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CREATIVE COMPONENT

Mapping Fietas

I

Fietas mapped provides no clues about where people lived
how they loved
and what they ate for Friday lunch.

II

I map Fietas by Nagin's Grocers on 17th
and the dry cleaners on De La Rey.
I map Fietas by imagining the pink house on 14th
and the lives lived inside.
I map Fietas through the cemetery,
our Central Park
with tombstone benches.

III

The God-view of a satellite-generated map
suffocates poetic observation
lacking lyricism and rhyme
leaving only the sound of my stomach churning.

IV

Red-roofed houses of when I was young
need not jostle for space with beige-and-browns of late.
Delineated by emptiness,
green rectangles punctuate present and past
like sighing spaces
making it hard to return.

V

Strangled between Braamfontein and Brixton cemeteries
it's small surprise that Fietas died an untimely death.

Fietas

I

Why Fietas?

Why not?
I lived there.
People still do.
It's only real if it's on paper.
It's a setting down, settling down, claiming of history.
I am replete with words.
I have forgotten.
We have forgotten.
We never knew.
It's fashionable not to forget.
I want in on the we-were-done-wrong bandwagon.
I have stories to tell.
We have stories to tell.

III

WHEREAS by Proclamation No. 110 dated 24 May 1963, the area defined in paragraph (a) of the Annexure thereto was declared an area for occupation by members of the White group; and whereas you are occupying the land or premises described as Stand...Pageview, Johannesburg, which land or premises are situated in the said area; and whereas you are not a member of the White group and are therefore a disqualified person in respect of the said area; you are hereby notified, in terms of Section 20 (1) bis (b) of the Group Areas Act, 1957 (Act No.77 of 1957) that the Acting Regional Under-Secretary, Department of Community Development, Johannesburg, by virtue of a delegation of the Minister of Community Development, has determined that the provisions of Section 23 of the said Act shall apply in respect of the said land or premises occupied for residential purposes with effect from 1st November, 1966, and that you, together with all disqualified persons occupying with your permission are required to vacate the said land or premises prior to the said date.

II

Fietas Died Today R.I.P

Fietas died today.
She wasn't sick, really.
Just the other day she was
alive with possibility.
Like this:
Unity-in-diversity;
Rainbow nation;
Simunye;
We are one;
New South Africa;
Farce.

Fietas was
a mini-Mzansi,
where Coolies
and Coloureds
and Kaffirs
and a sprinkling of
ching-
chong-
Chinamen
melted, blended and mixed.

Split/separated/marked off
of course
by streets
and cemeteries
and class
and self.

(R.I.P)E to be removed.

IV

We Remember Fietas

We remember 5 14th Street.

We remember the closeness of people and walking into anybody's home, at any time, without invitation.

We remember playing till midnight on the streets.

We remember being soccer and cricket crazy.

We remember scarved-aunties, their children and the old *toppies* and *tannies* cheering us on from balconies.

We remember being scared that the cops would take our balls away if we were caught playing on the streets.

We remember losing many balls.

We remember the cops coming into Fietas, chanting their favourite song:

*Uit die pad
Jou kerrie gat
Ons sal jou bal vat!*

V

I Don't Remember

I don't remember
the day we left.

I don't remember
the way we went.

I don't remember
if men wept.

I can't forget
the power of place
the loss of space.

I choose to forget
the silence I spoke
the air that choked.

VI

The empty plot that stands on 5 14th Street, Fietas now, could be seen as a sad reminder of what was, if it is a sad story I want to tell. The building that was razed to the ground could tell a tale of ruined community and spirit, if it is a nostalgic story I choose to narrate. The irony of now looking at nothing, where a stately shocking-pink building once stood, would make for a yarn of loss and heartache. But these aren't the stories I wish to tell.

VII

What's In A Name?

We remember the white side of Fietas being called Pageview.

We remember never knowing where the name Fietas came from.

We remember naming famous Fietas sons after sporting greats.

We remember the Gardas taking the naming thing too far with names like Morris, Chubb and Peter Garda after the illustrious England cricketer Peter May.

We remember cultivating the language of cricket by using commentary terms like “illustrious”; the meaning of which we only later learnt.

We remember calling a fat, very fat African man who lived in Garda's building Harry Garda.

We remember calling Bob, the painter, a Coloured “gentleman” from the Eastern Cape, Bob Bhamjee because he lived in Bhamjee's building.

We remember making jokes about the name Bhamjee because it reminded us of the word bum.

IX

Do you remember making up the words to *Pinocchio*?

Pinocchio

Is a stouter

Sy naam is Gina

En sy Gwaaa.

X

Samoosas

Whites called samoosas:
Driehoekie Koeliekoekie.

VIII

Harry Garda

Harry Garda was gargantuan
as large as all of Zululand
with lobes filled with beautiful
beaded
art.

Harry Garda became a Garda
because of the
scrubbing
mopping
washing
wiping
he did for the Gardas.

And by living in the back of their
14th Street home.

When Harry Garda got sick,
the time it took for him to negotiate
the steps felt like
an unfolding of history
an unfurling of time.

Step
by
step,
chair in hand
Harry Garda
heaved and huffed
panted and puffed
his way down
the spiral staircase
into the arms of 14th Street.

After every two steps,
he sat on the chair
he carried around
like a third leg.

Adding an odd appendage to the
silhouette of this
large man,
wearing a lobola hat
and Florsheim shoes.

XI

11th Street

11th Street was stretched
by tug-of-will
separating whites and colours
split down the centre
dissecting gay and straight
Malay and Coolie
brown and browner
10th
and
12th.

XII

“We lived in a house filled with laughs.”

XIII

Essop Madari

Essop Madari's shop on 14th Street was
heaped with goods in *help-my-krap* style.

Word has it that Essop Madari
was not 100 percent "because of nerves".

One Saturday, an elderly Jewish woman
who frequented Madari's shop
scratched in one of those heaps
and found
a beautiful jersey
for £2.
She insisted she had seen it
at OK Bazaar
for £1.

So Madari,
because of his nerves,
said she should buy it there.

The Jewish woman,
tired of haggling,
told Madari:
"The government is right by throwing you people out".

To which Madari retaliated:
"Hitler was right too".

XIV

Aisa Madari

Madari's wife/widow
Aisa (Khala) Madari
lives alone,
without a TV
but with a wind-up wireless
from 19-voetsek.

Sandwiched in her dirty-pink
government house
between the Vallys
of 14th Street
and the Mangeras
of 14th Street
Aisa Khala Madari
still sets a table for two.

She lives in a mothball-smelling world
of memories.

Her hands reach deep into her
sagging bosom –
a treasure chest of things owned.
Out flows:
A set of house keys;
An embroidered handkerchief tied like a
dumpling, holding some change;
A lilac packet of Kilty's Petités; and
A photograph of Essop
wrapped meticulously
in a now-browning plastic;
creased gently
from skin
and time.

XV

We remember the bubbling, gurgling sound of Essop Madari dying in the flat next
door and Dr Jassat arriving when it was too late.

XVI

Wild Guy Adda

The Fietas Coloureds searched us every other day. We remember the gangsters from the other side of 17th Street, living 20 or more in a semi-detached. The most feared of them all was a wild guy called Adda. One Sunday, during a soccer match, Adda mowed down three guys within 10 minutes.

Another soccer Sunday, when Goolam Kola was putting the ball back into play from an outball position, Adda began harassing him for money; Goolam, in his soccer kit, dropped the ball on the touch line and ran home.

We remember Uncle Lighty inviting Adda over to help load the bakkie when Uncle Lighty's family had to make the move to Newlands. Adda slogged like a dog with the promise of pay. After the bakkie was packed and the family said their goodbyes to Fietas, Uncle Lighty and his cronies beat Adda to a pulp and left him in the un-peopled living room.

XVII

Boere Beatings

We remember a beating from the boere boys for crossing the other side of De La Rey or going lower than 8th Street.

We remember the only dry cleaners in Fietas being on the wrong side of De La Rey.

We remember taking revenge on an innocent white man riding his bicycle down 14th Street after the boere boys got hold of us when we went to the De La Rey dry cleaners.

XVIII

Place for Four

There was place for only four Indians,
in the corner,
on the top of the tram
which ran between Newlands and town.

There were only four
Chinese
people
living in Fietas.

XVIII

“Mad Ali”

Bawa, my great-grandfather, would sit on the shoe-stand outside the mosque during the Trawih prayer in Ramadhan, correcting the Imam’s mistakes. He only had three walls in his room because the fourth was made invisible by the wall of Islamic books, stacked on each other to save place. Fietas books call Bawa “Mad Ali” for sitting on the pavement corner of 8th and De La Rey, a no-go zone for the rest of us, and smoking other people’s *stompies*.

We remember Bawa waiting for his son Ebrahim to return from LM before dying in his bed with all of us around him.

XXI

Uncle Jimmy – The Don of Fietas

Who can forget bridge nights at Uncle Jimmy’s? Friday nights brought Fietas’s best to the corner of Krause and 13th Street. Night would fade into morning.

Did you know that when South African cricketing great Basil D’Oliviera came to Fietas he stayed only at Uncle Jimmy’s place?

I remember when D’Oliviera was picked to play for England for their tour to South Africa. The tour was called off by Verwoerd or Vorster because D’Oliviera made the team.

Do you remember that Uncle Jimmy – the Don of Fietas – refused to move from his Krause Street semi?

I heard that new South Africa *tsotsis* succeeded where apartheid failed. Uncle Jimmy finally left his house in a hearse, stabbed to death in a robbery.

He still didn’t make it into the Brixton cemetery.

XX

Uncle Hurley

I remember Caribbean cricketer Rohan Kanhai, one of the greatest batsmen of all time, staying on 17th Street when he visited Fietas.

I remember that my daddy, Uncle George Naidoo and Uncle Aboobakr “Hurley” Asvat spent time with him during his stay.

I remember stories of Uncle Hurley, from 17th Street, having to go to Pakistan to study medicine and later being an Azapo member.

I remember loving the sound of the word Azanian and hearing, after a trip to Jan Smuts Airport, that Uncle Hurley had been murdered.

I remember my father’s wet face as he sat alone in his car after Uncle Hurley was buried and feeling privileged that Winnie Mandela came to Uncle Hurley’s funeral – in disguise.

I remember feeling differently a few days later when news broke of Winnie’s Stompie connection to Uncle Hurley.

XXII

Films

The cinema on 17th Street was called Taj. The one on 20th was Star.

We remember calling cinemas bioscopes and pronouncing “film” as “filim”.

My Mariam Ma wore her high-heels for the Saturday night Hindi double-feature at Planet or Lyric in Fordsburg.

Ma always said that a woman’s hips look more slender if she wears high-heels.

We remember walking through the damp, dark subway to get to Fordsburg.

XXIII

Nagin’s

When I open my stainless steel India spice tin to flavour a chicken korma or liven up a take-away from KFC, I can still smell the spices at Nagin’s Spice Emporium. When I was young I recall the sense of victory at finally being able to say the word “emporium”. My friends and I would sit on the drums filled with chilli, turmeric and coriander waiting for some scarved or saried aunty to open her beaded purse, knowing this would mean we would be asked to lift our bottoms and scoop out some spice.

XXIV

The telephone number, at our house on 5 14th Street, was 359153.

XXV

Kismet

We remember believing a ghost called Kismet lived in the storeroom under the staircase.

We remember Ma telling us the word kismet means fate in English.

We remember that the corner shop where we bought tomato sauce crisp and Coke nips was called Kismet.

XXVII

I remember the cops chasing Nazir Brady down 14th Street. He entered one of the buildings and jumped from roof to roof in a thrilling spectacle that forever made Superman pale in comparison.

XXVIII

We remember one of the Fietas urchins, with a kit-bag on his back trying to jump from the roof of the mosque chanting:
Batman and Robbinnn...

XXVI

S.A. Haque

Do you remember a guy by the name of S.A. Haque –
Now known as late-Haque (because he is late in the dead sense).
You could tell from the way Haque spoke English that he wasn't educated but Haque ran soccer and cricket in Fietas and was the most dedicated sports administrator (there's another of those must-know cricket terms).

We remember Haque being the first to arrive and the last to leave from the grounds because there were lines and creases to draw, netball nets and cricket boundaries to set up and sport to be played.

Haque led a team called Motherwells, which was his pride.
Motherwells' players were Malay and Coloured, with a smidgen of Indians.

My father, Moosa "Monkey" Mangera was one of those Indians.

Do you remember paying 20c ground tax for the washing of soccer kits and cricket whites and that if you couldn't afford it, then Haque would fork out the cash?

You must remember loving cricket a bit more than soccer.

XXVIII

When Papa died last year, after living for over a quarter of a century in Lenasia, the noticeboards at mosques and outside BP garage on Nirvana Drive read:

Ismail Mangera of Fietas died today.

Ghalieb on 11th

Ghalieb Misry is fabulous. He walks with the sway of a woman who knows love and loss and loneliness. The swishing of his slight hips as he sashays across the linoleum floor with a toss of his now-burgundy hair raises eyebrows – that are already raised in sexy arches by adept Pakistani male hands, a mouth and a piece of white cotton. *Hair to Dye For* reverberates with the cacophony of women having their facial hair removed with the Asian technique of threading. Interspersed between the women are men, of all ages and shapes, whose freshly-coiffured heads are being drummed to an Indian head massage beat. The impromptu symphony of knotted thread slicing off hair and the slapping of Amla Oil onto shiny heads cannot compete with Ghalieb's quiet dedication. He considers every snip of my hair that he extends between manicured fingers as though he were contemplating the making of history. Tenderly brushing aside tendrils, with a blow-dryer locked between skinny legs, Ghalieb is making history.

"Look at this photo, girlfriend," Ghalieb sings, in an accent that leaves me guessing. I am not sure if it is trying to be Cape-Malay or drag queen or whether the laugh is on me.

"Who do you think it is, huh?"

I scrutinise the black and white photo. The profile is of a woman with a towering up-style and a nose that takes centre stage. The scalloped white borders of the photograph whisper to me that the subject said "cheese" some time in the 60s. She is a handsome woman and I feel the same affinity I do with any woman who hangs on to the kohl-lined cat eyes of aging Bollywood divas.

"Take a guess who it is man. What do you think?"

"Your... your mother?"

“*Naai man, is nie!*” Ghalieb giggles like a girl who’s just played a prank on her best friend at the playground. With a spellbinding swing of his pendulum hips, he erupts: “It’s – my – father!”

“Oh.”

“Don’t be shy *meisie*. I’m not one to pretend about who I am.”

And as if to make doubly sure I understand, Ghalieb deliberately drops his comb and does a cheeky, straight-kneed bend to retrieve it. His low-hung stonewash denims drop a notch and I am cheek to cheek with a diamante g-string. I *am* one to pretend so I feign checking my cell phone for an SMS that didn’t arrive.

“You know my father was the first guy from Fietas to have a sex change?”

“Is it?”

“Yes. He was always so little bit other kind. My mother says when I was one year old my father decided to be true to himself so he chopped that thingie off.”

Ghalieb’s show-and-tell with his scissors as he cuts some of my hair to the sound of “thingie” leaves me somewhat shaken but I don’t want to be seen as a prude. I persevere.

“So what did your mother do?”

“She stayed with him till the very end when he died six years ago. You know I never had a father figure. It was like living with two mothers.”

I want to ask about the rumours I hear about his mother being the butchiest woman in all of Fietas but there is no way to mask my question in the guise of innocent curiosity. And there is also no way of asking it in a way that is not hurtful.

“And I was always raised as a girl, you see.”

“Really?”

“*Ja* really. But my parents were so nice – when I was 18 they offered to pay for my sex change because they knew how difficult life can be. I’m *mos* like a earthworm. A hermaphrodite.”

“You were born with both... parts Ghalieb? Shame man.”

“No it’s alright girl. I told my parents thanks but no thanks. I say if Allah created me like this then he knows why. Who am I to change it, *nê*?”

“So you still have both parts?”

“What can I say – my penis is really a non-event, like you know what I mean? It’s there for no reason like the UN.”

Our laughing eyes meet in the safety of the show-girl mirror.

“You won’t believe it but I even get period pains without the period. My insides are all woman I tell you. It’s just the outside that is fucking things up for me a bit.”

I almost spit up a platitude like: “Don’t be silly. You look good girlfriend,” but swallow my thoughts when I see his eyes. Heavily-made up green and bronze eyelids curtain teary fake green eyes. Ghalieb quickly wipes the tears away and shimmies over to the colour chart to the bumping beat of a Bhangra song.

“Hey bhai, blow that Aunty nicely *nê*,” Ghalieb says with a wink to one of his Bangladeshi protégés. The aunty in question pretends not to hear, but her pursed lips close tighter and she almost strangles poor Sha Rukh Khan on the cover of *SA India*.

“*Lyk net soos a poes wat met a nat tekkie geklap is*,” Ghalieb whispers. I am careful not to laugh at full volume lest I prove louder than the ambient salon noise.

“You’re too much!”

“*Ja* I know I’m being ugly but this *tannie* likes to *loer* at me from the corners of her eyes. My mother would have *klapped* her one if she was here. She don’t stand *kak* from no-one. Even at family functions she say I must keep my head up and walk tall like a flamingo not like a bitch with a *pis-willie* tucked between the legs.”

Ghalieb’s bravado encourages me to choose Flaming Red with Platinum and Grecian Blonde streaks so that I too may elicit some gasps from *tannies* at the wedding I am to attend. “At least your mother understands, hey Ghalieb.”

“True. Even in Fietas, on 11th where we lived, my mother used to take on those hypocrite ’Slam ous from 12th down and the *lastige* Whities from 10th up.”

Ghalieb’s hands work unthinkingly. He peels off layers of foil from my chameleon hair. The overweight man next to me looks orgasmic as young Shahi rubs Amla Oil onto his fat head in hypnotising circles.

Ghalieb giddy-ups me to the wash-basin, holding my tri-coloured hair reins. Rajah, the Pakistani owner, must not be doing too shabbily. The standard Fordsburg salon reclining chair that inevitably leaves one’s nape worse for the wash has been replaced with a black Cleopatra couch. Ghalieb gives my waxed legs an approving nod.

“Did they give your father a hard time?”

“*Ja* but not in the way he wanted – get it? No man, I’m just playing. I tell you those same people who walked from door-to-door talking about the mercy of Allah had no mercy in their hearts. They acted like the *moffies* from 11th and 13th were made by a different God.”

“I only hear Fietas stories of how everyone lived ‘like one big family’.”

“Maybe you were part of that happy family if you looked like everyone and fucked like everyone. Not *deurmekaar* like us.”

Ghalieb's profanity peaks everyone's ears. The Bangladeshi and Pakistani banter switches to a dialect both Ghalieb and I can't understand but we can guess.

"Do they treat you well here Ghalieb?"

"Yes, for sure. These Pakis *mos* think us *Ijras* – like they call *moffies* – bring good luck. That's why they'll never let me leave from here. Plus who taught them about colours and up-styles?"

The hairdryer creates a welcomed silence. Ghalieb works the round brush through the ends of my hair, pulling so taut that his sculptured arms threaten to break through his stocking top. He pouts his maroon lips and blows gently onto the ends so that no stray strands ruin his artwork. Shifting from side to side in a dizzying dance, he puffs and taps my hair into submission.

"Don't your arms get sore?"

"I'm used to it. I just get tired now that I've started chemo."

"You didn't tell me you weren't well. What's wrong? Why are you having chemo?"

"I *maar* laugh at it. I tell all my clients, who are friends like you, that this is life's way of kicking me in the balls even if my other head is up in the air like a flamingo. What they call it – pro-straight cancer. See, I told you, just like my father life keeps kicking me in the nuts."

Get Off The Bus

The bus-load of ageing East Rand *tannies* couldn't be more pleasant. The after-lunch lull means they smile on cue, laugh when my commentary points them in that direction and curtail their caustic comments behind cupped hands.

I enjoy hosting the East Rand Businesswomen's Group more than the Standard Bank yuppies of 2003. There's a sense of pressure-release in knowing that your audience shops at Milady's and doesn't hide it. Floral two-pieces and Honey jewellery are so much less intimidating than power casual wear *à la* Nike and Loxion Kulcha. And they also ask a lot more questions on this Johannesburg Indian Experience (like it's one blooming thing) than the banking lot.

"Ladies. Oh, ladies and gentleman," I correct myself as I remember the lone male on the bus, except for the nameless driver. The podgy, pimply young man clutches his *padkos*, unsure of whether to acknowledge my greeting. His mother stabs an elbow into his side. It switches on his smile – like magic.

"We are now about to drive past the historically-significant Pageview or Vrededorp. It was affectionately called Fietas by its residents. Fietas tells a similar story to that of District Six and Cato Manor..."

The well-fed sheep eyes and back-of-the-bus murmurings irritate me in a way that cannot hide itself. I bump up my tone and throw in some guilt.

"Fietas was a bustling business area, where the predominantly Indian residents lived peacefully besides Malay, Coloured and black people. 1956 marked the beginning of the end for Fietas when the apartheid government designated it a WHITE area in terms of the infamous Group Areas Act and began evicting residents."

Other than some uncomfortable shuffling in the front rows, my lesson in South Africa's unofficial history seems to have little effect. Two women stretch over the aisle to show off their bargains from the Oriental Plaza, while Tant Marie, sitting in

front of them, dozes like a Cabinet Minister. Perhaps the combination of the tumble she took at the Midrand Hindu temple and the chicken tikka from Delhi Delicious has taken its toll on her attention span. Even the lively women who were interested earlier seem to have slipped into a garlic-induced haze. For the first time since we boarded in Kempton Park, I appreciate the presence of teacher's pet, Lourika.

"Ma'am, me please. Please pick me, Ma'am," she seems to suggest with eyes that emulate a Grade One finger in the sky.

"Have any of you been here before?"

"Ooh yes," purrs Lourika. "My gran actually lived in Pageview. And because we were from a *plaas* near Rustenburg it was such a treat to come spend Christmas here. What with all the pretty fabrics and the friendly Indian traders. I can remember..."

"Did you all hear that at the back? Lourika was just telling us about her experiences as a child here in Fietas. And I am sure many of you will be able to recount similar tales. Fietas really was a shopping mecca. In the early 20th century Fietas Asian merchants turned 14th Street into a famous bazaar. The flourishing businesses raised the ire of white traders and this was one of the reasons why Fietas was re-."

The bus comes to an abrupt halt at the commemorative plaque on 14th Street, which sets in motion my *panjabi* in ways that are less than elegant. Between prising what have become knickerbockers from between my legs and clutching onto the mic, I seem to have won back everyone's attention. Even Tant Marie is shaken awake by the sudden stop.

"Ahem. As I was saying Fietas was then re-zoned and people were mainly moved to Lenasia, which like Soweto, is an acronym. It stands for Land of the Asians. But the real reason this place is of interest to me is because it is the place where I was born."

I pause for effect, half expecting a collective "ooh".

“If you look out to the left, at this fenced-off patch of grass, that’s exactly where the house that my great great-grandfather built stood. As you will see, a lot of Fietas was never re-developed for white occupation as originally planned.”

Lizette, the businesswoman who organised the tour, wipes away tears.

“The plaque that you see in front of the fenced off plot that was our home was erected as part of an initiative to reclaim the lost heritage of Fietas by former residents. A group of friends started the Fietas Festival in 2002 but unfortunately that festival drew to an end in 2004. Would you ladies like to step off the bus to read the plaque and go walkabout?”

Their lack of enthusiasm is not surprising. One can hardly feel affronted by their reluctance to traipse off an air-conditioned bus to look at a lonely plaque that is surrounded by crushed Coke cans, dirty nappies and – from the smell that wafts in through the ajar door – pissed-on dry grass.

“Okay, that’s fine. I think it’s been a long day and we still have Gandhi-ji’s statue to see.”

I hope my blasé tone masks *my* relief at not having to get off the bus.

Of Journeys, Home and Treasure

Feizel Mamdoo is a man on a journey. During his travels to Zanzibar in 2000 he was intrigued by Stone Town. The influence that its “narrow streets, design and layout” had on the relationships between people evoked memories for him of another space, a forgotten place. The “traditional way of life and mixed use of space for residences, businesses and recreation” conjured images of the Fietas of Mamdoo’s youth, allowing him to travel to his past by navigating through the present.

The present-day Mamdoo is easy to recognise even at a first meeting. His shoulder-length black hair, Afro-Indian pant and *kurta* set, pointed shoes and black-framed glasses may belie his 47 years but set off sirens that one is encountering a person of arty persuasion.

Although the idea of reviving the spirit of Fietas and his past had not been a new one for Mamdoo and his friends Hanif Patel, Percy Langa and Mudley Halim, his experiences in Stone Town resuscitated a tired dream.

Giving birth to the Fietas Festival was not easy. Mamdoo remembers the labour pains: “When we started in 2002 we tried to raise funds. It took a long time”. He recalls approaching the Lottery fund but the organisation’s insistence on seeing auditor’s statements for the previous three years was not practical since the Fietas Festival was a new initiative. “We did get contributions from previous residents but not enough to meet costs.” Despite these difficulties in its year of inception, Mamdoo and the team decided to persevere. Digging deep into their own pockets they launched the Fietas Festival during September, heritage month, of 2002. Mamdoo is profoundly aware of the toll of an unfunded project: “It had an impact on aesthetics. Without the money the aesthetic (of the festival) was different.” But the unintended bonus of funding difficulties was the “deepening of community participation”.

In almost any conversation about Fietas, and as if it is synonymous with Fietas, the word “community” springs up. Mudney Halim’s family was moved out from 18th Street Fietas when he was about nine years old. He recalls “longing for a community

that could have been”. Mamdoo reiterates this: “Fietas now only lives in the mind of those who lived there.”

So in an effort to make tangible this “imagined community”, the Fietas Festival sought to reunite the people of Fietas with the place. Mamdoo recognises that the “people of Fietas” are not a homogeneous bunch of disgruntled Indian Muslims, now living and working in Lenasia. Fietas people include: Malays, who see Fietas as “true ancestral ground”; black Africans who were moved to Orlando East even before Indians were forcibly removed; and Afrikaners who currently reside in what is now called Pageview/Vrededorp.

Mamdoo’s Fietas Festival concept document further breaks down the mixed-masala that was Fietas:

Fietas was an integrated community of people, space and use: of African, Indian, coloured, Malay and some Chinese people; of Hindu, Christian, Muslim and indigenous African faiths; of workers, professionals, shopkeepers, sangomas and artisans; of mosques and churches; bioscopes, shebeens and corner cafes; alleyways, backyards and stoeps and, the internationally famous 14th Street bazaar.

Both Mamdoo and Halim acknowledge that all was not bliss in Fietas. Mamdoo recalls tensions between former Malay and Indian residents in relation to how wealthy Indian landlords came to acquire land in Fietas. Halim remembers that “there were problems like gangsterism – the problems normal societies would have”. He chooses to focus, instead, on what he calls the more “noble aspects of Fietas culture”, the things that kept people together.

If the Fietas Festival was meant to be an exercise in bringing communities together, it also fulfilled an oppositional function in showing up deep fault lines. Mamdoo admits that his stronger connections with the Fietas Indian community, by virtue of his lineage, created a situation in the first year of the festival where “Malay people felt unrepresented.” In 2003 and 2004 however, the Fietas Malay community turned up in numbers. A similar scenario unfolded with the resident Afrikaner community, where

the tension prevalent in 2002 was replaced, largely, with support and participation in the next two years of the festival's existence. African participation throughout the festival's three-year lifespan was more muted due to historically-determined circumstances, where many former African residents of Fietas proved more difficult to trace, says Mamdoo.

However, despite these lines of fractures and faults, Mamdoo still sees Fietas – even only the one that lives in the imagination – as a beacon. He regards the values of non-racism and ethnic and religious tolerance that characterised Fietas as exemplary: “In places like Lenz, tension between Muslims and Hindus exists. Its (Fietas's) pertinence and relevance is evolving all the time. In the context of what's happening globally, like the representation of Muslims, the idea of Fietas is very important. People find it hard to challenge because it was lived experience.”

The Fietas Festival was therefore an attempt to recreate that “lived experience” and to engage with, reclaim and preserve lost heritage. But it is difficult to conceptualise such intangibles as culture and heritage. The festival looked at the concrete manifestations of these new South Africa buzzwords. It was billed as a “living celebration of the era's games, food, music, sport, dance, tastes, arts, occupational crafts, prose, poetry, cinema, artefacts, architecture, bazaars, characters and personalities, values and faiths”. Some of the games played during the festival conjure childhood memories of years gone by. Old games such as *kennetjie*, *morabaraba*, marbles, bridge, top, three-tins, *blikkies*, *kiriebekha*, charms and dominoes resuscitate lost sounds on Fietas's narrow streets.

A unique event that marked the inaugural 2002 festival was the sharing of oral history through open mic sessions. Former residents took to the platform in sometimes emotive recollections of their days in Fietas. “The first festival was very small – only about 2000 people,” says Mamdoo. “But the festival was special because the interactions between people were powerful.”

He remembers that the first oral history session took place “on 20th Street, the street of my birth. It was a huge emotional moment – coming back there after so long.” One story that lingers in his mind is a tale told by a middle-aged man, Salim, who never

felt any real connection with Fietas but obliged his mother by bringing her to the festival. He described the moment she pointed out the spot where he was born as “mind-blowing”. “He was confronted with his own history,” explains Mamdoo.

On a more personal note, Mamdoo says he didn’t ever realise that his father attended the school in Krause Street until the festival when former residents brought old photos along in an impromptu exercise in memorialising history. Halim was also moved by a photograph of a group of people marching to the old 23rd Street mosque. Leading the march was his now deceased father and the picture was taken 50 years ago to that day.

Yet another poignant, though engineered, event that grew in size and popularity during the life-span of the Fietas Festival was the 11th Street tea party. 11th Street was the geographic divide between white and black Fietas before the Group Areas Act rendered Fietas all-white. People from either side of that tarred border recall their sometimes dangerous escapades to “the other side”. The crossing of 11th Street during the festival entailed a sharing of *boere koeksisters* and *coolie* samoosas at that liminal space in a food-mediation. During the first festival a group of former Fietas residents, led by the Muslim brigade and Cape Malay drummers, marched to 11th Street and symbolically crossed over. They were greeted with roses by the resident Afrikaners who joined the march to a hall where food was shared. “I learnt, through the festival, that the Afrikaner people were also very diminished after our move,” says Mamdoo.

So why is the festival, like Fietas, no more? The short answer seems to be funds and capacity. “I had to put bread on the table”, says Mamdoo, who, after putting all his energy and finances in the Fietas Festival between 2002 and 2004, joined the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) until the end of 2005. “I don’t think I belong in government,” says Mamdoo, who was drawn to the position because of his anti-apartheid background and wanting to make a contribution to a democratic South Africa. But his love for story-telling and capturing memories has seen him leave his most recent post as Head of Communications at the Gauteng Department of Arts and Culture in June 2006. Having successfully made the critically-hailed *What Happened to Mbuyisa?* in 1998, he is currently producing a documentary on the 1906 Bambata rebellion, “one of the last stands against colonialism”.

Fietas is still never a thought away from Mamdoo's life journey and consciousness. During that pivotal trip to Zanzibar at the start of the millennium he began shooting for a documentary that was to be called *Journey*. Although his voyage literally started in Stone Town as a way of making sense of "Indian and African relationships, it has grown and gone beyond that". Engaging with the teachings of Sufi mystic and poet Rumi and contemporary novelist Paulo Coelho in the last two years, Mamdoo believes that "the idea of Fietas fits into a philosophical scheme – the idea of life being about journeys; that you need to leave home to come back to it". So he has begun to see the film that started as one story in 2000 as a new story with all that he has learnt in the interim.

In a globalised world where theorists such as Homi Bhabha re-configure the adage 'there is no place like home' to mean that we are literally all wanderers, searching for meaning, Mamdoo understands home in a broad sense. "On a spiritual plane," he explains, "home means so many things. Home can be religion. One needs to leave home to discover the treasure that is home."

As much as the Fietas Festival was about heritage, so too was it invested in the politics of identity. How does the place that we are from shape who we are? "I'm not comfortable being defined as a Muslim, or Indian (only). It's partial," says Mamdoo. In South Africa, where who we are has been socially constructed within a damaging binary system of black and white, it is easy to confine ourselves to prescribed identities. Mamdoo is acutely aware of the ways in which points of interruption are identity-shapers: "I don't think we appreciate the extent to which Fietas made us. I have come to appreciate the rupture between present and past."

Mamdoo also thinks about Fietas as a "*gham*" or village. Where South Africans of Indian descent historically situate themselves in relation to which village in India their forbears hail from, Fietas sons and daughters locate themselves in relation to which street in Fietas they come from. "We make sense in relation to one another because of Fietas. When they uprooted and moved us they attacked something very fundamental about ourselves," he says. This multi-dimensional way of making sense of identity

encapsulates resistance history, cultural ideology and what Rumi refers to as the uprooting of identity.

Mamdoo likens his expedition to unearth the treasures that are home and identity to that of Santiago, Coelho's intrepid character in *The Alchemist*. Santiago is an Andulasian shepherd who dreams about finding a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. He leaves home to find this illusive treasure and the lessons he learns along the way lead him back home. Therefore the search leads one back to the place where one started and having journeyed far and wide to find answers, one returns to that point of departure, able to understand the value of the place for the very first time. And having done so, one is able to grasp, even if only fleetingly, the value "of journeys, home and treasure".

Mariam Ma – of 14th Street

Ma died today. It is Saturday, 4 November 2006 and I am returning from a baby shower in Fietas at my cousin Nazeera's home on 7th Street. It is 8.55pm as I pull up toward my house when my phone rings. Mohammed is frantic: "Ma's sick. She's very sick. Come quickly."

"What do you mean? What happened? Why didn't you phone earlier?"

"Come quickly."

I struggle to breathe. Between calling my cousins who I was with just 15 minutes ago and racing to Lenasia I negotiate with God: "Please. I'm asking you. Just give me five minutes. Please let her be okay."

I know she isn't okay.

The trip to Lenz is never-ending. The thought that I will be too late to see her alive makes the journey even more unbearable.

It is difficult to reconcile the celebration of an unborn life only hours earlier with the loss of the head of our family. The baby we were ushering into the world with food, laughter and gifts would have been Mariam Mangera's 13th great-grandchild. Her mother says she is "unlucky 13" who will never know Ma – not in this lifetime at least.

This story seems to be regressing into tin-fish mode. You know those tin-fish stories of the deceased that recall arbitrary last conversations or meals? My cousin Salma and I have a pact – whoever dies first, the other will say of her: "Just yesterday she ate tin-fish," irrespective of what our last supper may have been.

My memory favours the last encounter with one who leaves or with something that is lost. The event takes first place in thinking's queue, elbowing out past contenders. I

am left with those final words, however mundane, that echo into tomorrow.

This is my tin-fish story about my granny, Mariam Suleiman Mangera:

On the Thursday before Ma died I visit Lenz. I know it will be a busy weekend and I can't let a week go by without seeing her. In a change from my routine I walk into my mother's house first. Ma undoubtedly sees my car in the communal drive-way because it's less than five minutes before the phone rings.

"Salam. When you came?"

"Just now Ma."

"What you doing *dikraa*?"

"I'm eating Ma. I'll be there now."

"No, Leave everything and come quickly. Run. I make something for you. It's a surprise."

For a moment, Ma's use of English leaves me perplexed – but not perplexed enough to ignore the lure of a surprise. With a bowl of rice in hand, I enter Ma's house to find her sitting on the couch with a knowing smile.

"Go see in the dining room *dikraa*. Under the table. In the silver pot."

"I made *chola* for me and you. For one year I'm looking for it but nobody can bring. Today your mother tells me she has some so I want to cook tomorrow but I hear you're coming today so I cook it now."

I savour the dried prawns like it is caviar. Ma feels a *chola* bond to me because the curry made of dried prawns, potato and brinjal is something enjoyed by the older people in my family. Not the pizza and spaghetti generation that Ma calls us. For 25 of my 31 years I have either lived in the same house or next door to my granny. I was

raised on her cooking and her stories.

“Okay Ma I’m going now. Thanks for the food. I won’t see Ma over the weekend so I’ll greet you now.”

She walks me to my car, shading her eyes from the sun. I kiss her on her cheek.

“Go safely, my darling.”

So on the day of her funeral, Sunday, 5 November 2006 I say: “Just on Thursday we ate *chola* together. Ma walked me to my car and said: ‘Go safely, my darling’.”

I tell anyone who will listen that I have a video interview of Ma, taken less than two months ago. In it she tells me about Fietas. But it is painful to watch the video. Her blue dress with tiny white flowers overshadows everything she says and does in this last visual memory of her. It is the dress she wears on the night she dies. It is the dress we cut off her body and place into a bag with all her belongings as we prepare to wash her body for the last time.

Ma was ready to die. On the top shelf of her cupboard she had stored her own *kafan*. The burial cloth was neatly folded and waiting for her last breath to leave.

It is less than two hours since Ma took that last breath and we are standing around a zinc table. The smell of camphor encircles the room. There is no sign of anguish on her face. She looks asleep and the women and girls she has birthed and bathed and put to bed begin washing her body.

I hold her heavy head in my hands. Carefully, very carefully I undo her thin, grey braid. It makes no sense, I know, but I’m scared of hurting her. I gently place her head back onto the cold, silver table. Jugs of water are passed down the length of the table from hand to hand. I see only the hands. When I am done loosening her hair and my aunt begins pouring water over Ma’s head, I want to freeze the moment; to stop it from ending. But the women’s voices rise, as one, to the final prayer and I have to go on. I gently wash her hair, trying to touch each strand thrice. Parting her hair into

three I place the separated thirds behind her, cautious not to lift the pink sheet that covers her body too much.

I've never thought about how my grandmother looked. My granny, with her stooping gait and weathered face somehow fell beyond the ambit of what magazines say are beautiful. But today, with her head leaning slightly to the right and the back of her stiff hand just touching her forehead, she is exquisite. Her shiny grey hair curls at the ends. She looks ethereal and we are all transfixed by her beauty.

On the video, Ma looks her 82 years. She scratches the papery skin on her hand. The textures of her furrowed face, white scarf knotted at her neck, burgundy couch and lace curtains that just invite the light in make for a fragile portrait. Ma is wearing anachronistic Reebok sunglasses. They protect her eyes from the sun and my prying camera's eye and balance out the power.

Ma has had a cataract in her right eye removed. She's as giddy as a school girl.

"Put your fingers up. Four fingers. I'm right or no?"

"You are right Ma."

"I can see you clearly now my *dikraa*," Ma smiles.

"When did you come to Fietas Ma?"

She releases an out-of-breath "1939".

"We came from India to Maputo. From Maputo to Park Station by train. From Park to Fietas. On 14th Street."

"We stayed in Bhamjee's building. What a difference there was between India and here. Here is very nice. It's very different in India."

"What was different Ma?"

“Everything my *dikraa*. No bathroom, no toilet in India. Nothing.”

“So where did you go in India? In the veld?”

“In the yard. The bath and toilet were outside. It was covered and you took your water there and bathed.

“I stayed with my father, mother, and step-mother. When I came to South Africa for good I was 12 years. The first time I came with my mother when I was five years old. That time my mother stayed for one-and-a-half years and Aysha was born. Aysha was seven days old and my mother passed away.”

Ma’s chewing gum makes a guest appearance between her missing front teeth. She relaxes on the couch. I see her willingness to continue and bombard her with questions: “When you stayed in Fietas, what was it like? Did u like it? Who lived there? Was it mixed or were there only Indian people?”

“All. Mostly Indian people. Some Coloured was on 13th, 14th. You know 13th, 11th this side. But mostly Hindu and Muslim – Indian people.”

“When did you stay with Papa?”

“When I was 15.”

“So who came to fetch you to go to Papa’s house?”

Ma falls back laughing. Raising her hands to the Gods in mock prayer as if to say give me patience in dealing with this fool she says: “Dadi came alone.”

“You know Dadi-Ma? Papa’s mother. The old one. And her mother – very very old. You know her?”

I don’t know them and I am still enraptured with imagining what a 15-year-old girl

(who has been married on paper at the age of seven) must feel when she goes to live with her husband.

“Were you scared to go stay with Papa?”

“With Papa? No. Papa stayed with Dada and Dadi. Before we didn’t have our own room like you young ones now. Even after my first-born Aboobakr was born, Papa’s whole family lived in the same house on 14th. We were all there. Papa’s brother Essop also bought my sister Khadija to stay there when they were married. We all stayed together – in two cottages.”

“Ma, when you saw Papa for the first time did you think he was handsome?”

“Oh *gonna*!” She claps her hands in disbelief.

“One day somebody will look at this and say: ‘Look at this lady. She’s old and mad and now she’s talking about these things’.”

“Please tell me Ma. I want to know.”

“*Sies*. How can I talk about that?”

“But was he handsome?”

“You saw how he was. That’s how he was!”

I try to beat Ma at this game of chopped logic: “I didn’t see photos of him when he was young.”

“But how was he now?”

“Very handsome, Ma.”

“*Ja*. So that’s how he was.”

Ma wins the logic game and knows she holds the power. “Now if you ask me all these things then I don’t know what to say?”

“Okay sorry Ma, then I won’t ask you those things.”

I need to quickly change gears if I want my questions answered.

“Do you remember Harry Garda?”

“Harry Garda was the boy the Gardas kept. Like Shorty who comes to your mother’s house always. You call him Shorty. Who knows what his name must be. So that poor guy must have been working for the Gardas for ages. Afterwards, he became so swollen – with water...”

Her arms bend at 45 degree angles and levitate like a balloon to show just how fat he was. She holds the posture like when we were young and acted out “I’m a little teapot. Short and stout.”

“So he became known as Harry Garda. At Bhamjee’s there was a guy – a Coloured guy. He became Bob Bhamjee. They gave people nicknames like that in Fietas.”

“Does Ma remember the day they told you to move to Lenz?”

“Ja. They troubled us a lot. They caused a lot of problems for us. The inspectors and them – all those whites. First where could we go to? Then they built houses in Lenz and started giving us our numbers. They told us to come fetch our house numbers. And then we had to empty our houses and go.

“On 14th Street, it was our own building. My Dada’s building. They didn’t even give us anything for it. No value. It was a double-storey.

“When we moved to Lenz so much of our stuff got stolen in the move. The boys unpacked our things anywhere. So much was damaged. Do you know how terrible the

roads were?

“Oh we cried a lot my darling. To leave our own homes and come this side. I think it was two or three years after we came to Lenz that they broke our building. It could even be more. I don’t know. Everybody went to see when a house was being broken. They’d say: ‘Now they are breaking this one’s house’.

“Just as soon as you left your house, those people took your front door off. Windows, lights – all of that they took. Only the walls remained. But when they took that too, I don’t know.

“I never went back to see 14th Street. It’s so hard. How could we go back to see our old house?

“They broke everything – lights, windows everything. How heartsore didn’t we get.”

“So Ma never went back to see 14th Street?”

“I don’t know. Oh yes, I went. When Nazeera got married and we were passing to go to her new house in Fietas on 7th Street, we passed the cemetery. Then I saw it was 14th Street. Everything is broken.

“The land is still there but we didn’t get a penny for it. We handed in the papers but we still have nothing for it.”

“Why didn’t you ever go back to India?”

“I don’t like India.” Ma emphatically shakes her head in slow motion. “Even if you give me a free ticket I won’t go.”

Turning her ears between her fore-fingers and thumbs Ma tells me: “I catch my ears and ask that Allah never takes me back there.”

“When summer comes the way people in India swear and fight.”

Using her hands to mark off a piece of land on the couch she says: “For such a small piece of land the hitting and fighting that went on. People would mark off their properties with make-shift fences. When night comes those fences used to mysteriously move so you wake up in the morning and find that your land has shrunk and your neighbour’s has grown.

“I don’t even miss it a little. Nothing. I don’t know why they sent me back there. But Mummy died and nobody could keep me here. My Dada was here. My Dadi was here. I had uncles and aunties here but nobody kept me and my cousin. My father’s sister looked after me in India.

“I lived with my aunty until I was 12 years old and then I came here. I really liked Fietas. I still like Fietas. Now Lenz seems alright – because we’ve been here for so many years. But it’s still not the same like Fietas. Fietas had such *wahti*. Next door too were our people. This side were our people. That side were our people. If you just screamed once all the children would come running. And here – they could kill you and nobody would come.

“People still live there in Fietas, you know? Bulbulias, Nanas, Karas still live there. And Himdad Khan. A bookkeeper on 13th Street.

“But now there are no Saloojees. There are no Vallys. There are no Takolias. There are no Akhalwayas.”

Ma turns her face away from my camera. I don’t know what her eyes behind those Reebok sunglasses are saying.

“Are you finished Ma?”

“*Dikraa*, I can keep talking and you can keep writing. I think even a year won’t be enough. If I tell you all my stories, you will write and write and fill up books.”

It is Sunday, 5 November 2006. The noticeboards in mosques around Lenasia read:

Mariam Suleiman Manger, of 14th Street, Fietas, passed away today.

Memory is invoked to heal, to blame, to legitimate.
Antze and Lambek

1. THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The poet C.S. Lewis said of stories: “We read to know we are not alone”. This assertion is telling. It situates the value of reading, and by implication, the act of writing within the realm of identity politics and the search for belonging. In a globalised world where theorists such as Homi Bhabha re-configure the adage ‘there is no place like home’ to mean that we are literally all wanderers, places we can call home, or the root of our identities, become all the more significant.

In Western cultural expression, the written word holds pride of place as *the* mode of telling or recording. There is also a global impetus or urgency to record stories, particularly ones of trauma. Steven Spielberg’s Shoah Foundation seeks to capture the stories and memories of Holocaust survivors and recorded more than 50 000 interviews from 1994, when it was established, until 1999. One reason behind this method of recording is to concretise oral history and memory through the more tangible acts of representation like writing, video memoirs and biography. But is the exercise to capture memory and history as simple as it sounds? How does memory work? Do current material circumstances colour our memories and pepper them with nostalgia? How much do we have to forget or veil in sentimentality for our memories of who we were, and where we come from, to cohere into a grand narrative?

Lewis’s observation can be altered for the purposes of this theoretical introduction to say we read to find ourselves. This opens up another area of discourse. Theories of identity abound, ranging from cultural identity to collective identity. Even within a particular discourse, like cultural identity theory, positions vary from notions that identity is essential and therefore fixed, to the social constructivist stance which posits that cultural identity is constructed, that it is a process, and that it falls within the ambit of the social. Theorists Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Leon de Kock unpack this social constructivist standpoint.

The position that I have adopted for this theoretical introduction speaks to an understanding of identity that both Hall and Bhabha suggest, which focuses on difference and change. Hall conceptualises cultural identity as a “matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of being”.¹ Bhabha refers to this as “cultural difference” and accounts for a sense of gap and a realisation that “cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation to Self and Other”.²

In South Africa, apartheid sought to create a simple racial binary of white and non-white. This Us/Them dichotomy is premised on the notion that the Other stands as a binary opposite to the exalted Self. These racial markers of identity have a specific meaning when viewed within a specific context – that of apartheid South Africa. But how do we identify ourselves in a post-apartheid South Africa, in a globalised world? I am a South African of Indian descent. I am a woman. I am black. I am Muslim. I am the product of my experiences and encounters thus far. I am shaped by the memories I have and the stories I hear and read. I am. So identity is tied to place, ancestry, gender, religion, experience and memories in this picture I draw of myself. But this list is not finite and these markers of identity are not fixed or mutually exclusive.

These ruminations about identity and memory lead me to my choice of topic for my creative work. I am interested in these questions: Who am I? Where do I come from? Which stories have shaped my life? I have attempted to examine why the first question is not an easy one to answer. The many facets of identity render the ‘Who am I?’ question more complicated than the three words suggest.

Nat Nakasa, who had a short-lived but prolific career in creative journalism in the 1950s and early 1960s in South Africa, posed the question a lot more eloquently. In response to a debate that was raging at the time in the Afrikaans press as to whether “it is a sin against apartheid to drink tea with Africans,” he said:

¹ Hall, S. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. L. Chrisman and P. Williams (Great Britain: University Press, 1994), p.394.

² Bhabha, H.K. “Cultural diversity and cultural difference”, in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.207.

To my mind, the importance of this discussion is that... (it) relates to the question of identity. Who am I? Where do I belong in the South African scheme of things? Who are my people?

Nakasa's thinking was revolutionary for the time in that it encapsulated the ideas of hybridity and plurality that have gained credence only in post-colonial thought. This is evident in his answer to his 'Who am I?' question:

I am a South African... 'My people' are South Africans. Mine is the history of the Great Trek, Gandhi's passive resistance in Johannesburg, the wars of Cetewayo and the dawn raids which gave us the treason trials in 1956. All these are South African things. They are part of me.³

To answer the second question of 'Where do I come from?' the Indian trace of my identity is runner-up to the South African if the list presented earlier is in order of prominence. My stock reply to this question is that I am South African of Indian descent. My mother was born in a village in the western Indian state of Gujarat. My father and I were born in Fietas. In my family, the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of ourselves always find their home in one place: Fietas.

1.2 Historical Background of Fietas

Less well known than the more written-about and represented District Six, Cato Manor and Sophiatown, "the very north-western corner of the Inner City (Johannesburg) is made up of two small suburbs that tend to merge with one another, Pageview and Vrededorp, known nostalgically as Fietas".⁴

The recorded history of Fietas dates back to 1880, when it was called the Malay Location. However, this designation belies the multi-ethnicity of those who settled in and frequented the area in subsequent years. The names of the two suburbs that make up Fietas have an interesting genesis:

³ Nakasa, N. "It's Difficult to Decide my Identity", in *The World of Nat Nakasa*, ed. E. Patel (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), p.160.

⁴ Fraser, N. "Year End Review 2: The West", City of Johannesburg Official Website (www.johannesburg.org.za), 15 November 2004.

Vrededorp (village of peace) was thus named in 1895 as a result of poor people being given squatter rights that could be passed on to heirs of those that had been granted such rights. The British did away with this arrangement after the Anglo Boer War... Pageview, marked on early maps as the Native Location was renamed after a city councilor of the early 1900s.⁵

The name Fietas is less easy to trace. Literature about Fietas says the place was ‘affectionately’ or ‘nostalgically’ referred to as such but offers few clues as to where the name emanated from. In an article written in the early 1960s in the *Rand Daily Mail* about the famous 14th Street, Nakasa called the place “Feedas”. My attempt to find some meaning to the word led me to the Afrikaans word *fieta*, which means “lout” or “roughneck”⁶ in English. If the less romantic stories of gangsterism, poor sanitation and poverty in Fietas are pointers, then the Afrikaans derivative of the name may provide an inkling as to how Fietas got its nickname.

Fietas was less known for its unsavoury social conditions than its residents’ acumen for trade. By the early 20th Century it had evolved into a bustling community of successful traders and artisans. 14th Street was an internationally famous bazaar. However, the childhood memories I have of Fietas are more alluring than its commercial prominence. I spent the first five years of my life on 14th Street, Fietas.

In addition to these memories, the turbulent political history of the suburb makes it an enticing subject. In 1956 the apartheid government declared Fietas a white area in terms of the Group Areas Act and went on to evict the mostly Indian residents. From 1956 until as late as the 1990s most of its residents were uprooted and relocated. However, unlike the more written-about Sophiatown, which was changed into a whites-only area sardonically named Triomf (meaning triumph) Fietas was never fully developed into a white suburb. Large tracts of land, like the piece of land that we lived on, still lay vacant – 25 years later.

⁵ Fraser, N. “Year End Review 2: The West”, City of Johannesburg Official Website (www.johannesburg.org.za), 15 November 2004.

⁶ *Reader’s Digest Afrikaans to English Dictionary* (Cape Town: The Reader’s Digest Association, 1995).

Although most houses were razed to the ground, forcing changes to the extended family structure that characterised Fietas families, 23 families refused to succumb to the apartheid government. They succeeded in resisting eviction attempts, which carried on into the early 1990s.

The geographical location of Fietas is described on the City of Johannesburg's website:

It's not a large area, sandwiched between the Braamfontein and Brixton Cemeteries – 1st Street starts north in Vrededorp and runs into Pageview, which ends in 25th Street, edged by Krause Street in the west and Solomon Street in the east.⁷

2. WHY FIETAS?

2.1 Fietas as the Choice for the Creative Work

As alluded to in the introduction, Fietas is intriguing for various reasons. It has significance because of my personal and familial history. It also has meaning because of the broader political and social climate that characterised Fietas prior to the forced removals. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, as an “imagined community”⁸ it is kept alive in the memories of those who lived there through stories that have sometimes survived and sometimes mutated through oral history.

All these reasons are temporally linked to the past even though Fietas, as it now stands, is not a ghost town. Some Indian families, like the Bulbulias managed to evade forced removals and did not move out. They scoff at the powers-that-were through a sign on their wall which reads “Bulbulia Street”. There is still a large Afrikaner population which moved in after the Indian community was moved out to Lenasia, south-west of Johannesburg, blacks were moved to Soweto and coloureds to the western townships from the late 1950s. Informal settlements have also sprung up

⁷ Davie, L. “Fietas Festival to Remember Good Times”, City of Johannesburg Official Website (www.johannesburg.org.za) 25 September 2003.

⁸ Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

post-1994 and because of successful land restitution claims in the last decade some families who lived in Fietas are beginning to return.

My decision to choose Fietas as the subject of my creative work is not based on what the place looks like now and who lives there now, but on the creative exploration of the following:

- The trope of telling ‘untold’ stories in post-apartheid South Africa;
- The relationship between place and identity; and
- Memory and memorialisation.

The first two of these theoretical imperatives will be discussed here. The discussion of memory will be considered later as it has a relationship to my choice of form.

The creative catalyst for wanting to tell stories about Fietas was a story I submitted as part of my portfolio for the MA (Writing) core course in 2004. The story (attached as Appendix A) was a journey through my childhood memories of Fietas and was structured around the idea of free association, with one memory flowing into the next. It became evident that the rich history of Fietas, its flamboyant characters and troubled past could work as stand-alone stories.

2.1 Telling ‘Untold’ Stories

Reference was made to the favouring in Western cultural expression of print media at the very outset of this theoretical introduction. It was alluded to later that Fietas has not received as much attention as the more famous District Six and Sophiatown. This is true if representation means only that which is written down or recorded. The trope of telling ‘untold’ stories, evident in several post-apartheid texts, suggests “it’s only real if it’s on paper” (see page 3 of the creative component).

Leon de Kock problematises this Eurocentric notion of the primacy of print media in his expansive rendering of the many components that make up South African literature. He asserts that “the scales remain unevenly balanced against

orality, as has been the case since the advent of print culture and colonisation in southern Africa”.⁹

But this indulgence of the debate surrounding oral versus written history is misplaced in an introduction to a Creative Writing (not telling) Masters Research Report. The merits of the anthropological deliberations aside, the theme of telling untold stories in the context of my creative writing does not suggest that Fietas stories are muted or non-existent, but rather that they are not abundant in the dominant discourse. This statement too begs qualification because Paul Abraham’s *Tell Freedom*, Chris Van Wyk’s *Now Listen Here*, Ahmed Essop’s *Jericho Again* and Dennis Hirson’s *I Remember King Kong (The Boxer)* deal, though sometimes obliquely, with Fietas as the subject matter.

The 1978 pictorial representation by Manfred Hermer, *The Passing of Pageview*, intersperses his own paintings of Fietas with newspaper clippings and interviews with people “most closely involved... with the removal of the Indian traders from Pageview and the re-location of their businesses in the Oriental Plaza complex”¹⁰. The book is concerned with the experiences of those whose businesses were moved and offers a visual reminiscence of the colourful streets of Fietas.

Nazir Carrim’s *Fietas A Social History of Pageview: 1948-1988* sets out to “record for generations to come what it was like to have lived in Pageview”.¹¹ The book also attempts to trace the history of Fietas during a 40-year period starting in 1948. In addition to this socio-historical dimension, it presents the voices of residents without any literary intervention on his part, and contains newspaper clippings and biographies of numerous Fietas personalities. Carrim’s book, which almost acts as a personal journal of recollection, is published by the Save Pageview Association. This ideologically situates his creative endeavour and opens space for nostalgia. The result is an interesting read which reveals some of the socio-economic problems that plagued Pageview, but the way in which residents’ voices are represented does not problematise memory or the history of Fietas. My creative work does not seek to react

⁹ De Kock, L. “South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction”, in *South Africa in the Global Imaginary*, ed. L. De Kock, L. Bethlehem and S. Laden (South Africa: Unisa Press, 2004), p.2.

¹⁰ Hermer, M. *The Passing of Pageview* (South Africa: Ravan Press, 1978).

¹¹ Carrim, N. *Fietas A Social History of Pageview: 1948-1988* (Johannesburg: Save Pageview Association, 1990), p.2.

to what has been written before but rather engage in a type of dialogue with other material on Fietas.

On a more personal level, I have been raised on the ‘Do you remember?’ stories about Fietas, filtered through time, experience and re-telling, by my grandparents and parents. In my family these stories have existed only in the realm of spoken words. So my passion for wanting to creatively express these stories in writing stems from a quest to record them so as to not lose them. There is a sense of evanescence in this pursuit; if these stories are not captured they will perish. There is also a hope that these stories will prompt others to remember. The last piece in my creative work, *Mariam Ma – of 14th Street*, is a poignant depiction of this argument.

I interviewed my paternal grandmother, Mariam Mangera in September 2006. This was the second of two video interviews I did with her in as many years. For the last few years there has been an urgency in all my discussions with my grandparents – from my side at least. Their stories and histories are important to me because they help in my understanding of where I am from and how this, in some respect, shapes me.

Therefore my interest in writing my granny’s story has as much to do with testimony as it does with self-preservation. My grandfather died on 18 May 2005 after a long illness. My granny died suddenly on 4 November 2006, less than two months after my interview on Fietas with her. There is sense of consolation in knowing that her story will reside in my memory, that her voice and actions in telling her story are preserved on film, and that her story, through my telling of it in words, is represented on paper (and becomes my story too).

2.3 The Relationship between Place and Identity

The relationship between place and identity has been accentuated throughout the introduction. The difficulties in understanding identity have also been delved into. De Kock unpacks the literary depiction of identity within a South African context. He complicates the notion of a unified, national identity by using the metaphor of the seam. De Kock is critical of the new South Africa insistence on a unified identity. “‘Oneness’ became a national jingle: ‘*Simunye – We Are One!*’” he laments. What

this unity-in-diversity, Rainbow Nation paradigm does, is ignore difference for the sake of nation-building. It attempts to deal with the binaries of apartheid by negating a plurality and fluidity of identity and opting instead for a neat, fixed singular identity. Like Bhabha, de Kock militates against this quick-fix stance and suggests that “representations of ourselves will always carry the mark of the seam”.

De Kock conceptualises the seam, referred to in other post-colonial literature as the border, the liminal space, or an interstitial space, as follows:

The ubiquitous South African ‘frontier’, as much cultural and psychological as territorial, has historically constituted one of the great meeting points: a place... of simultaneous convergence and divergence and where a representational seam is the paradox qualifying any attempt to imagine organicism and unity.¹²

Fietas as a seam or liminal space is an interesting literary consideration because implied by the term liminal are porous membranes, places or zones of transition, and a threshold of two systems of meaning. The ways in which different races interacted (or did not interact) in Fietas make for compelling literary material. Therefore, writing both from the perspective of, to use de Kock’s phrase, “South Africa in the global imaginary” and as a citizen of the Indian diaspora, the concept of the border is a prevailing concern in my creative work.

Fietas’s physical borders, marked off by street names, are a recurring site of literary imagination in my writing. 11th Street was the unofficial border between white Fietas to the north and black to the South. De La Rey Street served a similar function, separating whites to the east and blacks to the west. Yet the literature and oral stories that exist on Fietas sing praise to its multi-culturalism, its community spirit.

My poem, *Fietas Died Today R.I.P.*, on page 3 of the creative work seeks to problematise the martyr stories which tend towards romanticism and nostalgia by implying that not only were there physical boundaries between the people of Fietas, but psychological ones as well. Beneath the we-all-stand-together veneer were racial,

¹² De Kock, L. “South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction”, in *South Africa in the Global Imaginary*, ed. L. De Kock, L. Bethlehem and S. Laden (South Africa: Unisa Press, 2004), p.12.

economic, social, sexual and class-based fractures. These fractures were compounded by forced removals so the relationship between place and identity is necessarily complicated as de Kock suggests. If the place which one sees as home or the shaper of one's identity is fraught with internal dynamics (as all places are) the identity which derives from that place will be interrupted and displaced. In some of the oral stories on identity in relation to Fietas there is a feeling of double displacement – from India and Fietas. While clutching on to strands of a particularly Indian identity, through language, food, festival and other cultural manifestations, former residents also locate themselves in relation to Fietas.

Feizel Mamdoo, one of the founding members of the Fietas Festival, is the embodiment of these debates and discussions. His profile, *Of Journeys, Home and Treasure* (on page 20 of the creative work) raises concerns that are significant to an understanding of place and identity. He is acutely aware of how the architecture of a place lends to communal interaction and identity. Fietas's narrow streets and cramped living conditions had a direct relationship to how people related to one another and on how they perceived themselves in the "first-person plural".¹³ This means that identity shifts from the first-person singular, or I, to We. In some of the other of my pieces (contained in the collage called *Fietas* beginning on page 3) Dennis Hirson's incantation created by the repetition of "I remember"¹⁴ is replaced by "We remember" to invoke a communal voice and hence a collective sense of identity.

Mamdoo also focuses on the problems of memory and memorialisation by saying that "Fietas now only lives in the mind of those who lived there". So if Fietas still existed in the way those who lived there remember/memorialise it, would it have had the same currency or pertinence? Or would it have been just another lived-in space? In the case of Fietas as an identity-shaper, the destruction and displacement caused by forced removals are pivotal to the process of identity formation. If I was critical of the nostalgia referred to in relation to Carrim and Hermer's works, it must be qualified that the value of nostalgia in commemorative writing of contested

¹³ De Kock, L. "South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction", in *South Africa in the Global Imaginary*, ed. L. De Kock, L. Bethlehem and S. Laden (South Africa: Unisa Press, 2004), p.15.

¹⁴ Hirson, D. Postscript in *I Remember King Kong (The Boxer)* (South Africa: Jacana Media, 2004), p.135.

histories lies in the following: nostalgia necessarily needs to overlook the present for there to be symbolic compensation; a sense of we were wronged.

Mamdoo's personal journey has led him to a point where he has "come to appreciate the rupture between present and past" (page 24). His thinking about home and self speaks to the theoretical considerations introduced earlier, where he is able to see the value of leaving, or being displaced from home in order for it to have meaning as a home.

I have attempted to be cognisant throughout the process of my creative writing of the critical questions that form the basis to Rajendra Chetty and Pier Paulo Piciuccio's project, *India's Abroad – The Diaspora Writes Back*. Among these are:

- Do diaspora writers still hang on to their national identities (even those that deny it)?
- What are/will be the effect of globalisation, exile and emigration for Indian diaspora writers?¹⁵

Mamdoo, like many South Africans of Indian descent, makes clear that he sees himself as South African first; but not only. He insists that the tags he gives himself of Muslim and Indian are only partial. My grandmother's story and the snippets about my grandfather that run through my creative work suggest that they were of Fietas, not of the village of Samrod, in western India, which was their birthplace. On an anecdotal note, my granny's funeral was attended by many former Fietas residents – several of whom we have had no contact with since we left Fietas over 25 years ago. They had come to pay respect to Mariam Mangera of Fietas, one of 'Us'.

3. FINDING FORM

Having contextualised this theoretical introduction by providing a historical background and outlining some of the key theoretical considerations that have informed my choice of topic, I will now reflect on my choice of form. In my proposal

¹⁵ Chetty, R. and Piciuccio, P.P. "Introduction", *India's Abroad The Diaspora Writes Back*, ed. R. Chetty, and P.P. Piciuccio (South Africa: STE Publishers, 2004), p.9.

for this thesis, I envisaged writing three to four short stories on Fietas. I said that I had opted for the short story because the genre allows for similar issues to be explored from different perspectives, thereby ensuring a plurality of voices. I anticipated that these stories, though perhaps disparate in their modes of narration, subject-matter and style, would have been yoked together because of the issues and debates in representation with which they were to engage.

However, this was easier envisaged than done. There is a certain cohesiveness and self-containment to a well-written short story. I knew that I wanted to write the following: a story about my family's history and identity which are inextricably bound to Fietas; a story about the Fietas Festival; a story that speaks to Otherness in Fietas; and a piece about borders and boundaries. However, the story ideas and themes I was interested in were not finding fit with the short story form. Through the research and interviews I conducted in preparation for my creative writing it became clear that I had not carefully thought through my subject-matter in my proposal. I was stuck. It quickly became evident that I needed to re-think my writing plan if I was to write at all. Hirson's *I Remember King Kong (The Boxer)* was the key to my writer's (b)lock. Hirson's work, the form of which poet Antjie Krog says is "as surprising as its subtle ability to tell the tales of the past", had the same effect on me as he describes having after reading Georges Perec's *Je me souviens* (I Remember).¹⁶ The structure of his story provided a refreshing form for the many 'Do you remember?' stories of Fietas that I have been nurtured on.

Another insight that Hirson had in relation to Perec's work was that "though concerned with memory" it was also a "book of forgetting".¹⁷ The tension between remembering and forgetting will be unpacked later in this theoretical introduction, suffice to say that the form of my creative writing is informed by the activity or "practice of memory".¹⁸ For my story, *We Remember Fietas* (attached as Appendix B) I interviewed my father and other family members and asked them to tell me everything they remembered about the place. I included my memories in a creative

¹⁶ Hirson, D. Postscript in *I Remember King Kong (The Boxer)* (South Africa: Jacana Media, 2004), p.133.

¹⁷ Ibid 16, p.134.

¹⁸ Antze, P and Lambek, M. "Introduction: Forecasting Memory", in *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek (New York and London: Routledge 1996), p.xii.

non-fiction exercise and utilised internal logic to create a story from the short vignettes. However, the criticism received as feedback to the story was that the device of cumulative recollection was too similar to Hirson's and risked being derivative. Even though I decided not to continue with that form of the story and have excluded it from my portfolio, the experience of writing it was useful because it allowed me to experiment with form and see the value in using a fragmented structure to tell the Fietas stories.

The result is that I have a collection of poetry, prose, biography, profile and perspectival writing in a kind of literary scrapbook or collage. I initially used the term pastiche to describe the second piece *Fietas* (on page 3) but the coincidental structure implied by the term pastiche does not aptly convey the deliberate structure that I have opted for.

4. MEMORY AND MEMORIALISATION

Why do I say that my choice of form is related to my understanding of memory? To answer this it is imperative to decide on a usable definition of memory for the purposes of this creative writing exercise. But a succinct definition is quite elusive as the entire body of thought called memory studies shows. Douwe Draaisma argues that because of the slipperiness of understanding the way memory works we often resort to metaphor to understand it:

What is memory? It is at the same time ephemeral, unreliable and essential to everything we do. Without memory we lose our sense of identity, reasoning, even our ability to perform simple physical tasks. Yet it is also elusive and difficult to define, and throughout the ages philosophers and psychologists have used metaphors as a way of understanding it.¹⁹

Paul Antze and Michael Lambek in their seminal text, *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, echo Draaisma's sentiment: "It is virtually impossible

¹⁹ Draaisma, D. *Metaphors of Memory: A history of ideas about the mind* – translated from Dutch (England: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

to imagine memory – what it is, how it works, where it lies – without recourse to metaphor”.²⁰

Metaphors of memory proliferate. “Is memory a storehouse, a computer, a filing system, an encyclopaedia, or a landscape, a cathedral, a city?”²¹ ask Antze and Lambek. Draaisma extensively discusses Sigmund Freud’s understanding of a “mystic writing pad”²², or a palimpsest – where one text is written over another and the first text can still be seen – as a metaphor for memory. This conceptualisation of memory has dual significance: it emphasises the layering of memory and also implies a connection between memory and writing. To return once more to the idea that writing as the preferred mode of telling in Western practice, Draaisma traces the “close link between memory and writing” in Western culture: “The Latin *memoria* had a double meaning: ‘memory’ and ‘memoir’. Earlier... uses of the English noun ‘memorial’ included both ‘memory’ and ‘written record’”.²³ We make ‘to do’ lists and stick them up on our fridges so as to not forget. We journal our life experiences and as Freud said in 1925: “Whenever I distrust my memory, I can resort to pen and paper.”²⁴

So does this mean that when we record something, whether on paper, film or just in our minds, it is an accurate, finite reflection of the past event or experience? The answer to this is the premise upon which I have chosen the form of my writing to mirror the processes of memory:

Memories are never simply records of the past, but are interpretative reconstructions that bear the imprint of local narrative conventions, cultural assumptions, discursive formations and practices, and social contexts of recall and commemoration.²⁵

²⁰ Antze, P and Lambek, M. “Introduction: Forecasting Memory”, in *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek (New York and London: Routledge 1996), p.xi.

²¹ Antze, P and Lambek, M. “Introduction: Forecasting Memory”, in *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek (New York and London: Routledge 1996), p.xi.

²² Draaisma, D. *Metaphors of Memory: A history of ideas about the mind* – translated from Dutch (England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.7.

²³ Ibid 22, p.24.

²⁴ Ibid 22, p.7.

²⁵ Antze, P and Lambek, M. “Introduction: Forecasting Memory”, in *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek (New York and London: Routledge 1996), p.vii.

Memory is also by its nature fragmented and every act of remembering simultaneously entails the act of forgetting. Antze and Lambek's conceit of "memory as practice" understands memory "not as the pregiven object of our gaze but as the act of gazing and the object it generates".²⁶ To enunciate 'I remember' or 'We remember' as I have done in my writing is therefore, in Antze and Lambek's terminology "not to frame a mere description, but to signal a speech act".²⁷

In the video interview with my granny, which is represented in the story *Mariam Ma – of 14th Street* (on page 26 of the creative work), it is apparent that she was aware of the memorialising act implied by the recording of her story. Draaisma refers to "cassette recorders, video, CDs, computer memories, holograms" as "'artificial' memories".²⁸ He uses the term artificial not to imply a negative connotation of spuriousness, but rather to capture a sense that "image and sound are transportable in space and time, they are repeatable, reproducible".²⁹ My 82-year-old granny was conscious of memory as the "act of gazing and the object created by the gaze" referred to earlier. She was circumspect in answering my question of whether she thought my grandfather was handsome when she first saw him. "One day somebody will look at this and say: 'Look at this lady. She's old and mad and now she's talking about these things'," she answered.

Implicit too in that interview was the relationship between memory and trauma that Antze and Lambek focus on. Just as there is a strong bond between place and identity, so too is there a connection between memory and identity. These associations can be taken a step further to say that the relationship between place, memory and identity becomes more lucid in instances of displacement and trauma. The memory of the forced removals from Fietas, referred to eloquently as a "point of interruption" by Mamdoo, are key identity-shapers for former residents. The traumatic bulldozing of their homes and hence security inserts "a radical, often transformative

²⁶ Antze, P and Lambek, M. "Introduction: Forecasting Memory", in *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek (New York and London: Routledge 1996), p.xii.

²⁷ Ibid26, p.xxv.

²⁸ Draaisma, D. *Metaphors of Memory: A history of ideas about the mind* – translated from Dutch (England: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 2000), p.2.

²⁹ Ibid 28, p.2.

break in the flow of a life narrative”.³⁰ This formulation of a life narrative is of particular importance for my creative writing project:

In forging links of continuity between past and present, between who we are and who we think we are, memory operates most frequently by means of the threads of narrative. Life itself is a creative construction, and there is a point at which a person’s life and the stories she tells about it begin to merge.³¹

By the practice of memory we attempt to make meaning of our lives through stories which work towards a unified narrative. The danger in the shape or form that these stories take, according to Antze and Lambek is two-fold: “... fragmentation, the failure to produce a narrative of minimal coherence, and in the construction of an excessively determined story”.³² Mine was an exercise in finding middle-ground between these two types of stories. Because the idea of three to four short stories on *Fietas* was no longer feasible for me, the montage which I decided to use also needed an internal thread of connection, even in its fragmentary nature.

This long discussion of memory and memorialisation – in which I often could not resist paraphrasing Antze and Lambek’s cogent exploration of memory and trauma – seeks to locate my theoretical concerns within the structure of my writing. The fragments which make up *Fietas* (on page 3) as well as the yoking together of the disparate pieces in the entire creative work are meant to suggest the fragmentary nature of memory. I wanted the architecture of the writing to mimic the way memory happens – in flashes that are never-the-less, though perhaps subconsciously or unconsciously, acts of reconstruction. The title of my stories, *Re-Membering Fietas*, also speaks to this fragmentation. In her important text on slavery, trauma and remembering, *Beloved*, Toni Morrison’s protagonist Sethe uses the word “rememory” and “disremember”³³ instead of remember and forget respectively. The word rememory is used both as a noun and a verb and the past is made to be as alive as the

³⁰ Antze, P and Lambek, M. “Introduction: Forecasting Memory”, in *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek (New York and London: Routledge 1996), p.xvii.

³¹ Ibid 31, p.xvii.

³² Ibid 31, p. xviii.

³³ http://www.homework-online.com/beloved/sybmols-motifs_memory.asp

present. Morrison constructs events and the structure of the novel to emulate the way the mind works.

If forgetting is construed as the flip-side of remembering, it must be borne in mind that the two work together; there is fluidity between them. In my interviews it became apparent that even though the dislocation from Fietas was a primary shaper of identity, the actual forced removals were buried under the surface of memory or repressed. No-one could or would tell me about the day they left Fietas. I was told that someone else must remember the event better than the person to whom I posed the question. Alternately, people remembered the traumatic experience very tangentially. It was the year that Prince Charles and Princess Diana were married, recalled one respondent. Another said she remembers that it rained a lot that day. Memories of Fietas that present a less than flattering view of the place are conveniently glossed over. In Mamdoo's profile, Mudney Halim, another of the founders of the Fietas Festival, remembers that "there were problems like gangsterism – the problems normal societies would have". He chooses to focus, instead, on what he calls the more "noble aspects of Fietas culture". So "identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding".³⁴

5. WRITING AND REVISING

5.1 Types of Narratives

Once I found the form or structure within which to house my writing, the oral stories I grew up on, the interviews and research I conducted and new experiences I had, all found a creative outlet. It is not an exaggeration to say that I was almost consumed with Fietas stories. Where I was struggling to find ideas previously, I was now inundated with possible story-lines. I found Fietas-relevant narratives in almost everything I saw, in every encounter I had. What follows is an engagement with the types of narratives that comprise *Re-Membering Fietas*.

³⁴ Antze, P and Lambek, M. "Introduction: Forecasting Memory", in *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek (New York and London: Routledge 1996), p.xxix.

5.1.1 Mapping Fietas

The first piece in my collage, a prose poem called *Mapping Fietas* is strategically placed as the opening piece to my writing because of my interest in how we map out our identities in relation to both place and memory. As a child, Fietas for me was everything inside my house and what I could see from the balcony of our bright pink building. My internal map of Fietas also extended to visits to the corner sweet shop, and interactions with neighbours and people who frequented our house. I didn't have a panoramic memory of the entire place, even though the balcony did provide a good vantage point to what happened on the street below and in neighbours' backyards. Now, as an adult, I visit Fietas and drive, rather than walk, through its streets. My perspective has shifted from what in literary theory is referred to as the *flâneur's* viewpoint to a more cartographic viewpoint. These concepts are introduced in Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

The inspiration for writing *Mapping Fietas* however, came from neither an intellectual nor physical encounter with the place. During a work-related conference on the use of Geo-spatial Information Systems (GIS) I realised that I didn't know what Fietas looked like on a map. With software made popular through websites such as GoogleEarth, obtaining such a map was not difficult. Utilising the software at my disposal, the following map of Fietas was generated:

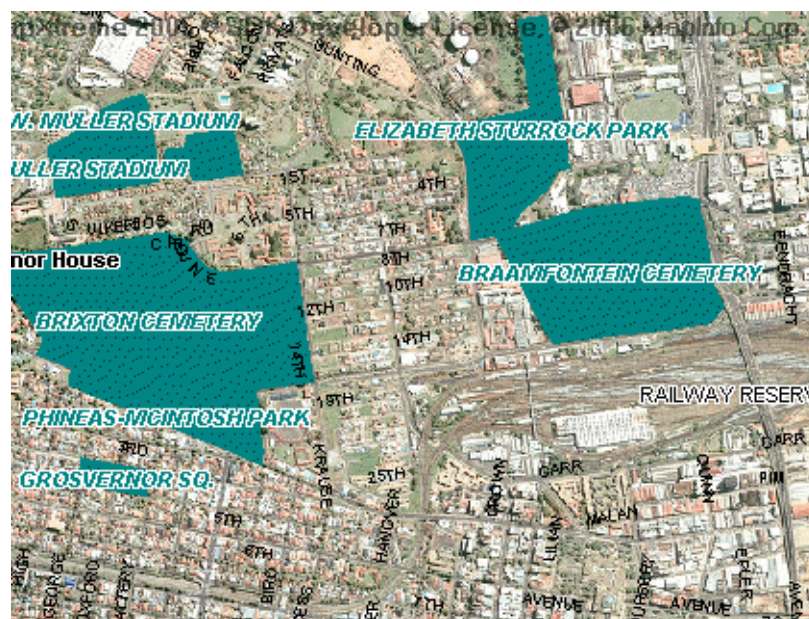


FIGURE 1: Aerial map of Fietas

From Figure 1 it was evident that Fietas was indeed sandwiched between two cemeteries as Davie's description referenced earlier suggests. The line that sprung to mind was:

Nestled between Braamfontein and Brixton cemeteries, it's small surprise that Fietas died an untimely death.

The last verse of my prose poem as it now stands reads slightly differently because of revisions. The map of Fietas provided the visual drive to engage with the idea of maps as they are represented on paper and the pictures we have of places in our memory or re-memory.

5.1.2 Fietas

It is superfluous at this juncture to explain, at length, the second piece in my creative component, called *Fietas* (on page 3) as this collection of vignettes has already been referred to in previous sections of this theoretical introduction. *Fietas* contains various types of narratives like one-line descriptions, poems, historical fragments (such as the Group Areas proclamation), and personal recollections. Although some of the vignettes are fictional, a large number of them are creative non-fiction. My reason for opting for the latter mode of narration in this piece, as well as other pieces throughout the creative component, was that I felt a sense of responsibility for retaining a degree of factuality in this story of contested history and identities.

The blend of narrative styles is prominent in the writing on page 7 about Essop Madari, his widow Aisa and the day he died. The sketch on Essop Madari was written from a recollection that my father had in the 'I Remember' exercise (referred to earlier and attached as Appendix B). The prose poem on Aisa Madari is based on impressions I have of her and the haunting aural memory of her husband's death (in XIV) has been told many times in my family. In terms of structure, all three vignettes are placed on one page in a symbolic burial ground or memorial site of one family's story and history.

5.1.3 *Ghalieb on 11th*

I wanted the short story of Ghalieb Misry to be propelled by dialogue. It was important to hear his voice as a representative member of a group of people who felt marginalised in Fietas, even though programmatic we-were-one stories of Fietas threaten to drown out such stories. Although an actual person inspired the story, it is a fictional one. I was confronted with the ethics of representation in writing it and hence obtained permission from the person who motivated it.

Ghalieb's character lives on 11th Street, the physical divide between whites and blacks in Fietas. It was important to locate the character in that liminal space because his sexuality and biology do not allow for him to be neatly classified or pigeon-holed. Oral stories about Fietas refer to Otherness in relation to the happy-family, community spirit discourse, with a degree of quirkiness. Stories of homosexuality and other 'sexual deviance' do not feature in these quirky re-tellings. Elsewhere in my writing, people such as the obese Harry Garda feature in the stories of people who were different but a still a part of the 'normative' Fietas society.

5.1.4 *Get Off The Bus*

The idea to write this first-person narrative, which almost reads like an internal memoir of the experience of guiding a cultural tour, came to me at 4.30 in the morning. In a reversal of the title of Spike Lee's 1996 movie, *Get on the bus* – about the 1995 Million Man March in Washington which was coordinated by the Nation of Islam – the phrase "get off the bus" provided the inspiration to write a story which had been playing in my mind. In 2003 and 2006 I was part of a team that organised a cultural tour called The Johannesburg Indian Experience. My reservations about the name of the tour and this packaging or commodifying of culture aside, the experience of planning and guiding the tour was instructive. It allowed me to engage with questions of my own identity and how I perceive Indian-ness in a South African context. It also prompted me to consider whether there is space for moving beyond the unity-in-diversity rhetoric to a place where we can appreciate and respect difference.

Utilising the framing device of guiding the tour to drive the narrative was effective because it allowed for the act of parcelling memory and history to be interspersed with the language of tourism and the narrator's internal dialogue. This framing device also facilitated the tempo of the story in relation to the movement of the bus. I utilised humour to off-set the tour-guide's patronising and didactic approach to telling a bus-load of Afrikaner women why they should be interested in the slice of Indian history that is Fietas.

The title of the piece is intended to allude to the fact that it is difficult to return. As much as the tour guide wants the group to appreciate the value of Fietas and the dislocating experience – so as to validate her memories and identity – she is grateful for not having to get off the bus and face her past/present. Again, Antze and Lambek's elegant thinking on this subject necessitates citation:

Memory becomes a 'site', a monument visited, rather than a context, a landscape inhabited. The ruins of memory are subject to restoration, and we all become the alienated tourists of our past.³⁵

5.1.5 *Of Journeys, Home and Treasure*

In a continuation of the themes introduced in *Get Off The Bus*, the profile of Feizel Mamdoo raises questions of memorialisation and commemoration. The Fietas Festival was conceived as a cultural space in which former and present residents of Fietas could engage with memory, loss, trauma and identity. That it also sought to "reclaim and preserve lost heritage" suggests that it was deeply invested in bringing Fietas's contested history into the domain of the dominant discourse. The profile is a third-person narrative that does not allow for too much authorial intervention and Mamdoo's voice is fore-grounded.

5.1.6 *Mariam Ma – of 14th Street*

I have already discussed my granny's story in relation to place, identity and memory. This first-person narrative has two dimensions: the first is my telling of my memories about Mariam Ma and her death and the second is almost a transcript of the

³⁵ Antze, P and Lambek, M. "Introduction: Forecasting Memory", in *Tense Past – Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek (New York and London: Routledge 1996), p.xiii.

video interview, where – as in the Mamdoo profile – my grandmother’s voice is resonant. Mariam Ma’s story is a very personal reflection and I wanted the narrative to create a sense of that intimacy.

5.2 Dilemmas of Revision

If I have learnt anything in this MA in Creative Writing course it is the merit of revision. I easily get attached to something I have written, feeling almost like I am pulling an eye out if a word or phrase I adore needs to be re-thought or removed. Yet, careful revision of my creative work has meant that a lot of it is crisper and more effective in telling my Fietas stories. The demons that have plagued my writing are broadly the following:

- Politically-programmatic writing;
- Rushdie-esque compound adjectives;
- Over-writing in a genre that calls for pared-down, distilled prose;
- Melodrama, nostalgia and over-sentimentality; and
- Telling not showing.

My process of revision thus entailed repeatedly combing through my writing so as to weed out examples of the aforementioned. I will highlight some of those edifying instances here.

The third stanza of *Mapping Fietas* elucidates some of my writing glitches. In the first draft the stanza read:

Why then does the God-view from above of
a satellite-generated map
Turn my stomach in ways that escape succinct poetic observation
Lacking lyricism and rhyme
Leaving only the sound of my stomach turning?

In the final version it reads:

The God-view of a satellite-generated map
suffocates poetic observation
lacking lyricism and rhyme
leaving only the sound of my stomach churning.

The wordy introduction to the stanza has been removed. The language has been pared down so that “escape succinct poetic observation” is replaced with “suffocates poetic observation”.

In stanza IV the following instance of telling as opposed to showing has been removed, resulting in tighter prose:

There is nothing surreal about looking at the place where I began
from above.

The most challenging piece in terms of revisions was the collage *Fietas*. In that story it became evident that the danger of commemorative writing is that it is easy to fall into a mode of sentimentality and nostalgia. While I believe it is important to tell the story of destruction and loss without diminishing that destruction and loss, it should be done in a nuanced way. “I Don’t Remember” (V in *Fietas*) depicts this dilemma of writing and revising. Originally, it read:

I don’t remember

I can’t remember
The day we left
The way we went
The shame we felt
The men who wept
The change of fate
The power of place
The loss of space

I won’t remember
How it was done
What was lost

What was found
At what cost

I choose to forget
The silence I spoke
The air that choked
A body that strayed
When the mind stayed.

On many levels this is appalling writing. It is steeped in sentimentality and the victim narrative is devoid of texture. In its final version, the piece is still lacking but I decided to include it, in its problematic construction, so that it could later be off-set by the more nuanced longer pieces that deal with memory and loss. The intention, therefore, of including programmatic lines like “We lived in a house filled with laughs” (page 6), is to present a constructive complexity when countered with pieces like *Ghalieb on 11th*. In so doing the glory days and martyr rhetoric of pieces like *We Remember Fietas* is problematised by introducing the prejudice, poverty, selective memory, and contested sites of memory in the last four pieces.

In the short poem *11th Street* (XI in *Fietas* on page 6) the first two lines in an earlier draft read:

11th Street was hurting
Stretched, beaten, bruised

This is one of the best (or should that be worst) examples of melodramatic writing. By using the language of violation and assault as a construction of victimhood and to personify 11th Street as a site of confrontation, the intention of the poem is diminished because of overstatement. The removal of the first two lines in its current formation allows for insinuation and thus works a lot more effectively. The first line now reads:

11th Street was stretched

Another revision I made was adjusting the pacing of some of my writing such as in the ending of *Get Off The Bus*. In the first version, feedback on the story suggested that the end felt rushed and the characterisation, which was well-achieved in the beginning, began tapering towards the end. It was also difficult to see the narrator’s

thought processes in the end and why the tour group should want to get off the bus. The positive changes I made to the story resulted in greater description and the movement in the bus, fuller narration, and more clarity in respect of who is saying what.

Although I wanted to use language in a de-familiarising way (so as to assert a particular identity formation) in the creative component I had to be cautious not to alienate the reader. In Mariam Ma's story leaving the word "dikraa" un-translated worked because it is obvious that it is a term of endearment and the use of Gujarati is important in relation to my thematic concern of identity. In *Ghalieb on 11th* I had to describe what the hair removal technique of threading entails because it may not be known to many Western readers. I also added more scene-setting details in that story because the preponderance of dialogue and inner thought was not enough to contextualise the narrative.

The revisions made to *Of Journeys, Home and Treasure* centred around creating a clearer picture of Mamdoo, and his love for film-making. As with *Ghalieb on 11th* I introduced more specifics relating to scene so that the reader would have a better sense of what happened at the Fietas Festival. The oral storytelling scene was introduced and the logistics of the 11th Street tea-part were made clearer.

In my final piece of writing, *Mariam Ma – of 14th Street*, I edited out instances of telling as opposed to showing and tightened the narrative by paring down the language.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of writing this theoretical introduction was broadly two-fold: to detail my process of writing and secondly to introduce and engage with the theories that have instructed my stories. Although I have discussed these two aims in an inter-related way, for purposes of recollection they each entailed an explication of the following:

Process of writing:

- Choice of topic;
- Choice of form; and
- Writing and revising process.

Theoretical considerations:

- The trope of telling ‘untold’ stories in post-apartheid South Africa;
- The relationship between place and identity; and
- Memory and memorialisation.

Like Feizel’s Mamdoo journey into new understandings of home, memory, archiving and history, writing *Re-Membering Fietas* has been a transformative experience for me. I have been able to engage with my own and broader communal memories through the process of writing general and particular memories. The writing of general memory entailed national narratives of nostalgia whereas particular memory invoked individual characters with distinct voices. The research and interviews that fed into these Fietas stories opened doors into literary theory, historiography and identity politics that I had only glimpsed through ajar windows in previous writings. This is just the beginning.

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8. APPENDIX A

Fietas

I knew that we lived on 14th Street. I can point out the plot where my first memories were made. But I only just learnt the number of this enigmatic place that lives in my mind. Number 5 14th Street, Fietas. Or, if you lived on the other, right side of 11th Street you would call it 5 14th Street, Pageview. Or, if you walked down my street a few years on, you could say that you had walked past the place where 5A 14th Street, Vrededorp once was.

Someone up in the north, in that place of Jacarandas and neat streets must have had a sense of humour. Why else did they name bleeding places Vrededorp and Triomf? These changing names of places that once were tell me that all we have are stories.

Do you remember the story of Bridge Nights at Uncle Jimmy's? Friday nights brought Fietas's best to the corner of Krause and 13th Street. Night faded into morning. On nights when we managed to sneak into the choc-a-block room where cigar smoke and freshly-brewed coffee vied for attention, we soaked it all in. Paying no notice to the intricacies of the game, we only had eyes for the shiny trophy that just one man could take home. Wrapped in our blue and pink nightgowns we maneuvered between the legs of men and chairs, hoping not to be evicted by our mothers with a telling tug at our ears.

Uncle Jimmy Bulbulia, whose real first name we never knew, wore his *kruisbande* with authority. Nobody spoke about why his eyes were always blood-shot. It just didn't do for a man of the community, who lived a breath away from 15th Street mosque, to be spoken of as a man of the bottle. Uncle Jimmy knew fine suits and the gentlemen's game better than anybody else. Or that's what I've been told. If ever you wanted to know what suit suited your style, you'd pop into Surtee's on Commissioner Street, and Uncle Jimmy kitted you out to the nines. And if you were curious about who won the cricket World Cup, in which year, by how many runs, at what run rate, at which stadium, to an audience of how many, you could always stop by Queen's Park grounds on a Sunday, and ask him.

And that ground held stories too. Hard luck stories of eager Indian boys playing soccer and cricket in the dirt. They could have been something great, people whisper, as they lament Hashim Amla being dropped from the Proteas. These should have/could have stories are ephemeral. There are other stories to tell. Of bitterness. Of laughter. Of when we were young, and things were good, and bread didn't cost as much.

There are those stories that grow with time and space. They are the stories we tell ourselves we must never forget. Like the one about the park next to Queen's Park grounds. They say its real name was William McKintosh Park. We called it *boere veld*. When our neighbourhood boys saw the green grass of *boere veld* mockingly peering at them over the black picket fence that separated the two playing fields, something in them stirred. Leaving the dust behind, they kicked their ball over and their bare feet smiled as they felt the softness of wet grass. It was a passing pleasure. Huge anthills were quickly deposited by willing tractors. Automatic grass was layered on to make it look as if the hills had always been there. And with that, the match was whistled to an end.

But we kept testing the borders. 11th Street onward to the north was white territory. De La Rey Street to the east was also all white. Krause Street to the west had a graveyard as its barrier between the Fietas Indians and the Mayfair Whites. The only reprieve was to the south. Heading down Krause Street, through the subway, via Fordsburg, to the Oriental Plaza was a strangely smooth journey. Except for the time when, clutching on to my youngest auntie's hand, I fell in the subway. She picked up 50c on the way to the Plaza, she told everyone when, with bleeding knees, we returned home.

I was more hurt by what I thought was the accusation that I had stolen money, than by having peep-holes in my Lee jeans.

Other lines weren't as easy to cross. Taking your jacket to the dry cleaners on the wrong side of De La Rey meant that you'd have a clean jacket, but also a badly-bruised eye. These borders worked from just one end. My street, 14th Street, was the shopping Mecca of Fietas and beyond, they tell me:

“Do you know that people for as far a field as the Free State came to shop there?”

“We even had American and Hindi movie stars coming to our road.”

“People of all colours came to do their Saturday shopping on 14th Street. Even the *boere* from 11th Street came.”

Of course I don't remember any of this activity that I hear so many stories about. Perhaps it was because from our second-floor balcony, which was our world, we had such a limited view. I like to think of it as a barcode view, because the black pillars that interspersed the shocking pink concrete of our balcony, only allowed snippets of the rest of the world to be filtered in. Do you remember us squeezing our faces through those pillars, trying to spit on the heads of passers-by. Or when Zaid and Zaheer whipped out their little private parts and tried to pee on Bobby Docrat's head. That Freud was really on to something when he thought of penis envy, because the very next day we pinched two pegs off the washing line, hid in the outside toilet and held back tears of pain as we tried to change into boys that could stand and pee.

We did, however, manage to throw a rotten apple onto tall Bobby Docrat's head. Revenge was so sweet. Bobby, with the koala bear patch birthmark across his left eye, once came home to deliver a parcel for his mother. To the delight of my mother that she had such a well-mannered child, I offered him a bite of my apple. He opened his enormous mouth and engulfed my entire apple. Then slowly, out came the sad remains – two pips and a bit of peel. War was declared. And victory was mine at the exact moment that the rotten apple said hello to the top of his head.

There were other battles to fight. Rookshana Valli, who lived across from us, next to the mosque, also didn't escape our venom. When she told my parents that I had been calling her father names, battle lines were drawn. Okay, I'll admit that I did call him Pimply, because... well, because he was pimply. That's beside the point. She had broken an unspoken promise of silence and had to pay. We invited her over for a game of dolly-housy and greeted her at the bottom of the stairs, at the entrance of our home, draped in white sheets. We walked down the stairs slowly and purposefully. Chanting *Kis-met, Kis-met, Kis-met* as we glided down the red-polished steps, we saw fat Rookshana haul arse across the road, quicker than ever before. The word spread faster than Rookshana fled that the rumours were true. Ghosts, named *Kismet*,

were roaming the corridor that led from the pavement to the steps up to our home. This meant that we had a lot less friends coming over to visit but we kept the Kismet pretence up so that our home remained our fort.

Like De La Rey Street, this line too couldn't be crossed from just one side. While other kids were wary of entering our house, we had complete freedom in venturing out. Forgiveness was not too expensive. Candy floss bartered with one empty Coke nip bought Rookshana's friendship again. We needed to restore the Kismet-battered relationship, because we couldn't bear to miss Sunday morning outings with her pimply father. On Sundays we fed the pigeons in Joubert Park or the ducks at Zoo Lake. We also needed Rookshana's friendship because access to her house guaranteed the best view in 14th Street. That is if sneaking a peek at the *boemelaars* rummaging in dustbins on a Tuesday morning was your thing. It was our thing.

When Ligza arrived, we knew that faking friendship with Rookshana was worth it. Ligza was all lips. He had stretched-out, bluish, cracked lips that only a mouth that had imbibed copious amounts of some lethal stuff would know. Dragging his little trolley behind him, he left three trails down 14th Street: the marks of the grimy tyres, his sweet-sick alcohol smell and his dirge.

No food.

No water.

Only malala pipes.

We sang along. We didn't know what *malala pipes* were, but had a sense that they weren't the nicest of pipes. It was always a shame that he chose to do his rummaging as the sun was about to set. The setting sun set in motion a chain of actions that saw us having to go back home. The muezzin looked out of his minaret for signs from the sky. When it was time, he put his index fingers into his ears, faced the direction of the real Mecca and began the *adhaan*.

Allah hu Akbar. Allah hu Akbar... His call for the evening prayer sent our mothers, with heads covered, onto the balcony, summoning our return. On our way back up to our house, we always knocked on Aisa Khala Madari's door. She and her husband

Essop rented a cottage in our house – which was more of a building to be precise. I'm not sure whether they adopted our family or whether it was the other way round, but they were always there. Knowing that she'd be charitable at that holy hour, we smiled our sweetest smiles, hoping to be rewarded from her never-ending supply of Kilty's Petités. They came in pink or lavender packaging and we called them, in our poshest accents, Kilty's Pat-ti-tés.

Sweets were a necessary part of most of our days. In the space that sleep allows, I still enter the corner café. I can't see Auntie Roshan over the counter but through the glass shelf that separates Chappies from Wilson's toffees, I spy her blue *stokies*.

Can I have tomato sauce crisp and a Crème Soda *stok*-sweet please?

I hand over the queen size Coke empty that secures these hidden pleasures.

We were all so close then. That's another story.

Do you know that we all lived in that one house from my great-grandfather's days?

asks my father. Ma, Papa, all seven of us with our wives, husbands, children and friends of the family – all living in once place. We were so close then.

This story doesn't remember everything, so that the part about my uncle sleeping under the dining room table, because of the lack of space, is conveniently put into the funny anecdote shelf. In this shelf too, we like to pack stories about my great-grandfather, Ali. This helps appease the fury we feel at seeing references of him as Mad Ali in the few books that exist on Fietas.

He was extraordinarily intelligent, they tell me. So intelligent, that he went mad.

If you opened the Qu'ran to any page and read just a few words, he told you which verse you were reading from, what the meaning of that verse was and in which chapter of the Qu'ran it appeared.

He was also a man of habit. Whatever the weather, he never had a hot shower. He woke every day, before the morning prayer at 4.30am and took an ice-cold shower.

Later, he walked through Fietas asking for a light for his *stompies*.

Maybe the Mad Ali reference is not off the mark after all. I don't know where to place him in the chronology of the story of where I am from. I know he existed in the past and died before I was born. There are no dates that mark off his life or that stick out in my memory.

Unlike 1975, the year I was born. It was the year that television came to South Africa. We were among the first to own a TV in Fietas. It was a Telefunken, they remember. And because we were in this privileged place, our house was turned into a bioscope. Chairs were brought from other homes, in other streets, and then placed in rows for everyone to share in the joys and sorrows of *Rich Man, Poor Man*. Even fat Rookshana forgot the trauma of Kismet and made the brave walk across to watch *Liewe Heksie*.

Somehow, a lived-in house and how that house fits into the space to which it belongs are two different things. The stories I tell myself about 14th Street always return to my barcoded, balcony view. Through spaces between pillars, or from the big people's view afforded by standing on a chair, we ruled Fietas. At the right angle, we could peer into the mosque - the house of God and the domain of men. To the right, although we chose not to look there too much, we could see into the cemetery – the house of the dead, also the domain of men. From our backyard, we even caught glimpses of life beyond dreaded 11th Street.

The empty plot that stands on 5A 14th Street now, could be seen as a sad reminder of what was, if it is a sad story I want to tell. The building that was razed to the ground could tell a tale of ruined community and spirit, if it is a nostalgic, we-were-done-wrong story I choose to narrate. The irony of now looking at nothing, where a stately shocking pink building once stood, would make for a yarn of loss and heartache. But these aren't the stories I wish to tell.

9. APPENDIX B

We Remember Fietas

We remember 5 14th Street, the place of my birth.

We remember the closeness of the people and walking into anybody's home, at any time, without invitation.

We remember playing till midnight on the streets.

We remember being a soccer and cricket-crazy community.

We remember scarved-aunties, their children and the old *toppies* and *tannies* supporting us from balconies.

We remember being scared of the cops who would take our balls away if we were caught playing on the streets.

We remember losing many balls.

We remember the cops coming into Fietas, chanting their favourite song:

*Uit die pad
Jou kerrie gat
Ons sal jou bal vat!*

We remember playing soccer on the sand grounds called Queen's Park and watching the grass of Boere Park across the fence.

We remember a beating from the boere boys for crossing the other side of De La Rey or going lower than 8th Street.

We remember the only dry cleaners in Fietas being on the wrong side of De La Rey.

We remember being searched regularly by the Coloureds, who would often take our money.

We remember the gangsters from the other side of 17th Street, living 20 or more in a semi-detached,

We remember a wild guy called Adda who was feared by most.

We remember a Sunday, during a soccer match, when Adda mowed down three guys within the space of 10 minutes.

We remember Goolam Kola putting the ball back into play from an outball position when Adda began harassing him for money; Goolam, in his soccer kit, dropped the ball on the touch line and ran home.

We remember Uncle Lighty inviting Adda over to help load the bakkie when Uncle Lighty's family had to make the move to Newlands and Adda slogging like a dog with the promise of pay. After the bakkie was packed and the family said their goodbyes to Fietas, Uncle Lighty and his cronies beat Adda to a pulp and left him in the un-peopled living room. That was revenge.

We remember taking revenge on an innocent white man riding his bicycle down 14th Street after the boere boys got hold of us when went to the dry cleaners on De La Rey.

We remember the white side of Fietas being called Pageview.

We remember never knowing where the name Fietas came from.

We remember naming famous Fietas sons after sporting greats.

We remember the Gardas taking the naming thing too far with names like Morris, Chubb and Peter Garda after the illustrious England cricketer Peter May.

We remember cultivating the language of cricket by using commentary terms like "illustrious"; the meaning of which we only later learnt.

We remember a fat, very fat African man who lived in Garda's building being called Harry Garda.

We remember Bob, the painter, a Coloured gentleman from the Eastern Cape being called Bob Bhamjee because he lived in the Bhamjee building.

We remember making jokes about the name Bhamjee because it reminded us of the word bum.

We remember being the first people to get a television set in Fietas because my father's boss, Sayed Bhamjee, took him as a son and gave it to him as a gift in 1976.

We remember people piling into our lounge to watch *Rich Man, Poor Man*.

We remember making up the words to *Pinocchio*:

Pinocchio
Is a stouter
Sy naam is Gina
En sy Gwaaa.

We remember older cousins doing puppet shows for us with used socks.

We remember Papa bringing home boxes of job-lot shoes after travelling through Transvaal and taking any pair that happened to fit, and feeling the luckiest in all of Fietas.

We remember a meal of Jeeroo-Mari Pani, a water soup flavoured with cumin and pepper with a loaf of bread for our family of nine.

We remember welcoming guests from as far as Middleburg to share in the meal.

We remember sitting around our coal stove smelling roti being made by Ma.

We remember Papa being sick when we were very young and having to leave school at the age of 16 to work.

We remember having to go down onto the street corners to sell imitation rings and having sold one or two or three returning home with the money so Ma could go out to buy meat or bread.

We remember that even on some Eids we'd go out after the early morning prayer to sell so that we could eat.

We remember a house filled with laughs.

We remember living in a flat with two rooms, a kitchen and adjoined bathroom cubicle, an outside toilet and a lounge and welcoming in the extended families of married brothers.

We remember people sitting in my parent's tiny room till well after midnight telling stories.

We remember Papa playing nursery rhymes for us in his lime green Toyota.

We remember peeing down from our balcony on cars parked below.

We remember people from far and wide coming to shop on 14th Street.

We remember Essop Madari's shop with its heaps of goods in help-my-krap style.

We remember Essop Madari not being 100 percent because of nerves. A jewish elderly woman who frequented Madari's shop scratched in one of the heaps and found a beautiful jersey for £2. She insisted that she had seen it at OK Bazaar for £1. So Madari, because of his nerves, said why didn't she go get it there. The jewish woman, tired of haggling, got so fed up that she told Madari: "The government is right by throwing you people out". A furious Madari retaliated: "Hitler was right too".

We remember everybody being anti-white. Indians, Coloureds and Africans – we were all together.

We remember that it was 1979 or something when we eventually left 14th Street for Lenasia.

We remember not knowing exactly when the decision for us to leave was made, but recall the cops troubling us to move out and the bulldozers coming in to force us out.

We remember our pink building being demolished.

We remember Jimmy Bulbulia refusing to move and finally being killed by robbers in the new South Africa in his house on Krause Street.

We remember Jimmy's one-room house being treated as a clubhouse. South African cricketer great Basil D'Oliviera would stay only at Jimmy's place when visiting Fietas.

We remember when D'Oliviera got picked to play for England for their tour to South Africa and the tour being called off by Verwoerd or Vorster because D'Oliviera made the team.

We remember Jimmy being kicked out from his family because of his boozing.

We remember the shebeen on 18th Street and how we weren't supposed to admit we knew where it was.

We remember that the telephone number at our house on 5 14th Street was 359153.

We remember the cinema called Taj on 17th Street and another called Star on 20th.

We remember calling cinemas bioscopes and pronouncing "film" as "filim".

We remember Ma wearing her high heels for the Saturday night double-feature at Planet or Lyric in Fordsburg.

We remember walking through the damp, dark subway to get to Fordsburg.

We remember believing that a ghost called Kismet lived in the storeroom under the staircase.

We remember Ma telling us that the word kismet means fate in English.

We remember that the corner shop where we bought tomato sauce crisp and Coke nips was called Kismet.

We remember the smell of spices at Nagin's Spice Emporium and recall the sense of victory at finally being able to say the word emporium.

We remember looking forward to next Sunday's cricket or soccer match even before this week's one had ended.

We remember a guy by the name of S.A. Haque, now known as late-Haque (because he is late in the dead sense). You could tell from the way Haque spoke English that he wasn't educated but Haque ran soccer and cricket in Fietas and was the most dedicated sports administrator (there's another of those must-know cricket terms).

We remember Haque being the first to arrive and last to leave from the grounds because there were lines and creases to draw, netball nets and cricket boundaries to set up and sport to be played.

We remember that Haque ran a team called Motherwells, which was his pride. Motherwells' players were Malay and Coloured, with a sprinkling of Indians.

We remember that my father, Moosa "Monkey" Mangera was one of those Indians.

We remember having to pay a 20c ground tax for the washing of soccer kits and cricket whites and that if you couldn't afford it, which we often couldn't then Haque would fork out the cash.

We remember loving cricket a bit more than soccer.

We remember the Caribbean cricketer Rohan Kanhai, one of the greatest batsmen of all time, staying on 17th Street when he visited Fietas and my father, Uncle George Naidoo and Uncle Aboobakr "Hurley" Asvat being there with him during his stay.

We remember Uncle Hurley, from 17th Street, having to go to Pakistan to study medicine and later being an Azapo member.

We remember loving the sound of the word Azanian and getting the news after a trip to the airport that Uncle Hurley had been murdered.

We remember my father's face, sitting alone in his car after Uncle Hurley had been buried and feeling privileged at the time that Winnie Mandela had come to his funeral, in disguise.

We remember feeling differently a few days later when we discovered Winnie's Stompie connection to Uncle Hurley.

We remember Uncle Hurley was killed on 27 January 1989.

We remember that during the 1976 riots, people from Alexandra township flooded into Fietas to take refuge with family and friends.

We remember being sjambokked by the cops for playing ball in the streets.

We remember cops chasing Nazir Brady down 14th Street. He entered one of the buildings and jumped from roof to roof in a thrilling spectacle that forever made Superman pale in comparison.

We remember one of the Fietas urchins, with a kit-bag on his back trying to jump from the roof of the mosque chanting Batman and Robbin.

We remember Bawa, my great-grandfather, sitting on the shoe-stand outside the mosque during the Trawih prayer in Ramadhan, correcting the Imam's mistakes.

We remember a wall filled with Islamic books, stacked on each other to save place.

We remember Bawa being called Mad Ali for sitting on the corner of 8th and De La Rey, a no-go zone for the rest of us and smoking stompies.

We remember Bawa waiting for his son Ebrahim to return from LM before dying in his bed with all of us around him.

We remember the bubbling, gurgling sound of Essop Madari dying in the flat next door and Dr Jassat arriving when it was too late.

We remember Aisa Madari never recovering from his death and still speaking about him in the present tense.

We remember that he couldn't be buried in the cemetery right across from our home because there was no place for Indians there.

We remember place for only four Indians, in the corner, on the top of the tram which ran between Newlands and town.

We remember four Chinese people living in Fietas.

We remember only having grades one and two at the corner of 13th and Krause streets.

We remember walking to Fordsburg to attend Bree Street Indian School and later Johannesburg Indian high School.

We remember you had to have the word Indian in the school names and those who couldn't be taken into these schools had to travel by train to Lenasia.

We remember whites calling samoosas *driehoeie koeliekoekie*.

We remember that when Papa died last year, after living for over a quarter of a century in Lenasia, the noticeboards at mosques and outside BP garage on Nirvana Drive read:

Ismail Mangera of Fietas passed away today.