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

Ngoveni, Lawrence

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CHAPTER ONE: *Introduction and Theoretical Background*

> In the second half of the 1980s there appeared in African writing a kind of fiction which challenged the customary ontological boundaries of a hitherto broadly realist mainstream tradition, eroding the lines of demarcation between what, in Western terms, are usually designated as observed and imagined experience, material and magical phenomena, and real and fictional worlds. In this writing different and disparate worlds coexist; the elision of figurative into narrative space leads to a puzzling indeterminacy as regards where literary reality ends and metaphor begins; the relations between history and fiction are problematic; and it is hard to tell in exactly what ways and at what levels human character is constituted.[1]

> I think there is a message that is linked with the search of our identity. Even if that identity is never founded because it is a construction and a very changeable and dynamic portrait. In our case we are obliged to establish bridges between the deaths (representing the live past) and the living ones. Mozambique is a kind of veranda looking to the Indian Ocean and part of our identity is born from that contact and cultural exchanges. Identities are built not in pure features (which are always mirage) but in this traffic of differences.[2]

> *You must understand: we lack the competency to stow our dead away in a place called eternity.*
> *Our dead refuse to accept their final condition: in their disobedience, they invade our daily lives, they intrude upon us from that territory where life's law of exclusion should hold sway.*
> *The most serious consequence of such promiscuity is that death itself, held in scant respect by its lodgers, loses the fascination of total absence. Death ceases to be the most irrevocable and absolute difference between beings.*[3]

The above extracts epitomize the writings of António Emílio Leite Couto, popularly known as Mia Couto, in that they fuse conventional polarities as a way of making an intervention into the problematic of memory in post-war Mozambique. Mia Couto's novel, *Under the Frangipani*, encourages the spirit of inclusivity: a blending of differing versions of the past, limiting the monopoly of modern science by recognizing indigenous/traditional knowledge, rejecting absolutist positions, creating a conduit in which differing voices and perspectives may be heard, incorporating a diversity of experiences across gender, race, class and so forth. The novel explores the tensions between and within the 'official domain'[4] and the domain of 'the weak.'[5]

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[1] Wright, Derek. "Postmodernism As Realism: Magic History in Recent West African Fiction." In: *Contemporary African Fiction*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies. 1997, p. 181.
[2] The information has been obtained in a personal interview with Mia Couto, a copy of which is attached at the end of this research report.
[3] Couto, Mia. "Rosalinda's journey to neverness." In: *Every Man is a Race*. Oxford: Heinemann. 1994, p.25.
[4] This thesis follows Adam Ashforth's conception of 'official domain(s)' as bureaucratic structures of governance involved in the ruling systems. This is a domain that believes in rationality, science and exclusivity. Ashforth, Adam. *The Politics of Official Discourses in Twentieth-Century South Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon press, 1990.
[5] The concept of the weak has been adapted from James Scott. Scott uses the concept to refer to the working class. (Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 29)

This thesis follows Adam Ashforth's conception of 'official domain(s)' as bureaucratic structures of governance involved in the ruling systems. The concept of the weak has been adapted from James Scott as he analyses peasants' resistance against exploitation. While Scott's use of the concept mainly refers to unskilled working class people, this study will henceforth use it to mean marginalized groups whose stories or memories remain on the periphery. Through this exploration of the tension between the authorities and masses, Couto suggests the need for the syncretization of a diversity of tools in the formation of memory. A reading of Couto's texts requires a constant awareness of the multiple narrative strategies that he deploys to shed light on the problem of memory. This approach results in a unique, suggestive, powerful and most importantly a wide-ranging narrative that provides a rich imagination of post-war Mozambique.

In the novel, the old people's home serves as a setting in which the tension between institutionalized and popular versions of the past manifests. This conflict emerges clearly as Izidine Naíta, a police officer, investigates the murder of Vastsome Excellency, a director of the old people's home. Vastsome represents the corrupt and brutal leadership of modern-states. He "is a caricature of the new type of leaders, new elite that emerged after the war, characterized by an outstanding appetite for power."[6] Izidine and his investigation epitomize officials' obsession with power, logic, exclusionary and conventional modern ways of reconstructing the past. These characters are the catalysts through which Couto exposes the greediness and power of modern governments and states. These are institutions that Jane Starfield says "can,

[6] The information has been obtained in a personal interview with Mia Couto, a copy of which is attached at the end of this research report.

should they feel that their version of the past is elemental to their staying in power,"[7] circulate their historical accounts through their various mediums. However, as Jane Starfield assets, "official history has an implicit articulation with other, less powerful, but no less competitive, versions."[8] In *Under the Frangipani*, the ruling body's domination in the production of memory is subverted by the construction of a permeable frontier between the dead and the living. This becomes possible with the adoption of a dead narrator whose spirit occupies part of Izidine's brain. The old people's stories further defy Izidine's attempts to solve the crime by refusing to be pinned down to a single perspective and context. Instead of responding to his investigation, the old people invite Izidine to their memories. Izidine also finds it difficult to record their stories because he does not understand their language, and often they discourage him from writing, preferring their stories to remain in the oral medium.

This conflict between the conventions of modern states and popular beliefs is a universal phenomenon and derives from multiple factors. In the Mozambican context, this conflict was prompted by modernity's increasing dominance over indigenous norms. According to Harry West, "from the settlements of the pre-independence period to the villages of the post independence period, sorcery has been considered an essential medium of power; the powerful, quite simply, have been assumed to act within the invisible realm."[9] Richard Petraitis draws attention to the use of African traditional healers during Mozambique's civil war that began in 1975 and continued till the early 1990s. He says that "RENAMO (*Resistência Nacional de Moçambique*)

[7] Starfield, Jane. "For Future Reference": The Mamathola Removal of 1958 and the Making of Apartheid". (Unpublished paper presented at the University of the Witwatersrand history Workshop; 6 – 10 February, 1990) p. 1.
[8] Starfield, J. p. 1.
[9] West, Harry. "Sorcery of Construction and Socialist Modernization: Ways of Understanding Power in Postcolonial Mozambique". *American Ethnologist* 28 (1): 119 – 150. 2001, p. 121.

fighters used healers to prepare their bodies with herbs before battles. These herbs were meant to act as a type of magical bulletproof vest for soldiers."[10] According to "rationalists" this dependence on magic is problematic for in their view, it led to the death of millions of people in Africa. FRELIMO (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*) sought to discourage this belief in the power of sorcery. As West argues, FRELIMO's mission was not only to depose the colonial regime, "but, also, dramatically to transform Mozambican society and the operations of power within it."[11] FRELIMO intended to deconstruct Mozambicans' belief in the power of witchcraft by means of introducing a modern social lifestyle. The enforcement of modernity through forced villagization, the abolition of chieftaincies and indoctrination into "scientific socialism" and so forth, as an effort to convert the Mozambicans, was not well received by many of the country's citizenry. As a result, many Mozambicans believed that the increasing dominance of modern practices is the manifestation of "hidden and destructive forces of sorcery."[12] Following Max Marwick, West asserts that "rapid social changes are likely to cause an increased preoccupation with beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft."[13] This continued dependence on sorcery means that power relations continue to be framed by such beliefs.

Scott draws out attention to forms of peasant resistance or rather what he calls, "weapons of the weak."[14] Scott emphasizes the need to understand what he calls "everyday forms of resistance". He says that these mundane, but constant resistances are not directed at the state officials. Instead they are aimed at the immediate boss –

[10] Petraitis, Richard. "Africa's Curse: Magical Beliefs". In: *The Reall News*. Vol. 8 (4) April 2000, p. 6.
[11] West, Harry. 2001, p. 121.
[12] West, Harry. 2001, p. 121.
[13] West, Harry. 2001, p. 121.
[14] Scott uses the phrase to refer to some of the modes and forms that he argue are adopted by powerless people in resisting against their immediate *bosses* (Scott, C. James. p. 29)

"those who seek to extract labour, food, rents, and interests from them."[15] Scott argues that these weapons of the weak – foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth – are unlikely to do more than marginally affect the various forms of exploitation that peasants confront.[16] He also observes that these forms of peasant rebellion "require little or no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms."[17] Scott's analysis of methods used by masses in defiance of official domination is significant in examining ways in which the old people in the novel subvert detective work.

Mozambique has an extended history of perennial violence, which emerged as a result of the nationalist struggle and civil war.[18] Couto positions the text in post-war circumstances as the country attempts to come to terms with its past. In an interview, he says that although the end of the war marked the turning point in the history of the country, both social and political, there were certain "wounds" that remained unattended.[19] Although Couto is not explicit about these, it is clear that the text attempts to explore the complications involved in remembering violence, and the tension involved in the construction of memory, particularly that between and within the ruling body and the masses. Although, as Phillip Rothwell points out, "*Under the Frangipani* is at some level a reflection on what the civil war had done to the nation,"[20] it deals greatly with the constitution of memory in post-war Mozambique.

[15] Scott, C. James, p. 29.
[16] Scott, C. James, p. 29.
[17] Scott, C. James, p.29.
[18] Chabal, Patrick. *The Postcolonial Literature of Lusophone Literature*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996, p. 80
[19] The information has been obtained in a personal interview with Mia Couto, a copy of which is attached at the end.
[20] Rothwell, Phillip. *A Postmodern Nationalist: Truth Orality, and Gender in the Works of Mia Couto.* Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004, p. 31.

In a study of poetry produced in former Portuguese colonies in Africa and their involvement in combating the atrocities of colonialism, Joane Collemanice reminds us that "African literature in Portuguese language is not dissimilar to creative writing in European languages from other parts of formerly colonized Africa," owing to the fact that it came out as the product of an African elite, and their rebellion against colonialism.[21] However, Collemanice does recognize that "while independence of the great majority of African nations was the product of political evolution…in Portuguese Africa, liberation came about only through revolution."[22] Mozambique was to witness the colonial war fought between FRELIMO and the Portuguese regime, and after gaining independence from Portugal in 1975, the country was "battered by conflicts involving its government's ideology, ranked by insurgency, and devastated by drought."[23] Yet, in *Under the Frangipani*, the author does not attempt to figure the impact of violence *per se*, but how violent occurrences are remembered or/and suppressed.

This study deals with the manner in which Couto's *Under the Frangipani*, written in post-war circumstances, make an intervention into the popular debate on memory and how memory is manipulated to suit certain missions as well as the manner in which memories of the weak find space in the making of collective memory. It also attempts to expand and in the same vein to complicate further the manner in which fictional narratives engage with the processes of memory. Couto stretches the theme of violence in Mozambican literature by figuring the complexities of memory. This consolidates the observation that Couto has not only pioneered the emergence of a

[21] Collemanice, J. E. *A Study of African Literary Expression in the Portuguese Language: Poetry and Liberation*. USA: University Microfilms International, 1979, p. i.
[22] Collemanice, J. E, p.i.
[23] Hume, Cameron. *Ending Mozambique's War: The Role of Mediation and Good Office*. Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1994, p. 3.

relatively "new" genre in Mozambique, but also points to a new direction of literary representation. Although it is difficult to make this kind of a postulation since most studies on Mozambican literature are in the Portuguese language, owing to the fact that the country is a former Portuguese colony, there are a handful of publications in English which this study draws on for a background on Mozambican literature. Russell G. Hamilton, Joane E. Collemanice, and Donald Burness provide a useful background to Lusophone literature published during the colonial regime.[24]

According to Hamilton the literary arena in Mozambique was dominated by poetry as a genre at the time. Most literatures that were produced then came out in the form of poetry, which was aimed at challenging the atrocities of the Portuguese regime.[25] Patrick Chabal points out that this was so because "it [poetry] was the medium most likely to elude censorship."[26] Hamilton singles out Luis Bernardo Honwana as one of the first writers in Mozambique to have introduced short story writing into the national literature.[27] He contends that Honwana's one modest collection of short stories, *Nos matamos o cao tinhoso*, "has set a direction for the modern prose fiction in Mozambique."[28] Mia Couto's novels are among the first to be written in Mozambique. Couto did not only pioneer the emergence of a relatively 'new genre' in Mozambique, but also crafted a unique mode of representation. In making an intervention into the problematic of memory, Couto's narratives dismantle ontological conventions, defamiliarize reality, and highlight contending voices so as to demonstrate the intricacy involved in the formation of memory and the need for diversity in its recollection.

[24] It is important to emphasize that the project does not use Mia Couto's writing to trace the history of Lusophone literature (even though at times this study draws on earlier studies on Mozambican literature); neither does it claim to exhaust the multiple facets of Mozambican literature.
[25] Hamilton, R. G. *Voices from an Empire*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975, p. 214.
[26] Chabal, Patrick, p. 75.
[27] Hamilton, R. G, p. 213.
[28] Hamilton, R. G, p. 213.

Couto's innovative narrative style and approach to the problematic of memory locates his works among contemporary fiction writers in Africa, such as Ben Okri, Sony Labou Tansi, and M. G. Vassanji. This is a group of writers that emerged in the mid-1980s and are known for their experimental narrative approach. As with most contemporary writers in Africa and the diaspora, Couto's writing "signals a clean break with the nationalist literature of the [late] colonial period."[29] It attempts to pave a novel form of imagining the process of remembering in post-independence Mozambique. Couto's narratives suggest that the realities of the country are complex and as a result the constitution of memory requires the recognition of a range of voices that form the country's history.

The fact that the narrator of the novel is a dead man, makes it easier for the narrative to merge differing worlds and, consequently, to highlight various points of view. As Mashishi has noted, the adoption of non-linear narrative in contemporary writing in Africa "shows that history is not merely linear, but quite arbitrary and intricate."[30] As a result of the adoption of this narrative strategy, a monolithic narrative logic is clearly undermined and reality is narrated from different angles. This is also in line with Mashishi's observation that Tansi's works provide an "ideological act of representation which presents alternative ways of seeing or reading social process in a post-colony."[31]

Couto's inclusion of a variety of narrative techniques is mirrored in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. Alatubosun Ogunsanwo observes that Ben Okri's *The Famished*

[29] Mashishi, Thapelo. *Narrating Post-colonial Crisis: The Post-colonial State and The Individual in the Works of Sony Labou Tansi* (M. A. Research Report) Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1999, p. 3.
[30] Mashishi, Thapelo. 1999. p. 3.
[31] Mashishi, Thapelo. 1999. p. 3.

Road aims at revealing a diversity of narrative dimensions and cultural interdiscursivity.[32] Ogunsawo demonstrates the combination of African and European modes of representation in Okri's works. He contends that although some of the figures scripted in Ben Okri's novel – such as the story of the *abiku* (a spirit child) – are similar to those given treatment by other Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka: "Okri's novel aims to explore the ontology of the *abiku*."[33] "As a result, "the text avoids the conventional division between terrestrial reality and the 'other reality,' between the 'factual' and the 'mythical,' just as postmodernism defies conventions and crosses the boundaries between history and fiction, and by extension between life and art."[34] This allows the narrative to cut across boundaries, and in the process provide space for multiplicity. In Couto's novel, the narrator's oscillation between the world of the dead and that of the living seems to achieve a similar effect in that it allows the process of remembering to transcend an empirical rendition of the past to cover aspects of the past that remains peripheral.

In Couto's narrative, this interdiscursivity also emerges in his crafting of hybridized characters. This is mainly because his narratives seem to be shaped chiefly by the belief that "every man is a race;" that collective identities are deceptive since each person is unique. For instance, the narrator in the short story, "Rosa Caramela" describes the hunchback protagonist as "a mixture of all the races."[35] The narrator says that "her body crossed many a continent."[36] As a result of their globalized stature, characters bring experiences and memories of differing nature into the narrative.

[32] Ogunsanwo, Alatubosun. "Intertextuality and Post-Colonial Literature in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*." In: *Reasearch in African literature***.** Vol. 26(1) 1995, p. 41.
[33] Ogunsanwo, Alatubosun. 1995, p. 44.
[34] Ogunsanwo, Alatubosun. 1995, p. 44.
[35] Couto, Mia. "Rosa Caramela." *Every Man is a Race*. p. 1.
[36] Couto, Mia. "Rosa Caramela." *Every Man is a Race*. p. 1.

Although some scholars such as Fiona Goncalves criticize Couto's characterization, this pioneering portrayal also contributes to the development of his wide-ranging narrative. Goncalves has criticized Couto's inscription of the Mozambican citizens in the short stories. In "Narrative Strategies in Mia Couto's *Terra Sonâmbula*" she contends that "Couto's earlier stories [in *Voices Made Night*] tended to inscribe Mozambican subjects as victims arrested in contorted postures of delusion and despair."[37] Although Karima Effendi finds Goncalves' argument reasonable, and concurs that Couto's characters are indeed deluded and somehow consumed by the emptiness of their environs, she maintains that it is through such portrayal that the author is able to transcend the stereotypical representation of the poor. She says: "as readers we are not only asked to marvel at people's poverty, but at the extent to which conditions of severe poverty and suffering are able to inform their distorted view of reality."[38] Although Goncalves slightly differs with Effendi, she seems also to acknowledge Effendi's point, for she explicitly admires the manner in which Mia Couto "maps the psychic terrain they [characters] explore by venturing through the postcolonial deformations of their war devastated present" in *Terra Sonâmbula* [*The Sleep-walking Land*].[39] Goncalves' description of the manner in which Couto maps the psychic terrain in *Terra Sonâmbula* is germane to his second novel, *Under the Frangipani*. In *Under the Frangipani*, this terrain emerges through the use of storytelling. The terrain also assists in fulfilling the author's desire to include multiple contending voices.

[37] Goncalves, Fiona. "Narrative Strategies in Mia Couto's *Terra Sonâmbula*". *Current Writing* 7(1) 1995, p. 60.
[38] Effendi, Karima. "Mia Couto's Voices Made Night as an Alternative Response to the "Historical Imagination". *Interaction* 5 (1996), p. 99.
[39] Goncalves, Fiona, p. 60.

Another form of narration that identifies contemporary writing is the overt disputation of absoluteness or dogmatic viewpoints. In Couto's narratives, a story is recited from different angles that are constantly in conflict with each other. The story continuously generates numerous perspectives or *truths*. It is also important to note that while Ben Okri's Azaro is able to "apprehend both worlds simultaneously and finds them both real,"[40] Couto's narrator is often confronted by uncertainties perpetuated by the contradictory circumstances of both worlds depicted in the novel. This is similar to Dan Ojwang's observation that "in *The Gunny Sack*, Moyez Vassanji scripts a story that provides the conditions for, and launches into, its own critique."[41] This form of narration challenges the idea of one dimensional representation that is prevalent among certain nationalist and post-colonial writers. Couto does not necessarily script a meta-narrative. His is an attempt to demonstrate the need to open space for contending voices, to include as many perspectives as possible in the formation of memory.

In her book, *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and The Crises of Historical Memory*, Nancy J. Peterson grapples with Toni Morrison's deliberately antihistorical approach in her writings, whilst she is interested in writing historical novels.[42] The elderly people's attitude to Izidine's investigation and their emphasis on the spontaneity of memory typifies this deliberate tendency to script what would seem to be an antihistorical text. The elderly people believe that it is not important to search for the past because it remains part of people's daily existence.

[40] Ogunsanwo, Alatubosun. "Intertextuality and Post-Colonial Literature in Ben Okri's The Famished Road". 1995, p. 44.
[41] Ojwang, D. O. *Writing Migracy and Ethnicity: The Politics of Identity in East African Indian Literature*. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, 2004, p. 287.
[42] Peterson, Nancy J. *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory*. Philadelphia: University of Pennysylvania Press, 2001, p. 56.

As with most contemporary fiction in Africa, Couto's narratives combine allegory and magic realism in representing the past. The use of allegory in the text is intertwined with some of the established modes of magic realism. This study does not intend to categorize Mia Couto as a magic realist *per se*, but is interested in the manner in which magic realism supplements the metaphorical depiction of the process of remembering in post-war Mozambique and most importantly in the manner in which it enables the narrative to be written from different perspectives. The form of narration adopted in the novel, for instance, typifies magic realist texts' propensity to adopt a "double sided mirror"[43] which reflects, and at times collates, two worlds. The fact that the narrator of the novel is a dead man enables the narrative, as Couto himself acknowledges, "to be written from both sides of the frontier."[44]

According to Chesca Long-Innes, the association of Couto's works with magic realism is premised on what has continually been observed as "a peculiar blend of fantasy and reality which runs through all his [Couto's] fiction."[45] On the basis of this observation Deirdre Byrne observes that Couto's mode has much in common with the great South American master of magic realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez: "Couto records with the unruffled uniformity of diction supernatural and mythical incidents along with the day-to-day dilemmas of Mozambique."[46] Nonetheless other scholars, such as Stephen Gray, skeptically caution against the hasty categorization of Mia Couto's writing as magic realism: "while he [Gray] acknowledges the fantastical elements in Couto's prose, he suggests we take care not to overrate it."[47] Long-Innes

[43] Faris, B. Wendy. "Scheherazade's Children: Magic Realism and Postmodern Fiction." In: *Magic Realism: Theory, History, Community***.** (Eds.) Zamora L. P. and Faris B. W. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995, p. 172.
[44] The information has been obtained in a personal interview with Mia Couto.
[45] Long-Innes, Chesca. "The Psychopathology of Post-colonial Mozambique: Mia Couto's *Voices Made Night*". In: *American Imago*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 1. 1998, 158.
[46] Byrne, Deirdre. "Versions of Transgression: Recent South African Writing." *Current Writing*, Vol. 4. 1992, 143 – 148.
[47] Long-Innes, Chesca. 1998, 158.

adds that "to this critic [Gray], Couto's use of fantasy is best understood as a form of stylistic embellishment, the function of which is to temper the impact of fictions 'grounded in social realities often too strong to take without some decoration: child abuse, marital cruelty, structural violence'."[48] Following Gray's skepticism, Fiona Goncalves believes that "it would be inadequate to categorize his [Couto's] fiction as magical Realism."[49] She prefers instead the concept "dialogic integration" – a term which embraces "narrative interaction, identity transversion, image transformation, and linguistic innovation."[50] Long-Innes argues that the inclination to categorize Mia Couto's peculiar blend of fantasy and reality is explicable through a consideration of its psychoanalytic perspective. He suggests that one can best make sense of Couto's use of fantasy if it can be thought of not so much as a product of 'magic realist' poetics, but "as 'naturalized' or motivated as a function of the collective neurosis of a society traumatized by its continuing history of poverty and extreme violence."[51] While this research report accepts Long-Innes' view, it submits that it would be logical not to deny the association of Couto's narratives with magic realism, since some of the stories seemingly reflect some of the established modes of the technique.

Despite the apparent defamiliarization of reality in Couto's writing, the inscription of Mozambicans is, as Effendi observes, "grounded on a conscious and clear sense of the Mozambican reality."[52] This argument echoes Patrick Chabal's assertion that although the stories are "never overtly tragic, Mia Couto's *contos* nevertheless discloses the tragedy of contemporary Mozambique concretely and powerfully."[53] Effendi argues strongly that Couto's fiction provides an alternative and more creative re-reading of

[48] Long-Innes, Chesca. 1998, 158.
[49] Goncalves, Fiona. 1995, p. 61.
[50] Goncalves, Fiona. 1995, p. 61.
[51] Long-Innes, Chesca. 1998, p.159.
[52] Effendi, Karima, p. 99.
[53] Chabal, Patrick, p.79.

Mozambican reality and history.[54] Indeed, as Michael Chapman notes, "the systematic violence and impoverishment of a country locked in civil strife between FRELIMO and RENAMO is felt everywhere in Couto's stories..."[55] In *Under the Frangipani*, it is clear in the narrative and thematic concerns that the author seeks to make an intervention in the representation of the past by focusing primarily on the problematic of memory. He seems to be interested in narrating the difficulty of constructing memory in a war-torn Mozambique and at the same time highlighting the need for the recognition of a diversity of voices. Thus, it is difficult to ignore how central the metaphoric depiction of Mozambique's complex history is to Couto's narratives. Yet, it is equally important to note the stories' urge to highlight contending voices, beliefs and practices.

In reading Couto's novel as an allegory of post-war Mozambique, this study has attempted to clarify the allegorical text's intervention in socio-political debates. Most scholars who have attempted to study the allegorical text, such as Deborah Madsen, James Ogude, and Stephen Slemon have identified the allegorical text's strong dependency on the past. While their argument is fundamental in opening discussion around the subject of allegory, not much has been done to interrogate the manner in which the allegorical text imagines and complicates memory. *Under the Frangipani* not only raises the reader's awareness of the past, but it also crafts a fresh form that imagines the tensions involved in the construction of such a past. In its metaphoric depiction of post-war Mozambique, it altogether disregards the linear form of narrative. Couto dedicates much space to the testimonies rendered by the characters.

[54] Effendi, Karima, p.98 (Effendi's argument is echoed by Andre Brink in his article, "stories of history: re-imagining the past in the post-apartheid narrative": In: *Negotiating The Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. (eds.) Nuttall, S. and Carli Coetzee. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 30)

[55] Chapman, Michael. "Angola and Mozambique. National Ideas and Pragmatic Realities". In: *Southern African Literature*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, p. 291.

His characters are themselves both the centre of memory and symbols of the negation of the past in Mozambique.

However, it is vital to underscore that this reading of Couto's *Under the Frangipani* as an allegory of post-war Mozambique is largely indebted to the above-mentioned scholars. Deborah L. Madsen's book, *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre*, traces the different definitions of the concept and the way in which it is often applied in literary studies as a means of bringing the methodological advances of post structuralism into the field of genre theory. Inspired by her assertion that "what one reader means by allegory is not necessarily shared by the next reader,"[56] Madsen identifies two ways in which allegory is understood: firstly, she mentions the classical Greek, Roman, and Judaistic models, which identify allegory as "a species of rhetoric that operates in the same way as metaphor;"[57] secondly she writes of allegory as metonymy, one that has been "developed as part of the typological explication of the two biblical testaments by the Gospel writers and latter patristic exegetes."[58] Perhaps a clearer distinction between the two ways in which allegory is understood is that the former (allegory as metaphor) operates as a kind of a code, which is laden with external or extrinsic meaning. In the latter (allegory as metonymy), Madsen says, "Allegorical meaning was transformed from an extrinsic and arbitrary significance imported to the text and became an intrinsic and mystical core of meaning embedded on the text by God and perceptible to divinely inspired readers."[59] The refuge for old people in Couto's novel has been coded in such a way that it is weighed with external meanings, symbolising post-war circumstance as imagined by the author, particularly the way in which memory is constituted and used in ordering history. Allegory as

[56] Madsen, L. Deborah. *Rereading of Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre*. New York: ST. Martin's Press, 1994, p. 2.
[57] Madsen, L. Deborah, p. 1.
[58] Madsen, L. Deborah, p. 1.
[59] Madsen, L. Deborah, p. 3.

metaphor, therefore, seems to be a suitable way of reading Couto's *Under the Frangipani.*

James Ogude's book, *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*, subscribes to the popular understanding of allegory as metaphor. Following Stephen Slemon, Ogude aligns himself with the theoretical assumption that allegory is a popular mode for recuperating the past and ordering history.[60] He writes that "the allegorical text...is bound to the authority of the past and is often deployed in the service of ordering historical narratives."[61] It is possible to read Couto's novel, *Under the Frangipani*, as an allegorical text that creates an awareness of the past, but it is equally important to note that the text also provides an image of the tensions involved in the construction of such past. Therefore, allegory in Couto's text serves mainly two functions: firstly, that of raising the awareness of the Mozambican past; secondly, that of providing an account of the tensions surrounding the construction of such past in the present, a phenomenon that is demonstrated also by the tendency to fuse the world of the dead with that of the living.

Ogude's book is also interesting in the manner in which it appropriates Walter Benjamin's idea of allegory as metaphor. In reading Ngugi's novels, Ogude argues that "in periods of fragmentation and displacement, allegory is often the mode best suited for piecing history together."[62] Ogude contends that for Ngugi, who is a product of a settler colony, characterised by land alienation and dispossession, "allegorical writing...must have opened up the possibility of transformation...a means

[60] Ogude, *James. Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. London: Pluto Press, 1999, p. 45.
[61] Ogude, James. 1999, p. 45. (see, Slemon, Stephen. "Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing". In: *Kunapipi*, 9: 3 (1987) p.4 -5.)
[62] Ogude, James. 1999, p. 45.

of rereading the imperial myths and their social agents in the postcolonial state."[63] I argue that *Under the Frangipani*'s use of allegory is intended to reflect upon the tensions that may hinder such emergence. And it seems to me that Couto chose to focus on the construction of memory, mainly because it exerts a major impact in sustaining the culture and history of a country.

Memory and its construction in the present, therefore, form an integral dimension of Couto's narratives. In the following section the manner in which memory has been studied and theorized in recent years is considered. Although my aim was to focus on literary materials published in the southern region of Africa, David Thelen's article, "Memory and American History", which was published as an introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of American History*, is fairly useful in engaging with the processes of memory in Couto's *Under the Frangipani*. It assists in understanding how memory is constituted, the motives that accompany such constitution, and how culture determines the manner in which memory is recovered and figured among the characters. Thelen says, "in each construction of memory, people reshape, omit, distort, combine, and reorganise…details with elements from different periods in the past."[64] These distortions, omissions, and figurations of memory are the consequence of both internal and external influences, some of which are mentioned above. The synthesis of the world of the dead with that of the living in *Under the Frangipani* demonstrates the manner in which such selective methods are likely to happen, and how in turn they are likely to lead on to the formation of "mythico-history."[65] Thelen

[63] Ogude, James. 1999, p. 46.
[64] Thelen, David. "Introduction: Memory and American History". In: *Journal of American History*. 75, 4, 1989, p. 1120.
[65] See Malkki, Liisa H. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania***.** Chicago & London: The University of Chicago. 1995

also reminds us that the constitution of memory is relatively determined by the time at which it takes place, and mostly "in response to the changing circumstances."[66]

While Thelen generally covers most of the technologies used in the construction of memory, Adam Ashforth focuses specifically on how political motives shape this construction. In his article, "The Xhosa Cattle Killing and the Politics of Memory", Ashforth engages with the multiple interpretations attending to the famous story of Nongqawuse and the demise of the Xhosa kingdom. He identifies three versions of the story as articulated by the colonialists, the Xhosa chiefs and the missionaries. Although he focuses on these three versions of Nongqawuse's story, Ashforth does not rule out the possibility that there could be other versions, but emphasizes the idea that "everyone who knows the story it seems has a way of telling it to further some more or less political objectives."[67] The two observations of Thelen and Ashforth – that the construction of memory is extremely influenced by the dynamics of time and that it is contested through political motives – are useful in analysing the manner in which time and motive shape the construction of memory by Couto's characters.

In addition to both Thelen and Ashforth's conception of technology and politics of memory, Soyinka highlights the difficulty of thinking of memory in terms of distance. Wole Soyinka's question – "how far back should memory reach? how deeply into the recesses of the past?"[68] – may seem to be unproblematic. This is particularly if one considers Thelen's observation of the selective manner in which memory is constructed: the distortions, omissions, and figurations, all of which make it almost impossible even to conceive of memory in terms of distance and boundaries. In fact,

[66] Thelen, David, p. 1118.
[67] Ashforth, Adam. "The Xhosa Cattle Killing and the Politics of Memory". In: *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1991, p.581.
[68] Soyinka, Wole. "Memory, Truth, and Healing". In: Amadiume, I & An'na'im, A. (eds.) *The Politics Of Memory: Truth, Healing & Social Justice*. 2000, p. 21.

for Soyinka "the answer that springs spontaneously to mind is that memory is not governed by the statute of limitations, and that collective memory is the very warp and weft of the tapestry of history that makes society."[69] However, this study considers it as a profound question that demands scholarly attention, and cannot be subjected to a singular response owing to the complexities of the process of memory. The permeable frontier between life and death, the contradictory testimonies of the old people, and the refusal to abide to linear form of narrative in Couto's *Under the Frangipani* transcends the question of distance by unmasking the secrets of death and making it appear as part of the present; by challenging scientific methods of recuperating the past; and by distorting chronological forms of narration.

These issues also challenge the possibility of periodizing memory. Richard Terdiman's book, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, is interesting to consider in regard to the proposed interaction between the past and the present. According to Terdiman, "memory is the modality of our relation to the past," "it is the faculty that sustains continuity in collective and individual memory," and it is a means through which the past reveals itself to, and shapes, the present. [70] Memory is seen to be ubiquitous, and assists in providing meaning to the present. Terdiman believes that memory's tendency to become intertwined with cognitive processes makes the resultant generation of meaning highly intricate. He believes that one way to deal with recollection of the past is to historicize it.[71] He argues that "seeing the phenomenon of memory as itself 'differentiated in time,' as localizable in some internally segmented temporal series, may provide some definition of the problematic that memory

[69] Soyinka, Wole, p. 21.
[70] Terdiman, Richard. *Present Past: Modernity and The Memory Crisis*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 7.
[71] Terdiman, Richard, p. 9.

establishes."[72] As with Richard Mitten, Couto's *Under the Frangipani*, however seems to subvert Terdiman's argument by suggesting that "memory is inherently sketchy, reconstructive, and unlocalizable."[73] It is important to note that Couto's text imagines memory to be omnipresent and implies that it is fictionally constructed so as to demonstrate the inconsistent nature of memory's origin and the difficulty of periodizing it.

In Southern Africa, any discussion of the generation of memory would be incomplete without reference to the post-apartheid South African body politic and civil society's engagement with individual and community memory at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC has attracted numerous scholarly responses internationally and locally, which contributed to the debate on the processes of memory and the making of collective memory. There are three main issues that seem to have attracted a consortium of scholars and critics: firstly, is the commission's insistence on the truth, which was seen by many to ignore the complexities attending to the formulation of memory; secondly, is the idea that testimonies were rendered orally and publicly; lastly, some scholars questioned the commission's ability to deal with trauma.

Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee's book, published at the time when the TRC was still in progress, is constituted of diverse articles that make an intervention into the process of remembrance, forgetting and forgiveness and the making of history, but implicitly respond to the question posed by Soyinka above. While all the articles are useful, I am particularly interested in Andre Brink's article, "Stories of History: Reimagining the

[72] Terdiman, Richard, p. 9.
[73] Mitten, Richard. "Minerva's Owl also Flies by Day: on History, Memory and Identity in Contemporary Austria". In: *How to Remember things with Words: A Colloquium on Language, Truth and the Past*. Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, 1997, p. 7.

Past in Post-apartheid Narrative". Although Nuttall and Coetzee argue that the article "can be read as a theorization of his [Brink's] own recent creative writing,"[74] this research report focuses in the way in which it engages with fiction's intervention into the continuing debate on memory. Brink believes that fiction offers an "alternative recitation of the past."[75] In re-telling the past, fiction is able to re-order the history of the Mozambican people by transcending their differing worlds. For this reason, this study examines the ways in which the past is told in Couto's *Under the Frangipani*.

The second chapter of the study examines Mia Couto's imagination of the construction of official memory and its subsequent tension with unofficial memory. It tackles the novel's portrayal and subversion of the elite's obsession with exclusionary methods of recovering the past. The officials, who remain unidentified in the novel (with the exception of Izidine and Vastsome), are preoccupied with inventing 'new' histories while at the same time effacing certain memories through strategic investigation. The ruling body, in *Under the Frangipani*, seems to privilege a particular mode of resuscitating and reciting the past. In the novel, officials seem to privilege the process of investigation as an effective mode of recovering the memories of the day Vastsome Excellency was killed; that of finding out the individual or a group of people responsible for the murder. The edifice of this investigation is maintained through labelling (the tagging of past events), which comes with certain authorized meanings. The notes that Izidine makes throughout his research are to be documented and considered not only as evidence but also as history. The novel seems to suggest that the officials' approach confines memory and history to certain frameworks constructed in their interest. Izidine's investigation, therefore, appears to

[74] Nutall, Sarah and Coetzee Carli. (eds.) In: *Negotiating the past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 3.
[75] Kim, Jodi. "Haunting History: Violence, Trauma, and the politics of Memory in Nora Okja Keller's Comfort Woman." In: *Hitting Critical Mass*. Vol.06, No. 1. 1999, p. 61.

function as a tool through which memories that underwrite the power of the nationalists are created. This reading of the text assists in understanding its portrayal and subversion of the officials' obsession with the logic and lust for power and the novel's emphasis on the conflation of various elements in the formation of memory.

The third chapter explores the centrality of storytelling in "ordinary" people's construction of memory and their subversion of officialdom's methods. Stories are part of our everyday conversations. We make sense of the surrounding environment through stories. In telling stories, we are able to transcend putative boundaries, and therefore subvert accepted conventional logics. Storytelling also allows characters to go beyond their immediate environments into the world of dreams. The novel suggests that storytelling is one of the most effective tools in the formation of memory because it is able to fuse a variety of stories by allowing the narrative to oscillate between varying worlds. The old people in the novel rely on storytelling in their endeavors to resuscitate the memories of Vastsome Excellency's demise. For old people in the novel, memory is, as Couto himself puts it, "not a faithful reproduction of the past, but its reconstruction by fictional mechanism."[76] The novel seems to be shaped by this view in that it creates a permeable frontier between the world of the dead and that of the living, a practice often associated with magic realism. Ermelindo Mucanga, the primary narrator's textual resuscitation after his physical death, seems to demonstrate that memory exists in, and interacts with, the present. This interaction between past and present shapes the old people's construction of their memories and how they subvert the methodical way in which the officials construct memory. Through the use of storytelling, the novel provides space for merging a diversity of historical accounts.

[76] The information has been obtained in a personal interview with Mia Couto, a copy of which is attached at the end of this research report.

Since the old people rely on storytelling to construct memory, orality becomes significant in shaping these characters' consciousness of their past. In response to Izidine's investigation, the old characters divert from his questions, and focus on their fragmented 'personal memories', ranging from childhood experiences, family histories, their perceptions of the environment in which they find themselves (sometimes in contrast with where they originated), and traditional customs. In doing so, they rely on oral forms such as proverbs and mythologies. Orality, therefore, seems to perform a significant role in framing their memories. Most importantly, it allows the narrative to create a space where differing worlds and viewpoints coexist and as a result create a world that values multiplicity.

In the concluding chapter, this study argues that while the novel points towards diversification by attempting to blur the binaries of people's existence, it is itself unable to transcend them. In its effort to foster the spirit of inclusivity by dissuading the focus of the investigation and opening space for the old people's stories, the novel seems to give weight to the stories of the elderly people. In other words the novel remains biased in favour of the elderly people's stories and as a result sustains the very same binaries it attempts to discourage. The question of hybridization in the formation of memory is to some extent simplistic, because it claims that all forms of memory are valid or useful in the formation of the country. This chapter will therefore also question such urge for diversification.

It is also important to note that although Mia Couto has written and published extensively, only two volumes of his short stories (*Voices Made Night* and *Every Man is a Race*) and two novels (*Under the Frangipani* and *The Last Flight of Flamingo*)

have been translated into English. It seems to me that there are commonalities in the manner in which some of the stories engage with the contestation of memory in a post-colony, and I have tended to draw on some of them in the hope of illuminating the discussion.