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Constructions of Place in Aziz Hassim's Fiction

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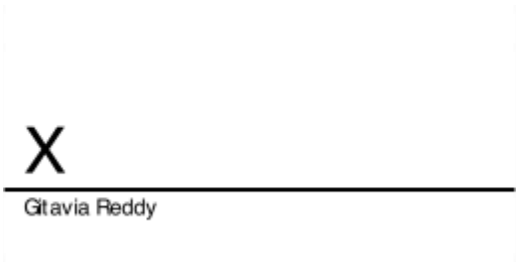
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts. Johannesburg, 2013

Abstract

The goal of this dissertation is to analyse the constructions of place in Aziz Hassim's fiction in order to demonstrate the close relationship between postcolonial writers and place. By analysing Hassim's three novels, this dissertation engages in a comparative study on the construction of place through different methods of remembering and through different sub-genres of historical fiction. I shall adopt a shifting perspective on the construction of both the urban and rural spaces in Hassim's fiction, looking at place in both its oppressive and liberatory form. I draw on Foucault's theorization of the Panopticon and the oppressive power of place. Theorist Michel de Certeau is used as a counterpoint to Foucault when engaging with place in its more liberating form. Hassim uses fiction as a method by which to reclaim history. He engages in the postcolonial act of recalling the history of once-marginalized people and places. It is the feeling, experiences and perspectives on social life of the city's inhabitants which come to define the city. Hassim also shows place as conducive to the remaking of culture, resulting in the creation of multiple identities, histories and cultures. Even under the oppressive nature of the Apartheid laws, place is still shown as a site of multiracialism and multiculturalism. Fiction becomes a method by which place is viewed in de Certeau terms.

Declaration

I declare this dissertation my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



Acknowledgements

Firstly, and most importantly, I wish to offer thanks to my parents, Dr. Kesava and Needhee Reddy, for the many ways in which they have encouraged and supported the academic endeavours of both their children. The writing of this dissertation would have been impossible without their unconditional care.

Thank you to my older brother, Kuvashan Reddy, whose scholarly achievements have greatly fuelled my own academic pursuits.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Denise Newfield, for all her guidance and support.

Finally, my sincere gratitude goes to Prof. Gerald Gaylard for establishing my interest in South African Indian Literature.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT 2
DECLARATION.....3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 4
TABLE OF CONTENTS 5
DEDICATION.....6
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....7
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 13
SPACE AND PLACE.....14
'PLACE' IN LITERATURE.....18
THE CITY.....22
WRITING THE CITY.....25
WRITING THE RURAL SPACE.....27
DIASPORIC CULTURE.....29
MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA.....32
CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....38
CHAPTER FOUR: FICTIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF PLACE IN AZIZ HASSIM'S *THE LOTUS PEOPLE* AND *REVENGE OF KALI*.....51
AZIZ HASSIM'S *THE LOTUS PEOPLE*.....51
WRITING THE CITY: PLACE AND SPACE IN *THE LOTUS PEOPLE*.....53
GREY STREET POLITICS.....59
THE CASBAH: A MINI INDIA.....61
MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA IN *THE LOTUS PEOPLE*.....67
REVENGE OF KALI.....72
PLACE AND SPACE IN *REVENGE OF KALI*.....73
DIASPORIC CULTURE IN *REVENGE OF KALI*.....82
MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA IN *REVENGE OF KALI*.....86
CHAPTER FIVE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF PLACE IN AZIZ HASSIM'S *THE AGONY OF VALLIAMMA*.....91
PLACE AND SPACE IN *THE AGONY OF VALLIAMMA*.....92
DIASPORIC CULTURE IN *THE AGONY OF VALLIAMMA*.....95
MEMORY IN *THE AGONY OF VALLIAMMA*.....96
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION.....99
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....104

Dedication

To my family.
To never walking alone.

Chapter One: Introduction

In its broadest terms, this project hopes to build on the criticism of the fictional constructions of place in South African postcolonial literature. In this dissertation, I will be exploring the constructions of place in Aziz Hassim's fiction in order to demonstrate the close relationship between postcolonial writers and place. I am particularly concerned with Hassim's construction of the urban space in his fiction. South African cities are important sites for postcolonial study, since they are intensely contested spaces. In this dissertation I will engage in the specific study of the literary constructions of a part of one of these cities: the Grey Street Complex in Durban. My main research question in this dissertation is: How does Hassim construct the Grey Street Complex in his fiction? I answer this, and other questions by analysing Hassim's three novels: *The Lotus People*, *Revenge of Kali* and *The Agony of Valliamma.* I analyse these novels through a comparative study; suggesting similarities and differences in the way in which Hassim represents place in his three works of fiction. Another important research question undertaken in this dissertation lies in the construction of place through memory and fiction. Again, I will engage in a comparative study of the three texts, looking at Hassim's construction of place through different methods of remembering and through different sub-genres of historical fiction. By engaging in such a study I hope to contribute to the study of cultural representation of the urban space in South Africa, especially in a South African Indian context.

In Chapter Two, I construct a theoretical framework which will direct my analysis of Hassim's fictional constructions of place in *The Lotus People*, *Revenge of Kali* and *The Agony of Valliamma.* I begin by discussing the importance of place in cultural and social theory. I then discuss Foucault's theories on the relationship between space and power, especially the way in which colonial power has impacted on geography, place, maps, boundaries and the naming of place. A distinction between place and space seems of vital importance to my analysis. I find agreement with Gieryn's (2000) distinction between place and space: space as just abstract geometries detached from material and cultural interpretation

and place, on the other hand, is made of geographic location, material form and invested with meaning and value. In Chapter Four, I argue that Hassim turns colonial spaces into meaningful places.

A key element of my dissertation lies in the relationship between writers and place. When discussing theoretical concepts surrounding place and literature, I begin with Said (1994) and his assertion that history is always embedded in place. Thus, place becomes an unavoidable subject especially for South African Indian writers. Indeed South Africa's Apartheid history makes it an extreme example of the "territorialisation of power" (Barnard, 2007:17), thus making the construction of place a major feature of South African fiction. Spivak's concept of 'othering' analyzes the way in which the colony defines itself against those it colonises or marginalises. Ashcroft et al (1998) suggests that literature has the power to re-root the marginalized into places which they were once excluded. The argument that I make, in Chapter Four, is that Hassim's fiction gives voice to the once marginalized or excluded, thus making a contribution to the rewriting of colonial narratives.

In Chapter Two, I will offer a discussion around the effects and power of writing history through the genre of fiction. I also differentiate between genres of fiction- namely two types of historical fiction. Novels which focus on real-life historic figures as protagonists are considered to be one type of historical fiction, and its purpose is to "reveal history and the true character of historic figures" (Brown, 1998: np). I differentiate these from novels whose protagonists are fictional characters and whose purpose is to "bring history to life" (Brown, 1998:np). In Chapters Four and Five, I analyse the effects of Hassim employing different types of historical fiction in his published texts.

It is the construction of the city which is of primary focus in Hassim's fiction. I shall adopt a shifting perspective on construction of the city in Hassim's three texts; on the one hand looking at the Apartheid city in its oppressive form and on the other hand in its more liberatory form. In understanding the urban space, I shall draw on Foucault's theorisation of

the Panopticon which, in an Apartheid city, ensured strict surveillance and control over race-specific areas. As a counterpoint to Foucault, theorist Michel de Certeau suggests that the city is rendered worthless without people; it is primarily walking people and the act of walking that brings the city to life and gives it meaning. It is the movement of people that defines the city. In Chapter Four, my analysis of Hassim's work finds more in favour with de Certeau. In present day South Africa, Sarah Nuttall (2004) argues that the city is the most conducive space to the remaking of culture, resulting in the creation of multiple identities, histories and cultures. In Chapter Four, Hassim's construction of the city will be read as a contributing site to the constant remaking of Indian identity and culture. Even under the racially segregated laws of Apartheid, the Grey Street Complex is still a site of multiracialism and multiculturalism. Hassim also constructs the rural space in his fiction; this will be read using the same theoretical framework used to analyze the city. Employing the same theoretical framework shows Hassim's similarity of approach when constructing the urban and rural space.

Hassim constructs the South African Indian space primarily in diasporic terms. Diaspora is a term referring to the dispersion of any people from their original homeland, in this instance from India to South Africa. Vertovec (1999) ascribes three meanings to the concept of diaspora: diaspora as a social form; diaspora as a type of consciousness and diaspora as a mode of cultural production. Vertovec describes diasporic identity as being subject to time and circumstance. This is in agreement with Mishra's definition of old and new diasporic groups. The new has a hyphened identity, made up of both passed-down definitions of Indian identity and newly formed ones in South Africa. Hassim constructs the Grey Street Complex showing how identities transmitted to new diasporic groups are slowly lost in time and there is a making and re-making of Indian identity. Schiller et al (1996) sees this making and re-making of cultural identity as a way in which diasporic people adapt to circumstances of their adopted land.

Nixon (1997) argues that postcolonial writing can be seen as a refusal of amnesia; the refusal of writers to forget the past. Dennis Walder (2005) suggests that collective remembering is a vital component to fully uncovering the past. Further, Lovell (1998) and Proust (1995) argue that memory is lodged in place; it is place that anchors memory. Hassim constructs place in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* through collective remembering, constructing a multi-voiced narrative which places fictional characters alongside real life political activists, thus valuing every contribution made to the struggle. Memory, being so subjective, is undoubtedly selective, distorted and, at times, even inaccurate. Nostalgia serves as a form of remembering which often distorts the past. In Chapter Two, I draw on Hutcheon's (1998) differentiation between two types of nostalgia, which links directly with Mishra's two types of diasporic communities. According to Hutcheon and Mishra, old diasporic groups maintain a nostalgic, yearning for the homeland; whereas new diasporic groups maintain a nostalgic yearning for their adopted land in an earlier time. Chapter Four will analyse Hassim's construction of Indian places through memory and nostalgia using the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Three, I will offer a broad historical and geographical overview of the Grey Street Complex, keeping in mind certain theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter Two. Hassim considers his fiction to be authentically rooted in historical fact. Thus it is useful to have a basic knowledge of the Grey Street Complex before analyzing Hassim's fictional constructions of the place. Chapter Three will include commentary on the arrival of the first Indian indentured labourers to South Africa in 1860 along with a description of the conditions on the canefield experienced by the diaspora. Also included is the change of Indian indentured labourers into so-called 'free Indians' as well as the arrival of 'passenger Indians'. Both free and passenger Indians contributed to the economic and cultural growth of the Grey Street Complex through the creation of homes, business and religious buildings. The Grey Street Complex was also a politically active place with Red Square hosting many anti-Apartheid resistance rallies attended by now famous Indian South African activists. These descriptions of the Grey Street complex as an economic, political and cultural space will be

sourced through the non-fictional works produced by South African Indian writers: Desai and Vahed (2007, 2010); Munsamy (2005); Naidoo (2002); Meer (1969, 1989) and Goonum (1991). These writers were either inhabitants of the Grey Street Complex and have thus directly experienced that which they write on (like Hassim), or are scholars who have investigated the plight of the Indian diasporic community living in South Africa. Chapter Three will end with a brief biographical description of Aziz Hassim, which leads to the next Chapter which focuses on his fictional works.

Chapter Four analyses Hassim's construction of place in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali,* in the light of the theoretical and historical contexts developed in the previous two chapters. Imraan Coovadia (2001), Mariam Akabor (2006), Ravi Govender (2006 & 2011) and Ronnie Govender (1996) have also fictionalised place in their literature and in Chapter Four they will be read, to some degree, in relation to Hassim, in order to show differences and similarities in their fictional constructions of place. In Chapter Four, I wish to show that through their fiction Indian writers are engaging in the postcolonial task of re-writing colonial history by representing histories which were once marginalised by the colonial/Apartheid state.

Chapter Five analyses Hassim's construction of place in his third novel *The Agony of Valliamma.* Although Hassim's third novel is not part of his *Casbah* Trilogy I have decided to include it in my research, allowing it to be read in comparison to Hassim's first two novels *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.* Hassim, in *The Agony of Valliamma,* employs a different type of historical fiction. By making a real-life historic figure the protagonist of his story instead of everyday, ordinary people, as in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali,* I argue that Hassim fails to achieve the same degree of sympathy from the reader as he did in his first two novels. In *The Agony of Valiamma* Hassim does not define place and culture as vividly as he does in his first two novels. If history is imbedded in place then Hassim, in failing to bring place to life in *The Agony of Valliamma,* also fails in bringing history to life at least in the same way in which he does in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.*

The final chapter, Chapter Six, will offer concluding remarks on the dissertation as a whole, restating the ways in which Hassim has constructed place in his fiction. The Chapter also considers what lies in the future not just for Hassim but for the literary representation of the Grey Street Complex. In Chapter Six, I offer a brief discussion into what the future may hold. How important will a spatial narrative be to future generations of South African Indian writers and how may their fictional constructions of the Grey Street Complex differ from Hassim's contributions. As the city changes so too will their fictional constructions. Chapter Six will also offer commentary on the future of Hassim as a writer: Will his fiction produced in the future still focus primarily on telling the histories of the South African Indian diaspora?

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will introduce and discuss the theoretical concepts surrounding place, fiction and memory which I will use in my examination of Aziz Hassim's fictional work. I will begin by discussing some of the broad theoretical concepts surrounding space and place. Firstly, I will distinguish between the two concepts 'space' and 'place' after which I will discuss sociological issues surrounding place- concentrating specifically on those which will help in my investigation of the fictional constructions of the Grey Street Complex in the works of Aziz Hassim. Following this, I will discuss theoretical concepts regarding place and literature, focusing on why place has become an increasingly important facet of literature. Since I am focusing primarily on the city, I will show the ways in which the city is represented in fiction so that I can later apply these concepts to Aziz Hassim's representation of the Grey Street Complex in his fiction. I will however, also offer commentary on theories on writing the rural space as such an environment does feature in Hassim's second novel *Revenge of Kali*. In doing so, I will explore ways in which fiction has the ability to challenge previous notions surrounding the city; the novel as a text holds the ability to re-define the city. I will then move on to theorising the experience of the Indian diasporic community, distinguishing between the 'old' and 'new' diasporic communities. Thereafter I will discuss the ways in which the diasporic community has been written in fiction; literature provides a platform for marginalised groups to include themselves in the history of the Grey Street Complex. Finally, I will shift towards theorising memory as a tool used by writers as a way taking control of a particular history and providing a remembering and re-membering of the past. To 're-member' a past suggests remembering it in a way that opposes previous exclusionary remembrance and which instead includes the memories and experiences of those who were once excluded from this history. I will also look at the role nostalgia plays in re-membering the city. At the end of this chapter, I will have a solid theoretical framework which will allow for an analysis of Hassim's fictional constructions of place in a South African Indian context.

Space and Place

It could be argued that almost all sociologists and literary scholars have a concern with place no matter what they analyze or how, whether it be social inequality, difference, power, politics, interaction, community, social movement, deviance, crime, identity, memory or literature. It is for this reason that there currently exists a rise in interest in the concepts of space and place in recent studies. I would like to begin by offering definitions and thus explaining the difference between the two terms: space and place. Whilst some theorists used in this dissertation such as Foucault, use the words 'space' and 'place' interchangeably, it is important for my understanding of place and space in literary texts to differentiate between the two. According to Gieryn (2000) place is comprised of three necessary and sufficient features. Gieryn (2000) makes it clear that it must first be understood that place is not space. For him, space is "more properly conceived as abstract geometries (distance, direction, size, shape, volume) detached from material form and cultural interpretation" (2000:465). Chris Barker's understanding concurs that 'space' is "an abstract idea, an empty or dead space..." (2000: 292).

Gieryn's (2000) three necessary and sufficient features of place are: geographic location, material form and investment with meaning and value. In terms of geographic location, a place is defined as a unique spot in the universe, the distinction between here and there, that which allows people to appreciate near and far. Material forms refer to the physicality of place. Place is stuff, a compilation of things or objects at some particular spot in the universe. This "stuff" can either be natural such as trees or rocks or man-made objects such as houses and streets. Either way, as Schama (1995) suggests, it is people who make places, place is worked by people, people make cities and buildings. Gieryn quoting Habraken goes on to suggest that; "[social] processes (difference, power, inequality, collective action) happen through the material forms that [people] design, build, use and protest" (2000). Finally, the third necessary feature of place according to Gieryn (2000), and perhaps the one which is of most concern in this dissertation is place and its investment with meaning and value. Beyond

just its constructed physicality, place according to Soja (1996) is also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined. Thus place is the centre of human relations and experiences:

> ...[without] identification, or representation by ordinary people, a place is not a place...A spot in the universe, with a gathering of physical stuff there, becomes a place only when it ensconces history or utopia, danger or security, identity or memory. In spite of its relatively enduring and imposing materiality, the meaning or value of the same place is labile- flexible in the hands of different people or cultures, malleable over time, and inevitably contested (Gieryn, 2000:465).

Since Hassim's work can be read in a postcolonial context, it becomes vital to define place in a postcolonial and post-Apartheid context. Ashsroft et al argue the following: "[by] 'place' we do not simply mean 'landscape'. [...] Rather, 'place' in post-colonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment" (1995:391). The definition of place as space to which meaning has been ascribed is a definition that will be adopted throughout this dissertation. I do however; at times adopt a second meaning of the word 'space' in my dissertation. The word is sometimes used metaphorically to denote the opportunity to assert or experience one's identity or needs freely; or to refer to a political or religious space. I personally see this metaphorical usage as being abstract, as denoting a virtual space in which politics, identity or religion can assert itself.

Place-making

The work of Michel Foucault, the French theorist, has always been filled with implications and insights concerning spatiality. It is important to note that what Foucault refers to as space, is what I, in this dissertation, refer to as place. One of Foucault's major concerns lies in his analysis of how space is used in power; Foucault suggests that "space [or rather place] is fundamental in any exercise of power" (During, 1993:168). Foucault suggests that control

over individuals both physically and psychologically can be achieved by ordering and manipulating spatial relations: "societies are discursively constituted through a series of normalising judgements that are put into effect by a system of divisions, exclusions and oppositions" (Gregory, 2003:314). Foucault uses the example of prisons, hospitals and schools as a manifestation of spatial or architectural discipline. In hospitals "it was necessary to avoid undue contact, contagion, physical proximity and overcrowding, while...at once dividing space up and keeping it open, ensuring a surveillance which would be global and individualising while at the same time carefully separating the individuals under observation" (Foucault, 1980:146). Foucault shows that throughout Europe, confinement, as a use of space, was intended to deal with poverty and economic crisis. In England, for example, the poor had to be confined because:

> It was feared that they would overrun the country, and since they could not, as on the continent, cross the border into another nation, it was proposed that they be 'banished and conveyed to the New-found land, the East and West Indies'...The community acquired an ethical power of segregation, which permitted it to eject, as into another world, all forms of social uselessness (Foucault, 1984:131-136).

Thus Foucault's concern is the way in which place is sub-divided to form areas of inclusion or exclusion so that those who are seen as sick or abnormal are spatially segregated from society's so-called 'normal' sites of social contact. Foucault refers to these exclusionary lands as 'heterotopias of exclusion' sites in which people who are deemed abnormal or inferior are segregated. The Grey Street Complex can be viewed as a heterotopia of exclusion, a site in which the Indian community, deemed inferior by the white colonials, was placed. Undoubtedly, one of the clearest examples of power-space is Foucault's panopticon which will be discussed later in this chapter.

According to Feld and Basso (1996) space is made into place primarily through acts of naming. This notion of naming and mapping is vital to postcolonial theory., Colonisers used

naming and mapping as a way of controlling and appropriating space, during colonialism. Ashcroft et al suggests the following about naming:

> To name a place is to announce discursive control over it by the very act of inscription, because through names, location becomes metonymic of those processes of travel, annexation and colonisation that affect the dominance of imperial powers over the non-European world (1995:183).

The notion of place-naming will be discussed in later chapters when considering the naming of the Grey Street Complex (taking its name from the main street named after Sir George Grey the British governor of the Cape Colony) as well the postcolonial project of re-naming colonial street names. Like naming, mapping is also vital when organising space into place. Research on mental (or cognitive) mapping by everyday people allows one to measure what people bring to the material forms they inhabit. It is often the case that representations of a particular place "will vary among individuals in terms of their biological characteristics and experiences: research shows considerable racial and ethnic differences in how people choose places to put on their maps" (Gieryn, 2000:472). Therefore, map creating is not objective or impartial but rather subjective, selective and political. In the colonial and Apartheid situation, it was the white subjective gaze which was given precedence. This is important when considering the way in which the Grey Street area was mapped during the colonial and apartheid time. The Group Areas Act, for example, saw the Apartheid government creating maps in which areas of South Africa where designated to different race groups. The Grey Street complex was the zone designated for South Africa's Indian population. Thus, in a colonial sense, mapping is used as a tool for the spatial subordination of marginalised 'others'.

'Place' in Literature

As stated in my introduction, one of the main aims of my dissertation is to explore the impact of Apartheid on literature produced by South African Indian writers in the years following democracy. In earlier parts of this theoretical framework, I have discussed the ways in which geography, place, maps, boundaries and the naming of place have impacted on colonial power. Thus it is not surprising that geography plays a great role in postcolonial writing. As Rita Barnard states, the focus on the spatial in critical social theory has been especially important in the study of imperialism, colonial discourse, and postcolonial theory (Barnard, 2007:16-17). Edward Said further highlights the significant role of place when describing culture and imperialism as "a kind of geographical enquiry into historical experience" and claims that "[just] as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free of the struggle over geography" (Said, 1994:7). History is imbedded in place, as Said (1994:7) suggests, and it is in the history of imperialism where the issue of land is most contested. Barnard makes the valid point: "Apartheid, though inseparable from this global phenomenon, clearly represents an extreme and therefore starkly illuminating instance of the territorialisation of power" (Barnard, 2007:17). Former South African Prime Minister B.J. Vorster claims: "If I were to wake up one morning and find myself a black man, the only major difference would be geographical", whilst an appalling defence of his government's policies, it does hint at the massive role geography played in all the major political features of the Apartheid state (Smith, 1974:42). These include: "the classification of the population into distinct racial categories, the segregation of racial areas on the basis of space...and the formidable apparatus of state surveillance and control" (Barnard, 2007). As Apartheid impacts on literary production, it comes as no surprise that geography plays a significant role in South African literature.

As place influences literary production the question then becomes; what does literature do with place? In this dissertation, I will aim to show the way in which place is constructed and reconstructed in one example of postcolonial literature. Keeping in mind the definitions of

place and space which were discussed earlier, it can be said that postcolonial literature is powerful in its ability to turn spaces into places, and to provide a platform for the once marginalized 'other'. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak coined the term 'othering' and describes it as "a process where the empire can define itself against those it colonizes, excludes and marginalizes [...] The business of creating the enemy...in order that the empire might define itself by its geographical and racial others" (Ashcroft et al, 1998:171-173). Thus, because of the binary nature of the relationship in which they exist, the imperial definition of 'self' is dependent upon its 'other'. Thus, as Ashcroft et al (1998) points out, the imperial definition of 'self' is limited, and it is this limiting, the act of defining and placing the 'other' outside the boundaries of self that is seen in the act of othering. Most recently, postcolonial authors have sought to rewrite such limiting and exclusionary colonial versions of history. Ashcroft et al (1989:33) lists writers such as J.M Coetzee, Wilson Harris, V.S Naipaul, George Lamming, Patrick White, Chinua Achebe, and Margaret Atwood, among those to have 'written back', writers who are using the textual space of fiction to reinterpret colonial spaces. While place plays a significant role in influencing literature, literature is powerful in re-constructing place and thus challenging colonial definitions of place. Literature is powerful in its ability to include the marginalised in the history of places from which colonial discourse excluded them. Aziz Hassim could be added to the list of writers who use their fictional texts to undermine colonial and Apartheid definitions, constructions and mapping of space. Ashcroft et al (1989:8) suggest that because the marginalized people experienced an erosion of self through colonial dislocation, place and displacement become a major concern in postcolonial literature. My readings of Hassim's novels, suggest that the task of "geographical projection" or even "geographical prophecy"(Barnard drawing on John Berger's phrase, 2000:28), of bringing whatever is marginalized and occluded into view, is central to Hassim's work. In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995) Ashcroft et al suggest that place in literature is not static but rather something that is always in the process of being made and re-made as it is being experienced by people at different junctures. This point is of particular importance to Aziz Hassim's work as he presents to the reader places which he

feels have been lost forever and places which are interpreted and experienced differently by newer generations of Indian writers in the diaspora.

One of the main concerns of this dissertation is to explore how and why Hassim reconstructs place through the medium of fiction rather than another genre. Hassim writes about events, people and places which influenced South African Indian history, an often marginalised history which he feels will be lost forever unless it is written about for newer generations to read. Thus, in a way, Hassim, as a writer, is seeking a kind of social justice in wanting marginalised histories to be explored and remembered. I find agreement with Carol Lakey Hess (n.d:1) who argues that "novels (and other forms of fiction) can make an important contribution to the work of social justice: "novels introduce us to the lives of those different than we are, and they thereby both enable us to sympathize with the characters and gain a critical perspective on reality." The argument made by Hess is that fiction serves the work of justice by giving readers a glimpse into the lives of marginalised others. Hess argues that fiction provides us with concrete others which is required for moral reflection. Azar Nafisi (2004:32) considers fiction to be a socially powerful form of writing:

> Imagination in fiction is equated with empathy; we can't experience all that others have gone through, but we can understand even the most monstrous individuals in works of fiction. A good novel is one that shows the complexity of individuals, and creates enough space for all these characters to have a voice...

Nafisi makes use of the term 'voice' which features largely in this dissertation and which can be defined as a medium of expression. Hess (n.d:4) states that fiction, as opposed to other forms of literature, gives voice to ordinary and often marginalised people. Hassim's novels are made up of multi-voiced narratives which includes the voices of many ordinary and often overlooked individuals. Hassim does this either through the direct voice of the narrator or through a series of dialogues between characters. In presenting the reader with a multi-voiced narrative, Hassim ensures that all perspectives and viewpoints, however ordinary they may

appear, are valued. Hassim appears to find agreement with Cunningham (Brown, 1998:5) who realises:

> [there] are no ordinary lives, just inadequate ways of looking at them...most of our lives look ordinary from the outside, but...to us... they are anything but; to us our lives are enormous and fascinating, even if they appear to be made up largely of work, errands, meals and sleep...Through [fiction] we understand that the workings of atomic particles are every bit as mysterious and enormous as the workings of galaxies...it all depends on whether you look out or look in.

Not only does fiction allow readers to 'look in' on the lives of the ordinary but also, according to Nussbaum, works of fiction that deal with social or political themes can be more veridical than a particular scientific approach. According to Hess (n.d:6):

> Nussbaum does not disparage reason or 'the scientific search for truth'. Yet she does trenchantly, criticize 'a particular scientific approach that claims to stand for truth and reason... [arguing that it] 'fails to stand for truth insofar as it dogmatically misrepresents the complexity of human beings and human life.

Issues of authenticity are further put into question when reading Hassim's writing as work of historical fiction. Reed categorizes novels that include historic characters as "historic fiction" and suggests that their purpose is to "reveal history and the true character of historic figures" (Brown, 1998:2). Reed terms books which do not include historic characters as "historical fiction" and whose purpose is to "bring history to life" (Brown, 1998:2). In this dissertation I choose not to distinguish between Hassim's work in terms of historical and historic fiction but rather to read them as different types of historical fiction: one which values actual historic figures and another which values fictitious characters. In the chapters that follow, I consider *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* to be works of historical fiction which value the use of fictitious characters. Even though these novels do include actual historical characters they are

not central to the novels' narrative; instead the main protagonists are fictitious characters. In contrast *The Agony of Valliamma* will be read as historical fiction; one whose purpose lies in revealing history and the true character of historic figures. According to Brown (1998:2) in both types of historical fiction protagonists are usually adolescents. These adolescent characters are often rendered powerless either because of their age, race, gender or class; they are frequently victimized but nonetheless manage to triumph in the face of adversity. In *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* I will argue that Hassim writes these adolescent characters through what Lasky terms "keyhole history," history rendered from the perspective of ordinary people. It is this form of writing which renders itself more authentic to its readers (Brown, 1998:2). In The *Agony of Valliamma* it will be argued that Hassim inflates that heroism and courage of historic characters and in doing so "sacrifices their humanity as well as challenge[s] the reader's suspension of disbelief" (Brown, 1998:2). In *The Agony of Valliamma*, Valliamma is made to be so heroic that she seems more mythical than human. In the prologue, Valliamma is described as "not of this world" (Hassim, 2011:8). In the chapters which follow, an analysis of Hassim's fiction will be made, keeping in mind the making of place and character representation through fiction (both historical and historic).

The City

A key concept that will be used in this dissertation when speaking of the city is Foucault's idea of the Panopticon. In *Discipline and Punishment* Foucault describes the Panopticon as "a diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstract from any obstacle, resistance or friction must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system" (Foucault 1980:201). For Foucault, the Panopticon represents the way in which discipline and punishment work in modern societies through visual surveillance. In a prison, for example, the panopticon ensures maximised efficiency of the institution. The design increases securities by facilitating more effective surveillance; prisoners are clearly distinguishable and visible to guards who are positioned in a central tower overlooking the dividing cells. The Panopticon has influenced the shape and feel of the modern city with its

tall buildings and network of streets that allow for optimum urban surveillance and control. Indeed, the urban design of the Apartheid city relied on the principles of the Panopticon to ensure ultimate control and power over the 'black areas' of the city. The Grey Street Complex of Durban was kept under strict surveillance by the Apartheid government, and was constantly policed to ensure that Indians remained in their designated areas. The Grey Street complex was typical of an Apartheid city in that it was segregated on the basis of race and class. Hassim shows in his fiction the geographical dividedness of Apartheid South Africa. The Grey Street complex or Casbah was largely an Indian area, with just a few Coloured and African inhabitants, while White South Africans inhabited the more gratifying area of Berea for their sole use. One cannot ignore the extent to which segregation laws and Apartheid structure divided the different communities of Durban, which serves as a good example of the panoptic ordering of space that was being imposed on the urban landscape of Apartheid South Africa. Speaking of the Warwick Avenue Triangle (WAT), a hub within the city of Durban, Briji Maharaj observes:

> WAT had developed as an integrated neighbourhood since the turn of the century. The rise of racial politics since the 1930's curbed the organic development of a thriving, integrated community. Although whites were initially in the majority, by the end of the 1990's the WAT reflected the ethnic vibrancy of the 'rainbow nation'. However, neither the central nor the local state recognised or supported the non-racial character of the area, and attempts were made to use slum clearance laws, the Group Areas Act and urban redevelopment plans to destroy the area (Maharaj, 1999:265).

However, Barnard, when writing on the Black township, suggests that the history of the South African transition offers certain important political and theoretical lessons:

> The fact that the disciplinary space of the township became the crucial locus of resistance in the antiapartheid struggle suggests that we need to be suspicious of

> totalizing models of power, of descriptions of place that ignore the transformative and creative capacities of human beings (2007:21).

The point being made by Barnard is that the design of the Apartheid city, one that relied on the principles of the Panopticon to ensure control and order of the city was unsuccessful because it failed to acknowledge the capacity of human beings to manipulate and evade such surveillance. In both *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* Hassim constructs the Grey Street Complex as a city whose inhabitants hold the ability to escape the constant surveillance and policing by the Apartheid government, by creatively mapping their journey through the city.

Michel de Certeau serves as another opposition to Foucault's theorisation of the panoptic ordering of urban life, offering an alternative way of engaging with the city. According to de Certeau (1984) the city, no matter how purposefully structured, is rendered worthless without people. So according to de Certeau, it is the inhabitants of the city that create its meaning. It is the people who direct the functioning of city buildings, who turn spaces into places, and anchor the city in time even if just for a fleeting moment. De Certeau has three requirements for what he terms a 'concept' city; a city founded on the principles of the Panopticon, these are: "Rational organisation must repress all the physical, mental and political pollutions that would compromise it"; "The substitution of a nowhen [a point from which one has an unrestricted perspective in time], or of a synchronic system, for the indeterminable and stubborn resistances offered by traditions"; and "The creation of a universal and anonymous subject which is the city itself" (1984:153). De Certeau criticises this way of ordering space. All three requirements of the ideal city leave us with a city without human existence, for it is the people of the city who bring about physical, mental and political pollution, it is the people who form and break traditions, and it is the people who breathe life into the city and grant it meaning. De Certeau argues that it is primarily the walking people and the act of walking that brings the city to life and gives it meaning. It is the movement of people that defines the city. As individuals walk the city, they create their own interpretations and meanings; the city is

pieced together, made up of individual viewpoints and meanings. In this way "The created order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order" (Certeau 1984:233). Thus, it is this mass movement of people which is ultimately responsible for the city's meaning. It is their "intertwined paths that give shape to places. They weave places together" (Certeau, 1993:157).

Of course the meanings of place only remain for as long as the individual granting it those meanings remains, thus definitions of the city are not static, they are ever changing. The city will be redefined and granted new meaning as one pedestrian is replaced by another.

Writing the City

Hassim offers the reader an insight into the panoptic ordering of the Grey Street Complex. However, he also undermines the Foucauldian view of panoptic spatial history, taking on instead a de Certeau-like perspective that focuses on the subjective experience of everyday life. In his work, Aziz Hassim favours the perspective of the walker, or the 'flaneur'. Chris Jenks provides a definition of the flaneur:

> The flaneur is the spectator and depicter of modern life, most specially in relation to contemporary art and the sights of the city. The flaneur moves through space and among the people with a viscosity that both enables and privileges vision...The flaneur possesses a power, it walks at will, freely and seemingly without purpose, but simultaneously with an inquisitive wonder and an infinite capacity to absorb the activities of the collective... (1995:146).

In Hassim's works the flaneur is often a male, marginal figure. In *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* we see the city from the perspective of gamblers, prostitutes, thieves, gangsters and other social misfits who make up the urban space. Walter Benjamin regards the marginalia of the city as the most vital players in uncovering meaning in the city (Gilloch

1996: 30). Hassim agrees with Benjamin in this sense, for in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* it is the marginal figures (the gangsters, prostitutes, thieves) who are educated in the 'University of the Street' and those who know the streets well are able to undermine the Foucauldian top-down ordering of city space. This point will be explored further in Chapter Four.

This dissertation will also aim to show the ways in which Hassim goes further than de Certeau's theory of walking. For Hassim, it is not just the act of walking that makes the city or allows its inhabitants to reclaim the city; it is also the stories and traditions passed down by families and communities that reshape the city. When focusing on city life and city forms in fictional writing, Nuttall (2004) suggests that the city form and the city lives to which it gives rise constitute a conducive space to the remaking of culture and identity because it is a place of difference, made up of multiple identities, histories and cultures. For Nuttall, cities can be places of effective segregation surveillance. However, within a culture of surveillance or difference, people will always find ways of walking unsurveyed and will also find ways of mixing culturally even in times of segregation. This helps to create a new culture of the city. Thus the city, even as a space of segmentation, is also a place of creolization (Nuttall, 2004). She states that creolization can be understood as the formation of new identities, which emerge as a result of cultural mixing, as participants actively choose cultural elements to become part of an inherited culture. Cohen states that creolization is "the formation of new identities and inherited culture [which] evolve to become different from those they possessed in the original cultures" (2007:370). I will return to this idea of creolization and the way in which Hassim presents the Grey Street Complex as a site of creolization when later discussing diasporic culture in the city. In Ronnie Govender's short stories on Cato Manor, it is the passed-down traditions of story-telling, the planting of trees native to India and the closeness of family and neighbours that helps define Cato Manor (Brown, 2006). Hassim, in *The Revenge of Kali* and *The Lotus people*, also shows that the Casbah is given meaning by its inhabitants and their interaction with one another, Hassim's texts thus demonstrate how city's inhabitants convert spaces into meaningful places for themselves.

Earlier in this chapter, the idea of the Grey Street complex as a 'heterotopia of exclusion' was discussed. However, ironically, within this heterotopia of exclusion a sense of belonging or inclusion is created. Elder et al (1996) suggest that the longer people have lived in a place, the more rooted they feel and the greater their attachment to it. Halbwachs (1980) suggests that place attachment facilitates a sense of security and well-being, defines group boundaries and stabilizes memories against the passage of time. In the following chapters it will be argued that the Grey Street Complex, even in its oppressiveness, provides a sanctuary from the Apartheid police and a sense of belonging and security for those who know the streets well. This close association with place suggests that any change to place will result in change of the individual. Fullilove (1996) suggests that the loss of place must have devastating implications for individual and collective identity, memory, and history, and for psychological well-being. In Aziz Hassim's novels it is not just the homeland of India that is longed for but there is also a longing for Grey Street's good old days by its inhabitants. Even in its oppressive form, the Grey Street Complex that was is still missed and idealized and thus becomes, paradoxically, a heterotopia of inclusion.

Writing the Rural Space

Aziz Hassim's *Revenge of Kali* is divided into three parts: part one is set on the Canefields, part two in the Duchene and lastly part three is set in The Casbah. Whilst my research does focus largely on the urban space, I find it impossible to examine place in *Revenge of Kali* without accounting for the narrative set in the rural region. There is a clear and intentional link that Hassim makes between rural and urban spaces. Thus, instead of taking a different theoretical approach when analyzing rural space, in the form of the canefields, I have chosen to take the same theoretical approach I use when analyzing the city. Thus, I will use a shifting perspective on the issue of the rural space, on one hand looking at the space in its oppressive form and on the other hand in its more fluid and liberatory form. In understanding the rural space I shall once again draw on Foucault's theorisation of the Panopticon, which in the

canefields ensured strict surveillance and control over specific areas. As a counterpoint to Foucault, theorist Michel de Certeau will once again be used. De Certeau offers us, by extension, another way of reading the rural space by suggesting that through the everyday practice of walking , the inhabitants of the space have the power to escape the 'imaginary totalizations' (de Certeau 1993:153) imposed by rural planners and thus it is the pedestrians who are the real makers of place.

Many theorists including M.L Bush (2000) have argued that indentured labour was a new form of slavery and was inaugurated in India from 1830, soon after slavery was abolished:

> [indentured] service has been designated a kind of slavery. It has been claimed that 'regardless of legal technicalities, slavery and indentured labour were synonymous'. Terms such as 'short-term slavery' or 'the new system of slavery' are used to capture its essence (2000:30).

Chapter Three will include a discussion on the history of Indian indentured labour to South Africa in some detail. Chapter Four will examine the way in which Hassim in *Revenge of Kali* presents the plantation field as a site of suffering which gives rise to 'the new system of slavery'. However, in *Revenge of Kali* slavery is not limited to the canefield. The Grey Street Complex, made up of Indian businesses, is directly connected to the story of indenture. The descendants of indentured labourers, who worked on the sugar cane plantation, find themselves being exploited by Indian businessmen. The method referred to as the "Grey Street System" saw victims of indentured labour ironically become oppressors themselves. Hassim suggests that a kind of urban slavery existed in The Casbah at the time. The slavery of indenture is transformed into new forms of urban exploitation which are set against the wider oppression of the Apartheid system.

Diasporic Culture

"We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians"
(D' Azeglio, cited in *Desai and Vahed* 2010:1)

Diaspora as a term is often used to describe any population or community which is considered 'deterritorialised' or 'transnational', which has "originated in a land other than which it currently resides, and whose social, economic and political networks cross the borders of nation states or, indeed, span the globe" (Vertovec, 1999:1). There are three discernable meanings of the concept of diaspora, these include: "'diaspora *as social form*, 'diaspora' *as type of consciousness*, and 'diaspora' *as mode of cultural production*" (Vertovec, 1999:1). As a social form, diaspora is defined as a process of becoming scattered, of a community living in different parts. As a type of consciousness, diaspora is defined as a state of mind or sense of identity. It is a particular kind of awareness said to be generated among transnational communities and is usually marked by a dual or paradoxical nature. As a mode of cultural production, diaspora is defined through a worldwide flow of cultural objects, images and meanings resulting in constant transformations.

While Hassim's works are novels, they are also a theorization that challenges rigid notions of place and identity constructions. Hassim constructs the Grey Street complex as a site in which Indian diasporic identity is in a constant state of flux, a site in which identity is being constructed, deconstructed and re-made. There are two types of Indian diasporic identities, a leading theorist groups Indian diaspora into two main categories: old diasporas and new diasporas (Mishra, 1996). The old diasporic community is the one who made the journey from India to South Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, usually as indentured labourers. In Hassim's novels the characters that make up the old diasporic communities nurse a deep longing to return to India, feeling a sense of non-belonging or alienation in South Africa. This sense of non-belonging felt by the old Indian diasporic community was caused by the racist, colonial discourse which deemed them as inferior

'others'. Mishra suggests that it is this sense of displacement in their new settlement which leads to the diaspora's creation of "imaginary homelands from the space of distance..." (2007:16). Cohen observes that "transnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims...a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artifacts and through shared imagination" (1996:516). This imaginary or fantasy homeland, as Mishra terms it, is created by the old diasporic group as way of finding a sense of identity and belonging in a land that at times denied them both. The old Indian diasporic community articulates and honours its Indian identity through the making of Indian architecture, religion, food, language and clothing. In Chapter Four, the ways in which the city is transformed by the Indian diaspora into replicas of the homeland will be discussed. In Hassim's *The Lotus People*, the Casbah is described as a mini-India.

The second type of Indian diaspora is what Mishra terms as the 'new' or 'border' diasporic groups. This diasporic community consists of the younger generation of Indian South Africans who, unlike their grandparents or parents, are born in South Africa. The new or border diasporic group also takes pride in its Indian cultural heritage, but for this generation, however discriminated and marginalised they feel, South Africa is still home. However, Parvathi Raman states: "any relationship with home for a diaspora community is in flux and subject to historical context" (Desai & Vahed 2010:6).

Mishra suggests that the identity of the new diasporic group is always hyphenated: "The hyphen is that which signifies the vibrant social and cultural spaces occupied by diasporas in nation-states...It also reminds us of the contaminated border, hybrid experience of the diaspora people" (1996: 432). The status of the border diaspora is what Sartre terms a "nervous condition"; the condition of being caught between tradition and modernity; past and present; old and new; east and west (1961). For Vertovec (1999:4) this meaning of diaspora indicates a type of consciousness, describing a variety of experience, a state of mind and a sense of identity, a kind of awareness generated among contemporary transnational

communities. Paul Gilroy (1987) similarly describes diasporic communities as being marked by a dual or paradoxical nature, as having a double consciousness. This dual nature is brought about by a sense of alienation or discrimination experienced in the host state, as well as with a sense of belonging and identification with the land of origin. Chapter Four will explore the ways in which Hassim's characters battle a dual consciousness; identity is seen to be a perpetual state of flux, "[d]iasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1990:235). According to Appadurai and Breckenridge:

> ...diasporas always leave a trail of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment. More and more diasporic groups have memories whose archaeology is fractured. These collective recollections, often [built] on the harsh play of memory and desire over time, have many trajectories and fissures which sometimes correspond to generational politics. Even for apparently wellsettled diasporic groups, the macro-politics of reproduction translates into the micro-politics of memory, among friends, relatives and generations. Compounded by the awareness of the multi-locality, the 'fractured memories' of diaspora consciousness produce a multiplicity of histories, 'communities' and selves (1989:i).

In Chapter Four I will also explore the ways in which Indian culture transmitted through cultural objects, images and meanings results in back-and-forth transferences, mutual influences and constant transformations. According to Schiller et al:

> [T]he constant and various flow of such [cultural] goods and [cultural] activities have embedded within them relationships between people. These social relations take on meaning within the flow and fabric of daily life, as linkages between different societies are maintained, renewed, and reconstructed in the context of families, of institutions, of economic investments, business, and finance and of political organisations and structures including nation-states (1996:11).

Chapter Four will explore the cultural production and reproduction of Durban's diasporic society in Hassim's *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali*, especially in relation to religious aspects of family and kinship, caste and ritual practice. The argument that I will make in Chapter Four is that such a multiplicity of histories, communities and selves brought about as a correspondence to generational politics can be seen as a tool of adaptive strength. In *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* each generation reacts differently to its environment in order to ensure its survival in that environment. Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanto explain:

> Within their complex web of social relations, transmigrants draw upon and create fluid and multiple identities grounded both in their society of origin and in the host societies. While some migrants identify more with one society than the other, the majority seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation. By maintaining different racial, national, [cultural] and ethnic identities, transmigrants are able to express their resistance to the global political and economic situations that engulf them, even as they accommodate themselves to living conditions marked by vulnerability and insecurity (1996:11).

Chapter Four will apply this position to the selected texts, showing the way in which postcolonial writers have written their people back into colonial history by dismissing simple definitions of Indian identity and instead presenting a hybrid identity which is constantly being made and remade.

Memory and Nostalgia

In my analysis of Aziz Hassim's fiction, it will be important to understand the ways in which the Indian diasporic communities in Durban have engaged in acts of social remembering. In keeping with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission there has been much need among South African writers since the country's transition into a democratic society to re-count the

suppressed histories of the past. Nixon refers to this need as a "refusal of amnesia" (1996:77). Nixon and Jacobs have both pointed out that since the 1990's writers have chosen to return to the past in more personal ways. As Jacobs summarises:

> The country is at present engaged in a process of self-narration-a national collection of all those blanked out areas of its identity. The current proliferation of South African stories may be seen as part of the autobiographical impulse of an entire nation finally bringing its past into proper perspective (Jacobs 1994:878).

However, in the course of this dissertation it will be important to understand the importance of 'collective remembering'. As Dennis Walder in *Remembering Rousseau: Nostalgia and the Responsibilities of the Self,* points out:

> ...it is not enough simply to remember the past and turn it into one's personal narrative. To understand it fully is to relate it to the memories of others, including the memories of those with whom you share the past. This is what I mean by having a responsibility for remembering...it is important to think about memory as something *shared*, for example when we promise to do something, we think of ourselves as responsible to the other for remembering this promise. Shared memories may involve histories, legacies, traditions. Heritage, monuments-and nostalgia... (2005:423).

It can thus be said that shared memories will help in giving a community a sense of identity and belonging in the past, which in turn will provide for a sense of belonging in the present. David Middleton and Derek Edwards in *Collective Remembering* state that "collective remembering is essential to the identity and integrity of the community" (1990: 10). Memory is an integral part of who we are, "we preserve memories of each epoch of our lives...and through them...a sense of identity is perpetuated" (Halbwachs, 1992:167). Speaking about the link between collective memory and identity in a South African context, Walder suggests:

> ...in South Africa it is not the future that is uncertain, but the past. This uncertainty has [led] to a preoccupation with the relation between present and past, between individual and collective memories, and between a nostalgic longing for things lost or devalued on the one hand, and a struggle to reconcile and reshape [the identity] of a whole society on the other (2005:425).

In Chapter Four of this dissertation, I will argue that Hassim's act of collective remembering through the writing of his fictional texts aids in restoring a sense of belonging, in both South Africa's past and present, for the Indian-South African diaspora. However, collective remembering in writing allows a writer not only to remember but also 're-member'; in other words, it allows for a writer to establish new understandings of the past, a re-membering of past. Writing through collective remembering allows for the stories and the histories of the marginalised diasporic communities to be heard and thus new perspectives of the city and the struggle are created. Middleton and Edwards suggest: "he who controls the past controls who we are" (1990:10). Thus, "memory is...a very important factor in struggle...if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism...it's vital to have possession of this memory, to control it, administer it, tell it what it must contain" (Foucault, 1975:210). Often the collective memories amongst previously marginalised groups involve the establishment of new memories that counter the official memory of the nation state. Walder suggests that "more complex definitions of who South Africans were, and are, are being explored, as many memories are being traced, and recovered; and which demand a re-membering" (2005:429). In Chapter Four, I will look at the way in which Hassim, in his fiction, emphasises collective remembering. In doing so, he gives precedence to the Indian diaspora of Durban and thus challenges the dominant memories of the South Africa's colonial and Apartheid state.

Having already established that memory plays an important role in the remembering of history, it can now be suggested that memory is imbedded in place. Nadia Lovell in her book *Locality and Belonging* states that: "Locality and belonging may be moulded and defined as much by actual territorial emplacement as by memories of belonging to particular landscapes

whose physical reality is enacted only through acts of collective remembering" (1998: 1-2). Thus memory, place and identity are all seen as being intertwined and interdependent. Lovell also argues that memory (and hence identity) is etched into landscapes in ways that cannot be erased. According to Proust:

> ...memories are lodged in specific places where people have been. These places bear the traces of past experiences. It is therefore possible that revisiting them may at some time evoke the past and in the same moment unlock past hopes and desires which previously seemed to be overtaken - and defeated - by the passage of time (Savage, 1995:27).

This idea of memory being etched into landscapes will be explored in this dissertation when analyzing Hassim's fictional constructions of place, especially the Grey Street complex or Casbah. Many of the landscapes in the Casbah trigger the collective memory of the city's marginal groups, and these memories aid in shaping Hassim's narratives of the city. One must then ask what effect collective remembering has on Hassim's narratives of the city. Collective remembering is not objective but rather filled with subjectivity and thus, collective memory can be largely selective, distorted and at times inaccurate. Nostalgia is one form of collective remembering that can often over-romanticize and so distort memories of the past. The term 'nostalgia' is made up of Greek roots: *nostas*, meaning "to return home" and *algos*, meaning "pain" The term was coined in 1688 by a Swiss student in his medical dissertation as a way to discuss a literally lethal kind of severe homesickness (Hofer, 1934). The remedy associated with this medical definition of nostalgia was the return home, or sometimes merely the promise of it. However, by the nineteenth century the word began to lose its purely medical meaning. Nostalgia was no longer simply a yearning to return home, just a need to return to a place, but also a need to return to a specific time. However, time, unlike space, cannot be returned to (Hutcheon, 1998). Thus Linda Hutcheon in *Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern* (1998) suggests that there are two types of nostalgia. The first nostalgia is the one that longs for home and in Hassim's fiction this type of nostalgia is felt by the old Indian

diasporic groups who long to leave South Africa and return to their homeland India. The second type of nostalgia is one that is in search of lost time, and is experienced by the characters that are part of the new Indian diasporic community. It is experienced too by Hassim himself in his longing to "record a past he is convinced has disappeared forever" (Hassim, 2009:216).

The question then is: how accurate of an image of the past can nostalgia (as a form of collective remembering) present? Hutcheon, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin suggests the following about nostalgia and its construction of the past:

> Nostalgia...depend[s]...on the irrecoverable nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal...This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an "historical inversion": the ideal that is not being lived now is projected into the past. It is "memorialized" as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations...The aesthetics of nostalgia might, therefore be less a matter of simple memory than of complex projection; the innovation of a partial, idealized history merges with a dissatisfaction with the present. And it can do so with great force (Hutcheon, 1998).

Despite these revelations on nostalgia, the act of nostalgic remembering is still seen by most critics as a positive act, the idea being that: "longing is what makes art possible" (Lerner, 1972:52). More-so however, Hassim argues that whilst his work indulges in nostalgia, it is still well researched and historically accurate, even though "it is wrong to imagine that there exists some non-nostalgic reading of the past that is by contrast 'honest' or authentically 'true'" (Shaw & Chase, 1989:30). In Chapter Four, Hassim's use of nostalgia will be explored. I shall demonstrate old diasporic communities long to return to their homeland, and how their nostalgia for India is revealed through their construction of mini-Indias in the

colonies. As for the new diasporas, their nostalgic yearning is for the "good-old-days" or the lost past.

In Chapter Two I have constructed a theoretical framework which will direct my analysis of Hassim's fictional constructions of place in his trilogy. The next chapter will discuss the historical context of the Grey Street Complex or Casbah, using the theoretical links developed in this chapter.

Chapter Three: Historical Context

They came, they saw, they toiled

-Shireen Sarojini Munsamy (2005)

In this chapter, I begin by providing a broad historical understanding of The Grey Street Complex, or as it is more affectionately known by former residents, the Casbah, highlighting the theoretical links with the previous chapter. Hassim considers himself a writer within the genre of historical fiction. While the novel's construction of place and character are fictional; Hassim's construction of them are authentically rooted in historical and geographical fact. It is for this reason that I find it useful to offer a broad historical context of Indians in the Grey Street Complex or Casbah before analysing Hassim's literary construction of space and place. By doing so, I can later prove the authenticity of Hassim's fictional constructions of place. I develop a historical context of the Indian experience in South Africa by using non-fiction written by South African Indian writers and scholars who have investigated the plight of the Indian diasporic community living in South Africa. In its former times the Casbah was a landmark of the social, cultural, educational, political, economic and residential life of the Durban Indian community. Up until the 1930s, the city's Indians were its largest racial grouping within the city's municipal boundaries.

The Grey Street Complex takes its name from the main street running through the complex.

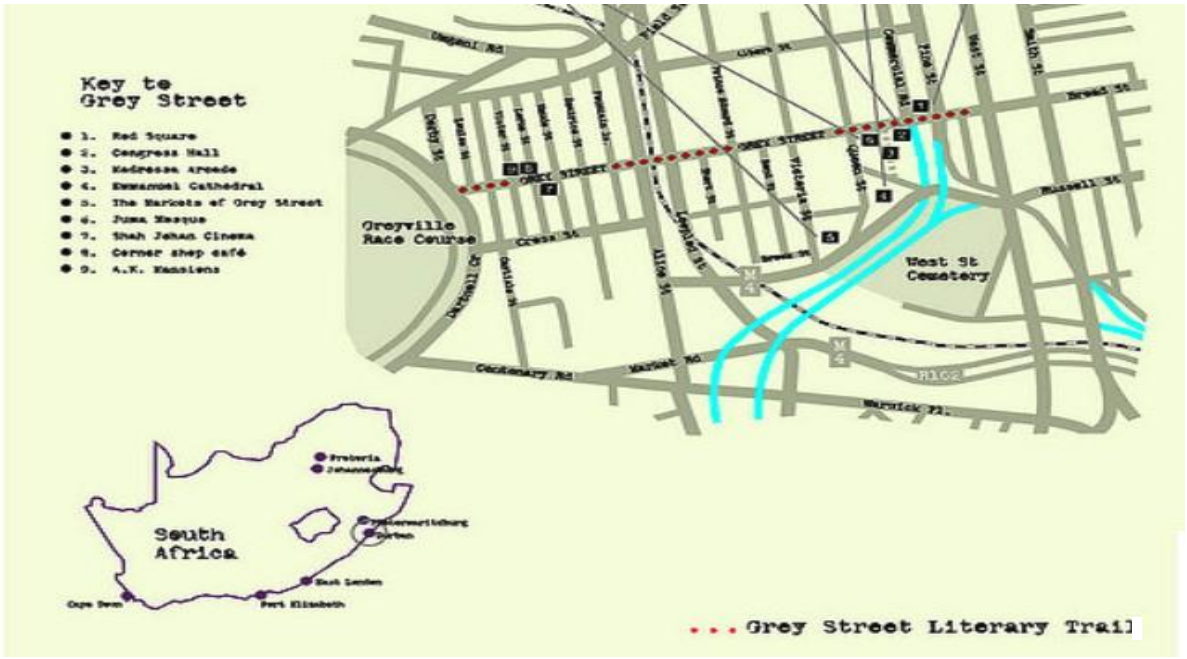


Figure 1: Grey Street area map (KZN Literary Tourism, 2007)

To understand how the Casbah became such a vital setting for Natal's Indian community, one must go back to the arrival of the first Indians in South Africa. During long negotiations between the Indian and South African government over indentured labour, it was finally agreed that Indian labourers would be indentured into South Africa. Recruitment and transportation arrangements were made, and two ships, the Belvedere and the Truro, left India for South Africa (Vahed, 1995:28).On 17 November 1960 the first ship of Indian indentured labourers arrived in Natal (Munsamy, 2005:16). It was believed that Natal could become a great sugar producing country, and whilst the use of imported labour was expensive, it was needed since the local labour was considered to be insufficient and unskilled. The proud military-minded Zulu had no intentions of "selling their labour to people whose economy and values were alien to their



Figure 2: 1ndentured Laborers arrive in South Africa. (Rising Sun, 2010:1)

own" (Vahed, 1995:26). India, being a crop-raising area, nurtured experienced crop growers who were sorely needed as employment on Natal's sugarcane plantations. Many Indians saw indenture as an escape from their home country which, during the 1860s, was hard-hit by famine. South Africa promised a new life with new opportunities for the Indian indentured labourers. However, the reality of the situation was soon unveiled. Indenture was practised as a new form of slavery (Munsamy, 2005:14). Indentured labourers were forced to work the land from sunrise till sunset in back-breaking conditions and were often victimised and exploited by their white employers. In response to such conditions, the colony had the second highest suicide rates of all the colonies receiving indentured labour at the time (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 2000:11).

Even though indentured labourers were only under contract for five years, after which they could leave Natal and head back to India, 58 percent of them opted to stay in Natal (Vahed, 1995:37). Many became landowners and businessmen and entered professions. Reasons for the then ex-indentured labourers staying on as free Indians varied amongst the labourers. Despite the harsh conditions under which they had lived in Natal for five years, some appreciated that Indians on the ship to Natal were able to lose all sense of caste and would be considered one and equal with each other in South Africa. This meant that those who were of a lower caste and were treated as such in India were now afforded a new lifestyle in South Africa in which caste no longer mattered (Meer, 1969:12). Other members of the diasporic community chose not to leave their adopted homeland having not experienced the kind of success in South Africa that their families in India expected them to achieve. In Hassim's *The Lotus People* (2002) Yahya feels that he has let his family down by not achieving great wealth in Natal; his shame keeps him from returning to his homeland.

However, not only did some former labourers decide to remain in Natal as 'free Indians' (Indians who were given the freedom to leave the plantations); there was also a second wave of Indians who actively entered South Africa and who became known as 'passenger Indians' (Munsamy, 2005:38). In 1875 'passenger Indians' arrived hoping to set up businesses that

would provide for the already existing Indians in South Africa. Brain (2003), when discussing indentured and free labourers, said: "One can say that the first Indian indentured labourers provided labour for all enterprises which together made up the economy of Natal". From 1871, many free Indians and passenger Indians began to build Indian settlements in the Grey Street Complex. However, it did not prove to be an easy task for the eager Indian businessmen as they were faced with many difficulties. The Dealers Act of 1897 was put in place when the number of Indians in Natal had exceeded the number of whites in the area. The Dealer's Licence Act sought to exclude the Indian traders from West Street thus privileging White traders; this meant that Indians were restricted to the Grey Street Area. Aside from the Dealer's Licence Act, Grey Street occupants were also threatened with removal under the Group Areas Act (1950) to the outskirts of the city. The Group Areas Act was designed to further impose racial segregation. Durban was to become a whites-only area, which meant that Indian residents were forcibly removed from their homes and placed into new residential areas in Phoenix and Chatsworth. The Group Areas Act saw the Grey Street complex became like Sophiatown and District Six, a site in which residents were hard-hit by the damage of being forcibly removed from their homes. Dr. Kesevaloo Goonum was one of the political figures who resisted the bulldozing of her family home in order to make way for white housing. After being arrested for her political activity, she made the following speech:

> I plead guilty and ask the court to impose the maximum sentence permitted to the law...I was protesting against that oppressive and pernicious law recently enacted against my people who had no part in framing it. The act spells disaster, ruin and a state of semi-selfdom to our people who contributed greatly to the prosperity of this country. South Africa we are reminded frequently, is a democratic country...I am here to vindicate this interpretation of democracy (Goonum, 1991:23).

The Casbah's boundaries were a highly contested issue between the then white city administration and its Black population, but most importantly by its Indian population. Finally, in 1973, much to the relief of the Indian community, the Grey Street area was

declared an Indian business district. After much struggle, in 1961 Indians were finally accorded the status of permanent residents in South Africa, and were later even given limited political representation in a political council set up on their behalf (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 2000:13). While some valued this inclusion, others analyzed it in same manner in which they had read the 1940 riots: as an attempt by the white government to drive a wedge between the Indian and Black community, and thus stifle their joint form of resistance.

The South African laws under which the old Indian diasporic communities were governed were largely designed to restrict and control racial groupings. However, the Grey Street complex was moulded and shaped by the Indian community into a mini-India, in order to create a sense of belonging amidst racial and cultural exclusion. The Grey Street Complex was designed as a heterotopia of exclusion, to use Foucault's (1997) term discussed in the previous chapter; however the area became transformed by its Indian inhabitants into what can be called a heterotopia of inclusion. The building of religious, cultural, economic, and educational institutions gave the Indian community a sense of belonging to a meaningful and habitable place.



Figure 3: GC Kapitans (*Rising Sun*, 2012:25)

Popular recreational venues in the Casbah included Kapitan's Balcony Hotel situated on the corner of Grey Street and Victoria Street, also GC Kapitan's, a vegetarian restaurant and home of the popular Durban 'bunny chow'. Grey Street was also known as a place where one could get a fresh delectable Indian meal at a reasonable price. Victory Lounge was a well-loved eatery within the Casbah. Other famous entertainment houses in the Casbah included the Lotus Club in Prince Edward Street, the Himalaya Hotel, the Goodwill Lounge and a

variety of cinemas. The Shah Jehan was the largest cinema in the Casbah at the time. It showed both English and Indian films, seated more than 800 people on the main platform and had three private boxes (*Rising Sun*, 2010:25).

Perhaps Grey Street's most prominent feature was its mosque, established by Aboobaker Amod Jhaveri and Hajee Mahomed Dada. The Juma Musjid Mosque, Natal's first, is the oldest and largest mosque in the Southern Hemisphere, able to accommodate around 6000 worshippers (Vahed, 1995:182). In *The Lotus People* Hassim describes it as "...the magnificent and architecturally famous Jumma Mosque, with its minarets and many domes...it was a natural landmark for both the local residents and the out of town visitors" (2002:169).



Figure 4: 1Juma Mosque (KZN Literary Tourism, 2007)

Passenger Indians, who used their own funds to come to Natal in 1870, established themselves locally as traders. It was estimated that by 1884 over 2000 passenger and free Indians had made homes for themselves in Natal, and many had relied on market gardening as a source of income for their families (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 2000:16). At first, finding a permanent place to sell their stock was difficult, until finally in 1910 the Victoria Street Market was established in order to house traders. Victoria Street Market provided a setting in which businessmen could make their livelihood. However, between 1958 and 1973 a new struggle emerged when there was a bid to remove the market in order to make way for the freeway. It was a bid that was heavily contested by the businessmen who had occupied the Market, but in 1973, under suspicious circumstances, the Victoria

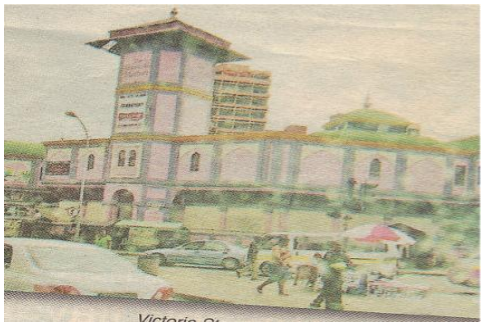


Figure 5: Victoria Street Market (Rising Sun, 2010:25)

Street Market went up in flames. In 1990 the traders were eventually relocated to the Bulk Sales Hall which soon became known as the Durban Indian Market. The most distinctive attribute of the Durban Indian Market was its harmonious diversity among an otherwise isolated community. The Indian traders co-existed with the African Market which ran alongside it. After much lobbying by traders and with the assistance of Senator Owen Howard, the market was rebuilt and traders relocated to the original market, aptly named The Victoria Street Market (Rising Sun, 2010:25). Currently, the market comprises the third and fourth generation descendants of the initial market traders. Most of the current traders at Victoria Street Market are shareholders in the new development and have sectional title rights to their new individual shops, selling cloths, curios, bags, spices and trinkets from Africa and the east. Across the road from the market lies a fish market and alongside this a small 'muti-market' selling skulls, skins and other parts of animals. The markets of the Grey Street Complex now exist as a 'melting pot' of cultures, and are still central to the lives of the surrounding community.

There is no doubt that both former indentured and passenger Indians created a strong sense of 'Indianness' in the city through performance of certain traditional practices and the building of cultural and religious institutions. However, as Mamet (2008:9) points out "the institutions and practices that were put in place in the colony were not mere replicas of those in India but rather were innovative adaptations that would enable the survival of diasporic groups in the urban milieu." A similar view is shared by Desai and Vahed (2007) that Indian traditions in a sense had to be reimagined by South African Indians in order to suit their new settings and

current circumstances. Perhaps the most noteworthy example is that of the caste system, which while strongly prevalent in India, was revised and replaced with a sense of intimate collective consciousness or "kutum" (Meer, 1969:66). Desai states of growth of Indian diaspora in South Africa:

> In many cases the religious and cultural symbols of the village were remembered and through tremendous sacrifices, there were attempts to recreate them. At the same time, old ways of living were challenged and relationships that would be considered taboo back in the village consummated a new, broader identities forged. The numbered bodies on the Truro and Belvedere probably never realised it, but in crossing the [sea], they were the spark for an imagining of a new community that sought to suture old traditions with new ways of living (Rising Sun, 2010:25).

The Indian community also adapted spaces in the Casbah into political places, to suit their political needs of the time.

Grey Street proved to be an intensely political space for Indian resistance against Apartheid laws. Grey Street's Red Square served as an important space for Indians in the resistance after the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill was passed in 1946, a law which dictated the forcible removal of Indians living within white designated areas in and around the city. Red Square was situated in the middle of Grey Street. It was named Red Square during the resistance and was home to mass rallies and political speeches. Red Square provided a platform for some of the giants of the revolutionary movement including Dr. Dadoo (1909-1893) and Dr. Naicker (1910-1978). In *Passive Resistance*, Fatima Meer tells of the violent attack by white youths on the people gathered at Red Square whereupon Dr. Naiker, being concerned about the safety of the women, asked them to leave. According to Meer (1989:59) the women were defiant, stating, "We are in it now and we shall face it to the bitter end...We have heard what has happened, but this makes us all the more determined to carry on, and we shall carry on. If sacrifice we must, then sacrifice we shall...". Hassim, in

The Lotus People, makes a point of addressing the way in which the women of Grey Street became a part of the resistance struggle, whether it be speakers like Fatima Meer interrupting parties in order to speak to women about joining the mass rallies, or those women who encouraged their husbands and children to join the rallies and struggle against Apartheid. The Square is now the Nichol Street Parkade and has lost its political significance.

Another important political site in the Grey Street area was Congress Hall, situated at the corner of Grey Street and Commercial Road. Bought by Gandhi, the Hall held meetings of the National Indian Congress. The building is now a low-rise office-block, no longer a place used for political purposes. Gandhi also purchased a building at 95 Prince Edward Street on behalf of the National Indian Congress. It is no longer a place of any political significance but is instead a parking lot which is oddly enough still administrated by the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation.

In 1947, Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naiker, the leaders of the National Indian Congress (NIC) pioneered a pledge of joint collaboration with the African National Congress (ANC). The 'Doctors Pact', as it was known, encouraged Natal's Indians not to view themselves as separate from the Black community but rather in conjunction with them in the resistance struggle. The idea was for a collective form of resistance, rather than the NIC speaking only for the Indian community. In 1948 the pact was put into action when Africans and Indians took to the streets together in the Defiance Campaign aimed at resisting the unjust laws of Apartheid. Nichol or Red Square became a platform for both the ANC and NIC to collectively voice their political feelings.

However, the romance between the Indian and African community in Grey Street was soon shattered. In 1949 riots broke out between the two communities. For quite some time the Africans had held a belief that Indians were exploiting them and were using the Casbah for their sole benefit. Then on the afternoon of 13 January 1949, a rumour spread that a young African boy was caught stealing from an Indian trader and was subsequently assaulted by the

shopkeeper. The riots that followed altered the relationship between the Indians and Africans. A vast crowd of Africans entered the Grey Street Complex terrorizing the Indian community. Indian traders began to run for cover whilst the police stood idle. The army of Africans that had gathered descended on the market area and with their makeshift weapons battered and hacked any Indian that stood in their path. Shops were looted and burned and women were raped. According to Vahed (1995:258) 142 people were killed in the riots and over 1000 injured; a total of 268 homes were destroyed, resulting in over 44,700 being housed in refugee camps. The memory of that horrific day lives on in the memory of those who experienced it. It certainly does for Aziz Hassim who takes much care to voice the collective memory of the 1940 riots in his fiction.

Many Indians joined Umkhonto weSizwe (MK "Spear of the Nation"), the ANC military wing which fought against the South African Apartheid government through acts of sabotage. Well known members of MK included Nelson Mandela, Joe Slovo, and Chris Hani. To avoid being arrested, MK meetings were held 'underground'. Many of these underground meetings took place within the Casbah, in homes and shops, and were attended by Indian activists including Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Goonum (Naidoo, 2002). The police were unaware of these meetings and thus Grey Street, much like District Six, became a hub of resistance. Through acts like the Group Areas Act, the Apartheid government had hoped to break down the collective, tight-knit nature of the Casbah, but the Casbah still functioned as a place of security for its community. In other words, the people who lived in and knew the Casbah best were able to find spaces that eluded the police and thus elude the Apartheid government's panoptic surveillance.

Grey Street was also known for its many gangs and turf wars (Naidoo, 2002). The Salot gang controlled the taxi rank near Kapitan's Balcony Hotel. The Crimson League often operated around Simon's Cafe and the younger generations operated around the Beatrice Street area. One of Grey Streets most



Figure 6: 1Sherrif Khan amongst fellow gang members (Rising Sun, 2012:25)

notorious gangsters, Sherif Khan, also known as "Sheephead Daddy", ran a stall at the Victoria Street Market and was feared by many. Despite the area being home to many gangs, the Casbah residents were seldom harassed by gang members; instead gangs fought wars amongst themselves over territory as well as over various illicit enterprises. Phyllis Naidoo, a member of the National Indian Congress and the South African Communist Party, who concerns herself today mainly with recording the history of the anti–apartheid struggle suggests that the gangsters of the Casbah were politically conscious. In *Footprints in Grey Street* Naidoo (2002:233) tells of a Daddy Naidoo, a member of the Crimson League, who donated to political prisoners, she states: "Thank you daddy and the Crimson League who made their contribution to the struggle". Hassim (2002) too in The *Lotus People* constructs gangsters as politically-minded individuals. He represents the gangsters as products of their socio-cultural history and heroes of their time.

Finally in 1994, after much struggle, Apartheid was demolished and the ANC was voted into power. No longer under the restrictions of the Group Areas Act and other Apartheid laws that spatially discriminated against the South African people, the Grey Street Area became a more culturally and racially diverse space. While still retaining its Indian influence the Casbah is now made up of entrepreneurs from all over Africa including Kenyans and Zimbabweans. In essence the Grey Street that is spoken about, by Hassim and other writers, is a lost community. Many of the Casbah's main figures have moved away from the area and it no longer has the feel of the collective and passionate community that is described in Hassim's novels. *The Lotus People* describes the Casbah as "...a vibrant and energetic community that was representative of the second and third generations of early settlers" (2002:169). The community was a sanctuary for the people who lived there, solace was found in the community's temples, mosques, customs and languages. This is no longer the case, in *The Lotus People* Hassim writes:

> The street's changing...Look around you. There was a time you could spot half a dozen scotens with one sweep of your eyes. Not anymore. And the cinemas-the Vic, the Royal, the Avalon - all no more than a memory. What happened to Dhanjees

> Fruiterers, Victoria Furniture Mart, Kapitans, that noisy Royal Tinsmith Company...Hell buddy, I could go on forever (2002:511).

Changes have not only been physical, there have also been many cultural changes to the Indian community that first arrived in South Africa. For example, the old diaspora were keen on retaining their vernacular and did so through schools and religious institutions. However, by 1990, English replaced the vernacular and 97.5 percent of Indians regarded English as their first language (Vahed, 1995:211). A minority, especially amongst the older generation, still speak some Indian languages such as Hindi and Tamil as their first language. English however is predominant and in younger generations is often the only language spoken. However, the English spoken by the Indian community has a distinct character. It is termed South African Indian English (SAIE) by linguists such as Rajend Mesthrie, who in December 2010 published a dictionary of South African Indian English. This style of speaking is said to have emerged from the Indian community's close contact and association with each other and the various Indian languages, as well as with the country's Zulu and Afrikaans speaking community. Such a mixture of language appears strongly in Hassim's *Revenge of Kali.*

Since the end the end of Apartheid there has been a refusal from the Grey Street writers to forget the past. Naidoo (2002) writes mainly political non-fiction concerned with recording the history of the struggle. Goonum (1991) has written an autobiography, capturing the life of the Indian community especially during the anti-Indian Land Act, which forcibly removed Indians from their home and placed them in ghettoes. Meer (1969 and 1989) published more than forty books, most of which were non-fiction dealing with socio-economic issues and history, as well as the first biography on Nelson Mandela as an anti – apartheid activist. Aziz Hassim (2002 and 2009), Ravi Govender (2006 and 2011) and Imraan Coovadia (2001) take on more of a nostalgic tone in their fiction based on The Grey Street area. As Govinden (2003:np), drawing on Jacobs (1994), states: "All these writers are writing from alienation of some sort, from a kind of void, and are resisting erasure, even of memory; they are located now in a different part of the city, in a landscape that does not yield the same memories as

their previous locations. They are writing in a world, mapping a territory that no longer exists as they know it."


Figure 7: Aziz Hassim (KZN Literary Tourism, 2007).

Aziz Hassim was born in 1935, and grew up in Queen Street, spending his years fraternizing on the streets of the Casbah. He still remembers the great political rallies lead by Dr. Goonum, Fatima Meer and Dr. Yusuf Dadoo. Speaking on his reasons behind writing *The Lotus People* (2002: book jacket) Hassim proclaims: "I also like to say to myself that we, all of us, need to know where we come from before we can know where we are going. This effort was a small step in that direction...the area [Casbah] had a kind of romance and bittersweet lifestyle during the fifties and sixties, which lives on only in the minds of those that inhabited it at the time."

This chapter has provided a broad historical context of Indians in the Grey Street Complex. The next chapter will offer an analysis into Hassim's *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali,* paying careful attention to the theories surrounding place and memory in fiction discussed in Chapter One and the history of Grey Street discussed in Chapter Two.

Chapter Four: Constructions of place in Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali*

In this chapter I analyse Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People* (2002) *and Revenge of Kali* (2009) in order to explore the ways in which Hassim constructs place and specifically the Grey Street complex in his fiction. I will analyse Hassim's fictional constructions of place in his two novels through the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two. I make reference to other South African Indian writers who have represented the Grey Street complex in their fiction; these including Imraan Coovadia in *The Wedding* (2001), Mariam Akabor in *Flat 9* (2006), Kesevaloo Goonum in *Coolie Doctor* (1991), Phyllis Naidoo in *Footprints in Grey Street* (2002) and Ravi Govender in *Down Memory Lane* (2006). I also make reference to other South African Indian writers who have constructed the Indian space in their fiction; this includes Ronnie Govender. My intention is not to offer an analysis of these works but rather to use their works to strengthen my analysis of Hassim's two novels, showing the similarities and differences in their representations of place.

Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People*

Set in Grey Street, *The Lotus People* takes the reader through the labyrinthine world of one of South Africa's most significant political spaces. One of the characteristics that separate *The Lotus People* from other works of fiction and non-fiction based in the Grey Street complex is the novel's ability to chronicle the story of a single family over a lengthy period of approximately a hundred years. Isabel Hofmeyr, taken by the novel's proportions states the following:

> The novel's epic reach is announced on the opening page which starts in 325 BCE with the Pathan warrior class in northwest India. And, it is indeed an exhilarating experience to read a South African novel that starts in this way...The dagger is

> repository of legend, memory and wealth. It is not static, but is made and remade as it circulates (Govinden, 2003: np).

The Lotus People tells the story of a single family arriving from India in the 1880s. The grandfather, Yahya Ali Suleiman, sets up his business and residence in the Grey Street complex. Hassim tells the story, not just from the perspective of the grand old patriarch, but also from the perspective of the younger generations in the form of Yahya's son Dara and Yahya's grandchildren, Sam and Jake. Each of these characters responds to the time and circumstance in which they lived, and thus each generation is made to respond to its own set of socio-political problems brought on by the colonial/Apartheid state. However challenging the living conditions of the colonial/Apartheid state, the family manages to build up from a small scale hawking business to large emporiums in the Grey Street complex. It is for this reason that Hassim refers to them as the 'Lotus' people: a Lotus flower can grow out of the mud and blossom out of the muddy water surface. As a symbol, the flower suggests that one can rise above one's circumstances and sufferings and 'blossom' into something great. In this way Hassim recreates the Indian diaspora in South Africa, and shows how against all odds many succeeded in creating a prosperous life for themselves in the country.

Hassim has referred to *The Lotus People* as an "historical fiction", stating that although the characters are fictional, they are based on real people and on real historical events (Basckin & Molver 2003, filmed interview). Hassim wishes that *The Lotus People* be read not as an autobiography but as a product of the environment in which he lived during the Apartheid period (Basckin & Molver 2003, filmed interview). Another South African Indian writer who is inspired by her lived experiences is Mariam Akabor. In *Flat 9* (2006) Akabor constructs the block of flats in which she spent her childhood and bases most of the stories on her personal experiences. Hassim has often referred to the novel as his "personal TRC" (2002:book jacket), as a way in which he has been able to testify to some of the crimes and horrors of apartheid, experienced by the Grey Street community. He is able to reconstruct these by creating a multi-voiced, hybrid text which enables some of his fictional characters to

engage with historically well-known political figures such as Kesavaloo Goonum and Mahatma Gandhi. History is thus told from multiple perspectives, and in doing so, Hassim gives the once silenced a platform on which to speak. As discussed in the previous chapter, postcolonial writers, such as Hassim, use fiction as a way in which to redefine and re-member colonial spaces. Hassim uses historical fiction as a method of bringing history to life. History told through fiction and non-fiction is similar in that they are both "a construct of the mind" (Brown, 1998:2). Brown argues that while evidence of history exists, "plain history" made by historians is rarely "plain" (Brown, 1998:2). Thus, no history "whether within a novel or history text can be without bias...meaning lies not in a chain of events themselves but in the writer's interpretation of what occurred" (Brown, 1998:2). The argument that will be made is that historical fiction can be more revealing and powerful in re-defining colonial spaces than the "plain history" told by non-fictional works. In Hassim's case it is because he writes his historical fiction through what was termed "keyhole history" in Chapter Two: history rendered from the perspective of ordinary people during extraordinary times, which renders the writing more authentic to its readers. This is uncharacteristic of non-fictional accounts of history which tend to focus largely on the stories of extraordinary heroic figures of history and which can call into question the work's credibility.

Writing the City: Place and Space in *The Lotus People*

This chapter analyses Hassim's portrayal of Grey Street through concepts derived from the work of Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau. Indeed, the urban design of the apartheid city relied on the principles of Foucault's panopticon to ensure ultimate control and power of the 'Black areas' of the city. The Grey Street complex of Durban was kept under strict surveillance by the apartheid government, and was constantly policed to ensure that Indians remained in their designated areas. In *The Lotus People*, Hassim constructs the Grey Street complex as a city kept under tight panoptic surveillance in order to restrict the movement of the Indian community and to ensure that they did not engage in acts of political resistance. Hassim writes:

> ...in an environment where the energies of the inhabitants were devoted solely towards keeping the body and its meagre possessions intact, the inclination to protest against moral issues was bound to be diluted. All that was required was to police the edges of the ghettoes...within each of the boundaries of the black residential areas, a token police force comprising exclusively of non-European constables headed by a white official was allocated the function of maintaining a modicum of law and order (Hassim, 2002:168)

Hassim depicts the racially demarcated areas of the city as a result of the apartheid government's tactics intended to cause tension between marginalised groups and weaken any unified resistance toward the master race. He writes:

> ...the demarcation of exclusive settlement zones, restricted to the sole occupation of a specific race group, acted as a neat hindrance to racially unified political resistance and fostered a degree of friction amongst the African, coloured and Indian citizens. Such animosities suited the state admirably; the concept of divide and rule was a useful tool indeed in keeping those marginalised people occupied with narrower issues and out of the mainstream of real politics (168).

Thus, Hassim depicts an Apartheid government as a body which saw the Grey Street complex as nothing more than an abstract space that needed to be governed and policed.

In *The Lotus People* however, Hassim refuses to paint the Grey Street complex as just an abstract space: instead he constructs it as a place of historical, social, political and economic happenings, in which the Indian community of the Grey Street complex shapes and re-defines the buildings and streets and attaches new meanings to them, meanings different from those of the apartheid government. Nichol Square is renamed Red Square in the 1940s alluding to the fiery anti-Apartheid rallies that were held there. Streets which bear the names of the

colonial Royal family are transformed by the Indian community. They are re-defined through Indian architecture and religious buildings which serves as a site of Indian identity. The narrator describes these landmarks as follows:

> At the corner of Grey and Queens Streets, occupying almost half a block, was the magnificent and architecturally famous Jumma Mosque, with its minarets and many domes. The largest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, it was a natural landmark for both the local residents and the out of town visitors. Adjoining the mosque, fronting onto the Cathedral Road and directly opposite the historic Emmanuel Cathedral, were a row of cottages that has been consolidated into a large unit that served as a madressah for Muslim children (Hassim, 2002:169).

Ronnie Govender in *At the Edge and other Cato Manor stories* (1996) constructs a Cato Manor similar to Hassim's Casbah, showing an Indian community which has come to re-define and add new meanings to its allocated area. In the fifties, the district became the first victim of the notorious Groups Areas Act. In Ronnie Govender's short stories on Cato Manor, Brown (2006) suggests that it is the passed down traditions of storytelling, the planting of trees native to India and the closeness of family and neighbours that helps define Cato Manor with new meanings thus making it a usable and habitable place.

In Chapter Two, de Certeau's theory is used as a counterpoint to Foucault's, since de Certeau insists that it is people who convert spaces into places. De Certeau offers us another way of reading the urban space by suggesting that through the everyday practice of walking through the city, the inhabitants of the space have the power to escape the 'imaginary totalizations' (de Certeau, 1993:153) imposed by city planners. Thus it is the pedestrians who are the real makers of the city, "it is people who anchor the city in time, even if only for a fleeting moment" (de Certeau, 1993:153). Phyllis Naidoo's book *Footprints in Grey Street* takes a lead from its title in suggesting that it is people on the ground, who walk through and use the streets on a day to day basis, rather than the streets and buildings themselves, which define

and bring meaning to the Grey Street complex. *The Lotus People* also emphasises the importance of walkers of the Grey Street Complex, suggesting an agreement with de Certeau's theorization that pedestrians are the real makers of the city.

As already suggested in the previous chapters, mapping was vital to the colonial and Apartheid projects as it aided in the ordering and policing of space. The Narrator shows that those who are educated at the "University of the street" (Hassim, 2002:376) those who use and experience the street in their everyday lives and know the ins and outs of the Grey Street complex re-map the city. Jake, as a gang leader, is educated in the University of the Street and is thus able to take his brother Sam through a route in the city that Sam did not know existed. As the narrator states:

> They walked side by side, Jake silently leading the way through narrow passages between deserted office buildings...They were moving through the rear of the blocks, through dark and gloomy areas where Sam could barely see...Jake, however, knew his way around and moved swiftly, scaling low walls and cutting through narrow gaps...They were walking in single file now, through a maze that left Sam totally disorientated (192).

For the gangsters, who are constantly watched by the police, it becomes a matter of survival that they be familiar with the labyrinth of streets. For the gangsters, knowing their way around allows them to locate micro spaces that serve as a protection from the surveillance of the Apartheid police. Jake says to his brother:

> The Casbah is another world...Another country. When you know your way around an army of cops wouldn't find you. You could disappear for weeks, move around freely. And don't even think this is the only such place. You could lose yourself just as easily in the Duchene or May Street or in any dozen other mini Casbahs (193).

Jake later again proves the de Certeau-like point that when you know the Casbah, not even the cops can find you:

> When he came to the wide entrance to the mosque he unhurriedly turned into it, then swiftly headed for the gates that led to the internal walkway...He could go left, alongside the rear of the shops towards a second broad passageway from which he could exit onto Queen Street once more and emerge a hundred years behind whoever was following him (274).

Thus, ironically, Hassim constructs the Grey Street complex as a sanctuary to its inhabitants. It is similar to what Rive says about District Six providing a sanctuary for its community:

> You know, it's a funny thing, but it's only in the District that I feel safe. District Six is like an island, if you follow me, an island in a sea of apartheid. The whole of District Six is one big apartheid, so we can't see it. We only see it when...we leave the District, when we leave our island and go to Cape Town or to Sea Point or come here to Kalk Bay. Then we see apartheid...When the white man comes into the District with his notice he is a stranger, and when we come out of the District he makes us realise that we are the strangers (Rive 1986: 95-96).

Ironically enough, Jake at one point himself holds a panoptic view over those who are meant to be watching over him: "In Madressa Arcade Jake entered a store, went to the rear and lowered himself into a chair. It was a good vantage-point; he had a clear view of the activity outside without being clearly visible to whoever was out there" (Hassim, 2002:275). Hassim therefore shows how Apartheid ideals are subverted by the walkers of the city who know the routes and spaces that are hidden from the panoptic gaze of the Apartheid government.

In *The Lotus People*, Hassim employs many marginal figures as the walkers of the city. In doing so Hassim surprises the reader, by taking us into unexplored and unexpected places

where many acts of political resistance are born and bred. Hassim introduces the reader to the world of gangsters, gamblers, prostitutes and thieves. He writes about these marginalised figures and the ways in which they participated in the struggle. He gives voice to the otherwise unspoken for. Hassim does not represent these gangsters as mysterious, ethereal beings but rather as individuals with a strong political consciousness. In a society that otherwise tries to deny them, Hassim presents the gangsters as strong minded, well-informed authorial voices who play a massive role in the anti-Apartheid struggle. Hassim refuses to view these gangsters as insignificant or unjust characters of society, instead he insists on highlighting their political activities, something that is often unrecognised or not understood. In doing so, Hassim reconstructs a Casbah that is acknowledging of the societal 'other'. In *The Lotus People*, Sal says:

> What I see are heads rolling in the gutter, broken bodies in the streets, blood in every corner...What these thugs in government are doing is beyond belief, they're tearing decent people to ribbons with those killer dogs of theirs, they're using their sjamboks to scar children for life and their elaborate laboratories are workshops of the devil! (524).

Fatima Meer (1998) reconstructs the identity of the underworld similarly in her biography of Andrew Zondo. Meer questions the normative definition of the term 'terrorist' suggesting that these individuals exhibit far more than what is conceived by the society from which they stem. Chapter Three made mention of the notorious Crimson League, in *Footprints in Grey Street* (2002), Naidoo pays homage to Daddy Naidoo, member of the Crimson league for his political strife: "Thank you Daddy and the Crimson League who made their contributions to the struggle" (2002:223). Thus, fiction and non-fiction written about this particular history share a similar perspective: both question the normative definition of 'criminal' in society. However, from the given passage above, it is argued that fiction works better when attempting to express the horrors of injustice during a particular history to the reader. Hassim uses characteristics of fiction to grab the reader's full attention and empathy. Hassim's

character Sal has a strong sensory reaction when voicing his opinion about the government: his language his highly emotive, using sharply descriptive metaphors (e.g. “they’re tearing decent people to ribbons with those killer dogs of theirs). In using such a writing style, Hassim is capable of generating a greater emotional response within the reader.

Hassim undermines the notion of the Apartheid government that sees the Casbah as an abstract space made up of the indistinguishable subjected urban mass. Instead *The Lotus People* constructs a city of subjectivity, a world of business men, gangsters, householders, actors, sportsmen and politicians. Hassim’s narrative is enriched by his insistence on giving voice to all those who played a part in the community and its socio-political struggles, and showing the Indian identity as being layered, differentiated and complex.

Grey Street Politics

Other Indian authors too have written fiction based on the Grey Street complex. Imraan Coovadia’s *The Wedding* (2001) which takes the form of an autobiography, tells the story of a couple’s tumultuous marriage which ultimately leads to the husband deciding that he and his wife should move to South Africa where they can start afresh. The couple manages to find a residence in the Grey Street Complex. They are faced with multiple challenges in their new environment enabling the text to raise questions about Indian diasporic identity. However, Coovadia places politics in the background and does not construct the Grey Street Complex as an important site of political strife. Unlike in *The Wedding*, Ravi Govender in *Down Memory Lane* (2006) constructs the Grey Street complex as a site of political significance. Aziz Hassim contributed to the book’s forward, writing: “There is a saying that if you forget your past you will be condemned to repeat it. When I read Ravi Govender's essays and his reminiscences about our somewhat chequered history, I marvel at his ability to recall Durban's bitter sweet past with touching finesse and a depth of perception” (Govender, 2006)

In his masterpiece *The Lotus People*, Hassim constructs the Casbah as a significant political space:

> And life in the Casbah was about politics too. Children were weaned on it, as children elsewhere were weaned on mother's milk. It was the logical outcome of the policies of repression, the common denominator around which their lives revolved. Spectators watched sport and simultaneously talked politics, diners enjoyed their meals and discussed the latest developments, young couples impressed each other with their awareness and the depth of their knowledge, and the street sweepers picked up pamphlets and debated the merits of protests as a force for peaceful change. There was no other area of under one square mile that could equal it for the intensity of its emotions and its pursuit of justice (Hassim 2002:109).

As Govinden suggests, "place and struggle have become synonyms in South African history" (2003:9). Hassim shows the part that the Grey Street complex played in the struggle. One of the most vivid pictures of political strife that Hassim paints is in his description of the 1949 riots. The Grey Street complex is presented in *The Lotus People* as a cultural contact zone, a place in which different racial and cultural groups come into contact with each other. Hassim constructs a vivid picture of this contact zone when writing about the 1949 riots, the history of which was discussed in Chapter Three. Dara, recalling the riots says, the following:

> the brutal savagery of the Zulu hordes that had rampaged through the Indian ghettos of the city, systematically plundering and destroying every Indian property and leaving a trail of destruction and scores of dead and dying. The sounds and sights of the carnage wreaked on a defenceless section of the population overwhelmed him, cruelly beating through his mind like crude jungle drums. The massacre had continued for three days and two nights, without respite or relief and with a curious apathy displayed by the forces of law and order (Hassim 2002:23).

Hassim's use of language and diction further enhance the picture of utter desolation caused by the riots. Hassim uses sharp, emotive language to fully express the wrath of devastation to the reader. Hassim uses words such as: 'savagery', 'destruction', 'carnage', and 'massacre' to suggest the inhumane and uncivilized manner of the riots.

Chapter Three has recalled the many ways in which the Grey Street complex served as a place of political protest. In her autobiography, *Coolie Doctor*, Dr Goonum reiterates Hassim's sentiment: "Our largest meetings were held in the heart of Durban on an empty piece of ground called Nichol Square which we renamed Red Square" (1991:106). Therefore, Hassim has constructed the Grey Street complex in the work, as a space that is vibrant with political apartheid and anti-apartheid struggle, rather than a static abstract space governed by the apartheid government.

The Casbah: A Mini India

Hassim's *The Lotus People* is concerned primarily with the diasporic culture of the Grey Street area in the 50s and 60s. Keeping in mind Vijay Mishra's theories of diasporic culture discussed in Chapter Two, it is fair to say that *The Lotus People* explores the experience of both the old and new generations of Indian diaspora which have settled in the Grey Street complex. In *The Lotus People* the old diasporas find it difficult to consider the Casbah as being 'home'. Yahya, for instance, arrived in Natal in the 1880s after being promised better business opportunities in South Africa. However, Yahya is quick to realize that the reality is far from the promises that were made to him. He states: "This country...has not been kind to us. Look at me. I'm an educated man, I can read and write fluently, I take nothing that does not belong to me. Yet I am reduced to a level below that of even a manual labourer" (Hassim, 2002:51). Yahya does think about returning to India; however, "a deep feeling of shame suffused him, the thought of returning to his family and admitting he had failed...was too much to bear" (51). Thus Yahya decides to stay on in his adopted land and brave the harsh circumstances:

> That was the last time Yahya complained to anyone about the shortcomings of his life. He stubbornly ignored the limitations placed on his race by the rulers of the land which he had settled in. He wrote copious letters to his family in India without once mentioning the hardships of his existence. He stoically accepted every indignity heaped on his once proud bearing and made a covenant with himself that would, ultimately, overcome the vicissitudes of his capricious fortunes (52).

Yahya succeeds in making a life for him and his family in his country of adoption but he never completely accepts South Africa as his home. Many members of the old diasporic community, like Yahya, feel a sense of alienation or non-belonging in their adopted land. Drawing on Vijay Mishra's concept of exclusivism, which was discussed in Chapter Three, I will now discuss the ways in which the novel constructs characters of *The Lotus People* who turn inwards and create what can be deemed a 'mini-India':

> The Casbah, as it was often referred to, was inhabited almost exclusively by Indians, with a fair sprinkling of coloureds. It was owned and developed in its entirety, and from its inception almost a hundred years before, by Indians who had automatically settled within its confines before spreading out into the suburbs. It was a vibrant and energetic community that was representative of the second and third generations of early settlers (169).

The novel represents the Indian community of the Casbah as one which does its best to maintain traditions and ideals of the homeland as a way both to cure its longing for India and maintain and preserve its Indian identity, especially when living in an Apartheid South Africa, run by a hostile government. Thus, the novel shows how the Casbah is transformed into a mini-India, a space that maintains Indian architecture, the vernacular, Indian cuisine and religious practices:

> In the late forties Grey Street, and the roads bisecting it, were a miniature replica of a major city in India. Rows of neat double-storied buildings, consisting of stores on the ground floor and residential flats above, stretched from one end of the road to the other...the magnificent and architecturally famous Jumma Mosque...opposite the historic Emmanuel Cathedral, were a row of cottages that had been consolidated into a large unit that served as a madressah for Muslim children (168-169).

Thus, even though the Apartheid government saw the Grey Street complex as but an area of exclusion, a demarcated and policed area that kept non-whites away from the white areas of Durban, Hassim undercuts this view of the Grey Street Complex. It is because of this social exclusion that the Indian community turns inwards into a space that becomes one of inclusion. Hassim constructs the Grey Street complex as not a marginal space but rather a lively and vibrant space:

> The Casbah on a Saturday morning was like no city anywhere on earth. The streets and pavements were clean, the shop windows freshly washed and glittering, the shoppers dressed in festive gear and wearing anything from the sari to the Hawaiian sarong. Old men in turbans and long shirts shuffled alongside the younger generation in jeans and colourful T-shirts (108).

Hassim constructs the Casbah through a nostalgic yearning for a cleaner, more exuberant city. Hassim's use of hyperbole in describing the Casbah as "like no city anywhere on earth" indicates his emotional attachment to the city's past.

As already mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Grey Street complex also becomes a place of refuge, a place of safety for the Indian community, in contrast to the rest of the city. As Sandy states:

> When you belong to it the street is your best friend. It's a cocoon that's safer than a mother's womb. Walk away and it's your greatest enemy. You're no more than game bait ...As Sam crossed over onto Grey Street he shrugged his shoulders, his lips stretched into a tight smile, eyes suddenly hard and merciless. He'd been there, he was not likely to forget where he came from. The punks could try their luck with him (223).

Sandy's word proves true when Nithin walks away from the Indian-designated area of Durban into the white part of the city. There he is attacked by a white boy and beaten up, effectively becoming 'game bait'.

Therefore, Hassim constructs a Casbah in which Indian diaspora create a replica of their homeland in their new space , and it is within this exclusive diasporic space that Indian culture is not only maintained but also undergoes creative re-imagining. Each street of the Casbah comes to have a specific function that then adds to the lifestyles of the community:

> ...perfect strangers [...] strolled on the pavements with gay abandon, some looking for bargains, a large number simply out to enjoy the day and meet friends and relatives before moving on to restaurants and bioscopes. Each street served a specific function. The eastern end of Victoria Street was theatre-land, the western half reserved mainly for the markets and grocery stores. Grey Street, from the racecourse to the West End Hotel in Pine Street, was the clothes-horses' paradise, offering an array of the most recent fashion trends from virtually every major city in the world, the garments carefully copied and faultlessly reproduced in local sweat shops and factories. Queen street was a street of barbers on the one side and hardware and timber merchants on the other side. Pine street housed the best family-owned tailor shops in the world; Prince Edward Street the neatest sari houses and craftsmen jewellers. In between and at every corner was the inevitable tea-room, serving the best in chillie-bites and confectionery (109).

Hassim constructs a romantic Casbah, one which is vibrant and all encompassing. In the passage, Hassim suggests an unbridled collectiveness amongst the Casbah community. 'Perfect strangers' strolled through the 'paradise' like streets where every need is met by 'the best in the world'. Similar images of the Grey Street complex are constructed by Ravi Govender in *Down Memory Lane* (2006: 27). Govender too writes in romantic, idealistic and exaggerated tones when describing the Casbah:

> ... there has not been a cinema in Durban, in my view, that can compare to the Shah Jehan Cinema which was located at 275 Grey Street.[...]Only if you had the pleasure of sitting in that regal auditorium have you really had a cinematic experience! Not surprisingly, the Shah Jehan shares its name with the emperor and creator of that other magnificent edifice, the Taj Mahal (2006:46)

Hassim constructs the Casbah as a space in which diasporic culture is re-worked and re-imagined. He does so through the characters of Naran and Yahya in *The Lotus People.* When the two first meet to discuss a business transaction they are cautious of each other as they belong to two different caste groups. As mentioned in Chapter Three the caste system was very strictly followed in India but gradually began to fall away as the indentured labourers leave for South Africa all grouped together, regardless of caste. The Apartheid government also does not distinguish between the caste of Naran and the caste of Yahya and they soon become great friends, after realising that they are both similarly struggling to get by in their adopted land:

> When they parted, neither was aware that the foundations of two great dynasties had been put in place, over a simple embrace. The Gujerati, whose cardinal rule governing any business transaction was to give nothing for nothing, has made a monumental exception. The Pathan who believed in taking possession of what he considered was his, by violence if necessary, had humbled himself against what was tantamount to a

> tribal conviction. A bond had been forged between two families, one that would outlast both their lifetimes and extend into the next century (Hassim 2002: 19).

In order for the diasporic community to succeed in its new land, it must let go of certain cultural forms from their land of origin such as the caste system. In *The Lotus People,* individuals from disparate originating groups in the old diasporic community unite, and it is this support for one another that ensure their survival in a country that has been distinctly hostile toward them. *The Lotus People* constructs the Grey Street complex as a culturally dynamic space in which culture is constantly being re-made and re-imagined.

In *The Lotus People,* Hassim constructs not just the lives of the old diasporic comminity but also the lives of the new Indian diasporic groups, represented mainly by Dara's children, Sam and Jake. Members of the new Indian diasporic community think differently from those of the old in that they come to regard South Africa as their home. This is evident at a family meeting when Dara suggests that the only way out of their problems is to "leave this country. Now!" (26). Jake on the other hand feels differently, and once his father has left the room he says the following to Sam: "His days are over anyway. He's running cold, like a real chacha. We belong here, we are part of the struggle. Damn it, Sam, this is our country" (26).

Sam and Jake are part of what Mishra terms the new 'border' diasporic community, an identity that is made up of two parts, of the old and the new. Sam is described in the text as having a manner "typical of a large number of his generation, [having] struck a delicate balance between his father and his own family, between tradition and a tolerance for change" (29).

It is also clear in *The Lotus People* that many of the Indian traditions that are passed down to the new diasporic generations by the old diasporic community are lost over time. Sam's mother admits that she has failed in educating her children well in Eastern customs and traditions and even though Dara is most comfortable speaking in Gujerati, to his children, it is

mostly a strange inaccessible language. English is often spoken with a sprinkling of Indian words: "He's running cold, like a real chacha" (26) and this South African Indian English is spoken along with street slang. Thus, in *The Lotus People*, the Grey Street complex is constructed as a space of transculturation. Hassim shows that the city is a space conducive to the remaking of culture and identity because it is the place of most difference, as suggested by Nuttall (discussed in Chapter Three). In *The Lotus* People, Hassim constructs a city in which culture is forever in a state of flux.

Memory and Nostalgia in *The Lotus People*

Describing *The Lotus People* Hassim says that he wished to record a past that he was "convinced has disappeared forever" and that he would also like to say to himself "that we, all of us, need to know where we come from before we can know where we are going" (Hassim, 2002:back cover page). *The Lotus People* can thus be seen as an act of collective remembering in the Indian community. Through his multi-voiced text Hassim engages in collective remembering, rather than individual remembering, Dennis Walder (discussed in Chapter Three) suggests that at certain historical junctures and in response to struggles and hardship, any individual remembering takes place within the context of a collective endeavour in order to fully understand and engage with the past (2005:429). Yahya's dagger serves as a link between him and his family back in India, and he later passes on the dagger to his son so that he too is always reminded of their homeland and its heritage. As Dara states to Sam:

> But you are a Pathan too - the product of a tribe whose heritage is as glorious as its history. You are the descendant of legendary warriors who bow before no man and bend their knees to God alone. Their ancestral homeland is the North West Frontier Province, on the border with Afghanistan. No one, not even the great Moghuls who were themselves renowned for their fighting prowess, nor the British after them

> whose imperial ambitions knew no boundaries, nor, more recently, the Russians, ever subjugated your people (Hassim 2002:472).

Dara speaks of his homeland in much the same way as the narrator speaks about the Casbah: through nostalgic, hyperbolic and idealistic tones. However, the 'glorious' history of the Pathan homeland is also written against the history of the Casbah when Dara argues that the Pathan people were never 'subjugated' by imperial powers.

Hassim (2002) states that he finds it important to know all the details of the past as it is not possible for us to know where we are going, without knowing where we come from. Thus, memory becomes an important tool in telling us who we are. In *The Lotus People*, Sam is determined to know the full history of both his father and his grandfather as he is sure this will help him to know and understand what kind of man he is.

In keeping with Lovell's argument, discussed in Chapter Three, it can be said that *The Lotus People* shows how memory and identity are etched into landscapes in ways that cannot be erased. Driving (instead of De Certeau's walking) through the area in which he grew up, Sam constructs the area as a site of memory. The narrator says the following about Sam's returning to his childhood home:

> He looked at the pavement below him, read the names that had been etched deeply into the concrete by children who had, in another age, inhabited the area. He saw the faint outline of squares, circles and oblongs created by some sharp instrument. Somehow it had survived the passage of time. He went down on his haunches and inspected the scratches, ran a finger over them, the rough concrete gritty to the touch. His memories went into free-fall. In vivid detail he could see the girls in knee length blue poplin dresses and white bobby sox, doing the hop, skip and jump as they played hopscotch. His ears acquired a new dimension, echoing the laughter of the schoolgirls as their dresses billowed in the air. His body responded to the thrill of recollection,

> involuntary trembling as long forgotten images surged through him. Sam would swear later that he had distinctly heard the happy voices of Lorraine Sebastian and her older sister Joan as they flew gracefully over the forbidden lines and landed in the centre of the squares. This was not his memory reliving the past, he was physically there with them, in form and substance (463).

Thus, the names, faces, and voices of Sam's friends are embedded in the environment, like ghosts, and Sam retorts, "And I'm somewhere there too, caught in a time warp, forever a part of this environment" (464). Hillis-Miller explains "a place is the element that anchors memory" (2001:3). Sam's memories are etched in places the same way that Hassim's memories are etched in the Casbah. Through Sam's memory, Hassim etches the marginal voice of the city into the landscape. Sam responds physically to his memories: "His ears acquired a new dimension...His body responded to the thrill of recollection, involuntary trembling as long forgotten images surged through him". This is similar to Thiru's out of body experience in *Revenge of Kali*. Through Sam's physical and mental experience, on seeing the names of past friends etched into the concrete, the narrator reminds the reader of the power of memory and its ability to "[survive] the passage of time".

As already discussed, the Casbah was about politics too, and in *The Lotus People* Hassim constructs the Casbah as a place of collective political remembering. As previously mentioned, Hassim has often stated that *The Lotus People* is his personal TRC, his way of testifying for the atrocities that were done by the Apartheid government. In the Grey Street complex the political struggle is never forgotten:

> Dara's thoughts drifted into the past, to the happy days behind the mosque and the lazy hours of talk and laughter; to Gandhi and his philosophy of Satyagraha- conceived initially during his stay in South Africa and carefully nurtured in India - and wondered what it had achieved. He actually became a victim, he thought bitterly of the violence that he preached against (Hassim 2002:144-145).

Thus, through *The Lotus People,* Hassim is able not just to remember but re-member the political strife. Hassim undercuts the Apartheid government's view of the Casbah and replaces it with a rich constructed narrative that gives voice to the histories and experiences of the marginalised groups living during the time.

There is no doubt that Aziz Hassim writes most of *The Lotus People* with a nostalgic yearning for something that he believes will never return again. Hassim states: "Durban and the Casbah area had a kind of romance and bittersweet lifestyle during the 1950's and 60's, which, despite the apartheid laws - or perhaps because of them - lives on only in the minds of those who inhabited it at the time" (in Govinden 2003: 16). Hassim's longing for a past that may never return is reiterated by Nithin when he says:

> The street's changing...Look around you. There was a time you could spot half a dozen scotens with one sweep of your eyes. Not anymore. And the cinemas - the Vic, the Royal, the Avalon - all no more than a memory. What happened to Dhanjees Fruiterers, Victoria Furniture Mart, Kapitans, that noisy Royal Tinsmith Company...hell buddy, I could go on forever (Hassim 2002: 511).

In *The Lotus People* the narrator even paints the illegal acts of the Casbah in a nostalgic light:

> It was a day reserved exclusively for pleasure. It seemed to provide a catharsis for body and soul and primed the spirit for the week ahead. The numbers racket, or Fah Fee as it was called, was played by nearly everyone who could spare a ticket or more and provided a lucrative source of income for the streetwise operators, which was supplemented by the sale of black-market cinema tickets, always in short supply and available only from sharp-eyed operators who had cornered the market. They were bought and sold with a cheerful smile and a gamblers abandon. It was simply a part of life in the Casbah (109).

Nostalgia can often lead to an oversimplified or over-romanticised description of a period in time. Writing from a nostalgic point of view can result in unreal, idealistic and utopian constructions of place. This is evident in *The Lotus People*. When describing the city, Hassim uses exaggerated tones which glorify the past in much the same way as Dara glorifies Sam's Pathan heritage. Such idealized constructions of the place are evident in Ravi Govender's *Down Memory Lane* (2006), where the representation of the Indian community living in South Africa during the 50s and 60s is somewhat distorted. Govender depicts the gangs of the Grey Street area like the glamorised gangsters from Hollywood movies and the piece is thus aptly titled *Bada Bing Bada Boom.* On the other hand, Hassim constructs the gangsters as politically conscious individuals who contribute to the struggle.

Even though Hassim's work is deeply nostalgic, he claims that is also historically correct. It is important for Hassim that he constructs an accurate picture of life in the Casbah during the 50s and 60s especially for the younger generations who falsely believe that his work is pure fiction (Reddy 2011, interview). Ronnie Govender adopts a similar style of writing in his collection of short stories *At the Edge and other Cato manor Stories*. Like Hassim, Govender makes mention of real-life activists who engage with fictional characters. In his introduction, Govender states: "Although I have taken some poetic licence in the telling of these stories, they are based on the lives of the people who lived in Cato Manor and deal with actual experiences, such as the 1949 riots..." (2001:9). Even though Hassim and Govender's work is represented nostalgically, it is authentically rooted in historical fact. Both writers intentionally use memory, re-membering and nostalgia to tell the stories of the Indian diaspora of South Africa and as a way of paying tribute to all those who have contributed to the struggle. They do so through what can be termed "keyhole history", history rendered from the perspective of ordinary people (Brown, 1998:2). Fiction gives writers like Hassim and Govender the poetic licence to account for the lives and experiences of the ordinary participants of South African Indian history. By giving voice to the once-marginalized (the prostitute, gangster, homemaker, shop keeper) Hassim makes the reader participants in their

lives. In doing so, readers are turned into critics of the social injustices experienced by these marginalized people. Through the voices of 'smaller' marginalised characters, who give the reader small details about the everyday difficulty around ideas of identity and existence, readers are exposed to a more sympathetic and encompassing version of history.

This chapter will now turn to an analysis of the fictional constructions of place in Hassim's second novel, *Revenge of Kali*, and will look at some of the ways in which the novel follows, or deviates, from his construction of place and space in *The Lotus People.*

Revenge of Kali

Hassim's second novel, like his first, is made up of historical, political and social narratives. The novel, rather short in comparison to *The Lotus People*, is divided into three parts- each telling the tales of a specific part of Durban. In Part One, the narrative explores the Canefields of Natal, then Part Two focuses on the Duchene and finally Part Three is based in the Casbah or Grey Street complex of Durban. The Canefields, Duchene and Casbah are all linked together by Hassim's central character Thiru. Thiru, who lives in Riverside having moved from the Duchene and Casbah, expresses a deep need to know his past. It is for this reason that at 2 o'clock one morning Thiru ventures into the chilly canfields of Durban in an attempt to reconnect with the stories of his forebears. As Thiru states:

> I have to go...You have to understand what drives me, the spur that goads me...my ancestors slaved on those farms, their bones fertilise the earth that they toiled on...For some time now, I have been preoccupied by thoughts of the arrival of my ancestors from their distant village in Madras (Hassim 2009: 13).

Hassim constructs Thiru's quest to get to know the stories of his ancestors as "a coolie odyssey" (78). David Dabydeen (1988) also entitles his collection of poetry, *The Coolie*

Odyssey. Coolie is a racial slur for people of Asian descent and it is ironically used in Hassim's work as a way of debunking its use in Apartheid South Africa.

Like *The Lotus People, Revenge of Kali* can arguably serve as an extended TRC project as it lays testimony to some of the crimes of apartheid experienced by the South African Indian diaspora. However, in Hassim's second novel, indenture is presented as the strongest form of oppression. It is through Hassim's narrative on indenture, which is presented as a form of slavery, that he is able to write back to the empire by placing the indentured labourers centrally and giving them a platform, a fictional platform from which to speak. In order to emphasize the importance of memory, Hassim constructs the protagonist's story as an identity quest. By the end of his odyssey, Thiru is able to rescript his cultural identity, he is transformed not just by his own lived experiences but also those of this ancestors which he vicariously lives through.

Space and Place in *Revenge of Kali*

Revenge of Kali is set not just in Durban's Grey Street complex but also outside of the city, in the canefields. I shall now examine Hassim's fictional account of the canefields to see whether and in what ways it is similar to his fictional account of the city of Durban.

As already mentioned, Thiru's desire to uncover his past leads him to the canefields on a chilly morning. Here Thiru has an out-of-body experience. He is transported backwards in time, and presented with the stories of his forbearers who served as indentured labourers on the canefields. It is a hundred years since Thiru's ancestors have worked on the canefields but they return that morning to answer his cries. Thiru is surrounded by ghosts from the past and who tell Thiru (in soft whispers) about the pain and difficulty they experienced on those very canefields. Thiru is also told about the life of Ellapen, his great-grandfather who came to South Africa on the Truro as part of the first batch of indentured labourers to South Africa (see Chapter Three). Hassim presents the canefields in *Revenge of Kali* in the same way in

which he presents the Casbah in *The Lotus People*. The canefields are also a space that is constantly under surveillance and watched. The Indian sirdars watch over the indentured labourers much the same way in which the policemen monitor the Apartheid city. As Ellapen says to Thiru: "There were guards all over the place, keeping their distance but watching us all the time" (52). In *Revenge of Kali*, Hassim reveals the way in which the canefields were kept under tight panoptic surveillance. Ellapen describes the canefields saying: "There were high walls all around us, we were treated like criminals in a prison" (52). The labourers are faced with brutal, backbreaking work, working from sunrise to sunset. At every turn these labourers are monitored by the sirdars to ensure that their work rate never slows down or that no form of resistance against the backbreaking work is established. As Runga argues: '"Who are the master's police, on the plantations? The sirdars!" (15). Thus, ironically the sirdars collude with the oppression of the indentured labourers, viewing themselves as superior to the indentured labourers:

> "Up! Up, you dogs!" The sirdars were back, with a vengeance. And they had come fully prepared, five of them, in a shadow of strength. They were grinning cruelly as they booted the sleeping bodies and shoved them out of their huts. "To the fields you filthy dogs! You've had your fun." The whips were singing once more. With the fight already knocked out of them, the workers scurried off, on empty bellies and full bowels (2009:56).

Thus, from the perspective of the white masters and the sirdars, who are employed by the white farm owners, the canefields was little more than an abstract space to be governed, and on which to exercise a sense of power and superiority. In constructing the canefields, it can be argued that Hassim employs a similar understanding to Foucault's theorization: that control over individuals both physically and psychologically can be achieved by ordering and manipulating spatial relations.

However, in *Revenge of Kali,* Hassim undermines this view of the canefields, in much the same way in which he undermines the Apartheid government's view of the Grey Street complex in *The Lotus People.* Hassim reconstructs the canefields in his fiction making it a meaningful place. As Thiru walks (to use the de Certeau theory) through the canfields he brings the landscape to life and assigns meaning to it. The fields come alive and speak to Thiru, he is lost in a trance like state and begins to hear his ancestors and so their voices and stories of the canefields are finally told and heard:

> If you listen carefully, and the wind is in the right direction, you will hear them, as I now did - the spectral voices, the soft whisper from the ancients. Listen now, not with your ears but with your heart and soul. Sink into yourself, below the sound of your breathing, deep into the underbelly of your consciousness...You'll hear the panting too, from the spirits of those who are still running, more than a century later, barely a step ahead of their pursuers - the hated sirdars and their vicious dogs. You are no longer an observer. The ancestors have you in thrall. [...] as you assimilate into your environment, you will know that the river that chills your bones flows with the tears of those that came before you...It will be a homecoming, a return to your roots (14-15).

In the above passage, memory is being experienced mentally, spiritually and physically. Thiru, the speaker, invites the reader to listen to the stories of the past. Thiru suggests that the stories of the past must not just be heard but experienced too, "with your heart and soul... into the underbelly of your consciousness... [chilling] your bones". By telling the history of "the hated sirdars and their vicious dogs" through the sympathetic character of Thiru, Hassim ensures that the reader is "no longer [just] an observer". Hassim brings the history to life and the passionate and fevered tone of the passage immediately denotes the kind of life-altering experience which Thiru will undergo through his uncovering of the canefields.

The canefields are no longer an abstract space; instead they become a meaningful place where oppression, hardship, family and community are all experienced. Thiru is told the story of the poignant love affair between Ellapen and Angamma, their marriage and way in which they raise their family, and of course the arrival of Kolapen, whom Thiru learns is his grandfather. Thiru also comes to know about the community that was formed by the indentured labourers, a close community, despite it being a diverse one both linguistically and in terms of religion. All the labourers, despite their differences in language or religion, are united in their hatred of the oppressors and commiserate with one another. Daniel, for example, constantly risks his life in trying to draw up passes that could allow the indentured labourers to leave for another village. Each member of the community also does its best to share rations of food and help one another get through the hard labour on the Canefields. The overall impression that Hassim creates is one of heroism. He recreates imaginatively a community who, in the face of such oppression and savagery, still do not lose their humanity and camaraderie: "[the] indentured were imaginative, creative beings who found all manner of means to resist, survive, or escape the strictures of indenture (Desai and Vahed, 2007:26). Constructing the Canefields in such a way allows Hassim to present to the reader a community which despite its struggles still fought to maintain a sense of collective being.

In *Revenge of Kali* The Grey Street complex is presented much the same way in which it is presented in *The Lotus People,* as a space that was kept under tight surveillance to ensure that the Indian community remained in their designated zone and did not engage in criminal or political acts. Thus, from the perspective of the Apartheid government the Casbah, like the Canefields, was little more than an abstract space to be governed.

However, in *Revenge of Kali* Hassim undermines this view and instead re-constructs the Casbah through his fiction as a meaningful space. The novel describes the area's buildings and stores which re-define the streets, turning them into sites of Indian communal identity:

> Padayachee Building was situated in the Casbah, in what is famously known as The Grey Street Complex. The street itself, from the racecourse through to the exclusively White West Street, is the main Indian trading area - some of the shops the size of department stores, others not much more than a hole in the wall. The larger stores had several branches, spread into the side streets (Hassim, 2009:115).

In *Revenge of Kali,* Hassim is also keen to shed light on the jazz scene that is nurtured in the Casbah and enjoyed by the community on Friday nights. As the narrator says:

> Friday nights in the Casbah were reserved exclusively for a slow, lingering escape from the week's unremitting drudgery, a respite from the agony of routine subsistence...The matriarchs, in an effort to escape the stifling heat trapped within the confines of their tiny flats, standing at their windows or sitting in the open balconies, would lean forward and strain their eyes at the vision approaching them: [...] And then, in a voice that eclipsed those of the leading crooners of the time, he would serenade his audience...not a dry eye would be in evidence (131-132).

In *Revenge of Kali,* Hassim constructs Apartheid laws as fallible in the Grey Street complex because the employed administrators of those laws were easily swayed. Club Lotus, for example, was open to both the Black and White inhabitants of the city and was the only spot where the two could mix freely without the threat of being hauled to the nearest police station. As the narrator says:

> In the eyes of the law it was an illegal venue. But the law has to be administered by individuals, and those taciturn souls were not immune to the club's hypnotic embrace - or to the thick envelope that the manager quietly slipped into their pockets. They came to initiate a raid, were beguiled by the easy laughter and friendly atmosphere, bewitched by the bonhomie of the revellers and, after a few drinks and with bulging

> pockets, departed without causing the slightest stir or dampening the exuberance of the carefree swarm of patrons (155).

Returning to de Certeau theory's, that the walkers of the city are the real makers and shapers of the space, it is clear that for Hassim, the Grey Street complex is a city of walkers who are constantly bringing the urban landscape to life, who "never travel in a straight line and [instead are] always stopping and sniffing around" (145). In *Revenge of Kali* and *The Lotus People*, Hassim presents the marginal figures as the epitome of the modern day walker in the city. Hassim takes us into Grey Street's underworld and introduces us to its gangsters, gamblers, thieves, prostitutes, pimps, hustlers and taxi drivers. Monty, who has been educated by the 'University of the Street' and it is for this reason that he is confident that he can take on the League, says to Miley: "All we do is move in on those areas they don't control any longer-the night clubs, gambling schools, massage parlours. Those are the places that they don't have any protection. They're there for the taking" (149). The Casbah's gangster, prostitutes and pimps are so well educated in the 'University of the Street' that they are all sent into motion to search the city for Miley and find him before he kills his father. As the narrator states:

> Every street kid, newspaper vendor, taxi driver, thug, racketeer and even the panhandlers and professional beggars had been roped in. Mo mobilised the street gangs: The Young Americans, The Queens Brigade, The Duchenes, The Beatrice Street Boys, The Victorians and The Vagabonds...Thiru marshalled the dockworkers, the pimps, the prostitutes, the informers, and even the stevedores from the Point area. The biggest search party ever organised by the underworld was set in motion. It was a net that a minnow couldn't have slipped through (197).

Hassim constructs the city as a sight which is best known by its marginalized inhabitants, who occupy the street on a daily basis. It is members of the city's underworld who experience the streets most fully and in doing so gain a greater sense of its limits and boundaries. The

reader is overwhelmed by the number of elements which make up the city. Hassim lists these elements (the beggars, street kids, gangs, and so on) in the same way as Fatima Meer, in her non-fictional work, lists the names of anti-apartheid fighters and political heroes. Hassim gives voice to the ordinary folk and in doing so constructs the part they played in shaping the city.

The players of the underworld are thus not abstract beings; for the most part Hassim represents them as products of their environment, as people who are simply trying to make a living in the Casbah. Hassim differentiates between the greedy criminals and those who are just fighting for survival. When Mo is weary of the top cop Vassa Pillay, Miley says to him: "Vassa is on the side of the battlers. He doesn't hassle okes like us. He knows we're trying to earn a living. He's after the big guys, the extortionists and murderers who exploit the weak and timid" (122). These marginal figures are also represented by Hassim as being politically conscious.

In *Revenge of Kali*, as in *The Lotus People,* Hassim combines real and fictitious characters in his narrative. In doing so, Hassim continues writing in a genre which he refers to as historical fiction (Reddy, 2011:interview) which adds to the validity of his work and yet his use of the combination of real and fictitious characters also allows Hassim to point out to the reader that political resistance was not confined to elite groups of activists. As Mo says to Miley: "I've been to a few rallies. I've heard Goonum talk. I've paid attention to what Dadoo had to say, and to Naicker. I had a drink with Debi Singh the other day, and with Dawood Seedat. A few nights ago Ahmed Timol was here - he was on the run from the Special Branch" (Hassim, 2009:190). By listing the names of prolific figures in South African Indian history next to Mo's, Hassim suggests that even the marginalized have a space in the history of the Indian diaspora living in South Africa. Miley, unlike Mo, feels that his political mission is not to fight against the Apartheid government but rather to fight against the 'Grey Street System' in which Indian workers are exploited by their Indian bosses. He says to Shakun:

> ...I understand what this government is about. I didn't grow up in some cocoon. But I don't see opposition to is as my mission in life. When we end up in Robben Island who will feed our families? The *fucken larnies*, who'll be sitting pretty in the safety of their fancy homes? You reckon they'll give a damn when our mothers end up selling samoosas on street corners? This *ghetto* crap...hell, Shakun, ninety-five percent of our people are *already* living in misery. It's the bloody *larine* that put them there, by exploiting their labour, long before this apartheid shit kicked in...Do you ever hear anything about the exploitation of our people, *by our own* people? Do they hold rallies to protest against that crime...They want the exploited to take up arms to defend the assets of the exploiter- a neat little twist...(192).

In the above passage, the reader is presented with the voice of an ordinary inhabitant of the Casbah who is assessing the social and political state of his homeland. Hassim's use of language specific to South African Indians, through the use of slang and colloquial words, adds to the validity of his characters. Hassim paints these marginal figures as being deeply politically conscious and as in *The Lotus People,* in *Revenge of Kali* it is the members of government who are seen as the real thieves. As Marie Naude expresses: "I've never heard of this Group Areas kak! How can they they do this...It's stealing. My Frikkie says only gangsters behave that way" (110). Therefore, by foregrounding the marginal individuals of the Grey Street complex that have largely gone unnoticed, Hassim subverts the conventional notion of the indistinguishable Indian community: the Casbah instead becomes a city of subjectivity, in which each individual's perception of either place or circumstance can be conditioned by personal characteristics.

In *Revenge of Kali* the Casbah and the Duchene are constructed as cultural contact zones. Monty says to Mo: "I'm a wit ou. Even the bitterest enemies in the Casbah will unite against me. But then, the same applies to my part of the city. No darkie can make a move and last longer than a few weeks. Fact of life" (151). In *Revenge of Kali*, as in *The Lotus People*, the events of the 1949 riots and the consequences of the Group Areas act are recorded. However,

Hassim's larger concern in *Revenge of Kali* is with the politics that lie within the Indian community. In the Duchene, Hassim distinguishes the "haves" from the "have-nots" (85). The distinction between the two is most unbearable for Miley during the Muslim festival of Eid as:

> the rich boys on his street would be decked out in their brand new suits, with shoes and ties to match. Accompanied by their fathers they would pile into their posh cars and head for mosque. For Miley it was a day of abject humiliation. Sarah would dress him in whatever caste-off clothing she had received... (101).

Ironically, the Casbah with its Indian businesses is directly linked with oppression on the Canefields. Hassim says that if *The Lotus People* is about the inhumane treatment of the Indian community by the white Apartheid government then *Revenge of Kali* is about the inhumane treatment of Indians by other Indians (Reddy, 2011:Interview). Describing this so called "Grey Street System", a "social phenomenon" as Miley describes it (189), the narrator states:

> The businesses are all family-controlled enterprises, a large majority owned by Gujarati Indians - Muslim and Hindu. And, with a few exceptions, they operated on a brutal system of vassalage refined to perfection. Second and third generations of Indian families ensured a constant supply of skilled labour possessing a work ethic unparalleled elsewhere in the world. It was a system based on the most evil exploitation of human resources, garnered from within its own community (115).

Thus, the oppressiveness of indenture is transmuted into new forms of oppression that were set against the wider backdrop of oppression of the Apartheid state. Thus, Hassim constructs the Casbah in his fiction not as a passive, unaffected space but rather as a hotbed of political activity against the Grey Street System and apartheid.

Diasporic Culture in *Revenge of Kali*

As in *The Lotus People*, in his second novel Hassim records the experience of both the old and the new diasporic generations (Mishra, 2007). However, unlike Yahya in *The Lotus People* who initially believes that South Africa will afford him great opportunities for success and who is then hit by the reality of the situation, for Ellapen the reality sets in from the moment he is kidnapped and thrown aboard the Truro:

> We were packed together like fish in a net. There was no place to move. The coughing and vomiting went on all the time. And the smell...it stuck to our nostrils...I was too frightened to breathe deeply. Most of the time I covered my nose with my hands."[...]"There was the day when I had a high fever, my body was burning...When I asked for a doctor the man next to me laughed hoarsely. When I pointed out that I had seen two doctors, both Indians, looking after the sick, he rasped, 'Yes, doctor Ally and his friend. They're both dead.' "And the crew, they were as bad as the sirdars here. They abused the women, molesting them at every opportunity (51).

Hassim constructs a morbid and sickly image of the Truro ship. The old diasporic communities did not accept Natal and South Africa as home, they experienced too much of exclusion and hatred and thus each one was "lost in his own world, the dream that the day would come when they could return to their homeland" (23).

In keeping with Mishra's notion which suggests that because of the intense social exclusion that the old diasporic group experiences, the community turns inwards and forms a diaspora of exclusivism, in which continuities are maintained with the homeland through cultural and religious acts. On the canefields the indentured labourers sing songs in their native tongue and offer prayers to the Goddess Kali who is benevolent rather than malevolent. When speaking about what the future holds for the next generation Ellapen says to the group:

> Forget about vengeance - only barbarians indulge in it. You are the offspring of the most civilised nation on earth. Our history teaches us that revenge is a bitter brew - it warps the mind and haunts you for the rest of your days. Do not sink to the level of your enemies! Leave revenge to the Goddess Kali. She will avenge for all of us... She is the goddess who punishes evil, penalizing corruption and depravity and ensuring justice for the powerless (53-54).

Hassim shows the ways in which members of the old diasporic community create a mini-homeland in their new space, and it is within this exclusive diasporic space that Indian culture is not only maintained but also undergoes creative re-imagining. Like Yahya and Naran in *The Lotus People,* the community of Indian indentured labourers on the canefields, also lose their belief in caste or religious differences: "The inhabitants of the tiny hutment, who had over the years moulded into a close-knit community, were revitalised. They had forgotten their tribal origins and caste differences, considered themselves as part of an extended family..." (69). Thus, the old diasporic community unites and disregards old cultural ideals that may prevent it from adapting to the new circumstances of their adopted land. The group does agree that it is only proper that Ellapen and Angamma are married before God before they sleep together. However, when Angamma and Ellapen decide to marry they are not too concerned with having the proper Indian customs attached to their wedding. Ellapen, even though he is a Hindu, does not mind if the wedding ceremony is performed by a Muslim priest. We are later told that Angamma and Ellapen were married with "Haree Sing performing the ritual in a considerably abbreviated form" (65). The cultural ideas around marriage are again re-made and re-imagined when Dhuneema looking at Kolapen announces one evening, "Look at that boy, Ella. He is in his prime. He needs a woman. He is like a pod on a tree, ready to burst" (71). On hearing this Runga scoffs at Dhuneema's suggestion saying: "Kola was not born to be a slave, to grow old here like us. He doesn't need a women, he needs his freedom. When he has that he can have any women he wants" (71). Thus, for Runga, the idea of marriage must only be entertained by Kolapen once he has found freedom in a land that up until then had denied them all of their freedom.

Hassim does not just speak of the old diasporic community in *Revenge of Kali,* he also speaks of the new generations of diaspora. Thiru and Miley are presented as belonging to what Mishra terms 'border diasporas'; a diaspora which is made up of two parts, the old and the new. Thiru's great Tamil lineage is recalled by his grandmother who is determined to ensure that Thiru does not lose his rich heritage. Thiru's grandmother encourages him to get an education saying:

> Education is your dharma, the moral law that we live by. In this place it is very easy to forget that. You do that and you give up the right to live, you commit the sin of anrtha. And then you must face the wrath of Varuna. If you want to avoid that you must never compromise your dharma (173).

Thiru's grandmother then goes on to tell him about his famous ancestor, Krsna Deva, a story that had "become a part of him; he wouldn't forget it if he lived to hundred" (173) :

> Krsna Deva was a great warrior. He united all of Tamil Nadu, more than four hundred years ago. He was crowned king of all our people. What did he do then? Did he chase women, demand gold and jewels...He was a crusader in the path of justice and knowledge. He forged an empire where there was only one law - dharma!... People from distant lands came to Madurai, to be educated, to become gurus and go back to their people to pass on the knowledge...And then what happened? We became complacent, we discontinued with the pursuit of knowledge. Now we sell murku and vadeh to make a living. *We sell food so that we can eat!* (173-174).

Thiru, on other hand, did not value his schooling and considered it "a waste of time, a restriction that prevented him from making money" (174). He attends university as he dares not disobey his granny but Thiru is still not sold on the words of the old diasporic community:

> All this education is okay...but this isn't Madurai. I need a marcher now. The old people are killing themselves just to make sure I get the best education. It means nothing to us darkies in this country. Like I said, this isn't Madurai! It is a city in India where knowledge was the coin of the realm. Here it won't buy me a bunny chow (175).

Caught on the border between old and new, Thiru does complete his law degree, specialising in criminal law, and in a short period of time he establishes himself as a leading lawyer in the city. He relocates with his grandparents to the Riverside but visits the Casbah whenever he or his grandparents wish to. Hassim constructs Thiru's story as one of triumph over adversity. He succeeds despite the hardships he has to face, and he is in some ways like his forbears who also overcome great difficulty and strife.

It is also clear in *Revenge of Kali* that much Indian culture including; significantly, language (that is passed down to the new diasporic groups by the old diasporic community) is lost over time: "Amongst themselves the residents communicated in English. Only occasionally, and one on one, was Tamil, Gujarati or Hindi spoken" (114). English is often spoken with a sprinkling of Indian words. This South African Indian English is further spoken with a mix of colloquial, street slang and formal language, which is why, In *Revenge of Kali* Hassim includes a glossary of Tamil, Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu, Afrikaans and Zulu words. Through the range of languages used, the Grey Street complex is represented as a space of cultural transculturation. Thus, Hassim shows that the city is a space conducive to the remaking of culture and identity because it is the place of most difference. For instance, we are told that on a Sunday night, for the Indian and Coloured residents of the city the magnetism of the Club Lotus was unequalled:

> It was, in effect, the only private club open to the public! It's unique charisma had its own seductive charm. For both the Black and White inhabitants of the city it was the

> only spot where they could mix relatively freely, without fear of summary ejection or being hauled to the nearest police station...High Society mingled with the hoi-polloi, racial and class barriers dissolved, the sound of music and the tinkle of glasses mingled with the echo of laughter, old enemies forgotten and replaced with good-fellowship. Perfect strangers toasted each other with convivial good humour, blithe spirit and gay abandon (156).

Hassim could be accused of being overly simplistic and idealistic by suggesting that Club Lotus was a place where "class barriers [for both white and black inhabitants of the city] dissolved... [and] old enemies [were] forgotten and replaced with good- fellowship". Despite an oversimplification on the writer's part, the passage is successful in showing that the Casbah is not a culturally pure space, but rather a place where culture is in a constant state of flux.

Memory and Nostalgia in *Revenge of Kali*

Revenge of Kali, like *The Lotus People*, pivots around collective remembering. For Hassim's characters, belonging to the old diasporic community it is vitally important that the past is always remembered and honoured. Thiru's granny is fond of reciting the story of Krsna Deva to him, the story of a great warrior of Tamil Nadu (173). Ellapen, too, is determined to ensure that the stories of the past are never forgotten or under-appreciated, when talking about his journey to the canefields he says the following to the rest of the indentured labourers:

> When you came here on the Belvedere, a few days after me, you were very young. You are older now, but still young men. Youth is a very resilient stage, you forget easily and act rashly to avenge the most recent atrocity. I want you to remember every word you heard, repeat everything I told you this night. If someday you have families of your own, tell your children our story. Make them promise to repeat it to *their* children, and to their children's children. Forget to do that and you are no better than

> animals-only animals have no history. When they die their past dies with them. A wise man learns from his past. A fool lives in it (53).

In *Revenge of Kali,* memory is presented as an important source of knowledge which tells us who we are. Kolapen tells Miley that he must forgive the sins of his father for his father "*forgot where he was coming from*...He descended to the level of an animal...When you do that you cease to be human" (209).

As with *The Lotus People,* in *Revenge of Kali* place is constructed as a site of remembering and re-membering. Memory and thus identity are etched into landscapes in ways that cannot be removed. *Revenge of Kali* is constructed through a multi-layered series of journeys; each journey echoes with stories and voices of the past which help Thiru to trace his roots and reconstruct his cultural identity. There are large and small journeys, larger journeys made by ship across the Indian Ocean, and smaller journeys within Durban that include journeys to the canefields, Duchene, Casbah and Riverside. Hassim constructs the larger and smaller journeys, from the movements across continents to the movements across domestic spaces. These journeys in *Revenge of Kali* serve as bridging devices across the imposed dividedness of histories and show how all these histories are interwoven. Hassim goes back 2300 years and links Niarchus, a general to the Great Alexander, and his discovery of sugar cane to the oppression of the Indian indentured labourers on the Natal canefields:

> Niarchus was unaware that he had chewed on a piece of *sakka,* cultivated in India for several millennia and mentioned, even before then, in the sacred text of the Hindu scriptures - the Atharva-veda. As much as its syrupy taste, it was the cultivation skills, possessed by no other race on earth, that the colonists in Natal clamoured for several millennia after Niarchus' overwhelming discovery. The sweetness of the sugar cane was soured by the brutality of the slavery that followed, and the bitter legacy it spawned (9).

The oppression experienced on the canefields is then linked directly with the oppression experienced in the Casbah, and the ability of the characters situated in the Casbah and Duchene to triumph over adversity, is inspired by the ability of the characters in the canefields who do the same. The novel ends with Thiru looking into the sky and seeing the canefield's story within a circle of light. Ellapen, Angamma, Mohideen, Runga, Daniel and Dhuneema - all arrayed before him and seem to be saluting him and Miley. The ensuing rain against the backdrop of the canefields, washes away the dark history of indenture and a new cycle is ready to unfold. Thiru says:

> I knew that my [coolie] odyssey was finally over. All the ghosts that had haunted me had finally been laid to rest. Suddenly, without warning, the sky growled, followed by thunder and a streak of lightening. Then the clouds burst open. The rains came. Huge drops, a torrential downpour. For a second we stood still, in awe of the elements, allowing the water to drench us. And then we were shouting joyously, jumping and skipping in the deluge (210)

Thiru is able to rescript his identity; he is transformed by his own direct and lived experiences and by those of his forbears through whom he vicariously lives. The joyous and euphoric tone of the passage signifies the triumphant end to the many journeys made within the story.

In *Revenge of Kali*, Hassim constructs place as a site for collective political remembering and re-membering. The Casbah for instance is portrayed as if the buildings still speak of the apartheid past. Sipho reminisces:"I've been to a few rallies. I've heard Goonum talk. I've paid attention to what Dadoo had to say, and to Naicker. I had a drink with Debi Singh the other day, and with Dawood Seedat...What those guys had to say...Miley, you were with Shakun on those evenings. And it all happened here at the club, not at some political space (190).

By including both real and fictitious characters in his novel, Hassim constructs resistance as a stance not confined to an elite group of activists but rather as existing amongst all classes, each bearing significance in relation to the struggle. Hassim creates new memories of the Casbah as a political space and dismisses any memories that attempt to erase the significance of marginalised groups in the struggle.

Revenge of Kali, like *The Lotus People*, is written from a nostalgic point of view. Hassim invites the reader to explore the Casbah in much the same way in which Thiru invites Malliga: "Come then, take another peek into this place called the Casbah; this coolie has one more journey to undertake. A nostalgic walk, if you like, into a not so distant past" (169).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Hassim remembers the Casbah of his childhood as being part of the romantic era which only lives on in the minds of those who inhabited it at the time. It is perhaps because of his own nostalgic memories of the place that he creates the Casbah through a nostalgic lens. The nostalgia at times is for a safer, more tightly-knit Grey Street, which is revealed with a description of a block of flats located in the Casbah:

> In the evenings the spacious corridors rang with the laughter of children at play, whilst their parents gathered in a group in the roomy passageway on the top floor and complained about the cost of living or conversed softly about the latest developments in the Casbah. They merged into one large family. The doors were never locked - an open invitation to walk in and chat, or use the bathroom if their own was occupied. In that, they were no different from a hundred other blocks of flats in the Casbah (113).

Hassim admits to being wary of becoming too nostalgic (Reddy, 2011:Interview) believing that it can lead to a distorted and over-romanticised construction of place, rather than a reflection of the true reality of the time. In Chapter Two it was argued that all remembering involves a degree of nostalgia. Perhaps it is for this reason that Hassim ends *Revenge of Kali* with the wise Kolapen who suggests that whilst it is important never to forget one's past, one

must look to the future and not remain only obsessed with that which has already been. Kolapen says to Thiru and Miley: “There is no peace in regurgitating the past. Only fools and the mentally retarded continue to live in the past. Put it behind you. The future is all you have. Revel in it” (209).

This chapter has offered an analysis on Hassim’s fictional constructions of place in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.* The agreement made that Hassim’s fiction gives voice to the once marginalized or excluded, thus making a contribution to the rewriting of colonial narratives. The next chapter will offer an analysis of Hassim’s latest novel *The Agony of Valliamma.*

Chapter Five: Constructions of Place in Aziz Hassim's *The Agony of Valliamma.*

In this chapter I analyse Hassim's *The Agony of Valliamma* (2011) exploring the ways in which Hassim constructs place in his third novel. I have chosen to place my analysis a new chapter since I read it to a large degree in opposition to Hassim's first two novels. Although *The Agony of Valliamma* is not the third instalment of Hassim's Casbah trilogy, I have decided to include it in my dissertation since it was published during the time of my investigation into Hassim's fiction. In the novel's foreword, Hassim attributes the novel to Soobrie Pillay, a friend who had always encouraged him to write about the life of Valliamma; "the child martyr who was murdered by the colonial regime when she was barely sixteen" (2011:5). Following Soobrie Pillays death Hassim finally undertook the task of writing Valliamma's story, using sources given to him by Soobrie's son Yana. While I have no doubt that Hassim is passionate about remembering the story of Valliamma, the child martyr, I do argue that his third novel reads more as a guilt offering to late friend, rather than a "personal TRC", a style which has come to define him following the publication of his first two novels. It is perhaps for this reason that Hassim's slim third novel falls short in producing the kind of vivid constructions of place and identity present in *The Lotus people* and *Revenge of Kali.*

While Hassim's first two novels can be read as one genre of historical fiction, Hassim's third novel, *The Agony of Valliamma,* can be labelled another type of historical fiction. As discussed in Chapter Two, one type of historical fiction is fiction which aims to bring history to life. It may include real historical figures but focuses predominantly on the narrative of ordinary, often marginalized, fictitious characters. On the other hand, the second type of historical fiction serves to reveal history and the true character of historical figures. It may include fictitious characters but focuses predominantly on the narrative of real historical figures. In his third novel, Hassim writes about the life of Valliamma, a child martyr, who despite her young age, fought vehemently against the colonial regime and subsequently died at the age of sixteen because of her efforts. In this chapter, I will discuss Hassim's

construction of place and space in *The Agony of Valliamma.* In his very short third novel, Hassim does make mention of numerous spaces and places in South Africa, but fails to offer the kind of vivid and imaginative descriptions of place which featured in his first two novels. I will then move on to a discussion of Hassim's construction of diasporic culture in certain Indian spaces of South Africa. Hassim employs the flashback style, the narrative shifts from the present to the past and can be divided into two parts: that which takes place between 1906 and1914 and then the narrative set entirely in the West End Hotel in 1974. In his third novel, Hassim does not construct clear distinctions of old and new diasporic communities which have settled in South Africa as he did in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.* However, he does suggest differences between younger and older generations in terms of language and political awareness. Finally, I will discuss the issue of memory in *The Agony of Valliamma*. While Hassim's third novel does engage in a multi-voiced narrative all voices appear solely concerned with the memory of Valliamma. Valliamma is often described as a mythical being, as hardly human. *The Agony of Valliamma* is concerned largely with remembering this mythical being and thus, lies in opposition to Hassim's first two novels which were concerned mainly with remembering and re-membering of place and community through ordinary, often overlooked, people. It is perhaps for this reason that *The Agony of Valliamma* lacks in literary richness and scope present in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.*

Place and Space in *The Agony of Valliamma*

In *The Agony of Valliamma,* Hassim constructs not just Durban and the Grey Street Complex but also other areas of Natal and areas of Johannesburg. However, Hassim's constructions of place in his third novel are not nearly defined and precise as his descriptions of place in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.* Hassim begins all twenty three chapters of his third novel by first introducing the place and date in which the chapter's action takes place. However, this introduction serves merely to indicate the shift of narrative to the reader. Unlike *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali, The Agony of Valliamma* is not centred on defined constructions of place in a particular time. *The Agony of Valliamma* is more concerned with

telling the story of the young martyr Valliamma rather than the story of a particular city or geography. It is for this reason that all the places written about in *The Agony of Valliamma* (including Newcastle, Johannesburg, Dundee, Doornfontein and Pietermaritzburg) appear indistinguishable from one another and could easily be viewed as one collective Indian space. Despite this, Hassim does comment on certain aspects of space and place. Indeed, the urban design of the apartheid city relied on the principles of Foucault's panopticon to ensure ultimate control and power of the 'Black areas' of the city. Durban was kept under strict surveillance by the Apartheid government. When Abbas mentions that none of his teachers ever mentioned the name of Valliamma to students, Billy Nair is quick to offer a reason why: "Our teachers are strictly monitored by government-appointed inspectors, and those guys are The Law" (63). Thus the image created is that of a restricted city, controlled and monitored by government.

The cover page of Hassim's third novel features an image of a young women (assumed to be Valliamma) kneeling behind prison bars. However, Hassim does not offer the reader many constructions of the prison space in his novel. Thambi describes it to Valliamma as bitterly cold, filthy, vermin infested and strictly guarded: "...there is no one you can complain to. The moment you open your mouth they shove the barrels of their guns down your throat" (23). In only the novel's second detailed description of prison, Mrs Naidoo describes the way in which the prison guards attempt to turn the prisoners against each other: "They stuffed us in this tiny cell, with no toilet facilities... And they know that, as the days pass we will begin to smell and try to create our own space – and that will lead to even more quarrels" (127). This adheres to Foucault's theorization of the power of space discussed in Chapter Two, where space is used as a tool to organise and direct behaviour of a subject.

In *The Agony of Valliamma*, as in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali*, Hassim also offers an image of place which contradicts the image of the city as defined through the principles of the panopticon. Hassim employs a de Certeau-like image of city, one which is defined by inhabitants. Inhabitants of the city convert its places into educational, political, and social

spaces. Soobrie and his customers turn the West End Hotel into more than just a lodge and eatery. Their talks about Valliamma, Gandhi and Mandela in the 'backroom' of the hotel's restaurant allows for the men to engage in historical lessons that were denied to them by their formal education. Abbas says the following about West End Hotel: "This place...is breeding revolutionaries. And that back room of yours is turning into a college, with history lessons the only subject" (112). Soobrie, their teacher, was himself taught these historical lessons in the West End Hotel. Soobrie describes the way in which he was taught more than what his formal education offered:

> ...my mother, she was not only my tutor but also one of the greatest historians. She used to work here, in the kitchen. We had very little money, so she got me a job here as a scullery boy...because we were together for most of the day, she gave me a running commentary on the developments in our country and told me about Valliamma... (36).

In *The Agony of Valliamma* there is a fleeting description of the Grey Street Complex made by Abbas, which recalls/echoes its description in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.* In *The Agony of Valliamma,* the Casbah is understood best by those who occupy the city, for whom it paradoxically serves as a santuary: "We are still treated by the cops like dirt. So we stay close to the casbah, where we call the shots and we can disappear into the alleys when they raid our areas" (35). Bond street is defined by Trevor as being inclusionary rather than exclusionary: "I live in a block of flats in Bond Street. And we're all one big family there – charous, bruinous, and even a few peckyous" (111). Thus, Hassim presents to the reader a community which despite its struggles still fought to maintain a sense of collective being.

In *The Agony of Valliamma* political veterans, including Valliamma, are able to resist apartheid policies through acts of walking. Valliamma leads anti-Apartheid marches from Johannesburg through Natal. Not only was the act of marching illegal under apartheid laws but it is also illegal to leave the Transvaal without a permit. Even without permits the

veterans, led by Valliamma, marched to many towns and cities of South Africa. They managed to do so by hiding out in the homes of other members of the Indian community. The towns are described as being made up of close knit communities who are always ready and willing to help one another: "...most of the towns that they passed through the Indian merchants provided them with food and accommodation, displaying the legendary Indian custom of hospitality and concern for travellers" (90).

In *The Agony of Valliamma,* Hassim constructs characters that are able to defy the policies of Apartheid by manipulating the system of surveillance. Sonny and his friends purposely cause riots which deter the policing eyes of surveillance towards them and away from political meetings. Sony says to the group of men gathered in the back room of West End Hotel: "When you guys ask us to go to the vit areas and break a few windows to distract the cops from your meetings, we're not slow to act" (77). Thus Hassim constructs place as being politically active despite the strong surveillance of the colonial/Apartheid state. Veterans engage in political meetings, protests are held outside prisons where their own are being held, and Valliamma leads protest marches from Johannesburg through Natal.

Diasporic Culture in *The Agony of Valliamma*

In *The Agony of Valliamma,* Hassim constructs a South Africa which is accepted as home by the then Indian community. When Gandhi suggests that he is proud to be a fellow Indian, Ally corrects him saying that Valliamma "sees herself as a South African" (59). Valliamma is never in doubt about her national identity; she identifies herself as South African despite her Indian heritage. Speaking of South Africa, Valliamma says: "Who would not die for one's motherland?" (132). All those who follow Valliamma in her protests and marches, indirectly assert their identity as being South African. Thus, in *The Agony of Valliamma,* unlike in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali*, Hassim does not construct national identity amongst the Indian diasporic population as a complex issue. However, in *The Agony of Valliamma* Hassim constructs the political identity of the Indian diaspora as somewhat complex. While

in *The Agony of Valliamma*, like *The Lotus people* and *Revenge of Kali*, characters agree that the government is the real "thug" of society (66), what the characters disagree on is the kind of political influence that gangs have in the resistance towards the colonial/apartheid government. Billy dismisses the gangsters as "thugs...engaging in gang wars" and sees their efforts in opposition to that of Valliamma who was "fighting for justice" (83). Sonny disagrees with Billy about the political role of the gangs of Durban: "We also do our bit... We may not be political animals, but we know right from wrong" (77). Thus, Hassim shows the complexity around methods of resistance amongst the Indian diasporic community.

The Agony of Valliamma does to a degree explore the experience of older and younger generations of Indian communities who have settled in South Africa. Hassim constructs the city as a space in which culture is re-worked and re-imagined; he does this through the use of language. Soobrie at times finds it difficult to understand the rest of the group because of the use of slang, we are told by Abbas that Soobrie "doesn't like slang" (24). Mohan dismisses Soobrie's dislike for slang saying: "the world has moved on...language changes" (44). By including certain slang terms such as 'cherry', 'vit', 'charous', 'breinous' and so on, the language not only rings true to the character speaking it but also corresponds to the vocabulary of the time. In *The Agony of Valliamma*, as in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali*, Hassim constructs Durban not as a culturally pure space, but rather a place where culture is forever in a state of flux.

Memory in *The Agony of Valliamma*

Unlike *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali, The Agony of Valliamma* pivots around individual remembering rather than collective remembering. Hassim tells the story of Valliamma through the memory of Soobrie, who recalls the history of this young martyr. Soobrie, during history lessons in the back room of West End Hotel, shares the story of Valliamma which was told to him many times by his mother. Soobrie is the only one of the men in the bar to have heard the story of Valliamma. Thus, he is constructed as an all-

knowing character. This limits the number of perspectives of history available to the reader and is unlike Hassim's first two novels which offered multiple perspectives.

While *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* were written through "keyhole history," events rendered from the perspective of ordinary characters during extraordinary times, *The Agony of Valliamma* is told by Soobrie from the perspective of a character of heroic proportions. Hassim inflates the valour and courage of Valliamma and in doing so diminishes and sacrifices her humanity. Within the novel itself, Valliamma is described as more mythical than human. On Valliamma's birth the spiritual midwife speaks to Valliamma's father about his daughter's powers: "She has seen God. She will do His work. She is also deeply intelligent. But she is not of this world" (8). Later, Gandhi expresses the same sentiments about Valliamma when he says to Mohanbhai: "I am convinced that she is not of this world" (29). Soobrie describes Valliamma as being sent from the Gods to lead the fight against colonial injustice, he says to the men: "It was a time when evil ruled this land, where the gods were sleeping, as if, having given us Valliamma they had no need to do anything more" (25). Thus, Hassim constructs Valliamma as an ethereal being; she is described as the "heroine of their lives" (12). Valliamma only appears human to the reader in death. By remembering history through the eyes of such a character, instead of through ordinary marginalised figures as in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali*, Hassim challenges the reader's suspension of disbelief. It is more difficult for a reader to engage and sympathize with a character who appears other-worldly.

In *The Agony of Valliamma,* history overwhelms the fiction. Hassim is so focused on telling the story of Valliamma, the young protester, that he misses opportunities to give more detailed accounts of the Indian diasporic community of South Africa. It was the smaller details: the way in which ordinary diasporic people appropriated space making it places of inclusion rather than exclusion which made *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* successful in the act of bringing history to life. In closing *The Agony of Valliamma,* Hassim includes passages on Valliamma made by political activists and historians. Hassim also includes

pictures of Valliamma, the library and bust- built in her honour in India, the women passive resisters who were lead by Valliamma, a picture of Valliamma autographed by Nelson Mandela, Valliamma's grave and a picture of West End Hotel. While these pictures and passages are appealing to the reader they further enhance the feeling of history overwhelming the fiction. The passages and descriptions of the pictures are written in what was termed "plain history" in Chapter Two. Thus, Hassim's third novel lacks the degree of creativity present in *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.*

This chapter has analysed *The Agony of Valliamma* in relation to *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali*. The next chapter will offer concluding remarks on the central issues of the dissertation.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have explored the ways in which Hassim has constructed place in his fiction. Hassim has attempted to record a past which he is convinced has disappeared forever. Hassim has engaged, in all three novels, in the postcolonial act of recalling the history of once marginalised people and places. As Govinden (2011:286) reiterates:

> A feature of the post-apartheid literary scene is the way the history of earlier times and of groups which were previously silent is being recalled and recounted. As part of this 'memory work' the history of Indian indenture in South Africa has emerged as a potent theme for both historians and writers of fiction. The history is being reclaimed and is being recognised as an intrinsic component of any South African narrative.

Hassim uses fiction as a method by which to reclaim history. Hassim's fiction serves the work of reclaiming history by giving readers insight into the lives of ordinary marginalised characters, thereby both enabling us to sympathise with the characters and gain a critical perspective on reality. Through fiction, Hassim brings the stories of those silent, those not present, those who have a right to be included in discussions concerning their lives to life. In *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali* Hassim constructs the Grey Street Complex as a place defined by its inhabitants. It is the feelings, experiences and perspectives on social life of the city's inhabitants which come to define the city.

In Hassim's fiction, it is this city's inhabitants, the walkers who experience the city, who really know the city best. Those who are educated in the 'University of the Street' know more about the city and its limits than those who have a panopticon view of the city. It is because of this knowledge of the city that inhabitants are at times able to avoid the panoptic view and escape the wrath of the police.

Hassim constructs the city primarily in diasporic terms. He constructs the Grey Street complex showing how identities transmitted to new diasporic generations are slowly lost in time and there is a making and re-making of Indian identity. Hassim constructs the city as a space conducive to the remaking of culture, resulting in the creation of multiple identities, histories and cultures. Even under the racially segregated laws of Apartheid, the Grey Street Complex shows to have been a site of multiracialism and multiculturalism.

Unlike *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali*, *The Agony of Valliamma* is not centered on defined constructions of place in a particular time. *The Agony of Valliamma* is more concerned with telling the story of the young martyr Valliamma than with the story of a particular geography. Despite this, Hassim does offer some description on certain aspects of space and place which are in keeping with his constructions of place in his first two novels. All three novels depict the Grey Street Complex as community-orientated and tightly-knit in spite or perhaps because of its origins being unjustly governed by the Group Areas Act and other of Apartheid's oppressive laws. In all three works of fiction, Hassim constructs Durban not as a culturally pure space, but rather a place where culture is forever in a constant state of flux.

Each generation of South Africans will face a different historical and political context. As the political state of the country changes, so too does the city. How then may the new generation of South African writers construct the Grey Street Complex in their fiction? Unlike Cato Manor, Sophiatown and District Six which were all almost completely destroyed during the apartheid era the Casbah still lives on. Cato Manor, Sophiatown and District Six represent a time-space that is gone forever. Thus, the memory of these areas remains fixed in time and so too their constructions in literature. This is not true for the Grey Street Complex which is still in existence and is a place constantly being re-made.

The Grey Street Complex has changed significantly since 1994. In 2009 Durban street names were changed to reflect a more inclusive and accurate historical representation of Durban and

South Africa. As part of South Africa's post-colonial/post-apartheid project colonial names were replaced with the names of South Africans who had contributed to the struggle. As such, Grey Street was renamed Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street. Ironically enough, Hassim still refers to it as Grey Street; for him there is too much meaning in the name to let it go (Reddy Interview, 2011). Since the end of Apartheid, the Casbah has undergone a transformation in terms of who lives and works there. Although Grey Street/Yusuf Dadoo Street remains a largely Indian populated area, in the last decade it has attracted immigrants from Pakistan as well as an influx of Black migrants from other African countries. Grey Street is now home to people of many races and nationalities. Of course, with a new name and new inhabitants, Grey Street/Yusuf Dadoo Street is subject to new problems including HIV/AIDS, crime, racism and xenophobia. All of these tensions might be included in fictional constructions of the Casbah made by a younger generation of writers. Imraan Coovadia is one such writer. In 2009 Coovadia released *High Low In – Between*, a novel set entirely in Durban but not in the Grey Street Complex. In *High Low In – Between* Coovadia's protagonist Nafisa, a member of the struggle, finds herself ostracised once more, drowning in a world of organ donation, greedy Aids denialists, quack doctors, bribes, and threats by the South African Revenue services. Thus Coovadia constructs a new Durban, beset with new problems; issues of apartheid are overridden by the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS.

However, older writers of the Grey Street Complex (like Hassim) remain inspired to write about experiences from the apartheid era, for the histories of South Africa's Indian diaspora have not yet been comprehensively covered. In November 2011, members of the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and history student Tumi Leta met with former residents of Sophiatown and looked back on Sophiatown since the forced removal days, in an effort to chronicle the life of specifically Indian people who inhabited the suburb (Lenasia Sun, 2011:12). Younger generations of historians and writers too remain concerned with discovering and telling the untold stories of the past, rather than constructing the country in its current time-space. According to Desai and Vahed (2010) the 150 year commemoration of Indians in South

Africa in 2010 has further inspired a time of memory in which apartheid spaces are being re-imagined and re-membered.

Ravi Govender is one such writer. Govender's follow-up to *Down Memory Lane* came in 2011 with the release of *Deja Vu.* A collection of articles written in his column, *Down Memory Lane*, *Deja Vu* spans the life in Durban from around the late 1800s to the 1960s and focuses largely on Durban's Indian history. In both his novels and recent columns in the *Post* newspaper, Govender concerns himself mainly with remembering the 'good old days' of Durban. Govender calls on the reader to imagine Durban as a site of 'Indianness' with its many authentically Indian shops and restaurants but also a site of non-racial harmony between Indian and African inhabitants.

Facebook, a social phenomenon, allows people of all ages to come together and collectively discuss issues of social importance. Recently many current and former inhabitants of the Grey Street complex joined a Facebook page entitled *Grey Street Casbah and Surrounding.* The page is described as a group "for all the people that lived in Durban in the 50's, 60's, 70's and 90's. Remembering life back then. People that lived in town [and] what you remember and for those that lived out of town, how you used to catch buses and come to Town to buy clothing, music, going to the bio's or meeting friends". Thus, the page encourages a collective remembering of the Grey Street Complex or Casbah. The page currently has a following of 1,544 members, including Aziz Hassim, who has become an active member on the site. Members constantly post on the page. The majority of the posts or comments begin with phrases such as: "anyone remember..."; "who could forget the..." or "Remembering the..." Hassim is often the member who can offer the most detailed descriptions of that which is being remembered. If Facebook is anything to go by it is clear that we are still "living in a time of memory" (Govinden, 2011). The *Grey Street Casbah and Surrounding* Facebook page holds 363 photographs, posted by its members, with each representing an historical image of the Casbah, of the area's shops, theatres, people or buildings. Members of the group also set up dates in which they meet up to walk the streets

of the Casbah. Hassim is often the leader of such walks, taking members in and around the city, remembering the city's landscapes and former inhabitants. The page is also used to unveil the works of writers who have set their narrative in the Grey Street Complex. Recently posted was a picture of Briji Ramguthee, a sports journalist and former editor of the Post newspaper, who in 2012 is set to launch a novel entitled *Across the Bridge* which is made up of a number of stories of the non-racial soccer games which took place in the Casbah.

It is possible that Hassim's newest piece of fiction will also feature on the Facebook page *Grey Street Casbah and Surrounding.* Hassim is currently working on his fourth novel, also the final piece of his "Casbah trilogy" following *The Lotus People* and *Revenge of Kali.* Entitled *Song of Shoba,* the novel was set to be completed by late 2012. According to Hassim the story "is about a family in the Casbah that is terrorised by thugs who break into their home. The [family] doesn't take the invasion lying down and decides to track down their tormentors and make them pay for their crime" (Reddy Interview, 2012). Hassim could not comment further on the novel's context or themes. However, what is clear is that he will continue writing on the forgotten or untold stories of the Indian South African community. This may lead to further investigation into The Grey Street Complex of Durban.

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