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Transactional Memory in Ronnie Govender's *At the Edge and other Cato Manor Stories*

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Ronnie Govender's text, *At the Edge and other Cato Manor Stories* (1996. Pretoria: Hibbard Publishers), regarded here as a text-site of memory, is significant in the construction of South Africa's national identity. The collection of short stories recalls the resilience of the multiracial community of Cato Manor, whose democratic co-existence and mutual respect comprise a model for the national democratic character of today. As a record of the ills of the past, Govender's text enables South Africans to confront and come to terms with issues such as indenture, colonialism and apartheid. Govender's unique performative prose revivifies the lives of the residents of Cato Manor, an area whose history is neglected compared with those of District Six or Sophiatown. This resuscitation of Cato Manor characters in this dramatic form facilitates the memory work of Govender's writing and performance. The new national identity recognizes the roles played by all communities past and present. Govender's work constitutes a major part of the construction of that identity, in speaking for his particular community, their contribution to the country and its struggle for freedom. In the course of recognizing the national significance of Govender's texts, this article traces defining generic intersections between theatricality, the short story and memory studies.

Key words: *At the Edge*; Ronnie Govender; national identity; performative prose; social harmony; transactional memory

In the current post-Apartheid era, the challenge lies in creating a convincing new foundation myth and commemorating an inclusive past that can be shared by all or most South Africans as the basis for a new nation. Sabine Marschall ([2005] 2008)

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Introduction

Pierre Nora and Lawrence Kritzman define a *lieu de memoire* or place of memory as ‘any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time, has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community’ ([1984] 1996, xvii). They distinguish between such *lieux de memoire* as constructed sites of memory and true sites of memory. They point out that places of memory in France such as the Arc de Triomphe or the Eiffel Tower filled the vacuum left by the loss of a pastoral identity. They contend that such new sites of memory were artificially synthesized to replace the old, albeit unarticulated, real sense of memory contained in countless rites of Frenchness that once informed the national psyche.

South Africa’s need to re-define itself after 1994 conforms to France’s need to re-create itself. After liberation, South Africa sought to reconstruct a new national identity, which involved coming to terms with the painful memories of the nationalist Afrikaner government (see Grundlingh 2009, 157–158). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up to provide frank exposure of wrongs, and to begin the healing demanded: their work was a remarkable instance of *travail de memoire*. Sites of suffering and pain such as District Six, Sophiatown, Cato Manor or Robben Island had to be reconciled with the collective memory of the nation. Ronnie Govender’s prose works and plays re-constitute the vital memory of multiracial living in Cato Manor in a way that contributes to the new national identity; it reminds audiences and readers of the possibility of harmonious interracial existence. His word-site is thus a public record of the past reconstituted for the living: it may be appreciated critically as a living place of memory, and a cultural and ethical continuity. The artefact of the book comprises or houses a way of living, itself a voice to be heard. His book can be regarded as interactive: an artistic installation which engages the interest and response of a participatory viewer/reader. His word-remains are as admonitory, vital and politically potent as the ghosts and bones of sites such as Prestwich Place in Cape Town. Govender remembers the dead of Cato Manor: those deceased and those dispossessed. The wronged are redeemed in the text as short story, and revived as performance text on stage. Govender’s written words incorporate memory-fragments which he presents, arranges and exhibits in much the same way that artefacts from District Six were lovingly recovered and recuperated on site in the District Six Museum. His writings are, uniquely, also theatrical scripts: introductions to, as much as memories of, people who purvey vital knowledge of life lived happily and well, which rekindle a useful and happy life for those to come. It is in this sense of memory transferred to daily life that his memory-work is transactional and significant in the foundation of a democratic national identity. Transactional is to be distinguished from ‘transactive’ memory, Daniel Wegner’s term, which emphasizes the nimbus of associative memory drawn upon by members of a group (1985, 105ff.). ‘Transactional’ stresses the transfer of

ethical priorities through the text-as-site to readers. Sites such as Prestwich Place in Cape Town and Cato Manor in Durban accumulate a degree of sanctity in a nation's collective unconscious. Maurice Halbwachs (1980, 57) observes: 'Our memory truly rests, not on learned history but on lived history'. Assman (1995, 129) locates this notion of the transactional within the discussion of cultural memory and collective memory.

In *At the Edge and other Cato Manor Stories* (1996), Govender does not conceive of the past as a separable entity but rather as a continuum, a stream of oneness: his mother's memory is brought to life in the character Vellamma in 'At the Edge' (p. 59); many other voices from the site of Cato Manor are similarly recreated. They are to be heard and learnt from as an ancestral continuity. His intention in writing is not to memorialize them, however, but to convey or re-ignite the quality of their lives, so that present and future generations can derive wisdom and happiness from their memory. He and his narration are tied to the realities of present life, and our conduct in a free society. In this sense, his particular kind of labour of memory may appropriately be termed transactional memory. He wishes to rekindle the flame he nurtures within the reader so that God can be seen in all of us: so that the life-force he reveres can burn again in all hearts. This inclusivity of religion and community is stated clearly in his own words: his mother wanted him to learn to see the 'God in Everyman'. He includes all races in his desire to teach us to hear the voices of Cato Manor, spoken for all South Africans. He invokes the memory of life as a present memory-guide to uphold freedom and humane values. Such continuity of life, the life of Cato Manor, is the secret essence he wishes to share. Govender appeals in the name of his 'society of life' for us to follow this path, as an *aide memoire* for a hopeful new democracy.

Many who endured colonialism or racism in such sites, both in South Africa and elsewhere, can identify with the following statement concerning injustices against the first inhabitants of Australia: 'When the skeletons of the past come back to haunt us, quite literally, how do we as a society respond to these hauntings? The discovery and re-mapping of these co-ordinates perform and embody our shared postcolonial condition, a condition that continues to haunt many individuals who carry unresolved traumas within them' (Till 2008, 107).

Although much research has been done on District Six in order to chronicle the injustice of forced removals, less attention has been paid to Cato Manor. Govender's collection of short stories describes this suburb, and the ghosts of its past. He urges South Africans to pay heed to the voices of the past that still rise from such wounded places: 'Listen, my friends, listen to the voices of Cato Manor, District Six and Sophiatown as we struggle to fashion a new life – a life free from the contradictions that prevent us from seeing God in Everyman' (Govender, Prologue).

Karen Till is a scholar in the field of memory who collaborated with other researchers on the gravesite of Prestwich Place. Like Govender, she feels a sense of

place is essential to memory work: 'I call for a memory studies agenda that remains sensitive to the ways individuals and groups understand their pasts and possible futures through the relationship they and others have with place'. (2008, 101–102)

Although residents of Cato Manor were removed, and the geography of the area changed, the sense of community nurtured there still speaks through collective and private memory. The democratic values of this community provide an ethical foundation for the new South Africa. Govender's short stories 'reconstitute' this lost geographical place by translating memories into words: his text may be treated therefore as a memory-site. The words of this textual site do not 'stand for', that is to say 'represent', the place: they 'stand in for' or reconstitute through recollection the lives that made Cato Manor what it was/is. Govender's site of words is a record: it comes to embody, through the transfer of memory, the lives of a community that is a permanent part of Govender's being.

Govender's works can play a significant part in the re-definition of a national identity. His short stories deal consistently with the pain and injustice of the past, caused by indenture, colonialism and apartheid. The texts similarly remind readers of an alternative to segregation and oppression: frequently he demonstrates the world of Cato Manor as a place of multiracial harmony and tolerance. The memory of Cato Manor transfers images of justice to the present. In this transfer or transaction the good from the past is reconstituted and made available. Thus Govender expresses his love of Cato Manor in poetry:

CATO MANOR

Silence now and bush
 No more Discovery Road
 No more Trimborne Road
 No more hopscotch
 No more ripe mangoes from Thumba's yard
 Cato Manor, you have done your penance
 Amid crumpled eviction notices (1996, 141)

The elegiac tone is contested by the harshness of legal terminology. One side of the prose-poetry, in 'hopscotch' and 'ripe mangoes', tells of life and humanity (treasured memory). The other, in 'eviction notices', recalls the exploitative hand of apartheid (public record). These are the two cords, of darkness and light, which wind through his narratives and the performances of them.

Apartheid legislation in Natal extended many of the racist laws already extant under British colonialism. Govender's text-site helps us to come to terms with 'our shared postcolonial condition'. *At the Edge* is examined in this article as a public record, political tract, personal diary and spiritual text: all these dimensions repose in the writing and collectively re-animate the geography that lies within and just behind the verbal frontispiece. The purpose of this investigation into Govender's memory

site is to identify the workings of memory in his prose and the nature of the particular generic amalgam he deploys.

I

Under the regime of Christian nationalism from 1948 to 1994, Christianity alone was recognized as the national religion in South Africa. One of the first tasks of the new South Africa was to acknowledge the full spectrum of theological convictions as equally important in the re-definition of what it is to be South African. Religious tolerance is one of the fundamental values for the new country, because so much injustice had been perpetrated in the name of a distorted Christianity. Govender's short story 'At the Edge' remains at the core of Govender's collection. It is a story about religious revelation and spiritual healing, which opens the window to spirituality, and which embraces and respects all religious convictions. 'At the Edge' shows the sublime world of the soul, a sacred place. In recalling his Tamil roots, Govender points to values which are useful in laying foundations for tolerance and compassion. Its sacred space forms the ethos for many of the author's narratives. He has the clear tablet of Hindu learning in front of him. These values have sustained the fight for freedom of many of South Africa's Indian struggle leaders, and they add a different dimension to the creation of a new national identity of co-operation and mutual respect. A plangent lyricism melts into the ancient Tamil chant:

Woolegelam woonen thothet kaari / Neele woolaviyen neermali vendiyen

Those who are beyond understanding and beyond praise / You on whose waterlogged hair wanders the crescent moon.

Vellamma's voice rose from deep within her, from within her heart and her mind, lips quivering and the sounds rising gently to caress the quilt of leaves on the spreading boughs of the syringa tree. (p. 53).

In a moment of spiritual revelation, Vellamma finds inner peace through these sacred phrases: they enable her to let go of her anger at life, her resentment, and her bitterness at the loss of her husband. Holy words have brought inner quiet. It may be disarming for Westerners to consider epiphanies outside the framework of the Abrahamic religions familiar to them. In re-constituting the life of Cato Manor, listening to its voices as Govender exhorts us to do, Hinduism is transposed as a cultural and spiritual memory, through the text, to current life. This process gently proffers an alternative to the brutality of Western political structures such as British colonialism or apartheid. The transfer of Hindu healing and inner life from a community that embodied it in Cato Manor, through Govender's reconstitution of it to a larger reading audience, may be termed transactional memory: the 'trans'-fer awakens a certain consciousness which instigates just and good 'acts'. *Transactional* is therefore a unique term for a unique strand of memory work. Govender is not concerned with

fond memory, nostalgia, retribution, reparation or statues. His concern is to see social consciousness and responsibility transferred into action: lives worth remembering are remembered best, he believes, by being copied. To Govender, memory work in this context is work that is demonstrably useful to the immediate community. Vellamma has been borne in her grief to the very edge: 'where life meant something else, something far removed from what she had known and felt' (p. 54). From her private existential turning-point she becomes a spiritual presence whose inner light is perceptible to the many people who start to seek her aid. Vellamma has a spiritual gift recognized by her community: she cleanses a possessed woman from across the road:

Mrs Munien emitted a sullen sound, like that of a trapped animal. She began to sway, and strange sounds emerged from her throat. Her head began to shake frenziedly and her long hair swirled around her. Vellamma didn't move. Her gaze did not waver and it seemed as if she was growing in physical stature. There was some sort of war going on – a war of wills. Suddenly Mrs Munien wilted as if she was withdrawing. She knelt on all fours, cringing and snarling as if cornered . . . Mrs. Munien was now writhing on the ground. Vellamma blew some ash on her face and Mrs. Munien suddenly lay still as if she had cast off some heavy load. (p. 55)

The tradition of Tamil language and Hindu culture, and, in this case, its sacred rites, cleanses Mrs Munien of her evil spirit. She has been set free. Govender offers liberation through his text-performances on stage: the auditor or reader may find emotional freedom through some tales, or spiritual enlightenment, as here, or political tolerance. At all times it must be remembered that the short stories are theatrical scripts used to great effect in performance. So the breakthrough for Mrs Munien is to be imagined as it would be on stage, as much as a narrative encounter. This transgression of customary generic boundaries sparks a particular kind of memory work: one that is far more dynamic and confrontational as stage event than as the quiet recollection of the armchair reader.

II

'The Fall Guy' is an example of Govender's particular melding of performance and literary experience. He exposes both the folly of a youth from his community, and the heavy-handed control of Christian Nationalist government. Govender presents life lived freely, even dangerously. The opposite is oppressive sterility. He instigates this polarity within his memory work, reminding us of the values of life, even if it is life lived at risk or at the edge, in contrast to deadening control. 'The Fall Guy' is both a warning and an exhortation held within a memory script: it reminds citizens how to avoid past errors and to rejoice in living. Govender never shirks from bringing his reader straight up against the rawness, danger and folly of real life lived at the

edge. In 'The Fall Guy', he describes how his main character, Goolam, embarks on a boys' night out. In Govender's eyes, Goolam's error of judgement, and the lesson learnt, are still preferable to a sterile fear of life. Govender celebrates life in all its rawness: Goolam is human and has feet of clay. This is the humanity that he instinctually demonstrates. He is comical in his self-delusion, as are we all. The pictures Govender paints are often mirrors of a Chaucerian kind: we see Goolam just in time to see ourselves. As a piece of theatre, 'The Fall Guy' invites us to laugh at Goolam, yet it obliges us to see ourselves in his stagey comic performance. 'It was a long hard draw. Goolam inhaled the fumes like the practised veteran he was, despite the acidity and pungent aroma of the dagga smoke. He inhaled the smoke and fumes deep into his lungs until, man, he felt like a man' (p. 116).

It is not difficult to visualize this incident as a stage scene. The young man needs dagga and a show of machismo to make him feel that he is a man. His comic self-deception and private fantasy are the Walter Mitty in us all: everyman's desire to be important. The backdrop of pygmy plants provides a touch of bathos in the scene: the smallness of the plants represents the actual insignificance of Goolam: 'He finished the skafe and a few bounces later he was standing under the stunted mango tree below the street light on the corner, resting against the tree with one foot jauntily on the low fork in the tree. He was King of the Night' (p. 116).

Govender has a way of implicating his reader and of catching the observer as observed. The ridiculous 'King of the Night' is any one of us at some time imagining we are large and significant, while the 'stunted mango' reminds us of the real scale of existence. Govender the playwright is more overt here than Govender the prose artist. His prose here is so visual that it comprises more stage direction than word-painting. Close to the surface glitter of the comic narrative, however, there is ever the political presence of Govender the activist:

They took a collection and stopped at a coloured shebeen for a bottle of cane spirits. It was risky, because Indians did not have the liquor franchise. They could drink in the Indian and coloured bar of a white hotel but were not allowed to have liquor in their possession. The coloured shebeens made a killing while the law was in force until white hoteliers who were losing out on a sizeable market share to coloured shebeeners, lobbied for the repeal of the law. (p. 117)

Govender's insertion of this political detail about the laws of segregation is abrupt, even disconcerting, given the flow of the narrative or swift action of the play. He jolts the reader in this way in other tales too. In 'Saris, bangles and bees' he suddenly notes that 'sewage systems were not installed in the non-white areas until the sixties, despite the fact that non-white property owners were paying the same rates as, and in some cases, even more than their white compatriots' (p. 67). Such memories of injustice have to be recorded and assimilated in the public psyche. Authentic national identity cannot be built on oblivion. Govender never loses sight of the

political realities and the harshness of conditions for Indian people under indenture and colonialism. But he is too adept a raconteur to allow the narrative to become a harangue: he keeps several concerns and voices concurrent and in exact tension.

Against the comic irony and political grievance, there is the sudden and dramatic theatre of Govender's 'performative prose'. This balancing act of self-discovery, humour, politics and theatrical dimension is what characterizes Govender's unique way of re-creating the life of Cato Manor. Bringing the place and its people back to life on stage and page galvanizes the work of memory: 'Police! They flashed their torches into the car. The light caught Muragase in the face. It jolted him and he hit the roof of the car as he jumped up yelling, "yammadio"' (p. 118).

Goolam's expedition is a coming of age in which he learns about himself and the brutality of the world about him. There is a light humour and staginess about Goolam's initial introduction and early irresponsibility which make his fall inevitable. Throughout this tale, however, Govender sustains the dark thread of political reality. The carefree youth has to come to terms with the grimness of a cynical and manipulative apartheid world. The theatrical nature of his sudden awareness parallels the moment of sobriety of many young South Africans as they encounter the political spectres of apartheid. This piece of theatre ties together the threads of self-knowledge, rite of passage, humour, stage-craft and political awareness. The sudden burst of light is an actual light as well as the light within him, a moment of inner growth; it is a physical light as well as the intrusive, judgmental, white-man's light, swept across the protagonist's face and the reader's page; it is a moment of anagnorisis. The sudden brightness is the stage-light that shows up the comedy of youth. We see the young Indian as comic, criminalized, growing up all at once. The turn-around is dramatic. But beneath the showmanship, remains a grave concern for justice. We, as the audience, have been lost in the performance but as soon as the tale closes and the curtain goes down, the lesson of the piece begins to form. This Shavian technique of employing theatre as a social/political school allows the memory of societal right and wrong to form in the reader's own mind. The lesson is transferred not as a whole piece but as a suggestion which requires the listener to complete it and own it individually. National identity is formed by facing the recollection of police intrusion, laws of segregation and the errors of youthful abandon. Such wrongs have to be internalized and assimilated in the collective unconscious.

III

In Govender's stories the British colonials are often exposed as the real barbarians. Usually, the satiric stroke is barely visible. In 'The Incomplete Human Being', for instance, Govender writes 'Isn't it a pity that the professional mourner has gone out of business – made extinct by the impact of Western culture – so-called . . .' (p. 79). He questions the word 'culture' as applied to the British nation, considering their lack

of fairness or sensitivity in ruling over the sub-continent. Gandhi's resistance and triumph over occupation in India and South Africa are ever-present in the texts. They are usually manifested in subtle ways but sometimes erupt, as in 'The Incomplete Human Being'. Govender regrets not learning Tamil, the ancient language of his ancestors, when he was a boy. Thaver, who runs the Tamil school, informs his pupils:

You see, you must learn your mother-tongue [Tamil]. It is very good for you. It teaches you more about life than English. English is the language of the conqueror. It has no soul, no poetry. In time you will see that life is much, much more than winning wars, getting rich or being better than your neighbours, and that's what Tamil culture is all about. (p. 75)

This searing critique of imperial Britain rests on the painful memory of such injustices as the indenture scheme, which has been examined by Desai (2007). Equally humiliating was the refusal to enfranchise Indians in South Africa, or to grant independence to India. In his deliberate distinction between Britain and India, Christianity and Hindu culture, Govender characterizes Britain as predatory, mercenary, and above all as arrogant. The Thavers run the Tamil school with no government funding: they sustain the ancient Tamil language and Hindu culture on their meagre fees. Govender's texts demarcate the significance and value of his ancient culture in South Africa. The contribution of political and intellectual leaders from Cato Manor has been substantial.

On a smaller scale, in 'Brothers of the Spirit', Govender describes Ramnath, a humble market gardener, who becomes the spokesperson for an abhorrence of English barbarity. The white housewives who are his clients are so narrow-minded and arrogant that they never suspect this lowly hawker has far more knowledge about food than they do. Govender masterfully satirizes the smugness and ignorance of white culture in the *sotto voce* satire of the subaltern Ramnath:

Every day Cut-Neck-Bobby's father [Ramnath] would load his baskets, hung at either end of a bamboo pole over his sturdy shoulders with the different types of vegetables from the garden and trudge over the hill to the tarred roads of Berea, where he would sell his. 'Fresh dhanias, Madam, fresh carrots, big, big cabbages . . .' and under his breath he would mumble, whenever one of the madams bought *dhanias*, 'Areh, what these people know about dhanias. They don't know nothing about jeera or garam masala. Cultured people eat cultured food. They only eat *kowtchi* food – meat, meat, boiled meat all the time. What they know about food? What they know about anything?' (p. 31)

IV

In the short story '1949', Osborne, the English boss, personifies the bombastic colonial who hides a spiritual, cultural and emotional emptiness. His behaviour is choreographed according to the colonial expectations placed upon him. He does not

regard anyone of another race as equal to himself: his smugness betrays a blind belief in his own innate superiority. The first victim of Osborne's imagined superiority is Osborne himself. He is 'possessed' by the expectations laid upon him by his race before he can develop his own personhood. Osborne is not him-self: he has never been able to discover who he is because his actions are those of a colonial agent. This alienation of the authentic self is symptomatic of the colonial condition. Osborne functions rather than lives. He represents a lifeless colonial whose first priority is guarding the boundaries of the empire, rather than living life. This distinction between spontaneous, natural life and sterile pretence is central to Govender's argument in the whole book of short stories. Cato Manor to him represents the beauty of ordinary life and living. Osborne is bland and indifferent to life's issues but explodes when the boundaries of white territory are threatened. This explosion shows the real Osborne behind the guise of geniality. Parvathi Raman comments about the threat, at the time, to men such as Osborne living in Durban during the 1940s: 'The so-called penetration of Indians into white areas was seen as a major problem for the Durban authorities . . . More and more, white South Africans wanted exclusive control of the desirable areas of Durban . . . By the 1940s, there was intensification in the struggle for social space . . .' (Raman 2006, 195). Aziz Hassim indicates similar sentiments:

With the resistance Movement engaging a higher gear, and entering the international arena, the illegitimate regime of Smuts and his cohorts bared its fangs. It moved in with a vengeance, ignoring the isolated and ineffectual voices of its somewhat liberal members. At a stroke of the pen, overnight and with breath-taking audacity, it declared the affluent sections of the city as exclusive areas for White occupation. Thousands of gracious and beautifully maintained homes, constructed and owned by Indian residents in the quiet suburbs of First Avenue, Mitchell Road, Florida Road, Cowey Road and their adjacent environs were expropriated and their occupiers given thirty days in which to vacate the premises. (Hassim 2002, 100)

The real Osborne, what really makes him tick, is exposed when the Mahommedys move too close to his place of work:

Osborne was livid, 'Why in God's name, don't those people go and live with the rest in their own areas? Why do they insist on living with us?'

And it was the only time Dumi heard him swearing, 'Bloody bastards! Give them an inch and they take a yard. They should send them all back to India. They breed like damn flies!' (p. 101)

Osborne is an agent for a system, rather than an authentic human being. In '1949' the contrast between oriental fecundity and occidental sterility is perceptible in the following description:

Onwards to Concord Road which was a short, neat road flanked by staid brick-and-tile houses which could have been transplanted from some lower middle-class English suburb.

Their inhabitants in shorts, floppy hats and sweaty red faces battled constantly to severely prune lush sub-tropica in a bid to transform it into lifeless gardens of well-ordered rows of hydrangea and meticulously manicured bougainvillea hedges. Dumi would contrast this soulless uniformity with the way nature celebrated the gift of life with such marvellous abandon on the banks of the Umgeni River as it wound its way through the Valley of a Thousand Hills where he grew up as a child. (p. 97)

The word 'neat' in the first sentence alerts us to the introduction of the Western fixation with control. 'Short' defines it as a term of physical and spiritual abbreviation. 'Flanked' begins the undercurrent of a military metaphor; this is not a suburb as much as an encampment. The houses are built to resist the 'other' rather than to be enjoyed as spaces for family growth. These structures form a barrier against the encroaching enemy area: the dark people. The fact that the houses could 'have been transplanted from some lower middle-class English suburb' tells us that the builders had no intention of adapting their houses to local conditions. Their main concern is to transport their own values and forms directly. Because the settlers are not prepared to change according to local climate and culture, their behaviour becomes incongruous and comic. They continue to garden as if they were in England; so they over-exert themselves in the heat of Natal. The women wear ludicrous floppy hats in a vain attempt to remain the same colour they were 'back home'. The men simply become 'sweaty' and 'red-faced'.

The Englishman needs to 'prune' 'constantly' and 'severely' the rich plethora of life contained in the 'lush sub-tropica'. The result of the Englishman's drive to control is a 'lifeless' landscape. The catalogue of insistent clipping represents a fear of the exotic and unknown. The invective reaches its climax in the paranomasia of 'meticulously manicured'. This is particularly dense phrasing, especially for Govender. The two words 'soulless uniformity' summarize the state of the English settler's position, which may be termed 'soulless'. 'Uniformity' tells of the military similarity of their dwellings. Govender contrasts this sterile self-deception of serving an illusory higher purpose with the fertility and abundant life of Cato Manor. There is a lyrical beauty to the words: 'the way nature celebrated the gift of life with such marvellous abandon'. The picturesque vision of the Umgeni River represents life's own sweet water winding 'its way' through the Natal hills. 'Its way' highlights for us the natural course of life that each human being is entitled to explore. Finally, Govender presents the opposing pictures of imprisonment and freedom: in every sense emotionally, spiritually and politically.

V

Memory involves recording and confronting evils of the past such as indenture, colonialism or apartheid, as well as revivifying aspects of good: patterns of bravery and self-reliance which merit replication. Govender's literary recording of darkness

is as crucial as his appeal for truth and light in the collective unconscious. His critique of Osborne as the unfeeling, inflexible Englishman is familiar from many fictional accounts of the time. Such dark memories are part of the history of a nation; the memory of them is a warning of the dangers of racial supremacy or segregation for future generations, and comprises a historical record of colonial occupation and its effects on the psyche. Osborne in his stilted lifelessness, an automaton of empire, may be compared to the barber-shop model of a colonial agent in *The Heart of Darkness*: a pastiche of what it is to be human. Conrad's lifeless image is a ventriloquist's dummy set down in the Congo to mouth the high-flown propaganda of King Leopold, who enjoys the spoils of Africa in the luxury of Brussels. Firchow asks whether 'the Accountant's careful attention to his own appearance and to the accuracy of his books, along with his complete inattention to the welfare of the human beings around him, black or white, augur[s] a similar attitude to Kurtz' (Firchow 2000, 72). Colonials exist in an absurd time-capsule and look increasingly absurd as time separates them from what they once were. Conrad describes this isolation in his first fictional description of the Congo: 'An Outpost of Progress':

They . . . found some old copies of a home paper. That print discussed what it was pleased to call 'Our Colonial expansion' in high-flown language. It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth. Carlier and Kayerts read, wondered, and began to think better of themselves. (in Harrison 2003, 41)

VI

The polarity between natural passion and the artificial restriction of racist legislation is perhaps most dramatically represented by miscegenation: outwardly regarded as one of the most unspeakable crimes in colonial situations, yet practised covertly almost on arrival in the subject land. In *Song of the Atman* (2006), Govender's biography of his uncle, the hotel owner is a white woman whose sexual attraction to the Indian – who runs her bar so well – cannot be denied. The Indian's handsome face causes the white woman to 'fall' in terms of her white society or to 'live' in terms of the humanity that Govender celebrates:

She held his face in her palms and placed her lips on his, her tongue gently probing his mouth. Despite himself, he found his hand wandering to her thigh. She whispered into his ear, 'Not now . . . later'.

She asked him to move into the hotel into the previous manager's suite, rent-free (2006, 118).

Govender shows how natural and irrepressible passion is across racial boundaries. Pitted as it is against the repression of colonialism and apartheid, the memory of

love and natural passion is revered in his eyes. Implicated in this memory of what is natural and good is the obverse: the evils of segregation and oppression which should never be forgotten but should be committed to public memory as an apt warning forever. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* exposes the emotional deadness of the British who have to pretend to be above the locals. Govender is similarly concerned with characterizing the thinking of the colonial agent, thereby warning his readers and his audiences of the dangers of racist thinking. The memories of evil and good are transferred through writing.

In order to appear to be colonial masters, Englishmen overseas had to restrain themselves from showing spontaneous impulses when amidst the local inhabitants. In *A Passage to India* Adela Quested, for example, watches the gradual alteration in her fiancé's manner: the longer he stays in India, the more he adopts the swagger of a sahib. She herself is increasingly attracted to the good-looking Indian doctor Aziz. Such a desire is abhorrent enough to the ethos of British colonialism: when it is discovered that the Indian does not return the white woman's feelings, the insult to the English establishment is doubled. Miss Quested is obliged to lay a charge against Aziz in the frenzy of jingoistic reaction to the incident in the caves. But eventually her conscience requires her to admit the shameful truth of a white woman who is rebuffed by an Indian (1985, 212). The injustice done to Aziz signifies little hope of a rapprochement in the negotiation of oriental and occidental relations. Abu Baker (2006) concurs with Edward Said and others in finding little sign of optimism in the overall conclusion of Forster's Indian novel. Such critics do not even see the vindication of Dr Aziz as holding out hope of any substantial change of heart amongst imperialist British or invaded Indians. Alexandra Yarrow points out Forster's crepuscular portrayal of race relations:

Ultimately, sympathy cannot overcome all boundaries, in Forster's opinion. In the pursuit of truths, Forster is the first to admit the unknowable. He is preoccupied with the question, posed at the beginning of the novel, of whether or not it is possible for an Indian and an Englishman to be friends. The reply echoes at the end of the novel, ambiguous to the end, 'no, not yet . . . no, not here' (p. 4).

Govender, by contrast, though harshly critical of those who become more English than the English when placed in positions of authority in colonial territories, still holds out the hope of some enlightenment and equality if the past and its ghosts are faced honestly.

Conclusion

Forster offers some hope for humanity in the world, but it is understandably tenuous: in his writing we glimpse the ideals of love between all races and all genders, emotional spontaneity and tolerance of all religions. This is the sort of spirituality

and maturity observable in a Mrs Moore; but inevitably there are also the obstacles of bigotry, narrow-mindedness and selfishness. High ideals of democracy, humanity and compassion are entrenched in the new South African constitution but between this dream and the reality there falls the shadow of private greed, corruption, narrow-mindedness and selfishness. The hard work of memory, *travail de memoire*, helps citizens to negotiate their own way through the real world of such obstacles, towards an authentic and enduring national identity. Memory of where the country erred in the past takes us through painful territory, but this process is preferable to airy optimism or unsupported idealism. Recalling the pain as well as the generosity and sensitivity of the past is one of the most reliable, if arduous, ways of ensuring a steady progress towards the better world of individual heroes such as Gandhi, Mrs Moore or the model of democratic, multiracial living that was Cato Manor.

Govender's memory work occupies a peculiar generic space: it is markedly similar to the resistance prose of many IRA writers (Fanning 2003). Their literary record contains strident elements of political protest as well as intimate recollections of family life. Such writing is both public record and treasured private memory. Memory sites such as Cato Manor are significant repositories in the construction of a new national identity which allows all South Africans to enact the liberty they fought for and dreamt of for so long. Govender's unique mode of memory work demands the enactment of justice in daily life. Sabine Marschall (2010, 362) reminds us: 'Contrary to common belief, monuments and memory sites do not have an integral capacity to preserve memory for the future. The transgenerational transfer of memory always relies on active processes of remembrance: such as purposeful visitation, commemorative functions and symbolic rituals'. The memory of Cato Manor is a gift of knowledge to be transferred to all South Africans, and actively lived out from one generation to another, in order to respect, safeguard and replicate patterns of democratic and meaningful life.

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