

CASTE, MEMORY, AND THE AFTERLIVES OF BONDAGE: HOW A SPECTRAL SLAVE BECAME A DEMIGOD IN COASTAL KERALA

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ABSTRACT

The former colonial port town of Kochi in India is home to memorial sites dedicated to enslaved Africans (Kapiri in Malayalam), called Kapirithara. Unlike memorials to slavery that centre victimhood, these sites venerate the Kapiri as a mighty, cigar-smoking demigod. According to popular lore, when the Portuguese lost the city to the Dutch in 1663, they killed their enslaved and buried their treasure with them, believing they would guard these treasures until the owners returned. These shrines, small inconspicuous spaces, marked by candles, incense, alcohol, beef and cigars, remain central to the ritual life of the marginalised communities of the region. The Kapiri is remembered not as a victim, but as a benevolent ancestor, a spectral protector dressed in white, offering help to those in need. The memorial sites of the Kapiri contradict prevailing narratives of cruelty and victimhood and challenge understandings of the memorialisation of slavery. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and oral narratives, this article argues that these shrines enact a form of multiple memorialisation in which diverse communities, from former slave castes like the Pulayas to landowning Brahmins, remember histories of slavery and caste oppression in ways that converge, yet refuse a narrative of victimhood. The article shows how these material practices constitute a vernacular mode of remembering that complicates dominant historiographies of slavery in South Asia and the Indian Ocean world.

INTRODUCTION

Scattered across the urban and semi-urban landscape of Kochi, India lie many inconspicuous spaces, marked by lit candles, toddy bottles, and fried fish. These are shrines dedicated to enslaved Africans. Unlike memorials to slavery elsewhere, these sites venerate the enslaved not as victims but as benevolent demigods. This absence of expected narratives of cruelty poses a fundamental challenge to how we understand the memorialisation of slavery. This paper examines the unusual spaces,

stories, and folklore commemorating the enslaved African, revered as the *Kapiri Muthappan*, the great Black ancestor.

For nearly five hundred years, Kochi, on the Malabar Coast of the Indian Ocean, was occupied by three colonial powers.¹ The narratives and local histories, produced out of these colonial engagements, often do not feature in authorised histories.² As a site of encounters between different colonial powers and as part of the intricate network of the trans-Indian Ocean slave trade, the port city is a repository of memory.

Amongst many stories rooted in the colonial experience of Kochi, the most revered are those related to the *Kapiri*. Under Portuguese rule Europeans employed enslaved Africans in Kochi. The Dutch expelled the Portuguese from Kochi in 1663 and forbade them from carrying away their wealth. In response, according to the local lore, the Portuguese elites murdered the enslaved and buried them with the family's valuables, believing that the dead would guard the treasure. These enslaved Africans are remembered in Kochi as *Kapiri*, and their memory lives on through oral folklore and sacred shrines called *Kapirithara*, dedicated to the *Kapiri Muthappan*. They are imagined as benevolent and kind ghosts or demigods and are held in reverence by almost all communities in Kochi. They feature in novels and stories, playing an influential role in the way the city imagines itself. The continued memory of the *Kapiri* shows how the memory of African enslavement has been refracted through multiple communities and social locations, complicating dominant understandings of colonialism and its legacies.

In Malayalam, *Kapiri* (plural *Kapirikal*) is a generalising vernacular designation for Africans or people of African origin. The term originates from the Arabic *kafir*, meaning non-believer or infidel, historically applied to non-Muslims, and its variants have travelled across the Indian Ocean, where Sinhala, Dhivehi, Malay, and other languages have used them to denote Africans. One of the best-known Malayalam usages is S. K. Pottekkatt's *Kappirikalude Naattil* (*In the Land of the Kapiris*), his 1951 African travelogue.³ The term in the context of Kochi and the shrines does not identify a single ethnic group, a historically recoverable individual, or a fixed number of people. This article uses *Kapiri* as a collective

¹ The Portuguese (1503-1663), the Dutch (1663-1795), and the British (1795-1947).

² The historical impact of colonialism in Kochi remains inadequately integrated within the framework of nationalist historiography. This oversight disregards the intricate cosmopolitan and transnational features that define the city, contributing significantly to its complex colonial past as a prominent port town.

³ S. K. Pottekkatt, *Kappirikalude Naattil*, 8th ed. (Kottayam: DC Books, 2007).

singular, as the vernacular figure through which these different histories and memories have been gathered. This diversity in narratives applies to their commemorations, in the form of roadside structures, consecrated stones, tree shrines, and sacred groves associated with Kapiri spirits. We refer to these sites collectively as Kapirithara, the most common rendering of these shrines.

Historical records on the presence of Africans on the Malabar Coast are scarce. Limited colonial records show that Africans were brought to the Coast as domestic slaves and soldiers, while people from the Malabar Coast were themselves transported through wider circuits of slavery across the Indian Ocean. These records, however, do not establish the specific ethnic, regional, or individual origins of the people later gathered under the term *Kapiri*. Nor do they confirm the local folklore that attaches a more specific history to the figure. Other accounts produce different genealogies. In Ponjikkara Rafi's *Ora Pro Nobis* (1981), for instance, the Kapiri appears to have arrived from Lisbon, already employed by a Portuguese family that later relocated to Kochi.⁴ Neelima Jeychandran has speculated that Kapiris may have served as guards at European fortifications and that the cigars and alcohol associated with their shrines may have originated as forms of payment or bribery from local people.⁵ Since most of these fortifications had been dismantled by the early nineteenth century⁶, and the available evidence does not establish these roles with certainty, such accounts remain part of the speculative and folkloric history surrounding the figure. These speculations do not establish the historicity of the Kapiri. They do, however, reveal how histories of African presence, enslavement, colonial violence, and local memory have become entangled. The term itself carries divergent meanings across the Indian Ocean. In South Africa, the derivative "kaffir" became one of the most virulent racial slurs of the apartheid era and remains legally classified as hate speech.⁷ The divergence between derogatory use in southern Africa and its reverential use in Kerala, where Kapiri Muthappan is an honorific combining the term with a kinship title for a revered ancestor, is itself suggestive of the figure's capacity to generate radically different meanings across the Indian

⁴ Ponjikkara Rafi, *Ora Pro Nobis* (Kochi: Pranatha Books, 1981).

⁵ Neelima Jeychandran, "Marginalized narratives: Memory work at African shrines in Kochi, India," in *Excavating Memory: Sites of remembering and forgetting*, eds. Maria Theresia Starzmann and John R. Roby (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2016), 119.

⁶ "Fort Immanuel at Fort Kochi," Kerala Tourism: <https://www.keralatourism.org/destination/fort-immanuel-fort-kochi/286/> [Accessed: 21 Sep. 2026].

⁷ Judith Geldenhuys and Michelle Kelly-Louw, "Demystifying hate speech under the PEPUDA," *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 23 (2020), 1-50.

Ocean world (IOW).

For the people of Kochi, the Kapiri is a spectre, a benevolent ghost, a guardian angel. The stories and legends surrounding the Kapiri describe a mysterious man, dressed entirely in white and often seen smoking a cigar. According to local lore, the Kapiri is believed to offer assistance and bestow wealth upon those he encounters. These narratives are closely connected with material sites of worship (Kapirithara). These locations are found across Fort Kochi and Mattancherry. Kapirithara shrines are inconspicuous spaces of worship, noticed because of “blazing candles and the strong scent of burning incense.”⁸ These shrines appear differently from other visible religious structures, such as shrines for Christian saints popular in Kochi, or the dargahs or mausoleums of Muslim saints. They look like miniature houses with a gable structure. Devotees, primarily members of the marginalised communities of Kochi, leave offerings such as arrack or toddy (locally produced alcohol), grilled fish, beef, and cigars at the Kapirithara. There are also shrines in the form of solitary stones called *Kapirikallu* or Kapiri stones that lie on raised platforms under the *aanjali* tree (wild jack or *Artocarpus hirsutus*). It is commonly believed that these stones indicate the sites where Portuguese buried their treasure alongside enslaved individuals, and that the spectre of the African resides in or visits these spaces.

Despite its past embedded in colonialism and slavery, the Kapiri shrines do not commemorate cruelty. The oppressor is not vilified, nor is the Kapiri portrayed as a victim. What is remembered at the Kapirithara is not a straightforward binary between oppressor and oppressed, but a set of histories in which slavery, colonial violence, caste, and local memory have become entangled. This paper, therefore, examines the frameworks through which communities remember and memorialise the Kapiri. Remembering is a social process. It is also a manifestation of power. This memorialisation raises several critical questions. If the Kapirithara do not operate within a paradigm of victimhood, then what framework correctly characterizes them. This paper proposes a framework of “multiple memorialisation,” examining how memories of the Kapiri converge with local histories of caste oppression to produce shared yet distinct ways of remembrance. Within this framework, the memory of slavery is neither singular nor uniform, but articulated differently across communities, social locations, and rituals, allowing for

⁸ Jeychandran, “Marginalized narratives,” 113.

simultaneous, and sometimes conflicting, recollections within the same site (Kapirithara). This in turn invites a closer look at how the material practices of the shrines and their accompanying folklore enable a convergence of histories, even as they produce divergent ways of remembrance. In doing so, it asks how local memory complicates dominant historiographies of slavery in South Asia and the IOW.

This paper begins by situating the Kapiri shrines within the scholarship on memory and slavery in the IOW. It then provides the historical context of slavery, caste, and colonialism on the Malabar Coast, specifically Kochi. The core of the analysis is ethnographic, structured around the framework of multiple memorialisation to examine how the Kapiri is venerated across Konkani Brahmin, lower-caste Pulaya, Dheevara, and Ezhava, Latin Catholic, Luso-Indian, and Muslim communities of the region. It argues that this pluralistic memory and multiple memorialisation complicate existing models of remembering of slavery and open up a distinct paradigm in understanding the afterlife of bondage in South Asia.

The ethnographic sections of this study are based on field visits conducted between 2021 and 2024 in Kochi. Conversations with devotees, caretakers of the shrines, and the locals were largely informal and are treated as ethnographic encounters rather than formal interviews. Gopinath Shetty and Ambika agreed to be named in this article. John and Freddie are pseudonyms. Bony Thomas and Mansoor Naina, both authors and local scholars, shared their respective accounts in phone and personal conversations. These exchanges are not sources of factual verification but are approached as repositories of memory, as expressions of how communities have processed and made sense of their past. The analysis is based on a dialogic process of interpretation. The stories, rituals, spatial arrangements, and documents are not treated as static data, but as local memorials whose meanings emerged, in part, through interactions with devotees and caretakers.

FORGOTTEN AS HISTORY, REMEMBERED AS SPIRIT: THEORISING NON-DISCURSIVE MEMORY AND MULTIPLE MEMORIALISATION

The myth of the Kapiri is over three centuries old, yet its narratives remain strikingly diverse and persistently contemporary. How does one account for the fact that a spectral figure, an enslaved African, has come to be remembered and revered

with such extraordinary respect across the region? How does one explain the divergent meanings assigned to the same figure within a tightly knit social landscape, one where caste hierarchies and religious identities otherwise operate with remarkable rigidity? And how might this mode of commemoration be placed against the institutionalised, nationalised, archival, or trauma-centred paradigms that dominate memorialisation of slavery? To address these questions, it is necessary to ask whether prevailing theories of memory, memorial practice, and Indian Ocean religiosity can meaningfully accommodate the figure of the Kapiri.

The Kapirithara in Kochi have no archive, no founding text, and no single account of who the Kapiri was. Canonical theories of memory studies would read this as memory that has not yet consolidated. Jan Assmann, for instance, describes everyday intergenerational transmission of stories and practices as communicative memory, and cultural memory as the more durable, canonised forms of memorialisation, institutionalised in monuments, rituals, texts, and other enduring mediating structures that sustain collective identity.⁹ Similarly, Pierre Nora, through his formulation, *lieux de mémoire*, argues that memory becomes anchored in material sites.¹⁰ Despite their differences, both frameworks assume that memorial practices ultimately acquire a sense of coherence, durability, and communal recognition. That is, they treat consolidation as the normative aspect of memorial practice. Divergence, plurality, and non-resolution appear within these frameworks as problems to be overcome rather than legitimate mnemonic formations. However, the Kapirithara has outlived the intergenerational aspect of communicative memory. It has not consolidated into cultural memory or crystallized into a monolith of *lieux de mémoire*. Rather, it persists outside these trajectories of mnemonic consolidation. While the frameworks posited by Assmann and Nora explain how memory becomes institutionalised and publicly recognised, they are less concerned with the ways in which memory persists through embodied practice. It is this concern that drives a parallel strand of scholarship in memory studies. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is foundational to this shift, describing it as "embodied history" that becomes internalised as "second nature" and thereby forgotten as history.¹¹ In this discourse, practice becomes a different way of remembering the past. Everyday choices such

⁹ Jan Assmann, "Communicative and cultural memory," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 109-18.

¹⁰ Pierre Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory: The construction of the French past*, vol. 1: *Conflicts and divisions*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 56.

as marriage strategies, ethnic identifications, and alliances, as well as disruptive and violent transregional events such as conquest, colonialism, migration, and war, are all “rendered internal” and “incorporated into people and their social and cultural practice.”¹² John and Jean Comaroff present this process of internalisation in their analysis of Christian missions in Africa.¹³ Reshaped by the macroprocess of colonialism, the everyday lives of the colonised change. In sanitary practices, work ethic, and daily routines, the body becomes an object of memory, a repository of the larger historical processes. Through the movement of bodies, habits, and rituals, the memorialised experience “merges subjectivity and social world.”¹⁴ Paul Connerton extends this insight through his concept of habit memory, arguing that the past is reproduced through the “capacity to reproduce a certain performance.”¹⁵ In these mnemonic performances or commemorative rituals, the past is remembered, reproduced, and memorialised.

The aspect of embodiment, however, does not explain why certain histories become embodied instead of being narrated. At this juncture, it is crucial to recognise that practical, non-discursive memory carries historical experiences that discursive accounts cannot or will not articulate, given that the history in question is one of violence, complicity, and social rupture. The stories that emerge in such contexts are rarely coherent or complete and often persist in fragments. Ann Laura Stoler reminds us that such fragmentation is neither accidental nor neutral. In her work on colonial Southeast Asia, Stoler shows that absences, elisions, and partial recollections are not mere voids but socially mediated practices through which communities selectively reorganise difficult pasts.¹⁶ In his turn, Ralph Austen notes a certain silence over the slave trade in West Africa.¹⁷ The nature of slavery, the violence and moral entanglements it produced for all communities involved made it an unattractive history to be claimed. Amidst the silence, what remains is a fragmented, unrecorded past that accrues spiritual and affective force. These remnants manifest in different

¹² Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and historical imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5.

¹³ John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 36-39.

¹⁴ Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, “How bodies remember: Social memory and bodily experience of criticism, resistance, and delegitimation following China’s Cultural Revolution,” *New Literary History*, 25, 3 (1994), 716-17.

¹⁵ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 22.

¹⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the intimate in colonial rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 165.

¹⁷ Ralph A. Austen, “The slave trade as history and memory: Confrontations of slaving voyage documents and communal traditions,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 58, 1 (2001), 236.

forms. In Congolese stories, witches transport stolen souls across the Atlantic to work in factories, in Cameroonian accounts sorcerers turn victims into plantation zombies, vampire cowrie shells grow on human corpses.¹⁸ The past may have been “forgotten as history but remembered as spirits, as a menacing landscape, as images in divination, as marriage, [and] as witchcraft.”¹⁹ The silence around cruelty at Kafirithara, or the forgetting itself, thus emerges as a structurally produced condition.

One way in which such fragmented memories persist is through the landscapes they inhabit. In *Memories of the Slave Trade*, Rosalind Shaw develops the concept of “spirit geography” from her research in Sierra Leone, where the spirits of ancestors are believed to inhabit the physical environment.²⁰ This belief bestows spiritual significance onto spaces, such as sacred groves, rivers, and rocks, where people engage in practices, including pouring libations, making offerings, and holding ceremonies. Through spirit geography, Shaw offers an alternate way of understanding the complex cultural ties that people have with their immediate environment. In the absence of written literature, the environment itself becomes the primary archive, a mnemonic repository, acquiring religious and supernatural qualities shaped by fragmented, often obscured memories. As Shaw notes, memory crystallises in “the dangerous invisible presences that pervade the landscape itself.”²¹ The Kafirithara constitute a spatiality suited to this spirit geography. However, they also exceed Shaw’s concept. The silence surrounding slavery in Kochi does not simply produce spectral presences, but multiplicitous meanings. The same African demigod is refracted into fear, reverence, kinship, and threat. Here, a shared landscape becomes the condition for multiple memorialisation.

Shaw’s framework, however, was built for a particular social configuration. Her Temne communities in Sierra Leone, despite their internal complexity, share a broadly common relationship to the history being remembered. They are communities that lived primarily under the threat of enslavement and raiding, remembering a history of predation from a relatively unified social position. Shaw herself observes that the Atlantic slave trade was not the same process for the New England merchant, the English ship captain, the African slave trader, the community

¹⁸ Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade*, 9.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 46.

²¹ Ibid., 50.

living under threat of enslavement, and the enslaved individual.²² This observation, deployed in service of an argument about modernity rather than memory, opens a theoretical possibility that her framework does not pursue. The present article develops this possibility by asking how a singular historical referent may sustain multiple, socially differentiated forms of memorialisation.

These formulations provide valuable insights into understanding the Kapiirithara. However, they do not encompass the nuances—certain silences, multiplicitous memories, absence of victimhood, coexisting and contradictory narratives—that constitute the Kapiirithara. None of these frameworks seem to fully account for a context where a singular, enslaved spectral figure is remembered through varied and community-specific registers. These memories neither converge into a shared narrative nor operate within paradigms of redemptive memory or nationalist memorialisation. Instead, the variations are conditioned by social location. For some, the Kapiri is a protective ancestor worthy of reverence. For others, he is a force who must be approached with caution or fear. What emerges through these varied reverences is not disorder or chaos but a locally coherent system of coexisting memorialisation.

It is in this light that we propose the concept of “multiple memorialisation”: a mnemonic formation in which a singular historical referent, a figure, event, or site, anchors not a unified narrative, but a constellation of divergent and often simultaneous ways of memorialisation. It foregrounds plurality, multiple meanings, and often their contradictory and diverse coexistence. Within this framework, divergence itself becomes the normative mode of engagement with the past. At the Kapiirithara, this multiplicity generates a non-redemptive, non-traumatic, non-institutional mode of remembering that challenges dominant historiographies of slavery in South Asia and the IOW.

In order to decipher the complex mnemonic landscape of Kapiirithara, it is important to understand the historical conditions that shaped Kochi. The memorial shrine does not exist in abstraction. Its multiplicity is anchored in the sociohistorical conditions of the region, layered in caste, enslavement, colonialism, urbanisation, and mercantile capitalism. These conditions produced and continue to produce the social worlds, ritual practices, and sensibilities within which the Kapiri continues to inhabit. The following section situates the Kapiri within the history of Kochi,

²² Ibid., 16.

outlining the conditions that made multiple memorialisation both possible and intelligible.

CASTE, BONDAGE, AND COLONIALISM: A BRIEF HISTORY OF KOCHI AND THE KAPIRI

The framework of multiple memorialisation at the Kaperithara is anchored in the entangled histories of Kochi mired in caste, capital and colonial interactions. Slavery on the Malabar Coast, sustained by the caste system, persisted well into the early twentieth century. Records of slave transactions dating back to 876 CE reveal an entrenched system of hereditary servitude tied to agricultural labour.²³ The caste system facilitated slavery, embedding it into the political economy as well as the social structure of the region. The arrival of Europeans did not disrupt this system, but in fact, extended it. For the Portuguese and the Dutch, the slave trade was lucrative, and they exploited it in the same manner as did any native upper-caste community in Kerala.²⁴ The European contribution lay in how they incorporated the slave economy of Kerala into the more extensive Indian Ocean slave trade network. Slavery primarily affected lower-caste individuals, though even non-slave caste members were occasionally traded. The system was pervasive, involving Syrian Christians, Latin Catholics, local Muslims, upper-caste Hindus, the Dutch and the Portuguese. It was an integral part of life in the Malabar Coast. Local markets operated regularly, and even churches served as temporary slave warehouses.²⁵ By the late sixteenth century, the Portuguese slave export trade from India had reached its peak, with roughly 5,000 to 6,000 slaves shipped annually, chiefly from Kochi.²⁶ Following its annexation by the Dutch in 1663, Kochi became a vital East India Company (VOC) outpost, connecting Mozambique, Surat, Ceylon, Persia, the Coromandel Coast, the Cape of Good Hope, Bengal, and the Indonesian archipelago.

²³ For more on agrestic slavery on the Malabar Coast, see K. Saradhamoni, "Agrestic slavery in Kerala in the nineteenth century," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 10, 4 (1973), 371-85.

²⁴ Vinil Baby Paul, "Local networks of the slave trade in colonial Kerala," in *Slavery and Bondage in Asia, 1550-1850: Towards a global history of coerced labour*, eds. Kate Ekama, Lisa Hellman, and Matthias van Rossum (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 199-212.

²⁵ Francis Day, *The Land of the Permauls, or Cochin: Its past and its present* (1863; repr. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2024), 40.

²⁶ K. S. Mathew, *Maritime Trade of the Malabar Coast and the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2016), 159.

Besides pepper, one of the region's primary exports was slaves.²⁷ Dutch records on slave transportation from Kochi, detailing the name, age, caste, and gender, underscore the symbiotic relationship between slavery and the caste system.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, the Pulayas, the agrestic slave caste, accounted for the majority of the exported slaves, followed by the Ezhava caste.²⁹

Enslaved individuals from the Malabar Coast were transported across Africa and Southeast Asia. Simultaneously, Africans, locally called Kapiri, were brought to the coast as domestic slaves and soldiers. The Portuguese and the Dutch captured people from Africa's western and southern regions and sold them along the Indian coast. Indian aristocrats and kings purchased these enslaved Africans as markers of power. For instance, the King of Cochin, Sakthan Thampuran (1751-1805), kept several African children.³⁰ In addition, a significant number of European households in the Malabar Coast owned enslaved Africans.³¹ While the scale and precise routes of this inward trade are less documented than the export trade, its existence is attested in regional and colonial historiography.³²

However, the popular legend that the Portuguese massacred and buried these men is not found in archives. It is local lore. Yet it is this very narrative, and not the archive, that persists with remarkable force. While the historical record establishes the presence of slavery on the Malabar Coast, it tells little about how these pasts circulate outside archives. Whatever survives in local memory appears in diffused and often contradictory forms. Within this mnemonic landscape, the Kapiri is revered not as a historical figure but as a lived presence whose meanings diverge across communities. Examining narratives on the Kapirithara shows how multiple memorialisation operates on the ground and how the afterlives of slavery in Kochi exceed textual documentation and conventional frameworks of historiography.

²⁷ Linda Mbeki and Matthias van Rossum, "Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world: A study into the networks and backgrounds of the slavers and the enslaved in South Asia and South Africa," *Slavery & Abolition*, 38, 1 (2017), 99.

²⁸ OBP (Overgekomen brieven en papieren) and acten van transport are Dutch archives concerning transportation.

²⁹ Mbeki and van Rossum, "Private slave trade," 110.

³⁰ Puthethazhathu Rama Menon, *Sakthan Thampuran* (Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi, 2023), 501.

³¹ Vinil Baby Paul, *Adima Keralathinte Adrishya Charithram* [The invisible history of slavery in Kerala] (Kottayam: DC Books, 2021), 31.

³² For Dutch and Portuguese documents on the African slave trade in Kochi, see Cochin State Archives (hereafter: CSA), Series I: 375/42, 375/43, 376/20, 380/2, 380/4, 380/5; Series II: 1159/7. For Portuguese slave trading on the Malabar Coast, see Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa: An account of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and their inhabitants*, ed. Mansel Longworth Dames (London: Hakluyt Society, 2011).

SPECTRAL ANCESTORS AND VERNACULAR VENERATION: THE SOCIAL LIFE OF KAPIRI IN KOCHI

Across Hindu, Christian, and Muslim localities, shrines dedicated to the Kochi appear in courtyards, street corners, and temple compounds, sustained by communities positioned differently within the caste hierarchy. These sites are neither uniform nor centrally regulated; their practices vary widely, shaped by neighbourhood histories, caste relations, and the everyday concerns of devotees. What links them is a shared understanding of the Kapiri as a powerful resident spirit—at once guardian, landlord, and ancestral presence. This section draws on ethnographic encounters across these shrines to show how multiple memorialisation takes shape in lived practice, and how the Kapiri's presence becomes embedded in the social life of contemporary Kochi.

The image of the Kapiri as an African demigod is deeply entangled within the caste system which shaped the historical context of slavery in Kochi. The Kapirithara stands as a relic, a vestige of these encounters. However, the veneration of the Kapiri is not confined to a single caste or locality. These shrines have long been maintained by various communities, predominantly by those positioned at the lower end of the caste hierarchy. This diffusion also shows that the devotional domain of Kapiri worship has never been watertight. Within this continuum, the presence of Kapirithara in the compounds of landowning Konkani Brahmin families is particularly interesting. Here, a community historically associated with economic power and caste privilege tends to subaltern shrines of the enslaved. In this preservation lies a paradox that unsettles fixed understandings of caste and the memorialisation of slavery.

The Konkani Brahmins migrated to Kochi from Goa in the sixteenth century following Portuguese persecution.³³ Among their descendants is our interlocutor, Gopinath Shetty, who owns a piece of land where a Kapirithara stands. Shetty had initially intended to sell the centrally located property in Amaravati, Fort Kochi, which contained both a *Yakshikaavu* and a Kapirithara.³⁴ A devout believer, Shetty sought guidance from a local astrologer, who cautioned against selling the land. The

³³ Bony Thomas, *Kochiites: A look into the intangible heritage of Kochi* (Kochi: Pranatha Books, 2018), 11.

³⁴ *Yakshis*, female nature spirits, are believed to dwell in sacred groves, such as *Yakshikaavu*, as depicted in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions.

astrologer warned that the land's true inhabitants—the yakshi and Kapiri—would not permit such a transaction and instructed him instead to strengthen their presence through ritual. Acting on this counsel, Shetty abandoned his plans to sell the land and undertook the clearing and renovation of both the yakshikaavu and the Kapirithara, reinstating daily prayers in these sacred spaces. He believes that this decision has considerably improved his financial circumstances.

In many places, Kapirikallu or Kapirithara might be absent, yet these practices persist. Shetty described this phenomenon as “sankalpam,” a concept in Hinduism signifying a solemn resolve to honour a deity through worship. Despite the absence of tangible objects like Kapirithara or Kapirikallu, these sites are believed to be inhabited by Kapiri, prompting regular prayers and rituals to be conducted therein. Across several spaces where the Kapiri is believed to reside, a distinctive annual ritual is observed. It takes place after the locality's ten-day temple festival, on the night of Holi—a festival that is otherwise uncommon in Kerala. At night, devotees assemble at the site and prepare offerings. Cooked white rice is placed on a banana leaf, accompanied by toddy, cigars, and *puttu* arranged in separate coconut shells.³⁵ Traditionally, the ritual involved *Kozhivettu*, or the sacrifice of a chicken. Two men, usually from the *Ambattan* or “lower” barber caste, slaughter the chicken and drain its blood over the rice, producing a vivid red colour. This rice is called *manja choru* or yellow rice: the term reminiscent of the sacred turmeric-infused rice, a key element in upper caste Hindu ceremonies. The chicken's head is placed atop the rice, while those who perform the sacrifice take home the remainder.

The offerings are then placed at four bridges, positioned in cardinal directions, after which residents are forbidden from accessing these bridges or entering the Kapirithara that night. The placement of these offerings at the bridges subtly draws Kochi's archipelagic geography into the ritual's spatial logic, mapping the Kapiri's guardianship onto the region's limits and liminal points. Numerous personal accounts of sightings of the Kapiri on these bridges reinforce his imagined role as a nocturnal guardian of Kochi.

Following the passage of the Kerala Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act of 1968, which banned the sacramental killing of birds and animals in the precincts of public religious worship, chicken sacrifice was discontinued at these

³⁵ Puttu is a steamed rice cake with coconut, popular in Kerala.

sites.³⁶ As a symbolic substitute, the chicken was replaced with ash gourd, a widely available vegetable in Kerala. A large ash gourd is cut into three pieces and placed next to the rice, alongside the other offerings. The rice, which had previously acquired its red hue from the chicken's blood, is now coloured using *chunnaambu* (slaked lime, or calcium hydroxide) and ground turmeric.

Similarly, rituals for the Kapiri are also performed in temples across the region. However, these differ fundamentally from the popular outdoor rites. Unlike the conventional temple rites, these are not conducted by Brahmin priests inside the temple. The annual ceremony honouring the Kapiri is held outside and performed by members of the *Kanakkan* caste, traditionally coconut tree climbers who are considered lower caste. This temple ceremony excludes the characteristic offerings of meat, toddy, or cigars and avoids animal sacrifice. Instead, rice is mixed with turmeric and black pepper and placed across the four bridges. In some parts of Kochi, such as Vypin, this integration extends further, and the African spirit is incorporated into the minor Hindu pantheon and worshipped alongside other local deities in *kaavu*, or sacred groves.³⁷

Similar to the various personal accounts of the help of the Kapiri Muthappan, stories also circulate about the rituals themselves. Following the rites, it is forbidden to visit these sites or even look back. Ambika, a 31-year-old from a Konkani Brahmin household, recalls a story popular in her family. When she was two, she witnessed the annual ritual at the Kapirithara. After it ended, everyone turned to leave, obeying the dictum not to look back. But baby Ambika, resting on her mother's shoulders, was facing backwards toward the shrine. She began crying as if she had been slapped and did not stop until later that night. Her family believes it was the sight—or the slap—of the Kapiri that caused her distress.

Conversations with various caretakers and stakeholders of these shrines suggest that these rituals are understood as inseparable from the land itself. A recurring aspect in these conversations is a consensus that the Kapiri is the true resident or lord of the land, and humans are merely cohabiting with these supernatural entities. As the land's overlord, the Kapiri is believed to protect its inhabitants, making it imperative for people to perform the rites every day to secure

³⁶ "The Kerala Animals and Birds Sacrifices Prohibition Act, 1968," Animal Legal and Historical Center: <https://www.animallaw.info/statute/animal-sacrifice-kerala-animals-and-birds-sacrifices-prohibition-act-1968> [Accessed: 21 Sep. 2026].

³⁷ Jeychandran, "Marginalized narratives," 113.

his goodwill. Since the Kapiri is also understood as a subaltern god, born of historical injustice, these dictums implicitly demand ethical conduct from upper-caste landlords. The Kapiri, as a figure of authority, is believed to shape the destiny of the land, and to bring misfortune upon landlords who fail to be just to their lower-caste dependents.

These stories are not limited to Konkani Brahmins or the lower-caste communities, and conversations with devotees at these shrines offer important insights. One evening, one of us met a young Latin Catholic man in his mid-twenties, referred to here as John for reasons of confidentiality, lighting candles at a Kapirithara. The reason he was here, he said, was that he had recently lost his motorbike near a local eatery on his way home from work. Despite filing a police complaint, the bike was missing for days. It was then that his grandmother advised him to make a vow at the Kapirithara and light a set number of candles. John did so for two consecutive days, after which he found the motorbike at the very spot where it had gone missing, near the eatery. When we met him, he was at the shrine to fulfil his vow.

The veneration of the Kapiri is followed among Muslims in Kochi as well. Mansoor Naina notes that some Muslims refer to the figure as Kapiri *thangal*.³⁸ Thangal is an honorific used for the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad in Kerala, and more broadly for Muslim saintly figures. There also exists a Muslim variation of the Kapirithara, structurally similar to its Hindu and Christian counterparts: an inconspicuous flat stone serving as the focal point. However, it also incorporates elements reminiscent of a dargah: an elevated platform draped in coloured silk cloths, incense sticks, and flowers. There are lit lamps or *vilakku*, an uncommon element in the Islamic practices of the region.

Familiar tales prevail among the Muslims in Mattancherry about the Kapiri. There are numerous small ponds near the mosques, originally intended to be spaces for *wudu* or ablution. Since ablution facilities have moved indoors, these ponds have now largely become recreational spaces for children. However, children are warned not to go there on Fridays. The story goes that the Kapiri will “catch” anyone who swims on Friday, a narrative likely intended to discourage children from skipping *Jumu'ah*, the obligatory congregational prayer held on Friday at noon.

In the lore of Kochi, the Kapiri does not merely judge from afar. He is very

³⁸ Mansoor Naina, personal conversation with author, 31 Mar. 2022.

much a participant in the many events and tales of moral drama unfolding in the city. Bony Thomas recounts the story of Freddie, another pseudonym, a middle-aged Luso-Indian³⁹ man who often gets drunk and sets off to visit a local sex worker.⁴⁰ Freddie believes that on such nights, he is intercepted and beaten by the Kapiri for his adulterous pursuits. He wakes up the next morning on the road, realising that he never made it to his destination. This comedic anecdote is more fable than fact but further reveals the way in which locals interpret and define the Kapiri. In these part-moral, part-supernatural narratives, the Kapiri ancestors anchor their presence in the everyday spaces of Kochi: bridges, crossroads, and back alleys where the divine and the profane routinely intersect.

Across Kochi, everyday engagements with the Kapirithara cut across castes and occupations. Fish workers routinely light candles before going out to sea, seeking protection and a favourable catch. A Pulaya woman may approach the Kapiri to recover a lost gold ornament, while an Ezhava man offers incense at the start of each month for prosperity.

The ethnographic snippets presented thus far demonstrate that the memory of the enslaved Kapiri of Kochi is not a monolith. It is articulated through a plurality of positionalities. This plurality of discourses, and their stable coexistence surrounding the same shrines, constitute the lived enactment of “multiple memorialisation.” Having established the landscape, we may move on to discuss the theoretical and regional implications of the phenomenon.

MULTIPLE MEMORIALISATION: THE AFTERLIVES OF SLAVERY IN KOCHI

Why does the memory of slavery in Kochi take a form that so conspicuously refuses the idioms of victimhood and anti-colonial resistance that are common tropes in Western scholarship on the subject? Across these sites, the Kapiri emerges not as a stable entity but as a relatable, mobile figure. His authority is not doctrinal, but negotiable and familiar. These practices do not simply preserve a memory of slavery. Across this constellation of shrines, stories, and practices, the Kapiri

³⁹ Luso-Indian refers here to people of Portuguese-Indian descent.

⁴⁰ Bony Thomas, telephone conversation with author, 21 Aug. 2023.

becomes a figure through whom communities register historical injury, articulate caste hierarchies, and imagine forms of justice that exceed institutional religion or formal historiography. They refract it into distinct, yet not watertight, moral grammars of fear, reciprocity, guardianship and ancestral surveillance. It is this vernacular assemblage, at once devotional, mnemonic, and moral, that provides the ground for analysing how afterlives of slavery persist in Kochi beyond archives.

The conspicuous absence of memorialisation centred around victimhood cannot be attributed to a simple lack of evidence or historical amnesia. For instance, in some communities, written literary production was never an important means of historical transmission. In others, access to public commemoration, archival inscription, or sometimes even literacy, was structurally foreclosed. It is due to factors like these that these absences cannot be read as a lack of memory or historical consciousness.

The shrines and the narratives indicate that absences need not point to a lack of memory or history. Documented historiography or written literature are not the only possible response to systemic violence. By limiting ourselves to binary discourses, we overlook other legitimate responses to domination, such as willful forgetting or a refusal to remember, resulting in amnesia or oblivion, complicating the possibility of resistance through counter-memories. Forgetting is not merely a passive failure of memory but is an active and complex process.

The Kapirithara is not an anomaly but a quintessential example of this active, complex process. These shrines demonstrate that in the IOW the memorialisation of slavery often operates not through the grammar of victimhood and resistance, but through a local logic. Here, the memory of slavery was neither erased nor formally archived, but transmuted into ritual landscape, with concurrent nodes of memorialisation. This multiplicitous memorialisation also erases the possibility of homogenous practices indicative of appropriation by hegemonic power structures. Stoler shows that communities that have experienced violence do not automatically construct a self-perception rooted in victimhood. The absence of a victimhood narrative is also not the absence of memory but a specific way of processing and inhabiting a difficult past.⁴¹ In death, the Kapiri does not become, or remain, a victim. The treasure he guards is no longer the mark of his bondage, but his authority. Kapiri's loyalty and piety, which in life were the conditions of his

⁴¹ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, 182.

enslavement, become in death the sources of his moral power. With the position of power transmuted, so does the treasure: the treasure of the white man becomes the treasure of the Kapiri. He becomes the all-powerful lord of the land. This transmutation, however, is not a denial of violence. It is a specific response that refuses victimhood as its organising logic.

In Kapirithara, these ceremonies persist as inherited practices through which communal identities are continually reproduced. The Konkani Brahmins, in their social location as upper-caste landowners, reenact their historical role by worshipping the deities before them: the yakshi, and the Kapiri. They delegate the act of sacrifice to lower-caste groups, as has been done historically, handing it down to the Kanakkan caste and the Ambattan caste, who maintain these ritual “rights.” Within the caste system, this delegation is also regarded as a matter of pride for all parties involved.

Once animal slaughter was outlawed, they adapted the rituals, changing it to an offering of ash gourd. The aim of the worship is also tied to their caste. The reverence is bound to fear. As the “original” lord of the land, the Kapiri is believed to possess the power to destroy the very land these Brahmins own and inhabit. Their prayers seek protection from his wrath, offering assurances of justice toward tenants and gifts in exchange for benevolence.

For devotees from lower-caste communities, especially the Parayas and the Pulayas, the Kapiri is a comrade in arms. He is an equal, a dignifying demigod to whom they address prayers and ask for help, bypassing hierarchical regimes. Ezhava⁴² devotees likewise describe the Kapiri through a register of equality. They do not fear him. In fact, they look forward to his benevolence and the gifts he offers. Within Ezhava traditions in Vypin and elsewhere, the Kapiri is incorporated into a pantheon of minor deities.

For the Latin Catholics of Kochi, who are predominantly descendants of lower caste converts, reverence for the Kapiri persists as a localised, syncretic practice. It operates on a register similar to the veneration of saints at *Kappela* (small roadside chapels), where devotees light candles and incense. The Kapiri is absorbed into the local Catholic idiom of saintly intercession and takes up the garb

⁴² The Ezhavas are a formerly untouchable, non-Dalit, lower-caste community. For more on the Ezhavas, see Adeep Hussain and S. Saranya, “Navigating caste in colonial Kerala: Aquatic ontology and the politics of devotion in Sree Narayana Guru’s *Daiva Dasakam*,” *Shima: The international journal of research into island cultures*, 20, 1 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.21463/shima.288>.

of a familiar guardian. However, this is also a vestigial adaptation. The Kapiri retains his identity as a benevolent demigod from a pre-Christian, or rather, subaltern pantheon that coexists with, and is not subsumed within, the Catholic cosmos.

For the Luso-Indian community of Kochi, however, the Kapiri is not a benevolent figure. Despite them falling into the broad category of Latin Catholics, the presence of Kapiri is typically associated with fear among the community. As in Freddie's anecdote, the Luso-Indian imagination of the Kapiri is governed by a fear-filled reverence. This fear may also emerge from the community's historical involvement in the slave trade and slaveholding under Portuguese and Dutch rule. It is possible that myths involving repercussions against unjust masters are based on real past events. For instance, based on VOC Court records of Kochi, Alexander Geelen writes about Barrido, an eighteenth-century Christian convert from the Pulaya caste in Dutch Kochi, owned by a Topeas or a Luso-Indian.⁴³ Such archival traces suggest that this fear-filled reverence may derive from a sublimated awareness of the violence historically enacted upon enslaved populations.

Within the Muslim communities of Mattancherry and Fort Kochi, Kapiri veneration, while localised and often class-inflected, is integrated into the moral and spatial imagination of the neighbourhood. Here, the Kapiri is not an object of worship. Instead, he is a figure in moral storytelling. Reverence is expressed not through rites or regular visits to the shrines but through circulating tales. Stories of his intimidating appearance, his kindness to the needy, and his ability to punish wrongdoers are often told to children. These narratives, in fact, align with and adapt existing cultural forms. Much like stories of saints or the jinn populate the Muslim moral imagination, the Kapiri is absorbed as a familiar yet distinct supernatural figure. Through these locally crafted and continually retold accounts, the Kapiri becomes a moral agent within the everyday geography of Kochi.

In this light, the responses of the Konkani Brahmins, lower-caste communities, Latin Catholics, Luso-Indians, and Muslims, and their distinct ways of veneration, start to make sense. For these communities, the Kapirithara becomes a space for making sense of their world. It becomes a crystallisation of memory from their own social locations. Their selfhood, subjectivity, and identities are

⁴³ Alexander Geelen, "Barrido: A thief, Christian, and Pulaya," in *Diversity and Empires: Negotiating plurality in European imperial projects from early modernity*, eds. Sophie Rose and Elisabeth Heijmans (London: Routledge, 2023), 55-75.

negotiated, imagined and reimagined through these sites. Memory is sustained through monuments, practices, and also through everyday acts of worship, storytelling, repetition, and restraint.

At the Kapirithara, a singular site anchors a multiplicity of memories. Slavery and its afterlives do not generate a unified narrative or a standardised moral vocabulary. Instead, they produce a communal memory refracted through divergent social positions. This multiplicity, in fact, offers a grounded means of remembering: one that situates slavery within the layered histories of Kochi, where caste-based and other forms of bondage governed everyday life, and where communities participated in slavery in different capacities. These differences in memorialisation, however, do not cancel each other out. Instead, they coexist around the same shrines, producing what can be described as multiple memorialisation: a condition in which a single historical figure or object sustains distinct moral lives across caste, class, religious, and occupational worlds. Memory here is not stabilised through consensus or institutional narration. It emerges as coexisting multiplicities produced and reproduced through ritual, and everyday practice. This multiplicity is not a failure of memory, but a historically conditioned and socially mediated transmutation: a process through which the figure of the Kapiri is continually reinterpreted and reproduced across distinct moral worlds.

Kapiri features in novels such as *Ora Pro Nobis* (1981) by Ponjikkara Rafi, *Chavunilam* (1996) and *Adiyalapretham* (2019) by P. F. Mathews, *Litanies of Dutch Battery* (2010) by N. S. Madhavan, *Maya* (2008) by George Thundiparambil, and *Ettamathe Velipadu* (2019) by Anoop Sasikumar, among others.⁴⁴ *Ora Pro Nobis* is the story of the descendants of the Kapiri. Set in 18th-century Dutch-controlled Kochi, the novel unravels through the bond between a grandfather and a grandson whose great ancestor made a great sacrifice for their Portuguese masters. The grandfather, aware of the location of the treasure, is bound by loyalty and piety. He believes that, in death, he will join his ancestors in guarding the treasure. *Adiyalapretham* paints a grimmer picture where the African is a victim of imperial tussles and greed. The loyal slave is stabbed and thrown into the treasure chest by his master, forever binding him to its guardianship. In *Chavunilam*, the Kapiri is a

⁴⁴ Rafi, *Ora Pro Nobis*; P. F. Mathews, *Chavunilam* (Kottayam: DC Books, 1996); P. F. Mathews, *Adiyalapretham* (Thrissur: Green Books, 2019); N. S. Madhavan, *Litanies of Dutch Battery* [Lanthan Batheriyile Luthiniyakal, 2003], trans. Rajesh Rajamohan (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010); George Thundiparambil, *Maya* (Pondicherry: Gaudi Books, 2008); Anoop Sasikumar, *Ettamathe Velipadu* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2019).

pedagogue who punishes greed, a moral guardian of the buried wealth. Mathews draws an altar of solidarity, drawing a parallel between the African slave and the caste slave. Udaya Kumar calls it a screen narrative, a surface through which “suppressed local histories” of caste bondage are memorialised.⁴⁵ In *Litanies of Dutch Battery*, the Kapiri is a metaphorical figure that narrates the layered histories of Kochi. In *Maya* and *Ettamathe Velipadu*, the spectre of the African takes up the role of guardian of the city. No two of these novels produce the same Kapiri. The shared quality is perhaps the recognition that the Kapiri exceeds any single interpretation. This plurality, we argue, is an extension of practice, a reproduction of multiple memorialisation.

CONCLUSION: KAPIRITHARA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN MEMORYSCAPES

The memorial logic at work in the Kapirithara is neither isolated nor regional. In fact, it occupies a distinct position within a global spectrum of memorialising slavery, ranging from formal national monuments to local, embodied practices. At one end stand sites like Le Morne Brabant in Mauritius, Elmina Castle in Ghana or Gorée Island in Senegal, which anchor slavery within national imaginaries through architectural commemoration and ritualised restitution.⁴⁶ At the other end exist practices like the Zar and Tumbura, spirit possession cults of Northeast Africa, where the memory of the Arab and East African slave trades is transmuted into rituals of healing, resistance, and negotiation with ambivalent foreign spirits.⁴⁷ The Kapirithara resonate most closely with the latter, vernacular tradition. Like Zar and Tumbura, Kapirithara translates a history of bondage into a living ritual with

⁴⁵ Udaya Kumar, “The haunted present: Contemporary Malayalam fiction and Kerala’s unaccommodated pasts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Indian Literatures*, eds. Ulka Anjaria and Anjali Nerlekar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 76.

⁴⁶ For more on Le Morne, see Krish Seetah, “Objects past, objects present: Materials, resistance and memory from the Le Morne Old Cemetery, Mauritius,” *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 15, 2 (2015), 233-53. For more on Elmina Castle and its memorial practices, see Neelima Jeychandran, “Memory, heritage, and cultural display in the former colonial port cities of Elmina (Ghana) and Fort Kochi (India)” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2014), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8r99s82c>. For more on Gorée Island, see Ibrahima Thiaw, “Slaves without shackles: An archaeology of everyday life on Gorée Island, Senegal,” in *Slavery in Africa: Archaeology and memory*, eds. Paul Lane and Kevin C. MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 147-65.

⁴⁷ For more on Tumbura, see G. P. Makris, “Slavery, possession and history: The construction of the self among slave descendants in the Sudan,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 66, 2 (1996), 159-82. For more on Zar, see Richard Natvig, “Oromos, slaves, and the Zar spirits: A contribution to the history of the Zar cult,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 20, 4 (1987), 669-89.

supernatural actors. However, they part ways on a crucial register: affect. Where Zar spirits are often ambivalent or malevolent, the Kapiri is overwhelmingly benevolent. The enslaved African spirit of Kochi is a divine protector, a demigod, a guardian of neighbourhoods. This is a memorialisation that refuses victimhood. The shrines do not monumentalise slavery as a curated past. They absorb it into the everyday—a lit candle, a vow, a story told to children. This absorption complicates dominant assumptions about the memorialisation of slavery.

Kapirithara stand in strong contrast to the frameworks that dominate the study of slavery. Where Ana Lucia Araujo analyses public commemoration as a project of moral and historical reckoning of slavery, and where Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* theorises memory of slavery as a diasporic identity forged in foundational trauma, Kochi's shrines propose a different grammar.⁴⁸ This position of multiple memorialisation, however, should not be understood as contradictory to Araujo or Gilroy. In fact, multiple memorialisation populates and complicates rather than contradicts the existing practices of memorialising slavery.

The Kapirithara do not simply recall a violent past. In these sites, they sustain an ongoing dialogue, a negotiation between history, land, and spirit. In this dialogue, memory itself becomes a form of moral cohabitation. The cigar-smoking, toddy-drinking spectre endures as a testament to the distinct ways the Indian Ocean world remembers, forgets, and reinhabits the afterlives of human bondage.

⁴⁸ Ana Lucia Araujo, *Shadows of the Slave Past: Memory, heritage, and slavery* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).