“The Foot Does Not Sniff”: Imagining the Post-*anti*-apartheid Intellectual

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Summary

The South African literary institution is engaged in an examination of both its role in the history of apartheid and its potential futures. Originating in Edward Said’s search for an alternative to a “politics of blame”, this article considers recent attempts to explore the possibility of “secular interpretation” in (and of) the South African context. Leon de Kock’s trope of “the seam” and Mark Sanders’s notion of “complicity” are considered. We characterise both as postdialectical descriptions of the interconnections that define South African (multivalent) being and mark its inscription. Further, we suggest that their postdialectical turn, despite the authors’ primary concern with the history of identity and historiography, advocates a persuasive mode of scholarship for engaging contemporary South African identity.

Leaving the domain of scholarly debate, we turn to a literary representation of the contemporary South African intellectual. We look at the figure of Camagu in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000) in the belief that he, caught as he is between contending cults of interpretation, embodies something of the practice of secular critique sought by Said, De Kock, and Sanders. Through Camagu, we maintain, it is possible for us to describe aspects of the dilemma of the “post-*anti*-apartheid” intellectual as well as the potential of a nondialectical engagement with both our past and our present.

Opsomming

Die Suid-Afrikaanse literêre instelling is gemoeid met ‘n ondersoek na die rol van die geskiedenis van apartheid en sy potensiële toekomste. Hierdie artikel, wat sy oorsprong het in Said se soeke na ’n alternatief vir ‘n “politiek van blaam”, oorweeg resente pogings om die moontlikheid van “sekulêre interpretasie” in (en van) die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te ondersoek. Leon de Kock se uitdrukking, nl. die “las” (“the seam”) en Mark Sanders se idee van komplisiteit word oorweeg. Ons karakteriseer albei as postdialektiese beskrywings van die interkonneksies wat die Suid-Afrikaanse (multivalente) wese definieer en sy inskripsie kenskets. Verder suggereer ons dat hulle postdialektiese keerpunt, ten spyte van die outeurs se primêre saak met die geskiedenis van identiteit en historiografie, ‘n oortuigende modus van vakkundigheid voorstaan om die Suid-Afrikaanse identiteit aan te neem.

Ons laat vaar die wetenskaplike debat en wend ons tot ‘n literêre voorstelling van die kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse intellektueel. Ons beskou die figuur Camagu in Zakes Mda se *The Heart of Redness* (2000) in die mening dat hy, vasgevang soos hy is tussen strydende kultusse van interpretasie, iets van die praktyk van sekulêre kritiek wat deur Said, De Kock, en Sanders nagestreef word, verpersoonlik. Ons voer aan dat dit deur Camagu vir ons moontlik is om aspekte van die dilemma van die “post-*anti*-

apartheid" intellektueel en ook die potensiaal van 'n nie-dialektiese verbintenis met sowel ons verlede as ons hede te beskryf.

1 Paths Beyond Blame

> [The] difficulty with theories of exclusiveness or barriers and sides is that once admitted these polarities absolve and forgive a great deal more ignorance and demagogy than they enable knowledge.
>
> (Said 1986: 55)

In a panel discussion held at Skidmore College on 10 April 1985, Conor Cruise O'Brien (1986: 65-67) accused Edward Said of a particular indirection: a failure to establish in unambiguous terms the alternative to a prevailing habit of postcolonial intellectual foreclosure that Said calls "*a politics of blame*" (Said 1986: 45). It is worth returning, in spite of Said's subsequent elaboration of that alternative,[1] to the initial argument that O'Brien sees as failing to address "how intellectuals now live, how they express themselves, what freedom they have, what they are" (p. 65).

Having acknowledged that "there is an irreducible subjective core to human experience" (1986: 55), Said suggests that experience, because it is also historical and secular, remains "accessible to certain kinds of analysis, and ... is not exhausted by totalising theories marked and limited by doctrinal lines or by analytical constructs" (p. 55). Knowledge, in this view, cannot be constructed through exclusions that deny imaginative and intellectual access to other communities of meaning defined in terms of that holy trinity of post-colonial theory: culture, gender and race. This epistemological advocacy, while at one level it opens the possibility of reiterating imperial power relations and patriarchy, persuasively "acknowledges the massively knotted and complex history of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences" (p. 56). Blame and its effect – a blunt intellectual instrumentality – can only be overcome, Said suggests, through an epistemology based in recognising the constitutive role of "knots", "overlaps" and "interconnections". In order to avoid a choked affiliated scholarship (that achieves its authority through claims to an insular and exclusive experiential authenticity) we need to imagine relational histories, identities and practices of meaning without denying the inequalities of power and the histories of domination in which they are based and which they instantiate. Said's alternative to "a politics of blame", his *"more interesting politics of secular interpretation*" (p. 46), advocates that the postcolonial intellectual clarify and expand our understanding of colonialism and its ongoing expansion in the present *but without the ideologist's closure*. To avert this closure requires an imaginative engagement with relational knowledge; an acknowledgement that the common dyads coloniser/

colonist, Western/non-Western, white/black and so on express, rather than succinct entities, complex ontological interconnection. We are concerned in this article with particular ways, both theoretical and literary, in which this "knotting" is imagined in the South African context.

Recent scholarship, arguably freed from the pressing demand to resist apartheid and imbued with a spirit of retrospective reflection, has sought new relational models, new tropes, to take account of South Africa's distinct history of this folding. Despite the risk of simplification, we will summarise two attempts to imagine a route beyond South Africa's legacy of blame. The first is Leon de Kock's elaboration of the trope of the "seam" (2001: 263-298) and the second, Mark Sanders's (2002) notion of "complicity".[2] Each is a post-dialectical description facing simultaneously the apartheid past and, what Loren Kruger (2002: 35) describes as South Africa's current "post-*anti*-apartheid" condition. They trace the history of modalities of interconnection (the "knots" and "overlaps") and, in doing so, suggest persuasive archaeologies of our "post-*anti*" present. While making far more modest claims than the grand gestures of affiliated intellectualism of the South African materialist intelligentsia of the 1970s and 1980s, each is a timely intervention at this historical horizon. Also, both are trenchant postmodern critiques that suggest ways in which the reification of racial and cultural difference might be avoided. This is accomplished through imbricating their object of scrutiny and their hermeneutic method: they simultaneously unravel relational knots (in subjectivities, historiography and the literary imagination) while participating, through their interpretive practices, in the intellectual politics of interconnection. As will become increasingly apparent, though, neither De Kock nor Sanders discerns nor advocates a simplistic version of "liberal" syncretism (that consoling philosophy of comfortable combination).[3] The sites of conjunction they describe are unsettled, marked as they are by strain, contradiction and imbalance. In refusing any sense of mechanistically constitutive polarity, they also *unsettle* any logocentric epistemic complacency.

In De Kock's description the "sense of crisis attendant upon writing about 'South Africa'" (2001: 273) derives from an abiding awareness of its "unresolved heterogeneity" (p. 273). This heterogeneity induces a crisis of inscription he imagines as a compulsive return to "the seam", that "site of a joining together that also bears the mark of the suture" (p. 276).[4] The "effort of suturing the incommensurate is an attempt to close the gap that defines it as incommensurate" (2001: 276). It is a labour consistently marked by a crisis, the mark being *the seam itself*. Whether writers seek to inscribe a relational understanding of communities of meaning, to renounce cultural conjunction (as in the project of Afrikaner Nationalism) or to assert ontological interconnectedness, the suturing shows, no matter what attempt is made to achieve an effect of seamlessness. The seam, then, marks the strain of relational selfhood,

whether it manifests in the tactical recuperation of the coloniser's discourse by the colonised, the rupture entailed in being forced to express one's identity in another's terms, the tensions of translation, the forced localisation of purportedly universal subjectivities or attempts to use the language of difference as a barricade. We South Africans are, in De Kock's terms (2001: 288) "enfolded in the convergence of identity and difference" and, thus enfolded, we must necessarily resist analytical totalisations because, at the seam, we can barely tell ourselves apart from the very sutures of our making.

We can deduce from De Kock's careful elaboration of the "seam" and his earlier intellectual project, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (1996), an envisaged role for the postcolonial intellectual. To enter the representational logic of the seam, to unpick its suturing, is to discern South African "*modalities* of subjectivity" (1996: 102). That is, the intellectual should set out to establish the episteme from which the terms of reference at the seam derive (such as, in *Civilising Barbarians*, the forms of missionary discourse) and then trace meticulously the ways in which these constraining terms are adapted, occluded, translated, interpreted, evaluated, (re)imagined, manipulated and recombined. In other words, in terms of the intellectual scheme of Michel de Certeau (1984), we should engage the *tactical* level of knowledge practices, the particular pathways of narrative meaning along which subjectivities emerge. Rather than unquestioningly repeating the orthodoxies (the binaries and dyads) of the seam, an intellectual engaging the South African context should dwell on the pathways of emergent subjectivities and the ways in which they instantiate, cross or complicate their discursive context. At the same time, as De Kock makes abundantly clear (1996: 190-193), the intellectual should be mindful of an inevitable complicity that arises from the ways in which particular disciplines and scholarly projects (such as the teaching of *English*) have set the very terms of (post)colonial subjectivity. Many of the vulnerabilities we, as contemporary scholars, identify at the seam are the legacy of past configurations of power and knowledge deployed to manage a difference perceived as threatening. There is, given the legacy of the bookish throngs of history, little room for complacency.

Since this paper will proceed to an analysis of Zakes Mda's representation of an intellectual, Camagu, in *The Heart of Redness*, a novel based in the struggle between the Xhosa "Believers" (or traditionalists) and the "Unbelievers" (the advocates of modernity), it is expedient at this point to consider De Kock's discussion of the particular dilemma and contribution of the Xhosa convert Tiyo Soga (1829-1871). Williams (1983: 1) catalogues Soga's importance in the South African historical imaginary: he was "the first [black] ordained minister; the first black missionary among Africans; the first black translator of an English classic into an African language;[5] and the first to

formulate a philosophy of Black consciousness and even negritude".[6] His life, captured at the time in the narrative of imperial missionary romance as that of the "model Kaffir" (cf De Kock's discussion (1996: 171) of Chalmers's biography, *Tiyo Soga: A Page of South African Mission Work*, published in 1877), instantiates the tension between the precolonial Xhosa community of meaning and the version of Christian modernity that Scottish missionaries had brought to the seam of the Eastern Cape frontier. De Kock juxtaposes Soga's self-representation, in particular "the conflict between different 'strands' of the discursive text which constitute a *seeming* subjectivity" (1996: 177), with the appropriation of his biography in missionary narratives. While Soga wrestled with the matter of his own Xhosa loyalty and advocated (ironically in writing) the preservation of pre-colonial oral forms (1996: 179-183), Chalmers and others transformed his life into a narrative of teleological progression out of "The Polygamist's Village" (the title of the introductory chapter of Chalmers's work), through Lovedale Mission towards an enlightened Christian modernity, a condition understood and expressed as "civilisation". This narrative order is achieved by denying, in Spivak's terms (quoted in De Kock 1996: 177), that "that which *seems to operate as a* subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network ... of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language and so on". De Kock proceeds to unpick the various "knottings and configurations of these strands" (p. 177) in order to come to terms with Soga's "*seeming* subjectivity" (p. 177). Although never exploited specifically in the analysis, the homophone (seem – seam) is operative. The "paradoxical shuttling in his own recourse to available forms of textual apprehension" (p. 184) suggests that Soga's subjectivity existed in the "tortured space of difference" (p. 184) that De Kock was later to characterise as "the seam". Soga's ambivalent inscription of precolonial Xhosa culture and missionary conformity (p. 184) marks the tension of the seeming (and "seaming") subjectivity of one drawn into a particular version of textual, and hence ontological, strain. The modalities of this strain and De Kock's reading present simultaneously an object and method for intellectual analysis: engaging the seam.[7]

A second attempt to imagine South Africa's ontological enfolding is that developed at some length by Mark Sanders in his recent work, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (2002). Sanders distinguishes intellectual complicity in the narrow sense (the debates concerning Heidegger and De Man are paradigmatic) from "a complicity which, being the condition of possibility of such complicities ... makes it possible to speak, in the realm of action at least, of complicity in an extra-moral sense" (2002: 11). It is in terms of this general sense of complicity, derived etymologically – "a folded-together-ness (*com-pli-city*) in human being (or the being of being human)" – that Sanders (2002: 5) imagines the role of the intellectual.

> If the goal of the intellectual, by accepting a complicity in human-being as such, is to affirm complicity in a general sense when the loyalties that constitute complicities in the narrow sense threaten the project of human folded-togetherness, it follows that any theory of the intellectual and responsibility that privileges commitment or loyalty to a particular party or cause is a one-sided interpretation of an original impulse that regards such affiliation as a problem. Stated briefly, this is because the actors in question ultimately accept responsibility only in front of their own.
>
> (Sanders 2002: 8)

While at one level this recalls Mannheim's patently optimistic formulation of the "socially unattached intelligentsia" (cf Delanty 2001: 76), Sanders's particular studies, which track intellectual "interventions, marked by degrees of affirmation and disavowal, in a continuum of foldedness or responsibility-in-complicity" (2002: 11), suggest a compelling tropology for coming to terms with intellectual conduct under and after apartheid. Facing the complex and contradictory history of both apartheid and anti-apartheid scholarship, equipped with this notion of "extra-moral complicity", Sanders is though understandably guarded when it comes to advocating an "ethical" model for scholarship. Arguably, and pertinent to our purpose, he comes closest to an unabashed advocacy in his description of A.C. Jordan's reading of Tiyo Soga's journalism.

Two of Soga's articles published in *Indaba*, a "Xhosa – English newspaper issued by Lovedale" (De Kock 1996: 179), are relevant here and to later discussions. The first, "Christians and Chiefs" (*Amahretsu nenkosi zelilizwe*), published in June 1864 (reproduced in Williams 1983: 172 -175), considers the obligation on the part of "the followers of the ways of God" (Soga in Williams 1983: 173) to show respect to the "traditional" chiefs of the Xhosa and, though added somewhat in passing, "our chiefs who are White" (p. 173). It proposes primarily and in some detail an appropriate mode of behaviour that will protect Christian converts from being "criticised by the red people[8] and the chiefs for lack of respect for the chiefs and lack of honouring great people who are recognised as such by tribal customs and usage" (pp. 173-174). Soga's argument treads a difficult path: it points out the biblical injunction to acknowledge secular authority, explains and validates Xhosa greeting practices and the power relations they index and concludes by suggesting that demonstrations of respect to white people be offered only to "White people who deserve this" (p. 175). Thus, while at points eliding the difference between Xhosa and colonial authorities ("Our chiefs who are White and our chiefs who are Black ..." (p. 173)), Soga at once acknowledges the integrity of the social hierarchy of the amaXhosa and teaches practices that reinforce both its sense of nationhood and the legitimacy of the authority on which it depends.

The second related article, “Mission People and Red People” (*Amakolwa na-MaXhosa angaphandle*) appeared in *Indaba* in October of the same year (reproduced in Williams 1983: 175-177). Here Soga addresses the complaints of those “outside our circle [who are poorly treated] when they are occasionally among us” (Soga in Williams 1983: 175-176). It relates an encounter with a man forced to sleep in the open after being driven away from various homes at a mission station. Through this figure of the excluded stranger, Soga allegorises a fundamental ethical failure of the converted and it is revealingly to a hybrid combination of the Xhosa principles of community and hospitality and Christian doctrine that he turns to develop an alternative. He concludes his argument:

> The Xhosas have a saying that the foot does not sniff, that is, you may land where you never thought you would ever be. So you never know whether some day you may be overtaken by night near homes of people you drive away from yours. You may not know that some day perhaps you may be compelled by hunger to ask food from the same people you refuse to give hospitality to. Remember therefore that if you are not kind to strangers who come from the red villages you may be failing to fulfil the law of your Master which says, “Do not be forgetful to entertain strangers”.
>
> (Soga in Williams 1983: 177)

It is Soga’s ethical alternative that A. C. Jordan, the literary scholar whose articles are collected as the seminal text *Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (1973), generalises as “ubuntu” (a term not used by Soga) and it is on this version of human foldedness that we need to dwell.

Sanders points out that, in Jordan’s argument, “ubuntu” “expresses a relation to the stranger, to the one not one’s own, to the one not *of* one’s own, to the one who has come to be treated as one not one’s own” (Sanders 2002: 125). Hospitality, then, is necessary because commonality *has already* been denied; ubuntu is known only in and through its loss, as an acknowledgement of a complicity (in the general sense of folded being) that has been and is being denied. Inasmuch as ubuntu might be considered a general ethical imperative (an ethics of responsibility) it is also an “ethics of human reciprocity that shows there is no ethics that is not also against apartheid” (Sanders 2002:125). “To identify a loss of ubuntu is thus to identify the evil, the untruth even, of apartheid in all its forms” (p. 125). Sanders develops the argument further: ubuntu is, in incorporating the excluded, a way of managing transition from one structure of difference (or differentiation) to another (p. 128). “If the disasters of the past are to be avoided, [he cautions us] the figure of the stranger must be continually reinvented” (p. 129).

While it seems obvious that ubuntu is an affective ethical project that acknowledges the foldedness of human being, it may be less obvious that it can be interpreted as proposing a range of intellectual tactics we might juxtapose with Said's "politics of blame". The critical foreclosure entailed in affiliation (complicity in the narrow sense) denies the stranger or sets out to recuperate his being to its orthodoxy. A logical consequence of affiliation is the attempt to drag the outsider towards a paradigmatic conformity. Any intellectual engagement that denies the "possibility and risk" embodied by the stranger (Sanders 2002: 129), in other words that *simply* reiterates and reinforces the dyads of the seam (traditional/modern, black/white, colonised/coloniser and so on) without acknowledging their being sutured together, is guilty of affective *and* intellectual foreclosure. At an obvious level, we might conclude, ubuntu suggests an ethics of intellectual conduct, a mode of engagement committed to reciprocation and inclusiveness. It also suggests, though, an epistemology of acknowledged complicity, of the seam. Perhaps it is only at the seam, facing the crisis of inscription it marks, that blame has less place than mutual recognition.

2 The Intellectual Turn in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

Though differently approached, both De Kock and Sanders see Tiyo Soga's discourse as manifesting the strain between Xhosa precolonial subjectivity and colonial Christian orthodoxy. In order to consider a "post-*anti*-apartheid" version of this strain, we might usefully turn to another interstitial, and in this instance fictional, figure, Camagu, the intellectual in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*. We will demonstrate that Camagu embodies, in certain respects at least, Said's "politics of secular criticism" in a context fashioned from and which persistently reiterates a "politics of blame". He engages a radically divided context, refuses the ready consolations of affiliation, and, having heard and been temporarily swayed by the rhetoric of each side (first the Unbelievers and then the Believers), sutures together a complex affective and intellectual advocacy *at the seam*. In persuasive respects, Camagu's intellectual lineage stretches back to Tiyo Soga. Engaging the tension between "tradition" and modernity, between pre- and (post)colonial forms of knowledge and subjectivity, both Soga and Camagu acknowledge a general and historical human complicity. This acknowledgment allows each to imagine a persuasive relational solution to, what we might consider, the epistemological and ethical dilemma of dyadic or binary thought and the blame to which it gives rise.

We first encounter Camagu as he inadvertently wanders into the midst of a wake atop the Hillbrow skyscraper in which he lives. He has been back in South Africa since the election in 1994 (the novel is set in 1998), having been

in exile in the United States since his family's flight in the 1960s. A state of ennui, a prevailing sense of homelessness, has settled on Camagu: he has been forced, despite possessing a doctorate in communication and economic development, into the comparatively lowly occupation of teaching at a "trade school" since he is prepared to accept neither a token affirmative action appointment in the private sector nor to adopt the role of sycophant that seems to be necessary to secure employment in the increasingly nepotistic government, among the "Aristocrats of the Revolution" (Mda 2000: 31-34). When Camagu attempts to join in the toyi-toyi at the wake, his "steps are rather awkward" (p. 31); he has "never learned the freedom dance" invented after his departure (p. 31). It is this sense of being trapped in an exilic condition, of being a stranger in his own land, which has driven Camagu to plan his return to New York. However, he impulsively chooses another journey. He finds himself enchanted by a beautiful young woman singing hymns in honour of her dead homeboy at the wake.

> He becomes breathless when he thinks of her. He is ashamed that the pangs of his famous lust are attacking him on such a solemn occasion. But quickly he decides it is not lust. Otherwise parts of his body would be running amok. No, he does not think of her in those terms. She is more like a spirit that can comfort him and heal his pain. A mothering spirit. And this alarms him, for he has never thought of any woman like that before. After all, she is a stranger with whom he has not exchanged a single word.
>
> (Mda 2000: 30)

Thus enraptured, he chooses to follow the "hearthly one" (2000: 39), NomaRussia, to the village of Qolorha, the birthplace of Nongqawuse, the girl-prophet whose prophesies led to the cataclysmic cattle-killing of 1856-1857.

Mda's narrative zig-zags between the history of that cataclysmic time[9] and its legacy: the contemporary division of the amaXhosa village into two sects, the Believers (who are descendants of the followers of Nongqawuse) and the Unbelievers (who opposed the cattle-killing). The two sects take their lineage from the ancestral twins, Twin and Twin-Twin, the former having, along with the majority of the amaXhosa in the Eastern Cape, killed his cattle in the misguided belief that this act would purify the land of witchcraft and corruption, rid it of the white colonisers and allow the ancestors to arise and return to the realm of the living. Twin-Twin, having been brutally whipped for supposed witchcraft during Mlanjeni's purges (pp. 16-17), places little store by prophets and rejects Nongqawuse's teaching out of hand. Thus is the rupture initiated in "the heart of redness". In Mda's imaginative extrapolation of this history, the dyad of Belief/Unbelief ceases to exist for the time of the "Middle Generations" (from the mid-1850s until the demise of apartheid)

during which "people were more concerned with surviving and overcoming their oppression" (p. 4). Now, hundred and fifty years later, the Cults have been reinvented, headed respectively by Zim (the believing descendant of Twin) and Bhonco (the unbelieving descendant of Twin-Twin). It is to a Qolorha thus divided that Camagu journeys.

As he approaches Qolorha, Camagu is "pleased to see that there are some people [there] who still wear isiXhosa costume" (2000: 61). There are though only few who do so.

> It is sad, he thinks, that when nations of the world wear their costumes with pride, the amaXhosa people despise theirs. They were taught by the missionaries that it is a sign of civilisation, of ubugqobhoka, to despise isikhakha as the clothing of the amaqaba – those who have not seen the light and who still smear themselves with red ochre.
>
> (Mda 2000: 61)

When Camagu, the "stranger from Johannesburg" (Mda 2000: 67), is welcomed by Bhonco to the feast celebrating his daughter's promotion to the position of school principal, he comes to realise the disputed significance of this traditional dress. Both Bhonco and the newly promoted Xoliswa Ximiya talk of the "redness of unenlightenment" (p. 79) and in the opinion of both the isikhaka shirt itself represents this "backwardness". Consequently, they have embarked on a systematic campaign to convince Bhonco's wife, NoPetticoat, to "do away with this prided isiXhosa costume" (p. 79). The Unbelievers, as Camagu comes to realise, are fervent advocates of modernity who accept the definitions of "civilisation" and "barbarism" taught by the missionaries. To the Unbelievers the signifiers of "redness" are no more than an embarrassing obstruction to progress. Attacking the Believers, an elder declares, "They want us to remain in our wildness! ... To remain red all our lives! To stay in the darkness of redness!" (p. 79).

At first Camagu is attracted to the rationality of Xoliswa Ximiya and is convinced by her spirited defence of a proposed scheme to build a casino in Qolorha. "We want to get rid of this bush which is a sign of our uncivilised state. We want developers to come and build the gambling city that will bring money to this community. That will bring modernity to our lives, and will rid us of our redness" (p. 105). Camagu, though, finds himself increasingly in two minds. "He has tried to observe the patterns of believing and unbelieving in this village, to try to make sense of them. And they remain beyond his comprehension" (p. 105). His sense of uncertain prevarication, of straddling two orders of meaning and belief, is brought home the moment he finds a brown snake in his bed at the Blue Flamingo Hotel. Much to the surprise of the assembled hotel workers, Camagu will not allow them to kill the snake. He

announces, "This is not just any snake. This is Majola" (p. 112). Majola, the brown mole snake, is the totem of the amaMpondomise clan to which Camagu belongs. The workers are awed at Camagu's attachment to tradition: they "did not expect a man with such great education, a man who has lived in the lands of the white people for thirty years, to have such respect for the customs of his people" (pp. 112-113). "He is indeed [they conclude] a man worthy of their respect" (p. 113).

When Zim, the leader of the Cult of Believers accuses Camagu of wooing Xoliswa Ximiya and hence of being prospectively "Bhonco's son-in-law" (p. 135), Camagu protests: "I am not anyone's son-in-law .... And I am not an Unbeliever. I am not a Believer either. I don't want to be dragged into your quarrels" (p. 135). It is this interstitial position that first earns Camagu the respect of the hotel workers and later becomes integral to his selfhood and role in the community of Qolorha. The counterintuitive combination of a doctorate in communication and development and a belief in Majola (an attachment to redness) represents something beyond the modality of Belief/Unbelief that prevails in Qolorha. There are other ways in which Camagu's progress in the novel unsettles the modality. Although he is an embodiment of modernity (having lived and been educated in New York), his existential seduction by the "mother spirit" NomaRussia and his growing attachment to Qukezwa, the highly libidinal daughter of Zim, show that Camagu is closed to neither the force of desire nor forms of affective memory. NomaRussia and Qukezwa, who in many respects is presented as a contemporary manifestation of the spirit of Nongqawuse, are figures of erotic attachment that remind Camagu of the limits of rational cognition. It is as if, dragged into a dream-world of the erotic imaginary, he crosses not only into a different order of being, but also into a visceral awareness of the immanence and importance of history. Mda renders Camagu's desire, then, as a route to learning, to reaching beyond the constraints of "enlightenment" towards an almost somatic recognition of both repressed desire and unspeakable trauma (the memory of the cattle-killing and the brutality of apartheid). It is as if the semiotic eruptions he experiences, which carry with them historical affect, destroy any complacency he might derive from modernity's supposed mastery of the order of knowledge. Camagu becomes increasingly aware, as the veil of rationality is lifted, of a propulsive *lack of understanding*, which simultaneously frees him from the structures of belief (and unbelief) that seek his affiliation. Stated differently, he overcomes the binaries of logocentric thought embodied by the Cults. He emerges, haphazardly, as an intellectual subjectivity by criss-crossing the seam at which rationality is purportedly divided from irrationality, reason from emotion, civilisation from barbarism, the semiotic from the symbolic, tradition from modernity, faith from knowledge and so on. It is, we might go so far as to say, his almost unintentional discovery of a *zig-zag* epistemology that comes, in

constituting his subjectivity, to comprise his emerging relational ontology.

As Camagu surpasses the choked rationality and self-serving politics of Xoliswa Ximiya and confronts the limits of Qukezwa's impulsiveness, he enters a condition of indeterminacy, of epistemic nomadism in which he can neither write off nor evade the "other", but is forced rather to acknowledge the interplay between rationality and that which it, by its very definition, suppresses. Among other expressions of affect, these include a vivid historical imagination, the constitutive role of desire and the necessary centrality of empathy in our understanding. It becomes clear that Camagu is fascinated by the amaThwa trance dance that the Unbelievers use to invoke grief "by engaging in a memory ritual" (p. 83) because it represents an instance of the relational ontology he is beginning to experience. Even the fervent opponents of belief deploy a "traditional" mechanism through which they can keep the traumatic history of the cattle-killing and the Middle Generations alive. It is as if no secular solution can keep the suffering of the amaXhosa sufficiently immanent. While the Unbelievers attempt publicly to overlook their lapse into faith in the face of history, Camagu follows this seeming contradiction to its necessary conclusion.

As the novel proceeds, a somewhat unlikely alliance develops between Camagu and John Dalton, the white initiate into the ways of the amaXhosa. Dalton is the store owner in Qolorha whose ancestor killed and boiled the head of Xixiya, the father of Twin and Twin-Twin. Both men, unlike the Believers and Unbelievers who look to the past to establish their doctrinal subjectivities, look to the future in an attempt to modify the constraints of the past. While each Cult imagines only one possibility – alternatively building the casino in the interests of progress or not building the casino in the interests of preserving tradition – Dalton and Camagu seek more creative forms of reconciliation. Dalton advocates the construction of a "cultural village", inducing the ire of Xoliswa Ximiya who fears the reduction of the amaXhosa to a spectacle of "primitive" custom. Further, as Camagu trenchantly points out to Dalton, "Real people in today's South Africa don't lead the life that is seen in cultural villages" (p. 285). Camagu's alternative is to advocate a form of sustainable ecological tourism based in both the judicious use of the natural resources in the area and educating visitors about its historical significance. He realises that the importance of Nongqawuse is such that "this place of miracles" (p. 277) should be declared a national heritage site (p. 233). A catastrophic past is, through Camagu's intellectual agency, turned to the community's salvation. Tradition in this view is not a fixed range of practices such as those Dalton seeks to stage but a salient cultural memory that can be deployed in the present in the interests of both self-representation and preservation. It appears, then, that Camagu's recognition of his own *seaming* identity comes to constitute the basis of his political advocacy, of his cultural and historical vision. His plan,

that will result in Xoliswa Ximiya leaving Qolorha since she has "lost the battle for the soul of the village and the love of Camagu" (p. 302), embodies a persuasive mutability of classification and understanding in the face of the anachronistic hostilities that prevail in the village.

There are, as we have seen, several levels at which Camagu acknowledges "knots", "overlaps" and interconnections", thereby bypassing the politics of blame intrinsic to the modality of Belief/Unbelief. In particular, though, he rejects the totalising theories on which the dyad is based by resisting any unexamined recourse to *modernity* and *tradition* as transcendental signifiers. For it is this hermeneutic turn to a transcendental value and its capacity to stabilise systems of belief and unbelief, that is the basis of both intellectual affiliation and doctrinal fixity – in Qolorha as elsewhere. Camagu's recognition of "overlapping territories and intertwined histories" (Said 1994: 1), of the relational processes of identity, keeps his interpretation "secular" (in the sense suggested by Said). And it is the commitment to secularity that protects him from being dragged into intellectual compliance with the orthodoxies of either of the competing Cults. It is significant in this, of course, that Camagu is a *stranger* in Qolorha. He is shown hospitality by both Bhonco of the Unbelievers and Zim of the Believers. It is only through this hospitality, their sense of ubuntu, that the Cults are inadvertently dragged from behind the barricades of their convictions. Mda's vision of the potential of secular intellectual intervention, then, relies on an acknowledgement of foldedness. Without ubuntu, without welcoming those "outside our circle" (Soga in Williams 1983: 175), there is no hope of overcoming the constitutive divisions of the past.

In Mda's vision, it is up to the intellectual to make an effort to suture the incommensurate even though a seam of incommensurability marks that labour (De Kock 2001: 276). At one point, asked about a particular ritual, Camagu answers the insistence of the participants: "We'll improvise" (Mda 2000: 280). It is this creative engagement with the potential of the seam that informs Camagu's politics of reconciliation and which is made possible by his individual relational pathway of becoming. As we try to imagine intellectual conduct in our "post-*anti*" condition, as the Cults of Believers and Unbelievers come to seem increasingly anachronistic, Camagu's tactics of selfhood and his practice of advocacy bear thinking about. We need to remind ourselves, though, that Camagu constantly experiences the strain of suturing. But that strain, like the presence of the seam itself, marks not our failure but the recognition of our difference (from others and ourselves). "We", as De Kock points out in relation to South African identity (De Kock 2001: 289), is a tenuously created category stitched together with deep ambivalences of signification". It is, though, only in improvising, from the consonance and dissonance of our history, that "we" can sound out how our future might be a sustainable development using the resources of both our present and our past.

3 "The Foot Does Not Sniff"

Soga's translation of the Xhosa idiom, we might recall, suggests that "you may land where you never thought you would ever be" (Soga in Williams 1983: 177). Whether Said's secular criticism, De Kock's seam or Sanders's complicity, postcolonial intellectuals are seeking ways out of the totalising theories of interpretation that foreclose debate by prohibiting access to other communities of meaning. Blame, all would concur, causes an intellectual impasse because it derives from undervaluing interconnectedness and perpetuates a blunt affiliated intellectualism. It makes enquiry instrumental. We need, it follows, the possibility that our intellectual apparatus will be taken by surprise, that a "stranger" will arrive in its midst and disrupt its otherwise relentless efficiency in (re)inscribing difference. Only by addressing ourselves to the interstitial spaces between codes of orthodoxy can we imagine the domain and role of this stranger. We might remind ourselves at this juncture of Sanders's encapsulation of A.C. Jordan's philosophy: "If the disasters of the past are to be avoided, the figure of the stranger must be continually reinvented" (2002: 129). Mda's stranger, Camagu, who embodies a persuasive postdialectical (post-*anti*-apartheid) mode of secular intellectual politics, represents one such reinvention.

Notes

1. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), encapsulated in the title of the first chapter, "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories" (pp. 1–72), can be read as a systematic presentation and enactment of an intellectual complicity in counterpoint to the cultural and racial essentialisation on which "a politics of blame" depends.

2. A third is Ashraf Jamal's *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (2002) a postdialectical engagement with the binaries that have so persistently dominated South African cultural and literary studies. In countering both instrumental versions of knowledge and affiliated intellectualism, this study persuasively imagines an interstitial space in which South African culture might surmount the inhibiting economy to which it is condemned by dialectical thought. In this, I believe, *Predicaments of Culture*, may become a central contribution to the emerging scholarship seeking at once a retrospective understanding of the textuality of apartheid and, simultaneously, elaborating a new range of terms (or tropes) to imagine the persistent "middle ground" of South Africa's endlessly contradictory epistemic inheritance.

3. For a useful, concise account of the history of intellectual affiliation, constructions of critical freedom in Mannhein and Gamsci and the conservative backlash, see Gerard Delanty (2001: 74–87).

4. De Kock takes the idea of the "seam" from Noël Mostert's magnificent history of the Eastern Cape, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (1992). The significance of this emerges later in this paper.

5. Tiyo Soga translated the first part of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into Xhosa.

6. De Kock argues convincingly that, given Soga's "explicit missionary bias and his belief in the origin of Africans as "the sons of Ham" (see Soga's journal entry, 25 April 1865, in Williams …" (1996: 182), that this seems rather to force the point.

7. This raises the matter of reflexivity since it suggests that the very terms of analysis are themselves implicated in the constitution of the object of attention. This acknowledges an inevitable complicity discussed later in this argument.

8. "Redness" is a signifier of Xhosa tradition generally deriving from the ochre body paint worn by the members of various clans. Washing off the paint is often iconographic of either conversion to Christianity or accepting the advent of modernity. It is not overstating the case to suggest, then, that since "redness" functions as both narrative icon and index; it becomes a metasignifier (a transcendental signifier) of the cultural locatedness.

9. A masterly retelling of this history, and a text to which Mda is clearly deeply indebted, is J. B. Peires *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1956-1957* (1989).

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