

Deconstructing Empire in Joseph Conrad and Zakes Mda¹

Harry Sewlall

Summary

The publication of Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* in 2000, almost a century after Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is not only redolent of its precursor in a titular sense, but also in its contingent and contiguous themes. Viewed from a postcolonial/postmodern perspective, both texts may be regarded as subversive offerings which disrupt colonial configurations of subjectivity. The degree to which Conrad and Mda succeed in deconstructing empire depends on the conditions of the historical production of their respective texts. Located within a modernist sensibility, *Heart of Darkness*, lacking the deictic in Mda's title, captures a historical moment of existential crisis in a manner that is simultaneously disruptive of colonial subjectivity and complicit with it, although in a characteristically ambiguous and inconclusive way. Set in the next millennium, *The Heart of Redness* continues the task of destabilising empire begun by Conrad, but this time through a revisionist reading of history, combining elements of realism with magic. Whilst Mda's deconstruction of Western colonialism is unambiguous owing to the writer's positioning in a postapartheid South Africa, his novel sardonically problematises another brand of colonialism, that of the enriched elite in government structures.

Opsomming

Die publikasie van Zakes Mda se *The Heart of Redness* in 2000, bykans 'n eeu na Conrad se *Heart of Darkness*, herinner nie alleen aan sy voorganger in 'n titulêre sin nie, maar ook aan sy kontingente en aanliggende temas. Vanuit 'n post-koloniale/post-moderne perspektief kan albei tekste beskou word as subversiewe aanbiedings wat koloniale konfigurasies van subjektiwiteit ontwig. Die mate waarin Conrad en Mda daarin slaag om empire te dekonstrueer hang af van die omstandighede van die historiese produksie van hulle onderskeie tekste. Gelokaliseer in 'n modernistiese ontvanklikheid, en by gebreke aan die deiktiese in Mda se titel, gee *Heart of Darkness* 'n historiese moment van eksistensiële krisis weer op 'n wyse wat koloniale subjektiwiteit terselfdertyd omvergooi en ook daaraan aandadig is, ofskoon op 'n kenmerkend dubbelsinnige en onoortuigende manier. Geplaas in die volgende millennium, sit *The Heart of Redness* die taak voort wat deur deur Conrad begin is om empire te destabiliseer – maar hierdie keer deur 'n revisionistiese lees van geskiedenis, en deur elemente van realisme en die magiese te kombineer. Waar Mda se dekonstruksie van Westerse kolonialisme ondubbelsinnig is as gevolg van sy plasing in 'n postapartheid Suid-Afrika, problematiseer sy roman sardonies 'n ander skandteken van kolonialisme, dié van die verrykte elite in regeringstrukture.

As tales about Africa, Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* are located at the intersections of ethical discourses that were inseparable from the European colonising project of the late nineteenth century. What links these two stories is the common theme of imperialism that provides the backdrop for the exploration of subjectivity within the context of what Mary Louise Pratt has termed "contact zones" (Pratt 1992: 4), which are social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination. Whilst Mda acknowledges his intertextual debt to Jeff Peires's *The Dead Will Arise* in his dedication, he does not mention Conrad's famous, if not beleaguered text at all. However, the resonances between *Heart of Darkness* and Mda's text are more than coincidental. J.U. Jacobs (2002: 228) discerns in Mda's title an "obvious allusion" to Conrad's text which requires that Mda be read in the light of Conrad's treatment of European colonisation of Africa. The inclusion of a deictic and a change of a morpheme results in the title *The Heart of Redness*, where darkness is substituted by the contingency of redness, and the deictic "the" imparts a degree of specificity that is lacking in Conrad's amorphous, all-pervasive and ominous title, *Heart of Darkness*. Apart from the echoes in the titles, there are other issues, both contingent and contiguous, which strengthen the intertextual fabric of these texts.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which might be regarded as the Ur-text of colonial and countercolonial discourse, made its first appearance in serialised form in *Blackwood's Magazine* between Feb-April 1899 (Baines 1959: 455). Frances B. Singh, who has written on the colonialistic bias in Conrad's novella, begins her essay in a manner reminiscent of Jane Austen: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that *Heart of Darkness* is one of the most powerful indictments of colonialism ever written" (Singh 1988: 268). However, this view has also been universally contested in the last three decades, as would be addressed briefly later. In 1876, twenty-five years before the novella was serialised, King Leopold II of Belgium, who had been looking for an empire of his own, announced his imperial ambitions at a conference of the International Association for the Suppression of Slavery and the Opening up of Central Africa held in Brussels: "To open to civilization the only area of our globe to which it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the gloom which hangs over entire races, constitutes, if I may dare to put it in this way, a Crusade worthy of this century of progress" (Watt 1980: 139). Thus was legitimised the colonisation of the Congo by Belgium. According to Ian Watt, Leopold's professed concern for free trade and the abolition of slavery was merely propaganda to gain international recognition of his position as sovereign of the Independent State of the Congo, a position which was ratified by the Berlin Conference of 1885. *Heart of Darkness* is an early expression of the worldwide revulsion from the horrors of Leopold's exploitation of the Congo which

Joseph Conrad had visited in 1890.

The *Heart of Redness* by Zakes Mda was published in 2000, a century after Conrad's pioneering work. As in Conrad's text which derives its significance from a historical context, the plot of Mda's novel is animated by the historical event of 1857 in the Eastern Cape, an event which old South African school history books refer to as "The National Suicide" of the amaXhosa (Fowler & Smit [s.a]: 165). Recent academic texts seem to prefer the term "cattle-killing" when referring to this tragic episode, which, according to Davenport and Saunders resulted "when, following the prophecy of a young girl, Nongquwuse, the Xhosa people slaughtered their stock and destroyed their crops in the expectation of the resurrection of ancestral spirits, accompanied by the provision of food from heaven (Davenport & Saunders [1977]2000: 142). Davenport and Saunders maintain that whilst there was a correlation between the cattle-killing and a serious outbreak of lung disease among the cattle in 1855, the belief in the prophecy of Nongquwuse was primarily a millenarian movement of passionate intensity when the Xhosa looked in desperation to the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead – a notion alien to Xhosa cosmology – as to an appeal to a stronger deity. Fowler and Smit argue that the National Suicide provided more room for Sir George Grey's colonising schemes as he proceeded to confiscate the land of the chiefs and divided them into locations for the settlement of whites (Fowler & Smit [s.a]: 165). Davenport and Saunders insist that the cattle-killing was not a plot by Grey to break Xhosa power, though he did block relief to the destitute and took advantage of the tragedy to open Xhosaland to white settlement (Davenport & Saunders [1977] 2000: 142).

Sir George Grey, who is mockingly referred to as "The Man Who Named Ten Rivers" in Mda's novel, was the Governor of the Cape from 1854 to 1861. Opinions about his civilising and colonial mission are sharply divided, both amongst historians as well as the characters in the text. According to one historical source, Grey's policy was to integrate black and white on the frontier; to make the Xhosa "a part of ourselves, with a common faith and common interests, useful servants, consumers of our goods, contributors to our revenue" (quoted in Davenport & Saunders [1977]2000: 141). To this end the Xhosa would be taught the Christian religion and the arts of European farming, as well as given an understanding of the white man's law. His attempt to apply the land policy he had developed in New Zealand where land was plentiful, was unwisely applied to the Eastern Cape frontier where his plans to penetrate tribal lands with white-owned farms were resented as were his plans to substitute European for traditional cultural values. With regard to the civilising mission of the colonists, Leon de Kock postulates that the object of literacy was to place "English" and the values embedded in it at the apex of "civilization", and this was achieved by reducing the language of the Other such as

Xhosa into a written orthography so that the Bible could be translated into the semiology of a previous oral culture (De Kock 1996: 65).

The historical debate over Grey's so-called humanitarian motives is rendered into the fictionalised dialectic of *The Heart of Redness* as the following argument between Twin-Twin and two other Unbelievers illustrates (an "Unbeliever" does not believe in prophecies and miracle-making, or thaumaturgy):

"Don't tell me about The Man Who Named Ten Rivers!" said Twin-Twin. "Like all the others he is a thief. Just as he stole the land of the people of countries across the seas, he stole the land of the amaXhosa and gave it to the amaMfengu. He stole more of our land to settle more of his people!"

Both Ned and Mjuza were up in Grey's defence. Grey was different from former governors they said. Grey was a friend of the amaXhosa. Grey was a great reader of the bible – the big book that talked about the true salvation of the true god. Grey believed that all men were equal – well, almost equal – as long as they adopted a civilized mode of dress and decent habits The land that he had grabbed in the process was really a very small price to pay for the wonderful gift of civilization.

(Mda 2000: 96)

The foregoing account of the argument amongst the Unbelievers is reflective of Mda's satiric mode of subverting empire, whether it is in direct speech, as when Twin-Twin speaks, or whether it is in the indirect form which Jeremy Hawthorn has identified as Free Indirect Discourse (Hawthorn 1990). The passage in question is also an index to the novel's debate around the issues of alterities such as us/them, Believers/Unbelievers, and the effects of colonisation on the present generation of Xhosas living in the Eastern Cape. The argument also foregrounds the debate over the issue of culture and civilisation, or the discourse of nature versus nurture, a subject that is fraught with postcolonial relevance. There is no mistaking the mockery in the authorial voice which serves to deconstruct the very notion of a civilisation predicated on some "big book" called the "bible", a "true god" and a "civilized mode of dress and decent habits". Robert Young (1995: 30-31) reminds us that the term "culture", deriving from the Latin word *cultura* and *colere*, had a range of meanings such as inhabit, cultivate, attend, protect, honour and worship. The idea of worship was assumed by Christianity, while the idea of inhabit, from the Latin word *colonus* meaning a "farm", came to denote a colony. Hence, posits Young, the notion of colonisation is at the heart of the meaning of culture. Edward Said ([1993]1994: xiii) argues that when the term culture modulates into ideas of nation, state and identity, it becomes aggressively associated with us and them and almost always with some degree of xenopho-

bia. From this point on it becomes an easy step to equate culture with civilisation, more especially Western civilisation, and nature with anarchy, a discourse which was underpinned by Matthew Arnold's treatise "Culture and Anarchy", a foundation text on cultural theory in the late nineteenth century when the zeal of British colonisation reached unprecedented heights. The postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha has trenchantly analysed the phenomenon of colonial discourse as an apparatus of power in one of his early writings:

Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a "subject peoples" through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.

(Bhabha 1986: 154)

Unlike Conrad's highly condensed fictionalised documentary, Mda's offering is almost three times the length of *Heart of Darkness*, set against the historical backdrop of the cattle-killing of 1857, which off-sets the present in which the descendants of the Believers and the Unbelievers play out the tensions enacted by their ancestors almost hundred and fifty years ago. With its vast canvas of subjects, *The Heart of Redness* is complicated by its array of personae who embody a polyphony of voices and viewpoints on issues such as thaumaturgy, tradition and modernity, belief and unbelief. To claim that Mda's novel is more ambitious in scope, which it is, is not to diminish the stature of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, with its own complexities which are integral to its location of darkness, representing the ultimate contingency that baffles understanding.

Cedric Watts has said of Conrad that politically he was "janiform" (Watts [1982]1993: 55). If his persona, Marlow, sometimes functions as his ventriloquist, then the ambivalent position occupied by Marlow must be acknowledged. Discussions of *Heart of Darkness* in the last three decades have been characterised by passionate attacks from some sources, energetic defences by aficionados of Conrad, and mediatory positions taken by others. All these debates, of course, stem mainly from the accusation by Chinua Achebe in 1975 that Conrad was a "thoroughgoing racist" (Achebe 1988: 257) and in 1977, "a bloody racist" (Achebe 1990: 124). Achebe's indictment, which includes charges of xenophobia and anti-Semitism, has not only helped propel Conrad into the popular imagination, but also into the twenty-first century which continues to valorise the writer, if not for anything else, then at least for his powerful critique of imperialism especially in *Heart of Darkness*, as exempli-

fied in the following oft-quoted passage:

They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to

(Conrad [1902]1927: 50-51)

This sustained quote has its own justification for it encapsulates the inherent, if not damning ambiguity that Cedric Watts must have had in mind when he labelled Conrad as politically “janiform”. The ambiguity in Conrad’s critique arises from Marlow’s explicit defence of British colonialism and administration, in contrast to that of the Belgians. This gesture is sometimes construed as Conrad’s attempt to placate the British public who would be his readers. No less an admirer of Conrad than Edward Said himself has articulated such a view. Referring to *Nostramo*, Said says that Conrad treats the local populations with the same pitying contempt and exoticism he reserves for African Blacks and South East Asian peasants: “In the end, Conrad’s audience was European, and his fiction had the effect not of challenging but of confirming that fact and consolidating consciousness of it, even though paradoxically his own corrosive scepticism was thereby released” (Said [1993]1994: 200). To employ Said’s own term, a contrapuntal reading might be found in the argument of Terry Collits (1994: 68) who suggests that the prejudice-ridden liberalism of the Marlow character-narrator encloses within its own strict limits the liberal-humanist ideology underpinning European imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century.

Some feminist critics of *Heart of Darkness* have been rather intransigent. Marianna Torgovnick (1990: 145) says that she was a bit repelled every time she read the book, but never more so than in her last reading when she looked at the writer’s portrayal of the natives and Kurtz’s African mistress in particular. She poses the question: “[W]hy is the woman an embodiment of Africa? What gives Marlow the right (and why does Conrad not challenge this right?) to make this woman so portentous a symbol?” (p. 155). Basically, Torgovnick is offended at the “West’s fascination with the primitive” (p. 157) and Conrad in her view is just another male culprit who perpetuates this

tradition. Padmini Mongia (2001: 159) insists that Achebe did ask the right questions and it is not necessary for critics (males in particular) to come to Conrad's defence. She asks, "What is at stake if we agreed with Achebe that Conrad was a racist?" It would be tempting to explore this debate but it would be beyond the parameters of this study. To take the controversy over Conrad's alleged racism into injury time, let me conclude with a recent rebuttal by Peter Firchow and a comment of my own. To Torgovnick's charge that Conrad's African woman is presented as all body and inchoate emotion (1990: 147), Firchow says that such an accusation is, "to put it bluntly, absurd, for if anyone in the whole story is noble and fearless, or powerfully motivated by a sharply focussed and indomitable will, then it is the Black Amazon" (Firchow 2000: 125). With regard to Mongia's question, it is my view that there is much at stake to assume that Conrad was a racist based simply on what Achebe says. Whilst Achebe was right in raising the issues of race and racism at a time when there was much ignorance in American academia with regard to Africa, it would be erroneous to label Conrad a racist on the basis of a (mis)reading of one text notwithstanding the vast body of evidence of a contrary nature in the writer's work as a whole, especially the early novels where he deals with the subject of interracial sex and portrays his European male characters as weak, stupid and ineffectual compared to their native women.

The intertextuality of Conrad's and Mda's work is enriched by the motifs of redness and darkness which heighten their themes of contiguity and contingency. Linked by the common theme of empire-building and the civilising mission, the novels' contiguity, or metonymic resonances, are complemented by the symbolic tones of redness and darkness. Metonymically, the title *Heart of Darkness* functions as a substitute for Africa, the Dark Continent as it was scripted in the European imagination. It represents, or acts as, a substitute for the African wilderness and a place which still awaits the civilising mission of the West. *The Heart of Redness* also assumes metonymic dimensions as it is the equivalent of backwardness and the absence of enlightenment. The tones of darkness and redness serve to augment the sense of bewilderment, contradiction and dislocation – in other words, the fortuitous and contingent nature of reality. Paul Armstrong (1987: 111) contends that Conrad is a novelist of contradictions which express his perpetual alternation between a deep longing to overcome contingency and an intense recognition that this is an impossible dream. This sense of contingency keeps his fictional universe in perpetual motion as characters and readers try to make sense of reality. The same idea of contingency also informs Mda's novel, as the characters attempt to construct their universe which is criss-crossed by their histories of Belief and Unbelief. In his previous novel, *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mda had used the trope of darkness to suggest the nature of contingency in the world of the dancers: "Only darkness, and the fear of the things of the night will drive

them home” (Mda 1995: 2). In *The Heart of Redness* the trope of darkness is replaced by that of redness which has a mysterious and ominous resonance. At various stages the motif is adduced to suggest the backwardness and primitiveness associated with the believers in prophecies and thaumaturgy.

Xoliswa Ximiya, the school principal and unmarried daughter of Bhonco, a descendant of Twin-Twin the Unbeliever, supposedly represents the modern Xhosa woman who has renounced the tradition of redness. Criticising the wearing of the traditional dress, the isikhakha, by cabinet ministers at the opening of parliament, she declares: “It does not matter if the president’s wife herself wore isikhakha It is part of our history of redness. It is a backward movement. All this nonsense about bringing back African traditions! We are civilized people. We have no time for beads and long pipes!” (Mda 2000: 184). Xoliswa, who supports the idea of material progress, is in favour of the building of a casino at Qolorha-by-Sea. Hence, she is opposed to the former exile, Camagu, whom she once fancied as her lover but who has fallen for the charms of the strange Qukezwa, the *alter ego* of the prophetess Nongqawuse. At the end of the novel, disappointed that Camagu has opted for redness, she decides to leave Qolorha, which metonymically represents the heart of redness for her. No sooner has she decided to renounce all signs of backwardness and superstition than she wakes up one morning to find that the scars of her ancestors’ flagellation have become her flagellation: “The Unbelievers were shocked to hear of the scars on their daughter’s civilized body. They thought that the scars had come to an end, as Bhonco did not have a male heir to inherit them” (p. 302). The artifice of magic realism, instanced in the appearance of the marks of flagellation on her body, is highly reminiscent of the threat of the pig’s tail being inherited in the Buendia family in Marquez’s novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Ashcroft et al. (1998: 133) maintain that magic realism is used “to interrogate the assumptions of Western, rational, linear narrative and to enclose it within an indigenous metatext, a body of textual forms that recuperate the pre-colonial culture”. As a structuring device, the use of magic realism is integral to the conception of Mda’s novel in which tradition and modernity, realism and magic, science and traditional healing are given equal discursive space to interrogate one another. In the case of Xoliswa, the inexplicable appearance of the marks of flagellation displaces her sense of reality which she has stubbornly based on her rationality and intellectualism. Her puzzlement dramatises the thaumaturgical response ending in the Cattle-Killing episode which gives impetus to the plot of the novel.

In many ways the text of *The Heart of Redness* may be considered as a site of hybridity which combines strategies such as ambivalence, mimicry, double-voicing and splitting to destabilise colonialist discourses of alterity. Hybridity and mimicry are related concepts, associated mainly with the work of Homi Bhabha whose theoretical constructs enable the postcolonial critic to dismantle

the institutionalised thinking of imperialism and coloniality. Hybridity, according to Bhabha, is a site of ambivalence which “unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power ... in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (Bhabha 1994: 112). Robert Young adds that the term hybridity overlaps with double-voicing as well as splitting to unmask the Other (Young 1995: 22). An early deployment of doubling and splitting occurs in a passage dealing with one of the many frontier wars fought between the Xhosa and the British forces, this time under Sir Harry Smith who calls himself the Great White Chief of the Xhosas in Mda’s novel (Mda 2000: 18). When a small band of guerillas spies British soldiers cutting off the ears of a dead umXhosa soldier to take away as souvenirs, Twin-Twin asks: “What are they doing that for? Are they wizards?” (p. 20). Believing that the British have their own form of magic, the Xhosa soldiers mutilate the bodies of British soldiers to disable their magical powers. This act “was considered savagery of the worst kind by the British, whenever they came across their dead comrades with ripped stomachs” (p. 20). If one savage act initiates another, the question is, who is the savage and who is the civilised? This double-voiced, dual perspective splits the difference between Self and Other so that both positions are partial and neither is sufficient unto itself. As Peires asserts, “Atrocities breed atrocities, and it would be wrong for the historian to pass judgement on those who killed and tortured in this most merciless of all frontier wars (Peires 1989: 23). A historical account of the Sixth Frontier War in which the forces of Sir Harry Smith were involved reads as follows:

The British troops invaded Hintsas’s territory beyond the Kei, and Hintsas was persuaded, on a promise of safe conduct, to enter the British camp to negotiate the return of 50 000 Colonial cattle of which he had taken delivery But [Hintsas] drew the line at ordering Maqoma and his brother Tyhali to surrender, and over the payment of a ransom for his own release. Then, realizing that he had been made a hostage, he made a bid for freedom only to be cornered, killed and then mutilated by his pursuers.

(Davenport & Saunders [1977]2000: 136)

Such “co-lateral damage”, as the Americans fashionably call it, undermines the putative moral authority of imperial power and its notions of a superior civilisation.

As the Xhosa guerillas watch the British soldiers from their hiding place, they are horrified to see the men cut off the head of the Xhosa soldier and place it in a pot of boiling water. One whispers, “They are cannibals, too”. Incensed at this, the guerillas “sprang from their hiding place and attacked the men of Queen Victoria” (Mda 2000: 21). A British prisoner-of-war later explains to

them that they were not going to eat their ancestor but remove the flesh from the skull which would be taken away for scientific enquiry. One Xhosa then utters: “Souvenirs. Scientific enquiry. It did not make sense. It was nothing but the witchcraft of the white man” (p. 21). This doubling and splitting of several voices, including that of the narrator, adds to the textured irony in this episode of the boiling head, an image which recurs throughout the book. One of the central issues it raises is the vexed question of cannibalism. Peter Hulme recounts how this term entered a European text in the fifteenth century when it was reported to Christopher Columbus by Arawak Indians that one-eyed men on an island ate other humans. Hulme’s argument is that the term “canibales” was based on a verbal report “in a language of which Columbus had no prior knowledge” (Hulme 1986: 17). Apart from this fact, Columbus’s journal went missing in the sixteenth century and what we have are copies of other copies. Marianna Torgovnick, summarising the various arguments about cannibalism, endorses the theory that cannibalism does exist in parts of the world but it is not a widely accepted social practice as is made out in stereotypical portrayals of “the African cooking pot in various popular representations of Africa, including the Tarzan novels” (1990: 258). The image of British soldiers boiling the head of a Xhosa ancestor is a neat, double-voiced ironic ploy which again interrogates versions of savagery as imbricated in Western discourses. Moreover, it is a sardonic commentary on the nineteenth-century obsession with the science of phrenology which sought to determine mental and other characteristics from the size of the cranium.

One reviewer has described *The Heart of Redness* as a “history book, a rural comedy, an environmental treatise, a cultural manual, and a love story” (Roussouw 2001: 1). Such a carnivalesque scope is enabled by the various sites of hybridity and mimicry from which Mda enunciates antithetical positions on culture, religion, thaumaturgy and colonialism, not to mention South Africa’s neocolonialism and its accompanying rhetoric, which Grant Farred (2000: 186) refers to as “postapartheid discourse”. Mimicry, a key term in Homi Bhabha’s critique, refers to the copying of the colonising culture, its values and manners. Mimicry, which contains both mockery and menace (Bhabha 1994: 86), seeks to show the limitations in the authority of colonial or neocolonial discourse. The quintessential mimic man in the novel is Camagu who is the catalyst in the deconstruction of both colonialism and neocolonialism. A former exile, he returns to South Africa after thirty years to vote in the first nonracial elections. During his exile in the United States he has earned a doctorate in communications. Despite his qualifications, he cannot find a job. After his twentieth interview he realises that

the corporate world did not want qualified blacks. They preferred the inexperienced ones who were only too happy to be placed in some glass affirmative

action office where they were displayed as paragons of empowerment The mentor would always be hovering as a consultant – for even bigger rewards.
(Mda 2000: 33)

Mda's satire spares no one, not even the newly empowered Blacks in South Africa. When Camagu tries to negotiate conditions under which a casino may be built for the benefit of all, one government representative says:

“How will you stop us? The government has already approved this project. I belong to the ruling party. Many important people in the ruling party are directors of this company. The chairman himself was a cabinet minister until he was deployed to the corporate world.”

(Mda 2000: 232)

Camagu may have spent most of his formative years in the U.S., but he is not a clone of the West. He is the archetypal hybrid, mimic man who believes in a deity such as Majola, the mole snake which has visited him. He can also be a vocal critic of the British. When he once visited the British Natural History Museum and saw the heads of Bushmen stored in boxes, he could not understand “this barbaric habit of the British of shrinking heads of the vanquished people and displaying them in these impressive buildings where ladies and gentlemen go to gloat and celebrate their superior civilization” (p. 193). Predictably, Camagu also makes reference to the egregious intrusion in the life of Saartjie Baartman whose “femaleness lives in a bottle in the land of the white man” (p. 196). Baartman, the so-called “Hottentot Venus”, was exhibited in London and Paris between 1810 and 1815. According to Sander L. Gilman, her sexual parts, her genitalia and her buttocks, serve as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century (Gilman 1986: 235). In 2002, at the behest of the South African government, France returned her mortal remains to the country of her birth.

The frame narrator in *Heart of Darkness* states that behind the exploits of empire are titled men, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin (Conrad [1902]1927: 47). To this list of titled men could be added the names of King Leopold II of Belgium, Sir Harry Smith and Sir George Grey. That the latter three are implicated in the dialectic between Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, is borne out by the strong intertextual strands that link both texts. Julia Kristeva, who developed Bakhtin's and Barthes's notions of intertextuality, points to the subversive potential of the intertext or transposition (the term preferred by Kristeva), which involves the altering of the thetic position – the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one (Kristeva 1984: 59). The historical mission of Leopold II, as stated at the Brussels conference, is echoed by the historical manifesto of Sir George

Grey, which in turn finds its fictional expression in Mda's novel in the following resounding terms:

The strongholds of murder and superstition shall be cleansed ... as the gospel is preached among ignorant and savage men. The ruder languages shall disappear, and the tongue of England alone shall be heard all around. So you see, my friends, this cattle-killing nonsense augurs the dawn of a new era.

(Mda 2000: 237)

Just as in Conrad's novella Mr Kurtz's journal advocates the slogan, "Exterminate all the brutes" (Conrad [1902]1927: 118), Sir Harry Smith, in Mda's fictionalised version says, "'Extermination is now the only word and principle that guides us. I loved these people and considered them my children. But now I say exterminate the savage beasts!' he told his field commanders" (Mda 2000: 19-20). Finally, just as the science of phrenology is satirised in Mda's book in the image of the boiling head, it is also cryptically referred to by Conrad in the scene where the doctor asks Marlow's permission to measure his skull before his mission into the Heart of Darkness (Conrad [1902]1927: 55-56). Such resemblances are more than coincidental and affirm the thesis of this paper that Mda's novel does more than simply echo the title of its predecessor. Both works may be regarded as attempts to deconstruct colonial subjectivity and to interrogate, within the margins of contiguity and contingency, the institutionalised ways of colonial thinking so that no one view is presented as the ultimate truth. As Jacobs expresses it, Mda's novel does not essentialise either the Believers or the Unbelievers (Jacobs 2002: 232). If the prophetess Nongqawuse is dismissed as foolish by the Unbelievers and regarded as a criminal by the British, then it is Camagu, the hybrid, mimic man who presents the unorthodox, revisionist view: "Her prophecies arose out of the spiritual and material anguish of the amaXhosa nation" (Mda 2000: 283).

Notes

1. This article is based on a paper read at the AUETSA/SAVAL/SACLALS conference at the University of Pretoria, 7-9 July 2003.
2. Probably early 1960s

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