The other (hi)stories: Diasporic tides of the (Lusophone) Indian Ocean in skin and O Outro Pé da Sereia

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The Other (Hi)Stories:
Diasporic Tides of the (Lusophone) Indian Ocean in *Skin* and *O Outro Pé da Sereia*

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The Indian Ocean's history of trade and migration offers insights into the global history of power relations and mobility. From a human historical perspective, the shores of Africa and Asia first met at the intersection of the ancient Arab, Indian and Swahili merchant routes, before the arrival of the European presence and the establishment of the transatlantic slave trade in the early modern era. As Isabel Hofmeyr points out in her seminal essay 'Universalizing the Indian Ocean', this interregional arena invites us to question facile dichotomies, to negotiate competing stories and to unwrap complex power hierarchies and dependencies, ultimately '[moving] us away from the simplicities of the resistant local and the dominating global and toward a historically deep archive of competing universalisms'.[1] In this scenario, we have to rethink key categories such as nation-state, diaspora, and religious universalisms as well as to break away from the Western model of modernity to rather engage with 'those formations of modernity that have taken shape in an archive of deep and layered existing social and intellectual traditions'.[2] Literary texts produced in the Indian Ocean world, as will be argued in this article, can be interpreted as critical responses to such — often fragmented, inaccessible, or even only imagined and non-existent — archives and can be read (following Maria Olaussen) as 'an exercise in understanding the structures that determine the relations of power'.[3] These 'multifaceted structures of power and dependence as well as the limitations of subject positions based on individual humanism'[4] are depicted in a particularly inspiring and thought-provoking way in novels that engage precisely with the historical connections between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic worlds in the context of the slave trade and their legacy in the form-ation of identities in contemporary postcolonial and transnational societies.

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[1] Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Universalizing the Indian Ocean', *PLMA*, 125.3 (2010), 721–29 (p. 722).
[2] Isabel Hofmeyr, 'The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean: Forging New Paradigms of Transnationalism for the Global South — Literary and Cultural Perspectives', *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 33.2 (2007), 3–32 (p. 13).
[3] Maria Olaussen, 'Archival Trajectories and Literary Voice in Indian Ocean Narratives of Slavery', in *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets*, ed. by Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 109–25 (p. 109).
[4] Olaussen, 'Archival Trajectories', p. 113.

This article explores the ways in which storytelling is a crucial tool for remembering, re-enacting and rewriting of traumatic waves of displacement, in a cathartic process in which both the victims and the perpetrators can be given voice, by taking as case studies two contemporary novels written on opposite shores of the Indian Ocean. The 2001 novel *Skin* by Margaret Mascarenhas tells the story of a young journalist, US-born and raised, but of Goan descent, who returns to her paternal homeland to overcome a personal trauma. The 2006 novel *O Outro Pé da Sereia* by Mia Couto also presents a female protagonist who returns to her hometown after years of living in almost complete solitude in a nearby village in the Zambezi region of Mozambique. In the two novels, the protagonists Pagan and Mwadia need to delve into the history of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean to understand the tensions and fractures within their own families and within the communities they belong to. By listening, reading and narrating, the two characters engage in tracing and reconstructing the silent — and silenced — history of their families and of the free and forced migrations traversing the region across centuries. Symmetrically, *O Outro Pé* offers an intergenerational literary account of Indian Mozambicans while *Skin* portrays the virtually invisible black community in Goa. By analysing the two novels as mirror-images of one another within the framework of Indian Ocean Studies and Critical Archival Studies, this article will address transnational identity building in post-imperial and postcolonial contexts, in which the past seems to be a haunting presence.

The Archive on the Move

The framework of Critical Archival Studies allows us to understand the creative ways in which both *Skin* and *O Outro Pé* engage with historical and fictional records to capture — and to silence — the history of slavery in the Indian Ocean. As Terry Cook argues, the archive — seen as a concept, a practice and an institution — performs a double-edged role: it preserves as well as creates memory. However, remembrance is intertwined with oblivion and thus memory creation involves selecting certain records and certain stories while silencing others.[5] Critical Archival Studies addresses precisely the different tensions and fractures inherent in the records' selection, preservation and dissemination.

In this regard, the Queer/ed Archival Methodology proposed by Jamie Ann Lee offers a valuable framework to analyse the embodied narratives of the past intertwined in Mia Couto's and Margaret Mascarenhas's novels. The guiding principle behind this methodology is the acknowledgment of the ephemeral character of the archive. The concept of the archival body — which encompasses both the human bodies and the archives — allows the author 'to articulate the queer and the archival, two seemingly distinct and opposing constructs; one

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[5]   Terry Cook, 'Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms', *Archival Science*, 13 (2013), 95–120 (p. 101).

dynamic, the other held and preserved and, therefore, considered relatively static'.[6] Such an approach opens up new conceptual perspectives that allow us to explore multiple, complementary, but also competing narratives emerging from the archival records. Importantly, Lee highlights that introducing the notion of the nomadic as an interpretative framework allows us to conceptualize the archival bodies as 'shifting sites of (un)becoming' and situate the collected stories as 'stories so far'.[7] Unsettling the supposedly static archive is thus a critical praxis employed 'so that archival practices do not reproduce neocolonializing categories or further subjugating conditions'.[8]

However, when engaging with the notions of nomadic subjectivity and states of (un)becoming proposed in Queer/ed Archival Methodology, it is crucial not to overlook the power structures and dynamics inherent to mobility, whether the latter concerns the physical movement of the people and communities portrayed or whether it portrays the movement associated with the collection, reproduction and dissemination of stories. As Sheller and Urry argue in their proposal for the New Mobilities Paradigm, there is an urgent need to challenge the sedentary approaches still predominant in certain social science and humanities-based research which 'treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness',[9] a clear preoccupation in Lee's methodological framework. However, Sheller and Urry also reject a certain grand narrative of mobility which celebrates nomadism without addressing explicitly the power structures that facilitate but also constrain mobility and change. Therefore, '[m]obilities cannot be described without attention to the necessary spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities'.[10] A comparative close reading of *Skin* and *O Outro Pé* will be a springboard to explore precisely the relation between mobility and materiality in narrating the Indian Ocean world's entangled histories of free and forced migrations.

Literary texts such as Couto's and Mascarenhas's novels open up a narrative space to engage with fragmentary records of a traumatic past and imagine the silenced, unheard voices. They can thus be read as artistic reproductions of 'impossible archival imaginaries', a concept explored by Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell to address human and ethical considerations related to the study of records that are unavailable, yet constitute sources of personal or public affect. Importantly,

[6] Jamie Ann Lee, 'A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Archival Bodies as Nomadic Subjects', *Journal of Critical Library and Archival Studies*, 1.2 (2017), 1–27 (p. 3).
[7] Lee, 'A Queer/ed Archival Methodology', p. 5.
[8] Lee, 'A Queer/ed Archival Methodology', p. 6.
[9] Mimi Sheller and John Urry, 'The New Mobilities Paradigm', *Environment and Planning A*, 38 (2006), 207–26 (p. 208).
[10] Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John Urry, 'Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings', *Mobilities*, 1.1 (2006), 1–22 (p. 3).

impossible archival imaginaries and the affect associated with the imagined records produced within those imaginaries, offer important affective counterbalances and sometimes resistance to dominant legal, bureaucratic, historical and forensic notions of evidence that so often fall short in explaining the capacity of records and archives to motivate, inspire, anger and traumatize.[11]

While including imagined records in the archival practice poses considerable challenges and disrupts the notions of evidence and authenticity,[12] fiction allows for the exploration of potential pluralist epistemologies that Gilliland and Caswell argue for in order to do justice to collective imaginaries rendered unheard and invisible. The affective dimension of such imagined records that the authors highlight works precisely as the organizing narrative thread in *Skin* and *O Outro Pé* which, as I will argue, are not so much novels about the history of the Indian Ocean *per se* but rather novels about (im)possibilities of unveiling and narrating its turbulent history. Their protagonists' endeavours to uncover the history of their families are not simply rooted in an enclosed past because 'the imagined record anchors and projects new possible futures, futures which are foreclosed in the absence of the material artifacts'.[13]

'Our mothers live under our skin'[14]

In Margaret Mascarenhas's *Skin*, Pagan's quest to unveil her family's history starts when she simply 'could write no more'.[15] An accomplished journalist and reporter, the young Goan-American woman suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder after her last assignment in a war-torn Angola. A sudden journey to India to meet her dying grandmother becomes an opportunity to listen to and discover the gaps and silences in the history of her own family, a painful yet healing process that allows her to recover her own voice, or rather to discover it for the first time. Indeed, there is no return to an earlier life. The epilogue depicts Pagan, who now divides her time between Goa and Brazil, the birthplace of her partner Xico, writing a novel 'seated at an old colonial teak desk in [her] mother's mud hut with a view of the sea'.[16] This transformation from a journalist who tries but fails to portray the 'unheard victims' of an armed conflict[17] into a novelist authoring a book suggestively entitled *White Lies* can be seen as an organizing narrative arc that questions the notion of fact-based evidence as a prerequisite of social justice.

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[11]   Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell, 'Records and their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined', *Archival Science*, 16 (2016), 52–75 (pp. 55–56).
[12]   Gilliland and Caswell, 'Records', p. 72.
[13]   Gilliland and Caswell, 'Records', p. 71.
[14]   Margaret Mascarenhas, *Skin* (Saligão: Goa 1556; Panjim: Broadway Publishing House, 2010), p. 241.
[15]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 14.
[16]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 261.
[17]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 14.

Facts build the baseline of a story but, as different storytellers seem to point out throughout *Skin*'s plot, accuracy alone does not make a narrative meaningful and representative unless it also expresses and inspires affect. Pagan's psychological recovery starts when she feels that '[s]omething seems too pat' about the family's saga told by her aunt Livia,[18] and she asks the family's old maid Esperança to fill in the gaps. For Esperança, '[s]tories were medicine',[19] passed on from generation to generation, a source of knowledge and belonging, but also a motivation to embrace life and its different experiences. This movement between past and future, which Gilliland and Caswell identify as characteristic for imagined records,[20] is clearly illustrated in the episode in which Pagan as a child hides away in her room embarrassed by a rash on her face and Esperança tells her a story of a broken-hearted African oral poet who hides in his hut and stops singing the history of his tribe. Pagan quickly recovers when she realizes that her own story will be lost if she remains in hiding because, as Esperança warns her, 'As long as you are under the net, nothing interesting can happen to you, and so you will have no history to tell your children when you grow up.'[21] As stories are meant to be passed on to future generations, or — more precisely, within the narrative logic of *Skin* — to future generations along the maternal line, the act of storytelling is an act of love and affection.

Furthermore, Esperança's reflections on the nature of education invite the reader to question the very notion of truth and its relevance or applicability when accessing and representing the history of the Indian Ocean and African slavery there. Having accompanied Livia in her studies at the Sorbonne in the 1960s, the family's maid comes to the conclusion that official education offers only 'the colonial edition of history' while the 'true story always resides with the mothers [...] But that doesn't mean they always tell the truth.'[22] However, it seems that the notion of truth becomes limiting or even muzzling when trying to tell those stories that counterbalance official narratives. This is especially true concerning narratives implicated in the discourses on nation building, modernity and development in postcolonial contexts. Embellishment, as Saudade — Esperança's daughter and (as later revealed) Pagan's biological mother — puts it in her diary, can be a strategic narrative tool to allow stories to emerge, stories that matter, that hurt, that inspire:

> You see, there were stories within stories, myths, dreams, legends, skeletons in closets. Mothers and fathers who weren't. Green-eyed girls and cases of mistaken identity. A melting pot of histories, races, religions. People who owned other people. Points of view. Acts of courage, cowardice, deceit. And

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[18]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 31.
[19]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 169.
[20]   Gilliland and Caswell, 'Records', p. 71.
[21]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 171.
[22]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 47.

love — the heart of the matter. Hearts that mattered, shattered, scattered. Like shards from a broken mirror.[23]

Such a tension between facts and fiction, between knowledge and imagination, invites the reader to reflect on the silence of the archive and the (im)possible strategies to recognize and restore, if not whole stories, at least such silences. Indeed, as argued by R. Benedito Ferrão, '*Skin* centers the matrilinearity as an archive — a "place" of knowledge unrestricted by time and space as each successive generation of women continues to bear witness to the past.'[24] By exploring 'racialized and gendered dominance as contiguities of imperial and native patriarchies',[25] Mascarenhas's novel taps into the debates on the possibility to 'exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive'.[26] Saidiya Hartman's work on the (impossible) history of female slaves in the Atlantic is particularly relevant here. The author addresses precisely the obstacles in researching the 'irreparable violence of the Atlantic slave trade'[27] — which is unspoken and not captured by the official records — as well as in exploring the meaning behind trying to replicate or imagine such stories. Investigating the case of an enslaved woman murdered on board a slave ship, Hartman reflects:

> My account replicates the very order of violence that it writes against by placing yet another demand upon the girl, by requiring that her life be made useful or instructive, by finding in it a lesson for our future or a hope for history. We all know better. It is much too late for the accounts of death to prevent other deaths; and it is much too early for such scenes of death to halt other crimes. But in the meantime, in the space of the interval, between too late and too early, between the no longer and the not yet, our lives are coeval with the girl's in the as-yet-incomplete project of freedom. In the meantime, it is clear that her life and ours hang in the balance.[28]

Mascarenhas pointedly pictures the violence of trade in black bodies through the stories of Esperança's female ancestors, expanding the focus from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and attesting to the 'unrecognized African movement to Asia'.[29] The story of Perpetua, born into slavery after her mother had been raped by the head of the Miranda Flores family and cruelly tortured and murdered at the hand of her master and biological father, fictionalizes the unheard, unspoken and irreparable accounts of violence Hartman discusses in the Atlantic context. Ferrão offers an insightful close reading of Perpetua's death from the perspective of patriarchy and capitalism, with a special focus on the act of the cutting off the woman's breast and fashioning it into a purse:

[23]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 6.
[24]   R. Benedito Ferrão, 'The Other Black Ocean: Indo-Portuguese Slavery and Africanness Elsewhere in Margaret Mascarenhas's *Skin*', *Research in African Literatures*, 45.3 (2014), 27–47 (p. 29).
[25]   Ferrão, 'The Other Black Ocean', p. 29.
[26]   Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, 26 (2016), 1–14 (p. 11).
[27]   Hartman, 'Venus', p. 12.
[28]   Hartman, 'Venus', p. 14.
[29]   Shihan de Silva Jayasurija, 'Indian Ocean Crossings: Music of the Afro-Asian Diaspora', *African Diaspora*, 1.1/2 (2008), 135–54 (p. 139).

'The breast, a reminder of colonial and patriarchal desire, but also symbolic of women's ability to nurture life and transform their sexual power into maternity, is truncated into a capitalistic emblem of masculine greed and possessiveness.'[30]

Building upon this interpretation, I would argue that this episode brings forth also relevant ethical and epistemological considerations, tapping into the academic debates on 'impossible records'. Perpetua's death is represented within the logic of the narrative as a clearly traumatic (and traumatizing) event of the past which haunts future generations. Dehumanizing death literally annihilated Perpetua's voice and identity. Her dead body was unrecognizable since she was consumed by the spirit she had invoked to curse Dom Bernardo, her father.[31] After death, she was unable to reach her own daughter in dreams. While Pagan experiences recurring dreams of her biological mother, Saudade, Perpetua's daughter, Consolação, is deprived of the equivalent spiritual connection and anchoring. 'Sometimes, upon waking up in the morning, Consolação had the feeling that her mother had visited her in dreams but she could never recollect what she said, or whether she had spoken at all.'[32] This intergenerational silence, a haunting presence whose words cannot be captured, is a mechanism which creates a narrative that can 'embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know',[33] which is what Hartman is arguing for.

Skin engages thus in a bilateral narrative movement between, on the one hand, imagining stories and voices of the Goan Siddis community — whose origins cannot be traced back 'to just one historical period or channel of migration'[34] — and on the other hand, disclosing the impossibility of writing a history that goes beyond the limitations of the archive. Pagan's story of being the descendant of an African enslaved woman, a Spanish Jesuit priest and a Goan Brahmani family who built their fortune on slave trade is just a 'story so far'.[35] Recalling, listening to and fictionalizing her own and her family's history — actually *White Lies* is a title of both Pagan's novel and one of the chapters in *Skin* — allows the protagonist to reflect on her own position as a racialized, gendered subject: the whitest girl in a Catholic boarding school in Goa, the brown one in a US public school; Katie's daughter, Saudade's daughter, a mother. By embodying all these stories, Pagan can be seen as an archival body herself, a body which is precisely transformative and shifting and thus challenging the supposedly static nature of the archive. Her transient body — travelling between continents and through storytelling, transiting between

[30]   Ferrão, 'The Other Black Ocean', p. 41.
[31]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 108.
[32]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, pp. 121–22.
[33]   Hartman, 'Venus', p. 3.
[34]   Mark Sebastian Pinto, 'The Forgotten Community, "the Siddis of Uttara Kannada": How the Portuguese Indian Ocean Slave Trade Produced a Community of Indians of African Descent', *InterDISCIPLINARY Journal of Portuguese Diaspora Studies*, 8 (2019), 165–88 (p. 166).
[35]   Lee, 'A Queer/ed Archival Methodology', p. 5.

time periods — inscribes Goa in both the local and global socio-political and economic dynamics. Indeed, as argued by Joana Passos, *Skin* 'permite ao leitor uma visão de Goa ao mesmo tempo "de fora" e "de dentro", ou seja uma duplamente informada visão liminar, de fronteira' [offers the reader at the same time an 'outsider' and an 'insider' view of Goa, in other words a two-sided, liminal, border vision].[36] Importantly, this inbetween space of (un)becoming woven by *Skin*'s narrative threads is not unbounded. In the epilogue, Pagan reveals: 'I wear the sacred stone around my neck to remind myself from whence I came, where I am, and where I am going.'[37]

'Eis a nossa sina: esquecer para ter passado, mentir para ter destino' [**This is our fate: to forget to have a past, to lie to have a destiny**][38]

While *Skin* explores the meaning and value behind storytelling practices, *O Outro Pé da Sereia* sets out from the idea of forgetting. Intertwining two parallel narratives, the novel fictionalizes the journey of a sixteenth-century historical figure, the Jesuit priest Dom Gonçalo da Silveira, from Goa to the Mutapa (or Monomotapa) empire, located in the vast territories along the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers in Southern Africa. Silveira's goal was to convert the African ruler, Muene Nogomo, to strengthen the Portuguese presence in the area. The mission was successful, but the priest was killed shortly after the king's baptism (apparently on the orders of the king himself, who was incited by Arab merchants afraid of losing their position in the regional commerce). This narrative is presented as a diary written by a priest accompanying Dom Gonçalo and is one of the fictional-historical artefacts which travel across the two narrative lines.

In fact, Silveira's journey engages in dialogue with the contemporary narrative at many levels. Just like the fictional diary, the other story line is set in the same region of the Zambezi valley and, as noted by Luís Madureira,[39] the two narratives are also linked by the presence of an *objet trouvé*, a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary. The artefact, according to the fictional account, was brought by Silveira as a gift for Muene Nogomo, and found together with the priest's remains by the novel's protagonist, Mwadia. This woman decides to return to her hometown, Vila Longe, to find a suitable place to keep the statue. On arriving, she learns that the inhabitants are preparing for a visit by two American scholars, Benjamin and Rosie Southman, who plan to do fieldwork on the memory of slavery in that region as well as propagate the ideas of an

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[36]   Joana Passos, 'Goa na diáspora e na literatura indiana em língua inglesa', *Via Atlântica*, 30 (2016), 85–98 (pp. 94–95).
[37]   Mascarenhas, *Skin*, p. 261.
[38]   Mia Couto, *O Outro Pé da Sereia* (Lisbon: Caminho, 2006), p. 75.
[39]   Luís Madureira, 'Nation, Identity and Loss of Footing: Mia Couto's *O Outro Pé da Sereia* and the Question of Lusophone Postcolonialism', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 41.2/3 (Spring/Summer 2008), 200–28 (p. 214).

NGO fighting 'Afro-pessimism'. This visit triggers a process of remembering, but also of reinventing Mozambican history and identity, when the local entrepreneurs try to present to the visitors an image of Africa that would match their expectations.

There is a considerable body of literature which focuses on the role of history and history writing in *O Outro Pé*. Elena Brugioni highlights that the relation between history and narrative is visible already in the graphic presentation of the original 2006 edition by Caminho: the white pages of the contemporary chapters contrast with the yellow paper of the sixteenth-century narrative, printed in a font imitating handwriting. Taking the apparently organic relation between story and history as her starting point, Brugioni argues that this novel is a story of post-coloniality which challenges the universal principles around such concepts as race, identity, history and tradition.[40] For Brugioni, the novel's originality lies precisely in the subversion of the dichotomy between the 'traditional' pre-colonial Africa and the 'modern' state created as a consequence of European colonization.[41] Jorge Valentim, too, finds the key to the interpretation of *O Outro Pé* in the interplay between the two story lines: it is 'a river of fiction' that opens up the dialogue between the contemporary and the historical narrative.[42] In particular, Mia Couto uses intrinsically fragmentary and imprecise information provided by the historical sources on the murder of priest Silveira to create a fictional account that '[d]os estilhaços da história, monta um outro novo espelho, sem imagens fixas, apenas com reflexos que podem ganhar os mais diversos formatos, dependendo do ponto de vista que se olha' [from the splinters of history assembles a new mirror, with no fixed images, only reflections that can take the most varied forms, depending on the point of view].[43]

Just as history writing is fragmented and imprecise, the same goes for collective memory. Forgetting seems to be depicted in the novel as an integral part of remembering: it is a shared, lived experience, symbolized by the imaginary of the Tree of Forgetting. The local people explain to the American visitors that they would ritually walk around the tree three times to forget where one comes from and who one's ancestors were. 'Tudo para se tornar recente, sem raiz, sem amarras' [Everything to become new, without roots, without moorings].[44] Interestingly, the symbolism of the tree brings forth the idea of rootedness on the one hand, and of vitality and rebirth on the other, connecting the past, the present and the future. Unrooting becomes thus a strategy of survival in a border land where the Zambezi river 'servia de refúgio

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[40]   Elena Brugioni, '*O Outro Pé da Sereia*: História(s) na Pós-colonialidade', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 49.1 (2012), 46–62 (p. 48).
[41]   Brugioni, 'História(s)', p. 50.
[42]   Jorge Vicente Valentim, 'Entre mapas movediços e águas míticas: alguns jogos de espelho em *O Outro Pé da Sereia*, de Mia Couto', *Crítica Cultural*, 6.2 (2011), 367–92 (p. 373).
[43]   Valentim, 'Entre mapas movediços', p. 376.
[44]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 321.

e barreira para assaltos de estranhos e vizinhos, guerreiros ferozes e raptores de escravos' [served as a refuge from and barrier against attacks from strangers and neighbours, fierce warriors and slave stealers].[45]

Chandani Patel offers an insightful reading of the motif of forgetting woven in the narrative arguing that 'forgetting generates a new kind of life' for the characters who 'have no markers of race, religious affiliation, or national past with which to produce [a] shared identity'.[46] As a complement to Patel's interpretation that forgetting opens up a space for an alternative present (and future), I would argue that the overt ritualization of oblivion represented in the novel invites the reader to reconsider the contribution of the archive (which can document trauma and violence) to post-conflict reconciliation. According to Mia Couto, Mozambique became a nation 'not because we speak the same language or because we remember the same things, but because we forget the same things in the same way'.[47] However, *O Outro Pé* suggestively paints this forgotten, or rather unspoken, past as a haunting presence, in a similar manner to Perpetua's silent apparitions in *Skin*. In the chapters preceding the protagonist's journey back home, the river's waters turn red when touched by Mwadia's husband, Zero. The man's hand awakes the blood that 'já estava lá, adormecido no rio' [was already there, asleep in the river],[48] a testimony to centuries of fight and flight. The feeling that 'morre apenas a História, os mortos não se vão' [only History dies, the dead do not leave][49] — as expressed in the epigraph opening the first chapter, attributed to the town's barber — traverses the interconnected stories to culminate in Mwadia's vision of her family photos, photos which are only displayed to treasure the loved ones who passed away.[50] This ambivalent ending which makes the reader question the veracity of the plot within the narrative logic, opens up a liminal space in between presence and absence, storytelling and silence, where Mwadia can navigate and reposition herself within the narratives of the past in a dynamic relation between 'being' and 'becoming'.[51]

In this context, the idea of forgetting presented in *O Outro Pé* is not an act of erasure. It is rather a textual exploration of the limits and potential of the archive to engage with precisely these stories that 'motivate, inspire, anger and traumatize'[52] and that cannot be possibly moulded in any grand narrative

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[45]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 343.
[46]   Chandani Patel, 'Goans, Oceans, and Intersections: Alter-Histories and Alternative Presents in Mia Couto's *O outro pé da sereia*', *Research in African Literatures*, 48.2 (2017), 94–111 (p. 105).
[47]   Ana Mafalda Leite et al. (eds), 'Interview with Mia Couto', in *Speaking the Postcolonial Nation: Interviews from Angola and Mozambique* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 173–98 (p. 178).
[48]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 53.
[49]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 15.
[50]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 381.
[51]   Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 222–37 (p. 225).
[52]   Gilliland and Caswell, 'Records', pp. 55–56.

of (national) reconciliation. In this regard, Mwadia's trance sessions, enacted to give the American visitors a feeling of an 'authentic' Africa,[53] can be read as 'stories so far',[54] comparable to Saudade's 'embellished' diary in *Skin*. Mia Couto's protagonist reads historical records, including the fictional diary written by a missionary accompanying D. Gonçalo da Silveira, in order to compose her own story of arrivals, crossings and departures in an embodied performance where she 'se exibia de meter medo: olhos revirados, cabelos hirsutos, braços ondeando como se vogassem entre águas e nuvens' [showed herself off in a terrifying way: rolled-back eyes, shaggy hair, arms swaying as if sailing between the waters and the clouds].[55] Despite the scene being a theatrical performance to impress the guests (and as can be read in between the lines, to challenge tio Casuarino who had pressured Mwadia to participate in such a spectacle), the invented narrative, composed out of threads of historical records, allows Mwadia to engage in a meaningful way with her own and her spectators' nomadic subjectivity. By operating at the liminal (story)space between fact and imagination, Mwadia — like Pagan — becomes an archival body, dynamic, transitory, but still rooted in historical and lived experience. Her act of story(re)telling 'maintain[s] a level of unsettledness to leave translation and interpretation open',[56] something that Lee argues for in the framework of the Queer/ed Archival Methodology. On the other hand, just like Pagan's writings transiting in between the time-spaces of the Indian Ocean's fragmented, silenced contact zone, Mwadia's 'critical fabulations'[57] allow for an emotional and possibly cathartic engagement with the traumas anchored in the history of transoceanic forced and free migrations, still inscribed in this region's socio-political and cultural dynamics.

The tension inherent to the narratives of (un)becoming is further explored in *O Outro Pé* through the characters of diasporic identity such as the Afro-American couple but also Mwadia's Indian stepfather and aunt. The topic of cultural hybridity has been already addressed in several pieces of research. Carmen Tindó Secco connects the destabilization of Eurocentric approaches to African history in Couto's novel with the need to reclaim the hybrid character of Mozambican culture in the past and in the present.[58] This interpretation is in line with the reading by Nazir Can, who argues that the Indian imaginary in *O Outro Pé* constructs the topos of hybridism,[59] providing an insight into

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[53] Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 276.
[54] Lee, 'A Queer/ed Archival Methodology', p. 5.
[55] Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 273.
[56] Lee, 'A Queer/ed Archival Methodology', p. 6.
[57] Hartman, 'Venus', p. 11.
[58] Carmen Tindó Secco, 'The Other Feet of History: A Reading of *Choriro* by Ungulani Ba Ka Khosa and *O Outro Pé da Sereia* by Mia Couto', in *Narrating the Postcolonial Nation*, ed. by Ana Mafalda Leite et al. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 45–66 (p. 58).
[59] Nazir Can, 'Os lugares do indiano na literatura moçambicana', in *Passagens para o Índico: encontros brasileiros com a literatura moçambicana*, ed. by Rita Chaves and Tania Macêdo (Maputo: Marimbique, 2012), pp. 217–30 (p. 223).

a more fragmented and multidimensional national identity. From a different perspective, Chandani Patel argues that the novel 'positions its Goan characters at the centre of the alter-histories it writes into being here, alter-histories that force a reconsideration of the categories of both African and Indian diasporas and the ancestral origins on which they rely'.[60] Such a transnational framework is also adopted by Luís Madureira who reads the novel's core symbol, the title's 'siren', as a metaphor of 'hybrid articulations of cultural difference'.[61] This idea is explored in more depth by David Brookshaw who sees the multi-directional border crossings present in the novel as a call for Mozambican cultural pluralism and an appeal to global identities in general. He argues that Mia Couto's representation of Mozambican identity is intrinsically hybrid in the sense of creative instability, as opposed to the Lusotropicalist ideal of assimilation, elaborated by Brazilian scholar Gilberto Freyre and disseminated in the 1950s by Salazar's dictatorial regime as a justification for its colonial stance.[62]

These readings offer valuable insights into the dynamics of identity building in multicultural contexts with a special focus on diasporic communities, showing how fiction engages with the Indian Ocean's history in a way that challenges easy binarisms and universalisms.[63] Importantly, the stories of the Rodrigues siblings, Mwadia's aunt Luzmina and stepfather Jesustino, invite the reader to reconceptualize the role of affect in creating an archive that can potentially capture 'multifaceted structures of power and dependence'[64] that Olaussen considers as the central axis of the narratives of/in the Indian Ocean world as well as 'turn impossible archival imaginaries into possibilities'.[65] The descendants of a Brahmani family of slave traders, Jesustino and Luzmina need to navigate within the social hierarchies constructed by the race-oriented discourse of the Portuguese colonial regime, where the Indian community occupied a rather ambivalent position, one which persisted post-independence, as evidenced by Thomaz and Nascimento.[66]

Jesustino is deeply hurt at being excluded from the interviews planned by the Southmans for not fitting into the clear-cut category of a 'true' African, a dialectic act replicating the 'comic classificatory and subclassificatory census boxes entitled "Other" conceal[ing] all real-life anomalies by a splendid bureaucratic *trompe l'oeil*'.[67] Jesustino clearly refuses any definitive classification when he

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[60]   Patel, 'Goans', p. 101.
[61]   Madureira, 'Nation', p. 223.
[62]   David Brookshaw, 'Indianos e o Índico: o pós-colonialismo transoceânico e internacional em *O Outro Pé da Sereia* de Mia Couto', in *Moçambique: das palavras escritas*, ed. by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro and Maria Paula Meneses (Porto: Afrontamento, 2008), pp. 129–39 (pp. 138–39).
[63]   See Hofmeyr, 'Universalizing', p. 722.
[64]   Olaussen, 'Archival Trajectories', p. 113.
[65]   Gilliland and Caswell, 'Records', p. 73.
[66]   Oscar Ribeiro Thomaz and Sebastião Nascimento, 'Nem Rodésia, nem Congo: Moçambique e os dias do fim das comunidades de origem europeia e asiática', in *Os outros da colonização: ensaios sobre o colonialismo tardio em Moçambique*, ed. by Cláudia Castelo et al. (Lisbon: ICS, 2012), pp. 315–39.
[67]   Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*

confesses to his stepdaughter that he is changing his race[68] and recurrently and deliberately abandons a fundamental mark of his identity: his name.[69] Such a display of discontinuity in the identity texture may be read in the context of the destructive impact of emotional exile. Édouard Glissant introduces a distinction between the concepts of exile and errantry precisely to pinpoint different effects of travels away from our emotional homelands. He argues: 'Whereas exile may erode one's sense of identity, the thought of errantry — the thought of that which relates — usually reinforces this sense of identity.'[70] Jesustino's annual baptisms do not add new components to a vibrant, multidimensional identity, as if in a romanticized nomadic imaginary, but simply cover up a hurtful void, a sense of longing for a space of his own. Despite feeling much more affinity with his African upbringing than with his Goan descent, the tailor is clearly exiled in between the shores of the Indian Ocean. He ends up telling his story to Rosie Southman when the woman comes to him in distress — 'naquele estado de alma, uma rodilha de desespero, balbuciando um rosário de lamentos' [in that state of mind, in despair, babbling a rosary of complaints][71] — after meeting the local postman, Zeca, for whom she has deep feelings. Jesustino wants to share his story but can only be heard when the interlocutor is ready and able to engage with feelings and emotions, with traumas and taboos.

The man's story is inseparable from the story of his sister Luzmina. It is a story of love, submerged, forbidden, accomplished, and finally rejected. The young woman supposedly falls in love with Zeca. However, she never declares her feelings because she does not consider him an appropriate match, both belonging as they do to subaltern groups in the colonial society as represented by Mia Couto, yet set apart from them. Luzmina thus keeps longing for a Goan Prince Charming who would be of 'adequada casta, estrato e geração' [suitable caste, status and upbringing][72] and her unwillingness to look for a suitor among the local men is explained either by her loyalty to the Indian social caste system or by her mystical and almost fanatical religious beliefs. Such an inflexible adherence to traditional Goan values could be read as the anchor upon which Luzmina desperately tries to construct her identity. Her personality seems though to be on the verge of disintegration, as shown by her later drastic behavioural changes. She engages in an incestuous relationship with her brother — in fact, the only inhabitant of Vila Longe of an equal social status — and, when later rejected, she publicly declares that she would be an excellent whore and become the patron saint of the prostitutes.[73] This chain of events is triggered by Jesustino discovering a love letter, a symbol of evidence, a proof to

(London: Verso, 1991), p. 184.

[68]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 110.

[69]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 83.

[70]   Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. by Betsy Wings (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 20.

[71]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 256.

[72]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 257.

[73]   Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 88.

be archived and documented. Importantly, the letter is not addressed to a real postal address but to 'a terra dos milagres' [the land of miracles],[74] showcasing Luzmina's dream of writing up an alternative present and future. 'Não é a carta que tem erros. É a vida, mano' [It's not the letter that contains mistakes. It's life, brother],[75] she declares. As 'the imagined record instantiates collective aspiration for not just what was, but what is and what will be possible',[76] Luzmina's visits to the post office, where she buys stamps for invented destinations, represent an urge to draw new trajectories of connection and contact that could circumvent the social and racial barriers constraining social mobility and relations. Transiting between facts and imagination, between sanity and delusion, Luzmina embodies competing stories of belonging and affect that escape traditional archival notions of evidence, veracity and stability to explore in the realm of fiction 'multiply-situated subjectivities' whose '[p]ast, present, and future intersect, overlap, and become the other'.[77]

The Other (Hi)Stories in the Indian Ocean

The history of the slave trade is still haunting the communities which came into being as a result of waves of displacement traversing the Indian Ocean and extending beyond its waters towards the Atlantic. Silenced, forgotten, and to a great extent inaccessible. Yet storytelling, in its momentary, performative nature, proves to be a critical tool for remembering, re-enacting and rewriting of such a traumatic past in ways that do not claim to present a definitive, universal truth, but rather try to engage with emotions and feelings triggered by such 'impossible archival imaginaries'.[78] As *Skin* and *O Outro Pé da Sereia* exemplify in their captivating and inspiring narratives, literature opens up thus a possibility for an alternative form of remembering that operates at the liminal space between representing and exploring the unspoken, the undepictable. Importantly, the stories that Pagan and Mwadia (re)create for themselves and their respective families are not accomplished, closed testimonies about a past that is made accessible and classifiable but rather 'stories so far'.[79] They are momentary, transient records that challenge both the universalisms implicated in processes of identity negotiation as well as the very nature of the archive. Both novels position the female body as the object of the exercise of power but also as a key agent in keeping or, in fact, recreating the memory of exploitation, abuse and resistance, in a way that writes history 'with and against the archive'.[80] Just like the postcolonial migratory texture of the Indian Ocean itself, Pagan and Mwadia, as fictional, female archival bodies that navigate through its history, bear witness to stories that matter.

[74] Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 259.
[75] Couto, *O Outro Pé*, p. 261.
[76] Gilliland and Caswell, 'Records', p. 71.
[77] Lee, 'A Queer/ed Archival Methodology', p. 7.
[78] Gilliland and Caswell, 'Records', p. 55.
[79] Lee, 'A Queer/ed Archival Methodology', p. 5.
[80] Hartman, 'Venus', p. 12.