

Re-constructing Grey Street in Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding*

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Introduction

In this paper I begin an exploration of the fictional constructions of Grey Street in Imraan Coovadia's novel, *The Wedding*, in order to attempt a deeper understanding of the connection between writers, place and identity in the South African Indian context. I am particularly interested in the experience of South African Indian urban space and how it is represented in literature. The Grey Street complex is a very interesting site for a study of this kind as it has, since the colonial era, been an intensely contested space. It is also a good indicator of South African Indian life since eighty percent of Indians are urban and over forty percent reside in Durban (Meer 1969:1). Many theories of urban space have already been established and much has been written in South Africa about the history and geography of the Grey Street complex. However, little has been said about the *literary* representations of Grey Street and a study of this kind can hopefully contribute to the debate on the cultural representation of urban space in South Africa and stimulate further studies of Indian literary production centered on writers, place and identity in the country.

This paper is adapted from my MA thesis, which analysed the fictional constructions of Grey Street by both Imraan Coovadia in *The Wedding* (2001) and Aziz Hassim in *The Lotus People* (2002), in order to explore the different ways in which South African Indian writers have constructed the Grey Street complex in their fiction¹. Although beyond the

¹ See my dissertation, *Fictional Constructions of Grey Street by Selected South African Indian Writers* (2007), supervised by Professor Lindy Stiebel.

scope of this paper, it must be acknowledged that other South African Indian writers have also represented Grey Street in their works, including Kesevaloo Goonam in *Coolie Doctor* (1991), Phyllis Naidoo in *Footprints in Grey Street* (2002), Mariam Akabor in *Flat 9* (2006) and Ravi Govender in *Down Memory Lane* (2006), and in a broader study they should be considered in relation to *The Wedding* in order to establish a more comprehensive view of the South African Indian experience of the Grey Street complex.

Historical Context

Since the colonial era, literary works representing the city of Durban have largely sidelined the experience of the Grey Street complex. This is evident, for example, in the work of Yvonne Miller entitled, *Dear Old Durban* (1985), in which she—a white South African—details the historical experiences of Durban's inhabitants in the different parts of the city. While her descriptions of the white-occupied areas of the city are thoroughly documented, when Miller goes on to describe Grey Street she admits,

I have said nothing about the very interesting Indian shops in Grey Street and the fascinating Indian Market because I knew nothing about them (1985:23).

It is this ignorance regarding the Indian areas of the city which has resulted largely in the Indian perspective being discarded in white, apartheid literature and the Grey Street complex being represented as a marginal and insignificant, though at times exotic, space (see, for example, Trapido 2003:82). As Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed highlight, the Indian perspective of South African history is lacking in the face of the overwhelming voice of colonial and apartheid ruling classes (2007:12). Today in the postcolonial/post-apartheid era there is a growing interest in the way in which postcolonial writers are using the textual space of fiction to redefine colonial spatial history. This paper explores the ways in which the South African Indian writer, Imraan Coovadia, through his novel, *The Wedding*, challenges the dominant, white spatial perspective of the city, re-

centering the borderlands and thus providing an alternative way of reading and writing the Grey Street complex.

The Grey Street complex, through which Grey Street runs, is a distinctly bounded space in Durban's city center and has, since the colonial era, been an intensely contested space. From as early as 1860, Indian migrants were brought to South Africa from India as indentured labourers to work on white-owned sugarcane farms in the colony. While this group of Indians mostly stayed in compounds in and around sugarcane farming areas, it was a second 'wave' of Indian immigrants, known as passenger Indians, who first settled in the Grey Street complex. From 1871 passenger Indians began coming to Natal freely in order to start up business ventures as they recognised early on that there was a market for the specialised needs of the indentured Indians in the colony (see Vahed 1995). Although the Grey Street complex was originally occupied by white settlers, it was marshy and not conducive to the use of wagons. As a result, Indians were left to make use of it while whites secured the more pleasant area of the Berea for their exclusive use (Badsha 2001:14).

It must be remembered, however, that although the whites initially gave way to Indian settlement in the Grey Street complex and in the colony generally, they believed that after the Indians had served their time as indentured labourers, they would all go back to India. For reasons beyond the scope of this paper to analyse in any depth, colonialists' expectations were thwarted when Indian immigrants decided to stay on in the colony after their terms of indenture had expired. Feeling increasingly threatened by the soaring number and economic success of the Indian population in Durban, the colonial government began to implement a number of strategies to control and quash what it deemed the 'Asiatic Menace'. From this point onwards the exclusion of Indians in Durban rose drastically, for the government

increasingly came to view town planning, public health, trade arrangements and other public issues in terms of racial and ethnic distinctions (Vahed 1995:42).

Numerous acts, including the Dealers Licenses Act (1897), were passed to restrict Indian trade and residence to the Grey Street complex alone, an area

in the white colonial city that became what Michel Foucault (1986) would call a 'heterotopia of exclusion', a site in which individuals whose behaviour or appearance is considered 'abnormal' or 'inferior' to the norm are placed. Furthermore, even though by 1911, 44 percent of the Indian population in the country was South African born, Indians were refused their right to South African citizenship right up until 1961 (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000:13). It is clear, therefore, that Indians in the Grey Street complex were, throughout the colonial and apartheid years, marginalised from the city's socio-spatial landscape, a circumstance that has in post-apartheid South Africa been redressed in the fictional works of South African Indian writers such as Coovadia.

Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding*

Because the kind of space I am looking at in this paper is a specifically urban city space, I draw specifically on Foucault's (1977; 1980) theorisation of the Panopticon which has influenced the construction and experience of the modern city with its grid-iron street patterns and high-rise buildings that create optimum urban surveillance and control. This idea of rational, top-down urban planning is important when analysing the spatial policy and urban design of the apartheid city, a policy that relied on the principles of the Panopticon to ensure control and order over the 'black spots' of the city (see, for example, Judin & Vladislavic 1998). The Grey Street complex, the Indian zone in the city of Durban, was an area kept under tight surveillance by the apartheid government. It was a zone that was constantly policed to ensure that Indians remained in their designated area and did not 'spill' onto the whites-only streets.

As a counterpoint to Foucault's notion of the panoptic ordering of urban space, urban theories by Michel de Certeau in 'Walking in the city' (1984) and Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* (2002) are used in this paper to explore an alternative way of engaging with city space. As the title of his essay connotes, de Certeau is concerned with the seemingly mundane, everyday practice of walking through the city. He argues that, through the action of walking, pedestrians have the power to individuate and make ambiguous the legible order given to cities by planners and thus escape the 'imaginary totalizations' imposed from above (de Certeau 1993:153). In

other words, for de Certeau, it is the pedestrians of the city down below who are the real makers and shapers of cities. It will be shown in an analysis of *The Wedding* to follow that, through an intimate knowledge of walking through the city, the Indian inhabitants of Grey Street are able to re-route and even re-root themselves in spaces that evade apartheid's surveillance infrastructure.

Like de Certeau, Benjamin believed that the city should be approached subjectively, on foot, by the individual. In *The Arcades Project* he focuses on the marginalia of the city, considering the gambler, the *flaneur* and the prostitute as being central to a fuller understanding of life in the modern city. This will be applicable to the characters in *The Wedding* who are considered by the white colonial government to be the flotsam and jetsam of society. However, Benjamin's *flaneur* figure, whom he considers the embodiment of the modern urban dweller, will have limited application in this paper. For the *flaneur*, the city is seen more than lived in and his gaze is that of the alienated man who never feels completely at home in the metropolis. However, because of the peculiar racial zoning within the South African apartheid city, the experience of the Grey Street complex would have differed greatly from that of Benjamin's *flaneur*. By restricting the Indian community of Grey Street to a specific bounded space in the city, what emerged was an homogenous, tight-knit Indian neighbourhood. Within this lived-in space of social cohesion, therefore, very few individuals could remain anonymous like the *flaneur* or experience urban life from a distance.

The Wedding has been called a 'novelised memoir' (Govinden 2004:158), as it takes the form of an autobiography narrated by a grandson about his grandparents, Ismet Nassin and Khateja Haveri. The novel begins by recounting the circumstances surrounding the wedding of the grandparents. Ismet, a clerk from Bombay, sees Khateja for the first time from a train window and falls in love with her immediately. After a deal is made with her father, Ismet is given permission to marry Khateja. Khateja on the other hand, being an aggressively independent woman, is insulted by being sold into marriage and promises to make Ismet's life a misery. The rest of the narrative focuses on the couple's turbulent marriage which ultimately leads Ismet to decide that he and his wife should move to South Africa where they can start afresh. Like many other passenger Indians coming to South Africa at the time, Ismet believes that better opportunities await them

in the new land. Once they arrive at the port of Durban, they manage to find an abode in the Grey Street complex. In Grey Street the couple is faced with unexpected challenges that force them to adapt to the new environment. *The Wedding* thus foregrounds the experience of the old Indian diasporas² in South Africa and the Grey Street complex in particular, raising questions about the meaning of home, Indian diasporic identity and collective remembering.

The autobiographical element in *The Wedding* has been said to be at the heart of postcolonial/post-apartheid writing in South Africa (Govinden 2008:14). Conventional historical accounts of Indians in South Africa have traditionally reduced the Indian people coming to South Africa to numbers. However, in *The Wedding*, Coovadia breaks away from recounting the conventional master narrative of South African history by deliberately foregrounding the couple's personal life story and at the same time relegating large historical and political events to the margins of the narrative. As the narrator points out, despite the fact that '[a]round these star-spangled anti-lovers, South Africa started to burn' politically, they continued to exist 'in a self-contained bubble, sealed off from their neighbours, from India, and from historical time' (Coovadia 2001:221). This is evident in Khateja who, despite enjoying reading the newspaper on a daily basis, does not pay any attention to the political issues raised in them. As the narrator says, Khateja

had too visceral a grasp on humanity to comprehend politics. What was in front of one's eyes and stepping on one's toes and sticking its fingers in one's nose, was real injustice (223).

Even for Ismet '[politics] never really intruded on his consciousness, which was otherwise occupied' (162). By decentering hegemonic history and enlarging the individual story in his work, Coovadia is successful in the

² The term diasporas is borrowed from Vijay Mishra in his essay 'The diasporic imaginary' (1996) and is used in this context as a noun to denote diasporic people rather than broader demographic shifts. The term old Indian diasporas refers specifically to those who travelled to the colonies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, either as indentured labourers or as passenger Indians.

postcolonial act of turning numbers back into people. In other words, Coovadia uses the autobiographical mode to re-write the previously marginalised back into the history from which they were once erased. Therefore, by recasting the historical events in the story in human scale, Coovadia undermines the Foucauldian panoptic view of spatial history, taking on instead a de Certeau-like perspective that focuses on the subjective experience of everyday life.

South Africa as Space and Place in *The Wedding*

At first, when Ismet introduces to Khateja the idea of moving to South Africa, neither of them has a precise sense of the place. For both of them it is a far away and indeterminate place for as Khateja exclaims,

South Africa, South Africa! What is this south South Africa? ... What is this South Africa thing you've gone and got into it? Where is it being anyway, just out of interest? (121).

Ismet's reply to this question also reveals an unclear understanding of the country's location: 'Below the Sahara desert. You know' (121). In adopting the definition of place presented by Erica Carter et al, that place is a 'space to which meaning has been ascribed' (1993:xii), because the couple does not have a true sense of South Africa's reality as a specific place, it remains for them an abstract space to which they can attach imaginary meanings. For Ismet therefore, South Africa seems to provide him with a promise of a better future and a way of making his wife love him. As he imagines, 'That aboriginal forged Africa would throw them ever more tightly into each other's arms' (Coovadia 2001:120). Ismet is convinced that, unlike India, '[w]herever one climbed off at a platform in history-free Africa, one wouldn't expect to stumble immediately upon a village' (119). This idea of a 'history-free' Africa appeals to Ismet precisely because it would present itself to him as a fresh parchment on which he could inscribe a new life for himself and his wife.

When the couple finally reaches Durban however, their expectations are thwarted when they see that 'there are railways heavy with locomotive

and track, there are tall buildings, even a minaret [... and] there is a city tabled out on the hills' (137). As the narrator exclaims, on arrival,

Khateja looked with greedy, particular eyes Red stone smokestacks, a rubber factory, a street of warehouses, a cement mixer on the pavement. Beachfront hotels. Bottle palms in lines, black iron benches (143).

However, at first there is too much for the couple to take in and the city is yet to become familiar to them. Because places can be rendered knowable through mapping (see, for example, Sienaert & Stiebel 1996), for the couple in the novel, in order to make sense of their whereabouts, Ismet takes out a 'pencil-sketch map' of Durban and tries to recall all the landmarks and highlights of the city about which he has heard (Coovadia 2001:143). What is interesting to note is that the map leads them straight to the Grey Street complex where they find an abode 'in a block of flats on Queen Street, not far from the central business district, the Grey Street mosque, the market' (144). Ismet is given the map before his voyage by an Indian friend of his who had worked in Durban for a time, and who thus knew where Indian people could go to find a sense of 'home' in the foreign city. This Indian-occupied part of the city is represented in the novel as a place that, unlike the rest of the unfamiliar city, is familiar and welcoming. This place resembles that of India:

There was a ground-floor tearoom, the stairways were cement blocks painted red, flaking red halls with a knee-high gray band, washing line strung up on chicken wire, black-eyed children with spades and buckets and dripping noses, the smell of cooking vegetables and evaporated butter, dimpled copper pots left out to dry by the screen doors, large circular women with red dots on their forehead (44).

Although not made explicit in the text, the spatial arrangement of these individuals in an exclusively Indian area of the city supports Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) idea of the 'habitus', that is the process which guides people of a similar social status to situate themselves together spatially. Primarily due to the racist colonial forces operating in South Africa at the

time of the couple's arrival, the habitus was based largely on racial and cultural differences which explains how Ismet and Khateja find themselves being directed to the Indian-occupied Grey Street complex.

It is within this habitus that the unknown, indeterminate space of Durban quickly becomes a tangible and familiar place. Ismet walks the streets of the Grey Street complex on a daily basis, orientating himself and taking in the sights and sounds of the place just like Benjamin's *flaneur* figure. As the narrator describes,

[h]e wandered over to Queen Street, on the Field Street corner where there were newspaper printing presses, a bottle store with crates of Castle Lager in the window, an off-track tote Then he stood on the street corner, lit a cigarette, and drank from the bottle (Coovadia 2001:161).

However, unlike the *flaneur* who remains anonymous in the city and who never comes to see the city as his home, the opposite is true for Ismet. Ismet finds new routes and roots in the city. For example, on Friday mornings he would

[take] his *namaaz* mat under his arm and set off for the Grey Street mosque He went straight past the jewelry stores with necklaces and Elgin and Madix watches on display in red velvet boxes, the *halaal* butchers selling cold meats and sausages (176).

Through his routine movements in the Grey Street complex, Ismet is able to turn the abstract space of the city into a lived-in and meaningful place to the extent that soon enough 'he was starting to feel perfectly at home' (176). This feeling of homeliness, which the *flaneur* never experiences in the modern city, is further encouraged by the fact that the Grey Street complex is transformed by Indians into a tight-knit neighbourhood. It is important to note that because Ismet and Khateja are immediately welcomed as the community's 'new neighbours' (145), the sense of alienation in the city that the *flaneur* would feel is instantly extinguished.

It is in the detailed descriptions of Ismet's daily journeys through the streets, and his almost banal encounters with shopkeepers and vendors, that

Coovadia is adopting a de Certeau-like stance in his representation of Grey Street. The racist urban planning of the city is dismissed in the novel and what is given precedence is the pedestrian, the everyday user of the streets, who is ultimately the one who, according to de Certeau, gives shape and meaning to the city. Although Grey Street was designated as a space to house Indians and keep them bound to one area in the city, Ismet experiences the city as fluid. He moulds the city to suit his needs and this is seen particularly when he moves around the city to sell his broomsticks. Not only does he sell his goods in the Grey Street complex but he finds ways of infiltrating the white shops in Smith and West Streets as well. It is thus evident in the novel that the walkers of the Grey Street complex are able to undermine the panoptic socio-spatial ordering imposed on the colonial city.

Diasporic Culture in Grey Street

In *The Wedding*, Coovadia constructs Grey Street as a characteristically diasporic place. His focus in the novel is almost exclusively on the old Indian diasporas in the Grey Street complex. Like most passenger Indians leaving India at the time, Ismet and Khateja see themselves as temporary sojourners in the new land, for as the narrator highlights, 'Ismet never exactly planned on leaving India forever and all eternity. He still thought of himself and his wife as tourists on an extended pilgrimage' (189). When they initially settle in the Grey Street complex, Ismet ensures that the lines of communication between him and his mother in India are kept open so that he does not lose touch with the goings-on in the homeland. His plan in the new country is to do what he went there to do, that is to make money, and that until then he and his wife 'should keep to themselves, pacifically, and then they would return *home*' (189, emphasis added). This statement reveals that at first, because India is still considered their 'home', Grey Street is thought of merely as a space of temporary residence for the old Indian diasporas, a kind of 'not-home'. Thinking of Grey Street in this way would mean that no unnecessary complications or ties with South Africa would be formed.

However, as in most cases, this myth of return to India begins to fade for the couple as, over the years, '[t]here were fewer letters back and forth to Bombay', an act that was essential for 'joining together countries ten thousand miles apart' (265). Their material possessions brought from India

to remind them of home also start degrading with age, a symbol of the ties with their homeland slowly breaking. For example,

The silk goods, those that accompanied them on that long ago ship sealed in a green trunk, were getting to be worn and thin, ... The tea chest popped its copper bindings. The curtain from her father's house had long since been taken out of the window and folded away in a cupboard, a poor slip of a thing (266).

As the grandson admits, such a loss meant that '[his] grandparents got mentally denationalised' (265) for as he elaborates, 'if something's been muscled out of the future, it's only a matter of time before it loses its grip on the past' (265). The couple eventually stops thinking of a return to India as they no longer feel that they belong there. Instead they accept South Africa in general, and the Grey Street complex in particular, as their new home.

It must be remembered that two opposing forces were at work in the new land. While the old Indian diasporas were feeling increasingly alienated from returning to India, they were also trying to maintain continuities with the homeland through cultural and religious acts and this is illustrated clearly in Coovadia's novel. On the couple's arrival in Durban it becomes clear that since,

Durban housed the largest number of Indians in a single place outside India, it was, excluding the subcontinent, the most rhetorical city in the world (143).

This statement functions to undermine the popular colonial belief that nations are bound to separate locales for as is revealed in the novel, 'India is a portable country, to some extent, which moves as people do, accommodating itself freely to new environments' (157). In this new landscape Ismet and Khateja establish continuity with the homeland in numerous ways. Firstly, tokens and relics of their lives lived in India are transported and 'transplanted' in the new land to give them a sense of security and homeliness:

India, multifold, many-fingered, articulated, cloth-covered India issued from their luggage: a Koran in a soft cream binding to put on the bookshelf that Pravina brought from down, a red-and-white-checked settee cover, the walking stick that once belonged to Ismet's father (148).

Religion is also translated into the new country:

Once things were a little clear Ismet took his *namaaz* mat from the bottom of his trunk and rolled it out proudly for them all to see Now he could pray in a proper and respectful manner in this new land (148).

Furthermore, in the novel Indian cuisine is seen as an important means of keeping Indian immigrants far from home connected to their culture. Ismet, for example, thinks he can re-live India in South Africa if Khateja can be encouraged to cook him traditional Indian meals. 'Ismet saw suppers, Sunday dinners, snacks on the weekend-time, curries, *biryanis*, *bhajias*, *pathas*, and *pooris* as the first essential step' to making Durban more homely (157f). When Ismet finds, on the corner of Grey and Bond Streets, a man selling *goolab jamus*, a delicious Indian sweet, he is delighted and believes 'it was a miracle that you could live here as you would in India' (189). In other words, in *The Wedding*, Coovadia uncovers the different ways in which the old Indian diasporas transformed Grey Street into a mini-India, an act which gave them a sense of being home away from home.

The mini-India constructed in *The Wedding* is shown not only as an active undertaking by Indian diasporas wanting to preserve their Indian identity but is also shown to be the outcome of an internalisation of the racist government's nationalist ideology that homogenised Indian immigrants in South Africa. During a job interview with his white employer, Ismet is shocked at how he is immediately 'lumped directly into the Indian masses' (151) when the white man says to him, 'I like Indians. As far as I'm concerned they're the best damned people in the whole damned country' (151). This statement exposes the colonial notion that Indians make up an homogenous 'national' group. Coovadia aims to highlight this point through his narrator who humorously declares,

and thanks to its piebald, multi-striped composition, the municipality of Durban inculcated in the mind of the expatriate Mohandas Ghandi, who was currently residing there, the outrageous conviction that each disparate subcontinental belonged to the same nationality—and so, in a sense, Durban created the nation-state of India (143).

As a result, in the course of the novel, the characters begin to internalise this view, continuing to see themselves as an extension of India, rather than of the new land they have settled in. As Govinden reiterates, 'nationalising' different races in colonial South Africa led to the development of the 'ethno-nationalist thinking that begins to determine and undergird the construction of "diaspora"' (Govinden 2004:165). Through the self-orientalising which Indian immigrants colluded in, Grey Street therefore became thought of more as being part of the Indian sub-continent than a South African one (see Govinden 2004:164).

In *The Wedding* Coovadia also constructs Grey Street as a characteristically cultural 'contact zone', a term originally coined by Mary Louise Pratt (1992). It must be remembered that because Durban had a population that was, according to the narrator in the novel, 'one-third black, one-third white, and one-third Indian', cultures were bound to clash, mix, and thus undergo change in this space (Coovadia 2001:142). Ismet's disgust at his white employer for having 'no conception of the subtleties in the world' (151), is further exacerbated when he is given what he considers ridiculous advice from his landlord, Vikram:

So please Ismet, one word of advice that I can give for you. In this country you must not come with stories if you are this Bombay-Indian or that one Tamil, one what-what Gujarati-Indian No, my friend, what is essential is we must stand together united as one (150).

This statement reveals that Vikram, along with many other Indian diasporas who had been in the new land for some time, had learned to put aside his caste difference and adopt the nationalist myth of a common ancestry imposed by colonial ideology. However, rather than being passively

absorbed, the Indian immigrants in *The Wedding* use this 'unifying fiction' to their advantage. In the face of isolation and marginalisation imposed by South Africa's colonial government, a growing solidarity among Indian diasporas would ensure their survival. Vikram understands this, telling Ismet that

if we stick together as Indians, then the sky is the limit We must be together as Indians. The blacks and whites do not have the time of day for us (188).

As already discussed, during this period the Grey Street complex was, to use Foucault's term, a heterotopia of exclusion. However, within this space Indians were no longer excluded on the basis of their skin colour but in fact experienced a sense of belonging and unity; Grey Street thus became what could be deemed a heterotopia of inclusion for Indian diasporas and is constructed as such in *The Wedding*. In his novel, Coovadia shows how the old Indian diasporas of Grey Street became inward-looking, representing them as being what Mishra has termed diasporas of exclusivism (1996:422). In opposition to the colonial policies which constantly aimed to destroy 'Indianness', the characters in the novel focus on creating a rich, cultural Indian community. At Ismet's second wedding for example, he announces to the congregation that he has chosen a traditional Indian band to play that day in order to keep Indian tradition in South Africa alive:

it is the little I can contribute to keep our Indian culture alive for all of us. Our Indian culture, that is what really counts at the end of the day (Coovadia 2001:273).

Even though Ismet is aware that the only India that really exists is one of 'a million squabbling fiefdoms and hostile tribes' (189), he too learns to forget his caste difference, embracing a broader, constructed, sense of 'Indianness' as a political means of asserting Indian identity in the land of his adoption. Grey Street therefore can be seen in the novel as a dynamic place in which cultural identities are constantly made and re-made to suit new circumstances.

However, the way in which the old Indian diasporas experienced the city was varied and Coovadia attempts to capture this in his novel. Ismet, as already mentioned, quickly adapts to the new environment, taking on his new Indian diasporic identity with relative ease. This can be seen mainly in his business ventures through which he builds close relationships with his diverse Indian clientele in the Grey Street complex and uses the Indian area to his full advantage. On his days off work for example,

Ismet was to be found on Bond Street sharing a tube of mint humbugs with school children ... handing around a sampler of guavas to shopkeepers in Salisbury Arcade Then he would produce his broomsticks and wheedle a good price out of them (202).

He does not feel constrained in this designated Indian zone but rather grows into a brilliant businessman there, better than he could ever be in India. Khateja on the other hand, although looked after by the other residents in Grey Street, feels isolated and stifled in this 'allotted' space. At the beginning of the novel she is portrayed as a feisty and lively woman who would never give up on her dreams and ambitions. However, in South Africa, things begin to change. In the couple's flat in Queen Street, 'the stovepipe roof and the plaster walls made her feel like nothing so much as a chicken in a coop' (183). Even in the streets Khateja can feel the restrictions placed on her freedom of movement in the city because of the colour of her skin:

The turbulent situation in Durban mostly affected her by ruining her free-ranging dispensation. She deeply relied on freedom of movement—a motorised expression of her capacious inner liberty (223).

Although beyond the scope of this paper, this representation of Khateja's experience in the Grey Street complex calls for a gendered interpretation and could be examined further in a lengthier study of *The Wedding*. By the end of the story Khateja is merely a shadow of her former self and as her grandson acknowledges,

the mask that's worn into my grandmother's face has a symbolic

function: by rendering her more or less anonymous, more or less interchangeable, it indicates that her story is no longer really her own (267).

This statement expresses the fact that Khateja's experience resembles that of many old Indian diasporas, who, although having found a tight-knit Indian community in places like Grey Street, felt a perpetual sense of alienation in the racist colonial city. Through his novel, therefore, Coovadia successfully portrays the complexity of the Indian experience in the Grey Street complex as it is constructed both as a homely *place* for some and as a claustrophobic *space* for others.

Collective Memory in *The Wedding*

In *Collective Remembering*, David Middleton and Derek Edwards argue that collective remembering is essential to the identity and integrity of social groups (1990:10). Coovadia captures this notion in *The Wedding*, constructing Grey Street as a place in which collective memories of the old Indian diasporas are made and passed down the generations in order to keep Indian identity in South Africa alive. As shown in the novel, the old Indian diasporas are concerned that if they start 'forgetting [India] in this and that detail, what would happen at the end of time?' (Coovadia 2001:157). For Khateja in particular, remembering India was a priority and she felt strongly that 'memories and a culture couldn't be left to themselves; instead each person had the responsibility of being a practitioner' (215). She is the practitioner who passes on the collective memory of the old Indian diasporas' voyage from India to South Africa to her grandson. It is only once his grandmother shares her memories of the past with him, that the grandson finally finds his 'bearings' and a sense of belonging, not only in Durban, but also in the world.

Like the grandson in *The Wedding*, Coovadia, who was born in Durban in 1970, is part of the younger Indian generation in South Africa whose ancestors came from India. As James Fentress and Chris Wickham explain in *Social Memory*, writing has the power to freeze collective memory in textual forms which in turn plays a powerful role in the postcolonial project of not only remembering, but also re-remembering, the colonial past

(1992:9). It must be acknowledged that the colonial government in South Africa not only marginalised the Indian diasporic communities in the country but also marginalised their histories. However, through his fiction, Coovadia records and re-centers the collective memories of the old Indian diasporas, establishing counter-memories that '[resist] the dominant coding of images and representations and [recover] differences that official memory has erased' (Boyer 1994:28). In other words, the Grey Street complex that Coovadia constructs in *The Wedding* is a place in which the collective memories of South African Indians are finally given precedence, an act essential in undermining the master narrative of South Africa's colonial and apartheid past. In this way, through *The Wedding*, Coovadia is taking part in a 'reterritorialisation' of the self, providing the younger generation of South African Indians with a sense of belonging in South Africa's past and present social landscape.

Grey Street and Beyond

It is evident from an analysis of Coovadia's *The Wedding* that the author has attempted to capture the Indian experience of life in the Grey Street complex from the 'inside' during the colonial era. In doing so, he has been successful in his postcolonial project of re-mapping the colonial city of Durban and re-centering the once marginalised Grey Street complex. However, it must be remembered that the Grey Street complex (re) constructed in Coovadia's novel captures a particular time that is now gone. The Grey Street complex today is an area that is still used and lived in, and thus is a place that is constantly being re-made. This is evident in the recent re-naming of Grey Street to Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street. As part of South Africa's post-apartheid/postcolonial project, the old, colonial street names are being replaced thus symbolising a new way of ordering the city space. As Tomlinson et al acknowledge, this process is emblematic 'of a breakdown of those modernist institutions by which the state had maintained its dominance' (2003:x). In its place has emerged an 'open', fluid city space through which people of all races and classes can pass. However, it is within this new liberated space that other challenges arise. What results is a 'new' place that is difficult to define and place boundary lines around and, therefore, for its Indian inhabitants, it becomes a place with which it is

difficult to bond and identify. As Omar Badsha points out,

these changes challenge the certainty and privilege enjoyed by Indians and Coloureds which underpinned the racialised apartheid state (2001:22).

The post-apartheid city has witnessed an influx of Chinese traders and black migrants from other African countries, some of whom have moved aggressively into street trading and illegal activities such as prostitution and drug dealing. As a result, the more elite Indian residents of the former Grey Street complex are moving out and establishing new homes in the suburbs.

The question that remains to be asked is how will these changes in the post-apartheid city affect the fictional constructions of Grey Street/Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street to come? It seems it is the younger generation of South African Indian writers coming from Durban who are trying to represent the current experiences of living in the city in their fictional works. Mariam Akabor, an upcoming South African Indian writer, describes her first novella, *Flat 9*, as an attempt on her part to describe the very humane and community-oriented dimension of the Grey Street complex that has lived on into the present. However, as she explains, 'I feel I have done my part, based on my experiences in Grey Street' (Mamet 2007b, email correspondence) and therefore her next novel will move away from the Grey Street complex. Coovadia too has described his forthcoming novel saying that it is set entirely in Durban—but not Grey Street—and deals with issues around HIV/AIDS and psychological denial (Mamet 2007a, email correspondence). These writers' move away from writing about an older Grey Street and Coovadia's current project aimed at portraying a Durban suffering under the weight of HIV/AIDS depicts the extent to which the remnants of the past are rapidly being dis-/re-placed by new realities.

The way in which pedestrians experience street life in the present is also very different to those that appear in novels such as *The Wedding*. Today's walker in the city is more like the *flâneur*, characterised by anonymity and alienation. The tight-knit Indian diasporic community of Grey Street is fast being replaced by a new African cosmopolitanism. As a result a redefinition of the meaning of urban space is required, for as Tomlinson et al point out, 'the old [city] exists in nostalgia; the new [city]

exists in *absentia*' (2003:xiii). The Grey Street complex is thus not a stagnant place but one in constant flux. It is a 'soft city' (see Raban 1974) whose practitioners are forever changing its shape and meaning, a text forever being re-inscribed and re-interpreted. For the upcoming generation, therefore, newer post-post-apartheid memories are being embedded in the landscape to the extent that future fictional constructions of Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street may no longer even resemble those of the older Grey Street complex.

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