

Chapter Four: Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Couto's *Under the Frangipani* attempts to mediate the tension between modern and traditional social practices. In its exploration of the problematic of memory, the text stretches putative boundaries and accommodates differing versions of the past. In *Under the Frangipani*, Couto scripts a narrative that values multiculturalism. It is a narrative that encourages the spirit of sharing and the recognition of various cultures. It is clear in the novel that Couto believes in a holistic understanding of history. His narratives may be grouped with contemporary African fiction that seeks to establish new ways of imagining the African continent.

The narrative style adopted in the novel as with other stories drifts from differing worlds and allows space for varying interpretations of the past to be narrated. The form of narration adopted in most of Couto's narratives points towards diversification and at the same time resembles magic realism's tendency to conflate varying worlds. The stories blur the existing binaries and in a process create a contact zone through which varying ideologies interact. In *Under the Frangipani*, this is made possible by the use of a dead man as a narrator and the belief among his characters that the dead and the living are always interacting.

While the novel clearly favours multiplicity in the formation of memory, it still manages to potently encapsulate the viciousness of war in Mozambique. The old people's home depicts the dispossession, displacements, identity traversal, and divisions among social groupings. It equates the negation and Vastome's maltreatment of the old people as an attack against the past. In the Novel, Martha

Gimo refers to the old people as “the guardians of a world.”²³⁸ This is the world that she says is gradually being eliminated. She refers to this eradication of the past as the real crime that Izidine should attempt to solve. The old people’s home in *Under the Frangipani* is figured allegorically in that the battle of vernacular and bureaucratic discourses in as far as memory is concerned takes place there. The mysterious death of Vastome Excellency becomes a text through which such differing ideologies emerge. Izidine Naita, the investigator assigned with the task of establishing the culprit(s) behind the murder, represents the officials. The views of the unofficial domain are represented by the elderly people who find themselves in the refuge as a consequence of political turmoil in the country, which as already stated left the country in wretchedness. It is through this simple, yet highly evocative narrative, that one realizes the author’s attempt to highlight the tension between and within institutionalized and popular memory in post-war Mozambique.

The tendency to unsettle the binaries of death and life also extends to the portrayal of characters. Couto’s characters come from different backgrounds or worlds, and their identities are the products of a combination of differing cultures. For instance, the attribution of the name Sidimingo to Domingos, the novel’s only white character symbolizes the fusion of westernization and Afrocentrism. Navaia’s image of a man-child epitomizes an attempt to combine older perceptions and present beliefs. Through this kind of portrayal, Couto suggests that people’s identities are the products of various social conventions.

Although it is quite difficult to assume that the novel pits authorized and popular versions, this research report discussed them in separate chapters, as it allows for a

²³⁸ Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 53.

greater examination of each domain as it manifests in the novel. The first chapter explores the critique and subversion of the methods adopted by official institutions in the formation of memory. The chapter has propounded three major dimensions related to the construction of institutionalized memory. It observes the novel's critique of officials' *hasty* advancement to the formation of public memory. It seems to suggest that the circumstance in post-war Mozambique requires considerable time and an extensive debate before it can enter into the construction of public memory. This is in view of the fact that memory is critical in the reformation of the country, so that the mistakes of the past may be avoided.

Beyond challenging the readiness of post-war Mozambique to venture into the formation of public memory, the novel seems to challenge the adoption of modernist methods of investigating the past. It challenges the systematic methods used by the official domain in the construction of memory. It seems to contend that systematic investigations are limiting in that they do not allow space for variety. This criticism is facilitated by the adoption of a narration that allows for the oscillation between polarities, past and present, or the world of the dead and that of the living. This kind of narration is used strategically to allegorically highlight some of the iniquities associated with the official domain.

In examining the critique of detective process, the chapter also considered the propensity in Couto's narratives to remove elements of significance in the investigation. This emerges clearly through the disappearance of Excellency's body. The officials in the novels seem to rely heavily on Excellency's body for clues on his murder. However in the text, the disappearance of the body (corpse) leaves a huge

void in Izidine's investigation. This in itself is a clear indication of the demise of systematic recovery of memory.

Another aspect that seems to hinder the officials' attempt to recover the memory of the day Excellency was murdered is the image of Izidine Naita. The fact that Izidine is representing the official domain, boasts a western/rationalist epistemological background, and that he seems alien to the culture and tradition of the elderly people in the refuge places him at an awkward position in his endeavors to resuscitate the past. His respondents view him as an enemy and, as a consequence, he is unable to piece together their stories.

While the novel rebukes systematic and exclusionary measures of the officialdom, it seems to valorize the role of orality in the formation of memory. In the third chapter, I highlighted the role of oral forms in the construction of memory. Orality is instrumental in the narration of the novel. The author believes that oral forms are significant in the formation of memory in that they are able to transcend official boundaries; they create space for the recitation of ordinary people's memories. The novel dedicates a large space to the old people's stories. In doing so, Couto elevates the old people in the refuge to the position of "authority". As he says, these old people are his co-authors, because it is their stories that shape the narrative.²³⁹

The promotion of these old people into the position of authority or the centre in the narrative signifies the decentralization of authority and points towards diversification. The old people in the refuge rely heavily on storytelling in responding to Izidine's investigation of the truth. Their stories deviate from Izidine's investigation of the

²³⁹ The information has been obtained in a personal interview with Mia Couto, a copy of which is attached at the end

murder of Vastome Excellency to cover their own historical backgrounds. This is done with the intention to foster the spirit of inclusivity.

It will appear that although the narrative creates pathways in between boundaries its valorization of orality and the stories of the old people strengthen the boundaries. Indeed it draws on a diversity of stories and explores various sources of memory. However, it is important to note that in the process of doing so the novel also seems to render official memory as insignificant, mainly because it is perceived to serve the interests of officialdom. The stories then valorize the significance of oral narratives. The novel itself is narrated from the position of the elderly people. As a result, the narrative remains caught in the binaries that it purports to erase.

However, it appears that although the novel's critique is a significant one that points towards the transition from the obvious repetition of official memory's selectivity (or rather exclusionary propensity), it is itself likely to be read as an exercise in the perpetuation of amnesia. In its critique of the readiness of the country to undertake the process of remembering, the novel also seems to adopt a relatively limited perspective. It seems to suggest that there are certain stages in a country's development that are suitable for the process of remembering. However if we agree with Terdiman's argument (and in fact the argument that the novel advances throughout the narration) that memory is ubiquitous, it becomes clear that the process is not a periodical one. Terdiman's contention that "memory functions in every act of perception, in every act of intellection, in every act of language,"²⁴⁰ also poses a challenge to the idea of a suitable time for the construction of memory. If memory is indeed part of our everyday interaction, thinking, and remembering, then it means

²⁴⁰ See Terdiman, Richard, 1993.

there can never be any “right” time for its construction. To question the readiness of the country, therefore, is to support national amnesia. The process of constructing memory deserves to be freed from the bondage of ideological and political boundaries.