

## Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*: Unbelonging and the Trauma of Imprisonment

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### Abstract

*Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel By the Sea (2001) is a compelling narrative of the trauma of displacement in postcolonial Africa. Set mainly between Zanzibar and Britain, it brings into focus the trauma of imprisonment as a defining feature of dislocation and unbelonging in postcolonial African cultures. The work critiques the forces of separation bred by racism in nationalist discourse, forces that act as the legacies of colonialism that limits the freedom of the oppressed colonial Other. This article supplements Michael Rothberg's notion of "traumatic realism" with Paul Gilroy's concept of "camp mentality". I argue that the novel's underlying purpose is to bear responsible witness to nationalist racism in Zanzibar and Britain as a holdover of the same ideological structures that made colonialism and slavery possible. As a bystander of the trauma of postcolonial displacement, the diasporic Zanzibari writer's narrative seeks to break free from the discursive and literal restrictions of a world marked by the racial division of subjectivities into "units of camps".*

**Keywords:** trauma-colonialism-nationalism-freedom-geography-unbelonging.

Quite a raft of critical work in postcolonial studies has focused on the posttraumatic aftereffects of colonialism and slavery (Craps and Buelens 2008; Visser 2008-2014; Craps 2013). The contributions bring into light the need to unmoor trauma studies from their Eurocentric harbors. However, not enough consideration has been given to displacement as a bequest of a painful past in postcolonial African cultures. Under the assumption that the same ideological structures that made colonialism possible still exist, this article argues that writing displacement breaks the boundaries between past and present, making the anxieties of unbelonging expressed in postcolonial literature intimately link the *postcolonial* to the *posttraumatic*. In Gurnah's exilic experience, a rereading of the past first and foremost attests to the lack of freedom imposed by racial politics as a legacy of colonial hegemony. As he is determined by the critical imperative to free writing from the shackles of racial politics, his novel *By the Sea* (2001) (hereafter referred to as *BTS*) can be read as one example of the redemptive narrative for which "historical responsibility" (Rothberg 2013) is of paramount significance. It is thus crucial to refer to writing as one way of "bearing witness" even if the writer is spatiotemporally at a distance from the events of the past. Living in England, Gurnah may have spoken from a relative safety vis-à-vis the terrorizing events that have marred the history of Zanzibar since the colonial encounter. However, his belonging to the *posttraumatic*, or *postcolonial*, culture implicates him post-generationally to bear responsible witness.

Using Zanzibar's postcolonial culture as an example, I seek to argue that when writing African diasporic subjectivity is confronted with the repercussions of displacement as a *posttraumatic* effect of colonialism, it links traumatic realism with morally engaging demands. Such claims entail "the survivor, who attempts to document an undocumentable experience; the bystander, who feels impelled to bear an impossible witness to the extreme from a place of relative safety; and the latecomer or representative of the 'postmemory' generation, who [...] inherits the detritus" of a violence culturally writ large (Rothberg 2000, 13).

I thus deploy a trauma-based reading to argue that the novel solicits responsible witnessing through the overarching notion of the "implicated subject" (Rothberg 2000, 2013). This subject needs to bear witness to events s/he is spatiotemporally distant from. The first section of this article refers to Gurnah's biography to illustrate the way in which he identifies in fictional terms with those left behind during the eruption of racial violence in post-independence Zanzibar. A theoretical investigation is employed to discuss the *literal* and *discursive* "encampment" that locates Gurnah in the restraining space between Zanzibar and Britain. Second, I will discuss how, by relating the micro-politics of dwelling to the macro-politics of home and belonging, the text breaks the boundaries between the extreme and the everyday in order to illustrate the insidiousness of trauma on a daily basis (cf. Craps 2013). The stories of the two refugee narrators take further dimensions as their everydayness runs parallel to the broader documentation of the extreme, violent history of post-independence Zanzibar. Third, I read Saleh's story of imprisonment as a redemptive narrative that seeks to break the victim/perpetrator and inside/outside binaries. This transgressive act of telling aims to bear witness beyond the boundaries inflicted by nationalism's gate-keeping industry.

### 3.1. Writing Exile, Writing the “Camp World”

A closer scrutiny of Gurnah’s writing offers insights into the quasi-fictive spatiotemporal identification that marks his writings. Based on the notion of “responsibility-in-complicity” which may be enabling, Mark Sanders, for instance, foregrounds the role of the imaginative writing represented by fictive works and the different forms that autobiography can take. I stress the different forms that are covertly assumed since the work under analysis is an indirect representation of the people, either fictional or real, with whom the writer identifies spatiotemporally. His responsibility “assumes a sympathetic identification that can be realized through narrative and through the projection of the ‘little perpetrator’ into quasi-fictive situations” (Sanders 2002, 2).

Such a subject-position draws attention to Gurnah’s experience of exile. At the age of 18 in 1969, five years after Zanzibar’s post-independence revolution, he left the terrorizing upheaval that marred the tranquility of the small island where “Thousands were slaughtered, whole communities were expelled and many others imprisoned” (Gurnah 2001, n.p.). The racism directed especially at Arabs was to be featured later in Gurnah’s novel *Memory of Departure* (1987) dealing with the period of Zanzibar’s independence; it testifies to the hatred instigated by nationalism especially toward the people of Arab descent. Hostility was then “unleashed by the removal of the common enemy, the British” and led to “persecutions, imprisonments, murders, and regime of terror that followed” (Hand 2010, 75). As a colonial legacy, the divide-and-rule policy of the British colonial system in turn contributed to the extreme events with its accentuation of the division of the Zanzibari society on racial grounds, hence mobilizing ethno-racial conflicts with its race politics (Killian 2008, 106).

Gurnah’s sense of entrapment in spatial and discursive terms lends complexity to his writing as it often realigns the free/unfree dichotomy when exploring displacement. In fact, it is not uncommon to his fiction to express the sense of entrapment between the colonial and nationalist “dystopic politics of exclusion” (Steiner 2010, 124) that leave deep scars when representing his sense of unbelonging. As Tina Steiner points out,

From psychological character study to family dynamics, national politics of postindependence East Africa and stories of empire and diaspora, his work investigates the intersections of micro-and macro-level constructions bearing down on his characters [...] Offering counternarratives to myths of nation, land and language, Gurnah’s fiction points out precisely the lack of freedom such discourses and politics produce. (Steiner 2010, 124-125)

Gurnah’s fiction on exile is therefore caught between discourses inextricably haunted by racial divides. In fact, the loss of freedom constitutes the binding theme in Gurnah’s writing about the forces of separation that afflict one’s identity as an exile. Leaving for England was first associated with the promising prospect of freedom from an imminent persecution and the severe penalties against those who tried to escape (cf. *BTS*, 208). Worse still, the young Gurnah came to face a resentful political landscape: Enoch Powell’s language of incitement gave vent to “fear and loathing” as the “influx” of East African Asians into Heathrow and Gatwick airports solicited every English citizen to act as a gate-keeper when “London dockers, the shock troops of the trade union movement, marched in support of Powell”

(Gurnah 2001). His controversial speech insisted on nurturing the forces of forgetting and separation between Britain and its ex-colonies out of the underlying necessity to deny its historical responsibility for colonialism. Powell “was predictably no supporter of overseas aid, and he was adamant in rejecting the idea that collective historical guilt for colonialism imposed on Britain any obligation to maintain ‘open door’ policy” (Murphy 2014, 368).

Within the spatial articulations that were legitimated by race and nationhood, military metaphors seemed to prevail as a national arena dividing ethnicities into separated “units of camps” was in the making. Paul Gilroy offers a glimpse of the British racial politics centered on immigration and nationality. He points to the debates that “have regularly presented the illegitimate presence of blacks as an *invasion*” (1999, 190; emphasis added). Within such a fraught context, he offers insight into the discursive mechanisms that define the “camp world” whose bounded space creates isolating geographical and ethnic boundaries. Such a reading helps illustrate how Gurnah is confined by the politics of race as an African diasporic writer of Arab descent. In such a subject-position, silence may be produced by what Gilroy refers to as “camp thinking” whose “distinctive rules and codes” (Gilroy 1999, 189) permeate the discursive sphere of statecraft and its promotion of “race” politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gilroy’s words below explain the concept at length:

I want to call the national and racial formations [...] ‘camps’, a name that emphasizes their hierarchical and regimented qualities rather than any organic features. The organic dimension has been widely commented upon as an antidote it supplied to mechanized modernity and its dehumanizing effects. In some cases, the final stages in the transformation of the nation into an embattled confluence of ‘race’ and nation in the service of authoritarian ends. It should be immediately apparent that nation states have often comprised camps in this straightforward descriptive sense. They are involutory complexes in which the utterly fantastic idea of transmuting heterogeneity into homogeneity can be organized and amplified outwards and inwards. (Gilroy 1999, 188)

The restraints enforced by “raciology”, which consists in the discursive invention by modernity of separation through “de-natured” race, have therefore constituted “units” of camps that have fostered the forces of exclusion and the incrimination of difference in the public sphere (Gilroy 1999, 185). The lamentable “camp mentality” thus tends to pervade the public arena in which the coalition of “race” and “nationality” in the discourse of modernity tends to prelude the violence limiting the freedom of both the incarcerated and the seemingly free. Gilroy’s interrogation is aligned with Graeme Harper’s unsettling the inside/outside dichotomy. In his inquiry of the state of unfreedom permeating the post-colonial subjects’ space, especially with regard to such writers as Gurnah, Harper ascertains that “Although ‘who is really free? And ‘who is *truly* imprisoned?’ are hardly new calls, they do reflect our expectations [...] as to the true nature of colonial incarceration” especially as the (ex)-colonized subject epitomizes those who write from within the modern West (Harper 2001, 3; emphasis original). This inquiry illustrates the anxieties of home and unbelonging with regard to Gurnah’s concerns with his diasporic subject-position, especially the relative freedom offered by using the language of the oppressor.

The pressing need to document the silenced history of Zanzibar situates Gurnah's expression of displacement in the oppressive space between homogenizing exclusion and confinement. Sensing the perilous prospect of being incarcerated by the racist regime in his country and the unavoidable hostility of the "white" English society, Gurnah occupies "a space between camps" and is "in danger of getting hostility from both sides, of being caught in the pincers of camp thinking" (Gilroy 1999, 191).

This reading thus opens inroads into intersecting histories of displacement and violence that situate such an overlap at the crossroads of cultures. It reflects a new remapping of the race politics that solicits the historicity of the African pasts as, in traumatic situations, these camps also translate physically for African diasporic subjects into "refugee camps, labour camps, punishment camps, even death camps, as providing opportunities for moral and political reflection" (Gilroy 1999, 193). More importantly, the latent aftereffects characterizing everyday trauma need to be recast in terms of a "social death" (Orlando Patterson's term) which "is common to inmates in regimes of unfreedom, coercion and systematic brutality" even if they may not be inmates in the strictest sense (Gilroy 1999, 193). Following Laura Brown's theorization of "insidious trauma", which takes the daily trauma into account, Stef Craps concurs that the culture-specific and the invisible everyday trauma of the oppressed and the disadvantaged is intimately related to how the institutions in the public sphere promulgate stereotypes about the Other (2013, 24). At a broader scale then, and tied to the exclusionist politics of modernity, the spatial manifestation of "camp thinking" is first and foremost produced by the re-conceptualization of "History" with the capital letter "in geographical and geo-political design" of the superior/inferior dichotomy (Gilroy 1999, 188). On that account, the "camp mentality" of racial separation can also take place at the level of geography and the creation of boundaries within the framework of a modern/pre-modern binary.

### **3.2. Re-territorializing the Camp World:**

In *By the Sea*, attention to being "between camps" literally and rhetorically ramifies quite strongly in Omar Saleh's story of coming of age. Of significance is the focus on how his narrative of encampment nourishes the need to explore the micro- and macro-politics of home and belonging in view of the feuds between his as well as the second narrator's families over the ownership of the disputed house. Such a debate realigns the dichotomy between the extreme and the everyday by mixing the quotidian of family feuds over dwelling with the extreme violence of imprisonment given the exclusionist politics of nationalism.

The memory work of the two narratives of the past foregrounds the testimonial importance of experience which serves as a platform for a *responsible* negotiation of a Zanzibari future that promises forgiveness and reconciliation with the past. In broader spatiotemporal terms, they are of great significance in that they render the past in generally intertwined historical and geographical underpinnings. Their role is to draw attention to the colonial discourse and its legacy within the post-independence conditions of confinement and racial exclusion. Central to the discussion of the "camp world" is the need to realign the victim/perpetrator dichotomy. Hence, responsibility is emphasized as the family feuds reveal that both Zanzibari diasporic narrators inadvertently contribute to each other's demise.

Against an impoverished understanding of history, the conception of the "concentrationary universe" as a borderland separating the extreme and the everyday has been



the bone of contention among a number of Holocaust theorists (Rothberg 2000). As this bounded universe is generally construed as the setting where the unfit are to be encamped by the forces of separation and racial divide, its re-conceptualization crystallizes through a traumatic realism that seeks to transcend the frontiers of the overly particular without affecting the singularity of the camps' context. It aims to blast open the restrictions imposed between the extreme and the everyday as a demand for testimony. The inevitably multidisciplinary analysis of the colonial enterprise and its race politics entails the use of this camp world as a concept metaphor for unsettling the forces of separation affecting other traumatic pasts than those centered in the West. As such, there is need for a rethinking of

the concentrationary universe as a complex object—at once extreme and everyday, historically produced and reproduced, experienced from a multitude of subject-positions, and accessible through discursive practices [...] there are multiple and crisscrossing lines that divide the world of the concentrationary, both within and without. The concentrationary universe is a specific version of the “borderland” [...]—a space not merely divided between inside and outside, but consisting precisely of the coexistence of that which the border seeks to keep separate [...] Preserving the conceptual openness of that universe means revealing the constant redrawing of boundaries that takes place as that world is produced, experienced, represented, and maintained as an object of memory, discourse and political struggle. (Rothberg 2000, 128-129)

Likewise, *By the Sea* as a narrative can testify to the need to supplement the “real” in history with the critical representation of the past. The novel subscribes to exploring the world of crisscrossing histories as it pinpoints the constant struggle with breaking the restrictive boundaries of race. The question that arises in the process is not merely contingent on providing the “real” of the extreme, but rather deals with the meaning of the past through profound explorations of the dynamics of the “concentrationary universe”. The centrality of the sea which figures prominently in Gurnah's fiction points to the theoretical exploration of re-territorialized space of the colonial and post-independence race politics in Zanzibar. His works especially align with Isabel Hofmeyr's reference to the Indian Ocean as part of the “transnational forms of analysis” in the academy which are becoming gradually “prominent” in the studies of current cultures in that it “attracts attention, especially as a domain that offers possibilities for working rich possibilities beyond the templates of the nation-state” (2012, 585).

In the space between the structures of the state, between England and Zanzibar, center and periphery, the interwoven narratives of Saleh Omar and Latif Mahmoud exemplify the differing subject-positions whose aim is to enrich and document the narrative of the past seeing that their versions lay the groundwork for a multidisciplinary exploration revolving around Omar Saleh's imprisonment. The two men's conflict over family houses opens avenues into the issue of imposed silence which combines slavery, colonialism and genocide as overlapping legacies.

In the opening pages of the novel, Saleh grapples with the intricacies of memory narrative, a fragmented account whose chronology is supposed to start in 1960. As anti-linearity traumatically affects the course of the storyline, the two narratives of the past can only be spatiotemporally entangled in the metropolis. The persistence of the memory of

incarceration back home drives Saleh to construe the refugee camps offered to him in England as enclaves of “detention”. He ends up living in a small and isolated flat in an English seaside town after having escaped a second imprisonment in his island of birth. The posttraumatic aftereffects of incarceration and isolation thereby constitute the guiding force for the exploration of race and space.

When first arriving at the airport in England, Saleh Omar pretends that he cannot speak English and mentions instead the words “refugee” and “asylum-seeker” to alter the customs officer’s alarming decision to proceed in deporting him back to his country lest he would be confined again (*BTS* 9). Motivated by the narrative imperative to protect segments hidden in the story of the luggage exposed to the immigration officer (*BTS* 8), Saleh Omar protects himself from possible incarceration. As asylum seekers are a category of displaced subjects that “becomes a liability which must be scrupulously policed” and potentially “captured”, they “must [...] not betray any information that could be used against them in the asylum process” (Newns 2015, 512). Of significance is also his assuming of a bogus identity. His passport has been confiscated and, as such, he uses that of Rajab Shaaban Mahmud’s, a deceased man and a distant relative whose wife Asha orchestrated Omar Saleh’s confinement for eleven years. Saleh has been deceived by the double-dealing of Hussein, a Persian merchant who visits his successful furniture shop and to whom he lends a sum of money for which he will obtain the house of Rajab Shaaban as security. The merchant never returns from his voyages and Saleh claims the repayment of the loan, the act for which he is accused of duplicity. Such an indictment is rationalized by his allegedly “underserved” inheritance of another house belonging to his stepmother, Shaaban’s widowed aunt.

The second Zanzibari narrator, who belongs to the next generation, is Latif Mahmud, the son of Rajab Shaaban Mahmud, who, together with Saleh, struggles to piece together some of the missing fragments of each other’s versions of the past. His tranquility as a poet and professor at the University of London has been interrupted by the second encounter with Saleh, the man he accuses of having stolen their house and property in the period before Zanzibar’s independence. Latif’s departure from home to study in socialist Eastern Germany in the 1970s culminated in his escape to Western Germany and eventually settles as a refugee in England. Living in exile, he expresses mixed feelings of deep discontent with family feuds towards the society he has left behind. The Zanzibari men’s conflicting perspectives of the painful past bear witness to the novel’s insistence on blurring the lines between victim and perpetrator as both their families have somehow contributed to each other’s agonizing conditions back home.

So, in addition to his experience of incarceration in Zanzibar, Saleh dwells in refugee or—what he insists on calling with a touch of melodrama—“detention” camps before moving to an isolated and small flat by the sea. He is constantly intrigued by maps which constitute the driving force that charts his narrative, thereby struggling to re-draw the terms of the imposed territories of his experience from the colonial to the post-colonial times. His obsession with maps foregrounds the colonial and post-colonial underpinnings of modernity which has remapped the world to revolve around Europe as the center (cf. Ashcroft 2001, 132). In refusing the epistemology offered by the single story of colonial cartography, the anti-linearity of the plot seeks to bring together a constellation of factors that have contributed to the conditions of exile in the two narrators’ versions of the past. Responding to the demands of extremity, the salient approach to the representation of a traumatic event is not

premised on pure mimetic representation. Rather, it can be compared to that of traumatic realism “because it seeks both to construct access to a previously unknowable object and to instruct an audience on how to approach that object” (Rothberg 2000, 103). Constantly in need of filling the gaps of each other’s accounts in order to grasp the complexity of the “real” in representation, the narrators’ crisscrossing stories span the generations between the colonial and the post-colonial in rigorous fashions. The meeting of the two characters in exile underlies the attempt at spatiotemporally exploring the past/present historical mechanisms that govern the camp world in order to bear witness at the crossroads of cultures.

Of significance is the exploration of the dynamics of space and dwelling as they entail the coexistence of the everyday and the extreme with regard to incarceration. The anti-linear narrative emplotment covers the wider ground of the geo-political dimensions that parallel the narratives’ thread to contribute to enriching the investigation of the past. The blending of the real and the fictional shows that the everyday and the extreme inextricably interact, as trauma narratives both insist on mimetic representation and reflect its fraught nature through fictional experimentation. Hence, “while the traumatic combination of the extreme and the everyday blocks traditional claims to synthetic knowledge, attentiveness to its structure can also lead to new forms of knowledge beyond the realist and antirealist positions and outside of traditional disciplines” (Rothberg 2000, 6-7). In multidisciplinary terms, such a demand to historicize bears close relation to the historical documentation by the novel of the Indian Ocean’s context registered in *Periplus of the Erythraean* which “records Indian merchants and seamen trading on the coast of East Africa as far back as the first century of the Christian Era and subsequently charts events onto a chronological road map” (Hand 2010, 78). The novel’s traumatic realism, however, preserves the contradictory real and anti-real in representation as

Gurnah combines both chronological history (dates and facts) and lived sensations (feelings and memories) in order to comment on the narratives of Zanzibari history [...] Apart from the two oral narratives of Omar and Mahmud, the author constructs a third narrative thread, a kind of parallel history, based on easily proved data. (Hand 2010, 78)

The real and anti-real tendencies in the emplotment of trauma narratives, therefore, maintain two paradoxical but tantamount roles. One is ethical and accounts for the poignancy of the human implications of trauma, and the other is documentary in that it seeks justice and public recognition. In order to be in line with the narrator’s indirect encounter with the events, the issue of documentation and identification with the victims becomes all the more pressing. Emblematic of being inflicted by the traumatic event, there is a pressing demand for literary experimentation and anti-linearity. Specific to the trauma narratives that reflect on the Lacanian notion of the “missed encounter” (Rothberg 2000, 138) with some of the harrowing events whose scars persist, Saleh’s story of exile brings the issue of distance and proximity to the forefront of his interrogation of the past. In his case as a displaced subject, he does not reflect upon the past in order to provide a full account of the “real” events, but rather acknowledges the rupture imposed by incarceration and exile. As such, he comments on the traumatic telling of the past,

So then these are the events that befell. Many of them are difficult to speak of without drama, and some of them fill me with anguish, but I crave to utter them, to display them as



judgements of my time and of the puniness of our duplicitous lives. I will tell them briefly, for many of them are events I have tried hard not to dwell on, for fear of diminishing what little I have left with bitterness and helplessness. I have had many years to think about them and to weigh them in the scale of things, and in that respect I have learnt that it is as well to live quietly with my grazes and sprains when others have to bear intolerable cruelties. (*BTS* 112)

As others have to “bear” the “cruelties” of nationalism, Saleh’s traumatic realism is defined by his narrative’s holding a morally vexed subject-position as a witnessing bystander from the “relative safety” (Rothberg 2000, 13) of exile. In the situations of extremity, there may be a persistence to bear witness to the “real” events, but the need to document reveals the fact that there is also a necessity to propel the narrative forward in order to provide a sound judgment of the history of his time. The traumatic realism of the novel is reflected in selecting fragments that fit into the framework of telling the past so that it “does not ignore the demand to confront the unfounded nature of writing, but it nevertheless attempts to develop new forms of ‘documentary’ and ‘referential’ discourse out of that very traumatic void” (Rothberg 2000, 96). In addition to allowing room within the fragmented narrative to grapple mainly with the “real” through historical and geographical underpinnings of the past, the benefit of leaving some segments of the story untold serves also to surmount the insurmountable in the details that tend to weigh on his telling. Saleh therefore does not tell all the events in their literality, but rather reveals the racial frameworks that lie in the background of their occurrence. The interruption inflicted on Saleh’s experience by unjustified atrocity has thus created a “hole” in his meaning making processes when representing the “real” past; his as well as Latif’s “stories” stand “alongside each other” to constantly attempt to fill their narratives’ gaps (*BTS*, 207). Ironically enough, the continuity of their narratives relies heavily on the discontinuity that allows access to a multidisciplinary exploration of extremity in order to hopefully fill in these voids.

### **3. Saleh’s encampment: Rethinking the Gate-keeping Industry**

The “real” in Saleh’s grim tale of the atrocities committed in the post-independence period, for instance, does not mirror the past in a chronological fashion; rather, it is focused on the events’ effect on the mix of the extreme and the everyday. As mentioned earlier, Saleh’s experience of the political context impinging on the extreme in the prison is filtered through the repercussions of the latent trauma of the everyday as signified in the novel’s family feuds. The struggle over the inheritance rationalized by blood relations opens up new perspectives on the debate concerning discursive indexing of violence through the politics of space and race. The case of the loss of Shaaban’s family house to Saleh synchronizes the climax of the general plundering and chaos taking place in the country after independence. With an atmosphere fraught with the time’s tensions in the backdrop, the overwhelmingly ominous conditions preparing the ground for Saleh’s incarceration seem to reach their peak. The politics of race have come to be tied to the problems of the house and, as a result, have given vent to the justification to incriminate Saleh who is thought to have “preyed” on women. Given that the self-righteous Shaaban laments the loss of ownership of the house out of a closer blood connection to his aunt (Saleh’s stepmother), it is deemed appropriate to claim that the nephew be the legitimate heir.

The wider canvas surrounding the feuds attests to the corrupt post-independence system of law that has taken an active part by legitimating Shaaban's allegations against an "outsider's" ownership on racial grounds. Although the imprisonment of Saleh has been orchestrated by Shaaban's wife Asha, the mistress of the Minister of Development and Resources, the event has been made to take broader dimensions that run parallel to the everyday squabbles over the quotidian matters of dwelling. In view of the violence that got out of control to affect the culture at large, Saleh mentions in passing that "Whatever it was she had in mind for me, matters were out of everyone's hands once the machinery of terror began to grind" (BTS 211). Justified in general economic terms, the pretext for forcing him to pay back the loan for which he has used the disputed house as a guarantee is the nationalization of the banks in 1967 (BTS 212). He is then unable to repay the loan which, to his surprise, has to be returned in full before its due period. The only resort for him to avoid imprisonment is therefore to hand over the house to the bank.

As is mentioned in the quotation above about Saleh's attempt at weighing the events "in the scale of things" (BTS 112) about the posttraumatic effect of a painful past, a more thorough grasp of the question of space and race needs to take broader dimensions which lie behind Saleh's poor and displaced condition in exile. Both the economic and the geographical are therefore brought to bear on the cultural effect of "camp mentality" and its role in the politics of the Zanzibari society. The involvement of history is nonetheless unavoidable through allusions to the place/time intersection when exploring the disastrous effects of nationalism. Drawing the two stories to form a diasporic community through responsible witnessing implies the necessity to historicize their painful pasts out of their being implicated in each other's traumas (Caruth 1991, 188) in postmemorial terms. In tandem with Hirsch's notion of "points of memory" (2011)—or those of "identification" (Hall 1990)—the "family space" most potently addresses inheritance seen as "symptomatology" since children want to "affirm their victimhood along that of parents" (2008, 112). In this light, out of the persistence of the traumatic event to be documented and yet defies understanding, Latif wonders why he has come to meet Saleh again in a small flat by the sea after having met him in his other house by the sea back home. In the past, the young Latif tries to retrieve their table upon his mother's insistence. He reluctantly runs the errand to fetch it as it is part of their property when they have lost the house case. It is particularly important as it reminds his mother of his elder brother Hassan. It was a gift from the Persian merchant who sexually seduced the young Hassan who fled the country with the latter. As Latif wonders why it is in exile that he has come to meet the "culprit" who took their house and property, he reflects on the last time Saleh refused to give him the table,

Saleh Omar called Faru and I was escorted out [...] it's as if I went on from Saleh Omar's house and right out of the country, and through the years I have been finding my way to his other house by the sea. It was only a fancy, a momentary despondency that the heaving and straining had been pointless exertion, only to arrive at what was mapped out from the beginning. (BTS 104)

The pull of the past seems thus to raise the pressing need to negotiate its significance beyond the contours of national boundaries in a dialogical and responsible fashion. As Saleh's houses are located by the sea, Mahmoud's invoking the feuds underscores the unavoidable encounter

with the traces of the past which has been “mapped out” from the very beginning. Between Zanzibar and England, the Indian and the Atlantic Oceans, the spatiotemporal perspective of the question of family feuds has now come to be construed in terms larger than the loss of one’s safe abode. Within a broader context marked by the door-keeping industry, there emerges a porous boundary in today’s “multiplying [...] home and the accessibility of home [where] the profound homogeneity between the devices of the private, clandestine, non-state network, and those of the police network of surveillance” (Derrida 2000, 61) is called into question. This encounter that redraws the topographies of memory brings to light what “opens” the nation-state’s “controlled and circumscribed space to intrusion,” seeing that “in order to constitute the space of a habitable house and a home, you also need an opening, a door and windows, you have to give up a passage to the outside world” (Derrida 2000, 61).

Both narrators seek reconciliation by recounting their pasts whose persistence seems to be tracking their experiences of exile in order to lay bare the ideological structures instigated by door-keeping surveillance. The race-related feuds are thus mapped onto the domain of geography in order to be more largely re-traced through the dimensions of nationalism and its “camp thinking” of which their narratives want to be redeemed. After all, the question that pertains to a spatiotemporal rethinking of racial boundaries through ethical hospitality is that, “the crossing of the threshold always remains a transgressive step” (Derrida 2000, 75). Such a rereading of the topographies of division construes Faru as an important element in the narrative of promoting exclusion and separation. Latif Mahmoud refers to him in the most antagonistic terms such as the “bawab” (doorkeeper) as he was at the door of Saleh’s home and felt humiliated by the latter’s refusal to return the table (*BTS* 153). By worsening Mahmoud’s feeling of hostility toward Saleh that has increased all these years before meeting him in exile, the “doorkeeper” comes to stand for the forces of racial separation within both the places of dwelling and the national boundaries, especially as, like the customs officer at the airport who closes the gates of Europe in the face of immigrants, Faru loves “uniforms” and becomes an “officer in the Customs Police” who stands out “at the harbor gates” in order to “keep unauthorized people out” (*BTS* 207-208). Therefore, in remapping the “camp world” that has led to the “gate-keeping” and its close association with the “colonization” of the public sphere, it becomes overwhelmed by the “unforgiving” “civil religion of nationalism: uniforms, flags and mass spectacles [whose] camps are armed and protected spaces” (Gilroy 1999, 190).

The mention of “Faru” thus invokes the micro-and macro-politics of home which underpin the posttraumatic effects of “camp thinking”. The oppression of a new order has started to take the place of colonialism in post-independence Zanzibar and its race politics. It seems that the more the reader is made to probe into the etiology of primal trauma, the more s/he is transported to the rich and manifold cultural fabric of the Indian Ocean. It evokes the growing loss of the geographical freedom in the re-territorialized Zanzibar caused by the new directions of the Marxist politics of revolution in 1964 after one year of independence. As Meg Samuelson asserts about the loss of the trading activity, Zanzibar ceded its position as the epicenter of the “musim” trade to the United Republic of Tanzania and lost contact with its hybrid past: the Arab dhows have now “been displaced by cargo ships from Russia, China and the GDR” (Samuelson 2013, 86). Following a description of the maps remade by the

colonial enterprise, Saleh captures the geo-political tenor of the history of revolution in order to remember the lost period of trading Somalis, Suri Arabs or Sindhis who brought “gaiety” to Stone Town and were soon to be forgotten as, in Saleh’s words, “they became unimaginable to the new lives we led in those early years of independence” (*BTS* 16). The streets of the town that have become silent reflect, as such, a new era forced to redefine the once “open spaces” (*BTS* 16) into bordered ones. The race politics were translated into the institutionalized creation of space under new terms of national unity of people of African descent. Addressing the question of the Self/Other divide related to territorial divisions and the harbinger of imminent violence, Homi K. Bhabha delineates the potential perils of carving out such an involuntarily nationalist space caused by “feuds” that can produce “paranoid projections ‘outwards’” because “so long as a firm boundary is maintained between the territories [...] the aggressivity will be projected onto the Other or the Outside” (1990, 300).

The nationalist project of “camp thinking” thus comes to take shape in the institutions built to nourish the forces of exclusion and incarceration. In *By the Sea*, institutionalized gate-keeping, or warding, is shown to result in Saleh Omar’s loss of the right of home and belonging when he leaves the safety of the place of dwelling to that of different camps where he has come to live and meet many other victims. Most importantly, the “open air” prison represented by the island where he is incarcerated stands for more than it may literally mean. Beyond the “brick-and-mortar” space of incarceration, the fact that the guards and prisoners on the island eat together in spite of the latter’s sporadic brutalities (*BTS* 227), implies that colonial incarceration holds sway. This fact unsettles “the sometimes ill-defined boundaries between ‘warders’ and ‘prisoners’” as it is “one way of recognizing that some general aspects of incarceration have been integral to the making of colonized societies” (Harper 2001, 1). As it is set by the sea, the island’s uncannily administered prison underlines a vibrant setting of boats/ships moving into and outside it, thus fostering a rethinking of the logic that has laid the groundwork for the borderland of race thinking by the nationalist regime. After having been locked away and tortured in a private cell where he was isolated, Saleh is moved to another isolating context which is the island used by the government as

a detention center since independence. They rounded up whole families of people of Omani descent, especially those who lived in the country or wore beards and turbans or were related to the ousted sultan, and transported them to the small island some distance off shore. There they were detained under guard, until eventually, several months later, ships chartered by the Omani government took them away in their thousands. There were so many of them that the ships stopped coming. It was known that there were still some people detained there. (*BTS*, 222)

It is therefore on the island that the processes of isolation, exclusion, and incarceration have come to intersect as manifestations of the “camp world” which incriminates racial difference as an endeavor to produce the dynamics of separation. A strong feeling of entrapment is shared by the Omanis as they are forced to migrate to escape torture. They have committed no crime except “the ignoble history of Oman in these parts” (*BTS* 225). As it has stranded them between states, the door-keeping enterprise of nationalism comes to assume its torturing disciplinary dimensions as the commanding officer and his troops devote their special attention to “tormenting them, ordering them to do endless menial tasks, abusing them, and at



times beating them” (BTS 225). The oversimplification of the binary of victim/perpetrator is the logic most closely associated with the forces of separation in this respect. The Africans, once slaves of the Omanis, are unaware of their use of the victim’s role to assume the other role of perpetrator in post-generational terms.

The reductive understanding of the descendants of African slaves of identity formation is also represented by using geographical terms. Saleh decries the insignificance of geographical and cultural division which uncompromisingly settles the question of home and belonging. For him, the victims of severe torture “were no more Omanis than I was except that they had an ancestor who was born there. They did not even look different from the rest of us” (BTS 225). Saleh’s blurring of the bloodlines of race separation as a bystander narrator is predicated on the fact of being set between the “them” (the Omani victims) and the “rest of us” (among whom many act as perpetrators). The colonial legacy of the Omani history shifts the terrain of Saleh’s investigation of the past toward a broader re-drawing of the cartography of race as his subject-position is that of a witness assuming the stance of an “implicated subject”. Having experienced the repercussions of race politics himself, Saleh’s witnessing solidarity seeks to call race politics into question through the spatial unsettling of the boundaries between inside and outside, the everyday and the extreme. The memory of his first moments of unjust imprisonment is told in the most ambiguous terms between opposites. As he is shoved off “in front of everybody”, he laments the fact that

There were *witnesses*, and I am not sure who is worse in such moments, the criminal or the innocents who stand by and watch and act as if nothing evil is taking place. There were witnesses outside, people walking by as if nothing was happening, strolling to their favorite cafés for a chat or to call on family or friends. (BTS 216; emphasis added)

Dismantling the boundaries between the victim and the perpetrator, the extreme and the everyday, inside and outside, Saleh seeks to bring in justice by implicating the bystanders in the public sphere to bear witness to the atrocities committed in the name of race. Uncertainty about who is criminal or innocent highlights the “unfreedom” that permeates the public sphere without many people’s awareness about the perils of the traps of totalitarianism; all the more so because “The punishments were administered in the open yard by people who still walk the streets of that town today, as do some of their victims” (BTS 218). The novel’s posttraumatic witnessing and its blurring of the victim/perpetrator boundary, aims in this instance to devote much of its energy to shaking more witnesses out of passivity through a traumatic realism that

is not turned only toward the past and its tendency to reappear in haunting repetition. By virtue of its performative access to a posttraumatic context, this kind of writing possesses a future orientation. The traumatic realist project is an attempt not to reflect the traumatic event mimetically but to *produce* it as an object of knowledge and to *transform* its readers so that they are forced to acknowledge their relationship to posttraumatic culture. (Rothberg 2000, 140; emphasis original)

In the intra- and inter-camp relations, for instance, the witnessing of heterogeneous experiences of incarceration takes place beyond and within the prison cells. As various means of punishment and chaos permeate the nation, Saleh recounts the witnessing tales by other inmates, “in their time” in other camps, of “incidents” and “consequences” of torture in



“detail” as they have come to take place between camps as particular experiences of imprisonment (*BTS* 218). Not to mention the fact that as “the whole island was out of bounds to visitors”, a picture of the detained Omanis is printed in a newspaper in Kenya; it shows the victims “looking at the cameras with tired melting eyes, some with cautious interest, bearded men capless and worn out” (*BTS* 222). Another Omani too keeps a diary of “all the persecutions that befell them” (*BTS* 223). The import of this witnessing beyond bars and geographical boundaries aims at a circulation that seeks to further its reach in the public sphere. As the meaning of the past constitutes the struggle between the Zanzibaris even today, Saleh and Mahmud embody the post-generational struggle to bring about a dialogue that does not “catch the crook”, but is rather based on breaching the victim/perpetrator boundaries in terms that implicate everybody in the national reconciliation.

So, in addition to erasing the line between the concentrationary and the everyday that solicits others to bear witness, “another line” should be drawn to portray the different trajectories of the prisoners “through the concentrationary that differentiates extreme from ordinary experiences” (Rothberg 2000, 124). The individual stories of the prisoners, and those between the prisoners and the seemingly unfree, have different beginnings and no closure (Rothberg 2000, 138). Saleh’s witnessing of other tortures worse than his, especially those of the Omanis based on racial separation, aims to countervail the homogenization that marks the boundaries between self and other. The heterogeneous histories of experience feed the need to avoid over-particularizing or over-homogenizing histories as there are ways in which they can crisscross in the camp world “from within and without”. To allow a thorough investigation that remaps the “camp world” in terms that account for the particular while seeking to homogenize, trauma studies “can seek to pursue an approach between homogenizing universalism and nominalist particularism” (Rothberg 2008, 230).

The boundaries of separation in the camp world have therefore been unsettled by both Saleh’s and Latif’s spatiotemporally directed narratives of the past. If the “units” of camps have invested their energy in the gate-keeping enterprise, a task undertaken by the prison warders, then the mechanisms that govern such thinking have been resisted by the solidarity of those afflicted by the forces of incarceration. The focus of this article on intertwined narratives and the constellation of mainly the geographical and historical analyses of camp mentality has sought to bring together the micro-and macro-level dimensions of race that have created the constrictive conditions leading to Saleh’s imprisonment. The presence of the imprisoned dissenters reveals the political affiliations that Saleh’s witnessing aims to build against the insignificance of the race politics fermenting the violence against the so-called “non-Africans”. This witnessing is carried out through rigorously documented testimony where dates and facts constitute the “real” in representation. However, out of the human implications of the conflict, a closer scrutiny may be able to show that the extreme events of trauma transcend the walls of prisons and implicate more people who might act as warders at the service of a camp mentality writ large.

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