

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
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CHALLENGING BOUNDARIES IN *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH* AND
UNDER THE FRANGIPANI

MONICA HUNTER
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Hoda El Shakry
Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature
Thesis Supervisor

Sydney Rice Aboul-Hosn
Senior Lecturer in Comparative Literature
Honors Adviser

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

“Challenging Boundaries in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Under the Frangipani*” argues that within Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* and Mia Couto’s *Under the Frangipani*, heterotopic spaces, orality, and natural imagery serve to critique the binary notions of East and West, North and South, and tradition and modernity that undergirded colonial experiences. Though set in Sudan and Mozambique, countries with distinct histories, these texts complement each other as they demonstrate the limits of these binary oppositions and hint at what moving beyond these constructs would look like. This paper first considers the importance of space as a tool to interrogate social and political norms. It then explores the way orality is used to construct memory and identity. Finally, it examines the use of natural imagery to reflect the post-independence challenges faced by those in Sudan and Mozambique. While this paper focuses on stories set following the colonial period, it hopes to demonstrate the importance of disrupting and renegotiating binary discourses.

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Introduction

Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and Mia Couto's *Under the Frangipani* are two novels by African authors that attempt to engage with the consequences of colonial history and its impact on the present and future. Set in Sudan and Mozambique, respectively, in the years following the achievement of independence, Salih and Couto make use of various elements within their novels to interrogate the ways that colonialism and its aftermath have influenced our assumptions and our relationship with the past. With their awareness of these influences, Salih and Couto demonstrate the need to renegotiate the binary constructions that characterized the colonial experience.

Season of Migration to the North tells the story of a young man's return home to Sudan after seven years of studying in London. Upon his return, he relishes the familiar nature of his village until he is disturbed by a stranger's presence. Although assured by his grandfather that the newcomer, Mustafa Sa'eed, is a reputable man, the narrator remains suspicious of Mustafa. Over time, the narrator learns that he and Mustafa have something in common: Both men spent part of their youth studying in London. This shared characteristic fosters their relationship and leads Mustafa to divulge his secret history of violent sexual relationships that left four English women dead. Shortly after disclosing this information, Mustafa dies during the annual flooding of the Nile. Haunted by his knowledge of Mustafa's past, the narrator must make sense of these revelations in the context of his own experience, including his efforts to understand the relationship between his village and the rest of the world.

Set in the 1960s in the fictional Sudanese village of Wad Hamid, much of the narrative within *Season of Migration to the North* is predicated on the lingering effects of the nation's

colonial past. Given Sudan's critical location along the Nile River, Egyptians and later Ottomans ruled over the people of the region for centuries. By 1898, the British, through a supposed partnership with the Egyptians, expanded control into what would become Sudan. Britain's power in the region established the modern Sudanese boundaries and created a "massive territory of nearly one million square miles" that encompassed many groups with a variety of cultural identities (Sharkey 6). Over the course of its occupation, the British dedicated most of their resources to northern Sudan, leading to the development of several differences between north and south Sudan. In the north, the British focused on educating Muslims and permitted the use of Arabic in schools, but in the south, Christian missionary groups led educational efforts and focused on the use of English (Sharkey 2003). These regional differences complicated the nationalist movements that were mounting in the north. By the 1950s, World War II had depleted the British's resources and their hold on the region weakened, as growing nationalist movements in Sudan foreshadowed independence. However, in 1955, civil war erupted between north and south as those in southern Sudan saw "the national project" as a "change of masters" from the British to the Northern Sudanese, rather than an opportunity to govern their own communities (Sharkey 12). While Sudan formally achieved independence in 1956, the conflict between north and south continued for years.

Cultural movements, as well as political movements influenced Sudan. The *Nahda*, a cultural movement in the Arab world, including Sudan, developed in the late 19th century and shaped culture for decades to come. Those in favor of the *Nahda*, or the "awakening," argued that the Enlightenment ideals of Europe could "offer... an opportunity for cultural and civilizational revival in the Arab world" (Hassan 3). As Makdisi notes, "modernity, in the Arab world, has been inextricably associated with Europe itself" (805). Unsurprisingly, tensions

developed between *Nahda* supporters and traditionalists, who remained wary of the colonial experience and the cultural imperialism that stemmed from Europe (Hassan 2003). This tension between modernity and tradition, as well as the divisive notions of East and West, underlies much of Salih's novel.

As the colonial history of Sudan shapes *Season of Migration to the North*, Mozambique's colonial history has the same effect on Couto's *Under the Frangipani*. Structured somewhat like a who-dunnit mystery, *Under the Frangipani* is set at an isolated fort on the shores of Mozambique and tells the story of a dead man, who in order to find a peaceful death, enters the body of a young police inspector. This police inspector arrives at the fort to determine who murdered the fort's director, Vastome Excellency. The fort is occupied by a collection of elderly folk who are separated both physically and ideologically from the rest of their nation. As the police inspector seeks to uncover the culprit of the director's murder, he unearths a variety of stories from the elderly who reveal not only what happened to the director, but also qualms that their nation is modernizing without their input.

Within *Under the Frangipani*, the colonial history and civil war that followed independence illuminate the experiences and perspectives of the elderly within the fort. Mozambique's strategic location on trading routes between Europe and India led to the presence of Portuguese traders in the 1500s. The Portuguese maintained their hold on the region for centuries despite clashes with the native groups of the region, and by 1891, the modern borders of the nation were established. Portuguese rule persisted for decades. While Mozambicans desired independence, they also faced the challenges of dealing with the artificial boundaries constructed by the Europeans and the subsequent challenge in creating a national identity given the diversity of the region. Liberation movements against Portugal began in the 1960s led by the

Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) and the nation achieved independence in 1975 through a bloodless coup in Lisbon (Funada-Classen 2013). Following independence, the FRELIMO-led government established a socialist nation and seemed committed to the nation's future. Despite liberation, challenges persisted in Mozambique and the nation found itself in the midst of a civil war by 1977 that evolved from confrontation between the FRELIMO government and “the anti-government guerrilla movement [of] the Mozambique National Resistance (MNR)” (Funada-Classen 4). The clash between the MNR, which was eventually renamed RENAMO (Resistência Nacional de Moçambicana), and FRELIMO stemmed from complicated issues regarding the decolonization process, regional politics, and differing opinions of the various communities within Mozambique (Funada-Classen 2013). Couto addresses these challenges within the communities of Mozambique in *Under the Frangipani*. The civil war lasted for 16 years before ending in 1992, and the nation held its first elections in 1994. More than one million people died and nearly 5 million people were displaced due to violence.

Together, these national histories inform the experiences of the characters within the novels and lead to rich reflections on a variety of challenges presented by colonialism. While the term ‘post-colonial’ is often used to describe these novels and their settings, there are several issues with the term itself and its implications on the study of these places and their literatures. This work attempts to study the literary and social elements of these novels in a way that recognizes their histories and treats the characters and their experiences with respect, hence my desire to unpack the term ‘post-colonial.’

The first limit of the term stems from the fact that there is no singular colonial experience. There are many differences between the colonialisms experienced among the continents and as a result, the term post-colonial clearly is a broad term that attempts to

encompass a variety of different experiences. Nonetheless, “post-colonial literature” developed to replace the notion of “Commonwealth literature” by signifying a field that “foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery” (Mishra and Hodge 276). From this perspective, the use of the term post-colonial is used in a “common sense manner” that attempts to approach the historical realities of the situation (Williams and Chrisman 272).

While some critics see the term in this manner, others criticize the terms as it reinforces a binary relationship between colonial and post-colonial. In her critique of the term, Anne McClintock notes that the field of “post-colonialism” is inherently related to and extends from the period of colonialism and Western conceptions of history. McClintock critiques the term as it “marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from ‘the pre-colonial’, to ‘the colonial’, to ‘the post-colonial’ - an unbidden, if disavowed commitment to linear time and the idea of ‘development,’” which “rehears[es] the Enlightenment trope of sequential, ‘linear’ progress” (292). McClintock thus argues that the same type of ideology that led to colonialism in the first place structures the term post-colonial. In this way, the term post-colonial serves as a divisive term, similar to the constructs of tradition and modernity or East and West/North and South that were used to justify colonialism and will be interrogated in this work.

Clearly, there is division among scholars when it comes to the use of the term. While for some it serves as nothing more than a description of the types of work included within the scope of study, for others, the term carries much more weight than a simple description. Because of the variety of opinions surrounding this term, I felt it was best to address the fact that important conversations occur around a word that is often used to describe both texts that are analyzed in this piece.

As literary works, *Season of Migration to the North* and *Under the Frangipani* attempt to address the complications of the “post-colonial” period and offer an opportunity to observe the ways that communities move forward with the knowledge of the past. Furthermore, they address the limits of binary constructions and attempt to renegotiate these relationships, such as that of East-West, North-South, and tradition-modernity.

The first chapter of this text will focus on the issue of space within each of these novels. Viewed through the lens of Foucault’s concept of heterotopias, these spaces force the reader to acknowledge and interrogate assumptions, in particular, those tied to ideas of the Orient and those related to the notion of a national identity. Through an examination of the construction of these spaces and the actions that take place within them, this chapter will explore the implications of these heterotopic spaces on the worlds beyond their walls.

The second chapter of this text will examine the use of orality and storytelling within the texts. It will explore orality as it is used to construct memory and identity. The use of orality continues the work of the first chapter to challenge the binary oppositions that undergirded the colonial mentality. This chapter will additionally examine the way Salih and Couto utilize many voices to create their visions of communities and characters. Finally, this chapter will focus on the power of communication and the extent to which characters define their worlds and themselves.

The final chapter of this text will explore the use of natural imagery in relation to the characters’ efforts to navigate the challenges of post-independence. Through images of trees and water, both authors seek to address the difficulty in negotiating the relationships between the past, present, and future.

In summary, this text will explore the ways in which space and narrative structure can address the limits of binary discourse before exploring Salih's and Couto's efforts to employ natural imagery to navigate these challenges. Together, these two texts present some of the challenges faced by those living in recently independent nations and suggest a movement beyond binary modes of thinking in order to create a positive future.

Chapter 1

Within *Season of Migration to the North* and *Under the Frangipani*, Tayeb Salih and Mia Couto utilize spaces within the novels to illuminate cultural and political critiques.

Geographically set in former colonies, each novel attempts to navigate the consequences of the colonial experience. As such, constructed physical spaces within the texts become important as they influence the reader's perception of the societies in which the spaces exist. The analysis of these spaces is rooted in Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces as places that serve to reflect and question society. When observed as heterotopias, these spaces highlight the assumptions and representational issues that affect characters who operate both in and out of the spaces. This chapter will examine the ways that particular spaces within the novel, when viewed as heterotopias, can demonstrate the illusory nature of binary oppositions.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the narrative flows back and forth between past and present, Sudan and London. Through these transitions two locations stand out amongst the rest: Mustafa's private spaces. In London, Mustafa constructs his bedroom as a site of seduction that capitalizes on the Orientalist fantasies of the women he encounters. In Sudan, his locked-off room that only he and the narrator are able to enter is perfectly fashioned after an English study. When interpreted as heterotopias, these spaces create friction in the assumptions that underlie the East-West binary. In *Under the Frangipani*, the space of the fort, as an isolated site where only the elderly reside, calls into question the basis of the tradition-modernity binary by highlighting the differences of opinions between the new government of Mozambique and the elderly residents of the fort.

In his 1984 lecture published as “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” Michel Foucault defines heterotopias as

real places—places that do exist...— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (3)

Foucault suggests that a trait of all heterotopias is “that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains...[T]heir role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory” (8). This idea that heterotopic spaces can call into question the illusions held by individuals or collective society resounds in *Season of Migration the North* and *Under the Frangipani*.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the relationship between North and South structures much of the narrative conflict. In particular, the relationship deeply affects the character of Mustafa Sa’eed and the construction of his private spaces. Mustafa’s thoughts about the relationship between North and South are related to Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism. The “south” in *Season of Migration to the North* mirrors the imagined East of Orientalism. Rather than reflecting the actual space of the East, “the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other” (5). Said addresses that there is a difference between the actual East as experienced by those who live there and the notion of “the Orient” as a site that exists only in Western conceptions of an imagined, foreign place. Mustafa attempts to negotiate this difference between his experience

and the way he is stereotyped as a man from the East by those in the West, and in doing so demonstrates the complicated reality of portioning the world between North and South.

This relationship between the real and imagined East frames his actions, as he uses this history of “Orientalizing” to validate his actions in London. As a brilliant and well-educated Sudanese youth, Mustafa moved to Cairo and eventually England to pursue his studies. While in London, he set out on a self-proclaimed, though somewhat satirical, quest to “liberate Africa with [his] penis” (Salih 100). Through this process, Mustafa seduced several women and eventually married one of them, Jean Morris. The seduction was not the end of their relationships, though, as each woman who had been with Mustafa committed suicide. In addition, he murdered his wife, Jean Morris.

While these relationships immediately seem disturbing to most readers, Mustafa ties his actions to what he frames as a reversal of the colonial experience. Mustafa expresses the relationship between North and South, as based on colonial relations, through the motif of a germ, which he frequently ties to issues of illness or contamination. From Mustafa’s view, colonialism is a disease that has infected societies of both the North and South. Their attempts to understand one another are predicated on the relationship that developed from the colonial experience. Thus, he uses this germ imagery to insinuate the inevitability of his actions and the deaths of these women. While on trial for the murder of Jean Morris and his connection with the other women’s suicides, Mustafa’s lawyer exclaims to the jury, “These girls were not killed by Mustafa Sa’eed but by the germ of a deadly disease that assailed them a thousand years ago” (Salih 29). This reference suggests that colonialism has had long lasting consequences that influence both those who experienced it and those who perpetrated it. In addition, Mustafa uses germ imagery to describe his encounters with these women, evidenced by comments such as

“She entered my bedroom a chaste virgin and when she left it she was carrying the germs of self-destruction within her” (Salih 30). Mustafa utilizes this notion of contamination that underlies the metropole-colony relationship to describe his relations with these women and validate his ulterior motives.

While the idea of contamination underpins his physical and emotional relationships with these women, the décor of the spaces Mustafa constructs are entirely devoid of any reference to this germ of colonial contact. He describes his bedroom in London, the site of the seduction where these “germs of self-destruction” are planted, as a “den of lethal lies that [he] had deliberately built up, lie upon lie” (Salih 121). In Laura Rice’s exploration of space in *Season of Migration to the North*, she notes that Mustafa recognizes the falseness of his bedroom, as it is constructed in an effort to “mimic a space that exists only in the colonial mindset” (45). He describes the features of the room:

[T]he sandalwood and incense; the ostrich feathers and ivory and ebony figurines; the paintings and drawings of forests of palm trees along the shores of the Nile, boats with sails like doves' wings, suns setting over the mountains of the Red Sea, camel caravans wending their way along sand dunes on the borders of the Yemen, baobab trees in Kordofan, naked girls from the tribes of the Zandi, the Nuer and the Shuluk, fields of banana and coffee on the Equator, old temples in the district of Nubia; Arabic books with decorated covers written in ornate Kufic script; Persian carpets, pink curtains, large mirrors on the walls, and coloured lights in the corners. (Salih 121)

Upon evaluation of the contents of this room, Wail Hassan notes that “these articles belong to very different cultural, historical, and geographical contexts...What they have in common is their

fetishism in sexualized Western fantasies about Africa and the Orient” (97). It is evident that Mustafa constructed this space to emphasize his “exotic” nature in the eyes of the English women. His room becomes “a space of lies furnished with real artifacts [that] mirrors the way the English imagination has constructed Africa” (Rice 45). As a result, the room assumes the role of a heterotopia of illusion, as its “uncontaminated” nature is entirely contrived and represents a place that fails to reflect any existing East. While Mustafa is well aware of the “contamination” between the cultures of North and South demonstrated by his use of germ imagery, he intentionally constructs this space as a purely exotic locale in order to use it as a tool of seduction.

The room’s stereotypically Eastern décor critiques the Orientalist mindset by highlighting the ignorance that underlies the way that Western minds stereotype and fetishize a place outside the bounds of their knowledge. This space draws attention to the actions that occur within it and the world that exists outside of it by demonstrating the seemingly unreal possibility of an “uncontaminated” life after colonialism. There is no return to a world that is simply South or North. As Mustafa seduces the women of London by capitalizing on their Orientalist fetishes, his room and the actions that occur within it illuminate the dangers of stereotyping a culture. While Mustafa chooses to conform to the stereotypes associated with his Arab-African identity, his actions and the space in which they take place contradict one another. He uses his room and his constructed character to lure the women in and validate their assumptions of the East, but the action of their intercourse, which Mustafa claims results in the women’s contamination with “the germs of self-destruction,” demonstrates the real consequences of the colonial experience. Mustafa’s bedroom and the actions that take place within it confront stereotypes and demonstrate

that the use of the colony-metropole, East-West binary upon which these particular women of London operate is flawed and dangerous.

Additionally, the terminology that Mustafa uses to describe his bedroom is related to Foucault's notion of a cemetery as a heterotopia. Mustafa claims, "My bedroom was a graveyard that looked onto a garden" (Salih 27). In his work, Foucault uses the image of a cemetery as a city of the dead that reflects the city of the living. He describes the 18th century charnel house, where "bodies lost the last traces of individuality" (5). Mustafa applies this to his room as he states that "On the walls were large mirrors, so that when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously" (Salih 27). Mustafa utilizes the destruction of individuality to replicate and reverse the stereotyped assumptions placed onto his own body by applying it to the women he encounters. In addition, the idea of his room as a cemetery references the deadly consequences of his sexual relations, but also raises the idea that to Mustafa, this room serves as a site that kills the idea of Orientalizing the East.

While Mustafa's bedroom demonstrates the limits of the assumptions that stem from the North-South binary, it raises issues as it serves as the site of violence against women. In his analysis of *Season to Migration to the North*, Wail Hassan discusses the relationship between the violence of patriarchy and of colonialism. He examines the colonial tendency, as described by Edward Said, to paint Europe as a masculine, penetrating force that acts on a feminine, vulnerable Africa. However, the idea that the violence of colonialism was enacted under the rule of Queen Victoria, "an omnipresent, omnipotent and violent goddess," creates, for Mustafa, the notion that each European woman serves as her "proxy or substitute" (Hassan 93). Mustafa uses this mentality to justify his own actions as a personal retaliation against the violence of colonialism. While he succeeded in seducing these women through his deceit, it seems as though

his quest to “liberate Africa with his penis” fell short. In reinforcing the stereotypes associated with his identity to lure in individual women, he only confirmed the imagined differences between East and West. It is only through a comprehensive look at his actions and especially his private spaces that the consequences of the North-South binary become evident. Hassan notes that “[m]any forms of anticolonial and antiracist struggle have reinscribed patriarchy; Salih’s novel demonstrates the futility of resisting one form of hegemony by consolidating another” (91). As such, Salih uses Mustafa’s bedroom as a space to condemn both colonialism and the patriarchy.

Salih returns to demonstrate the bizarre nature of the East-West binary with the construction of Mustafa’s study in Wad Hamid. Following his death, Mustafa leaves the key to his private room to the narrator. As the narrator enters the room he discovers that,

The whole floor of the room was covered with Persian rugs...How ridiculous! A fireplace—imagine it! A real English fireplace with all the bits and pieces....with the mantelpiece of blue marble; on either side of the fireplace were two Victorian chairs covered in a figured silk material... (Salih 113)

While his bedroom in London reflected a nonexistent, imagined East that failed to address any contact with the West, Mustafa enacts the reverse in this space. He crafts his study as a perfect mimicry of the North, sanitized from all contact with the South. This disjuncture is further demonstrated by the fact that “the four walls from floor to ceiling were filled, shelf upon shelf, with books and more books and yet more books... [but] not a single Arabic book” (Salih 112-114).

In his attempts to make sense of the room, the narrator calls the space “A graveyard. A mausoleum. An insane idea. A prison. A huge joke” (Salih 114). Several of these descriptors

align with Foucault's examples of heterotopias. In addition to his continued use of a cemetery to describe Mustafa's spaces, Salih utilizes the image of a prison. Foucault uses a prison as an example of a heterotopia of deviation, or a space "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (5). As these spaces echo Foucault's examples of heterotopias, the spaces illuminate the unreal qualities of an "uncontaminated" space. These heterotopic spaces require that the "germ" of colonialism and the impossibility of its eradication be recognized. As the narrator learns of Mustafa's past in London and experiences his study in Wad Hamid, he realizes the absurdity of Mustafa's attempts to live in such a binary manner. While the narrator's struggle to address his own experiences between North and South is further discussed in the third chapter of this work, Mustafa's private spaces as heterotopias illuminate the impossibilities of this binary existence and embody Said's argument:

The boundary notion of East and West, the varying degrees of projected inferiority and strength... the kinds of characteristic features ascribed to the Orient: all these testify to a willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West, and lived through during many centuries. (201)

With the notion that the space of the Orient is based in part on a "willed imaginative...division," these heterotopic spaces address that the North-South binary is based on illusions. The boundaries, both geographic and cultural, have been constructed in a way that permits imagined relationships to influence reality. As a result, Salih's work claims that these boundaries have been forced into construction, but despite being imaginary, they have real and lasting effects on the lives of those who must navigate the relationships between these spaces. The text also demonstrates the impossibility of the binary, as Mustafa's fractured identity and the narrator's

own struggle to know himself suggest that North and South do not operate in isolation from one another.

While the heterotopic spaces in *Season of Migration to the North* demonstrate the illusory groundings of the North-South divide, the heterotopic space of the fort in *Under the Frangipani* reflects the challenges that develop from a supposed clash between tradition and modernity. Set in the 1990s following the achievement of Mozambican independence and the civil war that followed, Couto's novel describes a nation torn apart by violence. He sets his narrative in "a deeply divided country with communities that were shattered and isolated, from each other and from the rest of world" (Rogers 115). The fort, as an isolated space separated from the rest of Mozambique both in location and in the sense that its residents are all elderly, demonstrates the challenges of establishing a nation that addresses its painful history in its movement toward the future.

Set at the fort, the novel has two interlocking narratives. The novel tells the story of Ermelindo Mucanga, a dead man buried under the frangipani tree on the terrace of the fort. Ermelindo chooses to leave his body in an effort to seek the peace in death that he has been unable to achieve due to an improper burial. In order to have a proper death he must infiltrate the body of a living person and die again. Ermelindo thus occupies the body of a police inspector, Izidine Naíta, who comes to the fort to unravel the mysterious death of the fort's director, Vastome Excellency. Ermelindo describes the site of the fort and the frangipani:

The frangipani occupies the terrace of a colonial fort. 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 was turned into a makeshift refuge for old people. With their arrival, the place went into decline. Then 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 starved by silence and emptiness. (3)

As an isolated location whose residents, as elderly people, feel estranged from the new nation being established beyond their reach and without their input, the fort serves as a heterotopia of illusion in the sense that as a location that seems to exist independently from the events of the rest of the nation, it “serves to expose every real space... as still more illusory” (Foucault 8). The fort serves as a counterpoint to the rest of the nation that is developing without input from the elderly and without addressing its own past.

In his attempts to discover Vastome Excellency’s murderer, the police inspector interviews each of the fort’s residents. Each elder claims responsibility for Vastome’s death, which confuses and frustrates the inspector. He recognizes a disconnect between his logic and the thoughts of the elders. As a young adult, he left Mozambique to study in Europe, only returning in the years following independence. The narrator begins to realize that despite being Mozambican, his experience outside of his country has created a disjuncture in his ability to relate to the elders. Ermelindo describes the inspector’s predicament:

Separation had curtailed his knowledge of the culture, of the 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. Little more than that. In the countryside, he was no more than

an outsider. (38)

This passage illuminates an underlying struggle presented in the novel, that of the cultural differences between the youth and elders. Through this description of the police inspector, Amílcar Cabral's notions regarding the role of culture in national liberation seem quite pertinent. According to Cabral, "Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history..." (54) He argues:

A people who free themselves from foreign domination will be free culturally only if, without complexes and without underestimating the importance of positive accretions from the oppressor and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture, which is nourished by the living reality of its environment, and which negates both harmful influences and any kind of subjection to foreign culture. (Cabral 56)

Cabral argues for the valuing of one's own culture following the colonial period, while also considering that there could be positive aspects gained from outside of one's own tradition. Cabral is clearly against the idea that the only valuable culture is based on Western ideals. Couto's description of the police inspector as culturally distant from his own history embodies the feelings of "total cultural alienation" that Cabral claims characterize "high officials" and "assimilated intellectuals," categories that could be expanded to include the ranks of the foreign-educated inspector (Cabral 59).

The elderly stand in contrast to the police officer's cultural alienation. Isolated from the rest of nation, they have only their memories of traditions and their pasts to occupy them. While the police inspector initially fails to understand the elders within the fort, over time he begins to uncover the meaning of their stories. He discovers that though each old person claims they killed

Vastosome for a different reason, their reasons represent an attempt to warn against the ignorance of moving forward without remembering the past. Navaia Caetano, the old man-child, claims to have killed Vastosome because he had no respect for tradition, calling it “buffoonery” (Couto 34). Domingos Mourão, the old Portuguese, claims he killed the director after realizing that he abused his wife, Ernestina. The old Portuguese himself loved her, too, and recognized that Vastosome’s poor treatment of her was symbolic of the struggles of others as well. He states, “The woman I loved so much wasn’t just one person. She was all the women, all the men who had been defeated by life” (Couto 50). Similarly, the Old Gaffer claims he killed the director after he saw the director hit Marta, the kind and loving nurse of the refuge. Little Miss No, the resident “witch,” who had suffered sexual abuse at the hands of her father and recognizes that the director shares her father’s spirit, confesses to murdering the director by poisoning him after he sexually assaults her.

Viewed collectively, each elder claims to have killed Vastosome because he represents the violence and destruction of colonialism and the civil war that followed, experiences that altered the way members of communities related to one another and themselves. As a result, the fort, which houses these elders who long for their experiences to matter in the development of the nation, serves as a heterotopic space that demonstrates the necessity of recognizing the process of history in a nation that currently does not. The young nurse, Marta, attempts to make this clear to Izidine, the police inspector, explaining that at present there is war against the past:

[Marta]: What’s happening here is a coup d’état.

[Izidine]: A coup d’état?

[Marta]: Yes, and that’s what you should be worrying about, mister policeman.

[Izidine]: But here in the fort, a coup? ...Honestly, Marta...

[Marta]: It's not just here in the fort. It's throughout the country. Oh yes, it's coup against the past... We must preserve the past. Otherwise the country will be left without its bedrock.

[Izidine]: I agree entirely, Marta. I just want to know who killed Vastsome Excellency. That's all. (Couto 99)

Through this exchange, Marta attempts to demonstrate that Vastsome, with his violent actions and disregard for the values that the elderly hold dear, represents the dangers of moving forward without recognition of the past. Despite her attempts to make this clear to the inspector, he fails to see how the death of Vastsome Excellency is connected to the erasure of the past. Finally, Marta exclaims,

The culprit you seek...isn't a person. It's war. The war's to blame for everything. The war killed Vastsome. The war tore to shreds the world in which elderly folk could shine and had a role to play. These old timers who are rotting away here, were loved before the conflict. There was a world to welcome them, and families who put themselves out to care for the aged. Then violence brought other priorities. And the old were banished from the world, banished from we ourselves. (Couto 123).

In this statement, Marta aligns the elderly people as representative of a past that those leading the national movement seek to forget. While his focus is on liberation movements, Cabral's ideas about culture could also be read in a way that relates to the process of nation building. Cabral notes, "The liberation movement must...embody the mass character, the popular character of the culture- which is not and never could be the privilege of one or of some sectors of the society"

(56). Thus, Couto and the elderly are not advocating for an entire return to the past, but rather the recognition of the past as the nation moves forward into the future.

As Mustafa's room addressed social and political issues and served as a site of violence, the fort follows this pattern, as Vastome Excellency physically and emotionally abuses the women and the elderly within the fort. The inspector's widow, Ernestina, attempts to explain Vastome's character to the inspector:

I was told that Vastome showed no mercy on the field of battle, behaving just like the enemy he called devils...When I came to the refuge, I came face to face with my husband's wickedness. Excellency was selling the provisions destined for the refuge. The old folk weren't even being fed the basic necessities and so they were wasting away...But Vastome really did not care about their suffering.
(Couto 104)

Through this description of Vastome's rule of the refuge, his violence ensured that the fort served as a microcosm for the rest of the nation. Not only did Vastome fail to feed the elders, he sold their food in order to buy arms to sell in the gun trade. His disregard for the lives of others is also demonstrated by his physical abuse and tendency to use corporal punishment on those of the fort. Under Vastome's rule, the fort becomes just another site in which violence extends to the community. However, the site becomes heterotopic when it becomes an alternative space where the violence of colonialism and civil war are vindicated against the representative figure of Vastome Excellency. Through the presentation of this "other" space that is separated from the world and offers an alternative path, Couto creates a heterotopia that serves to warn against an erasure of the past.

In his study of heterotopias, Kudzai Matereke states that they "are opposed to society

because they express a radical contrast with the rest of society and pose a challenge to it...By contesting the conventions of the dominant society, heterotopias nurture alternative forms of life and sustain the capacity for dissent, critique and pluralism which offers vitality, efficacy and creativity to the political domain” (43). Thus, the interrogation of the spaces of the fort and Mustafa’s rooms hold value because these places force the reader to think about the spaces and the actions that take inside them in contrast to the societies that operate on their outsides. Within *Season of Migration to the North*, Mustafa’s “uncontaminated” spaces reflect the limits of the East-West binary and the need to acknowledge the contact of colonialism. In *Under the Frangipani*, the fort challenges the efforts of a Mozambique that ignores the past in its construction of its future. While the spaces in the novels illuminate different critiques within their respective societies, they both call into question the realities that exist outside these spaces. They force the reader and the characters who encounter them to interrogate their perceptions of the world. As heterotopias of illusion, Mustafa’s rooms and the fort demonstrate worlds that exist on the fringe of our conception. By highlighting these spaces, Salih and Couto challenge the binaries that provided a basis for the colonial mentality and assert the need to recognize their illusory nature as we move forward into the future.

Chapter 2

As the heterotopic spaces of Mustafa's rooms and the fort challenge Orientalism and the erasure of the past, the narrative structures of *Season of Migration to the North* and *Under the Frangipani*, with their emphasis on orality, further challenge binary constructions. In *Under the Frangipani*, the old folks of the refuge use oral stories as a way to narrate their memories and demonstrate the value of these stories in the collective history of Mozambique. In this way, orality works to counter the tradition-modernity discourse by demonstrating the value of incorporating the past into the present. In *Season of Migration to the North*, Salih emphasizes the role of storytelling in the construction of Mustafa's identity in a way that further highlights the shallow nature of Orientalist constructions of the East. This chapter will seek to explore the ways in which Salih and Couto craft a sense of orality within their written works before examining the way orality is used to address the relationships between tradition and modernity and North and South.

The oral qualities of *Season of Migration to the North* and *Under the Frangipani* are evident from the opening pages of the novels. Salih begins his novel with the sentence, "It was, gentlemen, after a long absence...that I returned to my people" (Salih 3). The use of the direct address and the first person perspective of the statement inform the reader from the start that the novel will have the quality of a story being shared among people. Similarly, *Under the Frangipani's* beginning of "I am the dead man" is the first of many introductions that are aimed at both the reader and characters within the narrative (Couto 1). Couto continues to capture the oral nature of the narrative through the inclusion of conversations between the police inspector

and the old folks of the residents that begin with phrases such as “Who, me? Go through your things?...Someone did it. Not me, Navaia Caetano” and “Did you speak to the old Portuguese? I’ll wager he told you about that time he was sitting under the frangipani” (Couto 21, 57). With this structure, Couto and Salih successfully capture the conversational aspect of storytelling with a subtlety that allows the reader to feel privy to the subsequent conversations.

The incorporation of a sense of orality at the outset of these novels sets the stage for the importance of oral narratives within the overall structure of the texts. Couto crafts *Under the Frangipani* as a who-dunnit mystery in which a single character, who has the quality of being an outsider within the fort, grapples with the stories of several different elders to determine who killed Vastome Excellency, the fort’s director. These stories jump back and forth in time, mentioning events that on the surface seem unrelated to the director's death, but when more deeply observed have everything to do with his death and the changes in Mozambique that occurred post-independence. However, by structuring the narrative in a way that features these stories that may seem irrelevant to the director’s murder, Couto crafts a story that places more importance on the process of narration rather than the ultimate conclusion. This narrative choice highlights the importance of multiple viewpoints in storytelling and in society. This choice also suggests that a national history and culture can never be complete, but must always be incorporating new voices and perspectives.

The overarching structure of the novels exists because of and in concert with the conversations that occur within the narratives. *Under the Frangipani*, with its inclusion of many voices, allows the memories of the elderly people who reside within the fort to take on a level of importance that they are not afforded outside of the fort. As the police inspector interviews each member of the fort in order to determine who killed the director, he grows increasingly frustrated

by the winding narratives of the elders. In addition, each person claims to have killed the director, which undermines the police inspector's chance of establishing a continuous, logical explanation. It seems clear to the reader that the police inspector is seeking a conversation about the day of the murder, wanting to know what each character was doing in order to establish a picture of the day and unearth the facts. However, the characters who share their stories are uninterested in framing their stories in the way that the policeman desires. Rather, they frame their stories with phrases such as, "It all began in the time beyond time" and "I've lost my way, you're saying to yourself. No, I'm just chasing away the mist" (Couto 22, 29). It becomes clear that the old folks are not interested in helping the director solve the murder in the direct way he seeks, but rather they hope to offer grander reflections on the issues facing the nation through the use of their personal stories and the expression of their own memories. In constructing a narrative in this manner, Couto underscores the importance of multiple voices in the establishment of both a narrative and a national identity. However, the police inspector becomes increasingly frustrated and confused, even as the young nurse, Marta, warns him that "what we discover in this life does not come as the result of our searching for it" (Couto 37). Sean Rogers explores the use of multiple voices and multiple claims of responsibility for the murder:

[T]his telling of multiple stories results in a revoicing of the murder that allows for the multifaceted nature of the truth to be illustrated. Once this is accepted and understood, the reader is able to come to terms with the nature of a Mozambique that has been fractured through a civil war in which both sides were fighting for the supposed truth of their political beliefs. (117)

With this in mind, Couto's choice to craft a polyphonic narrative in which "truth" becomes a contested matter mirrors the historical struggle that those in Mozambique experienced. By

constructing the novel in a way that embraces many voices, the importance of memory becomes evident. As Edward notes, “oral information is ephemeral and relies on memory for its durability,” however, “memory is not always perfect; it can distort or change information” (41). As a result, memory and its relationship to orality take on an important role in determining the ways in which we come to understand our world.

In his critical work, Ngoveni Lawrence calls attention to this connection between orality and memory and suggests that “Couto argues for the consideration of vernacular memories, which are ordinarily marginalized in the formation of public memory. He suggests that such exclusion limits the scope through which public memory is constructed” (Lawrence 63). Lawrence additionally suggests that the elders create these vernacular memories using oral techniques. He states, “In Couto’s novel, orality is privileged for its receptiveness to a diversity of narrative modes and conventions and refusal to pin down a single version of *truth*” (63). In this way, both Rogers and Lawrence demonstrate the importance of multiple perspectives and the use of orality as a mode of transmission for these perspectives.

This issue of truth is central to the inspector’s struggle to understand the events of the fort. Despite the suggestions from Marta to listen rather than interrogate the old folks, the inspector grows increasingly frustrated with his inability to determine the truth about who killed the director. The more he speaks to the old people, the more confused he becomes. As the police inspector fails to understand the importance of multiple voices, he takes on the role of an outsider and his attempts to understand the “facts” of what happened to the director cement this position. Despite being native to Mozambique, the old folks within the refuge see the European-educated police inspector who comes from Maputo, the capital, to this remote and isolated fort as separate from their notion of Mozambique and its people. The Old Portuguese attempts to

explain this to the inspector, saying

I mean this seriously, inspector: you'll never find out 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've learned not to confide in a white man...I know what you're going to say. You're a black man like them. Just ask them what they see in you. As far as they are concerned, you're a white, an outsider, someone who doesn't merit their confidences. (Couto 49)

Following this conversation, the police inspector begins to realize that that "the old people didn't accept him. [He] couldn't even get near them. How could he expect them to open up and tell him the truth?" (Couto 95). Again, Marta offers suggestions to the police officer, but he fails to interpret them and accuses Marta of contributing to his struggle:

[Izidine]: Yes, you're the one filling the heads of these old codgers, so that they confuse me by talking a string of nonsense.

[Marta]: It's not nonsense. You're the one who doesn't understand what they're saying... They're all telling you things of great importance. You just don't speak their language.

[Izidine]: I don't speak their language? But we always speak in Portuguese!

[Marta]: But they speak another language, another Portuguese. And do you know why? Because they don't trust you...

[Izidine]: ...I want to get to the truth...

[Marta]: You want to punish them, and do you know why? Because you're scared of them!

[Izidine]: Scared, me?

[Marta]: Yes, scared. These old people are the past you are trampling on deep inside your head. These old people remind you of where you come from. (Couto 71-73)

In this passage, Couto demonstrates the existence of a complicated layer of truth that is inaccessible not just to the policeman, but to those who have become “culturally alienated” through their separation from the history of their communities (Cabral 59). This passage also serves to critique the idea of a single truth accessed through logical means and embodied by the inspector's determination to come to a simple conclusion about the director's death. Here Couto makes a claim that echoes that of Anne McClintock's assessment of the term post-colonial that was addressed in the introduction. In critiquing the police inspector's commitment to logic, in addition to the information that he was educated in Europe, Couto critiques Enlightenment rationalism and its “universalizing will to knowledge, [which] feeds Orientalism's will to power” (William and Chrisman 8). This critique of modes of thought that privilege Western ideals and denigrate alternative, non-Western means of conceptualizing reality draw attention to the limits of privileging one aspect of a binary relationship at the expense of the other. The police inspector's inability to connect with and understand people based on his “cultural alienation” demonstrates these limits.

However, through the expression of their experiences and memories, the old people attempt to solidify and share their version of Mozambique with the inspector. Lawrence explains the value of orality in this context:

[The] use of oral forms as tools in the formation of memory may create space for popular interpretations of the past that are of particular significance to ordinary people whose voices may not be sufficiently powerful to challenge officialdom and its dominant version of history. Oral forms are cardinal sources of memory: people rely on them in relating their interpretations of memory (72).

Thus, the use of orality gives power to the old folks as they use memory as a tool to “challenge... official discourses” (Lawrence 72). While the old folks may narrate their own experiences and hold dear their memories of the past, Couto does not seem to be advocating for a complete return to the past. Rather, this emphasis on memory is instead an attempt to impress upon the youth the ability to “imagine the possibility for post-war Mozambique to redefine itself as a country that boasts a meaningful history” (Lawrence 74). Thus, Couto’s novel uses orality to bring to light the value of tradition as “the transmission of a collective memory from generation to generation” that has been disregarded (Mosès 1989 quoted in Boyarin 11). Furthermore, he advocates for the continuation of this collective memory as the nation moves forward into the future.

While Couto’s work demonstrated the value of orality and memory to recall a forgotten past, Salih’s use of orality in the construction of Mustafa’s identity further highlights the shortcomings of Orientalizing the East. While Mustafa’s construction of his bedrooms as a site that replicated the imagined Orient was discussed in Chapter 1, his use of oral stories to further seduce the women of London demonstrates the absurdity of “the Orient” as imagined by the West.

As King states, “It is commonly accepted that identity or a sense of self is constructed by and through narrative - the stories we tell ourselves and each other about our lives” (2). Mustafa uses this ability to construct the self when he arrives in the village of Wad Hamid and figures

himself as a regular man who tired of business in Khartoum who came to Wad Hamid to live a quieter life. In contrast, during his years in England, he uses his homeland of Sudan and his physical appearance to craft a persona of an “exotic” man, which would allow him to “prey” on European women who fetishized this exotic quality.

Mustafa’s tools of seduction include his use of “honeyed words” and a way of describing his past that intentionally exoticizes his experience (Salih 30). He uses the boundary of North and South to frame all his relationships in London. He often states that the women he seduced “yearned for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons,” while in contrast he claims, “I am the South that yearns for the North and the ice” (Salih 27). As such, he constructs his character in a way that ensures he embodies the exotic South and becomes a “symbol of all [their] hankerings” (Salih 27).

When he seduces Isabella Seymour, he tells her a lie about his parents dying in a boat collapse in the Nile. Rather meeting this tragic (though false) story with pity, Isabella is absolutely intrigued by Mustafa’s proximity to the Nile. He responds to her excitement by explaining, “Our house is right on the bank of the Nile, so that when I’m lying on my bed at night I put my hand out of the window and idly play with the Nile waters till sleep takes me” (Salih 34). Just as he intentionally created his room to stimulate the Orientalist imagination, he does the same with the construction of his own identity. He again uses this tactic on Isabella Seymour when she explains that her mother is Spanish. He responds with verve:

That, then, explains everything. It explains our meeting by chance, our spontaneous mutual understanding as though we had got to know each other centuries ago. Doubtless one of my forefathers was a soldier in Tarik ibn Ziyad’s army. Doubtless he met one of your ancestors as she gathered in the grapes from

an orchard in Seville. Doubtless he fell in love with her at first sight and she with him. He lived with her for a time, then left her and went off to Africa. There he married again and I was one of his progeny in Africa, and you have come from his progeny in Spain. (Salih 36)

With passages and lies such as these, Mustafa capitalizes on the Orientalist fantasies of these women for his own sexual pleasure while also demonstrating the shallow nature of this manner of approaching and understanding the East.

Perhaps his greatest example of the downfall of Orientalizing discourse comes when Mustafa tells the narrator of a lecture he gave at Oxford University about Abu Nuwas:

I read them some of his poetry about wine in a comic oratorical style which I claimed was how Arabic poetry used to be recited in the Abbasid era...all arrant nonsense with no basis of fact. However, I was inspired that evening and found the lies tripping off my tongue like sublime truths. Feeling that my elation was communicating itself to my audience, I lied more and more extravagantly. After the lecture they all crowded round me: retired civil servants who had worked in the East, old women whose husbands had died in Egypt, Iraq and the Sudan, men who had fought with Kitchener and Allenby, orientalists, and officials in the Colonial Office and the Middle East section of the foreign Office. (Salih 118)

As Wail Hassan notes, “the disgraceful irony is that even those who should have first-hand knowledge of Arab culture, from either lived experience or scholarship, are duped by Mustafa’s deliberate lies simply because they reinforce cherished Oriental stereotypes” (96). Thus, Mustafa’s stories demonstrate the way that Orientalist discourse denies him and others from the region the opportunity to establish an identity based on their real, lived experience because the

tendency of Oriental discourse is to accept notions that align with an imagined conception of the East.

While Mustafa's revelation of his past satisfies the narrator's initial curiosity, the narrator becomes haunted by thoughts of Mustafa even after his death, which occurs early on in the novel. Hungry for more information, the narrator finds additional sources to gain scraps of information about Mustafa; however, the narrator begins to realize that Mustafa has constructed multiple identities. As Mustafa constructed his identity in London to capitalize on Orientalist fetishes for personal gain, in Sudan, he hides his education and experience in the North in order to fit in with the Wad Hamid community. While Mustafa divulges his secret past to the narrator, this part of his identity is unknown by the rest of the village, evidenced by the way they speak about him. For example, the narrator's grandfather knows very little about the man:

I do not know what it was that brought Mustafa to mind but suddenly I remembered him and said to myself that I'd ask my grandfather about him, for he was very knowledgeable about the genealogy of everyone in the village and even of people scattered up and down the river. But my grandfather shook his head and said that he knew nothing about him except that he was from the vicinity of Khartoum and that about five years ago he had come to the village and had bought some land. (Salih 7)

This appears to be the extent to which most of the village knew Mustafa, including his wife Hosna, who only mildly considered the possibility that Mustafa was "hiding something" because he used to speak "European talk" in his sleep (Salih 76). Otherwise, the community remains ignorant of Mustafa's European past, as they have accepted his own story that he left business in

Khartoum “not knowing where [he] was bound for” and ended up happily settled in Wad Hamid (Salih 11).

Despite his attempts to gain more information about Mustafa, the narrator realizes that each person only knew part of Mustafa’s identity. Foley describes the narrator’s process of coming to know Mustafa:

While Mustafa is the initial constructor of his fictions, and therefore the original storyteller, he is not the only medium by which the narrator comes to understand ...Mustafa. The narrator connects fragments of Mustafa’s lies as they are relayed by the other Sudanese villagers: Hosna bint Mahmoud, the Mamur on the train (‘we nicknamed him “The black Englishman”’ [53]), the college lecturer, and Mrs. Robinson. Because the narrative is not limited to one teller, Mustafa as a story is multiple and somewhat fractured... (164)

The narrator recognizes this fractured nature of Mustafa’s identity. The narrator, who also has struggled with his return from the North, on one hand understands Mustafa’s efforts to live dual lives, but also realizes that this must have been an incredibly challenging existence. When the narrator enters Mustafa’s private study in Wad Hamid and finds his diary, the dedication seems to embody Mustafa’s decision to live with multiple identities:

Opening a notebook, I read on the first page: ‘My Life Story—by Mustafa Sa’eed.’ On the next page was the dedication: ‘To those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue and see things as either black or white, either Eastern or Western.’ I flicked through the rest of the pages but found nothing—not a single sentence, not a single word. (Salih 125)

The message of the journal's dedication is two-fold. First, the blank pages following the dedication may represent the idea that no such recipient of the story exists. As Mustafa's own life was a lesson on the challenges of maintaining isolated identities, the possibility of anyone else existing with the ability to live such a partitioned life seems equally impossible. Second, while the pages of his life story lack any writing, his story had been shared orally with the narrator. In this way, the emptiness of the pages seem to suggest difficulty in committing thoughts to words, especially in a way that succumbs to neat and logical manners of interpretation. It supports the idea that the structure of the novel, with an emphasis on conversation and its movement back and forth in time and space, uses orality as a mean of "resistance to the teleology of linear textual narratives" that mirrors the construction of stories by the elderly within *Under the Frangipani* (Edwards 44).

If the heterotopic spaces of the fort and Mustafa's rooms present challenges to the East-West and tradition-modernity binaries, the use of orality within the novels further illuminates the shortcomings of these binary modes of thinking. Within *Under the Frangipani*, the inclusion of oral elements ensures that the story incorporates a multitude of voices, particularly those of the elderly who feel as though their perspective is being left out as the nation moves to modernize outside the walls of the fort. With the inclusion of oral elements, Couto highlights the importance of competing perspectives and the dangers of valuing modernity over tradition. Similarly, Salih uses the construction of Mustafa's identity by way of oral stories to highlight the tendency of the Orientalist mentality to fail to conceive of a multidimensional African person. He also captures the challenges of recognizing and living with the effects of the colonial experience. Through their inclusion of orality, Couto and Salih further underscore the limits of the binary constructions that shaped the experiences of their characters.

Chapter 3

The first two chapters of this text utilized the lenses of spatial discourse and narrative structure in order to illuminate the shortcomings of the binary oppositions that undergirded the colonial experience. This chapter will explore the ways in which Salih and Couto employ natural imagery to demonstrate their characters' struggles to negotiate these relationships, in particular that of the tradition-modernity binary. Within both novels, the images of trees and water reflect the challenge of addressing the past, interpreting the present, and forging a future. In *Season of Migration to the North* and *Under the Frangipani*, the images of trees represent the stability and rootedness of the past as related to the power of tradition. As characters attempt to negotiate the relationship between tradition and modernity, water imagery serves as an image of escape and a reminder of change. Finally, both texts hint at the possibility of the future in which the binary relationship between tradition and modernity is renegotiated, as represented in *Season of Migration to the North* by the narrator's relationship to the Nile and the resilience of the frangipani in *Under the Frangipani*.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, the narrator returns home to Sudan after seven years spent acquiring a doctorate of poetry in London. This return to his village is the beginning of the narrator's effort to personally address a challenge that was facing the greater Arab world: the relationship between the *Nahda* intellectuals, with their acceptance of the values of Enlightenment Europe, and the traditionalists, who attempted to maintain a distance from European processes of development. Though the narrator attempts to resist this struggle on the "tightrope between revivalism and a Western model of development" he eventually comes to recognize the need to face the consequences of his experiences in London and his return to Sudan (Loomba 306).

Upon his return to his village, the narrator realizes that he has greatly missed his community during his absence. He states, “It was not long before I felt as though a piece of ice were melting inside of me, as though I were some frozen substance on which the sun had shone—that life warmth of the tribe which I had lost for a time in a land ‘whose fishes die of the cold’” (Salih 3). With this comment, the narrator engages with the mentality that North and South are isolated and unknowingly mirrors Mustafa’s conception of the regional divide as mentioned in Chapter 2. He finds warmth and comfort at home to replace the coldness he felt in London. His return to his village leads to feelings of belonging and reminds him of the past he left behind seven years ago.

Upon awakening in his childhood room, the narrator feels reassured by his surroundings:

I looked through the window at the palm tree standing in the courtyard of our house and I knew that all was still well with life. I looked at its strong straight trunk, at its roots that strike down into the ground, at the green branches hanging down loosely over its top, and I experienced a feeling of assurance. I felt not like a storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose...Yes, life is good and the world as unchanged as ever.

(Salih 3-4)

The narrator uses this opportunity to introduce the tree as a motif that conveys a sense of security and stability. While viewing the tree, the narrator feels as though he is in his rightful place. The narrator further emphasizes his happiness at being home and the associated feelings of purpose as he sits under “a tall acacia tree on the river bank,” where he spent many hours as a child (Salih 5). The narrator emphasizes his desire to feel rooted as he observes the familiar events of his village and claims, “I feel a sense of stability, I feel that I am important, that I am continuous and

integral. No, I am not a stone thrown into the water but seed sown in a field” (Salih 6). Patricia Geesey, in her exploration of tree imagery in *Season of Migration to the North*, notes, “The narrator longs to see himself as a seed that will bear fruit for his community. Determined not to be adversely affected by his contact with the colonizer’s culture, he seeks to define himself only in terms of rootedness within his own group” (132). In aligning himself with his community and the stability presented by the tree, the narrator sees himself as returned to his rightful place. His failure to address the influence of his time in London on his character mirrors the way that Mustafa constructs his identity and his rooms with an emphasis on their “uncontaminated” nature.

Soon after the declaration of his desire to be rooted and to take part in post-independence Sudan, the narrator personifies the qualities conveyed by the tree motif by associating the same qualities with his grandfather. He states, “I go to my grandfather and he talks to me of life forty years ago, fifty years ago, even eighty, and my feeling of security is strengthened” (Salih 7). With this description, Salih establishes that the narrator both admires and aspires to achieve the stability of the tree and his grandfather.

While the narrator associates images of trees and his grandfather with the qualities of stability and the notion that he is returning to an unchanged home, these feelings of certainty are soon uprooted by his introduction to a newcomer in the village. His father tells him that Mustafa Sa’eed arrived to the village about five years ago and settled down with a childhood acquaintance of the narrator, Hosna Bint Mahmoud. Mustafa tells the narrator that he left his home and business in Khartoum for no real reason other than he wanted a change. Despite Mustafa’s efforts to keep his true nature a secret, the narrator soon learns of Mustafa’s past in London and the deaths of four women that occurred following sexual relations with him.

The revelation of Mustafa's past unsettles the narrator and forces him to question the certainty of his own experiences and identity. After Mustafa explains his complicated and violent past to the narrator, he attempts to explain how the tragedies could have been avoided. He states, "A tree grows simply and your grandfather has lived and will die simply. That is the secret" (Salih 35). Again, the tree motif appears as an image of stability personified by the narrator's grandfather. Here, Mustafa affirms the narrator's desire to isolate his experiences of North and South. Rather than confirming the narrator's claims that he too is rooted in his community, Mustafa's story makes the narrator question if he is really like his grandfather at all or if his time in the North has changed him as it had changed Mustafa. To the narrator, his grandfather represents the familiarity of the tradition and the South, while Mustafa represents the possibility of violence that can be associated with modernity and the North.

Despite being shaken by Mustafa's past, the narrator continues to associate himself with the rootedness of the tree. He claims that his experiences abroad had not altered his character in a profound way, stating, "Over there is like here, neither better nor worse. But I am from here, just as the date palm standing in the courtyard of our house has grown in *our* house and not in anyone else's" (Salih 41). With this assertion, the narrator continues to resist the potential of change occurring within his village or within himself, instead preferring to find comfort in the stability and certainty of the past. The narrator's efforts to align himself with the culture of his village and his failure to acknowledge the effect his time on Europe has had on his character demonstrate a "denial of history" that continues to support "a thoroughly colonialist conception of East as East and West as West" (Hassan 123). Furthermore, the narrator "understands his migration not as a potentially dynamic mediation between south and north, but rather as a time lag, a passage between two static worlds" (Hassan 117). With this mentality, the narrator supports a binary

understanding of his life in which tradition and modernity and North and South are inherently separated.

As tree imagery symbolizes stability to the narrator of *Season of Migration to the North*, the frangipani in *Under the Frangipani* takes on a similar role as it is tied to memories of the past and the experiences of the elderly. While the elders within the fort have a variety of backgrounds, the tree serves as a rooted, immovable reminder of the past in which the elderly find comfort.

When the police inspector interviews one of the residents, the Old Portuguese, he learns of the man's affection for the tree. The old man connects his love for tree with his identity as a Portuguese man who now lives isolated from his home country in Mozambique. The Old Portuguese explains:

...in your country, there are no other trees that shed their leaves. Only this one becomes bare, as if winter were approaching. When I came to Africa, I didn't experience autumn anymore. It was as if time no longer moved forward as if we were always in the same season. Only the frangipani restored that sense of time passing to me. Not that I need to feel the passage of the days any longer. But the fragrance on this terrace soothes my yearning for the life I used to lead in Mozambique. (Couto 41-42)

With the Old Portuguese's explanation of the frangipani, the reader learns that the frangipani tree is different from the rest of the trees in Mozambique. The Old Portuguese, as an outsider in Mozambique, relates to the frangipani, which is a transplant that came to Mozambique from the Americas (Rogers 2010). Thus, the frangipani's presence in the fort is a reminder of history that provides comfort, but it is also a testament to the potential of change and adaptability. The Old

Portuguese later reaffirms his connection to the tree, stating, “I’m that tree. I come from a plank in another world but my ground is here, my roots were reborn in this place” (Couto 43). In doing so, he emphasizes that the tree, as a being that has adapted to a new land as he has, evokes feelings of stability.

Other old folks within the refuge confirm the comforting power of the tree. When another character describes the Old Portuguese, he says, “Things tired him that lacked a soul, that was it. At least the tree, he said, had an immortal soul: the earth itself. When you touch its trunk you feel the earth’s blood flowing round every vein in your body” (Couto 62). The natural feeling of connectedness that stems from the tree mirrors the narrator’s notions of the tree’s stability in *Season of Migration*. These characters find something integral to their identities and their pasts in these trees. In addition, other characters affirm the calming and rooted presence of the tree, as exemplified when the Old Gaffer, a native Mozambican, explains the following creation story to the Old Portuguese:

So I told him about the origins of time beyond time. In the beginning, the world only contained men. There were no trees, no animals, no stones. Men alone existed. But so many humans were born that the gods realised there were too many and they were all the same. So they decided to turn some men into plants, others into animals. And some, even into stones. The result? We’re all brothers, trees and animals, animals and men, men and stones. We’re all related, created out of the same matter. (Couto 64)

This Mozambican creation story emphasizes a tie to the tree based on the unity of living beings. The Old Gaffer’s relationship to the tree is tied to the past in a different, but equally as important way as the Old Portuguese’s. Both of their connections to the tree are based on the fact that the

tree is a representative of their own histories. Through these connections, it becomes evident that the tree is important reminder of the past.

While the tree is connected to history, so too are the old folks. Isolated from the rest of their nation, they remember cultural practices and beliefs that are no longer appreciated outside the confines of the fort. Marta, the young nurse of the fort, attempts to make this known to Izidine, the inspector:

[Marta]: Listen, inspector, sir: the crime that's been committed here isn't the one you're trying to solve.

[Izidine]: What do you mean by that?

[Marta]: Look at these old folk, inspector. They're all dying

[Izidine]: That's what happens to all of us in the end.

[Marta]: But not like this, do you understand? These old folk are not just people... They are guardians of a world. It's that world which is slowly being killed off.

[Izidine]: I'm sorry, but as far as I'm concerned, that's philosophy. I'm only a policeman.

[Marta]: The real crime being committed here is that they are killing the world of the past... They are killing the last surviving roots that might have prevented us from becoming like you...

[Izidine]: Like me?

[Marta]: Yes, inspector. People without history, people who live by imitation.

(Couto 53-54)

Marta identifies the value of the old folks within the refuge while likening them to the tree. The elderly are the “last surviving roots” of a world that existed before facing the horrific destruction of a civil war that lasted 16 years. As the tree has roots that anchor it, Marta argues that the old folks should be appreciated, as their presence is needed to create a world that incorporates the lessons of the past, rather than one that moves forward blindly.

While the old folks in the refuge value the frangipani tree, in their conversations with the inspector, they reveal that the director did not share their feelings. The Old Gaffer explains to the inspector how conflict developed when the director ordered him to cut down the frangipani tree. This disregard for the feelings of the elderly is corroborated by the director’s other terrible behaviors. The elderly describe him as a man of violence who used corporal punishment and sold the food for the old folks in order to purchase arms for the underground gun trade. Together, these behaviors establish the director as a symbol of the violence that overtook Mozambique during the civil war that followed independence. His command to cut down the tree seems to reflect the ideal to press forward with the country’s development in a manner that is content to remove the roots of what transpired in the past.

In both *Season of Migration to the North* and *Under the Frangipani*, tree imagery serves as a visual reminder to the characters of the stability and comfort of the past. However, as Mustafa uproots the narrator’s confidence in his sense of belonging in his old village and the director’s aggression toward the tree demonstrates a disregard for the value of the lessons of the past, the characters within the novels turn to other forms of natural imagery to reflect their attempts to digest their present circumstances.

Dismayed by the director’s disregard for them and the memories of the past they hold dear, the elderly folk in *Under the Frangipani* turn to images of water and the sea. These images

represent an imagined and unachievable escape from their present situation. Isolated from the rest of the nation by minefields on one side and a “rocky beach [that] hindered access from the sea” on the other, even the fort’s geography ensures that an escape by the sea is impossible (Couto 14). While the old folks know that they cannot escape the fort, this reality does not stop them from imagining and frequently employing images of the water in order to entertain the idea of escape. The Old Portuguese describes his imagined escape by sea saying,

...I love the seas so much that I even like getting seasick. What do I do? I knock back a few drinks, the ones they traditionally make here in these parts, and allow myself to get sozzled. In this dizzy state, I fancy myself on the high seas, adrift in a boat... Yes, I know the dangers involved; he who confuses sky and water ends up unable to distinguish between life and death. (Couto 44)

The Old Portuguese captures the sentiments shared by other members of the fort: the sea is an escape from life at the fort under the Director, even if it is only achievable through imagination. While he recognizes the hopelessness and danger of growing obsessed with an unachievable escape, this mind game he plays with himself is the one of the only things that brings peace to him within the refuge.

Other members of the fort, including Little Miss No, the fort’s self-proclaimed witch, share the desire for the endless possibility offered by water and the sea. She describes her nightly routine of turning into water so she can sleep:

To tell you the truth, I’m only happy when I’m my watery self. When I fall asleep in that state, I’m spared the trouble of dreaming. For water has no past. As far as a river is concerned, all that matters is today, like a wave on a permanent crest.

There’s a riddle that goes like this: ‘What can you hit without ever hurting it?’ Do

you know the answer, sir? I'll give you the answer: you can hit water without causing it an injury. (Couto 80)

This image conveys the idea of a soothing quality of water, which echoes the Old Portuguese's sentiment that water provides an escape from the pains of daily life. Through this anecdote, Little Miss No conflates water with a painless existence and distance from the violence of the past and present. As such, her story comments on the painful life that she personally experienced, evidenced by her relationship with a sexually abusive father and the subsequent emotional distress his abuse caused, as well as the violence subjected to her by the fort's director.

Finally, the dead man himself also turns to an escape by sea as a method of comfort. When he reflects on his life as a carpenter, he remembers, "The whistle would be blown for work to stop and everyone would disperse. I alone would stay on to look at the sea, that gleaming terrace. It was there that I gained the comfort of an illusion: nothing in my life had been lost. Everything was like the ebb and flow of the waves" (Couto 118). Indeed, the sea itself is an illusion, a symbol of an alternative universe free from pain, death and the memory of violence that has beleaguered the people of Mozambique even after liberation.

While the sea serves as an illusory escape from the present violence for the elderly in the fort, the image of the Nile reminds the narrator in *Season of Migration to the North* that his efforts to isolate his experiences between North and South are ill fated. His encounters with the Nile suggest that he must face the changes that occurred in his country during his absence and the effect that his time in the land of the colonizer has had on his own character.

Within *Season of Migration to the North*, the image of the Nile runs through the text and the narrator's life. His village, Wad Hamid is a "small village at the bend of the Nile where the river, after flowing from south to north, suddenly turns almost at right angles and flows from

west to east” (Salih 52). From this description, the reader recognizes that the Nile has altered from its traditional vertical path and has become a horizontal barrier between North and South. In addition, even as the narrator uses tree motifs to assert his belief that his village has gone unchanged in his absence, upon his return home, he does acknowledge the subtle changes presented by the Nile. He states, “I saw the village slowly undergo a change: the water-wheels disappeared to be replaced on the bank of the Nile by pumps, each one doing the work of a hundred water-wheels” (Salih 6). The modernization of the river challenges the narrator’s view of a simple and static Sudan and a cosmopolitan North.

The Nile continues to serve as a backdrop for changes that challenge the narrator’s simplistic view of his village. Mustafa Sa’eed’s death in the flooding of the Nile plays with the idea of the Nile as a boundary between North and South. As described in Chapters 1 and 2, Mustafa cultivated a dual personality based on his location either North or South of this bend in the Nile. However, the narrator states that on a “steamingly hot July night,” during a year when “the Nile... experienced one of those floodings that occur once every twenty or thirty years and become legendary” Mustafa Sa’eed is believed to have drowned (Salih 38). While the narrator notes “Mustafa Sa’eed was, as far as I knew, an excellent swimmer,” he was no match for the power of the Nile. Likewise, while Mustafa attempted to keep his dual identities isolated, his consumption by the river, a barrier between North and South, suggests that the binary relationship between North and South has altered into a more complicated reality in which the contact between the two regions must be addressed. Just as Mustafa’s rooms took on a heterotopic nature by ignoring the cultural contact that transpired between North and South, his presumed drowning in this physical and allegorical boundary demonstrates that the narrator must

recognize the ways in which his experience in London has altered him and the way that his community has changed, or will be changing, as well.

Mustafa's death in the Nile ushers in a new chapter of the narrator's life. When Mustafa leaves the narrator as the guardian of his wife and children, the narrator begins to develop feelings for Mustafa's widow, Hosna Bint Mahmoud. As such, it shocks the narrator when he learns that Wad Rayyes, an elderly man who has had countless wives, seeks to pursue marriage with Hosna. Upon the revelation of Wad Rayyes intention, the narrator feels enraged:

Anger checked my tongue and I kept silent. The obscene pictures sprang simultaneously to my mind, and, to my extreme astonishment, the two pictures merged: I imagined Hosna Bint Mahmoud, Mustafa Sa'eed's widow, as being the same woman in both instances: two white, wide-open thighs in London, and a woman groaning before dawn in an obscure village on a bend of the Nile under the weight of the aged Wad Rayyes. If that other thing was evil, this too was evil... (Salih 72)

With this expression of emotion, the narrator finally begins to realize that his time spent away from his village has changed his perspective. The conflation of the violence of Mustafa and Wad Rayyes demonstrate that the narrator now conceptualizes the gender relations of his community differently than he had before. This becomes clearer when the narrator voices his frustration of the situation to his long-time friend Mahjoub. While Mahjoub reminds the narrator that "You know how life is run here... Women belong to men..." the narrator responds, "But the world's changed... These are things that no longer fit in with our life in this age" (Salih 83). As the narrator finally addresses that things have changed, he realizes that his time spent away from the

village has made him uncomfortable with some of the traditional aspects of his community. This incident forces him to realize that his time in the North has affected his perceptions.

This realization foreshadows the narrator's return from a business trip to Khartoum, upon which he learns that a terrible event has transpired in his absence. Despite Hosna's resistance, the marriage with Wad Rayyes proceeded. One night, when Wad Rayyes attempted to force himself onto Hosna, she stabbed him to death before stabbing herself in the heart. This event shakes the village, as many profess that violence such as this is unknown in Wad Hamid. The narrator's grandfather responds to the tragedy saying, "There is no power and no strength save in God--it's the first time anything like this has happened in the village since god created it. What a time of affliction we live in!" (Salih 102). Similarly, when Bint Majzoub, a friend of the narrator's grandfather, reveals the terrible details of the murders, she states, "The thing done by Bint Mahmoud is not easily spoken of. It is something we have never seen or heard of in times past or present" (Salih 103). Thus, Hosna Bint Mahmoud, perhaps through her relationship with Mustafa and through her own force of character, comes to challenge the patriarchal traditions of the village. When the narrator digests his own feelings about the tragedy, he, like his elders, feels uprooted: "The world has turned suddenly upside down....there is no escape, no place of refuge, no safeguard...Where, then, were the roots that struck down into times past? Where the memories of death and life..." (Salih 111). This tragedy finally forces the narrator to address that his efforts to maintain a sanitized perception of his village can no longer suffice if he is to move forward from this event. Rather, he must face the challenges of negotiating the relationship of tradition and modernity that his journey north and his return to his village have presented.

In his efforts to process this tragedy, the narrator grapples with the broader challenges of moving forward into the future. Again, the Nile serves as natural imagery, this time guiding the

narrator to recognize that his isolated conception of North and South are limiting his ability to function. The narrator finds himself approaching the Nile and entering its waters. He begins to swim with the goal of reaching the northern shore of the river. However, caught in the forces of the water, the narrator finds himself “half-way between north and south. I was unable to continue, unable to return” (Salih 138). This conflict mirrors the narrator’s overall struggle to understand and make sense of his position in a world where he finds himself unsettled by his experiences that have altered his conception of North and South and tradition and modernity. The narrator finds himself caught: “Turned over on to my back and motionless...I would not be able to keep thus poised for long; sooner or later the river’s forces would pull me down into its depths” (Salih 138). In this moment, the narrator recognizes that his fight to maintain the static vision of his village is futile. If he does not accept that his experiences abroad have altered him and continues to resist change within his village, he will not be able to make a productive impact on his community. He thus recognizes that he must make a choice to move toward a future:

Now I am making a decision. I choose life... I moved my feet and arms, violently and with difficulty, until the upper part of my body was above water. Like a comic actor shouting on a stage, I screamed with all my remaining strength, “Help! Help!” (Salih 138-139)

In this moment, the narrator clearly distinguishes himself from Mustafa Sa’eed. While Mustafa Sa’eed drowned in his efforts to maintain the binary nature of past and present and North and South, the narrator chooses to face the challenges of renegotiating these binaries. In choosing life, the narrator makes a commitment to his community, his country, and himself, despite the difficulties that changing times present. While it seems apparent the narrator survives his close encounter with drowning, given the oral quality of the narrative as discussed in Chapter 2, even

if the narrator drowns, his calls for help suggest that he is willing to commit to a future that requires him to challenge his initial conceptions of North and South, tradition and modernity. While the presence of the Nile helped the narrator in *Season of Migration to the North* learn the importance of forging a future that breaks down binary oppositions, the tree in *Under the Frangipani* returns as an image of a future that incorporates and acknowledges the past. In the dead man's last day in the inspector's body, which is also the inspector's final day to determine who killed the director, a fierce storm strikes the beach and decimates the fort. Led by Little Miss No, the elderly folk along with the inspector and Marta make their way to fort, where the walls seem to magically "re-emerge...intact" (Couto 148). Mystified by this development, the dead man, in the body of the inspector, feels as though his eyes of deceived him. However, he notes "proof of the recent chaos": the frangipani tree. He gazes at the tree and realizes that "all that was left of it was a crude skeleton, fingers of charcoal embracing a void. Its trunk, leaves, flowers had been reduced to ashes" (Couto 149). In this moment, the tree, destroyed in the violence of the storm, represents the recent history of Mozambique as a nation destroyed by the violence of civil war. However, the tree does not remain in this state for long as, the dead man remembers:

The tree was a place of miracles. So I got down from my body, and touched the ashes, turning them into petals. I turned over the remains of the trunk, and the sap, like the earth's semen, began to flow once more. With every gesture I made, the frangipani become reborn. And when the tree was fully restored, newly born into the fullness of life, I covered myself with the same ash into which the plant had disintegrated. In this way I let myself enter plant life, preparing for my own arborescence. (Couto 149)

As the dead man's spirit enters the tree and it begins to return to life, he realizes that the rest of the elderly are following him, leaving Marta Gitmo and Izidine Naíta behind, "their image fading, all that remained of them was a double crystalline halo, the brief glint of dawn" (Couto 150). In this moment, the tree becomes a symbol of rebirth and the future. In his analysis of the frangipani tree, Rogers states that in this moment "a natural order is restored and, crucially, this point is underscored by the organic image of the tree being employed as the symbol of this restoration. Within this order, the old have a place and death can once again fertilize life" (121). Moreover, in this moment, there is the potential for a future "Mozambique where time and history is re-voiced, re-claimed, and allowed to grow according to dictates of a progressive society" (Rogers 122). Thus, through this image of a rebirthed tree, Couto hints at a future that does not only seek the values of Western modernity, but one that can incorporate the lessons and values of the past into a positive future. In leaving behind Marta and Izidine, the only youthful members of the refuge, this rebirth of the tree demonstrates the hope for a new generation to carry the lessons of the past into the future.

The image of the rebirthed tree and the narrator's final decision to choose life in the waters of the Nile demonstrate that there is reason to hope for a future that can challenge the binary discourses that have shaped the past. There exists the possibility of a future that can negotiate the challenges of the relationships between North and South and modernity and tradition. Rather than advocating for a return to the past or the total embrace of modernity dictated by European standards, Couto and Salih craft stories that hint at a world that finds possibility where before there was only divide.

Postscript

In their novels, Salih and Couto paint vivid pictures of the difficulties of post-coloniality. The challenges of writing in this space are many, yet Salih and Couto successfully represent the complex realities of their nations and demonstrate the importance of reframing a world in way that goes beyond the binary oppositions that drove colonialism. Instead of these binaries, they seek to produce a space in which the ambiguous, grey areas between these seeming opposites present the possibility of a positive future.

Through their work, Couto and Salih narrate the struggles of those who live in the “in-between” spaces of these binaries. In *Under the Frangipani*, Couto allows the voices of the elderly to remind us of the value of the historical and cultural past, while the youthful presence of Marta and Izidine demonstrate the possibility of a future that responsibly addresses the past. In *Season of Migration to the North*, Salih allows Mustafa’s story to demonstrate the limits of exoticizing the East and gives the narrator the opportunity to address the challenges of returning home after living in the West. If Orientalism attempted to characterize the East on Western terms, Couto and Salih forcefully resist this through the construction of complex characters and their efforts to address difficult issues.

Reading these texts together has reinforced the necessity of going beyond the boundaries of binaries. As Couto focused on the negotiation of tradition and modernity and past and future, he demonstrated that these elements do not just exist as opposites, but rather when taken together hint at a future in which multiple perspectives and voices are celebrated. As the narrator and

Mustafa struggled to simultaneously address their experiences in the North and their histories in the South, Salih demonstrated the need to reevaluate the relationship between North and South.

Published in 1969 and 1996, Salih and Couto, respectively, created these texts within years of Sudan's and Mozambique's achievements of independence. These books and the lived histories of the people within both nations demonstrate that liberation is just the first hurdle in arriving at a truly post-colonial world. While Sudan and Mozambique have unfortunately continued to face major conflicts and obstacles, these texts serve as reminders of the challenging time of post-independence and as suggestions to the next generation of citizens

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ACADEMIC VITA

Monica E. Hunter
monicaehunter@gmail.com

Education

B.A. Honors in Comparative Literature, 2016
B.A. in International Politics
Minors in Spanish and Business

Thesis Title: Challenging Boundaries in *Season of Migration to the North* and *Under the Frangipani*
Thesis Supervisor: Hoda El Shakry

Work Experience

The Malini Club, State College, PA. Fall 2015-Spring 2015

Director of Global Fellowship Programs

- Recruited participants for summer programs through installation activities, information sessions and online outreach efforts
- Created informational material used in recruitment
- Participated in club's mission to empower girls and women through education

Common Cause, Washington, D.C. Summer 2015

Digital Communications Intern

- Created social media content to share the organization's message with national and state-level audiences
- Utilized Photoshop to create shareable graphic images
- Wrote blog posts related to the organization's major advocacy issues

Comparative Literature Studies Journal, State College, PA Spring 2015

Intern

- Utilized Editorial Manager to maintain a database of pending works
- Managed schedules of reviewers to ensure timeliness in the receipt of their works

The Daily Collegian, State College, PA Spring 2014

Student Government Reporter

- Generated content focused on Penn State University's student governments
- Wrote and contributed to 25 articles over the course of the spring semester
- Fact checked each article to ensure the accuracy and quality of content
- Worked breaking news desk to ensure The Daily Collegian's timeliness of reporting

United Concordia Dental, Harrisburg, PA

Summer 2013

Marketing Intern

- Assisted with various marketing initiatives, including a national advertising campaign focused on brand awareness
- Utilized social media to interact with customers and maintain an online presence
- Researched competitors in the marketplace to provide direction for new initiatives

Awards:

Recipient of the 2013-2014 Division of Undergraduate Studies Award Spring 2014
Recipient of the 2015-2016 Thomas R. and Joan G. Dye Scholarship Fall 2015
Dean's List Fall Fall 2012-Fall 2015

Professional Memberships:

Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society Member Spring 2015-present

Community Service Involvement:

Penn State Dance Marathon Committee Member Fall 2012-Spring 2016
Global Ambassador with University Office of Global Programs Fall 2014-Spring 2015
Global Connections Communication Partner Fall 2013-Spring 2015
American Red Cross of Centre County Volunteer Spring 2013

International Education:

CIEE Study Center at the Universidad de Sevilla Summer 2014
Completed coursework in Spanish culture and language in Sevilla, Spain

Language Proficiency:

English: Native Language
Spanish: Intermediate Proficiency
Modern Standard Arabic: Novice Proficiency