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Inclusivity and the construction of memory in Mia Couto's 'Under the Frangipani'

Ngoveni, Lawrence

2007-03-15T12:36:37Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/2270

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CHAPTER TWO

'A COUP AGAINST THE PAST': ENVISIONING THE MAKING OF MEMORY WITHIN OFFICIALDOM

The chapter seeks to bring a literary perspective to the analysis of 'postcolonial memory problematics'[77] by scrutinizing Mia Couto's imagination of the construction of official memory and its subsequent tension with popular memory. The novel, as with most fiction, allows for the imaginative reflection and engagement with the construction of memory. The subject of memory requires, as Andre Brink has noted, to be intensified, complicated and extended in the imaginings of literature. Brink notes that fiction "reaches well beyond facts: in as much as it is concerned with the real (whatever may be 'real' in any given context) it presumes a process through which the real is not merely represented but imagined. What is aimed at is not a reproduction but an imagination."[78] This exercise is done by looking particularly at *Under the Frangipani*'s imagination of the construction of 'formally' authorized memory. This chapter deals with three elements of the text as an attempt to conceptualize the novel's imagination of the assemblage of official memory in post-war Mozambique. Firstly, it explores the novel's critique of the hasty advancement towards the construction of official memory and its ordering in the making of public

[77] This research report generally locates this discussion under the postcolonial theoretical umbrella because the postcolonial perspective allows for a broader analysis of almost all Couto's writings including the short stories that were compiled into two anthologies titled *Voices Made Night* and *Every Man is a Race*. In the chapter, I will argue that Couto's *Under the Frangipani* allegorical envision the debates surrounding the construction of memory in post-war Mozambique as a segment of the broader question of memory in post-colonial African countries. Therefore, although specific focus is on post-war Mozambique, the discussion will at some point overlap to cover some of Couto's writings that are located in the postcolony.

[78] Brink, Andre. "Stories of History: Reimagining the Past in Post-apartheid Narrative". In: Nuttall, Sarah and Coetzee, Carli. (eds.) *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 30.

history. The novel challenges the leaders' anxieties in view of the complexity of the country's history and their intention to bypass a diversity of voices. Secondly, and central to the chapter, is to demonstrate and interrogate the manner in which *Under the Frangipani* subverts western modernist notions of rationality. The chapter elucidates the manner in which the novel treats the detective process and its contribution in shaping institutionalized memory and history. Lastly, the analysis engages with the novel's conception of monuments and monumentalisation as elements used in the creation and performance of *false*, exclusionary or biased histories that serve the interest of the ruling domain. This analysis will include the novel's interrogation of revered histories and heroes. Underlying the chapter is the need to demonstrate the text's urge that the history of Mozambique cannot be conceived from a single perspective. As with most of Couto's stories, *Under the Frangipani* is for the conflation of a variety of technologies and voices in the formation of memory.

The construction of official memory has generated numerous critical responses from scholars and critics alike. A number of scholars and critics have alluded to the state's propensity to intervene (if not to control) the production of official memory and its ordering in the making of history. In the introduction of the book *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*, which enunciates the crisis of memory in post-colonial African countries, Richard Werbner points out that "in some postcolonial countries in Africa the state has itself become the agent of nostalgia, for the sake of nation-building."[79] He asserts that "heritage is state cultural policy, often in an anti-colonial appeal inventing tradition for an authentic past."[80]

[79] Werbner, Richard. "Introduction: Beyond Oblivion: Confronting Memory Crisis". In: *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*. London and New York: Zed Books, 1998, p. 1.
[80] Werbner, Richard. 1998, p. 1.

Peter R. Schmidt and Thomas C. Patterson too have identified a number of tools used by the state in the making of local histories. These include the following:

> …censorship, the appointment of official state historians, the allocation of resources for research and training that serve to amplify knowledge only about the period with which the state is identified, the sponsorship of archaeological methods that ensure the erasure of local histories from the landscape, and the sanctions against and outright suppression of those who attempt to challenge official histories.[81]

All those elements ranging from strategic deployment of trusted state officers, financial supports, and the suppression of alternative versions, highlight the elite's dominant and selective ways of constructing memory. Although the novel does not touch on all these methodic ways of constructing memory, it reflects on their imperviousness to other interpretations of the past.

For Schmidt and Patterson, censorship, the creation of ideologically-acquiescent historians, state-funding, and the deliberate re-landscaping (or re-construction of the environment), aid the imposition of oppressive official history. Adam Ashforth's extensive study on institutional structures, such as commissions of inquiry, identifies their significance in sustaining state power:

> Although it is not usual to do so, a commission of inquiry can be considered as a theatre of power. It is a theatre in which a central 'truth' of state power is ritually played out before a public audience. This truth is that the subjects of

[81] Schmidt, R. Peter. and Patterson C. Thomas. (eds.) "Introduction: From Constructing to Making Alternative Histories". In *Making Alternative Histories: The Practice of Archaeology and History in Non-Western Settings*. New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1995, 4.

> power can speak freely of their interests, and will be heard; that state power is civilized, is a partner with 'society' in pursuit of the 'common good'.[82]

Ashforth is of the opinion that commissions of inquiry should be "interpreted more as symbolic rituals aiding in establishing and reproducing the power of modern states,"[83] than as functioning in the interest of the masses. He engages extensively with the modern state's propensity to label and categorize 'problems', a technique that enables the authorities to speak properly of the name, accurately of the cause and responsibly of the solution to the problem. The main concern with the tropes that institutions of power adopt is often based on their exclusionary propensity and the effacement of certain pasts, which are seen as oppositional to the current system. However, the state's dominance over the manufacture of state memory and the making of local histories remains a salient issue that warrants extensive scholarly attention.

In this chapter, I argue that Couto's novel combines both allegory and magic realist narrative styles in writing about the crisis of memory. While allegory is often associated with the ontological traditions of the realist novel, the magic realist text, with its fantastic expression, "supplements"[84] and at the same time, "reorders reality to seem alien."[85] In the case of Couto's narratives, fantasy seems to be the dominant tool: reality seems to take on a peculiar format for the characters. For readers the ethos of reality may seem immanent in the text, but the expression and imagery obviate comprehension or rather appear strangely distorted (almost hyper-real). The following extract elucidates this eccentric narrative strategy in Couto's novel:

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[82] Ashforth, Adam. *The Politics of Official Discourses in Twentieth-Century South Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon press, 1990, 7.
[83] Ashforth, Adam, p. 7.
[84] See Simpkins, Scott. "Magical Strategies: The Supplement of Realism". In: *Twentieth Century Literature*. 34. 20 (1988). In this article Simpkins seems to argue that magic realism simple adds to the conventions of realism, rather than preceding it.
[85] Wechsler, Jeffrey. "Magic Realism: Defining the Indefinite". In: *Art Journal*, 45, 4 1985, p. 293.

> All these thoughts were parading through my mind when, suddenly, the storm burst. It was like something never witnessed before: the whole sky caught fire, the clouds blazed and the world became as hot as a furnace. All of a sudden, the helicopter went up in flames. Its blades became detached and the machine, now wingless, fell like one of those scraps of paper that, when alight, don't know whether they're losing or gaining height. And so the machine, enveloped in tongues of fire, crashed onto the roof of the chapel. It came to grief on the exact spot where the arms were kept. It was then that a huge explosion shook the entire fort, and it was as if the whole world had been set ablaze. Thick clouds darkened the sky. Gradually, the smoke dispersed. When all was light once more, there appeared from that bottomless pit thousands of swallows, filling the firmament with sudden points of brightness. The birds flashed over our heads and scattered over the blue hills of the sea. In an instant, the sky gained wings and flattered away, far from the world.[86]

Couto's depiction of a burning helicopter and the subsequent explosion that is caused by its contact with the storeroom of armaments resembles the commonly held notion of hell. The detachment of some of the helicopter's components amid fire may be figurative of the disintegration of a society. While the sudden emergence of the birds, which are often used as symbols of peace, brings some brightness (peace), they soon vanish, living the sky naked, devoid of meaning. Couto suggests that the wrath of war, the greediness of the elite and their obsession with power may create or perpetuate scorching conditions in a country.

[86] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 147.

In the case of the story, "The Day Mabata-bata Exploded," the ox suddenly explodes and a young cowherd, Azarias, is unable to comprehend the occurrence. The narrator says,

> Suddenly, the ox exploded. It burst without so much as a moo. In the surrounding grass a rain of chucks and slices fell, as if the fruit and leaves of the ox. Its flesh turned into red butterflies. Its bones were scattered coins. Its horns were caught in some branches, swinging to and fro, imitating life in the invisibility of the wind.[87]

Azarias thinks that the ox may have been the victim of lightning despite the clearness of the sky.[88] The ox is transmogrified into an unreal object. Its constitutive elements (it's "oxness") are blown apart and transform miraculously into seemingly "natural" equivalents: its dispersal is a bizarre rain; its flesh and blood becomes red butterflies; its horns resemble the branches that catch them. Only the bones seem man-made, like coins. Despite the suspension of Azarias' logical faculty, which prevents him from comprehending the explosion of the ox, we read what he thinks he sees. As readers we may speculate that the explosion of the ox has been caused by a bomb-blast from the war. However, the most important issue to note is that the bombing of an ox is narrated in a hyper-real manner. In this case, one realizes that although the bombing of an ox allegorizes the iniquities of the war in Mozambique, reality takes a different form to the characters and at times to the readers.

[87] Couto, Mia. "The Day Mabata-bata exploded." *Voices Made Night,* p. 17.
[88] Couto, Mia. "The Day Mabata-bata exploded." *Voices Made Night,* p. 17.

Under the Frangipani questions the possibility of an effective construction of memory in a "traumatized society" contaminated by "collective neurosis."[89] Mozambique has witnessed the worst forms of violence, displacement, dispossession, deprivation and deterioration in the form of liberation and civil wars. It is this 'wretchedness' that prompted scholars, such as Patrick Chabal, to argue that "Mozambique is not yet a country in any meaningful sense of the word," that it is "part reality and part fiction."[90] The country's desolate state has influenced the creative works of Mia Couto. Most of his earlier short stories published in the two anthologies, *Voices Made Night* and *Every Man is a Race* attempt to examine those discourses that may hinder the country's emergence from this wretchedness. In the novel, as well as stories, Mozambique emerges as an empty territory, confronted by sadness and continually affected by the cycle of adversity. As Domingos Mourão says in *Under the Frangipani*:

> I tell you this with sadness: the Mozambique I loved is dying. It'll never come back. All that is left is this little patch of ground where I seek the shade of the sea. My nation is this terrace here, this balcony over the ocean.[91]

This quotation encapsulates the poignancy of the old people that is triggered by the demise of their beloved nation. In their view, Mozambique resembles a nation that has shrunken to a point where it appears more like a mirage. This image of a dying nation is evident in the following extract describing the history of the area in which the refuge for old people is situated:

[89] Long-Innes, Chesca. p. 155.
[90] Chabal, Patrick. *The Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Africa*. JHB: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996, p. 79 – 80.
[91] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. P. 44.

> This terrace has witnessed much history. Slaves, ivory and cloth were all shipped out through it. From its stonework, Portuguese cannons blazed against Dutch ships. Towards the end of colonial times, it was decided to build a prison there to shut away the revolutionaries who were fighting the Portuguese. After independence, it [the refuge] was turned into a makeshift refuge for old people. With their arrival, the place went into decline. The civil war came, producing a harvest of death. But the fighting took place far from the fort. When the war ended the refuge remained, unclaimed by anyone as an inheritance. Here, time was drained of its colour, everything starched by silence and emptiness.[92]

The cycle of violence that ranges from slavery till the end of civil war in Mozambique has drained the country of its colour, washing away the ingredients that define it as a nation. As Martha Gimo says, "war creates a cycle of time. Our lives are no longer measured by years or seasons…we start saying before the war, after the war."[93] Hence, Domingos says, "when I came to Africa, I didn't experience autumn anymore. It was as if time no longer moved forward, as if were always in the same season."[94] As is evident, war obliterates all sense of time. The result of such pandemonium is the terrible solitude, poverty and the loss of identity that is experienced by the novel's elderly people. The old people constantly appear to have been attacked by a vicious stagnation perpetuated by the feeling of loss of history.

This feeling of stagnation manifests itself in most of Couto's stories as well. The conditions portrayed in the first story of his collection *Voices Made Night*, "The Fire", represent Mozambique as a tattered country. The story is about the elderly couple

[92] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 3.
[93] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 123.
[94] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 41.

faced with loneliness and despair after the immigration (or death) of their children during the liberation and civil war. In *Under the Frangipani*, the old people in the refuge experience this loneliness and suffering. The conditions experienced by the elders in both occasions allegorize Couto's post-war Mozambique, a 'country' that is still attempting to emerge from violence and famine, and at the same time attempting to make sense of its past.

Couto seems to believe that any attempt at constructing public memory in a society that is still endeavoring to emerge from its atrocious past is bound to violate the past that it apparently attempts to resuscitate. In other words, Couto suggests that the ways in which official memory is constructed in post-war Mozambique, a country that survived corruption, starvation, and violence, is in essence a coup plotted against this past, an injustice towards a rather intricate reality. The critique of the methods associated with officialdom such as investigations, commissions of inquiry, the ‘authenticity’ of revered martyrs and the effacement of colonial ‘relics’ demonstrate the author’s doubt about the state’s intervention in the construction of public memories. The form of narration assumed in the writing of the novel as it will emerge particularly in chapter three points to the subversion of Izidine’s investigation of Excellency’s murder. His critique is propelled by the inclination to question the readiness of Mozambicans to venture into the construction of memory. The novel questions the society’s capacity to stimulate the imagination of its people for the emergence of ‘new thoughts’ and a ‘new country’.

"What we discover in this life does not come as the result of our searching for it"[95]: Couto's Critique of the Detective Process

At a first reading, the above maxim appears as a blatant gesture of pessimism that seeks to promote national amnesia. At a second glance, the statement strikes one as a profound aphorism that seeks to critique the methodical process of detective work. The maxim suggests the involuntary nature of the process of remembering. The old people in the novel repeat the maxim constantly, often coupling it to the belief that things begin even before they happen. Navaia Caetano, one of the elderly people, says,

> The act of birth is a sham: we are not born as a result of it. We are already being born beforehand. People awaken in a preceding time, prior to being born. It's like a plant that, within the secrecy of the soil is already a root, before proclaiming its greenery in the world above.[96]

The constant mention of this statement demonstrates one form in which the novel assails officials' reliance on a single modern approach to the process of remembering.

Couto's *Under the Frangipani*, as with most of his stories, adopts a post-modernist perspective in depicting the construction of memory and in criticizing the notion of science as the only effective method in constructing authorized memory. In making this point, one is not suggesting that any criticism of modernity and its ontological conventions is necessarily aligned with post-modernist theories. However, I concur with Lois Parkison Zamora's argument in *The Usable Past: The Imagination of*

[95] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*, p. 37.
[96] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*, p. 28.

History in Recent Fiction of the Americas, that magical realist texts tend to be truly postmodernist in their rejection of binaries, rationalism, and reductive materialisms.[97] Zamora's assertion is evident in Couto's *Under the Frangipani*, which as already noted, draws on some of the established modes of magic realism. In other words, the creation of a permeable frontier between two conventional pillars and its subversion of the detective process compromises the binary polarization and rationality of the nationalist viewpoint and in the same vein adopts the postmodernist's immersion in plurality.

It is imperative that in demonstrating *Under the Frangipani*'s postmodernist approach to the construction of memory that the link between detective work and the modern period as it appears in Ronald R. Thomas's work be considered. In *Detective Fiction and The Rise of Forensic Science*, Thomas points out that "detective fiction is generally recognized as an invention of the nineteenth century, coincident with the development of the modern police force and the creation of the modern bureaucratic state."[98] Modernity is characterized by the rise of science, which was aimed at finally establishing the 'truth' relating to socio-political and economic issues, which dominate people's lives. In the case of detective work, science was to assist in resuscitating the truth regarding the crime committed at a certain point in the past. According to Thomas, detective fiction was modeled in line with the scientific approach of the modern period. The main objective of a detective story, states Thomas, is to control the historical account. He says that "the detective's goal is to tell

[97] Zamora, Lois Parkison. *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 77
[98] Thomas R. Ronald. *Detective Fiction and The Rise of Forensic Science*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 4.

the story of a past event that remains otherwise unknown and unexplained by fixing the identity of a suspect and filling in the blank of a broken story."[99]

The point is that the detective process is instrumental in the making of official memory since its role is that of mending the broken pieces of the past. The ritual generally runs through a series of three steps. There is firstly the identification of the problem, which is often categorized and labeled so as to assist in investigating it, since as Ashforth has noted "every 'problem' in the world of modern state-makers must have a name, a rationale cause and a reasonable solution."[100] The murder of Vastsome Excellency becomes the rationale of Izidine's investigation. The investigation of the problem becomes the second phase of the detective process, through which the pieces of information that are *seen* to relate the occurrence are brought together in an attempt to reproduce that particular incident. Ashforth has noted that the findings of the investigation are often written and preserved as history or public memory. The documentation and preservation of the findings constitute the third and final stage of the investigation. In cases where the suspect is incarcerated, such an arrest does not only symbolize the success of state power, but also history in the making since the rest of the information may now find space in national books and archives. This logic is necessary for the state because for them any form of behaviour labeled as *crime* represents a disruption of "order" and as a result raises skepticism about the state's authority and its illusion of efficiency.

In Couto's *Under the Frangipani*, this modernist scientific construction of memory is subverted with a narration that allows for the establishment of a permeable frontier between the world of the dead and that of the living. The narrator in the novel is a

[99] Thomas R. Ronald. 1999, p. 4.
[100] Ashforth, A. 1990. *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Centuary South Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 6.

dead man who has come back to life by passively occupying "one corner of his [Izidine's] mind."[101] The narrator, Ermelindo Mucanga, says, "I watch him with great care so as not to disturb his inner workings. For this man, Izidine, is now me. I go with him, I go him. I talk to whoever he talks to. I desire whoever he desires. I dream of whoever he dreams."[102] It is in this unfamiliar conciliation of past and present – death and life – that readers of the text notice Couto's subscription to the notion of multiplicity. The oscillation of the narrator in the text suggests the present and the past always interact in such a way that they almost become inseparable. In other words, it seems as though the novel is suggesting that there is a past in the present and *vice versa*. The presupposition that any scientific attempt drawing on mythologies of the past that are used in the reconstruction of memory are mere inventions of that past provokes conflict among groups of different backgrounds. The old people, for instance, believe that all present events have an anterior history, and that the past keeps intruding into the present. Couto's novel seems to challenge the use of modern scientific constructions of memory by advancing the old people's understanding of the inseparability of past and present. The resonance of Ronald Thomas' conception of the role of a detective and by implication that of Izidine in the novel speaks volume of the author's intention to critique this linear and biased approach to a terrain (the process of remembering) that seems complicated.

The narrative in *Under the Frangipani* differs from the modern conventions of the detective process, which are identified with the official domain. It is in the portrayal of Izidine Naita that Couto constructs an attack on the process identified at the centre of investigation. The narrator, Ermelindo Mucanga, introduces the reader to Inspector Izidine Naita who has been assigned (seemingly by government officials in the

[101] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. P. 13.
[102] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani***.** P. 13.

capital) to investigate the mysterious death of Vastsome Excellency, "a mulatto who was responsible for the old people's refuge at Sao Nicolau."[103] Vastsome Excellency is murdered on his way to the capital, a journey arranged after his promotion to a position in the ruling body. In Mucanga's words, Izidine Naita is "going to negotiate labyrinths and obstacles"[104] – to search for the missing links in the sudden assassination of Vastsome Excellency. The emphasis on the 'patching' of memory, as the narrator suggests, connotes memory's fragmentation, and thereby demonstrates the novel's disapproval of the use of detective work as a method in the construction of memory. Already the emphasis on the patching of memory simultaneously reiterates memory's inherent selectivity and the futility of a scientific investigation.

Izidine Naíta's plan is indicative of the methodical construction of memory, which the novel seemingly disputes as an attack against memory, since the detective process is limiting. To begin with, Izidine has six days within which to complete his investigation of the memory of the night Vastsome Excellency dies. He plans to complete the inquiry successfully as follows:

> …every night, he would interview one of the old timers. During the day, he would pursue his investigation on the ground. After dinner, he would sit down by the fire and listen to each one's story. The next morning, he would write down everything he had heard the previous night.[105]

Izidine's plan is indicative of the official's belief in order or logic in pursuit of truth. The novel's old people subvert this systematic planning by appearing erratically for the interview, rendering contradictory testimonies, and admitting that they are guilty

[103] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani***.** p. 18.
[104] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. P. 13.
[105] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani***.** p. 18.

of the murder of Vastsome Excellency. The fact that Izidine does not understand their language works against the inquiry, because it means he is unable to comprehend the stories. Their belief in the permeability of the frontier between past and present further contravenes the empirical rendition of the past. Couto shuns a calculated investigation of the past by scripting a narrative that blurs conventional boundaries.

Couto's disapproval is not solely predicated on the tendency of the method to "reshape, omit, distort, combine, and reorganize,"[106] but also on his apparent argument that memory is omnipresent, and that it therefore becomes a futile exercise to search for it. As Richard Terdiman says "memory is so fundamental to our ability to conceive the world that it might seem impossible to analyze it at all. Memory stabilizes subjects and constitutes the present."[107] In *Under the Frangipani*, the emphasis is on the indissoluble interaction between past and present.

In the novel, the indissoluble relationship between past and present is somehow connected to magic realism's tendency to render the barrier between the living world of the present and the dead, who logically represent the past, permeable.[108] The narrator's reflections offer retrospective insight into the world of the living, and also mirror the ancestral world. Memory is told from different angles. It is through this oscillation that readers learn that Izidine's investigation will last six days. In this way the novel is able to demonstrate the need to consider a variety of technologies that may be employed in the formation of memory.

[106] See Thelen, David. "Introduction: Memory and American history". In: *Journal of American History*, 75, 4, 1989, p. 1120.
[107] Terdiman, Richard. *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 8.
[108] See Faris, Wendy. *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995.

The critique of detective work and the tension between official and vernacular memory emerge strongly in the image of Izidine Naíta. In the old people's eyes, Izidine's occupation (as a police Inspector) positions him on the side of the officials. Izidine has pursued his studies abroad and has lived there for some time. His stay abroad seems to have distanced him from some of the traditional practices that his interviewees seemingly cherish. His education and affiliation to the official domain make him appear as a 'white person'. Education also elevates him to the status of superiority. As a consequence the novel's old people perceive him as an outcast, an enemy not to be trusted. This is demonstrated in the following remark by Domingos, the only white character in the novel:

> I mean this seriously, inspector: you will never find the truth about the dead man. Firstly, these black friends of mine will never tell you what really happened. For them, you're a mezungo, a white man like myself. And for centuries they have learned not to confide to a white man…Being white has nothing to do with race. You know that, don't you?[109]

Despite the fact that he attempts some of their traditional practices and welcomes their suggestion that he undergoes circumcision, Izidine also acknowledges that his initiation into a 'modern' episteme has alienated him from some of the traditional cultural practices that are of specific significance to his respondents. He ponders:

> could it be that Martha was right? He studied in Europe, had returned to Mozambique some years after independence. Separation has curtailed his

[109] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani***.** p. 49.

> knowledge of culture, of languages, of the little things that shape a people's soul. Back in Mozambique he had gone straight into an office job in the capital. His day-to-day experience was limited to a tiny corner of Maputo.[110]

Izidine's education marginalizes him from mainstream cultural beliefs. The *Mezungo* image with which he is associated already creates a tension between official and unofficial memory. The old people's perception of him impinges on his investigation. This is another way through which Couto's challenges the effectiveness of detective work in the construction of memory, and at the same time, points towards the recognition of contending voices within the text.

The old people's association of the modern episteme with whiteness is also prominent in the story, "Whites". In the story, a tramp, Carlito Jonas, and his goat, Zequiha Buzi, gatecrash a party organized by black elite, to fetch his son. The party follows a seminar in which the narrator says "relevancies and eloquences had been exchanged."[111] The seminar is exclusive, as it seems only those in the elite league may understand its highbrow Marxist utterances about the dialectic. Carlito views such parties as symptoms of the ultimate assimilation of blacks into modern or "white" culture. He believes that the elite's disgust at the site of him is the manifestation of whiteness; hence he repeatedly refers to them as whites pretending to be blacks: "you're whites in disguise, you are pretending to be my race, you are just making fools of us folks…"[112] His destiny – "the faceless dark of the night"[113] – is different to the luxurious lifestyle that the elite are enjoying. In the story darkness is synonymous with blackness and poverty. The elite's disgust at the site of a dirty man

[110] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. P. 38.
[111] Couto, Mia. "Whites". In: *Every Man is a Race*. p. 103.
[112] Couto, Mia. "Whites". In: *Every Man is a Race*. p. 105.
[113] Couto, Mia. "Whites". In: *Every Man is a Race*. p. 105.

and his ultimate reference of them as white is indicative of the conflict between modern and traditional practices. In other words, those that see the light of the day – those who fall in the trappings of modernity – are believed to have renounced their racial status as blacks.

It is also noticeable in *Under the Frangipani* that despite the fact that Domingos Mourão is white, old black people seem more comfortable communicating with him than with Izidine. They acknowledge that Domingos is of a different race, but are willing to accommodate him, because of the similarities in terms of their experiences. As old Gaffer, one of the elderly people in the novel, says in his confession,

> The old white man bent down to pick up a flower that had fallen from the tree. The frangipani flowers were food for the old Portuguese fellow's eyes: he watched them fall like scales from the sun, white pearls of sweet from the clouds. *I'm going to die very soon, Gaffer. For me, the sky begins just above those leaves. I can almost touch it…* Such words gave me the shivers. That white man had been a close companion of mine over recent years and I couldn't imagine life without him around.[114]

This interracial companionship amongst the old people is clearly strengthened by the conditions in which they find themselves. They experience the cruel reality of their negation and the constant exposure to malnutrition. They also seem to accept their marginality in the society, as though it is a destiny. Another element which indicates Domingos Mourão's appropriation to the black race is the change of his name to, Sidimingo, and his acceptance that his language has changed. Most importantly, this

[114] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 61 – 62.

relationship demonstrates that Izidine is not trusted because of his association with the nationalist elite who live at a far remove from the ‘masses’.

Furthermore, postmodern theories of the detective’s role tend to maintain that his/her ideological orientation always impinges on his investigation. In *Assasins of Memory: Essays on Denial of the Holocaust,* Vidal-Naquet Piere argues that “however ‘positivist’ he is intent on being, however desirous of “letting the fact speak for themselves,” as the saying goes, the historian cannot evade responsibility to his personal choice or values.[115] Indeed, as indicated in the previous paragraph, Couto's *Under the Frangipani* seems intent on demonstrating the inevitable commonality of subjectivity and science. This conflation of personal ideological beliefs and investigation as it appears may be applied unconsciously, as a function of the detective's background, and consciously, when people manipulate the situation for their own purpose. In the case of Izidine, even the immediate intention – to establish clues leading to the incarceration of Vastsome's murderer – affects the way in which the event is perceived and remembered. This indication of the seemingly unavoidable combination does not only undermine the very possibility of solving the crime, it also demonstrates the novel's postmodernist propensity to challenge the capacity of modern tools and their orientation, and at the same time, envisions some of the challenges related to the production of memory faced by Mozambicans.

Couto’s subversion of detective work is embodied in the opaqueness of the leaders. In *Under the Frangipani*, members of officialdom remain invisible throughout the text, with the exception of Izidine Naita, whom one can consider as a “tool” used to advance the hidden agendas of the leaders. While he acknowledges the impossibility

[115] Vidal-Naquet, Pierre. *Assassins of Memory: Essays on denial of the Holocaust.* New York: Columbia University Press. 1992. p. 104.

of reproducing a genuine past, Couto argues that using discredited methods to investigate corruption cannot possibly assist in combatting that which the detective seeks to identify through memory. Andre Brink succinctly enunciates the impossibility of resuscitating corrupt memory through those 'corrupted' methods:

> The past cannot be corrected by bringing to it the procedures and mechanics and mind-sets that originally produced our very perception of that past. After all, it is not the past as such that has produced the present or poses the conditions for the future... but the way we think about it. Or, even more pertinently, the way in which we deal with it in language.[116]

Brink's emphasis falls on the vital role of representation at the level of language. The past itself does not influence the present, but the conception and verbal articulation of the past carries significance. The politicization of the process of remembering is clear in the following assertion of Marta Gimo, the nurse:

> You, for instance, there in the police. Do you ever ask yourself how long it will take for you to be stricken by the sickness of bribery? You know only too well what I'm talking about: Investigations that can be bought, policemen who accept backhanders. They took you off the drug-dealing case and transferred you to the narcotics section. Why? You know very well, Izidine. And why did they send you here, far from where the action is? Don't worry, I'll change the subject. Besides, I should be talking about myself.[117]

[116] Brink, Andre. Stories of history: Reimagining the Past in Post-apartheid Narrative". In: Nuttall, Sarah and Coetzee, Carli. (eds.) *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 33.
[117] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 124.

Brink's emphasis on the cognition of memory – the manner in which people think about memory – as the basis for its reconstruction in the present is significant to the analysis of Couto's subversion of the detective process. The novel suggests that detective work in post-war Mozambique is conditioned by the officials' political mentality. Part of the reason for investigations is indeed to identify the 'culprit', who committed the crime, and his/her incarceration. The documents pertaining to the assassination and incarceration of the 'culprit' are archived as history, since they represent the incident that happened somewhere in the past. However, Couto writes the story in such a way that incarceration does not happen. This demonstrates the official domain's failed attempt to design the country's history. Towards the end of the novel, those misdeeds that Izidine Naíta was assigned to investigate continue to drip blood. This time around, it is his blood which the perpetrators of corruption are hunting. The elite consider Izidine as a treat, because they suspect that during the investigation he might have uncovered information that would expose their greediness.

Izidine Naíta's modern scientific approach is further confronted by the mystery surrounding Excellency's body. Part of the establishment of forensic science, as it emerges in Ronald Thomas's book, was to make the corpse communicate what happened on the particular day of the incident. While Thomas' observation is specifically based on the propensity of science to render the body as a text, some scholars of the problematic of memory (such as Steven Robins) emphasize the social and political manipulation of instruments in rendering the body as a text. Robins writes about the measuring of the Jewish body so as to pave way for the development

of "Nazi racial theories of Aryan collective identity and supremacy."[118] He draws our attention to the similarities of such scientific tools to the ones that had been used in measuring the Khoisan bodies. Couto's text interrogates the possibility of reading an absent body or text. In the novel the body of Vastsome Excellency evaporates mysteriously:

> The moment they touched down, they clambered down the slope to recover the body. But, when they got to the rocks, there was no sign of Excellency's remains. They searched the immediate area. In Vain. The Corpse had vanished without trace. The waves had carried it off, or at least that is what they thought. They gave up the search and, as night was falling they set out on their journey back.[119]

This mysterious disappearance of Excellency's corpse creates a crucial void in Izidine's investigation. It removes an element of significance from the investigation and, as a result, complicates Izidine's modern approach to the recovery of memory. Such a narration challenges the limited and exclusionary approach of officialdom in its endeavors to make memory live.

The absence of the body, in this case a text, makes it difficult to establish the culprit, and inevitably signifies the failure of officialdom to piece together events of the day Vastsome is assassinated. The fact that incarceration does not happen in the book demonstrates the failure of the official domain to establish the 'truth' about the night Vastsome Excellency is murdered and also the ordering of such truth in the making of

[118] Robins, Steven. "Silence in my Father's House: Memory, Nationalism, and Narratives of the Body". In: Nuttall, Sarah and Coetzee Carli. (eds.) *Negotiating The Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 131 – 132.
[119] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*, p. 16.

history. Similar to most commissions of inquiry, Izidine's investigation was intended to excavate the 'truth'. As Rothwell has noted, in *Under the Frangipani*, "…the author demonstrates the instabilities inherent in the search for truth, and the aporia implicit in seeking to immobilize its constant transmogrifications."[120] The claim to truth has attracted a large body of scholarly responses, both locally and internationally; and a typical example is the "hype" that developed in post-apartheid South Africa as a result of the establishment of a truth commission, otherwise known as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). According to Deborah Posel, the TRC "was to be an excavation of the truth about human rights violations, both in respect of individual cases presented to the commission and more generally, by way of establishing 'systematic' local and national patterns of gross human violation."[121] The notion was that for the country's emerging democracy to be sustained, and for reconciliation to be achieved, a public forum was needed to resurrect a considerable quantity of the past atrocities. The desired outcome of this forum was to air – and, in some case, to re-enact – these atrocities, with a view to dismantling the boundaries of hatred and guilt, in order to fortify the struggle for a renewed society.

The absence of the body also seems to highlight the "collective neurosis" of post-war Mozambique. As stated, *Under the Frangipani* seems to suggest that any attempt to combine the pieces of the past in post-war Mozambique is ultimately confronted by the iniquities that bedeviled the Mozambican country from colonialism to the civil war. Couto's argument coincides with the missions of postcolonial detectives as highlighted in Ed Christian's book, *The Postcolonial Detective*. Christian argues that among the post-colonial detective genres, "individual crime comes to be seen as a

[120] Rothwell, Phillip. 2004, p. 30.
[121] Posel, Deborah. "The TRC report: What kind of History? What Kind of Truth?" (Unpublished paper presented at the University of the Witwatersrand history Workshop; 11 – 14 June) p. 04.

symptom of, result of, or reaction to the basic flaws of political, social, and industrial system."[122] Couto's *Under the Frangipani* suggests that the assassination of Vastsome Excellency is one incident among the multiple iniquities that confront Couto's post-war Mozambique, issues that the nation needs to overcome prior to the construction of memory and its ordering in the making of history.

These multiple iniquities are coupled with problematic issues that need an extensive engagement for post-war Mozambique to emerge from its troubled background. In most of Couto's stories there is an intense urge to suggest for the recognition of the memories of colonialists in the making of history. In advocating the inclusion of a variety of voices, *Under the Frangipani* emphasizes that colonial memories should have space in the construction of collective memory, since they carry significant meanings to certain groups of people. The addition of Domingos Mourão, the Portuguese character, as Couto says, "represents a certain type of memory, a very particular connection with Mozambican land. That is part of our history, we can't simply throw it away."[123] Couto's contention is further demonstrated by Domingos Mourão's (the novel's only white character) assertion of his 'rootedness' in the Mozambican country. In a conversation with the inspector, Domingos metaphorically asserts that he is a tree that comes from another world but is grounded within the Mozambican setting. He says that he has become a "de-portugoosed"[124] and is, therefore, himself a Mozambican. His demonstrates his desire to be remembered:

[122] Christian, Ed. "Introducing the Post-Colonial detective: Putting Marginality to Work". In: *The Post-Colonial Detective*. New York: Palgrave, 2001, p. 2 Christian defines the post-colonial detective in the following manner: "the post colonial detectives are always indigenous to or settlers in the countries where they work; they are usually marginalized in some way, which affects their ability to work at their fully potential; they are always central and sympathetic characters; and their creators' interest usually lies in an exploration of how these detectives' approaches to criminal investigation are influenced by their cultural attitudes." p. 2.
[123] This information was obtained in an interview with Mia Couto that was conducted electronically.
[124] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 42.

> I gave myself up to this country like someone converted to this religion. Now I want nothing except to be a stone in this ground. But not just any stone, one of those that never gets trodden on by anybody. I want to be a roadside stone.[125]

Domingos' complaint suggests that post-war Mozambique is a complex terrain; that the process of ordering the country's past requires a consideration of its inhabitants' history. In this extract Couto's novel advances the idea that the Portuguese in Mozambique also have a right to claim ownership of the land. They have been there for many years and most of them were even born in the country. The author himself was born in Mozambique, but is of Portuguese origin. In fact, many of his readers also claim that his writing is also heavily influenced by the circumstances, cultures and traditions, and languages in Mozambique.[126] In this case, Couto highlights one of the problematic issues that the country will have to deal with before it can attempt to venture into the past for the construction of public memory.

This urge to include colonial memories in the formation of memory echoes C.L.R. James's assertion that it is impossible to imagine world history as constituted by binary conceptions "Europe" and "Africa". In the article, "A National Purpose For Caribbean Peoples," James contends that "we are essentially an international people. We have no native civilization of our own; we have no native religion – even the rastafari when they discovered that the Empire of Ethiopia was God had to go to the

[125] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 44.
[126] See the Preface in *Under the Frangipani* by Henning Mankell. Mankell says "When I first met Mia Couto some fifteen years ago, I was surprised. I had read some of his writing and was quite sure that he was an African. But he wasn't. Or, to be exact: He was indeed an African, but a white man who had been born in Africa – in Mozambique – to European parents. I need to emphasize this because one of the most challenging things about Mia Couto's work is how profoundly it manifests an African sense of how a good story should be told. He confirms that skin colour never really explains a person's cultural, artistic or philosophical dimensions." Mankell concludes her assertion by saying, "Mia Couto can be said to be a white man with an African Soul."

English Bible to prove it."[127] Although the Caribbean situation to which James refers is unique, and certainly cannot be easily linked to Africa's situation, it is important to note that it is impossible to speak of African history/past without in any way implicating the colonialist or western cultural practices. Using similar reasoning, Couto suggests in the novel that the colonial past, despite its various iniquities that led to the degradation of humanity and perpetrated hatred among racial groupings, remains rooted within the country. This implies that one cannot write the history of the country completely, without in some way implicating the impact of colonial history.[128] In other words, the colonial past has contributed to producing the present.

Couto's narrative suggests that the effacement of colonial histories is prompted by the fear of the past that is seen to contravene logic. In two of his stories, "Rosa Caramela" and "The Tale of The Two Who returned From The Dead" (in *Every Man is a Race* and *Voices Made Night* respectively) the narrators draw attention to the officials' fear of unwanted history. In "Rosa Caramela," for instance, the state officials have thought it necessary to arrest Rosa for her affinity to colonial statues. "The militia chief," who represents the officials from the capital, accuses Rosa Caramela of "venerating a colonialist," The inclination to preserve power and the will to efface certain elements of the country's history is prominent in the following paragraph, which highlights a detailed explanation of the militia chief's disapproval of Rosa's affinity with colonial statues. The narrator says:

[127] James, C. L. R. "A National Purpose for Caribbean Peoples". p. 143.
[128] See also Gilroy Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993. p. 14. Gilroy argues that history is made in the sea. He says that the confluences of ideologies, as with cultures, began during the period of slavery and continued through colonization and other forms of oppressive practices. He suggests that cultural historians of the modern world could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern and use it to produce an explicit transnational and intercultural perspective.

> [He] explained the sentence: yearning for the past. The hunchback's motives. That was the commander's judgment. If that were not so, what other reason would she have to oppose, with bodily violence, the statue's demolition? Yes indeed, because it was a foot from the past tripping up the present. It was a matter of priority that the statue should be circumcised, for the nation's honour.[129]

The effacement of the colonial statues and the subsequent arrest of Rosa Caramela allegorize a major problematic for post-war Mozambique and more generally other post-colonial states. It also indicates an argument for the inclusion of colonial relics and occurrences in the making public memory.

While in "Rosa Caramela" the speaker demonstrates the official's efforts to efface colonial history, in "The Tale of the Two Who Returned from the Dead", the narrator highlights the militia's desire to suppress fellow comrades. This story deals with the exclusion of Luís Fernando and Aníbal Mucavel from the official list of people in the village after their disappearance during the time of floods in their village. The officials believed that these two men had died. The story begins by demonstrating the uncertainties that are brought by the sudden emergence of the past – in this case Luis and Anibal: "it is a truth: the dead ought not to return, to cross the frontier of their world. They only come and disturb our sadness. We already know for sure: so and so has gone. We comfort widows, shed all our tears."[130] The return of the past or dead to life brings fear in a society because it destabilizes the status quo and contradicts people's expectations. This fear is echoed later on the same page when the militia reacts upon being alerted to these men's sudden return. Readers will realize that when

[129] Couto, Mia. *Every Man is a Race*. p. 5.
[130] Couto, Mia. "The Tale of the Two Who Returned From The Dead". p. 71.

the official (identified by his chubbiness and colossal bellies) arrived at the scene carrying "a rifle as it were a hoe, he [the official] was trembling with fear".[131] This fear is exacerbated by the fact that Luís and Aníbal had participated in the war against the bandits who sought to conquer the village. They and Samuel, the school teacher, seem to believe that they should be treated as heroes. This emerges clearly in the conversation between Samuel and Aníbal:

> [Samuel]"*It's not fair that they should forget that, whether you're alive or dead, you still belong to our village. After all, when we had to defend it against the bandits, didn't you take up arms?*
> [Aníbal]"*That's true. I even got this scar from an enemy bullet. Here, look"*
> [Samuel]"*Everyone knows that you deserve to be counted among the living. It's fear alone that causes them to keep quiet, to accept lies".*
> [Samuel]"*these people who bedevil you are bound to fall. It is they who do not belong here, not you. Stay, my friends. Help us in our plight. We two are not considered: we are alive but it is as if we had less life, it's as if we were only halves. We don't want that*".[132]

Samuel and Aníbal's conversation highlights the desire to be recognized as human beings. Samuel's plea to Aníbal for assistance in fighting the injustices of their society highlights the confrontation between those in leadership positions and their constituents. It depicts the power of the officials. Aníbal uses the following synechdoche to demonstrate the injustices and exclusionary manner of the officials,

[131] Couto, Mia. "The Tale of the Two Who Returned From The Dead". p. 71.
[132] Couto, Mia. "The Tale of the Two Who Returned From The Dead". p. 74.

> My God, how unfair we are to our body. What part of it do we take most for granted? The feet, poor things, which drag themselves along to hold us up. It's they that bear both sadness and happiness. But as they are far from the eyes, we ignore our feet, as if they didn't belong to us. Just because we are above, we tread on our feet. That's how injustice begins in this world. Now in this case, those feet are myself and Luis, ignored, fallen amongst the dust of the rivers.[133]

This substitution of self for objects or body parts highlights the debasement of human beings. The image of eyes and feet in the extract echoes the distance between those in government, those who oversee the development of a country, and ordinary people on the ground. Thus, the story draws attention to the officials' obsession with exclusivity.

The constant reference in *Under the Frangipani* that all human beings are mulattos is an indication that the novel is keen to promote the principle of inclusivity. Mulatto comes from Spanish word for a young mule and hence a person of mixed race. Usually, "mulatto" is used to describe the offspring of a European and a person of African descent, but it may also be used for anyone of mixed race. In emphasizing that all human beings are mullatos, the narrator inevitably suggests that we are all products of hybridization, constantly borrowing from each other in our endeavors to formulate identity. In an interview Couto says, "In Mozambique mulattos are seen as those who doesn't have a banner. It is of course a racist stereotype. But it reveals a representation of a group marked by some ambiguity, and searching for their own identity. But, in the end. We are cultural mulattos. And who is the one that has found

[133] Couto, Mia. "The Tale of the Two Who Returned From The Dead". p. 73 – 74.

his entire identity?"[134] This constant emphasis on reconciling opposites is an indication that the novel critiques the method used by officialdom in constructing memory.

This allegorical portrayal of the problematic of colonial past in Couto's stories often takes quite an alien form, which displays elements of magic realist narrative. This eccentric portrayal of reality emerges strongly in the story from *Every Man is a Race*, "The Private Apocalypse of Uncle Gegue." The narrator introduces the reader to the question of the military boot, which is one of the relics that remain from the previous war in Couto's Mozambique. The military boot seemingly represents a variety of historical artifacts related to colonial memory. As readers we are told that when "he (Uncle Gegue) picked up the boot and threw it far away...a strange thing happened: hurled into the air, the boot seemed to have found its wings. It flew along in rapid gyrations. Had Uncle Gegue challenged the spirits of war?"[135] The peculiar nature of the boot demonstrates the familiarity of colonial memories and its entrenchment in the Mozambican land. Magic realism's propensity for representing a strangulated reality makes it difficult to comprehend the boot's transformation in the eyes of Uncle Gegue. This is made difficult to comprehend magical realism's propensity to render reality in strangulation.

Domingos Mourão's (the novel's only white character) intense desire to be remembered and his metaphoric expression of his entrenchment in Mozambican culture and lifestyle introduce the impact of the land and individual identities. People attach symbolic significance to the landscape and, thus it becomes an active participant in the representation process and has the capacity to transform individual

[134] The information has been obtained in a personal interview with Mia Couto, a copy of which is attached at the end.
[135]Couto, Mia. "The Private Apocalypse of Uncle Gegue". In: *Every Man is a Race*. p. 11.

identities. W. J. T. Mitchell's *Landscape and Power* questions not just what landscape is or means to people, but what it does, and how it operates as a cultural practice. He states that "landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a package and the commodity inside the package."[136] Mitchell argues further that "Landscape…doesn't merely signify or symbolize power relations, it is an instrument of cultural power, perhaps even an agent of power that is (or frequently represents itself as) independent of human intentions."[137] Mitchell's comment indicates that there is a need to read carefully the relation between the construction of memory and the landscape among the characters in Couto's *Under the Frangipani*. As indicated, Domingos speaks of the manner in which Mozambique, especially the old people's home, has changed him. He asserts, "forgive me for my Portuguese, I don't know what language I talk anymore, my grammar is all muddy, the colour of this soil. And it's not just my talk that's changed. It's may thinking too inspector."[138] These changes in language and thoughts or perceptions are attributed to the conditions in which he finds himself and the culture adhered by the elderly people. Domingos acknowledges that while "Africa robs us of our identity…it fills our being."[139] He continues, "That's why even today, I feel like setting fire to those plains. So that they may lose their eternity. So that they may leave me alone."[140] Another example of the way in which landscape impacts on people is the symbolic significance of the frangipani tree for the Portuguese character. As Rothwell notes, "In fact, the frangipani tree forms a link with his [Domingos'] past since it reminds him of autumn and the changing seasons of Europe."[141] The tree did not originate in Mozambique, "it dates back to the arrival of the Portuguese in East

[136] Mitchell, W. J. T. (ed.) *Landscape and Power*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago press, 1994, p.1-2.
[137] Mitchell, W. J. T. 1994, p.1-2.
[138] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p.42.
[139] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p.43.
[140] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p.43.
[141] Rothwell, Phillip. 2004. p. 35.

Africa and indicates their desire to take roots on the continent."[142] It seems that the colonialists wanted to surround themselves with images that reminded themselves of their origin. They had intended to transform Africa into a sub-European continent. In that way, the presence of the colonialists in Mozambique adds another dimension to the country's image. The traversion of Domingos' identity and the colonialists' restructuring of the land demonstrate the constant interaction between people and their environment. It also shows that in as much as people create monuments or reconstruct their surrounding, the environment also shapes their memories.

Beyond the critique of detective work in the construction of memory, Couto's *Under the Frangipani* confronts the creation of 'false' martyrs, through its narration, which allows for the narration of stories by people of different worlds. The narration's oscillation between these worlds challenges the officials' propensity to create 'false' heroes as a way of attempting to silence alternative or contending voices. It enables the reader to transcend official discourse by uncovering memories of the deceased. In this way, it also creates an alternative to the stories that the nationalists created, stories that would otherwise remain buried in the grave. We learn in *Under the Frangipani* that the narrator, Ermelindo Mucanga, never participated in liberation movements. He worked as a carpenter for colonial masters, as this extract clearly depicts:

> What spurred those people on, causing my death to come alive? I pried into their conversation and understood: the governors wanted to turn me into a national hero. They were wrapping me in glory. Rumour has it that I had died in battle fighting the colonial oppressor. Now they wanted my mortal remains or rather immortal remains. They needed a hero, but not just a hero one of my

[142] Rothwell, Phillip. 2004.p. 35.

> particular race, tribe and region. To satisfy discord and placate the aggrieved. They wanted to put race on display, to peel off the skin and show off the skin and show the fruit ...from being a needy, I became a needed.[143]

In the extract, Mucanga's astonishment at such sudden intrusion and bestowal challenges the illusion of accuracy or science that is propelled by the will to sustain power.

The creation of 'false heroes' is also evident in some of the stories published in his collection of short stories. In "The Swapped Medals," Zeca Tomé is erroneously elevated to the position of a national hero and awarded a medal. The messenger, who informs Zeca of the leaders' intensions to bestow him a medal in honour of his commitment to the struggle, is not interested in his denial. As the narrator says, "the messenger declared that time was shorter than his tongue, which was why haste was called for. Whichever Tomé it was, it didn't matter for the occasion."[144] In depicting some of the pitfalls of science, Couto inevitably undermines the leaders' illusion of efficiency. Clearly, the fusing of differing worlds enables the author to challenge official discourses and to promote a sense of inclusivity.

In *Under the Frangipani*, the narrator also points out that the governors were not only looking for any hero; their hero had to be of specific origin - race and ethnicity. Through this, Couto suggests that revered national martyrs are in most cases chosen and celebrated not because of their contribution to the development of society. Instead, the selection of national heroes is done strategically and their monumentalization is embodied in anxieties to construct representative public

[143] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 4.
[144] Couto, Mia. "The Swapped Medals". In: *Every Man is a Race*. p. 99.

memory and to protect the image and power of the ruling body. The novel then sets about revealing these *corrupt* methods as a way of opening space for other voices.

Under the Frangipani also questions the governors' periodical propensity to create national heroes as an act of preserving its powers and to curb 'alternative histories'. The narration's oscillation between two worlds is crafted in such a way that the reader is made aware of the inadequate methods used in the formation of public memory. In the novel, as with most stories in the two anthologies, officials cherish 'national heroes' during the moments when they aim at silencing other histories, or as a way of evading conflict. Ermelindo Mucanga says, "apart from this, a hero is like a saint. No one really and truly loves him. He is remembered in times of personal grief and national affliction. I was loved when I was alive, and I did not need this intrusion now."[145] Mucanga demonstrates not only the periodical and strategic creation of heroes, but also the politics involved in the creation of the past. He suggests that national heroes are the products of political discourses, manufactured so as to preserve the officials' space in power. This is another way in which the author seems to advance the need for inclusivity in formation of memory as the dominant methods of the officials are limited.

In narrating the limitations of the official domain, the text demonstrates the role of monuments in the creation of official memory. Monuments provide a base for the storage of histories deemed necessary by those in power. Most importantly, they serve as symbolic inscription of the officials' power, as they only reflect authorized versions of the past. This is clearly expressed in the following extract:

[145] Couto, Mia. *Under the Frangipani*. p. 4.

> Museums, like memory, mediate the past, present, and future. But unlike personal memory, which is animated by an individual's lived experience, museums give material form to authorized versions of the past, which in time become institutionalized as public memory. In this way, museums anchor memory.[146]

It is this institutionalization of memory that creates tensions between official memory and personal memories. *Under the Frangipani* suggests that such institutionalization of memory and the tendency to immortalize it, has a detrimental effect for post-war Mozambique as it tends to be biased and often emerges from politically engineered interpretations of the past.

In *Under the Frangipani*, Couto critiques the limitation of the methods adopted by officials in the formation of memory. The novel combines allegory and magic realism in an attempt to imagine the construction of official memory in post-war Mozambique. The narrative techniques adopted in the novel demonstrate the challenges facing post-war Mozambique and at the same time adopting magic realism's notion of plurality. The narration's oscillation between the world of the dead and that of the living is intended to highlight the limitation of official methods and at the same time to demonstrate the need for the recognition of the multiplicity of stories told by people of varying descents.

According to Rothwell, "In postindependence Mozambique, the dogma of the Frelimo government – based on a rhetorical fusion of scientific socialism and unifying nationalism – presupposed a totalizing truth that could logically account for all actions

[146] Davison, Patricia. "Museums and the Reshaping of Memory." In: Nuttall, Sarah and Coetzee Carli. (Eds.) *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.

and situations in morally charged binary terms, and which sought to banish the multiple perspectives on reality that Mozambique's complex, cultural syncretism offers."[147] *Under the Frangipani* challenges the officials' exclusionary instruments, while pushing for a multi-dimensional approach in the formation of memory. The novel interrogates the effectiveness of the detective process in the construction of memory. It suggests that detective processes often function as agents of officialdom fulfilling its interests in power. It questions the use of strategic criteria used in the officialdom, and seems to view them as borders protecting the interests of those in power. Its skepticism of the methods adopted by officialdom is also leveled at the domain's revered heroes and memories and its monuments. This is done by the use of a narrative technique that creates a permeable frontier between two conventional poles, the two worlds of death and life. Such undulation is made possible by the adoption of a narrator who is a dead man. This "dead" narrator is immediately magical and represents marginal voices. It writes back to the officials' version of memory, by unmasking the secrets of life. This alternation suggests that memory is omnipresent; that it always interacts with the present to such a point that one cannot separate one from the other. It suggests that memory is a product of interpretations or imagination, though at times related to an event that actually happened in the past. Most importantly it provides the reader with alternative versions of the events as a way of demonstrating the limitations of the official domain.

This tendency to highlight multiple stories and memories emerges as Couto's text advocates the inclusion of colonial memories. Couto suggests that it would be impossible to speak of Mozambique's memory without including the history of colonialism in the country. In other words, the novel argues that colonial memories

[147] Rothwell, Phillip. 2004, p. 29.

are an integral part of the Mozambican history, and they deserve recognition in the construction of the country's public memory. In the novel, this seems to be intended to highlight contending memories attending to the methods associated with the official domain. The officials' exclusionary methods are juxtaposed to the inclusive nature of oral forms adopted by old people in the novel. In the next chapter, I examine the role of orality in the formation of memory as propounded in Couto's narratives, particularly *Under the Frangipani*.