to his teaching Hamza German, the knowledge of which will propel the narrative to a conclusive resolution.<sup>6</sup>

Seen through a colonial, imperialistic lens, the intimacy between Hamza and the *Oberleutnant* is reprehensibly unnatural and seems to be the reason behind the ruthless attack of the *Feldwebel*, a German officer of lower rank, who marks Hamza's askari body with his sword. The violence exerted on the bodies of askaris, as shown in the humiliating way they are made to stand in line for inspection—"the ombasha stiffened his spine and shouted that the swine were ready for inspection" (*Afterlives* 55)—and the viciousness of the *Feldwebel*'s assault are predicated on a vernacular of terror that connects slavery with concentration camps. The camp where the askaris are taken, called a boma, conjures up the structure of concentration camps and plantation estates. After being recruited, askaris are marched "like animals nearing their pens" (53) toward "the gates of the walled boma," "the mzungu's camp" (54).<sup>7</sup> There, in the middle, presiding over everything and everyone, stands "a long whitewashed building," the German officers' quarters (54). Once the gates are shut, there is no escape from the boma camp (55). The multidirectional memory that monitors the narration of *Afterlives* culminates in the convergence of Hamza's story with that of Ilyas, another askari, who ends up in a concentration camp in Germany during the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup>

What differentiates Hamza from Yusuf and, therefore, *Afterlives* from *Paradise* is the fact that readers witness Hamza's gradual growth to maturity; Hamza grows old, whereas Yusuf's story ends when he is still a young man. It takes an experienced Hamza to understand what the innocent Yusuf could not—namely, that the shame of slavery falls on the owner and not the owned, that "nobody owns anyone body and spirit" (*Afterlives* 206). In

Hamza's case, desire actually propels him to freedom inasmuch as Afiya, his beloved and the adopted daughter of Khalifa, Hamza's friend, will grant him the possibility to settle down, form a family, and cultivate a healthy sense of belonging firmly rooted in freedom. In short, Afiya allows Hamza to shrug off the aura of homelessness that so painfully disrupted his notion of belonging. After leaving the *Schutztruppe* under a cloud of suspicion, he headed toward the place of his former confinement, "the house where he lived" as a slave (*Paradise* 133); at this point in his life Hamza is still trapped in a corrosive sentiment of belonging.<sup>9</sup> The fact that Hamza heads toward the house where he lived as a slave indicates how he still perceives his master's home as his own home and has not been able to successfully disengage himself from his past as a slave. He feels as if he still belongs to Uncle Aziz.

In line with Yusuf's Amina, Afiya had also been treated as a slave by an adopted family after the death of both her parents, and, just like Amina, she also has a brother, the above-mentioned Ilyas, whose fateful appearance momentarily rescues her from her dreadful life. Khalil and Ilyas, I infer, fail to protect their younger sisters because they cannot liberate their own minds from the shackles of psychological bondage. Even after he has been freed by Uncle Aziz, Khalil's decision to stay with Aziz on the grounds that he has "nowhere to go" testifies to his internalization of his condition as a slave (*Paradise* 207). Khalil cannot conceive of himself as a free man, and therefore he does not even contemplate the possibility that he might liberate his sister from the hands of Uncle Aziz. His physical and psychic stagnation is a determining factor in the unnatural preservation of his enslaved self. Ilyas is subjugated to a more insidious form of enslavement—to wit, the servitude that stems from the civilizing mission of colonialism. His admiration of the Germans leads him to volunteer in the *Schutztruppe*, an action that translates as abandonment of his brotherly obligations toward Afiya, who is sent back to the family that had abused her.<sup>10</sup> The climax of Ilyas's enslavement is his death as the Germanized Elias in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp outside Berlin after he had been seen "marching with the

Reichskolonialbund, a Nazi Party organization" that demanded the recuperation of the German colonies lost in World War I (*Afterlives* 274). Ilyas becomes the irrefutable embodiment of the convergence of the Holocaust with colonialism. As a "*subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha 85), Ilyas Hassan will never be accredited as Elias Essen. His black skin stands in the way, and so the nation that he devotedly admires will, in a cruel ironic twist, punish his loyalty by sending him to a concentration camp.

Unlike Khalil and Ilyas, Yusuf and Hamza can think as free men. Although the end of *Paradise* suggests that Yusuf will enter another kind of enslavement with his enrollment in the German Army, the truth is that the seeds of freedom have already been planted in his psyche, as they never are in Khalil's. Yusuf is, for example, startled before Khalil's incapacity to leave Uncle Aziz once his freedom had been granted. Hamza should be read as Gurnah's instinctive prolongation of Yusuf, and their troubled memories, together with Afiya's, are passed on to Ilyas, Hamza and Afiya's son, named after his lost uncle.

At the age of eleven, Ilyas-son begins to hear the "grieving voice" of a woman that ceaselessly calls his name and insists on repeating the same question: "Where is Ilyas?" (*Afterlives* 248, 251). Because Ilyas-uncle never returns after World War I and because nobody knows his whereabouts, his unresolved story entangles the whole family—Hamza, Afiya, and Ilyas-son—in a traumatized collective memory that forecloses any mourning performance. Ilyas-son's "whispering malaise" is reignited every time he hears "talk of war and recruitment of an army," a clear reference to World War II (251). Ilyas-son's traumatic exploits can be explained through Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. Coined in the context of the Holocaust, *postmemory* refers to a type of memory entrenched in trauma that descendants of Holocaust survivors experience without having lived through the Holocaust themselves ("Family Pictures" 8). Postmemory entails a remembrance act that is always "belated, temporally and qualitatively removed" ("Connective Arts" 172). The recurrent traumatic episode Ilyas-son is made

to relive echoes the feeling of guilt that Holocaust survivors passed on to their descendants. Hamza is aware of the traumatic inheritance he and Afiya have bequeathed their son:

[Hamza] had his own guilty idea that it was his trauma which was the source of what was tormenting his son, an aftermath of something he had done in the war. He could not think what it could be so there was no logic in the sense that it was something in his past which generated the evil air. Then there was the lost Ilyas. They had named their son after him and somehow established a connection between them, made the boy bear the tragedy of Afiya's loss, share in her guilt that their efforts to locate her brother or discover his fate had failed.

(Gurnah, *Afterlives* 254)

And yet, the fact that Ilyas-son's traumatic episodes are attuned to "war talk" renders this postmemory performance a more nuanced interpretation on my part (251). "War talk" projects an uncanny association between the two world wars that results in the creation of a disruptive intimacy between nephew and uncle, suggesting that in his way Ilyas-son lives the ordeal of Ilyas-uncle in the concentration camp.<sup>11</sup> To put it differently, Ilyas-son's inherited trauma delineates a constellation (Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*) that surpasses chronological temporality by traumatically fusing the past times of World War I with the present times of World War II. Furthermore, the two world wars are constitutive of the trauma of displacement in the East African collective memory. The turning of East Africa into a battlefield unleashed a series of forced displacements condemning the local people to a state of homelessness (Pujolràs-Noguer, "Scramble"). Ilyas-son is the recipient of the troubled memories of both his parents, and, in a further twist, he is made to bear the terror his uncle is enduring in the concentration camp, entwining the Holocaust with colonialism.

Trauma condemns individuals to a perpetual state of enslavement, and, as *Afterlives* demonstrates, trauma can only be surmounted by uncovering the communal source of the individual destruction. Bondage, be that the outcome of the caravan trade

or colonialism, interrupts the natural flow of life, which can only be restored to the narrative by creating an existence after the death of the free self that slavery causes. The title, *Afterlives*, following the spiritual undertones exuded by the title *Paradise*, alludes to a regeneration of life. From this standpoint, we can proclaim that Yusuf lives again in Hamza and that troubled memories can indeed be nourishment for survival stories. In his determination to save his family and thus bring Ilyas-uncle back to the narration, Hamza contacts the wife of the Lutheran pastor who took care of him after the incident with the *Feldweibel*. Although the "Frau" replied to his letter (254), the outbreak of World War II brought an end to their correspondence. As a reflection of postmemory, Ilyas-uncle remains a fearful presence, a constant reminder of disruption, "an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture" (Hirsch, "Connective Arts" 173), and so, when Ilyas-son is awarded a scholarship to study in the Federal Republic of Germany, he takes the opportunity to discover "the whereabouts of his uncle Ilyas" (Gurnah, *Afterlives* 268). Hence, Ilyas-uncle becomes the theme of his required journalistic project. At this point in the story, Ilyas-son is thirty-eight years old and so, from his experience as "a mature man with his eyes open and curious" (268), he reveals the transformation of Ilyas Hassan into Elias Essen. The end of *Afterlives* recollects the facts that will lead to the demise of Ilyas-uncle: "wounded at the Battle of Madhiwa in October 1917," he somehow managed to make it to Hamburg and start a new life there as Elias Essen, "a performer in low-life Hamburg cabarets" (274), marrying a German woman and having three children. As Elias, he participated in the Nazi parades that demanded the return of the colonies lost in World War I but was finally sent to a concentration camp in 1938 "for breaking the Nazi race laws and defiling an Aryan woman" (275). Facts alone, though, do not adequately convey the depth of Ilyas-uncle's multidirectional life story. The unique confluence of colonialism and the Holocaust in the Indian Ocean-inflected world in which Ilyas-uncle's story unfolds has yet to be given its due. Numerous questions arise: What was Ilyas-uncle's life like in

Germany as a cabaret singer? How did his romance with the German woman who became his wife evolve? And what about this son that, as Ilyas-son points out in the very last paragraph of *Afterlives*, “loved him enough to follow him to certain death in a concentration camp in order to keep him company” (275)?

### Conclusion: Inventories of Self, History, and the Novel

When Khalifa suspects that Hamza and Afiya are in a love relationship, he prods Hamza into finally opening up and telling him where he comes from, who his family is. Khalifa has long resented Hamza's stubborn privacy, which he regards as an annoying lack of confidence in him. Cornered by Khalifa's insistence, Hamza responds with a distressing confession of an interrupted and fragmented life story: “You want me to tell you about myself as if I have a complete story but all I have are fragments which are snagged by troubling gaps, things I would have asked about if I could, moments that ended too soon or were inconclusive” (206).

The inconclusiveness of Hamza's life story hints at a historical drive that willfully erases the traces that could potentially make up an inventory of the self. If, as Gramsci asserts, knowing oneself is only possible through the construction of that inventory, and if that inventory is only feasible through the structuring of the traces that history has left on us, should we conclude that Hamza—and, by extension, disempowered people like him—has been deprived of the possibility to know himself?

One characteristic of Indian Ocean slavery as opposed to the Black Atlantic is its lack of a literary tradition that registers the hardships of slavery (Alpers 84). Whereas slave narratives such as Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* became a cornerstone of literary production in the Black Atlantic, no such equivalent is to be found in the Indian Ocean world. Historians have recently

taken up the task of restoring slavery to the Indian Ocean narrative; in doing so, they admit that one of the reasons Africa was expunged from the Indian Ocean imagination was an unwillingness to contend with the memory of slavery (Alpers; Campbell, “Islam”; Sheriff; Hawley; Desai). In this context, Gurnah's conscientious recollection of historical traces in order to build up an Indian Ocean inventory adds another layer to the historians' work through the sensorial re-creation of an Indoceanic scenario in which silenced individuals are granted a voice. As Amitav Ghosh asserts, the novel, “in rendering a setting through the eyes of individuals . . . can take on the task of re-creating the multifaceted nature of a character's experience” (1555), something that the linearity of historical discourse cannot apprehend (Mishra 118). According to Ghosh, “to inhabit a place is to be able to see it, to experience it through one's senses, breathe its smells, rest one's eyes on its sights” (1557). “The capaciousness of the novel, as a form,” he concludes, “makes it well suited to this endeavour” (1557). Ghosh's novelistic perspective is attuned to Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the chronotope, the fusion of space and time, as the distinguishing feature of novelistic discourse. In literature, Bakhtin affirms, “temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values” (243). When seen from this chronotopic perspective, Gurnah's novels color the African Indian Ocean with the emotions and values attached to a scrupulous arrangement of the lost traces that will give shape to the fragmented inventory of histories immersed in the original trauma of displacement. As a repository of multidirectional memory (Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*), Gurnah's novelistic interventions connect the African Indian Ocean to a far-reaching web of diverse and divergent histories temporally and spatially bound to experiences of enslavement. *Paradise* and *Afterlives* locate *rehani*, *askaris*, and Holocaust victims in a shared Indian Ocean constellation. And although we can claim that the interrupted story of Yusuf, the *rehani*, continues in Hamza, the *askari*, the truth is that the story concerning the lost Ilyas, the *askari* and Holocaust victim who resides in a traumatized



collective memory, is awaiting resolution. Perhaps Ilyas-uncle will be resurrected in a future novel, or perhaps he will, in the manner of “the Holocaust photograph,” “hover between life and death” (Hirsch, “Family Pictures” 7), a perpetual menace to mourning, forever deferring the possibility of closure.

## NOTES

1. The image that appears on the front cover is reproduced in chapter 13 (196), where the reader learns that the photograph is that of a slave road.

2. The character of Zulekha in *Paradise* bears the same name as the wife of Yusuf’s master in the Koran. And the name of Yusuf’s master in the Koran is Al-‘Aziz, which reminds us of Uncle Aziz from *Paradise*. In short, the fictional characters of Yusuf, Aziz, and Zulekha are all reminiscent of the story of Yusuf, one of the prophets of Islam, narrated in the Koran.

3. Note how the anti-slavery rhetoric employed in African American slave narratives resorts to natural law to exemplify the fundamental ethical wrongness of the “benign institution” by exposing the unhealthy human relationships that it generates.

4. *Rehani* is a Swahili word that literally means “pawn.” It is used to describe the servitude that human beings were forced into when they could not repay a debt. Repayment of the debt was, more often than not, impossible and so they remained the property of the master for life. For all intents and purposes, this was another form of slavery, and, therefore, in this article I refer to Yusuf as Aziz’s slave or Aziz’s servant interchangeably. In *Paradise*, Yusuf’s father cannot pay his debt to Uncle Aziz and therefore offers his own son as a *rehani*. As the novel progresses, it is made clear that Yusuf’s father will never repay the debt—he dies before getting the chance to—and Yusuf will remain a *rehani* for life.

5. In *The Historical Novel*, Lukács categorizes as literary types those characters that embody the constrictions of everyday life while enmeshed in the webs of history. In Gurnah’s fiction the exiled characters can be perfectly interpreted as Lukácsian types, and here I argue that Yusuf and Hamza belong to the same literary type, that of the slave that comes of age and is converted into a free man.

6. Hamza’s knowledge of the German language will play a decisive role in the search for Ilyas, his wife Afiya’s brother, who disappeared after enlisting in the war on the German side.

7. *Mzungu* is the Swahili word used to refer to white people. It actually means “aimless wanderer,” and, in this sense, *mzungu* captures the uneasiness that East Africans detected in the Europeans who wandered their land. For a more detailed account of the implications of the meaning of *mzungu* as “aimless wanderer,” see Pujolràs-Noguer, “Imperially White and Male.”

8. As the subtitle of his *Multidirectional Memory—Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization—*

indicates, Rothberg bases his theory on the interconnectedness of histories of oppression on a study of texts that set up a conscientious dialogue between the Holocaust and colonialism.

9. Hamza is not officially dismissed from the *Schutztruppe*. Because of his injuries from the *Feldwebel*’s attack, Hamza is taken to a mission run by a Lutheran pastor who takes care of him and saves his life. In the eyes of the German Army, Hamza is a deserter.

10. Khalifa, who becomes Hamza’s friend and protector, adopts Afiya after he rescues her from the family that continuously abuses her.

11. In 1938 Ilyas-uncle was arrested and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Ilyas-son was eleven when he started to hear the grieving voice. When Ilyas-son is thirty-eight years old, he goes to Germany. That was the year 1963, which means that he went through these traumatic episodes in the period between 1936 and 1938. We could therefore play with the possibility that when Ilyas-son is confronted with the question “Where is Ilyas?” Ilyas-uncle might have been in the concentration camp.

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