

Dressing the Cuts of the Past, Seaming a Glocal Future in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

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Summary

This article focuses on two contemporary novels, Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, which revolve around the ways in which two indigenous communities, the Chippewa of North Dakota, America, and the Xhosa of the Eastern Cape in South Africa, try to cope with the devastating effects of colonial invasion and exploitation of their lands and culture, and to maintain a sense of bioregional history and identity, while anticipating a future of fruitful interaction with global society. Both novels demonstrate the entwinement and interdependence of these native tribes and the specific natural environment they inhabit, both in the economic and spiritual sense, and underscore the importance of a sustainable relationship of communities with their local environment for a healthy and peaceful engagement among themselves and with the rest of the world. Various characters with shamanic features play a significant role in combining tribal lore with the emergent configurations of existence, especially in their capacity to integrate the material and the spiritual, the animate and the inanimate, as well as the past, the present, and the future. While exploring the links between shamanism and environmental consciousness in a global context, as implied by the two novels, this article will avoid homogenising shamanism into a conceptual category or flattening its contextuality.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel fokus op twee eietydse romans, naamlik *Tracks* deur Louise Erdrich en *The Heart of Redness* deur Zakes Mda. Dié romans handel oor twee inheemse gemeenskappe, die Chippewa in Noord-Dakota, Amerika, en die Xhosas in die Oos-Kaap, Suid-Afrika, en hulle pogings om sin te maak van die verwoestende gevolge van koloniale indringing en die gepaardgaande uitbuiting van hul grond en kultuur. Terselfdetyd probeer die Chippewa- en Xhosa-gemeenskappe om hul eie streeks-geskiedenis en identiteit te bewaar, terwyl hulle 'n vrugbare en vreedsame wisselwerking met die res van die wêreld in die vooruitsig stel. Beide romans wys op die verweefdheid van hierdie inheemse stamme met die bepaalde natuurlike omgewings waarin hulle hul bevind, op sowel geestelike as ekonomiese gebied, en die onderlinge afhanklikheid wat daar tussen dié stamme en hulle omgewings bestaan. Verskeie karakters met sjamanistiese trekke speel 'n belangrike rol in die kombinerings van die stamme se geskiedenis en verhale met nuwe bestaans-konfigurasies, veral vanweë hul vermoë om die materiële en geestelike, lewende en nie-lewende, en verlede, hede

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en toekoms te integreer. Die artikel ondersoek derhalwe die verbande tussen sjamanisme en 'n globale omgewingsbewussyn, soos deur die twee romans gesuggereer. Sjamanisme word egter nie in hierdie artikel binne 'n enkele konseptuele kategorie gehomogeniseer nie, en die konteksgebondenheid van sjamanisme word nie gering geskat nie.

Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) are novels that focus on the devastating effects of colonialism and global capitalism on two indigenous communities from two different parts of the world, the Turtle Mountain Ojibwa (Chippewa) of North Dakota in America and the amaXhosa of the Eastern Cape in South Africa respectively. They underscore the parallelism between environmental degradation and the demise, dispossession, and dislocation of these human societies whose health, culture, and economy depended on their entwined and interdependent existence with their natural environment. Both novels feature multiple characters with shamanic qualities, who, in that capacity, mediate between the past and the present, the material and the spiritual, the local and the global, and thus heal the natural or social ills oppressing their communities at times of crisis.

Tracks opens in 1912, twenty five years after the Dawes Act, when the grace period granted by the U.S. government to the Native American individuals or families to keep their allotments from tribal lands without taxation has ended. As Cyrus R.K. Patell writes, "The Dawes Act was intended to speed the process of assimilation by bringing to an end the Native tribal system, with its economy based on hunting and gathering, and introducing Native Americans to an individualistic conception of social life and a capitalistic understanding of land use and agriculture" (60). However, many Native Americans, who lost members of their family on those lands, also in battles against the settlers or from imported illnesses, refused to give up the traditional ways of life of their ancestors, such as Fleur Pillager in the novel. Thus, they failed to pay their tax money and gradually lost their allotment lands either to the settler government or to other members of their clan, who were willing to accommodate themselves to the settler economy and culture, the Morrissey, Lazarre, and finally, Kashpaw families. The antagonism between Fleur, "a shaman with supernatural powers", as Michelle R. Hessler (1995) describes her, and Pauline Puyat, the mix-race staunch convert to Christianity, foregrounds the tension between Chippewa spirituality and the settler religion throughout the novel, although Pauline's religious practices, as well as her spiritual exercises into which she channels her bodily and mental desires ironically draw on her Native American heritage and often turn out destructive and self-destructive at the same time.

The Heart of Redness also starts with a traumatic incident from the history of the amaXhosa, the 1856 Cattle Killing, which split the nation into two camps of the Believers and the Unbelievers in the prophecies of the young prophetess Nongqawuse. Nongqawuse divined the resurrection, from the

Gxarha River, of their ancestors, together with their cattle uncontaminated by the lung sickness contracted from European bulls, on the condition that all the living cattle be slaughtered, the crops destroyed, and witchcraft abolished from Xhosa land, to constitute the new and pure generation of the amaXhosa. The controversy even divides families, such as the brothers Twin and Twin-Twin, the two sons of Xikixa, who was beheaded by the invading English soldiers, their common enemy. It is carried over to their descendants in post-apartheid South Africa: Zim and Bhonco, and their daughters, Qukezwa and Xoliswa, the firm Believers and Unbelievers of the village Qolorha-by-Sea.

The rivalry between Qukezwa and Xoliswa can be likened to the one between Fleur and Pauline in *Tracks*; Qukezwa has not received much formal education but, like Fleur, displays full knowledge of the natural landscape of Qolorha-by-Sea and a profound affinity with all the species in it, while Xoliswa Ximiya takes pride in her Western-style clothes and her formal education, including a semester in the U.S., which entitles her to the position of the Principal of the Secondary School, an institution representative of the settler culture, just like the convent Pauline enters in *Tracks*. Qukezwa represents the “redness” that Xoliswa despises, namely all that stands for superstition and backwardness ranging from traditional clothes to uncultivated wild nature. Ironically, however, Belief and Unbelief display an unresolved tension in the novel in the sense that the Believers and the Unbelievers hold each other responsible for the sufferings of their ancestors, the hunger, poverty, and humiliation they experienced when they had to seek refuge in other clans’ lands or submit to the colonisers’ rules. The conflict between the Believers and the Unbelievers in post-apartheid South Africa is again centred on the natural resources of the village. While Believers insist on the conservation of the natural environment, Unbelievers argue for the use of land and sea for economic progress, with developmental projects that will both attract tourists and create jobs for local people, such as luxury hotels, entertainment parks, and casinos. As Dan Wylie writes,

Mda here treats the Xhosa country of the Eastern Cape in both precolonial and present-day narrative strands, with a strong emphasis on the natural environment. Mda argues that the early Xhosa, before the disaster of the 1856 Cattle Killing, practiced an effective ecological management system, some lineaments of which struggle to resurface from beneath the weight and fragmentation of settler land-use and even allegedly eco-friendly, but at bottom still imperialistic, current commercial schemes.

(2008: 11)

In both *The Heart of Redness* and *Tracks*, threats to the ecosystem by impending or continuing developmental projects that go by the name of progress, and their negative effects on human and nonhuman life, constitute the primary concern. Both novels demonstrate that mankind’s destruction of the environment in the course of history, eventually becomes self-destructive.

As Jared Diamond remarks, “[A]mong our unique qualities are two that jeopardize our existence: our propensities to kill each other and to destroy our environment” (1992: 3). Harry Sewlall describes the land as “a primordial symbol in humankind’s struggle for survival” and “a metaphor of possession and dispossession” (2007: 375). He points to Mda’s recognition of the need for a symbiotic balance between nature and culture on the one hand, and modernity and tradition on the other, instead of binaristic responses to this debate, with reference to Jonathan Fowler’s emphasis on the pressing need to “restore the balance between consumption of natural resources and the Earth’s ability to renew them” (376).

The Heart of Redness and *Tracks* not only display the ways in which the sought balance has been disrupted, but also point to possibilities of restoring the balance in changing and emerging historical configurations, mostly by drawing attention the liminal position and the social impact of various shamanic figures. David S. Whitley writes,

Life, and especially the shaman’s place in it, was always a balance between the dark and the light, death and life, hope and despair, and success and ruin. All one could reasonably hope, given this circumstance, was to stand at the balance, maintaining a kind of unstable equilibrium. Indeed, the trick was to maintain that balance because, if circumstances tilt too strongly either way, order would be lost and society would spin off into disarray.

(2009: 181)

Anthropologists, such as Hodayun Sidky and M.F. Brown, describe shamans as socially recognised healers, problem solvers, and leaders of public rituals that involve drumming, singing, and dancing, as well as distinctive paraphernalia such as costume, bells or beads. They have the ability to go on ecstatic soul journeys, to possess spirits or be possessed by spirits or gods, sometimes with the use of herbs or drugs produced from herbs. Since they have both healing and destructive powers, society approaches them both with reverence and/or fear or caution; they have command of specialised knowledge transmitted from teacher to pupil or from one family member to another. Last but not least, they have an intimate connection to nature that is considered the abode of ancestor and/or animal spirits.

Both novels present characters that possess one or more of these distinctive traits. The plurality and variety of shaman figures respect individual and/or contextual forms of shamanic existence, and specific kinds of entanglement of human and nonhuman entities in differing cultural and/or environmental settings, thus precluding the romanticised myth of pure nature or culture. The multiple configurations of shamanic roles in accordance with changing historical circumstances foregrounds the idea of nature and culture in a constant state of transition and transformation, and challenges essentialist conceptions of identity. Shamanism in all these various constellations

manifests a worldview that crosses the boundaries of time, space, race, gender, and species.

Shamanism has stimulated a substantial body of research in the Western world ever since the era of European colonisation of Asian, African and Native American territories. Alice Beck Kehoe's discussion of Mircea Eliade's work that became a classic in the mid-twentieth century contains significant clues to the function of shamanism in Erdrich and Mda's novels. According to Beck Kehoe, Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, like Sir James Frazer's work before, reflected the European tradition of a compilation of travellers' descriptions of the rites and mystical experiences of certain Oriental peoples, to picture a projected ancient religion in its pure state. This romanticising attitude on the part of scholars positing a primordial or "primitive" spirituality of the past in contrast to Western forms of spirituality and/or rationality has been contested by many anthropologists and cultural critics later, such as Eric Wolf who argues that this myth of an ancient religion dehumanizes non-Western nations and makes them people without history (Beck Kehoe 2000: 2). Beck Kehoe further remarks that German anthropologist Franz Boas who spent a year living with the Inuit in north-easternmost region of Canada in the late nineteenth century and observed the Inuit practitioners of drum, song, dance and prophecy, came to the conclusion as early as 1884 "that all contemporary peoples are equally evolved and that every nation has as long a history as every other" (15).

Debates on the definition, cultural and religious significance, and practice or performance of shamanism in different parts of the world, both in the past and the present, continue vigorously among scholars of anthropology, sociology, history, ethnography, cultural and religious studies, as well as health sciences. In literary studies, shamanism has not received much critical attention except minor references to it as an aspect of "magic realism" which highlights supernatural and fantastic elements especially in postcolonial literature and art, as a means to undermine traditional boundaries between reality and fantasy, or reason and imagination, so as to empower the colonised, oppressed, or marginalised communities or individuals vis-à-vis their colonisers who relied on those boundaries to justify their discriminatory policies and actions. However, magic realism, while subverting Western rationalist discourse, has also lent itself to readings that found a confirmation of the idea of a primitive, superstitious culture, thus perpetuating the established myths.

Tracks and *The Heart of Redness* are novels that stimulate readings that can fill in a critical gap in literary studies, namely to demonstrate how literature, in its essence as storytelling, has the power to resituate in history the peoples and cultures, which have been deprived of their specific identities by totalising discourses and ideologies. By endowing different characters inhabiting more or less the same locality but are exposed to various outside influences with some shamanic traits, without identifying any as *the* shaman,

Erdrich and Mda respect the transforming boundaries of and the emergence of individual configurations of identities in shamanistic cultures. While the religious practitioners, diviners, healers, ritual performers, storytellers and shapeshifters in the novels under consideration can be described as shamans, their ethnographic particularities reflecting the history of their society are foregrounded.

While discussing the cultural heterogeneity and hybridity of South Africa, which he describes as unresolved difference or being other to itself, Leon De Kock highlights multiple constructions of identity and points out that the main rubric of his work, that is “South Africa in the Global Imaginary” “captures both the impositions, from without, of various identity-forming global discourses upon the territory and its people as well as forms of self-fashioning from within, either in the image of a greater world ‘out there’ or in defiance of it” (2001: 271). De Kock underscores that it is especially since the advent of colonisation that the dialectics of “here” and “there,” the local and the imperial, have haunted South Africans to the extent that it is a country of “glorious bastardization,” using Breytenbach’s terms (272). De Kock’s note, that the plurality of communities occupying the land of southern Africa were neither static nor necessarily egalitarian, is highly significant in the context of Mda’s novel that abounds in references to some of the indigenous peoples of southern Africa, such as the Khoikhoi and the abaThwa, and their often tension-laden but also fruitful encounters and cultural exchange. Twin’s wife Qukezwa is Khoikhoi, which dismays his family but spiritually enriches Twin, paralleled in the effect on Camagu of Zim’s daughter Qukezwa in the new generation, and Bhonko has long used the abaThwa dance in his public rituals to commemorate his ancestors, although the abaThwa later repeal their dance.

De Kock’s metaphor of the “seam” as the site of both convergence and difference, of a joining together that also bears the mark of the suture, which highlights “a crisis of inscription” in the context of identity-forming as well as literary and cultural representation in South Africa, provides significant insights into the Native American context, as it finds expression in *Tracks*. De Kock remarks, “on the one hand the effort of suturing the incommensurate is an attempt to close the gap that defines it as incommensurate, and on the other this process unavoidably bears the mark of its own crisis, the seam” (276). In *Tracks*, Pauline’s efforts to attain a transcendental or ecstatic state by self-torture or fasting on the one hand, and her recourse to hallucinogens to induce altered states of consciousness in herself and others, points to a crisis in the ways in which she sutures settler religion and native shamanic practices, which, as David S. Whitley stresses, are two distinct phenomena. As opposed to the equation of shamanic trance and mystical transcendence in Western intellectual consciousness, mainly under Eliade’s influence, Whitley argues, drawing on David Lewis-Williams’ neuropsychological model of altered states of consciousness, based on his and Whitley’s own rock art research,

that any relationship between hallucinatory states and religious experience is exceptional (2009: 194), and spirituality, both as an aspect of shamanic trance and religion, is an outcome of natural evolutionary processes (204).

The metaphor of the “seam” can also be associated with the “unstable equilibrium” that the shaman has to maintain, to reiterate Whitley’s terms. Indeed, Nanapush, a significant shamanic character in *Tracks*, who also shares the status of the narrator with Pauline, finds himself mediating between those community members who display unswerving attachment to local culture and environment and others who would rather integrate themselves into global society, such as Eli Kashpaw, Fleur’s lover, who rejects education in the white curriculum, and instead tries to develop his hunting skills, while his brother Nector goes to school, explores the town, and immerses himself in cultural and economic practices of the U.S. Nanapush tries to maintain a glocal position when he passes on the stories of the Chippewa to Lulu, Fleur’s daughter, in accordance with their oral cultural tradition, but also signs several government documents in the course of the novel, despite his initial aversion to written culture. Storytelling and transmitting tribal lore to future generations is an important task for shamans. While telling the history of the Chippewa, Nanapush pays special attention to Fleur Pillager’s life, who has a very strong bond to the Pillager land as well as the animals with which their lives have always been interwoven. He not only acts like a father figure for Fleur, but also names and adopts Lulu, by registering her as his daughter in government records during Eli’s absence at the time. Nanapush also saves Fleur from drowning and consumption, fulfilling the shaman’s role as a healer of illness caused by the disruption of the food chain and the sources of regeneration among humans and nonhumans alike, mainly due to environmental degradation, which also describes the situation of the Chippewa. In the novel, there are recurrent references to decimated game animals, which makes it more and more difficult to survive for those characters who stick to the traditional lifestyle and do not engage in trade in towns near the reservation, especially in winter when the lake is frozen and they cannot catch fish either. Nanapush’s decision to assume a more active political role as a bureaucrat towards the end of the novel for the wellbeing of his society confirms his role as shaman.

Nanapush is also endowed with profound hunting knowledge that was first and foremost among the shamans’ abilities. Russian ethnologists Waldemar and Dina Brodsky Jochelson write that shamanic practices were prevalent in the far north of Eurasia and America, where peoples depended on the reindeer for food and clothing (Beck Kehoe 2000: 8). This is the case with the Chippewa in *Tracks*. Graham Harvey states that “Obtaining the promise of game or ‘good luck’ for hunters of [the] community is the shaman’s main function in the most archaic Siberian societies in their traditional mode of life, [...] a function much more basic than healing” (2003: 63). Nanapush’s hunting skills, including the divination of the place of the game through a

mental communing with the animal, becomes apparent when he tries to pass on his powers to his nephew Eli Kashpaw who falls in love with Fleur. The novel combines love and hunt in the scenes revolving around Eli and Fleur's relationship, which also points to the connection between success in hunt and the regeneration of life. Eli loses his way in the forest while following the tracks of a doe that he injured but not killed, which causes a lot of anxiety and shame in him. As Harvey points out, inappropriate behaviour toward game animals can cause illness; in most shamanistic cultures, the treatment of game animals is subject to a set of taboos, the breaking of which can have serious consequences for the individuals or the community as a whole (7). He experiences almost an epiphany when he finds Fleur cutting through the carcass with expert movements, her arms bloody and bare, as if her flesh is the flesh of the doe. It is at that moment that Eli desires her for the first time, and all these happen by the lake Matchimanito, where Nanapush buried the rest of Fleur's family who fell to an epidemic that took many lives in their reservation in North Dakota. Matchimanito is a lake where Fleur spends most of her time although it is a frightening place for many. There are even rumours that she is pregnant from the spirit of the lake. Twice she came back from drowning in its waters.

Fleur is another shaman figure, who derives her spiritual powers from the lake, one of the most important components of the natural landscape inhabited by the members of her tribe for many generations, as it is often the case with shamans in various tribal settings; therefore, the lake is also the dwelling of her ancestor spirits. As often is the case with shamans, Fleur possesses both regenerative and destructive powers. She uses the latter in most of the trying incidents in the novel. She inspires awe and fear in other characters, including Eli and Pauline whose part of the narrative begins with an account of how Fleur uses her powers to bring down a tornado that leads to the terrifying end of the three white men who abused her. Throughout the novel, she displays an unwavering attachment to the Chippewa lands that are under the threat of being auctioned because most of the families cannot pay the taxes required by their contracts, mainly due to the dwindling resources in the reserve. There is a scarcity of game, and even the intermarried and interrelated families of the tribe find themselves in a tension-laden competition, which appears as another epidemic among diseases that often stem from malnutrition. Nanapush says that Fleur had come back from drowning in the lake that was the burial ground for her parents as well as many others, because she kept "the lake thing controlled" and also disturbed the area around Matchimanito, where the oaks were big and the bush less dense, the berries thick and plump, the animals fatter and more tender. "People went there although they didn't want to meet the dead or the living, Fleur especially, or her brother, Moses, who had defeated the sickness by turning half animal and living in a den" with his many cats and mixing medicines and potions of herbs (35). As such, Moses appears as yet another shaman figure.

Fleur herself is often associated with the bear and the wolf. In the part of the narrative in which Nanapush tells Lulu the story of her birth, he says that the last bear on the reservation was shot on the day when Fleur gave birth to Lulu. Pauline shot the bear that came to Fleur's cabin during the disturbing silence when Nanapush and Eli were anxiously waiting outside:

But it wasn't until the afternoon of that second day that the stillness finally broke, and then, it was as if the Manitous all through the woods spoke through Fleur, loose, arguing. I recognized them. Turtle's quavering scratch, Eagle's high shriek, Loon's crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear's low rasp. Perhaps the bear had heard Fleur calling, and answered.

(59)

Nanapush adds that it was when Fleur saw the bear and was filled with so much fear and power that she raised herself and gave birth. After Pauline shot the bear at the heart, it was as if it gave the bear strength: "For I heard the gun go off and then saw the creature whirl and roar from the house. It barrelled past me, crashed through the brush into the woods, and was not seen after. It left no trail either, so it could have been a spirit bear" (60). Elsewhere, Nanapush refers to the Pillagers as the bear clan:

Power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth. It comes down through the hands, which in the Pillagers are strong and knotted, big, spidery and rough, with sensitive fingertips good at dealing cards. It comes through the eyes, too, belligerent, darkest brown, the eyes of those in the bear clan, impolite as they gaze directly at a person.

(31)

Nanapush himself mostly uses his powers to heal the physical, social and moral ills of his community. He lends his support to Eli for a hunt that will get them through the times of shortage and also gives Eli the opportunity to prove himself to Fleur:

In my fist I had a lump of charcoal, with which I blackened my face. I placed my otter bag upon my chest, my rattle near. I began to sing slowly, calling on my helpers, until the words came from my mouth but were not mine, until the rattle started, the song sang itself, and there, in the deep bright drifts, I saw the tracks of Eli's snowshoes clearly.

(101)

Through a ritual of drum and song, which summon his spirit allies, Nanapush brings to life Eli's tracks following the tracks of the moose in the woods, clears Eli's vision and directs his hand. Nanapush's song also helps Eli butcher the game carefully and properly as Fleur did earlier. Eli makes himself "a new body", as Nanapush describes how Eli bound and wrapped himself in the body parts of the animal, "a moose transformed into the mold of Eli, an

armor that would fit no other” (104). This image functions to display most vividly the interwoven lives of humans and animals that share the same habitat and sustain each other. Nanapush tells Lulu that he took the drum without opening his eyes and beat out footsteps for Eli to hear and follow all the way back (104).

Lulu also inherits shamanic qualities, both from her mother Fleur and Nanapush who named her. John A. Grim writes, in the Ojibway (Chippewa) tradition the shaman’s naming of a child is associated with “the blessing of clear vision on the child” (1983: 179). Near the end of the novel, Nanapush tries in vain to talk Lulu out of her decision to marry one of the young Morrisseys, one of the families that choose assimilation to the dominant white culture. Thus, Lulu demonstrates the rebellious character of her mother, and ironically, intends to join a family detested by her mother.

Nanapush distinguishes himself not only through his hunting and healing abilities, but also his social skills, which makes him a respected member of his community, regardless of whether they adhere to the traditional lifestyle of their tribe or try to accommodate themselves to the demands of consumer society. Nanapush positions himself in between. On the one hand, he cherishes their traditional lifestyle by which they feel and are empowered, but on the other, he is aware that they might have no other option but to take the whites’ offer of purchase of their allotment land. He acknowledges the cultural and economic circumstances that foster the urge, in the members of the Chippewa, to open their land to development so as to integrate themselves to the outside world and global economy. Unlike Fleur, who refuses to leave their natural resources to the hands of the developers, he seeks ways in which the two tendencies can be reconciled, and decides to take an active political role in the committees where native lands and their development is under discussion.

There is a striking parallelism between Nanapush and Camagu’s shamanic positions in *Tracks* and *The Heart of Darkness* respectively. An expatriate from the Eastern Cape, Camagu, after an absence of many years, comes back from the U.S. to Qolorha-by Sea, and finds himself wavering between Zim’s daughter Qukezwa and Bhonco’s daughter Xoliswa, as he tries to mediate between the Believers and the Unbelievers. Disappointing Xoliswa who invests her hope in his ability as a modern man to enlighten her people about development and progress, Camagu campaigns against the kind of capitalist projects that would harm the natural environment and the people of Qolorha-by-Sea. He works to have the village declared as a natural heritage site, forms the cooperative society with the local, sea-harvesting women, and designs other projects, which will enable the local people to both interact with the outside world and obtain the profit for their labour without including the corporations. Finally, he marries Qukezwa, who has taught him a great deal about the natural resources, as well as the indigenous species of the region, some of which are considered as spirit animals. Camagu himself is very

excited about encountering the snake Majola, the totem animal of his clan amaMpondomise, which “pays a visit to chosen members of the clan to give them good fortune” (98). Soon after that Camagu has his first enchanting encounter with Qukezwa in the novel.

Qukezwa emerges as a significant shaman figure marked by her deep bond with her natural environment, as well as her role in transmitting local lore that is also deeply entwined with the natural landscape. Qukezwa’s shamanic traits parallel in certain ways Fleur’s in *Tracks*, especially her adamant and defiant attitude when it comes to environmental protection. Her adeptness in her treatment of the flora and the fauna of her locality resembles Fleur’s aptitude in hunting and treating game. Her tantalising and challenging smile resembles Fleur’s wolfish grin. Qukezwa also seems to read Camagu’s thoughts about NomaRussia whose beauty and singing at a funeral in Johannesburg made Camagu change his mind about flying back to the U.S., after his futile attempts to find a job, and come instead to Qolorha-by-Sea to look for her. Like Fleur who draws Eli to her presence in his quest for the wounded deer, or Nanapush who, with his thoughts, directs Eli and game to one another, Qukezwa appears to have drawn Camagu to Qolorha-by-Sea.

Qukezwa’s profound ecological wisdom, as well as her singing inspires awe and desire in Camagu, which is reminiscent of Fleur’s effect on Eli. Sope Maithufi writes that shamanism, as a structural design, bedecks the watershed moments in Mda’s novels, especially when read through the central characters’ engagement in art, dance and music, and that “in these portrayals of the turning points, the body is often shown undergoing a trance experience” (2016: 126). Such are Camagu’s enchanting encounters with Qukezwa on the banks of the river or by the sea, while she is singing and riding her horse Gxagxa. Camagu looks for Gxagxa’s tracks when he walks alone on the beach, which calls to mind Fleur’s bear-like tracks on the snow. To ride with Qukezwa on Gxagxa, “bareback, reinless and naked,” on silvery nights gives Camagu tremendous pleasure, so much so that he experiences a trance that is simultaneously sensual and spiritual. It is as if they are all one. Christopher Warnes points to the aesthetic aspect of such scenes in Mda’s novels, which activate healing and reconciliation through enchantment, with specific reference to the aesthetics of the Wild Coast that Camagu perceives as an artwork with lush colors echoed in Qukezwa’s singing (2009: 223).

Gxagxa was also the name of the horse of Twin and Qukezwa of the early generation, which seems to be revived in the new era. Twin was inconsolable when he lost Gxagxa to lung sickness and was hoping to welcome her together with the new generation of tribespeople and cattle, as Nonquawuse had predicted. Twin’s wife Qukezwa was Khoikoi, and therefore despised by Twin-Twin’s circle of Unbelievers, because Khoikhoi women were said to have slept with the British soldiers in order to smuggle gunpowder to their fighting clansmen. Twin, however, was fascinated by her reverence for their God Tsiqwa, the one who tells stories in heaven, and for the ancestor spirits,

especially Heitsi Eibib, the first prophet of the Khoikoi, which she demonstrated by her chanting, as she piled stones and then herbs on them, so as “to be one with the source of your soul” (23). Camagu is equally fascinated when he sees Qukezwa performing the same ritual; all the more so when she invites him to throw a silvery coin into Nongqawuse’s pool.

Throughout the novel, both Qukezwa and Zim display a keen environmental consciousness, which highlights not only the parallelism between the sufferings of their ancestors and the native species, but also the importance of a sustainable relationship with nature in order to prevent future suffering. Their attitude against governmental policies that endanger indigenous species recalls Alfred Crosby’s concept of ‘ecological imperialism,’ also stressed by Huggan and Tiffin, when they underscore “the historical embeddedness of ecology in the European imperial enterprise [...] the violent appropriation of indigenous land to the ill-considered introduction of non-domestic livestock and European agricultural practices,” which, as the two critics point out, “has tended to come at the cost of its historical specificity” (3). Sewlall (2007) describes Qukezwa as “the quintessential ecofeminist”, especially with reference to the trial at court where she is accused of cutting the lantana and wattle trees, as she cut the inkberry tree before because it was poisonous. She defends herself by demonstrating the destructive effects of those imported trees to the local flora. Qukezwa adamantly rejects projects like the gambling city, holiday resort, and water sports centre, since she knows that they will spoil the environment, as well as the villagers’ free interaction with the environment, as manifested in the rhythmic walk, singing and ululating of the women as they harvest mussels and oysters, which also serve as an aphrodisiac.

Zim, who also cherishes the natural landscape of Qolorha-by-Sea, has rituals of sitting under the tall fig tree in his backyard, walking with his daughter Qukezwa among the trees in the valley, listening to the sounds of different kinds of fish and other species in “Nongqawuse’s Pool”, and remembering lamentingly the aloes and reeds that are no longer there. Zim and Qukezwa have a special habit of talking in whistles. They not only “sound like the birds in the forest”, but also like the ancestor spirits. The new people who the Believers expected to come riding on the waves had also manifested themselves and communicated with Nongqawuse in the form of whistles. In this sense, the whistles constitute a link between the past and the future. Qukezwa often speaks to the birds that eagerly answer. Zim tells his daughter that, if she works hard enough, she will end up being a prophetess like Nongqawuse whom he associates with the Nomyayi bird. He says, “They were one person” (47).

Particularly striking, however, are Bhonco’s meetings with the elders of the Unbelievers under the *umsintsi* tree, which turn into a ritualistic dance and “a trance that takes them to the past. To the world of the ancestors” (73). These rituals constitute Bhonco’s communal shamanic practice, during which he

traverses the time between the past and the present future although he is a steadfast Unbeliever. When the abaThwa take their dance back from the Unbelievers, Bhonco starts thinking of a new dance for his community, which points to the idea of tradition that is always subject to transformation. As Bhonco's wife NoPetticoat tells Camagu, the ritual itself is an invented custom, in which the Unbelievers "induce sadness in their lives, so that they may have a greater appreciation of happiness of the new age" (73). Maithufi stresses that the novel's account of the tension concerning the use of amaXhosa historical sites commences in Bhonco's descent into a trance upon being aware of encryptions on his body, which are enacted in dance, and is resolved in the Unbelievers' invocation of the dance of contrition, "which is also a performance of the thawing of the emotions appropriated from abaThwa" (2016: 134-135).

Bhonco's rituals are meant for both remembering and healing for a better future, a goal that connects the Unbelievers with the Believers, especially Zim and Qukezwa who, as two shamanic figures initiate Camagu into his position as shaman, so that he can actualise his own material and spiritual potential to fruitfully link the history of his community to its future. After their rides on Gxagxa, she jumps into the river where she swims like a fish, invites him in, and teaches him to swim. She teases him when his body itches, which ironically recalls Bhonco's itching scars of history, by saying, "Don't be such a baby [...] It is only the *thithiboya* caterpillar that has walked on you. Or poison ivy. So far no one has died from either" (204). She reminds him of an entwined existence in nature while rubbing his body with some leaves. Their baby is named Heitsi, in homage to the ancestors. Camagu, thus, becomes part of the history of Qolorha-by-Sea, and collaborates with Qukezwa towards a sustainable glocal future.

As Gale Fincham writes, Mda's novel undermines dualistic thinking, "whether between the past and the present, the human and the non-human, the living and the dead, the rural and the urban, the realistic and the imaginary, or the local and the global" (2011: 17). How *The Heart of Redness* does that can be best summarized with reference to Sarah Nuttall's notion of entanglement in terms of which Sarah Nuttall envisions meeting the challenges of the after-apartheid. Nuttall describes entanglement as "a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with [...] an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited" (2009: 1).

It is a means by which to draw into our analyses those sites in which what was once thought of as separate – identities, spaces, histories – come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways. It is an idea which signals largely unexplored terrains of mutuality, wrought from a common, though often coercive and confrontational, experience. It enables a complex temporality of past, present, and future; one which points away from a time of resistance towards a more ambivalent moment in which the time of potential, both latent and actively surfacing in South Africa, exists in complex tandem

with new kinds of closure and opposition. It also signals a move away from an apartheid optic and temporal lens towards one which reifies neither the past nor the exceptionality of South African life.

(11)

The narrative web of Mda's novel demonstrates significant parallels to Erdrich's *Tracks*, although each novel presents entanglements specific to its ethnographic and historical setting. However, both novels express a deep concern about the lingering effects of European colonial expansion long after it has run its course, and the exacerbation of those effects with the growing demands of global capitalism, all of which find reflection in the tensions in and between families in fragmented communities, but above all, in the disruption of the ecosystem that sustained the lives and cultures of indigenous peoples in colonised territories. What the two nations in such far apart geographies have in common is their interdependency and entwinement with their natural habitat, and their resistance to the separation of this bond, as especially manifested in the attitudes and practices of several shaman figures in each novel. It is particularly significant in this context to recognise that both communities are portrayed as evolving or transforming cultures, which appears as an inevitable process that inscribes all cultures irrespective of time and space. Along those lines, the novels do not seek to retrieve an original, pure culture, but to portray the historical process of changes and reconfigurations, so as to link the past with the present, as well as to project a future when societies with a bioregional consciousness can interact peacefully and productively with each other, and with their natural environment.

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DRESSING THE CUTS OF THE PAST, SEAMING A GLOCAL FUTURE ...

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