

Shamanism: Literacies for Alternative Totalities in Zakes Mda's Fiction

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Summary

This article considers the theme of shamanism in those novels of Zakes Mda that trace it to the people named respectively 'abaThwa', 'Khoikhoi', 'Barwa', 'San' and 'Xam', as opposed to amaXhosa and Basotho who comprise this fiction's dominant orders. The proposition is that shamanism is a discourse in which it is believed that, having entered into a trance, the performer articulates alterities and effects healing in his/her people. Notable in this examination is the fiction's representations of the trance in terms of audience formation and how they, in turn – and well after the executor's descent into a trance – actualise it as mediations of plights.

The article proposes that understanding shamanism through Mda's fiction calls for a foregrounding of the complex histories of cultural exchange between these indigenous people and the Bantu, and also offers an opportunity to define Africa without first having to peel off the European colonial moment. The suggestion is that, taking the subject of shamanism as the focal point, more than one scholarship on this theme needs to be deployed in order to outline the significant inflections of the emergent culture, its technologies of cognition and microphysics of power. The first section, which theorises shamanism, emphasises that Mda moulds the essence of the trance in a compass that chimes in with scientific cosmological and neuropsychological discourses. The final part of the discussion applies this delineation to a reading of select texts of Mda.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek sjamanisme in die romans van Zakes Mda wat die tema verbind met die 'Thwa'-, 'Khoikhoi'-, 'Barwa'-, 'San'- en 'Xam'-stamme, in teenstelling met die Xhosa en Basotho, wat in hierdie soort fiksie die dominante orde verteenwoordig. Die outeur gaan van die veronderstelling uit dat sjamanisme as diskoers aanvaar dat sodra 'n sjamaan in 'n staat van beswying gaan, hy/sy alteriteite verwoord en genesing teweegbring onder sy/haar mense. Kentekenend van hierdie studie is die wyse waarop sodanige fiksie die staat van beswying omskryf volgens die uitwerking wat dit op omstanders het, en hoe hulle dit gevolglik – selfs lank nadat die sjamaan in 'n beswying verval het – aktualiseer as bemiddeling of voorspraak in tye van nood.

Ten einde sjamanisme deur middel van Mda se fiksie te beskou, moet die komplekse geskiedenis van kulturele wisselwerking tussen bogenoemde inheemse bevolkingsgroepe en die Bantoe op die voorgrond geplaas word, wat dan ook 'n geleentheid bied om Afrika te definieer sonder om eers die Europese koloniale moment bloot te lê. Die outeur stel voor dat, met sjamanisme as die fokuspunt, meer

as een vakkundige benadering tot hierdie tema gebruik word – ten einde betekenisvolle vormveranderinge te omskryf wat verband hou met die opkomende kultuur, sy kognisietegnologieë en die mikrofisika van mag. Die eerste gedeelte van die artikel beskou sjamanisme uit 'n teoretiese oogpunt en lê klem daarop dat Mda die aard en wese van beswying uitbeeld deur die leser te verwys na wetenskaplik-kosmologiese sowel as neuropsigologiese diskoerse. In die slotgedeelte van die bespreking word hierdie uitbeelding toegepas in 'n vertolking van enkele tekste van Mda.

Desired Roots

As a structural design, shamanism bedecks the watershed moments in Mda's novels, particularly when they are read through the central characters who engage in art – especially visual art, dance and music. In these portrayals of the turning points, the body is often shown undergoing a trance experience, an achievement the geneses of which Mda locates within the customs of the people known as Barwa in *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), abaThwa in *The Heart of Redness* (2000), Khoikhoi in *The Whale Caller* (2005) and /Xam in *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe* (2013). Also in Mda's tracking of the source of this exploit, he depicts it as being discursive, as opposed to being cryptic, and as a site that redresses the sense of incompleteness plaguing the performers. The pattern is arresting, because the initial owners of this feat are considered to be cultural outsiders for not tracing their lineages to the dominant social formations of the Bantu-speaking peoples.

Since Mda's publication of *The Heart of Redness* (2000), there has been an inconsistent rise of the momentum to read his fiction in terms of its engagements with the cultural traces of the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. On the whole, the scholarship has been impressively utilising Mieke Bal's concept of the narrator-focaliser (see, for instance, Bell & Jacobs 2009: 7, 8, cf. Fincham 2011: xxiii), showing the links that human beings construct between themselves and animals (see, for example, Woodward 2007: 295), and also tracing Mda's intriguing experimentation with the motif of twins (see, for example, Bell & Jacobs 2009). Drawing on Bal and on autochthonous narratives has therefore ingeniously upended the stultifying focus on whether or not *The Heart of Redness* plagiarises Jeff Pieres's 1989 *The Dead Will Arise* (see Offenburger 2008). For instance, concluding his discussion of *The Heart of Redness*, Klopper (2011: 103) mentions that Xhosa divination might have benefitted from the "contact with Khoisan communities". Because of this scholarship's inclination to outline these inter-texts (for a detailed discussion, see Jacobs 2002: 225), the readings have also qualified the degrees to which *The Heart of Redness* nuances its proximity to or contrasts with different forms of non-mimetic realisms (see, for instance, Maithufi 2015: 83).

Also because of the consistency with which, in his fiction, Mda returns to the indigenous Southern African peoples' cultural archives, the inclination

has also implicitly prepared the grounds for a comprehensive critique of his oeuvre. And this is why Fincham's 2011 monograph on Mda is welcomed. However, in tracing Mda's performance art to J.M. Coetzee's idea of the interconnection between human beings and non-human beings (2011: xv), Fincham's book appears to be less concerned about the huge investment that Mda deposits in the aesthetics of the indigenous peoples. Unmistakeably, the inclination to highlight these resonances is comparable to the established motif in the Mda scholarship where he is made to dialogue with world luminaries such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (see Sewlall (2003) and Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (see Sewlall (2016: 29). These critiques also convincingly highlight how Mda enunciates the postcolonial in his problematizing of simplistic binary opposition (see also Bell & Jacobs 2009, cf. Woodward 2003; Titlestad 2003). Recently, however, it does not appear that there is consensus on the ideological significance of Mda's experimentation with the pre-colonial and with the narratives of the Southern African indigenous people's narratives in his latest fiction, particularly regarding *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe* (2013) (see, for instance, Jacobs 2015, cf. Sewlall 2016).

Joining the debate, this article identifies the Bantu people's exploitation of the Southern African indigenous people's trance in Mda's fiction as a decisive turning point in the evolution of black Africaneity, at least prior to contact with the European coloniser in what later became Southern Africa. The appropriation is unmistakable where the performer enthralls the audience in an ecstatic rendition of music or dance or both. As is the case in *She Plays with the Darkness* and *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe*, at the apogee of the performance, the lead character modulates in ontology from being a human being to being an animal, and vice versa. By contrast, in *The Heart of Redness* and *The Whale Caller*, the transformation happens between being a member of abaThwa and Khoikhoi, respectively, and being Xhosa. The article proposes that integral to this feat is the negation of parochialism, the enabling of literacy and cognition, and the translation of what is seen or felt or experienced for the phenomenological benefit of another subject. The mastery of this skill is displayed in the ability to interpret and to exploit the cultural wealth of the perceived outsider. Particularly in *She Plays with the Darkness*, *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe* and *The Whale Caller*, descent into a trance is tied up with the force of gravity such as it controls planetary phenomena, and this is a theme that does not appear to receive adequate scholarly attention.

Analysing these fictive constructions of shamanism as well as the characters who appear to fill this calling calls for a fusing of more than one anthropology scholarship on shamanism. The first insists on identifying the Southern African indigenous peoples in the pejorative, "Bushman", despite also noting that they are culturally heterogeneous (Guenther 1999: 58). This reading also observes that the "Bushmen" culturally evolved from

“foraging” (5, 98) the Bantu cultures and the white colonials. This scholarship presents a detailed outline of the trance experience, and locates it in the figure of the shaman. According to Mathias Guenther, the shaman is a fusion between the “trickster” and a “trancer” (4) whom, in “Bushman religion” (7), are “embodiment[s] of ambiguity” (4, 101). While the “trickster” “pervades Bushman mythology and cosmology”, the “trancer” is a construct of “ritual” (4). Guenther (7) continues that the “trickster” is a god-like figure associated with origin or the “first phase of being, at primal time, when beings and states were inchoate and dreamlike, as well as fluid and flawed and ever-ready to change their forms or being”, such as into animal subjects (cf. 98, 99). Guenther (8) regards the “fluidity” as “therianthrope”, that is, an “expression of a ... key cosmological element, human kindredness with animals”. As “god and protagonist” (98), s/he “may be human or humanoid, or it may be animalian or therianthrope” (98, cf. 8), “capable of transforming his shape or guise, from human to animal and back, or from one animal species to another” (99). Also according to Guenther (4), the two, “trickster” and “trancer”, frequently enter one another’s domain, such as at the trance dance, at its climactic moment, when the trancer “dies” and his spirit takes over and proceeds with the curing task on a mystical plane’. Therefore, it stands to reason that mythology and ritual may not be as neatly polarised as it may appear in the attempt to distinguish the “trickster” from the “trancer”. Occupying the liminal state between myth and history or “dream and reality” (104), the shaman is the “master of mediums and custodian of healing aroma in the context of the curing dance” (112).

The second scholarship, one which is known to be about divination, as opposed to shamanism, and neuro-anthropological in approach, expands on the technology of the trance experience, and also synchronises well with Mda’s apparent using of “divination” and “shamanism” as synonyms. The argument is that, through many senses, the trance – as in ritual – makes possible healing and sympathetic identification with marginalised peoples or those who are afflicted. The proposal is that the genesis of the network has everything to do with the subjects’ “limbic” system or “paleomammalian brain” which, as Winkelman (2000: xii) remarks, comprises “memory”, or the seat of “self-identity, and social identity and their attachments, emotions, meanings, and references”. In short, shamanism is effected in the trance experience, or what Winkelman (2000: 88) calls an “out-of-body experience” and “astral projection”, which is essentially an attempt to mediate the plights destined for other people. The extension involves cognition of an appearance of images in the mind through a counterpoint of first person and third person perspectives. Winkelman (89) defines this counterpoint as a “self-floating out of the body, with a continued awareness of the circumstances surrounding the physical body”. Winkelman (89) continues that the drama “is an innate psychophysiological structure

reflecting neurognostic structures and psychosocial processes". These phenomena align the subject's "internal and external experiences" in "visual images of the body and bodily sensations" "as well as in terms of memory" (90). Being about "memory", divination (this is the concept that Winkelman uses) makes possible the re-alignment of seemingly disparate forces, such as the past and present, male and female, citizen and victim of xenophobia, and human and non-human creatures. This is also because "memory" "result[s] from the disinhibition of the visual cortex" (85) and proceeds along a paradoxical trajectory. In short, it is where the subject takes "the role of the other ... to represent ... own body as it would appear from the others' perspectives" (90-91). In this mode, the subject reigns "independent of the constraints of everyday life and [of] the verbal cognitive [moral/normative] mode" (92), as it is common during the trance-marked carnival.

By virtue of relating them intertextually, the outlined theories of shamanism and of divination make obvious the fact that, in Mda's fiction, the Bantu-speaking people are culturally beholden to the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. The discussion follows the motif of the deployment in Mda's novels as solo extemporisations that are saturated in light energy, or gravity – suggesting that he envelopes mediations within the framework of cosmic consciousness. According to this outline, all forms of existence – from human life to the ecosystem to the planetary phenomena – are synchronised by light particles and bent against hegemonic essentialisms. The article traces these improvisations to the performers' preconscious and profound inclination towards those denied difference as well as those who are afflicted. The argument is that Mda represents memory by alluding to key features of the shamanic experiences gleaned from the Southern African indigenous peoples' art. The first highlight concerns decoding inscriptions during epiphanic moments. The second is shown in these representations' apparent mode of the therianthropic. The third is indicated in the fact that these compositions define the therianthropic as a mode of cognition that facilitates intercession, illumination and plenitude as shown during a trance. This is where, for instance, the subject converts into an animal figure (see Lewis-Williams 1992: 56-60, cf. Dowson 1988: 116-128) and this, on its own, is a parallel of an enunciation of the dissonance and harmony that Mda valorises and constructs between the dominant subject and the marginalised one.

Trances & Tactics

With the exception of Mda's *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), nowhere in his fiction does shamanism commence explicitly from reading rock art and from overtly attributing it to Barwa, one of the Southern African indigenous peoples. Also, at no point is the act of reading actioned in a way

that sets the scene for the questioning of the stereotype of steatopygia and of the xenophobic attitudes towards the people of Barwa/Khoi/San/Xam lineages and patriarchy. What also sets this novel apart from Mda's oeuvre is the fact that he has the modality of reading unfolding explicitly against the ambience of light. This illumination is interspersed across the storyline's overwhelming depictions of the incidents of male graft responsible for the degeneration of the Kingdom of Lesotho into a postcolony. This is the world into which Radisene, the twin brother of the celibate heroine, Dikosha, matures and excels as an entrepreneur adept at defrauding the Road Accident Fund (63, 67, 81, 84, 203). Also highlighting these social ills, the bulk of the plot presents the everyday cultures and political bureaucracy of Lesotho in the grip of men who are obscenely obsessed with sexual pleasure. In addition, the only considerable source of generating income is the migrant labour system away at Maseru and in the neighbouring South African mining industry. When the story concludes, all the key male Basotho characters perish in their blind fixations. It seems that the epitome of this paranoia is the character, "Sorry My Darlie". Having apparently deteriorated into a schizophrenic as a result of his unrequited lust for Dikosha, "Sorry My Darlie" sits vigil outside of Dikosha's home, as if on a pilgrimage. In another instance, Dikosha's twin brother, Radisene, loses virtually all his wealth to impostors from Nigeria (180, 190) and his wife subsequently leaves him (192).

A series of occurrences, all depicting Dikosha arriving at the mouth of the cave of Barwa (Mda 1995: 50, cf. 41, 48, 101, 169, 170), hints at the redress of hyper-masculinity in the terms involving shamanism, as already outlined. The central pivot can be found earlier in the novel when Dikosha beholds "rock painting" "each surrounded by a ring of light" apparently emitted by the painting itself and showing "red paintings of men and women with protruding buttocks" (50). In Dikosha's observation, "[s]ome [men and women] were pointing fingers at animals. Others were kneeling down and blood was oozing from their noses". In addition, several men and women were pointing fingers at "legless" animals while some of the "dancers" had antelope heads and hoofs. In one specific painting, men dance around a person lying on the ground, "their maleness pointing firmly outwards". The person lying prostrate seems to be in a catatonic stupor. We are here reminded of a descent into a trance shown when the Shaman, already defined as the "trickster" and "trancer", experiences epistaxis. According to the anthropologist Thomas A Dowson (1988: 120), this form of bleeding is symptomatic of the Shaman's interconnecting with those animals such as the eland at the point when it slowly dies from the hunter's spear stab.

Dikosha's reading of herself into rock art is facilitated by the shroud of light which is a symbol of the force of gravity and cosmic balance. And this is why as a result she begins to see herself from the third person perspective. From this angle, she appears as a defender of black women who are

maligned on the basis of allegedly having steatopygia such as attributed to Barwa. This is evident in Dikosha's observation that even men had "protruding buttocks" (50). The apparent flattening of the patriarchal and colonial idiom about black women nuances the therianthrope where, as if having descended into a trance, human beings experience epistaxis and perceive "legless animals" (50). In these rock engravings that foreground enchantment, the human being and the animal are physiologically joined, completing each other. At the same time, the perceiver in this art is hailed into a comparable union, and this is why "men" "point" "fingers at legless animals" (50). This thesis also parallels an argument for delayed sexual penetration, that is, as evident in the drama in which "men dance around a person lying on the ground", "their maleness pointing firmly outwards" (50), already quoted. It is as if, seen from a different angle, the dancing men establish an electric field in a typical carnivalesque scene where subjects spontaneously break out into corresponding performances.

In what seems to be the climax of Dikosha's exorcising of hyper-masculinity, the symbol of "light" shines inwards, turning her into a poet. In this trade, it appears as if this is the point at which Dikosha goes on a parallel series of trance, as if taking command of the ecosystem and defining sexual pleasure. For this "out-of-body experience" and "astral projection" to happen, to return to Winkelman's (2000: 88) theory on divination, Dikosha "construct[s] images of all the things the [dancers] were saying in her mind" and "also read[s] her thoughts" (51). This is despite her awareness that she "did not understand" the dancers' speech and clicks-ridden language (51). It is also revealed to Dikosha later that she is "lying on the ground, and the men [are] dancing in circles around her, their maleness unflinchingly pointing at her" amidst loud music "mixed well with jubilant clicks and laughter" (51). Regardless of this commotion, Dikosha is conscious of the concert of dance, music and various "out-of-body" flights undertaken by other subjects (51-52). Also in her trance, she is attuned to how, in their death, their spirits journey to the other worlds, "battling with sickness and death" (51) but returning in the morning with loads of music in their "stomachs and buttocks" (51). It is significant that Dikosha also sees herself as part of the afflicted people who receive healing, specifically, through a chiropractic mode involving spears, as opposed to needles (52). In this alterity, "protruding buttocks", "spear therapy" and "click-ridden" language appear in the language of prejudice as tropes and stereotypes of Barwa or abaThwa or Khoikhoi or /Xam peoples. In this novel, these subjectivities are foregrounded through the heroine's fantasy. In this case, "fantasy" is a style that enables cosmopolitanism, by virtue of ethically tying up subjects with each other (Rose 1996: 3), synchronising the first (self) and third person (other) perspectives.

Mda's locating of divination within Dikosha is cleverly suggested also in his portrait of her. True to her name which means popular or folk music,

Dikosha is famed for her spontaneous singing (2). But the idea of the popular in this case suggests alterity, as shown in the fact that she is notorious for being “a lefetwa, a girl who had long passed the age of marriage” (5), in having been “conceived at a night dance” (4) and in being subsequently born outside of wedlock to the father she never gets to know. As a metonym of dissonance, that is, from conception to adulthood, Dikosha illuminates the only form of light energy that quintessentially diffuses across and profanes institutionalised morality. This is why, when the novel ends, “many of the men who worked in the mines” and had come “home for the holidays” and “[s]ome” who “had come from towns in the lowlands” (198) and “locals” (199) visit her in order to “confess” (198-199). This is a fitting ending to the novel, because confession is an invention of a sophisticated reading process or reflection – in the same poetic manner that Dikosha “wills” to “life” rock art (51). Also, confession implies an orphic inclination towards that which the hegemonic order denies rectitude.

Eighteen years later and having published more than four novels in the interim, Mda returns to the setting of the cave, again using it as a backdrop to the theatre of the trance and of the theme of shamanism in *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe* (2013). In this revisit, the technology of conjuring up photonic links contrasts with the one in which, in *She Plays with the darkness* (1995), Dikosha goes into a trance upon her reading of rock art representation of the “astral projection” (Winkelman 2000: 88). It is interesting that, in *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe*, Mda (2013: 127) uses the concept, “divination”, to refer to the popular phenomenon called “the Community of Gazers” (127, cf. 123, 128, 133, 150, 151). In the narrator’s view, this process is marked by people breaking out into “songs” (127) as soon as they behold the chryselephantine sculpture of a “Khoikhoi woman” (107, 123) accomplished by one of their fellow denizens, the main character Chata (short for Chatambudza, as already stated). The cave in which this carving is found is the underground floor of Chata’s house (120), suggesting that it is a site of defiance, or alterities, as already stated in the theoretical exposition of how the “trickster” and “trancer” figures delineate ambiguous oneness. The dominant order in this case is pioneered by Chata’s half-brother, Rendani. The story is that Rendani had incited the king to send soldiers to take possession of Chata’s house after he had refused to obey the injunction to utilise his gold mine yield to praise the king (123). Another reason for Rendani’s mean-spiritedness is that he saw that his realistic sculptures lacked charm, especially the kind that appealed to their father, Zwanga, and the sort that also sent the people into mutinous public trances. Hence Rendani’s art remains marginal to the novel’s key thematic foci, because it does not celebrate or initiate alterity and “divination” (127).

This is why the discourse of civilisation to which the word “Mapungubwe” alludes is deconstructed in the concept of “sculpting”, which is fundamental to this novel. As a trade and in contrast to rock art in *She Plays with the*

Darkness, sculpting is secular and lends itself to interpretation, as in “astral projection” (Winkelman 2000: 88). Thus, for instance, the narrator has Chata’s sculpture of a naked woman read as a play on the stereotype of nakedness used to vilify the indigenous peoples of southern Africa, reminiscent of Diksha’s highlighting of steatopygia in *She Plays with the Darkness*. In this protest, the storyline relies also on dialogism and irony, the textures of which poke fun at the depiction of the foreigner as “of the lowliest birth”. The protagonist of the people considered to be outsiders is the sculptor, Chata, whose mother was ‘a !Kung woman, one of those cave dwellers who called themselves Zhun/twasi, which meant “real people”’ (Mda 2013: 9-10) and held in awe as “People of the Trance” despite them being “despised” “for being lowborn midgets” (10). This grammar of unfair discrimination, which also typecasts difference and attempts to seal it in the body, articulates desire, ironically, as shown in the illicit and extra-marital affair between Chata’s mother and his father.

Through dramatic irony, what this romance produces from an undisclosed metaphorical cave is Chata, the baby boy who, later on as a young adult, enchants the people in public with his dance during the rain making ritual (Mda 2013: 111). As in the illicit romance that profanes the essentialised institution of marriage, Chata’s descent into a trance, later on, celebrates totality, redolent of Guenther’s (1999: 8) concept, “therianthrope”; it happens while Chata is “possessed by the spirit of the hwamanda, the mbila and the drums” during an elaborate assembly (Mda 2013: 108) aimed at “eat[ing] and drink[ing] drought out of their kingdom” (105). Expanding upon the theme of carnival, Marubini, one of the village girls, breaks out in a dialogical parade of Chata’s dance. According to the storyteller, Marubini’s display is marked by “elegance and grace” (111). Marubini simulates different animal postures and traits in sequence: “She was a gazelle. And a snake. And a buffalo. She soared like an eagle and swooped like a kite on a hapless rodent. She became a mole hill. Then an anthill. Then a mountain. She flowed like a river, and became bubbly like the water at the confluence of the Limpopo and the Shashe.” Following this feat, it drizzled (111).

In comparison to *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), the conception of shamanism that Mda centres through dance is more textured and organic to the storyline of his two later novels, *The Heart of Redness* (2000) and in *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe* (2013). This is in spite of the fact that *The Heart of Redness* does not at all locate the seminal dance scene within the cave, as is the case in *She Plays with the Darkness*. Reminiscent of *She Plays with the Darkness*, dance in *The Heart of Redness* (2000) is a key mode of therapy and memory, the latter being traced by the narrator to those who are considered “foreign”, named as “abaThwa”. Dance is performed by one of the local leaders, Bhonco Ximiya, in concert with the public, in order to mediate the sense of disgrace that apparently befell amaXhosa for allegedly allowing themselves to be duped by the prophet Nongqawuse, during the

second part of the 19th century. In the novel, the humility is shown to be felt two centuries later in the outbreak of a dispute over whether or not to convert the setting, which is the village of Qolorha-by-Sea in the Eastern Cape region, into a modern day tourist attraction (79, 134, 231-234). Those who are opposed to the venture, led by Zim, argue that it would pollute the ecosystem (233) and profane amaXhosa historical sites such as Nongqawuse iconises.

The novel's account of this tension is equally dense with an allusion to shamanism; it commences in Bhonco's descent into a trance upon being aware of encryptions on his body. Also, in manifestation, the scripts are enacted in dance, as already stated. In this outline, the novel goes back in time to just before the mid-nineteenth century in the house of the patriarch, Xikixa (Mda 2000: 21), the father of twin boys, Twin-Twin and Twin, the great grandfathers of Bhonco and Zim, respectively. According to the narrator, in his adult life, Twin-Twin was "identified" as a "wizard" by "Prophet Mlanjeni" (12) and, as chastisement, was publicly "flogged" "by men" (12, cf. 17). Because of this corporal punishment, Twin-Twin's back became incised. Many years later, the conflict appears to resurface, dividing people into two camps. The first one is the Believers, those who subscribed to Nongqawuse's prophecy. The second group is the UnBelievers, those who refused to believe in her prophecy.

Subsequent to Twin-Twin being flogged, "[e]very first-boy child in succeeding generations of his tree is born with the scars" (Mda 2000: 12). Bhonco's "scars become itchy" when he is anxious (12), and this makes him think that it is the reason why he brought "the Cult of the Unbelievers from the recesses of time" (Mda 2000: 12, cf. 301). The assumption is that Bhonco's ancestry embodies the signs that draw attention to the people's blunders since the time of Twin-Twin. The supposition is also that these errors became neglected also later on when some of amaXhosa became followers of Nongqawuse. This is why, in making up for these slipups, Bhonco appropriates and re-contextualises the dance of abaThwa for the purpose of inducing remorse and guilt (215-218). When the story concludes, the back of Bhonco's daughter and only child, Xoliswa, is shown to be similarly etched (301-302), owing possibly to her bigoted attitude towards everything which is indigenously Xhosa. As it happens, Xoliswa becomes marked by the ignominy reminiscent of the one that her disbelieving ancestor unfairly bore. Also, the implication is that her attention is drawn to the engravings on her back, and to interpret them in ways that make her humble herself into the broader Xhosa bondedness, that is, before it became colonially vilified.

It is therefore intriguing that the schism between the UnBelievers and the Believers is only superficial. It is also fascinating that, at best, the tension 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 (Mda 2000: 215-218). The art that makes possible the shared trance experience has several utility values. In the first instance, dance enables Bhonco to bring to life the angst of the alleged “folly of belief” in Nongqawuse’s prophecy that is deemed to have plunged amaXhosa in famine and poverty. In the second but also related case, to Bhonco, the art of dance “writes out” itself into a narrative, hailing him into seeing himself in the stereotype of the supposed tragic figure, that is, those who fell for Nongqawuse’s prophecy. This is where the engagements in dance and subsequent trance venture entangle/trap the performers in the body which is the primary site of the humiliation from which they intend to find liberation. All these dramatic ironies hint at the enthusiasts’ ethical obligation, which is to make amends.

The broader implications of shamanism in all these ironies appear to be cogently captured in one specific watershed scene (Mda 2000: 81) where the elders scold and admonish Bhonco to grieve for the “folly of belief that racked [amaXhosa] and is felt even today” (81). Humbly agreeing, Bhonco becomes “shamefaced” as the “words of his peers reached deep inside him”, and thereafter he breaks out in “one long sharp wail ... [that of] the howl of a mountain dog when the moon is full” (81). What develops from Bhonco’s ‘wailing’ dramatizes the extent to which the novel turns the body into a theatre of the therianthrope, redolent of how Dikosha’s trance in *She Plays with the Darkness* articulates the politics of revolt:

In a slow rhythm, the elders begin to dance. It is a painful dance. One can see the pain on their faces as they lift their limbs and stamp them on the ground. They are all wailing now, and mumbling things like people who talk in tongues. But they are not talking in tongues in the way that Christians do. They are going into a trance that takes them back to the past. To the world of the ancestors. Not the Otherworld where the ancestors of today live. Not the world that lives parallel to our world. But to this world when it still belonged to them. When they were still people of flesh and blood like the people who walk the world today.

(81)

In the episode quoted above, the UnBelievers, “now dancing the painful dance that will send them into a deep trance” (Mda 2000: 208-209), conjure up “sadness” or “unhappiness” (215). In other words, the body is a site of the intersection between the neurological, psychological and memory. Also, the body is imaginatively deployed to those shores that remain prohibited by the dominant order, such as those that deny rectitude to the presumed foreigners such as abaThwa. These are narratives that will not acknowledge that the cultures of unfairly discriminated peoples such as abaThwa are appropriated into bedrocks of modern civilisations. Hence, in another episode resonant of Dikosha’s lapse into the imagined world of Barwa,

Bhonco has a vision in which abaThwa have returned to claim their dance from his cult's invocations of "unhappiness" (215-218).

It is fitting that *The Heart of Redness* articulates its argument on shamanism also through the metaphor of fluidity, especially in the storyline's charting of Camagu's search for NoMaRussia, the woman whom he meets for the first time while she is singing at a wake in Johannesburg (2000: 27, cf. 307) and who subsequently leaves for Qolorha-by-Sea. It is only towards the end of the novel (306) that Camagu finds NoMaRussia terminal with "cervical cancer" (306), having been cursed by Zim's late wife, NoPetticoat, according to popular belief (303, cf. 304). In her gradual bodily wastage, NoMaRussia is an anachronism of the slow demise of the construct of amaXhosa of the time of Nongqawuse. By implication, the quest narrative is expressed in the theatre wherein Camagu is tasked with a rescue mission. This is also the case with Bhonco Ximiya's dance, which memorialises the "folly" of Nongqawuse (215-218).

In contradistinction to Bhonco, however, Camagu embarks on the interceding process while he is seemingly unaware or, if not at all, through a dense symbolism featuring water. In several episodes (80, c.f. 102-103, 195, 305), Camagu dreams of himself being the river on which flows NoMaRussia. In this vision, the river, which is a metaphor of an animal suited for equestrian activities, alludes to what anthropologists see as the "transformation" of a shaman into an animal during the "San trance experience" (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1990: 14). It is interesting that, in contrast to the San people who allegedly conceptualise the out-of-body flight in terms of being "under water" (Lewis-Williams 1992: 57), in Camagu's dream, NoMaRussia is riding on his body – itself serving as a craft, suggesting that she is being delivered safe to convalescence and to the mortal world. Articulated through the metaphor of a flowing river, the implication is that the salvage assignment recalls Winkleman's (2000: 88) image of "astral projection" – which is essentially about generating alternative identification athwart moral essentialism or binary opposition.

The liberation mission is also expressed in another instance. In naming a child NoMaRussia, amaXhosa attempt to memorialise what to them is the demise of their colonial oppressor (the English) at the hands of the Russians during the Crimean War. Memory, in this case, is tied up with invoking the recovery of the livestock that amaXhosa had lost during the various border wars with the English and during the 1865 cattle-lung pandemic. However, the act of memory is itself as touching and crucial as the "astral projections" to the apparent disgraceful history of "belief" in the prophecy of Nongqawuse. The poignancy shows itself in the endeavour to spiritually mediate people's painful fates. This is also why Camagu sees himself on a river trip to salvage NoMaRussia, that is, unknowingly from her sinful attempt to seduce Zim away from his wife, NoPetticoat. This salvage enterprise resonates in Bhonco's famous deployment of the dance of

abaThwa in his “griev[ing]” for the “folly of belief that racked [amaXhosa] and is felt even today” (Mda 2000: 81), as already argued above. Because the source of this mode of intercession is extraneous, it can be inferred that Zim introduces a dissonant note into the chordal community imagined as amaXhosa. In short, the ambition is quintessentially divine and epiphanic, in the sense that what is presumably achieved is reconciliation with the horror that befell amaXhosa at the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. In making Camagu visualise himself as the raft on which NoMaRussia rides, and in having Bhonco and his cult colleagues lose themselves in the sadness of the dance, Mda sounds an anticipatory note to his exploration of the theme of shamanism in *The Whale Caller* (2005), the novel integral to which is a relationship between a man and a female southern right whale. The expectation is unmistakable, because Camagu’s journey to retrieve NoMaRussia as well as the UnBelievers’ dance intercession of the folly of belief also effortlessly straddles ontological boundaries. The overlap is unique, in the sense in which Camagu does not share in NoMaRussia’s alleged sin and because of the fact that his mediation of her plight happens at the level of a dream. The same inference is valid in respect of Bhonco’s dance of “unhappiness”, because they and the Unbelievers could never have been complicit in what is perceived to be Nongqawuse’s misguided prophecy. Translated into musical parlance, Camagu’s trip recalls blues music, as it tends to yoke together notes that are not considered to vibrate sympathetically with one another within the musical scale (or chord), and also because blues music is predominantly contrapuntal. But the resolution is well expressed by Davis (1999: xv): “blues ... construct seemingly antagonistic relationships as noncontradictory oppositions”. In this definition, Davis (4) seems to argue, “blues gave musical expression to the new social and sexual realities encountered by African American as free women and men”.

However, in *The Whale Caller*, Mda reassigns the blues radically by imagining sexual relations between the whale caller and the whale. It is therefore worth spending time on this image of redeployment in the conclusion of this article, as this proposal also recalls the broad theme of the therianthropie explored in the novels discussed above. Just as NoMaRussia reads as an anachronism of amaXhosa, as already argued in the preceding paragraphs, she also prepares the reader for the whale that the kelp hornist woos to the Hermanus shore in Mda’s *The Whale Caller*. As it were, the affair between the man and the whale is reified within a liminal space of the arts. In this enterprise, the suitor has a tenuous or fragile perspective of his “object” of attention. Also, in order to sustain a semblance in his mind of the relationship and to re-connect with his imagined love, it is vital to imagine and enact a new score. And this is possible in Mda’s novels’ symbolist import where connections are constructed between mortality and immortality, male and female, and human and animal bodies.

This is why the novel's characterisation of the whale caller is crucial, by virtue of outlining the force of gravity which is integral to shamanism, as already discussed above. According to the narrator, the whale caller assumed his trade after he had walked out of the "Church of the Sacred Kelp Horn". It is in this church where, as the anointed "Chief Horn Player" (Mda 2005: 8), he used to stir "the congregation into a climactic frenzy until they spoke in tongues" (9). But what turned him into a whale caller is his discovery that he was talented on two key ways. The first is that he was skilled in "blowing the sacred sounds of baptism" to the fascination of a whale (9, cf. 12), and this he proved when it responded by emitting "sonorous" "sounds" "transmitted in tremors through the waves and the rocks and the ground" (48-49). The second is that the mode of his blowing of notes is "sound echo location" (40) consistent with how the tide rises as a result of the "unison" pulling of the "sun and the moon" (37). It also appears that the whale caller confirmed his talent to himself, because he understood the tremors that the whale made in response to his music to be "massag[ing] his body until it feels completely relaxed" (49).

The novel foregrounds an intriguing nuance of the theme of gravity also in those episodes illuminated by the unmistakable ambience of the moon (2005: 37, 191). Predominantly, these are the scenes where the narrator describes the whale caller's blowing of his horn as being shrouded by the moon (192). In one seminal passage, the whale caller, upon observing Sharisha engaging in a sex orgy within the setting that he considers to be his horn's notes, is incited into a climax (84) and thereafter feels "like a father" to his image of Sharisha's cub (61). Essentially, the union between the man and the animal is visualised through dissonance – as in blues harmony. When the novel ends, the perceived marriage is presumed to be consummated in a modality that crosses different ontological dimensions, that is, when Sharisha beaches herself seemingly entranced by the whale caller's music. As it were, the discord results also from the apparent disruption of lunar rhythm or the apparent failure of Sharisha to return to the belly of the sea with its tidal fall.

As the storyteller notes, the deviation is consistent with blues music, famed for tweaking the conventional and hegemonic harmonies in minor chordal structures and interrupted cadences. In elaborating on the subject of dissonance, the novel sets up a parallel between the whale caller and Sharisha, on the one hand, and through the relationship between the whale caller and Saluni, his vagrant and drunk live-in lover, on the other hand. Essentially, the latter is an affair that the novel considers to be lacking in the kind of gravity that sustains and re-energises the cosmic space through counterpoint. This is why Saluni is shown battling for the whale caller's attention in terms that do not enunciate growth, freedom and alterity. For instance, she is presented as fighting for her "mating [territorial] rights" (Mda 2005: 175, cf. 199-200, 211, 236, 238, 240) with Sharisha, and to this

effect, she “flashes” and “moons” Sharisha (236). What Saluni is not aware of is that, to the whale caller, by contrast, she articulates an ethical dilemma, because she reminds him of his late mother’s smell (7, 94-95, 143, 208). In other words, while Saluni wants the whale caller for herself, he and Sharisha have each other in abeyance and in selfless continuity, as in gravity. This is why, focusing on the whale caller’s relationship with Saluni, the narrator describes them as ‘stars that have lost their way in the sky’ (254, cf. 255).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to argue that shamanism in Mda’s fiction is a performance of art that represents human beings within a broad and synchronised world and universe. The argument has been that the construction commences from the protagonists who visualise engravings and then interpret and enact them as directives towards networking with subjects in different positions. Using terms derived from two main scholarships on shamanism, as opposed to literary theory so pervasive in the scholarships on Mda, the article has submitted that shamanism is post-humanist and about memory. Here, memory is considered as being about defying the norm and the dominant discourse, reminiscent of carnival. In elaborating on memory, care has been to show that Mda’s fiction draws heavily from the shamanic rituals of the southern African indigenous peoples’ rituals, especially as they occur in such venues as the cave’s threshold, and along the shore, and through dance and the dream. The thesis has been that dance, and specifically water voyages, suggest “weightlessness”, reminiscent of the observation made by the scholars on the shamanic practices of the indigenous peoples of southern Africa. Thomas Dowson (1988: 120), in particular, notes that “trance” and “being underwater” conjure up the idea of “weightlessness”. Shamanism, which is about restoring harmony across the cosmos, takes place only when the subject is in a “weightless” mode such as during the trance-induced art performance and when in a dreamy state. It is in this disposition that the subject envisions encryptions and goes on to decipher and enact them. The proposition has been that these rites are essentially products of art, and also that it forges interconnections in liberal and exuberant photonic energy. The submission has also been that photonic energy is fundamentally about gravity, that is, the same that initiates harmony and counterpoints across the cosmic space. Within this process lies a poetic moment: where the subject perceives of his/her body through a dialogue of first person and third person perspectives.

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