Revisiting Grey Street: Phyllis Naidoo as Historian

Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, University of the Western Cape

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When Phyllis Naidoo was conferred with an honorary doctorate by the then University of Durban-Westville she began her acceptance speech

> Why am I here? What did I do to deserve this honour? Did I produce a mind-blowing dissertation on Mathsin Goki, Ngiyaki Kilde, Can Themba, and our own Mandla Langa?
>
> I did not, so why?
>
> Actually this is a masquerade. (Phyllis Naidoo: *The Meaning of Our Freedom*. 2007. www.1860 heritagecentre.wordpress)

Yet by this time Phyllis was already the author of several books. *Waiting to Die in Pretoria* (1990); *Izinyanya: a Millenium Diary in the Year of Older Persons* (1992); *Le Rona re Batho* (1992); *Footprints in Grey Street (2002)*; *156 Hands that Built South Africa* (2006); and *Footprints Beyond Grey Street* (2007). She occluded her role as a compiler of biographies of those who had played a role in liberation. In referring to those whom she had not written `a dissertation' on, she was cleverly asking testing her audience as to whether they knew these people.

Phyllis accepted the honorary doctorate `for those who struggled for democracy and especially for those who paid the ultimate price.' While she acknowledged her grandfather, originally an indentured worker who became a market gardener, and her father (her mother is referred to as his `Catholic wife') who on a meagre teacher's salary provided for his ten children and extended family, what followed was an acknowledgement of political parties such as the Unity Movement, the Natal Indian Congress, the Human Rights Committee which highlighted the plight of those `banished people', the South African Communist Party, Umkhonto we Siswe, comrades who had served on Robben Island, those murdered by apartheid death squads, those who were hung by the state, and her sons Sahdan (who was assassinated) and Sha (who also offered himself to the struggle but died due to a `medical accident'). It was on behalf of all these that she accepted her honour. We see in this speech how the word `I' was submerged and we are given only the briefest indication of her own role. This, in fact, was a Phyllis trademark.

It is an honour to be given the task of remembering Phyllis especially since those who preceded me have been high profile individuals who spoke about land rights, human rights and international relations. I have decided to focus on Phyllis as a writer of history and, in particular, to focus on her book *Footprints in Grey Street*. It is an opportune moment to revisit her work given the recent release of *Durban's Casbah: Bunny Chows, Bolsheviks and Bioscopes* (2023) a tour de force by a formidable partnership constituted by Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed who have given us well-researched and analysed books such as *Inside Indenture: A South African Story 1860-1914* (2010 and 2012); *A History of the Present: a Biography of Indian South Africans, 1990-2019* (2019); and *Colour, Class and Community - The Natal Indian Congress, 1971-1994* (2021). Scholars such as Betty Govinden (2008), Antoinette Burton (2012) and Rajendra Chetty (2015) have analysed several of Phyllis Naidoo's books. I draw on their insights while offering some thoughts of my own.

No assessment of the scholarship on Grey Street, can begin without an acknowledgement of the work of Omar Badsha. Already in his 1979 book *Letters to Farzanah*, he gave an indication of what his Grey Street was. While visually representing children in various localities across Durban, there are eighteen photographs taken in the Grey Street area. Omar's camera documents the intersection of African and Indian lives on the streets of Durban which were also spaces of theatre and spectacle and he reminds one of the less fortunate in the underbelly of the area. His *Imperial Ghetto* expanded on the provocation for ` new ways of seeing'. (2001: 5). Omar's Grey Street area was expansive moving away from a concentration on the streets immediately adjacent to Grey Street. His `ghetto' stretched to incorporating the Warwick Avenue/ Centenary Road Area. This broader definition of the Grey Street area which may be taken for granted now was not that apparent until his book. Was Wills Road where Omar once lived generally regarded as part of the Grey Street area. Apart from this geographical re-mapping, Omar challenges any perception of the Grey Street area as an Indian area. While we see Indian businesses, Indian temples and Indian cultural expressions, what stands out are photographs of an African family eating in an Indian restaurant, African migrant workers having their hair done in Beatrice Street, a traditional healer's shop in Queen's Street and a white clerk who is an inhabitant of the Durban Men's Home in Queen Street. Omar's work is class and gender sensitive. A workers' play in a hall in Leopold Street is captured. One photograph of a

restaurant window inviting passers-by to `come inside and enjoy our most appetising dishes' has a woman lying outside on the pavement fast asleep on her small bundle of possessions. There are many photographs of women at work – hairdressers and quilt makers. Omar's Grey Street is also a political space with Victoria Mxgenge campaigning in Beatrice Street for the Million Dollars Signature and a housing conference being held in a hall in Carlisle Street. Omar's eye, while recognising the vibrancy and meeting points in the street, also takes us into interiors – into the corridors of flats and bedrooms.

The influence of Omar's Grey Street area is very evident in Desai's and Vahed's book. While they ditch the word *Ghetto* and embrace the more popular use of term *Casbah* with sound reasons, from the cover and inside photographs, to the physical boundaries of the area and the conception of the area as much more than Indian we see the imprint of Omar's way of seeing. The authors of course do much more. As one who grew up in Kismet Arcade in Prince Edward Street and whose father had a shop, Imperial Textile Distributors, in Bond Street, it was a treat to be taken along this exploration of the Grey Street area. It is a rare experience to see one's life experience captured so brilliantly in a scholarly work. And this is what former residents of Grey Street will find when the flip through these pages. They will recognise their own Grey Street for the authors capture the many worlds of residents and passersby -from the narrow worlds determined by religion, language, or regional affiliation in India to the cosmopolitan activities in the area, to the political, the cultural, the cinema halls and world of sport both indoors and outdoors.

They manage to convey the citiness of Grey Street, a concept Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall urged future urban scholarship to pursue in lieu of the more standard focus on racial segregation (2014). It is not surprising that the authors, whose own youth was shaped in this area and who remind us they are now grey haired, take us on their walk through the area. Michel de Certau, Lindy Stiebel reminds us, found that walkers of a city reveal a different conception of city spaces to planning intentions of officials. Walkers, he asserted, `give their shape to spaces. They weave places together' (2010:17). I am reminded of Club Lotus on the ninth floor of Kismet Arcade; the family of Namie Naidoo of Goodwill Lounge fame who lived on the same floor as us; the coloured, Hindu, Tamil, Gujarati, Christian and Muslim tenants into whose homes we flitted in an out and the surgery of the flamboyant Dr Goonam which was located at the end of the arcade. I am also reminded of the card players who

occupied a flat on the first floor just below our fourth floor flat and the gun shots that sounded out one Sunday in a game gone horribly wrong. I learnt for the first time what the men I saw who went into the basement of Kismet Arcade did. There was nothing surreptitious – they were innocently playing snooker. I am reminded about my daily walk down Prince Edward Street then around through to Victoria Street and the sounds emanating from the shops, eating places, radio stores and cinemas and from the Mecheni (the Ematsheni Beerhall) which was on the opposite end of the Victoria Street Library where I spent long afternoons. I am reminded of the thrill of the Friday evening family walk to the cinema and the special preference we enjoyed at the Naaz which was owned by very close family friends, the Goshalias. I recall leaning out of the window of our fourth-floor flat to watch the soccer matches over weekends as the street was cordoned off. Desai and Vahed reminded me of Mr Chupty from whom we bought vegetables from the top market. I am reminded of my walks to St Anthony's School, Durban Indian Girls High, to my private Gujarati tutors in Bond Street and Victoria Street, to the plays and political meetings held in Bolton Hall, to the gatherings of Gujaratis in the Lorne Street hall of the Kathiawad Hindu Seva Samaj, the Gujarati school at the end of Prince Edward Street where my young nephew was literally taken screaming to, to Bal Mandir where a niece attended nursery school, to the weddings held at the many halls in the area, to Popatlal Kara where I bought my engagement sari, to my father's shop where he had rolls of chiffon saries which he imported from Singapore and to cold rainy days when he would send out for bhajias from Kapitans, which came in wrapped paper with a monkey nut chutney, to Prem Patel who always threw in a Jalebi if I ever visited Patel's in Grey Street, of Sunday family lunches at Goodwill Lounge and the Himalaya Hotel. And in my daily walks I encountered the legendary activist A.K. M. Docrat, always dressed in a short jacket and a cap on his head, who also walked the streets at about the same time. I am reminded that my school friend and I visited the Revelation Record Library in CNR House (at the corner of Prince Edward and Cross Streets) run by Vino Reddy and Saths Cooper where we borrowed Bob Marley's records. *Durban's Casbah* brings back a flood of memories some stored, some forgotten and some incompletely and, in cases, inaccurately remembered. The one site of relevance for me and the dancing fraternity that is missing from this book is the M.K. Bobby Naidoo studio where Jayalakshmi Naidoo newly trained from India used the back room before expanding next door for her Bharata Natyam Dance School. From this tiny space major dance dramas were staged at the City Hall and

elsewhere and it produced Suria Naidoo of later Suria Langa fame as one of the first batch of graduates.

There are many Grey Street worlds and it depended on where one lived. Living in Prince Edward Street was different to the Queen Street world which was different from the Lorne Street world and the Warwick Avenue world. Many similarities but enough to produce a specific street identity. *Durban's Casbah* allows a view into each of these different worlds, a formidable feat, indeed. The authors do more than prompt memories. They document with rigour the growth of the physical landscape from cottages to high rise buildings, to businesses, schools and religious and cultural institutions and they plot the changes in spaces over time. Many of the chapters serve almost like a directory of sites for you can find the exact address of the site you had forgotten but they do much more for we have well researched biographies of those who occupied and shaped these spaces. Their work is grounded in impressive research, official records, oral histories, memoirs, biographies, surveys and vivid contemporary descriptions by journalists of the day. What we learn most of all is how residents and businessmen themselves worked with vision and, without help from a hostile municipality, to provide vital facilities in the area. Within this four square km range just about everything needed could be found.

The book also reminds us of the presence of Africans in the area – in buildings such as the Ematsheni Beerhall, The Native Eating Market, The Thokoza Women's Hostel, The Bantu Social Club later renamed the Young Men's Christian Hall in Beatrice Street where many dances were held. We see the slow erasure of these spaces. The neighbourhood is a cosmopolitan one but at the same time the organisational logic saw concentrations of Memons, Surti Muslims, Gujarati Hindus, and south Indians in specific zones. This was Grey Street in all its complexity. The authors who devote no less than five chapters to sport (representing a deep passion of theirs), have one chapter on political figures in the area. This is an appropriate moment to shift now to Phyliss Naidoo's publications and, in particular, *Footprints*, published two decades previously.

In the 1990s and 2000s, when Phyllis began writing after her return from exile, there was a splurge in political biographies (mainly that of men by men). Women activists did not wait for a biographer to discover them, they took control of the story of their own lives and wrote their own memoirs and autobiographies. Phyllis did not follow this trend though she could

easily have done so. Instead, her books are a collection of biographies of individuals who, like her, contributed to the struggle and whose lives often intersected with hers. Rajendra Chetty refers to her work as `autobiographical displacement' and labels her approach as `communography' (2015 : 17-18). Her writing is defined by her `identification with the community of activists and a conscious attempt to write the other not the self' (2015:26). Betty Govinden argues that a project to illuminate Phyllis's biography is to `excavate a submerged self' (2008: 297). Even in her account of her ten days in prison, Phyllis `acts as a conduit for the voices of others and foregrounds their stories' (2008: 296).

Shireen Hassim observed that the other formidable woman of Durban, Fatima Meer, self-published and, to this end, established Madiba Publishers in 1991 and, later, the Institute for Black Research. Not only did this facilitate the publication of black scholarship but Hassim suggests `Perhaps it was the experience of rejection and indifference to the kinds of issues that she thought important that led to Meer setting up her own independent entities (Hassim 2019: 46). At the very same time as Meer was doing this, Phyllis herself eschewed the commercial publishing route. *Waiting to Die in Pretoria* is proudly published by Phyllis Naidoo as are several of her other books. She sought a small outlet like Far Ocean Jetty owned by Viroshen Chetty, for the publication of *Footprints.* She relied on Jeeva Rajgopaul for an editorial eye and when he was too busy she drew on Betty Govinden and Vasantha Angamuthu. When Jeeva brought to her attention that some of the profiles were too short she informs the reader `They will have to be short factually but improved with your continued research'. As for omissions, she pointed to the lack of `time, cash and energy' reminding the reader that she was both 74 years old and a pensioner. (p.13) Phyllis retained control of what she wrote, its distribution, its cost and its proceeds. For Phyllis, there was no place for a publishing house that would evaluate her manuscripts for their commercial viability. Nor was she going to bend to the intervention of editors and readers of manuscripts who could force her project into a particular direction. She gave permission to anyone wanting to campaign against the death penalty to reproduce *Waiting to Die* as long as the original was acknowledged. With some Phyllis cheekiness, she writes in *Footprints* `my publishers will tell you about copyrights. But I want you to read, to quote and know your glorious past'(14). She is very careful to acknowledge the books and articles from which she draws information and quotes from.

So why did Phyllis write *Footprints*? She puts it down to a request from Paul Tichmann of the KwaMuhle Museum to give a talk on Grey Street which then evolved into a book `of short stories of my comrades'. She is clear as to what she will not write about:

> I will give the history of Grey Street a miss. I shall omit its landmarks, its beauty, its filth, its magnificent gardens, its monuments both historical and otherwise, its wonderful residents both the housed and the squatters, the joys of Ajmeri Arcade and Madressa Arcades, Manjera's and the trees and flowers [there was none of this] and so much more. (13)

Her goal, she wrote, is ` to show you the beauty, the immeasurable courage, the absolute heart breaking poverty from which the desire for freedom was fed.' (13-14) One author while delineating the boundaries of the Grey Street area in the same way established already by Omar Badsha, refers to it as `a distinctly bounded space' (Stiebel 2010: 7). There is no `bounded space' for Phyliss. Her book is not just about residents within the boundaries but includes stories about those who were temporal visitors and who worked here. It is on this broad canvas that she unveils who should feature and, in this way, Phyliss makes a major innovation to the study of place. It is, as Antoinette Burton, argues an act of reframing and repositioning of Grey Street. What she does is to bring forth `Afrindian stories out of obscurity and into this history'. In this way, she is ` desegregating Grey Street and repositioning it on the grid of "South African" history writ large'. (2012: 440). Grey Street has national relevance and from it the national liberation struggle can be understood.

Her canvas allowed Phyllis to paint 58 biographies of which only 17 are Indian. While the biographies may be ranked as African or Indian or white, the lives lived illustrate their oneness regardless of race – they eat together, walk together, strategise together, hide together, help each other out. These are lives that rail against apartheid's racial divisions and Phyllis's own life experience with many of those she interacted with becomes the means by which the intersections become apparent. While there are many well-known names profiled in the book, there are also many that would be unknown to a general audience. Phyllis gives these men and women their due and, more so, because most of them are dead. She also reveals events and stories that one may not have already read or heard about.

Phyllis's rejection of Grey Street as that `bounded space' is seen in the fact that there are innumerable stories in the book which have little to do with the Grey Street area for Phyllis takes her freedom to frame her own project seriously. A chapter on Harry Belafonte is really

a means for her to relate how her son Sha brought her a cassette of Belafonte's songs in Zimbabwe. It is a means for her to pay tribute to her son, a son of Grey Street, who died in 1995 (41ff). We have a chapter of her in hospital in Budapest where a major rumpus occurred because the toilet seats were wet after use. When washing practices of Palestinians was pointed out to her, there emerged `well protracted, sometimes cantankerous, argumentative discussions … between the washers and the wipers'. Tempers were calmed by the suggestion that the `washers' wipe the seats with a cloth after use. Phyllis heads off the anticipated criticism of a reader as to the belonging of this tale in a book about Grey Street, `since it happened to me and since I belong to the Kasbah that is Grey Street, here it is' (70).

There are other examples. The biography of Jane Turner, the mother of Rick Turner, is included because `Rick was buried in the Brook Street Muslim cemetery adjoining the market near Victoria Street' (105). There is of course more to this since Phyllis and Jane had something in common – the assassination of their sons. A chapter on Samora Machel who died while she was in Zimbabwe is justified by the fact that she and her children often saw many vehicles with Mozambican number plates and she recalls many shops owned by Portuguese in Durban. These Portuguese whites, she writes were `manna from heaven for our racists'. The lack of certainty as to the death of Machel remained in Phyllis's mind as she wrote this chapter. And who is to argue with Phyllis when she says `So Samora Machel is firmly embedded in my Grey Street' (183-184). Grey Street comes to stand for the struggle in the southern African region. Taufie Bardien, a taxi owner in Cape Town features because he came to her aid without charging her when she visited Cape Town in 1971 to go to Robben Island. Taufie himself endured a banning order and a period of detention. He is in the book for Phyllis to pay thanks to him (209-212).

Kiru Naidoo in his forward to *Footprints Beyond Grey Street* has referred to Phyllis's `wicked and witty tongue' (2007:6) and this is evident in *Footprints*. She includes a story of a Muthoo Moodley, a waiter at whose house in Wills Road she stayed in the early 1950s. Moodley worked for the Durban Club and late one night he came home with two large white underpants which he then washed and hung on the line. `it was cotton knit in white, which filled a very large butt, probably worn by an old man then'. The next day Muthoo took the freshly ironed undergarments to work. Piqued by this, Phyllis could not resist interrogating

the appearance of the undergarment. It belonged to Sir De Villiers Graaf, the leader of the opposition in parliament. She ends the tale with `how close could a Black get to a white parliamentarian in the 1950s?' (206-208)

If *Footprints* included some stories marginal to the Grey Street story, then not surprisingly the sequel *Footprints Beyond Grey Street* includes stories that belong to Grey Street. In the book *Durban's Casbah*, there is a delightful chapter on the cinemas or bioscopes in the area. From the very first silent bioscope in 1910, there would be at least 10 by the 1960s and 1970s. We are provided with valuable biographies of the owners, the nature of the film industry, the role of projectionists, the sellers of black-market tickets, the transformation of the streets at weekends when residents came out in their finery to seek the celluloid world which provided relief from the real world. The Rajab family who owned Shiraz, Isfahan and Shah Jehan feature in a section `Persia in the Casbah' and the authors draw on the glamourous descriptions in the opening brochure of the Shah Jehan. We do have Mamoo Rajab explaining how some films could not be shown to African audiences as per the stipulation of the Censor Board `no Bantus'.

Phyllis Naidoo devotes a whole chapter in a book not about Grey Street to the Shah Jehan. She locates it within the vicinity of `that monstrosity' the Thokoza Women's Hostel. Not for her is the glossy brochure that told of the luxury offered by the new architectural wonder in Grey Street. Her story is how she, Fred Dube and Johnny Makathini went to investigate the claim that Africans were discriminated at the cinema. They bought tickets and she entered on her own while the other two entered separately. They were offered different entry routes and they later found that the Shah Jehan had 200 of its 1200 seats reserved for Africans. Phyllis includes a note from her editor, Jeeva Rajgopaul, that the Shiraz had a ban on African movie goers and there was a widely publicised incident when an African was physically assaulted and prevented from entering the cinema. Asserting her role as a revealer of history as it happened Phyllis writes:

> From the accounts you have read of the opening of the Shah you would not have read the above story. There would have been pages of photographs of men in bow ties and tuxedos with bejewelled women on their arms.
>
> So there are two stories of Shah Jehan. One of the red carpet, velvet and pearls brigade – much larger and more popular; and the other-smaller with no media attention- for those involved in the struggle to democratise our city. (126-28)

But the struggle is not necessarily a united one – an Africanist taunted her with the comment that she was `a shareholder in Shah Jehan'.

To return to *Footprints.* Just as all residents had their specific routes and sites of interest we are introduced to Phyllis's sites between the late 1950s and 1970s. They include the Archie Gumede and Phyllis Naidoo legal offices in Cross Street; the ANC offices in Lakhani Chambers in Saville Street; Valbro Chambers where M.N. Pather the secretary of SACOS had his land and estate agency and where Dr Suleiman Ismail had his surgery begore moving to Dinesh Mansions in Bond Sreet; Lodson House from which *New Age* was published and where Bill Bhengu had his office; Victoria Heights were Phyllis was articled to R.S. Pather and T.C. Mehta; Hoosen Buildings in Queen Street where she first saw Poomaney Moodley placing pamphlets in the postal boxes; the YMCA in Beatrice Street where the ANC held its conferences and where Lilian Ngoyi's memorial service was addressed by Gladys Manzi, Archie Gumede, Paul David, Florence Mkize and Bheki Shezi; the Kathiwad Hall in Lorne Street where Chief Luthuli addressed an ANC meeting; the Gandhi Library in Queen Street; Victory Lounge from which she bought sev and boondhi en route to a rendezvous; Flat 1 Nirmal Court at 78 Victoria Street, the home of A.K.M. Docrat; Cartwright's Flat in Albert Street where Johannes Nkosi was killed; Ajmeri Arcade where the Liberal Study Group held its meetings; the Queen Street office of attorney, G.S. Naidoo, for whom George Naicker was a clerk; the dental surgery of Dr Nad Padayachee where Gladys Manzi worked as a nurse in Cross Street; finally, the three flats Phyllis lived in namely in Mistri Mansions, Cross Street; the eight floor of a building in Victoria Street opposite the market and, later, Scala Building in Warwick Avenue.

Like Desai and Vahed, Phyliss walks us through these roads. We walk with her and Chief Albert Luthuli and two other African males from Carlisle Street to Lakhani Chambers; we walk with her and Govan (Oom) Mbeki from Cross Street to the market; we walk with her to A.K.M. Docrat's flat where the `the long, urine smelling and mostly dark passage' had to be braved before reaching his flat which was `filled with books, dust, dirt, cockroaches and cobwebs from floor to ceiling'. (163). Most of all it is the offices of Gumede and Naidoo and the flats she occupied that become a gathering place for comrades and a hiding place. From the flat in Cross Street, Phyliss lets us see the view from below where Africans hasten by to beat the 11pm curfew in the city. Inside the flat, we see Dume Nokwe, Govan Mbeki and

Moses Kotane hammering out Luthuli's acceptance speech on receiving the Nobel Peace Award; we see Vuyisle Mnini and sixteen other eastern Cape comrades , stripped to their underpants and bare shirts sleeping on every available floor space of her one bedroomed apartment; we see a body hiding under her bed, we see comrades crawling up the floors to her apartment so that they would not be seen. From her Victoria Street apartment we are treated to a game of bridge between Phyllis, Docrat , Ebrahim Ebrahim and Natoo Babenia as a bomb goes off near the Victoria Street bridge which they had no small hand in planting. She gets us to smell the stench from the meat and fish stalls of the top market.

Phyllis lets us see how others who were in what they saw as the `Indian quarter' viewed her and her comrades. Taxi drivers smirk at `our nation girl' walking with three African males. `They did not use that word of course' she reminds us (27-28). In a delightful passage detailing the residence of Vuyisile Mini and 16 others in her apartment she describes a mischievous encounter through windows as the Gujarati girls in the flat opposite peer at the almost naked African men in her flat before their parents hastily shut the curtains. The girls were `fascinated' she says and the men `not shy'. In recalling this Phyllis, runs counter to the Grey Street where as a rule (and there were many exceptions), Muslims married Muslims, Kathiawadis married Kathiawadis, Sonis married Sonis and Mochis married Mochis and where interracial counters were left to cosmopolitan spaces like the Goodwill Lounge and Himalaya Hotel. Phyllis leads us to a different way of seeing, one that provokes and rails against conservatism and narrow prejudices.

We are not told much about her methodology but from hints and clues strewn through the book we know that some of her subjects were handed out questions to answer, some were directly interviewed or questioned by her about their own lives or that of others, some supplied resumes, and she also drew on books and articles some of which she had written herself. She often drew on her own memory. In relating the biography of Gladys Manzi she warns us that there will not be a chronological or full story but there are `thoughts as they come to mind'. On a particular incident she says `My memory is hazy presently. I am not able to say which happened first. But they happened the records will prove!' (96-97). Of Dr Masilamoney Rathnum Pather's biography she writes `None of the facts of his life come from my pen, but from a faxed copy, in his writing', which she describes as the bad handwriting of a doctor (143). Whatever her method, what comes to life are commitments

and sacrifices. Antoinette Burton has argued: `Naidoo thinks history and does history … in a mode of solidarity that may have begun as a means of doing political resistance but has ended up as the basis of an anti-apartheid historical method'. (2012: 124) Burton argues further: `… among the most compelling – and vexed questions of anti-apartheid history is the nature and extent of political collaboration and social intercourse between Africans and Indians, whom both the colonial state and the Nationalist government aimed to pit against one another – and whose histories have mainly been written in parallel rather than in tandem'. (133) Her writing is `an act of desegregation'(134).

> Beyond inscribing these lives in and as antiapartheid history, vignettes like these serve a number of purposes. In the first instance, Naidoo registers Afrindian solidarity at the ground level of struggle in ways that official political histories of the period have rarely done, in part because they are more concerned with establishing party/political timeline or even more simply, with identifying links and intersections and collaborations from what is admittedly an extraordinarily fragmented archive… (136)

Did Phyllis inspire Mewa Ramgobin's *Prism of Light "Within My Memory"* (2009) which tells his life through the biographical encounters he held with people? Phyllis's approach of telling a period and a space through biographies is a well-established scholarly practice and continues to be favoured in recent writings by Durban scholars and in my own work. This approach also makes history accessible to a popular audience which brings us to Burton's question as to whom Phyllis aimed her readership? Burton supposes it `may well be people of South Asian descent who she believes are unaware of the long and deep history of interracial politics, social intercourse and resistance: those who think Grey Street – as an urban space and as a metaphor – belongs only to Indians.' (2012: 144). I would like to suggest that it is aimed at all South Africans and especially black Africans who may not be aware of all the on the ground stories of co-operation of people of all races and sometimes diverse parties to achieve this political freedom that we enjoy today.

I would like to end by some thoughts for the future of urban writing. We need to continue to expand on ideas of citiness and we need to make comparisons with places unfamiliar to our local and South African contexts. I am reminded by Bill Freund's urging in the first decade of this century for us to see South African spaces as not unique or exceptional but to see the similarities with other spaces in, for instance, the South. There is a space for street histories and also for histories of buildings. Novelists have been particularly good at this. I think immediately of *The Yacobian Building* by Alaa al-Aswany (2002) which is a magnificent

literary effort weaving stories of inhabitants of a building in Cairo and of a book I have not read by Mariam Akabor *Flat 9* (2006) which draws on Afzal Building in Grey Street. Buildings offer a vertical view of the street below and windows also gaze into other windows and there is a lot of seeing. It is my regret that Satish Dhupelia did not take my urging to write vignettes of Kismet Arcade for he knew each of its nooks and crannies and those who resided in it, frequented it and worked in it. I want to end with Burton's emphasis that *Footprints in Grey Street* `is a clarion call for South African history itself to de-segregate …' Phyllis Naidoo has shown one way of doing this, a way determined by how she lived her own life. The challenge is out for historians to find their own way.

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