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### **Abstract**

In 1991, when the issue of *Kunapipi* on 'New Art and Literature from South Africa' appeared, Njabulo S Ndebele's complaint about the way in which black South African writing, committed to political engagement, had deteriorated into struggle allegory, was already a critical commonplace. South African fiction, Ndebele had said back in the 80s, was 'the product of an ideology whose analysis of society is based on moral premises' (23), and its characters consisted essentially of the stereotypical villains and victims of apartheid, impersonal ciphers in a moral debate. Formulaic rather than analytical, such novels had come to reproduce apartheid's negation of human individuality in a heroic narrative of 'numbing sensationalism' (24) and spectacle, requiring nothing beyond recognition. What was needed, Ndebele argued, was the rediscovery of the ordinary and the restoration of the truly human dimension to black South African storytelling.

J.U. JACOBS

## Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*: The Novel as *Umngqokolo*

In 1991, when the issue of *Kunapipi* on 'New Art and Literature from South Africa' appeared, Njabulo S Ndebele's complaint about the way in which black South African writing, committed to political engagement, had deteriorated into struggle allegory, was already a critical commonplace. South African fiction, Ndebele had said back in the 80s, was 'the product of an ideology whose analysis of society is based on moral premises' (23), and its characters consisted essentially of the stereotypical villains and victims of apartheid, impersonal ciphers in a moral debate. Formulaic rather than analytical, such novels had come to reproduce apartheid's negation of human individuality in a heroic narrative of 'numbing sensationalism' (24) and spectacle, requiring nothing beyond recognition. What was needed, Ndebele argued, was the rediscovery of the ordinary and the restoration of the truly human dimension to black South African storytelling.

Margaret Mervis has offered a persuasive reading of *Ways of Dying*, the first novel by the South African playwright, Zakes Mda, as a fictional exploration of 'new ideas and an alternative ideology through which he can envisage a place for himself and his art in the future' (42). She develops the thesis that in a narrative 'combination of Brechtian didacticism and indigenous African participatory storytelling' (55), Mda has succeeded in translating his theories of 'Theatre for Development' (Mda 1993) into what she calls 'Fiction for Development', a new kind of text informed by a humanistic ethos.

This essay, however, will attempt to show how, in his third and most recent novel, *The Heart of Redness*, Mda has responded to Ndebele's challenge by addressing the present history of South Africa in regional terms rather than those of national allegory, and in a narrative that draws on distinctive cultural practice and a particular event from the South African past to structure its concern with contemporary realities. *The Heart of Redness* not only graphically represents the formal and informal occasions by means of which a culture enacts both its perpetuation of ancient traditions and its engagement with present circumstances, but the text itself is also a *performative* one. *The Heart of Redness* bears out David Coplan's observation that, 'The importance of expression in action, of making meaning visible, has been documented in genres of dance, oral poetry, and narrative throughout black South Africa' (1). *The Heart of Redness* depicts the cultural traditions and performances of the amaXhosa, and the way in which the narrative also observes their cultural protocols in the telling makes the text in

a crucial way analogous to the narrative art of traditional African storytelling. 'The storyteller', Harold Scheub says in his book, *The Tongue is Fire: South African Storytellers and Apartheid*, 'orchestrates images, joining the imaginative image of the storytelling tradition and the imagination of the performer to the fact of the historian' (53). It is in this storytelling convention, this essay will argue, that Mda can also be seen to operate: valuing tradition while also manipulating it to shape the present. At the heart of oral performance in South Africa, Scheub has demonstrated, lies a recognition of the reciprocal relationship between the past and the present. As he explains it:

Storytellers, and this includes the poets and the historians in the oral tradition, fuse idea and emotion into story, and in that interchange audience members are wedded to the past, as a significant exchange occurs: the past influences and shapes the experience of the present, at the same time that the experience of the present determines what of the past is useful and meaningful today. (xv)

\* \* \* \*

In *The Heart of Redness*, the protagonist, Camagu, has never before heard singing like that of the young Xhosa girl, Qukezwa:

She bursts into a song and plays her umrhubhe musical instrument. She whistles and sings all at the same time. *Many voices come from her mouth*. Deep sounds that echo like the night. Sounds that have the heaviness of a steamy summer night. Flaming sounds that crackle like a veld fire. Light sounds that float like flakes of snow on top of the Amathole Mountains. Hollow sounds like laughing mountains. *Coming out all at once*. As if a whole choir lives in her mouth. (Mda 175) [emphasis added]

When he later again hears her 'song of many voices' (316) — or 'split-tone singing' as it is referred to in the novel — he tries to describe the extraordinary range of vocal colour:

Qukezwa sings in such beautiful colours. Soft colours like the ochre of yellow gullies. Reassuring colours of the earth. Red. Hot colours like blazing fire. Deep blue. Deep green. Colours of the valleys and the ocean. Cool colours like the rain of summer sliding down a pair of naked bodies.

She sings in soft pastel colours, this Qukezwa. In crude and glaring colours. And in bright glossy colours. In subdued colours of the newly turned fields. *All at the same time*. (223) [emphasis added]

The amaXhosa, the southernmost Bantu-speaking people in South Africa, inherited much of their music culture, together with the click consonants of their language, from the KhoiSan with whom they had particularly close contact. The ethnomusicologist, David Dargie, to whom I am greatly indebted for all my information about Xhosa music, suggests that 'Thembu overtone singing' — as it is more accurately called — 'was also inherited from the San' (Dargie 1993, 1–2). Thembu Xhosa music is especially noted, Dargie says, for its marvellous

techniques: 'musical bows gently singing out melody and rich harmony through overtone patterns, the proliferation of song parts as singers build their harmony and polyphony on the bow sounds, the almost unbelievable complexity of the rhythms, and the strange and wonderful Thembu practices of overtone singing — apparently the only examples of the technique in African traditional music'. (Dargie 1994, 1)

The Xhosa use two main kinds of musical bow: the *uhadi*, which is a gourd-resonated percussion bow, and the *umrhubhe*, which is a mouth-resonated friction bow (Dargie 1993, 2). The *umrhubhe*, with which Qukezwa is singing in the first extract I quoted from the novel, is played by bowing the wire string with a scraped stick or reed:

One hand holds the bow at its further end, holding the near end against the side of the mouth. The string is stopped with either the thumb-nail or the middle finger of the hand holding the bow. The other hand holds the *umcinga*, bowing it against the string.... The player amplifies the melody overtones by shaping the mouth, the bow stick pressing firmly through the cheek against the teeth.... The player may also whistle out of the side of the mouth, while continuing to bow the string. The technique then is to play the leader part using overtones, and play the follower parts using both overtones and whistling'. (Dargie 1994, 9)

All Xhosa bow-playing, Dargie explains, is based on the same bow theory:

The bow is conceived as a quasi-person playing the same role in a song as a singer, mostly as the song-leader, but also as a song-follower. Bows play the *izicabo* [text-lines] of the song ... and only by implication the melody lines of the singer(s). These melodies grow out of the speech-tone — both sentence tone and word tone. And they are realised using a hexatonic scale derived from bow-theory. Unaccompanied Xhosa singing also draws heavily on bow theory. The bows produce major triads by using overtones of the fundamentals of the single string, one fundamental using the open string, and one a whole tone higher produced by stopping the string.... The aim of the bow player is to follow melody; but because of the bow fundamental-overtone system, this necessarily implies a constant use of harmony, according to the pattern of tonality shift required by the song.... From these constant patterns of harmony the Xhosa have developed very rich techniques of harmony and polyphony. (Dargie 1993, 3–4)

Dargie quotes a saying that the Xhosa people, 'like to put salt into their songs' (1994 1). Never content just to sing a song straight, they give it zest by adding more and more parts to it, 'overlapping parts, harmony parts'. To perform one rhythm at a time is not enough: 'the melody must have its rhythm, and the body movement/clap must have another which fits against it, even though quite different' (2). Similarly, it is not sufficient for some people just to play a single melody on the *umrhubhe*: 'using the overtones, they play the melodies of the leading singer, and then at the same time they whistle the melodies of answering singers. Some people are not content just to sing one melody at a time — using the techniques of *umngqokolo* overtone singing ... many ... can sing more than one note at the same time' (Dargie 1994, 2).

*Umngqokolo* literally means 'rough noise'. Dargie points out how, whereas 'bows are personified in song performance' (1993 4), this procedure is reversed in *umngqokolo* overtone singing:

Now it is the singer who attempts to reproduce the bows' method of following the *izicabo* of the song. As with the bow player, the chief aim of the *umngqokolo* overtone singer is to produce melody. In 'ordinary' *umngqokolo*, the singer — always a woman or girl — artificially forces the voice down into the bass register. As with all overtone singing, the nasal passages must be kept open as a supplementary cavity to enhance the mouth cavity. The forced bass fundamental, very rough in tone, is well suited to the production of overtones. The singer lifts the tip of the tongue over the teeth, holding the lips in a position as when pronouncing the vowel u as in ululate, but with the lips thrust out a bit more than normal. The tongue touches the inside of the under lip. By lifting and lowering the tongue slightly, by shaping it and by shaping the lips, the singer is able to resonate chosen overtones of each particular fundamental tone.... The shift from one 'ordinary' *umngqokolo* overtone to the other may be very rapid, so that at first hearing one may only notice the deep, gruff pattern of three or four note bass melody. The overtones are relatively faint, but nevertheless clear. Because of this close relation of fundamentals and melody tones, the overtone singing fits perfectly into the harmony patterns of bow and singers using normal voice. From a distance the overtone singer, once she has got her music going well, sounds not unlike an *umrhubhe* being well played'. (Dargie 1993, 4–5)

In *umngqokolo ngomqangi* the voice deliberately imitates the *umrhubhe* bow (*umqangi* is an old name for the *umrhubhe*). The technique, Dargie explains, 'is similar to that used for 'ordinary' *umngqokolo*, except that now the tongue is kept flat in the mouth.... But now the overtones are very loud and clear, of a similar volume to the fundamental tones, which are themselves rather less rough in tone than in normal *umngqokolo*' — and only two fundamentals are used, a whole tone apart (Dargie 1993, 7).

Stylistically, *umngqokolo* overtone singing has its roots in KhoiSan culture. In *The Heart of Redness*, Qukezwa's Khoikhoi ancestor, also Qukezwa, for whom she is named, prays to Tsiqwa, 'Father of fathers' who created the Khoikhoi and all the world. The epithet by which he is known, she explains, is 'the one who tells his stories in heaven' (Mda 23). In *The Heart of Redness* Zakes Mda traces his own art of storytelling back to Tsiqwa, Creator and source of all narrative. In Mda's second novel, *She Plays with the Darkness*, the narrative not only describes the traditional songs and dances of the Basotho, but the text itself is also a performative one in so far as the overall narrative rhythm derives from a complex pattern of repetition and variation by means of which Mda consciously manipulates the modes and images of the past in relation to the unfolding history of modern Lesotho (see Jacobs). In *The Heart of Redness* he once again turns to traditional performance to mediate a culture in the process of transition and renewal, but his focus is now on Xhosa culture in the context of contemporary South Africa, and his fictional mode is more complex and also more accomplished. *The Heart of*

*Redness* may best be approached, I suggest, as the fictional equivalent of Xhosa overtone singing — in effect, an *umngqokolo* narrative.

To borrow the saying quoted earlier, Mda ‘puts salt into his narrative’ in various ways, beginning with its overt intertextuality. The theory of intertextuality says that a text ‘cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and does not function as a closed system’ (Worton and Still 1). First, writers are themselves readers of texts before they are creators of texts, and therefore their works are ‘inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind’; and secondly, readers in turn bring a background of other texts to their reading of any particular text. Both kinds of intertextuality that Michael Riffaterre distinguishes apply to *The Heart of Redness*: ‘aleatory intertextuality ... which allows the reader to read a text through the prism of all and any familiar texts’, and ‘obligatory intertextuality which demands that the reader take account of a hypogrammatic origin’ (Worton and Still 26). To begin with the latter, in his Dedication Mda expressly acknowledges his indebtedness to J.J. Peires’s book, *The Dead Will Arise*, as his main source of information and inspiration for the history of the prophetess Nongqawuse and the great Xhosa cattle-killing of 1856–57. In addition to this obligatory historical intertext, the obvious allusion to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in the title of Mda’s novel requires that its presentation and analysis of nineteenth-century British colonialism as well as the impact of globalisation in present-day South Africa also be read in the light of Conrad’s canonical fictional treatment of European colonialism in Africa. The genealogical tree of the Xhosa ‘descendants of the headless ancestor’ that Mda provides at the beginning of the novel, invites one to consider it as a South African offshoot of Gabriel García Márquez’s magic realist novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, with its similarly twinned and recurrent family names and characteristics. Closer to home, Zoë Wicomb’s novel, *David’s Story*, also published in 2000, might also serve as an aleatory South African intertext with its comparable genealogical tree setting out the aboriginal Griqua ancestry of the protagonist, David Dirkse, a former MK soldier trying to get his story told in the new South Africa. Various voices may be heard together contributing to the narrative in Mda’s novel in a cultivated polyphony that draws the reader’s attention to textual functioning as well as simply to hermeneutics (see Worton and Still 11).

An obvious split-tone aspect of the narrative in *The Heart of Redness* is its *palimpsest* structure, to use Gérard Genette’s term for intertextuality. At the fundamental level of the 1856–57 narrative, the story of Nongqawuse’s prophecies about the resurrection of the new people in Xhosaland, the conflict between the Believers and the Unbelievers over the cattle-killing, and the ensuing starvation, provides a *hypotext*: a tragic history of rebirth foretold but devastation and death realised. Over this historical narrative is inscribed a fictional *hypertext*, more comic in tone, and set in 1998 in the coastal village of Qolorha-by-Sea in the Eastern Cape, close to the mouth of the Gxarha River where Nongqawuse had

her visions one hundred and forty-odd years earlier. The main conflict in this 1998 chronotope is, however, between latter-day Believers and Unbelievers, descendents of the original two factions, but now divided about the imperatives for cultural change in the overall intellectual climate of African Renaissance in South Africa today. The tonally distinct contemporary narrative enhances, offsets and comments on the fundamental narrative about religious and political visionaries, their followers and their detractors.

Another obvious split-tone aspect of the narrative is its diglossic character. The many Xhosa words and expressions that are introduced and translated in the text provide a virtual directory of Xhosa culture, reminding the reader at the same time that the speech world of this English-language text is a southern Nguni one. Social positions and gender roles are defined in isiXhosa terms: *xhego* (an old man); *amabhinqa* (women); *makoti* (a daughter-in-law); *intombi* (a young woman); *umfana* (a young man); *kwedini* (a stupid boy). Formal institutions such as *imbhizo* (a public meeting) or *inkundla* (the court of the chief) are featured, as well as less formal but nonetheless established practices such as *ukukrexeza* (having lovers outside marriage). Xhosa traditional dress is described in detail: the *amahomba* (those who look beautiful and pride themselves in fashion) with their *iqhiya* (turban), *isikhakha* (red-ochred dress) with its *umbhaco* (black strip decorations), their beads, the square *amatikiti*, multi-coloured *uphalaza* and *icangci*, and *amacici* beaded earrings. Traditional foods are carefully distinguished: *umphokoqo* (maize porridge that is specially eaten with sour milk); *inqodi* (fermented sorghum soft-porridge); *amarhewu* (fermented maize soft-porridge); and shellfish such as *imbhatyisa* (oysters), *imbhaza* (mussels), *amangquba* (abalone) and *amaqonga* (varieties of abalone that look like large snails). The vernacular names for various trees are given, such as *usundu* palms, the *umsintsi* or coral tree, the *ikhamanga*, or wild banana, and the common *umga*, or mimosa tree; and different species of birds are identified, also according to their symbolic significance: from the *amahobohobo* (weaverbirds), *uxomoyi* (giant kingfisher) and *ing'ang'ane* (haded a ibis), to *uthekwane*, the brown hammerhead bird that can call down lightning, and *isomi*, the red-winged starling, a holy bird which it is a sin to kill. Cultural rituals are recorded, such as the circumcision rites involving *abakhwetha* (the initiates), *amakhankatha* (the men who teach the initiates how to be men), and the *ingcibi* (the doctor who cuts the foreskin), and ceremonies such as *isizathu* (the ceremony for the dead that is held some months after the death). Various aspects of the Xhosa belief system feature in the novel: *igqirha* (the healer and diviner), *ubuthi* (witchcraft or evil charms), *iqungu* (the vengeful force generated by war medicines), *imilozu* (whistles that are the language of the spirits), *isivivane* (the stone cairns that mark the graves of ancestors), and rituals such as the *ukurhuda* in which sacred enemas and emetics are administered. And in addition to the overtone singing, a range of other Xhosa songs and dances are also described: *amagqiyazana* (the dance of the young girls who have not yet reached puberty),

*umxhentso* (the dance by men and women together in memory of the dead), *tyityimba* (a dance which involves shaking the upper body), *umbhorotho* (bridesmaids' songs), *izitibiri* (also known as sounds), the *umtshotsho* song, and the ululation of the *abayiyizeli*.

What makes all this cultural information more than just ethnography is the way it is contained in the dialectic between, on the one hand, *ubuqaba* (backwardness and heathenism) and, on the other, *ubugqobokha* (enlightenment and civilisation). Backwardness and enlightenment, and traditional belief and skepticism, are contrasted and relativised in both main narrative periods of the novel. The feuding fictional community of Believers and Unbelievers in Qolorha-by-Sea at the turn of the millennium are the descendents of the Middle Generation, as those who suffered under apartheid are referred to in the novel, and who in turn inherited from their nineteenth-century forebears a world massively damaged by a combination of colonialism and their own creeds. Both the 1856 and 1998 narratives are coded in terms of ambivalence and cultural heterogeneity that resonates back and forth between the past and the present.

The underlying story of the Xhosa cattle-killing in 1856 is constructed around representative twin sons of the Xhosa patriarch, Xixika, a patrician of the Great Place of King Sarhili. Twin-Twin, first-born yet paradoxically, according to Xhosa custom, regarded as the younger brother, is a lover of women, husband of numerous wives and father of many children; Twin, the second-born but 'older' brother, is the monogamous husband of the Khoikhoi woman, Qukezwa, who had prostituted herself to the British soldiers in order to steal their gunpowder during the colonial war against the prophet Mlanjeni from 1850–1853. Their only child, Heitsi, is named for the Khoikhoi prophet and saviour, Heitsi Eibib, son of Tsiqwa, and is the bearer of the ancient traditions of both the Xhosa and the Khoikhoi.

The fictional narrative follows the main contours of the historical one very closely, beginning with the three-year-long war waged against the Xhosas by their self-styled 'Great White Chief', the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Harry Smith, and continued under his successor, Sir George Cathcart. Not only does the novel quote Smith's instruction to his field commanders to 'exterminate the savage beasts!' (Mda 2000, 20; see Peires 1989, 12: 'to destroy and exterminate these most barbarous and treacherous savages'), almost in anticipation of Conrad's Kurtz, but the notion of savagery is further relativised by the inclusion in Mda's narrative of the Xhosa practice of disembowelling slain British soldiers to render their witchcraft powerless as well as the British practice of decapitating slain Xhosas and boiling down their skulls in the Victorian spirit of '[s]cientific enquiry' (Mda 21). As Peires expresses it: 'Atrocities breed atrocities, and it would be wrong for the historian to pass judgement on those who killed and tortured in this most merciless of all frontier wars' (Peires 23).

The cultural hybridity embodied in the young Heitsi is a metonymy of the cultural hybridity, political compromise and religious syncretism that is thematised

in Mda's novel and also analysed in Peires's history of the period. Peires points out that the Xhosa people's struggling to come to terms with a new conception of death after the terrible smallpox epidemic of 1770 had provided a favourable context for the Christian message of the resurrection. The lineage of Xhosa prophets in the nineteenth century 'whose doctrines were explicitly derived from Christianity' (Peires 32) began with Ntsikana, who 'preached a gospel of peace and praise' (33) and predicted the coming of the white man, and Nxele, who renounced mission Christianity and evolved a new theology that amalgamated the chief elements of the Christian and Xhosa religions — in the words of Mda's novel, he fired the Xhosa imagination with his revelations concerning 'Mdalidephu the god of the black man, Thixo the God of the white man, and Thixo's son, Tayi, who was killed by the white people' (Mda 14). Strains of both religious discourses might have filtered through the prophecies of Mlanjeni, the Riverman of the Keiskamma River, who venerated the sun and exhorted the Xhosa to purify themselves and cleanse the drought-stricken earth by rejecting all witchcraft and slaughtering all their dun and yellow-coloured cattle — which the settlers feared was because dun was the colour associated with them.

Ntsikana and Nxele were obvious precursors, however, of the prophet Mhlakaza, who most clearly embodied the syncretism of Christianity and Xhosa religion and whose religious obsessions prepared the way for the later, more far-reaching prophecies of Nongqawuse. After his father had killed his mother, Mhlakaza had come to the Cape Colony, adopted Christianity together with the name Wilhelm Goliath, and was baptised in the Methodist Church. When he met Nathaniel Merriman, the Anglican Archdeacon of Grahamstown, Goliath joined the Anglicans, boasting that he was 'the first umXhosa ever to receive the Anglican Communion' (Mda 53). He regarded himself as a Gospel Man — as he is described in Mda's novel: 'He could recite the Creed, all Ten Commandments in their proper order, and the Lord's Prayer. He spoke the language of the Dutch people too, as if he was one of them' (53). Finding himself treated as a servant by the Merrimans, however, he left in 1853 to go and live on the Gxarha River just beyond the borders of British Kaffraria, resumed his own name of Mhlakaza, and — in the words of Peires, 'within a few years ... began to preach a new Gospel of his own devising which was to succeed — and to fail — beyond his wildest dreams' (Peires 36).

Mda's novel traces the syncretistic religious strain through Mhlakaza to his fifteen-year-old orphan niece, Nongqawuse, who claimed to have seen spirits ('Strangers' as she called them) in the bush and in the sea. In her words: 'They said they were messengers of Naphakade, He-Who-Is-Forever, the descendant of Sifuba-Sibanzi, the Broad-Chested One' (Mda 59). People were confused about this: 'They had not heard of He-Who-Is-Forever, nor of the Broad-Chested-One. Obviously these must be the new names of the god of the amaXhosa people ... the one who is known by everyone as Qamata or Mvelingqangi ... the one who was called Mdalidephu by Prophet Nxele' (59). Peires emphasises the fusion of

Christian and Xhosa components in the identity of these spirit-messengers: the Christian dichotomy between God and Christ is reflected in the two figures of Naphakade and Sifuba-Sibanzi, but although Sifuba-Sibanzi, in the tradition of heroic apostrophe, 'is today a universally recognised praise name for Jesus Christ', it was also 'originally a Khoi name for God' (Peires 137).

Mhlakaza's blend of Christianity and Xhosa belief also informed the 'Strangers'' visionary message, with its combination of apocalypse and resurrection: they instructed the Xhosa nation to slaughter all their cattle and destroy their corn because they had been contaminated by witchcraft. They were to abjure all forms of witchcraft, and they were not to cultivate their fields in the new season, but dig new grain pits, erect new cattle kraals, build new houses and wear new ornaments 'to greet a new and perfect world' (Peires 311). The whole community of the dead — the ancestors — were preparing to rise again, as well new cattle, and new corn would miraculously appear. 'On the appointed day, the sun would rise blood-red with a terrible heat, until it turned back at midday to set again, turning the earth pitch-black' (Peires 311–12). After a terrible storm in which the unbelievers, their impure cattle and their witchcraft would be destroyed, the new people, the new cattle and the new corn would rise again.

Mda's novel plots the ensuing drama of division, equivocation and prevarication in terms of the lives of Twin and Twin-Twin. Despite — and because of — King Sarhili's confirming that he too has seen and spoken to the spirit messengers and been given a glimpse of his dead son on the waves in the distance, the Xhosa people split into two factions: the Believers, or amaThamba — 'those whose hearts [are] soft and compassionate' and who uphold the common good (Mda 98; see also Peires 175–77) — and the Unbelievers, amaGogotya — 'the hard ones' (Mda 98), who are ruled by greedy self-interest. True to the historical facts, Mda's novel does not essentialise either the Believers or the Unbelievers. Peires argues that neither the Xhosas' loss of land in the Frontier Wars and their subsequent attitudes towards the colonial government, nor their adherence to their precolonial beliefs or conversion to Christianity, were *per se* determining factors in their participation in the Cattle-Killing movement (see Peires 1989, 165ff). In Mda's novel there are both Believers as well as Unbelievers who believe in 'Qamata, the god of the amaXhosa', as there are those from both groups who believe in 'Thixo, the god of the white man' (Mda 129). The cattle lung sickness epidemic that had ravaged Xhosaland in 1854–55 might have suggested cattle-killing to the Xhosa, Peires says, but this alone 'cannot account for the pattern of division between believer and unbeliever' (Peires 1989, 168). Twin-Twin's unbelief causes him to sink 'deeper into collaboration with the conquerors of his people' (Mda 2000, 53). His unwavering rejection of Nongqawuse's prophecies and of the cattle-killing brings him paradoxically into alliance with Xhosa chiefs who have deserted their own gods for Christianity and been seduced by Sir George Grey's brand of colonialism with its promise of schools and hospitals. Families

are split apart as rifts grow between fathers and sons, husbands and wives. When Twin-Twin's senior wife eventually runs away to join the Believers on the banks of the Gxarha River he is devastated, as he is when his own brother, Twin, leads a party of Believers who burn down his homestead.

The plight of the Believers is presented from the perspectives of Twin and his wife, Qukezwa. In them can be seen the complex operation of belief on the one hand, and on the other, frustration at colonial domination and the hope that the settlers would also be swept away when the new people arrived. Together with Twin and Qukezwa the reader experiences the First Disappointment when the first date of the resurrection set by the prophets, the full moon of June 1856, comes and goes like any other day. And the Second Disappointment at the next full moon in mid-August when, instead of two suns rising as the prophets now promise, a 'solitary sun ... walk[s] across the sky as if it [is] just another day' (150). Like the Unbelievers, the Believers are not a homogeneous group, but become divided between the followers of Nongqawuse and the followers of Nonkosi, the eleven-year-old daughter of the traditional healer, Kulwana, who begins prophesying on the banks of the Mpongo River. The failure of the new people and cattle to materialise is attributed at first to the only partial obedience to the cattle-killing command by the Believers, and then to the disobedience of the Unbelievers and their betrayal of the Xhosa nation. The further postponement of the promised arrival on the full moon of January 1857 to mid-February makes belief all the more urgent as starvation bites in, the country is filled with the stench of rotting carcasses, and angry resentment against the Unbelievers grows. The long-awaited 16 February 1857 dawns, but turns out to be the day of the Great Disappointment. In the words of the novel:

The sun rose. It was not the colour of blood. It looked like any other sun. It did not rise late either. The Believers watched it in disbelief as it moved across the sky. There was no darkness. No thunder. No lightning. The dead did not arise. (242).

A general fury erupts against the Unbelievers as people die in their thousands, and corpses and skeletons become a common sight in the veld and around homesteads in what the narrative describes as 'a dog-eat-dog world' (292). The story of the Cattle-Killing ends with the starving survivors of the Xhosa having to cast themselves on the arbitrary charity of Sir George Grey, and being forced from their land to work for white settlers. Twin dies raving mad from starvation in the Kaffir Relief House; Qukezwa wanders from village to village begging for scraps of food. By the end of 1857, approximately 40,000 Xhosa people had starved to death — an estimated four per homestead — and upwards of 150,000 more were displaced. An estimated 400,000 head of cattle had been slaughtered by January 1857. More than 600,000 acres of land were subsequently lost by the Xhosa (see Peires 1989, 319).

The 1998 narrative in Mda's split-tone text provides an elaborate interchange with the story of the Cattle-Killing, with its own version of the nineteenth-century

conflict between amaThamba and amaGogoty, and between *ubuqaba*, backwardness — or 'redness' for the red ochre with which the women smear their bodies and dye their skirts — and *ubugqobokha*, moving forward with the times. The feud between Believers and Unbelievers in Qolorha-by-Sea sometimes leads, at other times follows, and often overlaps with the Nongqawuse narrative. The narrative polyphony is further enriched by the Xhosa cultural world of the 1998 chronotope being presented as complex as the nineteenth-century one.

The protagonist, Camagu, returns to South Africa in 1994 after thirty years in the United States, only to find himself one of the 'disaffected exiles and sundry learned rejects of this new society' (Mda 28). He loses his enthusiasm for this newly democratic society when he realises that he lacks the struggle credentials to be admitted to its inner circles. In Mda's novel the new African Renaissance is as compromised a creed as Nongqawuse's prophecy of the rebirth of the new people. The ruling elite — the latter-day chiefs of the nation — Camagu discovers, consists of the 'Aristocrats of the Revolution' (36); networking, lobbying, nepotism and racial tokenism might secure employment, not his American doctorate in communication and development; black empowerment means the enrichment of a chosen few, an elite clique of black businessmen, trade union leaders and corrupt politicians.

For all its picturesqueness, the fictional — like the actual — Eastern Cape village of Qolorha-by-Sea to which Camagu comes in search of the beautiful young Xhosa girl he heard singing at a funeral on the roof of a Johannesburg building, is situated in the province with 'the worst levels of poverty, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, infrastructure, services and skills ... in the country' (waga Mage 11). True democracy is no more readily available to these people than running water or electricity.

Camagu is both observer and mediator of the conflict led by the elderly councillor, the widowed Zim, spokesman for the Believing faction and champion of traditional Xhosa values and practices, and his counterpart, Bhonco, representing the case of the Unbelievers in favour of development and progress. However, although Camagu tries 'to observe the patterns of believing and unbelieving at this village, to try to make sense of them ... they remain beyond his comprehension' (Mda 105). The Unbelievers are deeply embarrassed by the history and legacy of Nongqawuse and prefer to suppress it, whereas the family of Believers and their followers are proud of her heritage and of her Pool nearby. The antagonists and other principal actors in this cultural drama cannot be easily categorised, however. Zim's traditionalism is supported by his monthly government pension, while NoPetticoat, wife of the enlightened Bhonco, matches her husband's rival in her preference for traditional Xhosa costume. The close identification of Zim's daughter, Qukezwa, with Nongqawuse, and her overtone singing while riding her horse, Gxagxa — an experience which excites the hapless Camagu to involuntary orgasm — has to be modified by the Pierre Cardin logo on her cap. Similarly, the

enthusiasm that Bhonco's daughter, the headmistress Xoliswa Ximiya, expresses for all things Western has to be seen in the light of her cultural icons, Dolly Parton and Eddy Murphy, and to offset and match this cultural hybridity the trading store owner, Dalton, may look 'like a parody of an Afrikaner farmer' (7), but is in fact the grandson of an English missionary and great-great-grandson of a frontier magistrate in the days of Nongqawuse. Not only does he speak better isiXhosa than most people in the village, but he has also gone to the initiation school and 'been circumcised in accordance with the customs of the amaXhosa people' (7).

The debate about bringing progress to Qolorha is conducted around the plans of a big company to build a casino and resort hotel on the Gxarha River mouth and so attract tourists from all over the world. Set against the Unbelievers' support of this visionary project is the modest exercise in cultural tourism by some of the village women, which offends Xoliswa Ximiya since 'her people are made to act like buffoons for ... white tourists' (110). The conflict intensifies as a parodied inversion of the nineteenth-century conflict between the Unbelievers and the Believers, again between the 'soft' people whose concern is for the wellbeing of the community and the 'hard' people who interpret profit as progress. An international-style gambling resort would marginalise and exclude the local people; alternatively, a cultural village would misrepresent their actual daily lives. The outcome is victory for neither the Believers nor the Unbelievers: the conflict leads to Nongqawuse's Pool being declared a national heritage site, and instead of the 'wonderful gambling city [rising] in all its crystal splendour and glory' (310), the villagers run a co-operatively owned holiday camp.

*The Heart of Redness* succeeds in imaginatively expanding and focusing the overtones of its nineteenth-century historical discourse into a fictional narrative; it also succeeds in developing the realism of its late-twentieth century fictional discourse into a uniquely South African — or more correctly Xhosa — kind of magical realism with oral undertones. In this hybrid text, Camagu recognises his amaMpondomise clan totem in a brown mole snake that he finds in his bed; Qukezwa, with whom he falls in love, becomes pregnant, despite the grandmothers confirming her virginity, and gives birth to a son she calls Heitsi; Bhonco engages a group of ululants to torment Zim, who retaliates by sending hadeda birds to laugh at him; NomaRussia, stricken with cervical cancer, waits in vigil outside Zim's hut for him to die and in the world of the ancestors intercede with his wife, NoEngland, who has preceded him there, to remove the witchcraft that has caused her haemorrhaging.

The novel ends with separate episodes from the two time periods merging: in the 1857 narrative, Twin's wife, Qukezwa, is next to the lagoon with her son, Heitsi, and singing 'in split tones'. 'She sings in glaring colours. In violent colours. Colours of gore. Colours of today and of yesterday. Dreamy colours. Colours that paint nightmares on barren landscapes. She haunts yesterday's reefs and ridges with redness' (312). In the 1998 narrative, Zim's daughter, Qukezwa, is also on

the beach with her son, Heitsi, 'fill[ing] the valley with her many voices. She fills the wild beach with dull colours. Colours that are hazy and misty'. The two stories blend into a seamless narrative of the past and of the present, and the two voices combine into a single, split-tone song.

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