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## The Supernatural's Role in the Juxtaposition of the Ideas of Modernity, Traditionalism and Identity in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

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ENG 502

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The Supernatural's Role in the Juxtaposition of the Ideas of Modernity, Traditionalism and Identity in

Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

The supernatural, as a mystical force beyond understanding, is a common feature in many African cultures and it constitutes a crucial aspect of an existence rooted in tradition. It is conceived as a part of the land and, as such, it shapes every aspect of the people's interactions with it. African cosmology has been the subject of much interest in research on African literature. Along with postcolonial sentiments, this literature is being examined for its 'magical realism' – a mode in literature often associated with a mixture of realistic and fantastic elements (Murfin and Ray 279). This blending of reality and myth is a tendency that many critics have noted in the works of South African playwright and novelist, Zakes Mda. His works are recognized for their use of a unique blend of magical realism that Mda introduces in his novels to give color to his characters and their settings. While critics acknowledge Mda's use of magical realism, studies on his works tend to attempt to treat the magical (supernatural) entity in isolation and do not always look at it in relation to other elements within his literary works. In Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, magical realism is seen in the supernatural which emanates from the real historical event of the prophecy by Nongqawuse that spurred the Xhosa cattle killings of 1856-7. The supernatural in this novel permeates every aspect of the modern context and actively shapes how the characters perceive themselves and their world through their decisions and actions. It informs decisions and actions on the issues bordering on the dominant themes of traditionalism and modernity in the novel. These themes are set up as antithetical to each other and they give different identities to their supporters. In the novel's dual setting there is constant interaction between past and present, represented by modernity and

traditionalism, which is mediated by the supernatural. This, Klopper notes, is the “challenge posed by the novel to binary thinking” (95) as magical realism traverses and renders useless the immutable time divide of past and present. Many studies that note this past/present binary in the novel tend to view it in terms of binary oppositions which Mda sets up about various issues in South Africa’s nation-building efforts. Much like this paper, Klopper acknowledges the supernatural as a negotiator between the traditionalism/modernity binary. His focus, however, does not take the theme of identity into consideration. This study approaches the mediation of modernity and tradition by the supernatural with the belief that they play a crucial role in the identity formation of their supporters in the novel.

*The Heart of Redness* is generally lauded in reviews for its portrayal of the Xhosa cattle killings of 1856-7. These cattle killings form the background for Mda’s novel which is set in Eastern Cape, South Africa where, in the 1850s, a teenage girl named Nongqawuse instructed the Xhosa tribe to kill its livestock and burn its crops. Nongqawuse had claimed to have seen her ancestors who had given her this message for the Xhosa. Having followed the instruction and denounced their witchcraft, the people were to construct “great new grain pits”, “new houses”, “great strong cattle enclosures”, cut out “new milksacks” and weave “many doors from buka roots” (Peires 79) in order to prepare for the coming of a new people that would emerge from the sea to drive out the British colonialists and bring new cattle and harvests for the Xhosa. Critics have who have studied the reasons for the Xhosa tribe’s compliance with this seemingly absurd prophecy have defended the Xhosa from inevitable ridicule. Both Klopper and Gohrisch agree with the need to situate the event in its historical background. The former, more elaborately than the latter, points to the encroachment of settlers into lands historically owned by the Xhosa and the outbreak of lung-sickness among Xhosa herds as important factors in understanding why the Xhosa obeyed Nongqawuse’s prophecy (93). However, they both reference Peires who claims that the enabling conditions during the time of Nongqawuse’s prophecy were the result of these factors and certain religious elements within the Xhosa tradition itself (see Peires 312-314). In any case, these writers point to the fact that the apocalyptic atmosphere coupled with other factors created the right conditions for

the acceptance of Nongqawuse's radical prophecy. In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda builds a fictional narrative around this historical event. He places some of the historical figures within his narrative where they interact with his fictional characters who actively participate in the historical event's unfolding.

The aim of this paper is to examine the role of the supernatural (or the 'magic') in determining perceptions on modernity, traditionalism and identity. It attempts to answer the question, how does the belief/unbelief motif within the context of the supernatural influence ideas about traditionalism, modernity and identity in Mda's novel? These ideas will be dealt with in terms of their impact on education, culture and community development within the novel.

The novel features a dual narrative that is divided by time. The past and the present are juxtaposed throughout the narrative where they run parallel to each other. The placement of these two obviously opposing concepts in the same narrative alongside each other creates a sense of permeability where they both shape and inform one another. Movement from past to present within the plot is made possible by the presence of the supernatural that, in the work of a magical realist, receives license to move freely through time. According to Williams, this back and forth movement between past and present in the novel ultimately endows the present with nuances of the past and vice versa (45). She notes the presence of the supernatural in the sharing of similar traits by certain characters occupying different time periods (45). This unconventional use of time in this novel is testament to Mda's magical realism. His portrayal of time, as Williams notes, is non-linear, but it is based on indigenous Xhosa concepts of time (11). It is with the help of the supernatural that the past and the present in the novel connect.

Scholars like Klopper and Offenburger, among others, have noted the influence of J. B. Peires' *The Dead Will Arise* in *The Heart of Redness*. However, their responses to Mda's novel in relation to Peires' book differ widely. Klopper joins most critics in praising Mda's ingenuity of blending the history of the Xhosa cattle killings from Peires' book successfully with his own creativity. Offenburger on the contrary, is very critical of Mda in his 2008 essay "Duplicity and Plagiarism in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of*

*Redness*". He accuses Mda of plagiarizing Peires' work and places side by side, passages within both books where he claims that Mda liberally lifted material, only adapting it a little for purposes of style, without acknowledging Peires. He claims that Mda's plagiarism is evident in his "paraphrasing, borrowing... copying and replicating semantic strategies" in Peires' book (168). Mda has response of the same year is titled: A Response to "Duplicity and Plagiarism in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*" by Andrew Offenburger. In this essay Mda rejects Offenburger's accusation and claims that he does actually credit Peires in his novel, as he also credits the source of his oral history, Rufus Hulley (200). Mda warns against reading the novel as a history textbook, and not the work of fiction that it was intended to be. However, while the novel is not a product of historiography, it cannot be denied, however, that it carries an honest lesson in the history of the Xhosa tribe. Most scholars who write on the novel, like Klopper, are in agreement over Mda's artistry in skillfully handling the real historical event in a fictionalized manner to produce a literary work that appeals to both historians and literature practitioners.

The main split between the past and the present and how other related binaries, such as modernity vs. tradition, education vs. illiteracy, city vs. village, conservation vs. non-conservation, etc, develop from it, has been popular with critics of the novel. All of these binaries are related as they spring from the same basic division of time. So, many writers have examined this past/present concept including its many variants against certain aspects of the novel. Klopper, as mentioned already, mainly focuses on the negotiation of the tensions between traditional practices and modernity's ideals, which correspond with this paper focus on the supernatural's impact on these aspect. Lloyd studies the novel for its combination of traditional culture with the "materialistic" global culture of the present (38). His views on how traditional beliefs interplay with westernization provide a useful resource for the treatment traditionalism in light of modernity. Gohrisch's study presents a cultural exchange in the novel that occurs between the past and the present; it provides an important background in examining culture's influence in shaping identity. Schatteman studies *The Heart of Redness* for its complexity which actually defies simple binary thinking in terms polarities like modernity and tradition, but transcends them to unifying effects through

Camagu (284). This study offers a theoretical framework from which to locate discussion that aims to move past the obvious divisions depicted in the novel to modern-day efforts of reconciliation in South Africa. Cloete and Madadzhe, in their study of the novel, focus how the women are instrumental in continually shaping the destiny of the Xhosa both in the past and the present. Their focus on Xoliswa and Qukezwa offers a rich comparative analysis of the motivations of each character. Williams studies the novel's back and forth movement through time between past and present. She views this as a device that serves to transport certain aspects of each polarity to the other (45). Williams offers an important resource on the aspects of culture that filter through the past/present divide in novel. Moreover, her study offers an understanding of how the Xhosa culture defines time. These scholars, and others, have observed trends in the past/present binary that this paper explores. They offer a close look at the interaction between past and present and how this leads to certain outcomes that they have noted in their reading of the Mda's novel.

Mda's novel deals with issues in the African society that can be directly linked to colonialism. The past context of Mda's novel deals with issues of a society living under the threat of colonialism and the present features a decolonized society that suffers a new form of colonialism, i.e. neo-colonialism. The impact of both forms of colonialism on the society has a bearing on the issues of modernity, traditionalism and identity as mediated by the supernatural. Thus, it is postcolonial literature which According to Murfin and Ray should "express resistance to colonialism and project potential for independence" in order to qualify as postcolonial (394). While opposing colonialism, it should also carry the ideals of liberty and freedom for the colonized people and assert their suppressed voices. When the overt manifestations of colonialism have been lifted, postcolonial literature will challenge the 'lingering' forms of colonialism. As African writers strive to remain relevant in addressing their societies' problems they inevitably fall under the postcolonial tag. Therefore, their writing is always purposeful and is packed with messages directed to the western colonizers and also to their own people. In this regard, the title: *The Heart of Redness* has been compared to Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*. Some critics have

viewed Mda's work as a response to Joseph Conrad's novel and claim that the former should thus, be "read in the light of Conrad's treatment of European colonization of Africa" (Sewlall 332). They both explore power relations that are based on the superiority of one culture over another.

The supernatural aspect of the novel is what gives it its appeal as a unique literary work that blends elements from various sources and delivers them effectively through magic realism. It is contained in the depiction of the divine through actual Xhosa prophets, such as Nxele, Mlanjeni, and, of course, Nongqawuse. The supernatural is what connects the world of the cattle-killings in the past to the modern-day world of casinos and resorts. It is more than the prophecy itself, as it is the voice sounding the prophecy. At the risk of sounding poetic, the supernatural in the novel is the voice that dared a people to do the unthinkable in the midst of sickness and death. Indeed, the first clear sign of the supernatural is, I believe, in the voice of the messy-haired confused and disoriented teenage girl at Mhlakaza's homestead challenging, with her voice and image, the community to destroy its only source of livelihood. The prophecy couldn't have come at a worse time for the Xhosa whose cattle were "infected by the lung disease imported from Europe at the same the British were trying to gain more land for the settlers from the Xhosa" (Gohrisch 240). Therefore, the Xhosa were faced with serious problems when the supernatural was sounded by Nongqawuse, who, when she voiced the prophecy, became the embodiment of the supernatural.

As Mda's novel progresses the supernatural theme weaves its way around the plot and maintains a strong presence throughout the novel. In the present context of *The Heart of Redness* the supernatural takes the form of both physical manifestation as well as ethereal reality, where it is manifested in ideas as well as in the characters themselves. For instance, Qukezwa is charged with supernatural presence in her ability to commune with nature and in her compelling temperament which Vital characterizes as "wild in her unconventional behavior" (310). She is depicted as a loner who is different in every way from all the other female characters and is has a strange approach to life. As far as unconventionality goes, Qukezwa is the hard-boiled non-conformist in the novel; she rides her horse bareback while naked (235), sings in

split-tone (175), communicates “in the language of the birds” (42) and Camagu finds her very intriguing and magnetic. She is not afraid to say what is on her mind as she declares her interest in Camagu at their first meeting (62). Moreover, Qukezwa knows her way around the forest as she is well at ease with nature.

Qukezwa is evocative of Nongqawuse, as they both share qualities of the supernatural. Like the prophetess, Qukezwa stands for the great unknown that demands compliance against all reason. Her supernatural presence is revealed to Camagu, who is then reluctantly drawn to her as the story progresses even though he resents her. For him, she holds a magnetic effect that is both fascinating and terrifying. Camagu is mesmerized by her lore of both Xhosa and Khoi culture; her intimate knowledge of the land; her split-tone singing ability; etc, all of which lead him towards his own personal experience of the supernatural. At the same time Camagu is also terrified by Qukezwa who has enough presence in his life to even “invade” his dreams (102-3). The similarity between Qukezwa and Nongqawuse is, moreover, in their ages. They are both teenage girls whose involvement with the supernatural puts them in a strange position for an African setting where the child has to be ‘dictate’ to seniors, rather than the opposite situation. Nongqawuse dictates to the Xhosa people, including their chiefs, while Qukezwa dictates to Camagu via her influence on him.

The past Qukezwa of Khoi descent in the past context of the novel, is, in the same manner as her descendant, fully charged with the presence of the supernatural. She embodies an otherworldly spirit that becomes a connection between the Xhosa and Khoikhoi tribes. Her marriage to Twin is a marriage of the two cultures. Like Moses – charged with the presence of God – leading the Israelites to the safety of a promised land, Qukezwa, who “knew the language of the stars” (56), is guided by the supernatural to lead Twin and Twin-Twin to the safety of a new land away from lung-sickness. This becomes the land of plenty where “life [is] beautiful” and there is plenty of grazing land for their cattle (57). Magical realism is evident during this journey as Qukezwa rides bareback and without reins (like her modern



counterpart) on a horse that seems to know the destination without its rider's guidance (56). The whole journey is uncharted and follows an erratic course, which manages to eventually lead them to safety.

Moreover, past Qukezwa also possesses a wealth of knowledge about the supernatural that, much like that of present Qukezwa, is captivating. Her stories of Khoi deities enchant Twin who is "captivated by her wisdom" (24). This knowledge makes her a repository of not only the Khoi culture, but also that of Xhosa as well. Both cultures, Twin discovers, are shaped by the interaction of the physical world with the supernatural world of the ancestors. Vital calls this amalgamation of cultures a "hybridity," and he attributes it to intermarriage between the Khoikhoi and the Xhosa (308). More than inter-marriage, this hybridity can also be attributed to the shared beliefs about the supernatural in both Khoi and Xhosa cultures that are brought to the fore as Qukezwa tells of the great lore. For example, they both venerate their ancestors, who may appear to the living a variety of forms.

Also, the supernatural is embodied through the brown and white horse, Gxagxa. In the past context, Gxagxa is the horse that seems to "know exactly where to go without being guided" (56) when Qukezwa leads everyone to safety. Together with its rider, the horse is possessed by the supernatural and its consciousness is conjoined to that of its rider through a symbiotic connection between horse and rider. Even after his death Gxagxa is still serviceable to Twin because it serves to enjoin Twin with the supernatural. This becomes significant as it establishes the grounds for an outlook that defines not only Twin's immediate situation, but that of his bloodline in the future—i.e. the idea of Belief. The supernatural embodiment in Gxagxa, the horse, stems mostly from the fact that through its death Twin is led to believe in the supernatural. The horse's death, like that of a messiah, becomes the 'path' that leads to Twin's 'salvation'.

The supernatural's omnipresence in the present context of the novel is to be found in the various reincarnations of characters from the past. In this manner, Gxagxa is reincarnated in the present context of the novel; just like past Qukezwa is reincarnated in Zim's daughter of the same name, in the same time

period; and also, the mythical Heisti Eibib is reincarnated in present Qukezwa's son, Heisti. Also, among the Unbelievers, Twin-Twin's flagellation scars are supernaturally reincarnated not just in the present context alone, but also in the time between past and present through "every first boy-child... of Twin-Twin's tree" (12). Williams and Woodward have made note of this reappearance of characters as the reincarnation of the past into the present. Woodward sees present Qukezwa's "indigenous knowledge of resident plants animals and birds" as the reincarnation of past Qukezwa in the present context (295). For Woodward, reincarnation is realized through ideals of the past carrying over into the present. Williams sees the reincarnation of Heisti Eibib, the "mythic ancestor" of the past, in the "virgin birth" Qukezwa's son of the same name in the present (46). Both Williams and Woodward find the reincarnation of these of these characters as being much more than a connection in name, ethnicity or even blood relations, but they view it in terms of qualities that the present characters share with their past counterparts.

This conflict between traditionalism and modernity in the context of the novel is really a tension between past and present. The tension between these ideas is based on the failure of the present to acknowledge the past. In the novel, the present disassociates itself from the past. It holds the past in contempt and would rather be totally divorced of it. The past, for its part, fails to make itself relevant to the present, and instead, dwells in its own shadow. It is equally hostile to the present and would rather exist without it. These, of course, are the antithetical stances taken by the Believers and Unbelievers in *The heart of Redness*. The latter favor the past and are therefore associated with Traditionalism, while the former favor Modernity which aligns them with the present.

The supernatural juxtaposes modernity and traditionalism in terms of education. For a long, both during and after colonialism, the general view has been that because modernity is forward looking, it harbors education, while traditionalism is "regressive" and holds no education. This was the reason for Europe's "civilizing mission" in Africa as well as other parts of the "uncivilized" world; it was to bring civilization in the form of education, education and trade to the uncultured natives. In such a context, education is viewed as being synonymous with modernity. Its conception is attributed solely to

modernity, a product of the west. Conversely, traditionalism which is associated with the natives is denied such privileges to education. Instead of education traditionalism has mysticism, which is, itself scorned by the colonizer and labeled as voodoo. So, modernity has education, which is a positive thing, while traditionalism has the supernatural, which is a bad thing.

In the modern setting, Xoliswa prefers modernity to traditionalism. As a result, she strongly condemns her people's indigenous customs. Her brief encounter with the west and her western education turn her against her Xhosa tradition. She rejects African traditionalism wholesale and will not be associated with what she labels as "redness" (184), which is the red ochre that Xhosa women traditionally use to adorn themselves (Gohrisch 242). Bogue says that this red dye from the Eastern Cape's wild coast is a symbol of Xhosa culture (49). In rejecting redness, Xoliswa is eschewing that unique element in her heritage that makes her who she is as an umXhosa woman. Therefore, she is also throwing away her identity along with everything.

Qukezwa on the other hand has received minimum formal education, enough to enable her to "read and write" and certainly not one to make her an "Excuse Me" like Xoliswa (115). She obviously places little value on the western-type education and resents how it turns natives like Xoliswa into enemies of their own culture. With her scant formal education Qukezwa can only get a menial job working at the local trading store, which is a far cry from Xoliswa's big position as principal of the local secondary school. Compared to Xoliswa, she is virtually uneducated in a modern society that demands more than a secondary education certificate for its members to get better jobs.

Qukezwa, however, is well educated in the traditions and cultures of the land and her people. Many writers, including Falola and Fleming, have noted that African societies had rich and diverse cultures that were, in their own unique style, tailored to the space and time they occupied. Thus, education was an important aspect in these precolonial civilizations as it served as a tool for the transmission of culture and tradition from one generation to the next. Qukezwa might not be 'educated' in the western

sense of the word, but she has been fully trained in the education system of her people. That is why she has deep “intimate” knowledge about her culture and the natural environment which are closely tied together in the novel. Because of her acumen, Klopper labels Qukezwa as a diviner; she is able to mediate between nature and culture to bring about social change (100). This ability to draw from nature and her culture to improve society proves that her education, rather than being out-dated, is still relevant in the modern context. Through her indigenous education, she knows, for example, that the inkberry plant is harmful to the native plants and animals (116); she knows the plants and the birds that feed on them and the patterns of the latter (120). Moreover, Qukezwa has more common sense than the educated Xoliswa, and even the more educated Camagu, because she is aware of the disadvantages of the gambling complex for the ‘uneducated’ Xhosa; as she points out they will not get any big jobs, other than lowly jobs as cleaners and gardeners, which are also restrictive since they too require special skills (118). Here, Mda is showing indigenous education of African societies triumphing over western education. In portraying Qukezwa as a supernaturally charged individual who becomes the voice of reason, Mda paves the way for the acknowledgment of indigenous education. It is less objectively structured as its western counterpart, but it has an inherently subjective curriculum that entwines the abstract supernatural, which western education frowns upon, with the culture. The colonialist suppressed this African education and labeled some of its practices as “barbaric” and “backward” and instead, tried to super-impose western education as a way to “uplift” the African and make him “modern” (Hoagland).

Mda also brings to the fore the issue of colonial education, which can be viewed alongside the debate of traditional vs. formal education. This is education that was given to the natives by the colonizers in the ‘civilizing’ process. Although, this issue makes a very brief appearance in the past context of novel, its consequences however, extend into the present context. When he first appears in the novel, Mhlakaza is Wilhelm Goliath a black man who teaches the gospel to the natives, with a white missionary. He carries the white man’s heavy luggage over long distances between villages and tends to his domestic needs while they are on the road (52-3). Mhlakaza has received some education from the colonizers as he can

recite the creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. Moreover, he can speak colonizers' language as if he is one of them (53). However, this colonial education that Mhlakaza received was not meant to create a critical thinker in him, but it was geared towards making him an efficient tool in the colonial machinery, and he proves to be very efficient indeed. Through Mhlakaza's ethnicity the missionary gains access into the native community, and utilizes his knowledge of Dutch to preach to the people. Therefore, this 'education' Mhlakaza has received does not empower him, but it makes him subservient to the colonizers, instead.

The same argument can be made, to some extent, regarding Xoliswa's education. In the modern postcolonial context, her education is supposed to be empowering. Instead of elevating her mind, it pulls her down to a bottom level. Of course, there is nothing wrong with the education, itself, as compared to Mhlakaza's case. What is wrong however is the resulting mentality that was imprinted by colonialism in the native's mind regarding her culture and traditions, which western education triggers in Xoliswa. Having received the western education, she resents the culture of her people and sees traditionalism and all its trappings as foolish and outmoded. These extreme positions by Xoliswa and Mhlakaza are ridiculed by both the native characters and the author who portrays them as silly, in their acquired airs of self-importance. Mda rejects both forms of education as harmful to the native imagination. The first form reduces to native to a lackey of the white man, and the second turns him into a slave of the western culture.

In *The Heart of Redness*, Modernity strives to differentiate itself from the past whose agent is tradition; therefore, it takes on a hostile position to traditionalism. This portrays modernity as being intolerant of the past and therefore the impression is that modernity and past (tradition) cannot live side-by-side as the former is always looking forward to the future to stay relevant. In the novel, this conflict between modernity and tradition is such that the characters cannot have both but must choose one or the other. The Unbelievers are the forward-looking group that has modernity on its side while the Believers are on the side of tradition. Xoliswa Ximiya, daughter of the former group, is a shining example of a

modernized character that is 100 percent for modernity. Her diplomas and certificates of higher learning obtained from the western – developed – world, and her high social standing among the educated elite in the village are a source of great pride for her. Hence she is more than sympathetic to modernity's cause. Her nemesis, Qukezwa, daughter of the Believers, is, on the other hand, a staunch traditionalist in the manner of her people. She professes 'belief'—a mode of existence that is in touch with the mythical power of the land—and lives by its codes. And so, in this manner, Qukezwa is close to nature and acts to protect it and, by so doing she preserves tradition (which, in the novel, is aligned with nature as modernity wants to destroy it). Qukezwa counteracts certain 'modernizing' efforts that are harmful to nature/tradition, in the novel. For example, she speaks out against plans to build a casino and resort in the village (117-8) chops down invasive plant species that have possibly been introduced to the village for aesthetic purposes (a 'modernizing' concept). Klopper says this action by Qukezwa shows that she views nature as possessing a soul.

In modernity's attempt to disassociate itself from traditionalism in the novel, the latter runs the risk of almost entirely being defined as everything that modernity is not. For instance, since modernity is in favor of progress in the novel, then antithetically, traditionalism must be against progress. Yet, this is not so. The traditional, as already mentioned, is associated with the Believers and it is embodied in Qukezwa who shrouds it with mysticism.

The main difference between Xoliswa and Qukezwa, besides the obvious (Xoliswa stands for modernity and Qukezwa for traditionalism), is that the latter is not only connected to the supernatural, but also embraces that connection, while the former strives by all means to sever all ties with the supernatural. Qukezwa's connection to the mythical is derived from her links to the land. The land is the sacred motherland to the native with which he/she has an umbilical bond. Klopper associates the land with nature (103). Adams sees it, within the context of the community, as a place of "belonging" (75). To Woodward, the land is the prize that the colonialist claims through the act of re-naming it after seizing it from the native (35). This renaming is done in order to erase all marks of native ownership on the land

and set up, in their place, the stamp of colonialism. Thus, the land is very important to both the supporters of modernity and those of traditionalism. Xoliswa's attempts to distance herself from the supernatural result in her separation from the land. She leaves Qolorha for the city. Her dream of modernizing the village is defeated by Qukezwa, who is joined by Camagu, whose sustainable approaches for the village win over the casino initiative she had supported. Xoliswa's departure is not victorious, but it is disgraceful because her cause has been defeated and the village remains in its backwardness (its redness). In short, defeated, she is running away from the village.

Xoliswa shares her father's sentiments about the shameful past which they think traditionalism is trying to resurrect. As Unbelievers, they reject the cattle killings of the 1850s and they see traditionalism as carried by the Believers, to be dragging the community back into "darkness of redness" (79). Bhonco and Xoliswa would rather forget that Nongqawuse's ever existed. They favor modernity because it will deliver them from the past by supplanting it. The construction of the casino and resort is a sign of progress for them. They revel in progress, which has no room for the unbelievers and their traditionalism. Thus, progress is set against regression in the novel's binary divisions. With the believers on the side of progress, the unbelievers are placed on the side of regression as they are viewed as holding on to the past through their attachment to the past through traditionalism and the supernatural.

In *The Heart of Redness*, Camagu rediscovers his cultural identity. He moves from a Euro-centric into an Afro-centric position as the novel progresses, and in the latter position he reconnects with his African heritage. This then, becomes his cultural reclamation for he takes back what his thirty-year exile in the west, had deprived him of. The turn in his point of view comes with the visitation by Majola, the totem snake of his clan, the amaMpondomise, which visits every newborn child and chosen members of the clan to give them good fortune (112). Lloyd argues that this visitation as well as Camagu's visit to the valley of Nongqawuse where he joins Qukezwa in placing a stone on an ancient cairn as a commemoration of the Khoi God, Heisti Eibib and the ancestors, create a link between Camagu and the supernatural (Lloyd 37). It ushers the previously culturally aloof Camagu into the spiritual realm of his

people where, with Qukezwa as his spiritual guide, he discovers his true identity. Qukezwa's guidance to this realization is important and necessary because of her role as an embodiment of the supernatural. Unlike Camagu, she is already comfortable in her African identity. In fact, among the young people of the new South Africa that are portrayed in the novel (i.e. Xoliswa, Camagu and herself), Qukezwa is the one who is surest of her identity. Despite her young age, Qukezwa does not suffer from an identity crisis. At nineteen years old, she already knows who she is and what her role in society is.

Xoliswa, who is thirty-six years old, is still having identity issues. She has a hard time reconciling her Xhosa heritage with her western education. She defines herself through the latter and greatly admires America, yet the former has a strong hold on her. Xoliswa's Xhosa culture is represented everywhere around her in the village and there is just no escaping it, no matter how much she resents it. She is put in a incongruous situation of living in the grim reality of a world she hates while harboring rosy dreams of a world she barely knows. The western identity that Xoliswa longs for is idealistic and unattainable in the village of Qolorha, where it bears no relevance to the deeply mythical African society. This mysticism in her surroundings has shaped the identity of the land and its people and Xoliswa tries to resist its force in shaping her identity. She despises the veneration by the Believers of Nongqawuse and their attempts to bring back "the shame of the past" (173). Her belief that the past should be buried and forgotten, also goes for her Xhosa identity. In burying the past, Xoliswa is also burying her indigenous identity with it.

Prior to finding his own identity, Camagu is shown to be in the same identity crisis as Xoliswa. He left South Africa as a young boy and has lived in the United States for thirty-years. When he left his country, he also left his Xhosa identity behind. But, coming back after his long absence, he finds that he can no longer fit in his native land. Identity proves to be more complex than a blanket that one may choose to get into or out of. Adams calls Camagu's crisis an issue of one's "belongingness" not just to the land, but also to one's culture (75). At the heart of this identity crisis, Camagu is a man without roots. His "transnational identity", to borrow Adams' phrase, puts him in both the western and the African worlds, but he truly does not belong to any of them as neither will claim him as its own.



The issue of identity search cuts across generations in the novel. On the other side of the identity scale is the older generation, some of whose members, also suffer an identity crisis. Bhonco is shown to be one such character who, at his advanced age, is still trying to define himself. Although, he hates the idea of traditionalism which is embraced by the Believers, and claims to “stand for progress” (105), Bhonco still has markers of his Xhosa tradition that are mediated by the tradition. His manner of dress is a mixture of both western and Xhosa items which only give him a silly appearance. Bhonco’s dress code is first presented as a mixture of the modern and the traditional. He wears overalls, gumboots and a skullcap, and mixes these with traditional Xhosa beads around his neck that make him look like a slob as they seem out of place on his modern outfit (43). Later in the novel Bhonco, to prove the point that Unbelievers stand for progress, decides to do away with all traces of cultural markings in his dress and wear suits exclusively. However this suit is wrinkled and haphazardly put together (105), which sends the wrong message rather than the one he intends. This mixing of western and Xhosa attire depicts him as man who is trying to find his identity at the crossroads of two cultures. He knows which culture to side with; however, the traditional culture, that he resents, still has a strong grip on him.

Zim on the other hand is portrayed as always immaculately dressed from head to toe in the traditional attire of his culture that when he appears “heads turn” (43). On the same occasion where Bhonco is wearing his crumpled suit, Zim is shown to be “looking regal, in traditional finery” (105). This cool image is also transferred to his manner for he speaks deliberately and meaningfully. Bhonco, in western attire is portrayed comically. While he previously wears his western clothes with Xhosa beads, this time he leaves out the beads, but forgets to also leave the rabbit-skin bag around his shoulder. It is apparent that the narrative favors Zim as one who is identity secure and his rival as one whose identity is frayed as he mixes the old with the new. These images correspond to not only how each character approaches the progress, but also with how each presents his argument for their case. In this, Mda sides with the believers by depicting their identity as secure in the magical realism of their culture and traditions.

This study has tried to map the supernatural's mediation in issues of modernity, traditionalism and identity in *The Heart of Redness*. The supernatural should not be rejected in today's modern society, but should be acknowledged as an equally important aspect of the human condition that can be adopted as one of many approaches to social development. The novel as a postcolonial work, serves to ultimately help society diagnose its problems that are a result of colonialism and then suggests new ways to move forward. The supernatural then, provides a vehicle through which the Xhosa community may approach its issues of the past that stem from both Nongqawuse's prophecy and imperialism. Also it may be engaged in modern times to deal with issues of progress and how to move the community and the country forward sustainably.

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