

CONFLICT AS A NARRATIVE  
TOOL IN POSTCOLONIAL  
WRITING – THE CASE OF  
MARGARET MASCARENHAS’  
NOVEL *SKIN*

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the significance of conflict in Margaret Mascarenhas' novel *Skin* as a literary tool, using Robert Stanton's notions of internal and external conflict. The primary goal is to investigate how conflict progresses the narrative and creates thematic discourse in the text. Internal conflicts are caused by characters' inner struggles with opposing emotions, impulses, and ethical dilemmas, whilst external conflicts are caused by fights with nature or supernatural factors. This study underlines the centrality of conflict in literature, impacting character development, narrative advancement, and thematic exploration. It offers light on the complexity of Goan literature, identity formation, and the interplay between colonial and postcolonial forces, by merging postcolonial concepts and conflict analysis, highlighting the critical role of conflict as a catalyst for narrative development.

**Keywords:** Conflict; Postcolonial literature; Goa; Margaret Mascarenhas; *Skin*.

## RESUMO

Este estudo investiga o significado do conflito no romance *Skin* de Margaret Mascarenhas como ferramenta literária, utilizando as noções de conflito interno e externo de Robert Stanton. O objetivo principal é investigar a forma como o conflito faz progredir a narrativa e cria um discurso temático no texto. Os conflitos internos são causados pelas lutas interiores das personagens com emoções opostas, impulsos e dilemas éticos, enquanto os conflitos externos são causados por lutas com a natureza ou fatores sobrenaturais. Este estudo sublinha a centralidade do conflito na literatura, com impacto no desenvolvimento das personagens, no avanço da narrativa e na exploração temática. O estudo esclarece a complexidade da literatura goesa, a formação da identidade, e a interação entre as forças coloniais e pós-coloniais, através da fusão de conceitos pós-coloniais e da análise de conflitos, salientando o papel fundamental do conflito como catalisador do desenvolvimento narrativo.

**Palavras-chave:** Conflito; Literatura pós-colonial; Goa; Margaret Mascarenhas; *Skin*.

## INTRODUCTION

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the emergence of post-colonial studies as an academic discipline. This phenomenon emerged as an aftermath of decolonization, in the context of European colonial powers whose lasting colonial impressions on societies, cultures, economics, and politics were emerging areas of academic interest. The complex colonial legacies such as economic exploitation, cultural imperialism, racial hierarchies, and power dynamics were ingrained during the colonial period.

However, it is imperative to note the subtle difference in the meaning of the words 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial', brought by a single use of a hyphen. Overbey, K. (2012: 145) remarks on the evolution of the words in her paper titled *Postcolonial*. She notes that towards the end of the 19th century till the 1970s, the hyphenated word 'post-colonial' was used to denote postindependence or that that existed after the end of colonial rule. This linear chronology included the condition of a former colony. However, post-1970s, the word 'post' in 'post-colonialism' was upheld with an ideological value rather than temporal. Thus, 'postcolonial studies', without the hyphen, indicates the study of the social conditions and subjectivities both within/during colonial rule and occupation, and after independence, and as well as in diasporic and transnational communities.

There is also a sense in which post-colonial writing itself, as well as the systematic indigenous theories, offers a broader, non-Eurocentric perspective on some traditional questions of theory (Ashcroft et al., 2002). In doing so, it deconstructs the dominant colonial narrative, and shifts focus to the experiences and perspectives of the colonized peoples, thereby exploring alternative narratives that emerged from within the colonized societies.

The major contributors to the development of the field of postcolonial studies include scholars such as Homi Bhabha (b. 1949) whose concepts such as hybridity, difference and ambivalence described the ways in which colonized peoples resisted the power of the colonizer. His work, titled *Location of Culture* (1994), problematizes cultural identity, wherein he challenges the cohesiveness of culture. Another major contributor to postcolonial studies is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (b. 1942). Her work has generated notable ideas

such as the subaltern, strategic existentialism, and epistemological performance. Edward Said (1935-2003), another postcolonial theorist whose works provided a theoretical framework for many postcolonial studies, through his work titled *Orientalism* (1978), challenged this concept of Orientalism and the difference between representations of the East and West. He elucidated that this illogical and artificial distinction from their own point of view divided the population into 'us' and 'them'. With this, the Europeans claimed to be of a superior race to the people of the East, thus justifying colonization and colonialism.

Over a period of time, this field of study has evolved and expanded to encompass a wide range of disciplines such as literature, history, anthropology, sociology, political science, and cultural studies. It has permitted the researchers to understand the complexities of the societies, and the interplay between the colonial and post-colonial powers, thereby exploring identity formation, cultural hybridity, and resistance to colonial rule.

The Portuguese colonial rule in Goa, that lasted 451 years, led to complex legacies of colonization and post-colonial experiences in this region. Goa was annexed to India in 1961. In the cadre of postcolonial literature, Goan writings have underlined the multifaceted effects of colonization on Goan identity, culture and social workings. They investigate the contact between Goan indigenous traditions and the influences of Portuguese colonialism that lead to the complex postcolonial landscape. This socio-politico-cultural phenomenon inspired writings in English like Lambert Mascarenhas' *Sorrowing lies my Land* (1970), as well as a number of pertinent narratives in Portuguese, like those of Vimala Devi in *Monção* (1963), and of Epiácio Pais in *Os Javalis de Codval* (1973).

Jason Keith Fernandes (2014), in his essay *The Curious Case of Goan Orientalism* presents two orientalist representational models: the ideal types of *Goa Portuguesa*, and the other of *Goa Indica*. This form of contrastive or layered identities is found in multiple Goan writings. Thus, there is a surge of postcolonial themes in Goan literature, such as cultural hybridity, memory, and displacement. The Goan experience of resistance and resilience, and its characters' pursuit of self-sustenance and autonomy, have drawn up the Goan literary narrative.

Works in Goan literature have evaluated the impact of colonialism on language. Kyoko Matsukawa (2002) presents the socio-cultural factors behind the language problem in post-colonial Goa in her work titled *Konkani and 'Goan Identity' in Post-Colonial Goa*. Similarly, the impact of colonialism has been examined on religion, social hierarchies, and the formation of Goan identity.

Goan postcolonial studies explore Goan history, politics, anthropology and other disciplines, thereby examining issues such as economic exploitation, cultural assimilation, and power dynamics that continue from the Goan colonial era to the contemporary times.

Margaret Mascarenhas was an American citizen born in the United States but grew up in Caracas, Venezuela. She was of Goan origin and hailed from the village of Anjuna in Bardez, in the state of Goa, India. Her Indian grandparents considered themselves 'Catholic' Saraswat Brahmins. (Needham, 2010). Despite her Goan origins, she never lived in India as a young girl but made brief visits to India. She was met with an understanding of the existing colour consciousness in Goa and India when she returned to India to work as a consulting editor in Mumbai (da Silva Gracias, 2022).

As one would generally expect of the influence of the author's life on the development of her/his central character, the case here wasn't the same. In an interview with Jayesh Needham (2010), Margaret Mascarenhas points out that she grew up in a well-integrated multi-racial society and frequented multi-racial, multicultural, bilingual and secondary schools. However, she did not encounter identity-related preoccupations like her main character Pagan does. Through her novel *Skin*, she revitalizes the diaspora and its roots, which have been diluted and mixed with the belief systems.

### **ABOUT THE NOVEL**

Published in 2010, *Skin* is a novel by Margaret Mascarenhas that, through its plot(s) and characters, tackles themes of culture and identity through complex human relationships in the context of Goa. The story revolves around the multiple lives of the protagonist, a young woman named Pagan, who, like

much of the 2nd generation Goan diaspora, is interested in learning about her Goan roots, as she returns to the land “carpeted in paddy fields of the brightest green” (Mascarenhas, 2010: 153), only to learn about the dark truth of her family’s involvement in the African slave trade under Portuguese colonial rule. The story traverses across continents, making references to the protagonist’s life in the USA, as well as the tales of her ancestors in India (Goa and Daman), and Africa, tapping into themes of colonialism and the Indian Ocean slave trade. As the story unfolds at the narration of Pagan’s former caretaker, an enslaved African woman named Esperança, the reader understands that there exists a magically real slippage between heredity and history (Ferrão, 2014), resulting in a possible biological connection between Pagan and the ancestors she grew to despise.

Jayesh Needham, while recording his interview in the journal *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* (2010) with the author of the novel, notes that the novel *Skin* features Pagan as the main character. Through her story, issues such as Portuguese colonialism, slavery and identity: post-colonial, neo-colonial, or otherwise are brought out. The legacy of colonialism, cultural hybridity, and the tension between tradition and modernity form a major part of the novel’s plot. This novel presents the intricate layers of individuality and the ways in which societal constructs shape our understanding of ourselves and others.

Anna Beatriz Paula’s work titled *Re-telling Goa’s History: The Margin Narrative* (2013) uses Margaret Mascarenhas’ *Skin* to demonstrate the presentation of Goan history from different perspectives through a circular narrative structure. She concludes that stories in *Skin* are connected by memory. Hence, Pagan’s memory uses stories that she was told to reconstruct history. But retelling these stories for her children decolonizes the historical discourse in the transmission process.

## **THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Oxford Learner’s Dictionary defines ‘Conflict’ as a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings, or wishes; a situation in which it is

difficult to choose. Conflict is a literary technique that serves as a vital element in writing. It creates enormous tension within a story, moving the narrative forward. Furthermore, conflict frequently reveals profound layers of meaning inside the narrative fabric, revealing light on the characters' motivations, ideals, and vulnerabilities.

Conflict takes on a crucial role in a narrative or drama's construction within the area of the plot. It frequently serves as the motivating factor for the actions in the story. Additionally, conflict draws readers in by posing difficulties and creating a sense of ambiguity about the final result. Plots frequently have multiple occurrences of conflict, representing different types, that cause tension within the storyline. The resolution of problems by the end of the novel gives the reader a sense of closure and fulfilment. A conflict that does not reach its resolution often serves as a tool of intrigue for further readings.

Robert Stanton, in his book *An Introduction to Fiction* (1965), presents two categories of conflict, namely internal conflict and external conflict. Internal conflict occurs when a character battles with conflicting wants or beliefs within themselves. They experience it inside, and it shapes how they evolve as a person. A character is pitted against an outside force in an external conflict. External factors obstruct a character's motivations and increase tension while they work to accomplish their objectives.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This paper's main goal is to apply the theory of Stanton's (1965) internal and external conflict, and investigate the function of conflict, with an emphasis on how it might advance the narrative in the postcolonial novel and help thematic discourse take shape. The paper focuses on conflict as it is presented in the novel *Skin* by Margaret Mascarenhas. It aims to shed light on the link between conflict and its influence on the narrative structure, character dynamics, and theme investigation. This study concludes that conflict functions as a driving force in postcolonial literature, and influences the discourse of the novel.

## CONFLICTS IN MARGARET MASCARENHAS' *SKIN*

### INTERNAL CONFLICT

Internal conflict, often known as 'character vs. self conflict', is a prevalent narrative component in literature that shows a characters' struggles within themselves. It is caused by the characters' own emotions, anxieties, competing desires, or mental diseases, resulting in a war between opposing forces within the same individual. Internal conflict may be evaluated by concentrating on two basic aspects: 'conflict with self' and 'conflict with other'. We get insights into the narrative functions and contributions to character development by investigating various types of internal conflicts.

In the preliminary chapter of the novel, Mascarenhas introduces the reader to Pagan, the protagonist, who is described as a cultural hybrid, the conventional, perfect amalgamation of 'Saraswat Brahmins, highborn Castilian, and African-Angolan' (Mascarenhas, 2010), who, in her own unconventional ways, is distraught with conflict. Be it the death of her parents at the ripe age of 6, or the socio-politico-cultural pandemonium she is faced with throughout her life (read: lives) in San Francisco, Angola, Pondicherry (now Puducherry) and Goa, Maria Livia de Miranda Flores, a.k.a. Pagan, furnishes Mascarenhas' writing with conflict, which drives the narrative. The following section illustrates and discusses two types of internal conflict, as depicted in the novel.

'Conflict with self' refers to an inner struggle in which a character has trouble with opposing feelings, wants, ideals, or moral issues. It frequently entails a decision between good and wrong or a collision of competing desires, needs, or expectations. This internal conflict deepens character development by allowing for moral progress and self-discovery. For example, a character may be faced with the difficult decision of selecting between two love interests, which reflects the intricacies of their emotions and personal wants. Such conflicts, even if they appear trivial, contribute to the plot's overall development.

Mascarenhas' Pagan evolves as a character that captures the attention of the reader from the word 'go'. The first chapter is adequately decked with instances of the protagonist's conflict with herself.

Pagan groans with the exertion of trying to communicate. "No. Xico," she says, "America is not the problem. The problem is me, in me. But I can't resolve it here. I need to be somewhere else."

(Mascarenhas, 2010: 17)

The chapter, simply titled *Fear of Flying* begins with the knowledge that, as the name suggests, Pagan has a seemingly illogical fear of traveling by air, which the reader is later given to understand is caused by the untimely demise of her parents, caused by an airplane crash.

Pagan's dreams are often visited by the image of Micky Mouse, taking on different roles (like that of Satan), which stems from a childhood episode she had experienced with her aunt Sarah, and cousin, Meredith. The two, orthodox Baptists by nature, had condemned five-year-old Pagan's father, a brown Catholic, naturally scarring the child, who, even in her adult-life, has episodes of frantic panic. The consistent episodes of (inter)personal conflict lead to an emotionally inconsistent character. "(...) But she does admit to love, since loving Xico is practically like loving herself; they are alike in so many ways." (Mascarenhas, 2010: 159). The reader is then presented with the knowledge that much earlier, Pagan's lover Xico had, in fact, proposed marriage to her, to which she had no response, possibly credited to the culmination of her own personal conflict. Such a situation could result from the interparental issues as proposed by Simon and Furman (2010) who note that "Adolescents exposed to high levels of interparental conflict might anticipate and potentiate conflict with romantic partners." (Simon and Furman, 2010).

Finding herself full of internal conflict, and unable to cope despite multiple sessions of therapy, the protagonist is led to the Orient, where she will discover the roots of her ancestry, the mixed lineage she is born out of, and the brewing conflict that has led to the cultural hybrid that she is.

In contrast, ‘conflict with other’ refers to the external impediment of a character’s ambitions by other people. As the protagonist must overcome the hurdles given by another individual or group, this person-versus-person conflict might emerge as debates or violent confrontations. This struggle emphasizes the collision of opposing forces and adds drama and suspense to the story.

Mascarenhas banks on this type of conflict to lead the narrative, and her technique works flawlessly, be it Pagan’s conflict with her cousins and classmates at a young age, which contributes significantly to her character development, or the conflict that emerges with her grandmother, Dona Gabriela Maria Clara de Miranda Flores, a staunch casteist and racist element, who conveniently fails to recognise her granddaughter, when she appears to have darker skin. “She recognized you. She just didn’t acknowledge your skin.” (Mascarenhas, 2010: 43).

While the novel involves multiple intertwining storylines that all come together like an orchestral masterpiece as the story climaxes, the reader is introduced to the beautifully dangerous and feared Consolação, whose twins with her husband Gor-gor are in danger, when the latter believes they are not his own. The entire village is brought down to its knees when Gor-gor lights up all of Consolação’s magic cures and herbs, dancing round the fire, and cursing his own children to death. “From then on, when Consolação gazed upon her children, she felt not only love, but also fear.” (Mascarenhas, 2010: 132). This sort of conflict erupting between the two characters in question guide the entire plot in the fourth chapter.

This type of internal conflict is presented yet again towards the end of the narrative, in a different, sociocultural light, and so may be termed as ‘conflict with society’. Mascarenhas makes references to Goa’s cultural identity crisis, wherein a number of Goans could be seen as cultural appropriators simply because they did not know who they actually were. Post-liberation Goa witnessed a two-sided coin approach, wherein some Goans attached themselves to the older Portuguese way of living, while others, taking after Goa’s annexation to India, embraced the Indian cultural ways. “Our culture, thinks Pagan. Goa has been overrun by so many cultures, no one knows who they are anymore, much less what culture they belong to.” (Mascarenhas, 2010: 216).

Internal conflict, in both its 'conflict with self' and 'conflict with other' manifestations, acts as a narrative technique that improves storytelling and character development. It provides readers with a glimpse into the complexity of the human psyche, allowing them to empathize with individuals and explore universal issues like morality, personal growth, and the choices we confront in life. Take for example Consolação's constant struggle as a black woman in society, wherein Mascarenhas notes, "Everything in history and in her culture had taught her to believe that women were made to suffer, and that even the smallest happiness came at a great cost." (Mascarenhas, 2010: 128-129). Authors provide readers with opportunities for introspection by portraying internal tensions, as they traverse the intricacies of moral dilemmas and internal battles with the characters.

## **EXTERNAL CONFLICT**

External conflict is a classic narrative element in literature, pitching people against external factors that obstruct their objectives and build suspense throughout the novel. The external conflict has two major components: 'conflict with nature' and 'conflict with supernatural'.

*Skin* is brimming with elements of external conflict, as one would imagine. Set in Portuguese colonial India, the story provides the reader with the classic Indian social structure, with a central focus on conflict based on caste, religion, class and gender. Be it in Daman or back in Goa, Mascarenhas' characters are constantly seen bearing the brunt of the pre-existing social stratification of the time, and as she notes,

(...) Pagan felt sorry for the Hindu girls. Yet, she was also aware that Hindus exercised their own forms of oppression – through the caste system, the dowry system and traditions (...) such as sati.

(Mascarenhas, 2010: 177)

The following section illustrates and discusses two types of external conflict, as depicted in the novel.

‘Conflict with nature’ depicts characters engaged in a conflict with elements of nature or wild creatures. It moves the story ahead by putting characters in perilous circumstances or introducing them to unknown and perilous places. Such clashes with nature heighten tension, highlight humanity’s weakness, and represent the natural world’s force and unpredictability. Authors frequently use conflict with nature to represent humanity’s natural fight against their circumstances. This external conflict allows for character development, resilience, and survival instincts. It also accentuates issues such as man’s interaction with nature and the effects of environmental forces on human lives.

In various chapters of the novel, readers are presented with narratives based on the Collective Memory of a people, that have to do with wild animals, and how their role was vital in tribal communities, as the one that Esperança, one of the central characters, comes from. Animals play a strong role in bringing about sudden changes, the so-called plot twists, in this narrative. A key example would be the case of the black leopard appearing out of nowhere, killing Gor-gor, thereby freeing Consolação’s twins from peril. The dangerous relationship between these elements of nature and the characters lead the plot to its climax, without which the stories could not possibly collide. Perhaps the addition of this type of conflict is a writing technique, one that is used but sparingly and carefully by the author.

Characters in ‘conflict with supernatural’ deal with fate, spirits, deities, or otherworldly beings. This type of external conflict instills a feeling of mystery, the unknown, and the invisible forces that influence the lives of individuals. Conflict with the supernatural delves into the limitations of human life, the frontiers of knowledge, and the interplay of the mortal and the divine. It raises serious concerns about fate, free choice, and the presence of powers beyond our knowledge. The authors create an atmosphere of wonder, dread, and the incomprehensible by using this type of external conflict, adding complexity and interest to the tale.

The *pièce de résistance* presents itself in this niche of conflict theory, wherein all the various, intricate detailing comes together. The novel offers the reader multiple instances of conflict with the supernatural right from

the beginning, wherein a young Pagan encourages her newfound friends to jump into a painting with the power of their minds. Mascarenhas makes no account of this occurrence being imaginary of any kind, and to this effect, as an adult, Pagan is reminded of this supernatural adventure through a fateful encounter with one of her childhood companions. "(...) Aren't you the one who got us to pray to the Goddess and – " "Jump into the picture!" they both said simultaneously" (Mascarenhas, 2010: 191).

As an adult, the same, now emotionally wrecked protagonist has recurrent dreams of a mysterious woman named Saudade. Who is Saudade? The plot thickens as the reader is led, slowly but surely, to this discovery.

There is a word in Portuguese for which there is no English equivalent (...) It is Loss, Yearning, Nostalgia, Bitter-Sweetness – all at once. The word is *Saudade*.  
(Mascarenhas, 2010: 18)

The inclusion of this supernatural appearance of Saudade in Pagan's dreams is what leads to her eventual crisis resolution in the story's climax. Ultimately, as Pagan learns about her intimate, somewhat otherworldly relationship with Saudade, the reader is provided with the string that pulls the narrative together. Why does Pagan feel a stronger connection towards Africa than India? "(...) "What interests you about African Studies?" Bigmama asked her granddaughter during the midterm break. "I would have thought you'd be more interested in India, where your dad came from." (...) (Mascarenhas, 2010: 190). The reason, despite Pagan's ignorance during the time, is Saudade, who, the reader then discovers, is Pagan's biological mother.

External conflict, as manifested in 'conflict with nature' and 'conflict with the supernatural', is a potent narrative element in literature. These conflicts advance the story, heighten suspense, and allow individuals to demonstrate their persistence, flexibility, and inner strength. Nature's conflict highlights humanity's link with the environment and the forces that affect our life. The supernatural conflict extends into realms of mystery, fate,

and mysterious powers beyond human comprehension. Authors stimulate readers' imaginations, encourage introspection, and provide views into the complicated relationships between humans and the environment they live by addressing these external conflicts. The external battle with nature and the supernatural enhances the narrative landscape by stirring emotions and prompting meditation on the immense intricacies of existence.

### CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The seventh chapter of the novel, titled *A dream traveller's diary* offers the reader with long-awaited closure. With bated breath, one is able to understand the significance of Saudade – the character and the concept – in Pagan's life. All types of conflict, be it internal (with oneself or with another) or external (with nature or with the supernatural) meet their ultimate fate, culminating in conflict resolution on the part of the protagonist, Pagan. Leandro, Pagan's uncle, for example, who always shared a conflictual and complex relationship with his niece, is later discovered to be the girl's biological father. Closure is offered to a past occurrence that had portrayed Leandro in an adversarial light.

“(...) “If you were my daughter, I would give you a solid beating,” he said.”  
“You're just jealous because you're shorter than my father, and anyway, I'm not yours,” Pagan yelled (...).”  
(Mascarenhas, 2010: 86)

However, in the Epilogue of her work, Mascarenhas ensures her readers are left yearning for the same conflict she seemed to have diffused. The aforementioned physically abusive husband of Consolação, Gor-gor, is described to have a single nipple, and it is in this epilogical description that Pagan foresees the misfortune of her newborn daughter, who shares the same biological trait, marking her ancestry as one that is conflictual. Leaving the readers on a cliffhanger, one is assured that the story, the lineage and the narrative continue to thrive because of conflict.

## CONFLICT AND THE POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL

At what junctures, then, does conflict, as a theme, advance the narrative in the postcolonial novel *Skin*? The works of three major postcolonial theorists, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Edward Said, and their relation to the novel, are discussed briefly in this section.

Homi Bhabha, in his work *The Location of Culture* (1994), dwells on the concept of ambivalence, a central theme of Pagan's return to Goa. As a cultural hybrid herself, she is met with the dilemma of appropriation vs abrogation. As her western ideologies fail to meet the expectations of her Goan orthodox and conservative counterparts – especially in relation to her romantic life, and her relationship with her casteist and racist grandmother – she finds herself at a standstill.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her work *Death of a Discipline* (2003), contributes to subaltern studies, which focuses on populations that are outside the hegemonic power structure under colonial rule. A common concept in this area of studies, focusing on 'history told from below', proves relevant when dissecting the narrative structure of *Skin*. The narrative style in the novel allows for much of the plot to be chronicled by Esperança, an enslaved woman from Africa. As the narrative structure now shifts, the reader is presented with a fresh point of view, one that defies eurocentrism.

(...) “In both India and Africa they traded their weapons of destruction for diamonds, copper, ivory, gold and mostly... black gold.” Esperança pauses and stares down at the dirt floor of the hut, so Pagan cannot see her eyes. “Which is to say, mostly slaves,” she says. And now, she raises her head and looks at Pagan directly (...)

(Mascarenhas, 2010: 102)

Amélia Polónia, in her studies on new historiographical perspectives on the Portuguese Overseas Expansion, delves into the role of the African slave trade under colonial rule, and how different perspectives, especially those of the subaltern, i.e 'from below', help in un-learning and re-learning historical occurrences. She states, “The role performed by the indigenous agents in the

success of European expansion is even better understood if one thinks of the levels of dependency at the point of cooperation”. (Polónia, 2022). She argues that the impact of this slave trade across the Indian Ocean is felt in ethnic, cultural and linguistic flows, and it is a field yet to be understood and evaluated fully.

The work of Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978), is a valid resource, wherein he argues that orientalism is a manner of depicting the east (the orient) through writing that is dominated by western perspectives and ideological biases, and that these are not factual, but constructed. In one of the letters Pagan writes to her partner Xico, she mentions “(...) unlike the anal-retentive Americans who have to analyze and prove everything, most people here don't really bother to try and separate fact from fiction (...)” (Mascarenhas, 2010: 153). The western point of view, that all communities from the orient are similar, and are in opposition to the features of the occident, is a common theme in the novel.

## CONCLUSION

Postcolonial writing often involves the discussion of experiences such as slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender and place as well as responses to the discourses of imperial rule (Quayson, 2020). It was no doubt, therefore, that this genre of literature developed in a land such as India, under the British Raj, and Goa, its smallest state, that experienced 451 years of Portuguese Colonial Rule. While the African Slave Trade to Europe and the Americas has been studied in great detail, its effects in the East, across the Indian Ocean, is a field of study that offers novel perspectives of European Imperialism.

Conflict theory, as proposed by Robert Stanton, suggests that there exist two broad categories of conflict - internal and external - and while the novel *Skin* proves worthy for illustrative purposes, producing multiple instances of the various types of conflict, we argue that it is a tool used by Mascarenhas, to boost narrative structures, keeping readers involved and desirous for more.

It would seem that, for Mascarenhas, conflict is a salient feature in postcolonial spaces. As the story unravels, through its “mélange of plots and subplots, of races and cultures, (it) stresses the hybridity of a post-colonial experience characterised by suppleness and ambivalence of form and content” (Noronha Melo Furtado, 2019). The novel, that puts forth multiple instances of conflictual relationships and occurrences, through the narration(s) of Pagan and Esperança, “creates new forms of representation for the subaltern woman, in this case, the protagonist herself as well as the African women sold during the slave trade” (Noronha Melo Furtado, 2019).

What Mascarenhas so beautifully orchestrates is a vivid illustration of how conflict, in its countless avatars, drives the narrative structure in the postcolonial novel, concluding with a cliffhanger of an epilogue, that arouses in the reader the desire to keep the conflict within Pagan and her multicultural ancestry alive.

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