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TABLE DES MATIERES

TRIUMPHING FROM EVILS AND CHANGING PERSPECTIVES: AN EXAMINATION OF BLACKS' DILEMMA IN ZAKES MDA'S *THE HEART OF REDNESS*.

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ABSTRACT

The end of apartheid ushers in a new transitional stage for South African authors who challenge to explore original subject materials and envision a new future. While racial injustice remains a strong theme in post-apartheid literature, the postmodern environment takes into account a critical re-examination and recontextualisation as expounded by Zakes Mda in *The Heart of Redness*. The author explores new South Africa's stories through beautifully realized characters whose search for love and connection takes up readers close to the black experience, past and present. This study seeks to examine the binarism of tradition versus modernity, from the black South Africans' dilemma of where to position themselves between traditional beliefs and post-liberation ambitions, hence the current subjects overlapped with postmodernist interpretations of post-apartheid challenges.

Key words: believers, culture, identity, modernity, post-apartheid, post-liberation, postmodernism, prophecy, South Africa, unbelievers.

RÉSUMÉ

La fin de l'apartheid fait entrer l'Afrique du Sud dans une nouvelle phase de transition pour les écrivains sud-africains qui s'avisent à chercher des sujets basés sur l'originalité, puis envisager un nouvel avenir. Alors que l'injustice raciale reste un sujet poignant dans la littérature post-apartheid, l'environnement postmoderne prend en compte un réexamen et une recontextualisation comme Zakes Mda l'expose dans *The Heart of Redness*. L'auteur examine minutieusement les faits en Afrique du Sud contemporaine à travers des personnages élégamment mis en scène, et dont la quête pour l'amour du prochain et le vivre ensemble emmènent les lecteurs à faire un rapprochement avec l'expérience, le passé et le présent du Noir. Cet article vise à analyser l'opposition binaire entre la tradition et la modernité, le dilemme des Noirs sud-africains à se dévouer aux croyances traditionnelles au détriment des ambitions libératoires, d'où les sujets actuels qui se recoupent à travers des interprétations postmodernistes face aux défis après l'apartheid.

Mots-clés: partisans, culture, identité, modernité, post-apartheid, post-libération, postmodernisme, prophétie, Afrique du Sud, non-partisans.

Introduction

The Heart of Redness[11] (2000) is a triumph of imagination, which is described by critics, according to *Sunday Times* (2001), as a 'magical realist text of great beauty, humour and pathos'. It is a complex novel that weaves the fascinating past [history] that reflects the mid-nineteenth century prophecy of a young, "foolish" girl called Nongqawuse who 'once lied that she saw miracles' (*HR*, 2000: 67). The standard historical accounts include whites in Eastern Cape village of Qolorha at the height of British colonization and the portrayal of contemporary life of black people in South Africa and their attachment to place.

A distinctive feature of Zakes Mda's novel is the resort to the past by castigating the evils of colonialism and apartheid. His principal interest lies in the problems and limitations that the black community faces in 'new' South Africa or post-apartheid South Africa. Before the abolition of apartheid in February 1990, because he was in exile and far away from racial injustices, Mda was forced to use his imagination in order to recreate the situation in such a way he remembered it, that is, on the ground of his imagination (Naidoo, 1997: 251). That works to Mda's advantage even [today] when the apartheid system is currently abolished.

The concatenation of *The Heart of Redness* account resorts to a postcolonial and postmodern approach, given the impacts of the British colonialism on post-apartheid South Africa. How Mda uses his literary creation to dramatize the dilemma of black South Africans, between traditional beliefs and contemporary expectations, i.e., post-apartheid separation policies. This study examines Mda's achievement in theorising the decimation of iniquitous apartheid symptoms and digging out the drifts and blurring policies of the ANC-led government at the earliest inception of democracy in South Africa.

I- Prophesying the Decimation of Racism Symptoms.

The Heart of Redness is the story about a fifteen-year-old girl called Nongqawuse in the Eastern Cape village of Qolorha. The teenage girl is torn between the Xhosa people, the

[11] In this paper, the abbreviation *HR* in references stands for the title of Zakes Mda's novel *The Heart of Redness* that was published in 2000.

Nongqawuse Believers and their opponents viewed as the Unbelievers. The girl's dilemma is just like that of many Xhosa families. The Believers put the blame on Nongqawuse's unrealistic visions on the Unbelievers' pessimism. Nongqawuse has prophesied that the dead will come back to life if the Xhosa nation destroys all their cattle and crops. On the one hand, the Believers believe that the dead will rise. The traditionalists who hold on to their culture, religion, belief system, believe in witchcraft and the spirit of the dead. They follow the self-destructive orders of the prophetess Nongqawuse. The Unbelievers, on the other hand, are pictured as 'civilized' people who do not believe that their ancestors can come back to life. They represent the indoctrinated modernists converted to Christianity by British 'civilization' and culture. There are also those Unbelievers who are 'civilized' but still practice traditional culture, customs, and rituals. The Unbelievers neither kill their cattle nor destroy their crops. They accuse the Nongqawuse of 'misleading' the Xhosa nation through the belief in the resurrection of the dead. To this end, they accuse the Nongqawuse of causing them to suffer and endure starvation. The prophecy results in strong opposition among members of the tribe, including siblings, men and their wives. The consequences are gruesome, and devastating.

The feud between Believers and Unbelievers simmers in the village of Qolorha, as the villagers get opposed on any issues. In *The Heart of Redness*, the narrator accounts for the project of building a vast casino, with parks, hotels, water-sports and a huge tourist resort in the village, they disagree on their future, and faced the loss of their heritage.

> He[Camagu] is passionate about development. His wrath is directed at the Believers who are bent on opposing everything that is meant to improve the lives of the people of Qolorha. 'They want us to remain in our wildness!' says the elder. 'To remain red all our lives! To stay in the darkness of redness!' The Unbelievers are moving forward with the times. That is why they support the casino and the water-sports paradise that the developers want to build. The Unbelievers stand for civilization (*HR*, 2000: 79).

The Believers fear progress and oppose the changes they foresee coming to the village's traditions, whilst the Unbelievers favour economic development, and welcome 'progress'. Mda, in the character of Camagu, wonders why the Believers are so bent on opposing development that seems to be of benefit to everyone in the Easter Cape village of Qolorha.

The British colonizers exploited the conflict by further dividing the Xhosa people in order to 'steal' their land. They spread Western civilization, introduced schools and ensured that their

language became the medium of communication. The British colonizers used their prowess to dominate the indigenous people. They introduced their economy, religion, education, culture, 'civilization' and language, hence, English-colonial doubts about cultural identity are projected and blamed upon the English language itself. Consequently, the kings of the Xhosas lost their supremacy. This further fermented a feud between the British people and the Xhosas, and among the Xhosa nation itself, hence the Believers and Unbelievers. Then, as now, the villagers of Qolorha were split. Mda, however, exploits the present conflict and weaves in the iniquitous history of the village of Qolorha, where the savage British colonizers (white conquerors) arrived with 'civilization'. Nongqawuse, the young Xhosa prophetess, told the people to resist British encroachment upon the land of the Xhosa nation and to resist British invasion by destroying their cattle and crops. Mda seems to be sympathetic to the Believers, who wanted to preserve their Xhosa tradition, custom, culture, belief system and natural beauty of the village. As soon as South Africa entered the post-apartheid era, also called the 'New' South Africa, many laws concerning segregation, land distribution and health systems have been adapted to the new social and political order. The end of apartheid has not only induced political and social change, but also influenced the literary imagination in post-apartheid South Africa.

Mda's literary achievement is greatly influenced by his essays on fiction and storytelling, which show a marked emphasis on metafictionality, a concept which is inherently connected with postmodernism. South African fiction greatly influenced the political and social system. In this regard, Poyner argues, governmental issues and laws greatly influenced the cultural and literary production at the time; and that "post-apartheid fiction reveals that the private can serve productively as a corrective to the public, suggesting that the "dichotomies" of public/private, political/ethical need reconceptualizing" (2008: 103-105). Attwell and Harlow also admit that during apartheid writers were aware of public issues, whereas in the post-apartheid these issues have been given less important dimension than before In this regard, they state that,

> (…) under apartheid, to separate the political and the aesthetic - to insist that the aesthetic had its own priorities and demands - was to risk political censure, that separation is now widely endorsed. The liberalism of the new order is more accommodating than a revolutionary culture could ever be, to the re-invention of tradition, to irony, to play. Under apartheid, writers were expected to address the great historical issues of the time, whereas now they are free to write in a more personal key (Attwell & David, 2000: 4).

This idea is of particular relevance to Mda's postmodern writing deriving from imagination. In the 'New' South African literary context, Saunders Rebecca states that 'apartheid exploits linguistic foreignness by constructing a text that "say[s] one thing [and] means quite another" (2001: 236-237). By foregrounding these words, Saunders explains that postmodern texts are essentially metaphorical in nature. As a result, the events which occur in postmodern fictional works cannot be read literally, and are therefore difficult to represent.

Mda diplomatically and earnestly subverts the portrayal of Nongqawuse's cattle-killing as 'foolish' and unnecessary, whilst he tactfully plays with very serious colonial and post-colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid construction of [national] identity and [country's] history. The novel ingeniously derides shibboleths of post-apartheid South Africa, apartheid era, racist South Africa, and British Colonialism in the nineteenth century. It also portrays social policies disadvantageous to the Blacks, i.e., the have-nots in democratic South Africa.

Apartheid meant racial segregation under the regime of white domination. The 1950s saw "a plethora of laws and executive actions" (Thompson, 1990: 190) which included rigid and increasingly sophisticated controls over all black South Africans, and the division of urban areas into zones where "members of one specified race alone could live and work" (Thompson, 1990: 194). According to the *Reader's Digest* (1995: 367), in the apartheid period the National Party introduced a battery of legislation to prop up its policy, which aimed to regulate every aspect of private, social and economic life.

Mda's fiction interrogates the symptoms of racism, that is, political oppression and economic exploitation in South Africa. In the post-apartheid literary production, the writer "attempts to function as the voices of the black disenfranchised" (Naidoo, 1998: 89) and gives way to a reflection on the evils of the past and present. In the same order, Farisani concurs with Naidoo's assertion as he points out that 'the legacy of apartheid is one of the ugliest and most unfortunate things that every South African who can be counted amongst the true revolutionaries would like to put behind us' (in Mbete *et al*, 2001: 3). Likewise, Ahluwalia *et al* (1997: 27) believe that the apartheid regime subjected the African people to the infamous authority and grotesque military force of an alien power.

In the evocation of the apartheid system, Mda's narrative reads as the voices of the black disfranchised, and proportionally highlights the present conflict and weaves in the iniquitous history

of the village of Qolorha. As soon as the savage British colonizers (white conquerors) arrive in the village with 'civilization', Nongqawuse, the young Xhosa prophetess, tells the people to resist British encroachment upon the land of the Xhosa nation, by destroying their cattle and crops. Mda's novel is sympathetic to the Believers who want to preserve their Xhosa tradition, custom, culture, spiritual and religious systems, and the natural beauty of the village. Even though the Believers fear 'progress', Mda through the character of Camagu maintains:

> (…) electricity must come to the village ... but not because of the gambling city ... The Government must bring electricity here because the village needs it. It is the policy of the government now to electrify even the most remote villages (*HR*: 275-276).

The Believers fear progress and oppose the changes they foresee coming to the village's traditions, whilst the Unbelievers favour economic development, and heartily welcome 'progress'. Through the character of Camagu, the novel enables to wonder why the Believers are so bent on opposing development that seems to be advantageous to everyone in the Easter Cape village of Qolorha.

Viewed as 'an explorer of existence', Mda is endowed with an immense commitment to South African people's liberation. Jones and Jones in support of this view, point out that 'to the African ethos of communality is added commitment'. They maintain that commitment, as is evidenced in Mda's writing. The writer's commitment emanates from a positive but pained state of mind – 'suffering, sacrifice, selflessness, determination to defy misery and triumph over travails' – and is concomitant with resistance. It is made more significant and meaningful by plagues prevalent in South Africa during colonization and apartheid. The symptoms being 'racism, repression, oppression, exploitation, determination to destroy the helpless, innocent victims' (Jones & Jones, 1996: 121).

Zakes Mda accounts for foreseeable strategies that constantly shift between contemporary life and the mid-nineteenth century when the Xhosa nation was split into Believers and Unbelievers. More than the novel's allusion to the misconceptions of Nongqawuse's prophecy, the focus remains the white conquerors and their helpers – the Unbelievers – who consider Nongqawuse's visions and cattle-killing as 'foolishness', or as success of colonization. Contrarily to this category of protagonists, the Believers regard cattle-killing as unprecedented ways of setting them free from the bondage and chains of British 'civilization' and the white conquerors. In other words, there are divergent opinions about Nongqawuse's prophecy and its devastating consequences. That is how

the novel plays out the dilemma of black people about the way to define themselves between traditional culture, beliefs and their current needs and ambitions.

The novel also suggests looking at the two overlapping stories of Nongqawuse's prophecy in the mid-nineteenth century and their impacts today on the lives of black South Africans. The fascinating story about tradition through the ancestors' religious values parallels the description of the community in present time. The constant combination of past and present slows the narrative, but the novel's distinct characteristic is its ability to subvert the heart-of-darkness stereotypes, beyond any intention of romanticizing the 'primitive.' The village people want electricity, running water, literacy. Nonetheless, quite at the same degree, they want to preserve their Xhosa culture and the natural beauty of their place, not in the sense of being reluctant to change, but as a dynamic community.

The Xhosa nation, reluctantly, accepted that the catastrophe of Nongqawuse was irreversible, and they took up the continuing struggle for liberation. As the novel is based on history, Mda had to travel to the Eastern Cape village of Qolorha. He does a lot of research about the life of the people, conditions under which they live and the ripple effects of Nongqawuse, the young prophetess who brought the message from the ancestors to the Xhosa nation that:

> (…) the Strangers said I must tell the nation that all cattle now living must be slaughtered. They have been reared by contaminated hands because there are people who deal in witchcraft. The fields must not be cultivated, but great new grain pits must be dug, new houses must be built, and great strong cattle *kraals* must be erected. Cut out new milk sacks and weave many doors from *buka* roots. The Strangers say that the whole community of the dead will arise. When the time is ripe they will arise from the dead, and new cattle will fill the kraals. The people must leave their witchcraft, for soon they will be examined by diviners. (*HR*, 60).

Nongqawuse's prophecy caused the division among the Xhosa nation enabling the British government, under Sir Harry Smith, to bring independent 'native' tribes under British protection and white guardianship in order to 'civilize and detribalize them' (Muller, 1969: 168). Similarly, Sir George Grey aimed at detribalizing, educating and befriending them (1969: 169). Consequently, according to Moleah (1993: 65), the society that was well arranged with 'specified duties and obligations sanctioned by the whole society', lost its unity, culture, religion, belief system, heritage, identity and land. But, Peires (1989: 321) believes that the amount of land effectively at the Xhosa nation's disposal was greatly curtailed by Grey's policy of concentrating them into villages. Sir

George Grey manipulated the feuding Xhosa people - Believers and Unbelievers – by spreading British 'civilization' (Grey 1989: 53) to aggravate the already volatile situation to further divide the Xhosa nation. Grey applied the divide and rule system in order to achieve his objectives.

Perhaps, most importantly, the division among the village of Qoloma's community shapes the story to its own end. As Mda is the ultimate writer of the novel, he is providing a narrative, largely based on historical fact (past and present), that he has managed to shape and modify in order to convey his own thematic concerns. This is visible, particularly in the dialogue of the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir George Grey, as cited by Mda in *The Heart of Redness* (2000), word for word from his diaries. It would appear that the division among the once close-knit village of Qolorha community, as a result of British invasion, and encroachment into the land of the Xhosa nation and Nongqawuse's cattle-killing saga, demonstrates that unity can occur only in relatively small groups of people (Believers and Unbelievers), and even in these groups a sense of oneness is breaking down. It is worth noting that the division between Believers and Unbelievers, argues Peires, was not therefore a simple reaction to the crisis of the prophecies, but a reflection of the 'deeper communal tensions generated by the breakup of Xhosa society under colonial pressure' (1989: 316). Consider that, in spite of these divisions and petty quarrels between Believers and Unbelievers, the (neutral) villagers:

> (…) want to see development happening. They want clean water. They want health delivery services. They see Bhonco and Zim and their small bands of followers as clowns who are holding desperately to the quarrels of the past. But the whole thing frustrates developments (*HR*, 133).

The textual tensions between Believers and Unbelievers, the colonizers and the amaXhosa (the colonized) 'reflect a South Africa experiencing the pain and joys of new order' (Naidoo, 1998: 99). Accordingly, the novel displays a very strong feature of Mda's concern with issues of transformation that affect black people who are politically, socially and economically deprived and disadvantaged. In the narrative, affection and depravation are concomitantly expressed:

> Twin-Twin's weals opened up and became wounds. After many months the wounds healed and became scars. But occasionally they itched and reminded him of his flagellation. At the time he did not know that his progeny were destined to carry the burden of the scars (*HR*, 2000: 17).

In this regard characters are forced to engage with history owing to the fact that the story and events in the story occurred within a particular, distinguishable historical context, and the

suffering, the 'fate of some of those characters was tied in with the political situation' (Naidoo, 1997: 258) in the Cape in the past and in the present. These two periods (past and present) merge and the characters move swiftly in time and space from one period to the next (1997: 260). This situation enables the characters of the present time, like Camagu, to engage, liaise, and interact with characters. For instance, the narrative pinpoints Camagu's interaction with Bhonco, John Dalton, Qukezwa, Zim, NomaRussia, Xoliswa Ximiya, and villagers:

> But Camagu, for the first time after many years, is a very fulfilled man. Although he has not said it in so many words, he regards Qolorha as his home now, and it is reasonable for Dalton to suspect he will not be thinking of going to America or even back to Johannesburg in the near future. He often says this is the most beautiful place in the world (*HR,* 2000: 159).

Protagonist Camagu, a Westernized African, the returned exile (like Zakes Mda), originally comes to the rural village of Qolorha looking for a woman (NomaRussia) whose memory haunts him but ends up being associated with the cold, beautiful Xoliswa Ximiya, daughter of Bhonco (the chief Unbeliever), and stays on. The incidents in the novel deal with the suffering of the African children taken away by the British for 'civilization' after the dislocation of their families. The narrator tells the story of Sarah 'Saartjie' Baartman born around 1787. The story about Saartjie is similar to the suffering endured by the indigenous people in the Cape colony. The altercation is attributed to the war between the Believers and Unbelievers based on their belief system. Dalton indicts Camagu and states that their 'ancestors must be ashamed of them for the way they behave' (*HR*, 2000: 193). Camagu blames Dalton's forebears for all the suffering in Qolorha and reiterates:

> The heads of our ancestors are all over Europe.... Trophies collected in military action and in executions', continues Camagu. 'Not only heads. In Paris the private parts of a Khoikhoi woman called Saartjie Baartman are kept in a bottle!' (*HR,* 194).

Saartjie is said to in the fiction a Khoi woman from the Eastern Cape who settles in France in 1814, as a sideshow freak. Saartjie is lonely – far from her home and people. Her life is a cauldron of dark sorrow. She is reportedly raped and sexually exploited by the Europeans – Dalton's ancestors – who are fascinated by this 'big-butted woman from darkest Africa'. Because Saartjie is a 'slave-girl, her consent is obtained through coercion (*HR,* 30).

Mda is inclined to hold identity politics up for scrutiny, mocking notion of racialised identity as fixed. *The Heart of Redness* outlines the fact that whiteness may blur with blackness if a white man takes on African [Xhosa] custom and culture. By delving into the complexities of new

[democratic] South African society that [still] suffers from the effects of western intrusion, I intend to explore Mda's ability to create a new and revealing post-apartheid fictional reality unveiling themes exclusively on the post-apartheid liberation and its blurring expectations amidst the black people in South Africa.

II- Post-apartheid Drifts and Blurring Expectations.

The inception of democracy in 1994 is invoked through Mda's vigorous novelistic material. His inspiration focuses 'on black oppression and exploitation of other black people' (Lloyd, 2001: 34). The scars of colonialism, the evils of apartheid, the democratically-elected black government and the country's governance are ideologically criticised in order to alleviate the suffering of the black community. Unfortunately, the narrator accounts for Bhonco's distress:

> Bhonco adopts a new tactic and becomes very pitiful. 'Ever since Nongqawuse things were never right,' he laments. 'Until now. They are becoming right a bit now, although not for me. They are becoming right for others. Me… no ... I am still waiting for my nkamnkam. This is my seventh year waiting. My wife came here as a child ... she is many years younger than me. But she now gets nkamnkam. I am very very old, but the government refuses to give me my pension' (*HR*, 9).

The extract emphasises the view that *The Heart of Redness* serves as an intricate plot, providing the opportunity to explore weighty subjects and themes, such as frustration and resilience, stereotypes and racial prejudices. Black indigents are entrapped in a state of systematic exclusion due to the ANC-led government's stumbles. As a result, post-liberation period expectations for alleviating poverty, redistributing wealth and improving the social welfare are doomed to failure.

Mda discovered that just about everywhere one turns [today], complaints abound about this new South Africa which after founding democratic elections in 1994, continues to fascinate the international community. The complaints, both legitimate and not-so legitimate, obviously differ according to who raises them. The complaints among some in the black majority have to do with the pace of social and economic change in the country at local, provincial and national levels – which is generally regarded as relatively slower. Mda believes that the black majority in the new political order expect the ANC-led government to move with some speed to improve the lot of the still impoverished black masses – the majority of whom live in conditions not much better than those in which they found themselves before freedom dawned less than a decade ago. Mda has this to say to express the people's frustrations and helplessness:

> Sometimes a foolish weaverbird chooses a very weak branch on which to build its nest. As the nest grows bigger it gets heavier. The branch breaks and the nest falls. Whenever that happens Zim becomes very distressed. The bird's labour of many days has been wasted (*HR*: 42).

What is at issue in the novel is that after the dismantling of apartheid, political prisoners are released, the liberation movements are not banned, and the exiles returned. The paradox [now] is that, like many black leaders who come from exile, Camagu faces trouble finding his place in the new system, to the extent that such leaders are not familiar 'with South Africa and its problems' (*HR*, 32). Like Camagu, many village people are disillusioned by the troubles of the post-liberation period. Camagu eventually becomes embroiled in the village politics which is magnificently communicated to the reader through the deployment of humour and irony. He is drawn into the villagers' heritage and their future, and also drawn into a grotesque love triangle. The novel's humour and irony derive from Camagu's conviction that he can escape the binarism of tradition versus modernity, from the black South African's dilemma of where to position themselves between traditional beliefs and post-liberation ambitions, and from the heartbeats of all black people in the country.

Apart from post-liberation representational issues in democratic South Africa, [post]modern environment emphasises ontological questions. *The Heart of Redness* can be said to draw on several of the strategies and techniques which McHale includes in what he calls the "postmodernist repertoire", and which are related to the ontological dominant of "What world is this?...". Among the strategies and techniques that may contribute to flaunting a work's quality, McHale (1992: 55) pays special attention to mirror reflections and mise-en-abyme structures. In *The Heart of Redness*, the *world* where most of the actions take place conspicuously synthetises all the novel is. Henceforth, the black majority in the new political order expect the ANC-led government to make progress and better living conditions of impoverished black masses – the majority of whom live in conditions not much better than those in which they found themselves before freedom dawned less than a decade ago. Black people's frustrations and helplessness are echoed in the below statement:

> Sometimes a foolish weaverbird chooses a very weak branch on which to build its nest. As the nest grows bigger it gets heavier. The branch breaks and the nest falls. Whenever that happens Zim becomes very distressed. The bird's labour of many days has been wasted (*HR*: 42).

While accounting for post-apartheid symptoms including iniquitous feelings, it is merely a mirror of society. It is the reflection of what the African people feel at a given time. Mda maintains that [today] black South Africans are disappointed with the ANC-led government. Not many of the ruling party election promises come true. Black people, like *birds*, as a result of unemployment and poverty, build shacks and slums almost everywhere they find a vacant piece of land – river-banks, hills, valleys, mountains – where there is no running water and sanitation, no health-care service, no infrastructure. Moleah shares this view by stating that Africans in South Africa lived in settlements which differed in 'arrangement and concentration to either constitute individual homesteads, villages or towns' (Moleah, 1993: 61), for example, the Phillipi, Nelson Mandela in Eastern Cape, Langa, Joe Slovo, Kreifontein, Mooitrap in Cape Town, Alexandra in Johannesburg, George Koge in Eastern Johannesburg, Mshenguville in Pretoria, Msawawa in Randburg, Cato Manor, Cato Crest, Bhambayi, Inanda in Durban. Such settlements, according to Peires, emanate from the fact that the amount of land effectively at the 'disposal of the African people was greatly curtailed by Grey's policy of concentrating them into villages' (Peires, 1989: 321) where they endure the constant pain of harassment and hunger and where people live below the poverty threshold.

Accordingly, as more and more Xhosa returned home from the spell of forced labour in the colony, these tiny allocations undoubtedly become increasingly unable to sustain and support them. Eventually, Mda believes that Eastern Cape and other parts of the country are degenerated into a vast rural and urban slums and undocumented settlements. As a result, the Xhosa who 'occupy their homesteads suddenly discovered that they were squatters on their own land' (*HR*, 296). Consider for example, the statement in *Ways of Dying* (1995) that demonstrates what happens when the government delays to give people houses:

> The people decided that they were going to move en masse, and unilaterally take this land on the outskirts of the city, and build their shacks there. This was Toloki's opportunity to get himself a house. He joined the settlers, and allocated himself a small plot where he constructed his shack.
>
> That was the shack that he decorated with newspapers and magazines (Mda, 1995: 121).

Invariably, it is due to these gruesome conditions that children born in slums, shacks and squatter camps, then, and as now became unconsciously politicized. According to Mda, children from informal settlements and from the rural village of Qolorha come to school malnourished, tired

and with poor concentration. These children are inclined to devote themselves to the liberation of their people. This is a reality which they could deal with in a myriad of ways. They simply find themselves doing so and could not do otherwise because:

> To be an African in South Africa means that one is politicized from the moment of one's birth, whether one acknowledges it or not. An African child is born in an African Only hospital, taken home in an African Only bus, lives in an African Only area and attends an African Only school, if he attends school at all (Mandela, 1994: 89).

The extract, according to Thompson (1990: 197), reminds one that from 1948 on, 'Whites Only' notices appeared in every conceivable place, and a range of laws and regulations confirmed or imposed segregation for taxis, ambulances, hearses, buses, trains, elevators, benches, lavatories, parks, residences, hospitals as well as schools and universities. Evidently, the extract quoted above provides an incisive view of Mda's concerns and clearly demonstrates that the majority of Africans in the new political order are unemployed, even those that are employed cannot afford medical aids, private hospitals and clinics, (luxurious) cars, or to live in affluent areas, and cannot afford to send their children to private or semi-private schools, but rely entirely on government institutions all because 'we are slaves in our own country. We are tenants on our own soil' (Mandela, 1994: 28), and are strangers in their land of birth.

Post-apartheid could have been the period of black South Africans' welfare. Unfortunately, like in the 1930s, they are experiencing harsh living conditions, i.e., congestion and chaos. According to the *Reader's Digest* (354), they are blighted by ill-health and starvation, they suffered appalling mortality rate among infants and 'lived in heavily over-populated and grossly neglected areas', and they 'have been rendered powerless by starvation' (*HR*, 238). Black South Africans look like people risen from the grave:

> Their sunken eyes showed a little glimmer of life. Their cracked skin looked like land that had been thoroughly punished by drought. Their skin clung desperately to their bones. Twin and Qukezwa knew that they would be very fortunate if they themselves were not eventually counted among the roadside dead (*HR*, 294).

Ironically, Mda believes that African people have no control over their own destiny on the land of their birth in the post-liberation era as they have no strength, no power, and still have no land where they could prosper and multiply as they still live in shacks, 'filling in the emptiness of their lives with alcohol' (Hodge, 1995: 191), for all black South Africans are still a conquered people. Jordan (*Towards an African Literature*, 1973: 79) on the other end argues that in as much

as the National Party is to blame for informal settlements, shacks and slums, Nongqawuse also 'created the homeless squatters'. Even though 'the masses were hungry, but they lived on faith' (*HR*, 2000: 241). Making an allusion to present-day South Africa, the novel is revealing of the problems of housing, services, and the redistribution of land. The story in the fiction pictures people who live in slums and shacks, and suffer from various diseases and blazes.

The Heart of Redness shows that there are [still] areas in the country that have no occupational health facilities, that South Africa had never an equitable health care system and was historically racially discriminatory, and that there is a dire need for an accessible, equitable and affordable health care system in rural areas in particular. Besides, wide discrepancies in the distribution of wealth between urban and rural areas and 'between the center and the periphery in both urban and rural areas' (Naidoo, 1998: 88).

Hospitals in the Eastern Cape suffer a severe staff shortage, and patients have to travel many kilometres to the nearest clinic or hospital. They have to wait over two hours to see a doctor as many doctors and nurses refuse to come to rural areas or abscond from rural clinics or hospitals where they mostly work under harsh conditions. Like embattled, frustrated scientists, teachers, pharmacists, social workers, speech therapists, paramedics, psychiatrists, emigrate to England, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, America, Australia, New Zealand. For instance, Camagu who hopes that post-apartheid environment will be satisfactory and in a year or two, doors would open (*HR*, 37), is frustrated by 'the strike at the school where he was teaching'. Like many other embattled professionals in this country, Camagu is not happy about the present situation and has 'resigned from the school. His suitcase is packed and tomorrow he is flying away' (*HR*, 38).

Many South Africans, especially those who had been historically advantaged had to make a choice or take position: whether to be part of Believers or part of Unbelievers. Those who did not want to part of Believers packed their bags for 'greener' pastures in countries abroad. John Dalton comments:

> 'Your homelands are in Australia and New Zealand. That is why you emigrate in droves to those countries where you can spend a blissful life without blacks ... with people of your culture and your language ... just like the Orania Afrikaners. Whenever there is any problem in this country you threaten to leave. You are only here for what you can get out of this country. You think you can hold us all to ransom' (*HR*, 160-161).

The view expressed in this statement is that there are still those who do not see themselves as South Africans and as such whose spirit is not rooted in the values and culture of being South Africans, and do not want to succumb to change and subscribe to transformation of the post-apartheid era. Dalton, according to the extract, believes that, in as much as people are unhappy with the pace of progress in the country, in Sub-Saharan Africa South Africa is still the best, but it is not good enough. He believes that all decent South Africans want peace, and that 'it is possible for us to live together in harmony' (*HR*, 143).

The Heart of Redness is produced to shape up ANC-led government's human and social policies, and not to destabilise. South Africa whose history is unique because of the political compromise – evidenced in the 1990s – that rescued South Africans from mutual, unprecedented destruction. Mda's fictional work places South Africa's democracy under scrutiny. Through the narrative, characters struggle with their own choices as to the right thing to do and the best thing to do for their survival:

> It cannot happen,' answered Mhlakaza. 'The instructions are firm on that matter. The present animals are contaminated. So are the present crops. The Strangers made it clear that the new ones will not come unless we do as we are told. The new people, our ancestors, will not rise from the dead until we have cleansed the earth by destroying all our cattle and all our crops both in the fields and in the granaries. The instructions are clear', said the king. 'But my herds are too many. I shall only ask that I be given three months to destroy them all (*HR*, 89).

The book's strength is in the dialogue and the way it chronicles 'history, heritage, exile, conservation, and empowerment of a community riven by old animosities and coming to grips with its future and its past' (Natal Witness' in *Sunday Times*, 2001). Naidoo (1998: 75) is of the opinion that the writer 'interacts with his characters.' Commenting on his fiction, Mda himself confesses:

> I find that I am actually enjoying what I am writing. The writing of plays on the other hand becomes quite a chore and I am relieved when it is all over. But when I write novels, the process of writing itself is such great fun that when I am finished I find that I miss the characters with whom I have been interacting (Naidoo, 1997: 257).

Although the novel describes fictional space and characters, the identities of some characters like Camagu, the protagonist, could be patently obvious to readers. Identities of some significant characters are disguised in the fiction, the inferences arise from the perceptions and interpretations of the history and the political conditions in South Africa between the nineteenth century and twenty-first century. Post-apartheid period fails to alleviate poverty, redistribute wealth and

improve social welfare. Accordingly, *The Heart of Redness* serves as an intricate plot, providing the opportunity to explore beliefs and cultural values. From the impact of Nongqawuse's cattle-killing story, the narrative sheds light on colonialism, the [post]apartheid system, social power, stereotypes, racial prejudices, traditionalism and modernism. The novel skilfully slams British colonialism – through Nongqawuse's cattle-killing prophecy; – it equally slams apartheid, and also the ruling party, ANC, for abandoning the poor and perpetuating inequality and exploitation in post-apartheid South Africa. Mda takes his reader on a riveting analysis of one hundred-and-fifty years of displacement, oppression, discrimination, inequality and exploitation by successive British colonial and Afrikaner racial regimes. In the narrative, the writer shows that the advent of a non-racial democracy has not only failed to bring equality and development but has deepened divisions between haves and have-nots, rich and poor, rural and urban, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed.

> He [Camagu] wonders how the old ones manage to be so relentless in their rhythmic movement. And some of them are going to work in the morning. They'll be standing up all day, eking out a meager living as maids, washerwomen and street vendors. Fortunately he is not going to work. Not tomorrow. Not ever in this country. Four years have passed, and Camagu is still not employed in what he was trained for (*HR*, 2000: 33)

Camagu was embattled when he came to understand the full implication of life in the new democratic society and even frustrated to experience that "the jobs he had been applying for had all gone to people whose only qualification was that they were sons and daughters of the Aristocrats of the Revolution" (*HR*, 2000: 36). Mda opportunistically shows the level of nepotism, corruption, greed and self-interest in the post-apartheid government. It might be ironic the ANC that has fought through all its history to uproot the evil system of colonialism and to crush the system of racial segregation and racism respectively, is in the dilemma of rife nepotism, corruption and greed. All that is visible in this new democracy, according to Jones and Jones (*New Trends and Generations in African Literature*, 1996: 127) is that sham solidarity of the government's 'paying lip-service, setting up public funds that go into private pockets'. Some ANC-led govemment officials embezzle money for their self-aggrandizement while the starving majority are patiently waiting for miracles to happen. Camagu's thoughts as he drives to Qolorha from hospital to visit Dalton are significant:

> The whole country is ruled by greed. Everyone wants to have his or her snout in the trough. Sooner or later the powers that be may decide, in the name of the people ... And of course the powers that be or their proxies – in the form of wives, sons, daughters and cousins – shall be given equity (*HR*, 319).

Mda views post-apartheid era as a serious dilemma for the ANC because, while the people on the ground are told to tighten their belts and tolerate the fluctuating currency, heavy taxation, inflation and social drifts, the government officials of the ANC are enjoying the privileges of power with their affirmative action and black empowerment cronies.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, *The Heart of Redness* illuminates a historical concern, expounded by Mandela, that to achieve fairness in South Africa, one had to dismantle apartheid itself 'for it was the very embodiment of injustice' (Mandela, 1994: 164). Using the historical prophetess Nongqawuse and the horrific Cattle Killing of the mid-nineteenth century as his jumping off point, Mda constructs fantastically a triumph of imaginative and historical writing that freely flows between the historical struggle of South Africans with colonizing Europeans and the late twentieth century struggle between modernity and tradition.

Mda's fictional work is a seamless weave of history, myth, and realism, which outlines the scars of British colonialism and apartheid evils. Mda establishes links between the pre-colonial era, colonial era, apartheid period and post-apartheid order and juxtaposes the link with the black people's dilemma of where to position themselves between traditional beliefs and contemporary desires. Mda's strategy of fusing devices of the traditional belief system and modernization is distinguishable in the novel. [His] distinguished ability to juxtapose reality with supernatural has enabled Mda to establish a novel that clearly depicts worlds of 'multiple realities during times of historical change', according to Naidoo's terms (304),. Mda's use of the supernatural and historical realities [facts] enable him to go beyond the forces of history and its scars in the post-liberation time.

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