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**The Heart of Redness: an
Ecocritical Point of View on
Zakes Mda's South Africa**

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*Dedicato ai miei nonni e a papà, che mi hanno trasmesso l'amore per la lettura,
alla mia famiglia, in particolare mamma e Paolo, per il supporto e l'affetto,
e a Fabio, che mi ha accompagnata lungo tutto il percorso.*

ABSTRACT

The Heart of Redness is one of Zakes Mda's significant novels of South African contemporary literary production, which explores the interconnection between present and past. Dealing with issues related to environmental and human rights, sustainability and exploitation, the plot of the novel is built on two different temporary level, demonstrating that historical events remain relevant to reflect on many current issues. This thesis examines how literature can contribute in raising awareness on contemporary environmental issues: the first chapter gives a brief historical background of the environmental humanities, analyzing the interconnections existing among ecocriticism, postcolonialism and environmental history. The second chapter focuses on the analysis of *The Heart of Redness*, exploring its historical context and the ecological theme. The third chapter is concerned with the connection that exists between colonialism and landscape and the dichotomy nature-culture, while the fourth is dedicated to the topics of activism, ecological knowledge, ecotourism, sustainability and environmental justice.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature and Environment

Ecocriticism started to be studied in relation to postcolonialism about 20 years ago (Buell, Heise and Thornber 2011: 420), allowing to uncover the intersections and points of divergence between the discourses of colonial supremacy and environmental crisis. With the emergence of the environmental humanities, which originated from the intersection between ecocritical and postcolonialist studies, the different kind of connection that exists between environment and cultures became more evident. An increasing number of initiatives is risen over the last couple of years, transforming the way scholars in the field of environmental humanities do research, interact with sciences and perceive their role. In recent times, the field of study of the environmental humanities has been developing a growing interest in Non-Western texts that discuss environmental and ecological issues from a postcolonial point of view. Recent studies look more closely at the cause-effect relationship between imperialism and ecological issues, taking into account literary works produced not only in Europe or North America, but also in Africa, Asia, Australia and South America.

Zapf defines cultural ecology as “a new direction in recent ecocriticism which has found considerable attention [...] in the field. A cultural ecology of literature proposes a transdisciplinary approach to literary texts, in which the interaction and mutual interdependence between culture and nature is posited as a fundamental dimension of literary production and creativity” (Zapf 2016). Cultural ecology aims to find the meeting point and the interconnections that exist between the anthropocentric

perspective of literature and culture, in which nature is reduced to a definition coined by humans, and ecocentrism, characterized by a nature-centered system of processes. This kind of view on the interdependent relationship between nature and culture sees literature as the most suitable cultural means to analyze critically the evolution of present-day society, that can work as “an ecological force within the larger system of cultural discourses” (Zapf 2016).

We live in a world where the existence of many areas, animals, and the very survival of humanity is threatened by the rising impact of an environmental crisis caused by global warming. Climate change was caused by humans themselves, who became the geological agents of the era we live in and caused a drastic change in the Earth's processes (Ghosh 2016: 15). The fact that humans have now become geological agents implies that everything we do, our lifestyle and our everyday actions have consequences, that in certain cases can be very serious, on environmental welfare. Being aware of the importance of our impact on the Earth is the first necessary step to give our contribution in dealing with the environmental issues that are currently affecting the world we live in an increasingly massive way.

The field of ecocriticism started to emerge in the early 1990s, and the term was coined to describe an approach to literature that is environmentally oriented, on the basis that the humanities can provide a substantial contribution in understanding and addressing the contemporary environmental issues that are plaguing the Earth. The notion of “place” has always been a relevant concept in literature-environment studies (Buell, Heise and Thornber 2011: 420), reflecting the acknowledgment of the existing connection between environment, human life and history and raising awareness on the fact that local actions always have a bigger impact that involves ecological processes

on a global scale. The environmental humanities are a young but ever-expanding field, which aims to bring into conversation both the socio-cultural and the scientific sides of ecological thought. The environmental humanities cross traditional boundaries among disciplines and experiment new ways to spread knowledge in order to reach a broader audience, in which scholars need to find a meeting point to cooperate interdisciplinary. The contribute of a postcolonial method is of great importance to add the historical dimension to the whole. It is important to provide different cultural and historical perspectives on environmental issues across different locations and areas, analyzing power plays and structural injustices from the point of view of postcolonial thought. Through the resources of cultural customs it is possible to collectively leave the power of imagination free to express itself and restore a fairer and more ecological worldview.

Literature and other forms of artistic expression have been used since ancient times as vehicles for the representation of the interactions between human beings and the environment. The relationship between humans and natural world has been constantly changing according to different historical periods and different cultures. Although literature cannot influence the course of events on a practical level, nor can it directly affect the environmental issues that we are currently experiencing, literature can achieve a lot when it comes to raising awareness among readers. Literature can have a more powerful and engaging impact on its audience, for it combines a strong emotional component that can touch the readers' sensibility with the depiction of issues that affect us directly, which in the common perception tend to seem more distant than they actually are when we hear about them from other means of communication. In spite of this potential, climate change is not considered a suitable topic to occupy a dominant position in contemporary literary fiction.

Climate change is one of the world's main problems but, as Ghosh affirms, we have proved to be incapable of addressing the issue properly through literature. The climate events that afflict Earth, which by now have become an everyday occurrence, are so incredibly tragic that those who do not experience first hand the effects of an environmental calamity tend to consider them as something far away from their everyday life. The same mechanism affects literary production: disastrous storms, floods, tornadoes and tsunamis are topics which are not considered suitable for novels: they are automatically relegated to other genres such as science fiction, and are reduced to events that can happen only in far away lands and times. Ghosh asserts that, in fact, "the contemporary novel has become ever more radically centred on the individual psyche while the collective [...] has receded, both in the cultural and the fictional imagination. [...] The acceleration in carbon emissions and the turn away from the collective are both, in one sense, effects of that aspect of modernity that sees time as 'an irreversible arrow, as capitalization, as progress'" (Ghosh 2016: 80, 81). The current environmental crisis urges us to take collective action, and Ghosh invites us to imagine alternative forms of human existence with the complicity of literature, a cultural form that with its immediacy lends itself well to confronting the most urgent and worrying problem of our time.

CHAPTER ONE

The Environmental Humanities

The environmental humanities are a relatively recent and rapidly evolving inter- and multi-disciplinary academic field, which has emerged at the beginning of the 21st century and has developed in different countries. Taking into account scientific evidence, after years of research carried out by individuals and associations concerned with environmental issues, the field of environmental humanities has now acquired a name and an identity. The origins of the environmental humanities can be dated to about 100 years ago (Emmett and Nye 2017: 3), even though the field has flourished as a result of some developments occurred between the 1970s and 1980s in the literary, historical, philosophical and anthropological study areas. The first departments that connected environmental sciences with humanities encouraging an interdisciplinary study emerged in the 1990s.

Today we live in a geological era called “Anthropocene”, in which human beings have been recognized as geological agents. Researchers in the field of postcolonialism have identified new narrative tropes present in politically and socially engaged texts. There are texts that narrate about both environmental justice and colonial legacies, developing new forms of narratives such as for example forest fictions and petrofiction. Climate change and global warming are happening right now and it has been demonstrated that human beings have contributed to make it happen. The rate of species extinction is alarmingly increasing and the current demand and consumption of natural resources cannot be sustained anymore. Plastic and air pollution, the occurrence of exceptional meteorological and

geological disasters and the excessive production of human waste now are problems placed on the agenda of scientists. However, besides identifying and explaining them, there is currently not much more scientists would be able to do alone to find a solution to such problems.

This is where the environmental humanities enter the field: cultural and political knowledge is essential to address the ongoing climate crisis; raising awareness and convincing people to adopt a sustainable lifestyle is “not a scientific problem, but an interdisciplinary one” (Emmett and Nye 2017: 3). It is not possible to propose and adopt advanced changes without considering the social and cultural contexts, without consulting with the locals and without understanding the basic needs of human beings that could very well have a totally different background compared with the planners’ one. The humanities can act as an intermediary and play a key role in contributing to understand and helping to solve environmental problems, and it is not possible to speak separately of the environment and matters such as industrialization and imperialism.

Therefore the environmental humanities can be defined as a global intellectual movement that links scientific disciplines and the humanities, with the latter being essential to understand and solve the challenges emerged with the rise of industrial society. The environmental humanities are useful to see natural, social and ethical issues from a historical point of view, to make them become more widespread and ensure that scientific and technical data are accessible and understandable for everyone. After all, as Griffiths asserts: “Scientists often argue for the need to overcome deficits of knowledge, but rarely ask why we do not act upon what we already know. Most of the constraints working against environmental change are

cultural: we have to know ourselves as well as the country” (Emmett and Nye, 2017: 5). The environmental humanities are currently addressing issues in relation to medicine, technology, animals, race, gender and climate. In the attempt to communicate with a larger section of public, the environmental humanities are attracting attention to how complex and resilient the ecological systems are, arousing sympathy for endangered habitats and species. The environmental humanities adopt an open approach, which constructively stimulate cooperation between sciences and humanities to motivate the compelling need to intervene in the environmental sphere with actions driven by knowledge.

The planetary environmental crisis requires a new way of thinking that generates not only technological solutions, but proposes solutions in the shape of civic knowledge so that they can be assimilated by a passive population of consumers. It is our behavior that has led to the current crisis and expecting solutions to come solely from the scientific expertise, who have themselves contributed to seek progress at the expense of environment is no longer an option. It is due to cultural and political reasons that the vast majority of scientific and technological solutions are often not adopted. The environmental humanities believe that climate change and the current global crisis need to be confronted with an interdisciplinary approach, which includes both the humanities and the sciences.

1.2 Main Concepts and History of the Environmental Humanities

Humans play an active role in natural processes, since human beings are agents in the natural world, not mere observers. Anticipating the environmental humanities, environmental philosophy asserted that it does not exist an isolated or disconnected

object, instead the existence of every object is part of a unified process and depends on its relationships and the networks it is part of. Even so scientific findings (such as global warming) are often not fully believed or understood by everyone, and the humanities can contribute to reach the public in a more efficient way. People need the power of words and emotions to feel compelled to act and mobilize.

The concerns of the environmental humanities have been risen as a result of a multiple-front ecological, economic and political crisis. The 1970s are the years in which voices about a global ecological crisis were heard for the first time. Although there was no virtual awareness of global warming, the major concerns regarded “the limits to growth” (Emmett and Nye, 2017: 8). Intellectuals of the likes of Rachel Carson were among the first to recognize humankind as the responsible of a global ecological crisis. She was a biologist and zoologist before she could focus on full-time writing and dedicate to cultural criticism. She was among the first individuals belonging to the earliest generation of environmental historians. In the 1990s environmental challenges were increasingly growing, stimulating scholars in the growing fields of environmental history and ecocriticism. Environmental historians and ecocritics have been successful in the academic field, but at that time have unfortunately failed to reach a broader public. Last decade saw some political and epistemological struggles, which led to a crisis of humanities. Several teachers and researchers started to propose the environmental humanities (side by side to social and natural sciences) as a response to long-term, complex environmental and social issues. In the aftermath of these struggles, always more people started joining organizations for environmental history, ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, anthropology and many more after 2000.

In fact, the enterprise of environmental humanities has been promoted since the first years of 2000 by Australian scholarship before spreading worldwide, giving life to works that bring together the perspective of environmental humanities and postcolonialism, which take into account not only the notions of social and environmental justice but also imperial practices and histories of colonial settlement, dominance and marginalization. By now we know that science is not sufficient to address environmental issues. In fact, ecological instability is not only a physical environment crisis, but also a cultural, social, moral and ethical crisis and one of the consequences can be found in the transition into the system of capitalist globalization.

Environmental humanities understand global development in the perspective of environmental justice movements and their principles of ethics and responsibility. Two of the current main challenges consist in clearly defining what environmental humanities research implies and how it can efficiently meet the challenge posed by global ecology through communicative and interdisciplinary methods which connect art and science.

1.3 A Postcolonial Approach to the Environmental Humanities

Recent work in new materialism and posthumanism has been highly influential to correct the anthropocentric charge that have connotated the humanities and social sciences. Postcolonial environmental humanities consider historical and contemporary power relations worth of a deep understanding, essential to reconsider the exceptionalism conferred to the human species. European imperialism has created the binary opposition between nature and culture,

constructing a hierarchy that objectified the figure of nature and relegated to it indigenous people of the colonized nations, while white men were considered as the impersonation of rationality and culture. A postcolonial approach advocates for the differences of ethical and philosophical codes that belong to different cultures, which often do not have the same consideration of the notion of “environment” as western configurations. (Carrigan, DeLoughrey and Didur, 2015: 11).

William Stanley Jevon was a thinker concerned about coal supply and consumption in the British Empire and was writing about them in 1865 already. There is a clear connection between the environmental humanities and thinkers who considered the interconnection and interdependence of environment and humanity. The field of the environmental humanities has been influenced also by postcolonial and feminist studies, which refused the lingering anthropocentric and imperial bias in ethics and politics. In fact, an implicit conception of natural world as “racialized” is the consequence of the belief that humans stand outside nature and have the power to control it, as it is seen as a passive and feminized entity.

Christianity rejected the theory of evolution, as the Bible sees human beings as made in the image of God rather than animals. From this point of view, mortality is not biological and humanity is not dependent on other species. The emerging field of animal studies analyzes the relationship between humans and animals from an ethical point of view, considering every animal and plant as holders of the essential right to exist, rather than evaluating them according to their usefulness to the human species.

We must move beyond the core of a human exceptionalism that holds us apart from the rest of the world and, as such, contributes to

our inability to be affected by the incredible loss of this period of extinction, and so to mourn the ongoing deaths of species. (Emmett and Nye, 2017: 11)

The environmental humanities refuse the principle according to which Western culture is placed above other cultures. The European imperial expansion reached its height in the 1990's, and during colonial times it was firmly believed that technological superiority meant cultural superiority. The assumption that progress and evolution could be achieved by means of Western technologies was widespread. However, a high level of technology and science does not stand for a superior culture and civilization. After all, who can consider Nazi Germany or North Korea as culturally superior only because of an advanced scientific community and atomic weapons, respectively? In the same way, the Aztecs could not be considered culturally inferior to the Spanish only because they did not fight with steel swords and did not know about the use of the wheel for transportation. Postcolonial environmental humanities can be seen as an invitation to "learn from below" (Carrigan et al. 2015: 8). Global development is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon and it can not be resolved into outdated narratives of "progress".

By examining nature more closely, it is easy to notice an alongside existing social landscape, and it is the history of colonialism that tells us how necessary is the entanglement of human beings in the natural world. It is argued that narrative is essential to understand the history of imperialism and its ecological representation. An aim of the environmental humanities is to address criticism about nature, culture and globalization extensively, taking into consideration environmental

debates of our century and their historical reasons (Carrigan et al. 2015: 8). The environmental humanities are an ever-changing and continuously developing field, extremely relevant for the contemporary heritage of colonial empires. A branch of the environmental humanities focuses on how the history of imperialism and globalization is crucial to understand today's environmental issues. A postcolonial approach to the environmental humanities provides new points of view on how environmental issues can be explained through an interconnection of narratives, histories and historical facts such as colonialism and globalization. A postcolonial approach therefore sheds light on how past and present environmental violence and injustice constitute ecological challenges for the Global South, possibly suggesting solutions for a restoration in line with the principles of anti-colonial politics. Diverging from American exceptionalism and Eurocentrism, postcolonial studies take into account historical experiences of domination and violence to explore deeply environmental issues, inequality and injustice to globally deconstruct colonization.

Through narrative we can understand, reflect and give further attention on ecological concerns and serious environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, the extraction of resources and the capitalization of nature. Both the environmental humanities and postcolonial studies are interdisciplinary and comparative fields, which share principles and methodologies also with the work done in the fields of political ecology and environmental justice. As Carolyn Merchant explains in her text *The Death of Nature* (1980), narratives of nature influence the different attitudes that a culture can have towards the Earth, which is often considered as intact and unspoiled, waiting for the intervention of empire and globalization (Merchant 1980). Today we find ourselves in an era of tremendous

danger and insecurity and the knowledge of a single discipline is not enough to be trusted. As anthropologist Arturo Escobar asserted almost twenty years ago, “we need new hybrid narratives of life and culture, [...] (which) arise from the mediations that local cultures are able to effect on the discourses and practices of nature, capital, and modernity” (Escobar 1995: 341).

Approaching environmental humanities through a postcolonial approach allows to reflect on the history of ecological difference in different locations and times, inviting to narrate and visualize alternative ecological futures and differences. With a globally comparative method, complexities and contradictions of the Global South can be given attention to, and this can be achieved through critically situated narratives. Thanks to critical narratives one can identify and theorize the historical context of texts, resisting the impulse to universalize and generalize. Global and local environmental concerns often hide many contradictions. Establishing a dialogue between the environmental humanities and everyday issues of environmental exploitation can help paying a closer attention to them. The utopian, imaginative vision of nonfiction writing can help uncover what globalization tries to homogenize and hide, raising awareness on empowerment, ethics and responsibility. Colonial narratives teach us how people have been alienated and displaced from the land. By rejecting any generalized notions of idealized balance and harmony, postcolonial representation of environment address the consequences of the violent transformation of cultures and environment, attempting to recollect narratives that histories of colonialism have long suppressed.

Up to a hundred years ago it was commonly believed that all cultures should look at the Western model in order to become developed and civilized; the environmental

humanities do not aim to determine the superiority of a culture and acknowledge that different cultures follow different historical trajectories. Every culture presents distinctive tracts because it develops in a specific area, therefore obviously it is not possible to speak about homogeneity. Every society has its own ecological knowledge and its culture is the expression of how people live within a given place, and ecology and globalization must be specifically approached through the distinguishing experiences of colonialism, militarism and land exploitation.

As DeLoughrey and Handley argue, “the discourse of nature is a universalizing one [...] (therefore scholarship) is particularly vulnerable to naturalizing dominant forms of environmental discourse, particularly those that do not fundamentally engage with questions of difference, power, and privilege” (Carrigan et al. 2015: 6). Indeed singular societies must also deal with global problems such as accelerating growth, extinction, resource shortage and climate instability, which require collective responses. It is undoubtedly needed to address environmental crisis of global nature in universal modes, but it is equally important to consider the singularity of ecological and environmental conceptions, which can be understood with the aid of the history of empire and globalization and the associated narratives of ecological vulnerability, violence and transformation. Such realities shed light on the forms of political agency, power and domination that brought us into the Anthropocene.

Globalization cannot be simply reduced as a mere consequence of imperialism. A postcolonial approach to the environmental humanities opens the possibility to correlate cultural and historical analyses with ecological concerns, paying a closer attention to how power relations have an impact on global environmental decisions.

1.4 Ecocriticism, Postcolonialism and Environmental History

Ecocriticism and environmental history are two fields which are categorized into the family of environmental humanities and study how the environment has been influenced by human action. Environmental issues have been explored by historians, philosophers and literary critics, and the result has been a disjointed debate on the complexities of nature and environmental concerns. This resulted in a fragmented discourse about the complex nature of the environment and the concerns that have followed. The work of the environmental humanities needs to be collaborative, cohesive and inclusive, arouse popular interest and make an impact in the public domain, being pushed into the world and not just across disciplines, avoiding complacency and narrowness that could let it lose its respectability as a literary studies' branch (Bergthaller et al. 2014). Different disciplines and traditions need to find common ground, bring together different trajectories, attitudes and methods and establish a useful dialogue. Peculiarities of different disciplines must be kept in sight to achieve a wider vision and consider concerns placed beyond the mere interdisciplinarity.

The word “humanities” itself hides the notion of human exceptionalism, implying a strong division between human and natural world, with the latter being considered as “soulless” and inert. To overcome such intrinsic divisions, it is important not to overshadow social differences and recognize the heterogeneity of different cultures. The initiative of the environmental humanities is not as straightforwardly methodological as scientific procedures, the environmental humanities instead move back and forth in time and space, between the past, the present and the future of environment and culture. The approach of the environmental humanities has a

reflective and interpretative connotation, and this is the reason why they are naturally progressing by gradual, but slow, stages. To notice more profound implications and ambiguities and realize the arguments and possibilities of narratives by reading them more carefully, we need to pay closer attention to texts and especially contexts, and this requires reflexivity and long-term experimentation.

The environment should not be considered as a solely material entity at the margins of human societies. Environmental history and ecocriticism recognize that environment is also the product of society and the way it is modified by human action. Ecocriticism was a minor, emerging field recognized in the USA at the beginning of the 1990s dealing with literature and environment studies. The first wave of ecocriticism celebrated wilderness and nature writing. From the beginning, some ecocritics have decided to deviate emphasis on gender issues and environmental justice. The development of ecocriticism therefore assumed an uneven tone and there was a disagreement on its main purpose, because it related to different environmental matters.

Recently ecocriticism has become a successful and highly productive field of the humanities for literary and cultural studies worldwide, gaining always more recognition as a branch that brings new opportunities to reassert the importance and responsibility of the humanities in a historical period when globalization continues to be considered as an economic and technological process in the first place. Environmental justice has always acted as a unifying concept between the fields of environmental history and ecocriticism, because it represents a common ground where society, culture and environment present and confront their respective

challenges. The term “environmental justice” is generally used to refer to the struggles that indigenous communities must fight against resource extraction and land exploitation. This political link has become the prolific meeting point between postcolonialism and ecocriticism from a social and critical point of view.

Putting environmental justice in the framework of new materialist approach is enriching because it allows to take into consideration the agency of matter in our life. Considering the ethical and political consequences of the agency of things opens up new dimensions to narrate environmental history and environmental justice. It goes without saying that historians and literary scholars read and interpret texts differently, but there is a relationship of interdependence between these differences. The aesthetics of a literary text has to be historicized to be adequately enjoyed, and historical texts are not able to speak to the masses without capturing the aesthetic essence. In order to take advantage of the reciprocally illuminating connotations of historical and literary interpretations, it is important that the analysis of literature is accompanied by the study of historiography in order to combine their analogies and specificities within the area of research of the environmental humanities.

In the interests of an interdisciplinary approach, environmental historians and ecocritics must map the common ground and collaborate consciously to open up the environmental humanities and transmit forceful arguments to the audience, transforming it in “usable knowledge” (Bergthaller et al. 2014) that can shape how people engage with environment. Knowledge is treated as culturally situated by the environmental humanities to offer a different, historically and culturally collocated understanding of the relationship between human and environment, while

remaining conscious about the limits of the methodological approaches of every discipline.

Narratives have influenced the different representation of nonhuman nature and environment. Stories about ecology are crucial to imagine and articulate our environmental future and can help us understanding the current environmental crisis, even if they narrate about everyday moments. Narratives can be powerful mobilizers by strategically taking advantage of fiction and not necessarily employing the true facts of scientific ecology. By themselves, narratives of environmental crisis cannot relieve societies from harmful ways of living that damage ecosystems. Anyway, reading such works and reflecting on them can push worrying about the consequences of bad decisions and think about solutions and alternative choices.

CHAPTER TWO

ECOCRITICISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

The discourse of ecocriticism has been defined in many ways during the past years. Cheryll Glotfelty describes ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”(Fromm, Glotfelty 1996), while Lawrence Buell’s definition of ecocriticism is that of a “study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis”(Buell 1995: 430). Buell openly considers the coexistence of an ethical dimension, which probably Glotfelty considers implicit in her definition, if we think that literature produced by humans should imply a sort of responsibility towards the environment. The ethical side is emphasized in Estok’s definition of ecocriticism:

Ecocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, first by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections. Ecocriticism may be many other things besides, but it is always at least these two. (Estok 2001: 220)

Considering that it can be employed to raise awareness and can be a useful mean to link literary texts and nature, ecocriticism is practically defined by Barker as “the identification in texts of ‘appropriate’ representations of normatively defined responses to the environment” (Barker 2010: 17). Being a relatively new discipline,

ecocriticism does not appear to have a fixed theoretical basis. Estok does not see the state of growth and development of ecocriticism as a drawback, considering it instead a necessary condition that helps developing a new critical practice:

Feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and historicism draw heavily on other theories that preceded them. Such borrowing, however, is exactly what goes on in the articulation on a new critical practice. (Estok 2001: 224)

How can postcolonial, Global South, African and South African perspectives work in synergy with ecocritical studies? What role do race and geography play? What are the peculiarities of an ecocriticism specifically focused on South Africa? Is its representation unique, or is it part of the larger postcolonial project of the Global North? Ecocriticism in South Africa is a minor, however important phenomenon (Barker 2010: 11). In 1992 an important conference named “Literature, Nature and the Land: Ethics and Aesthetics of the Environment” introduced ecocriticism to the academy concretely for the first time. The culture of environmentalism in South Africa has kept changing throughout the decade, affected by South Africa’s shift to democratic government. Environmentalism through the apartheid preserved the same interest in conservation of the colonialist era. Along with the political shift, a link between environment and society has emerged from a more “people-centered” tendency (Vital, 2015: 297). This cultural transformation has brought the development of a postcolonial knowledge of ecology. This new perspective merges the persistent influence of colonialism and the current position of South Africa, situated now in a context dominated by the global North.

Hedley Twidle has produced a historically specific, South Africa-localized ecocritical work, which is also globally relevant. Twidle questions “how a key text of North American environmentalism” - Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* – “reads from the global South” (Twidle 2013: 52). Twidle argues about how some environmental signs that can be claimed as universal can very well change meaning in another context. For example, in *Silent Spring* the vanishing of birdsong stands for the destruction of environment. At Cape Town, however, the lack of birdsong marks also the unsuccessful project of imperialist Cecil Rhodes to take English songbirds to Table Mountain in the nineteenth century. In the attempt to re-build the local landscape in the image and likeness of England, Rhodes has exploited both people’s labor force and land’s environmental resources in the mines. Twidle explains that “If for Carson birdsong came to symbolize an environment under threat... then on these slopes it was inflected with the grand designs of settler – an index of [...] (the) impulse to re-make the environment in the image of one’s own native land” (Twidle 2013: 56). Twidle uses the example of the different meanings of birdsong to illustrate “the complexity that is entailed in thinking through the various cultures of nature in a place like South Africa” (Twidle 2013: 57). In South Africa, colonial appropriation of land has resulted in ecological exchange, tragic landscape changes and destruction of the environment, but also conservation (Brooke, Dana Phillips 2017: 3). Twidle invites to rethink about birdsong and all generalized ecocritical principles elaborated in the Global North in a new context. Twidle suggests to employ local specificity to oppose a universalized Western symbolism. In South Africa the silent landscape has also colonial implications, as well as environmental. Exploring the involvement of social, political, historical and environmental issues is crucial when we talk about ecocriticism in South Africa, a unique country both for its landscapes and environmental peculiarities and for its

colonial history. In spite of the significance of postcolonial ecocriticism, it is important to remember that postcolonial theory is mainly produced in the Global North. As a result, ecocriticism and postcolonial critiques on the side of scholars in the Global South cannot generate from theories produced elsewhere (Brooke, Dana Phillips 2017: 3). Starting from the late nineties, a variety of ecocritical scholarship has arisen from South Africa to expand the field of postcolonial ecocriticism and avoid the globalization of intellectual and cultural evolution.

The topographical and aesthetic concept of landscape has had a significant influence on South African ecocriticism (Coetzee 1988). Coetzee labels the representation of landscape as a colonial process to enter the South African context, which reads the landscape according to a European aesthetic and western environmental categories. In spite of Coetzee's influence in analyzing the role of landscape, ecocriticism oriented towards landscape too frequently tends to relapse "into lyrical admiration for the pastoral and the wild" (Brooke, Dana Phillips 2017: 4). The strain focused on land of South African ecocriticism rejects the romantic aesthetics of American and English early ecocriticism, with the first celebrating wilderness and the latter nostalgically evoking a vanishing pastoral England. South African ecocriticism examines the politics of uses and exploitation of land and natural resources, consistently with good part of postcolonial ecocriticism.

In her 1998 monograph *African Horizons*, Christine Loflin provides one of the first investigations of landscape discourses in South African writing. Loflin does not focus on environmental issues, but she effectively responds to statements that African writing rarely features the representation of landscape, remarking that such considerations are based on European aesthetics of landscape. Loflin examines

writers who do not have an idealized view of nature as separated from culture, rather they depict landscapes that expose “the influence of human conflict and compromise” (Loflin 1998: 82). Loflin makes a gender distinction in analyzing South African novels, suggesting that male authors depict street life-spaces to detach themselves from an individualist, European focus in favor of a more communal concern. On the other hand, women tend to emphasize “interior spaces of the home and the workplace” (Loflin, 1998: 83) rather than landscapes of street life, as a way to talk about social configurations.

Animal studies can be considered as another distinguishing tendency in South African ecocriticism. Earthlife Africa was founded in 1988 as an activist organisation working on environmental justice that “rethought the relation between progressive politics and environmental concern” (Vital 2015: 298). This particular movement is the manifestation of a postcolonial environmentalism, offering a helpful background to read South African writing. South African animal studies may import Northern or Western models, exactly how landscape studies overemphasize pastoral or wilderness ideals typical of the European and American traditions. African conservation histories suggest that emphasizing the concern of animals might inadvertently overshadow other equally important social and political concerns of interest to ecocriticism. The so called “charismatic megafauna” (which in South Africa refers to the “Big Five”, namely the African lion, leopard, elephant, Cape buffalo and two species of rhinoceros) fascinates and holds an irresistible attraction on tourists, photographers, hunters and conservationists. Such attraction can serve as a justification of the South African tendency to displace people and mistreat local communities in favour of the government takeover of land for the expansion of national parks, such as the

Pilanesberg and Marakele parks (Brooke, Dana Phillips 2017: 6). Issues of animals and property of land, and therefore about people, are closely related in South Africa, in spite of the separation between criticism focused on landscape and animals. In addition, the fact that in South Africa good part of the land that we are considering is not arable complicates the issues involved. Rob Nixon illustrates South African ecocriticism's commitment on animals, land and people as inextricable entities. Nixon remarks on this aspect, reflecting on entering a post-apartheid game lodge as a black tourist. The white game lodge is identified by Nixon as a "temporal enclave", a space which belongs to colonial history and is situated in an everlastingly natural dimension, set in "a time outside of time, before and after the human, when megafauna rule... [The] game lodge locates itself in the post-apartheid marketplace by selling a blended aura of colonial time and prehuman natural time" (Nixon 2011: 181). The game lodge administrates the land as an area of animal conservation and a place where tourists can catch a show. Avoiding an unrealistic divide between landscape and animal concerns is possible through "a mutual renegotiation of postcolonial ecocriticism and animal studies, as well as a (re)politicization of both landscape and human-animal relations" (Brooke, Dana Phillips 2017: 7).

As Anthony Vital suggests, a "specifically South African ecocriticism" must address environmental justice to stress "the need for a 'people centred' interest in the environment", staying "alert to both South Africa's colonial legacies and its peripheral position within a globalised economy" (Vital 2015: 29). It is evident that juxtaposing people and animals is excessively simplistic, even if in South Africa a renewed emphasis on people in ecocriticism and animal studies has been needed to avoid an underestimation of social injustice. Ecocritics of the likes of Rob Nixon

effectively tackle the complicated interplay of such issues, focussing and giving equal importance to people, animals and landscape. Likewise, efforts are being made in the field of conservation, concerning with more threatened species of animals and plants rather than concentrating only on the charismatic megafauna. In the same way, efforts for a greater involvement and empowerment of locals in the parks are taking place, in order to employ local people not only as trackers, but as guides and rangers. In the next chapter, we will analyze how South African writer Zakes Mda addresses the tangled preoccupations with endangered animals, commodification of megafauna for the tourists and the ways ecotourism can hide the importance of social injustice, considering the correlation between different ecocritical approaches and the urge to push the boundaries of South African literature canons (Brooke, Dana Phillips 2017: 8).

Writers belonging to the South African canon such as Coetzee now benefit from convincing new approaches thanks to ecocriticism. While literary studies in South Africa aim to a national canon leaning towards inclusiveness, ecocritics need to question how they can contribute to this. Whereas scholars of the likes of Jane Carruthers and Derek Barker lament a lack of nature and ecologically oriented writings in South Africa, professor William Slaymaker is not of the same opinion. He asserts that “[there] is no lack of writing in Africa that might fall under the rubric of nature writing”, instead “[the] bulk of nature writing about sub-Saharan Africa – particularly as practiced by white writers – is connected with the Euro-American academic literary traditions of thematizing landscape, space, and conservationism”, noting that “there is no rush by African literary and cultural critics to adopt ecocriticism or the literature of the environment as there are promulgated from many of the world’s metropolitan centers”, because they risk to

“misrepresent the varied landscapes of sub-Saharan Africa” (Slaymaker 2001: 134). Slaymaker concludes predicting that “[the] low visibility of ecolit and ecocrit in recent black African writing is temporary. The green revolution will spread to and through communities of readers and writers of African literature, ‘ecoing’ the booming interest” (Slaymaker 2001: 139). Slaymaker considers ecocriticism and ecoliterature as a product of metropolitan centers, without considering that “a global ecocritical conversation must be multidirectional (Brooke, Dana Phillips 2017: 9). In order to be relevant, African literature and ecocriticism should not identify in the context and principles of Anglo-American studies (Caminero-Santangelo, Garth: 2011). Reading ecocritical works by venturing beyond the boundaries of American “nature writing” can result in different interpretations and viewpoints.

In the essay collection *Environmental Justice in South Africa* (McDonald 2002), McDonald addresses the concerns that emerge from environmentalism by considering a series of social issues with an implication in environment, such as poverty, gender, water supply, marginalization, inequality and waste management, to name a few. McDonald explains the reason why a re-shaped approach to environmental justice is needed in a society dominated by inequities. McDonald states that environmental justice literature, whereas “unrepentantly anthropocentric in its orientation”, is “far from homogeneous and is in fact riven with deep ideological splits on foundational questions such as race, class, and gender” (McDonald 2002: 3, 5). He however considers this tension as a way to bring people and cultures into a potentially productive conversation on environmental questions. For the purpose of a postcolonial understanding of ecology and in the context of an ecocriticism situated in a postcolonial context, it is necessary to deal with two

important sources of tension. In the first place, it is necessary to attempt practically to make a use of ecology on behalf of the ones suffering from colonial legacies and the modern global economic order. The notion of conservation is a concept historically related to empire. Today, an implication of ecology in the bureaucracy of the leading classes can still be seen, for example “in the ideologies protecting the material comforts which modernity is spreading with great unevenness across the planet” (Vital 2015: 299). Meanwhile, ecology can also represent a meeting point where local resistance can contain the expansionary ambitions of the global leadership. Postcolonial environmentalism invites us to be wary of the economic and cultural power flowing from metropolitan centers, distrusting what can be detected as damaging. Secondly, it must be considered that the anthropocentric trait of postcolonial ecology, which inevitably causes a tension between the inclination to give priority to humans and their need and the acknowledgment that also natural world is valuable. These two sources of tension could prove to be useful, resulting in a deeper understanding of people and places from a social and ecological point of view. McDonald argues that a similar understanding, grown in South African context of a colonialist past and a present dominated by struggles for domination, could help and support the strife for the promotion of well-being. Such an understanding can consolidate the foundations for a distinctly South African ecocriticism, in which past and present writing, literature and culture, can be read in the context of the evolving new environmentalism.

2.2 Historical Context and Cultural Landscape of *The Heart of Redness*

In the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa there is an area of great naturalistic beauty, known as Wild Coast because it is mostly still unspoiled. The area is full of

natural reserves, established to protect the varied local flora and fauna. The Wild Coast covers the area from East London to Port Edward. Before 1994 the area east of the Great Kei River was declared a Bantustan by the white National Party administration, that is to say a formally independent territory, kept separate for the black citizens of South Africa, where the Xhosa people could live separately. One of the purposes of apartheid was to hold together the members of a specific ethnic group, in order to ensure that the territories were ethnically uniform. In the 1976 the territory was renamed Republic of Transkei, and until the transition to democracy in 1994 the area has remained underdeveloped, internationally unrecognized and characterized by serious social and political conflicts.

Zanemvula Kizito Gatyeni Mda (known as Zakes Mda) was born in 1948 in the Eastern Cape and has dedicated his literary career to social and political commitment, engaging artistically in the socio-political struggles experienced in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. He is one of the most significant South African writers: in the period between the 1970s and 1980s he devoted his interest mainly to the theater, using his plays as a vehicle to offer the public dramas of protest and cultural critique (Bogue 2010: 49). The fall of apartheid and the advent of the first black government elected democratically have inspired many Zakes Mda's novels, including *The Heart of Redness*, his third novel published in 2000, allowing him to focus on the themes of oppression and exploitation resulting from colonialism and apartheid. By the use of his novels he reports what he feels about the society and government, from the transition to democracy and the political campaigns in 1994 to the 1990-2000, when the process of ending apartheid officially started (Lloyd 2001: 34). *The Heart of Redness* is set in the present-day Wild Coast, in a coastal village called Qolorha-by-Sea, a few kilometers east of the

mouth of river Kei. The small rural village is part of the areas traditionally inhabited by the Xhosa. Zakes Mda himself is a Xhosa: now he lives between South Africa and the USA, where he teaches creative writing at Ohio State University, but he was born in Herschel, a small rural town on the north-eastern border of the Eastern Cape Province. The novel is set in the in the years in which Mda writes, around the turn of the century. However, the time-line is more complicated than that, and it affects the structure of the novel itself. The narrative switches from the depiction of a contemporary Xhosa village to fragmented time jumps in a past that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. The place remains the same throughout the narrative, because it is precisely there that in 1856 a prophecy that would have a huge impact on the Xhosa is made.

Mda resorts to magical realism to connect the traditional elements and the sufferings of the poor with the present global culture, characterized by venality and materialism. Magical realism is defined by Cooper as “the fictional device of the supernatural, not only from any source the writer chooses, syncretized with a developed realistic, historical perspective” (Cooper, 1998: 16). In this respect, Mda comments:

Some critics have called my work magic realism... I wrote in this manner because I am a product of this culture, in my culture the magical is not disconcerting. It is taken for granted... A lot of my work is set in the rural areas because they retain that magic, whereas the urban areas have lost it to Westernization (Mda 1997: 281)

In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda deals with the opposition between the rural areas in which the current influence of Westernization challenges the traditional beliefs and

the past, when traditions and beliefs were prominent within the community, but still contested by imperialism and the Great Cattle Killing, two of the most important historical events for the Xhosa. *The Heart of Redness* analyzes the conflict of values in the present by aligning two distinct narrative threads: one follows the events occurred four years from the first democratic elections in South Africa, while the other narrates the “Cattle Killing Movement”, dating back to 1856-1857 and exploring the first contacts between the British colonizers and the Xhosa. Mda retrieves the earlier episode set up in the visions of the young prophetess Nongqawuse and brings it to the contemporary debate raising from economic and social issues of development, originated by the proposal to realize a touristic project in the village of Qolorha. Mda succeeds in articulating the challenges and complicated elements that distinguish the culture and society of past and present South Africa. Mda enhances the image of Qolorha and the character of Nongqawuse, transforming them into a touristic attraction that can potentially help the local population to develop sustainably and freeing them from the bad association with one of the most tragic events in the history of the Xhosa people. Through the aid of his protagonist, Mda saves Qolorha from the danger of mass tourism, restores the importance of the prophetess Nongqawuse as a significant element of the history of the Xhosa people and highlights how important are models of alternative development.

Kissack and Titlestad examine the ways in which fiction and history, past and present intersect in the novel, and how this intersections effectively portray the challenges confronted by post-apartheid South Africa:

Mda establishes an engaging dialect between retrospective evaluation and prospective visions as he reconstructs the momentous event of the Xhosa cattle killing of 1856-57, tracing the legacy of this event for the Xhosa inhabitants of Qolorha-by-Sea and portraying the constraints and limitations that this historical memory, with its attendant values and expectations, imposes upon the present. In Mda's imaginative synthesis of historical reality and fictional construction, he presents us with a scenario of post-apartheid transformation, which is deeply cognisant of the constraining presence of the past on people's anticipations of a better future. (Kissack and Titlestad 2009: 152-53).

The first democratic elections of 1994 have been the most poignant and meaningful event in the recent history of South Africa, and it is the reason why in *The Heart of Redness* the protagonist Camagu decides to come back after almost 30 years of exile in the USA to his home country, willing to give his contribution to South Africa's development. There are remarkable similarities, which are not accidental, between Camagu's and Mda's backgrounds: the Xhosa origins, the extended period of exile in the USA, the studies and specialization in the field of development communication, and eventually the comeback after the fall of Apartheid for the opportunity to take part in South Africa's development. These intentional analogies have been underlined by Samuelson, who also asserts that "Camagu is quickly disabused of any idealised notions of the South African 'miracle' and becomes the spokesman for Mda's strongly worded critique of the 'new' South Africa" (Samuelson 2009: 237). After four years from arriving in Johannesburg with high hopes, yet still not succeeding in finding a job coherent with his qualifications,

Camagu becomes part of the group of the “disenchanted intellectuals” (Goncalves Pires 2013: 129), those who have grown increasingly disillusioned towards the socio-political situation the route followed by post-apartheid South Africa, which seems not to have any space for them:

He was at Giggles, a toneless nightclub on the ground floor, when he decided to take a walk. He is regular at Giggles because he lives on the fourth floor of this building. He does not need to walk the deadly streets of Hillbrow for a tippie. Most of Giggles’ patrons are disaffected exiles and sundry learned rejects of this new society. He is one of them too, and constantly marvels at the irony of being called an exile in his own country (26).¹

As Lloyd argues, by depicting Camagu’s inability to find a job Mda subtly satirizes modern South Africa (Lloyd 2001: 37). Camagu is highly educated and holds a PhD in communications. However, he is still not able to find his place in a South Africa which “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” (HR 33). He is not even able to find a job in the government offices. Camagu will become aware of the mendacity in which the government, made up of over-privileged, is caught up. Only when advised to join the Aristocrats of the Revolution, Camagu understands “the full implications of life in this new democratic society. He did not qualify for any important position because he was not a member of the Aristocrats of the Revolution, an exclusive club that is composed of the ruling elites, their families and close friends... The jobs he had been applying for had all gone to people whose

1 Mda, Z., *The Heart of Redness*, New York, Picador; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000. Hence referred to as “HR”

only qualification was that they were sons and daughters of the Aristocrats of the Revolution” (HR 36). Camagu does not understand that the 1994 first democratic elections are just the beginning of a challenging transformation process in South Africa, as if the elections were the culmination of that process. Disillusioned and disappointed, Camagu chooses to return to the USA, but after encountering a beautiful woman from Qolorha, he changes his mind and decides to travel to the village to look for her. As soon as Camagu becomes involved in the argument about the tourist project regarding the seaside village of Qolorha-by-Sea and gets to know the villagers’ different perspectives on the matter of development, he understands that debating on the strategy of eco-political development that best suits a community at a local level could prove to be more useful and gratifying than his former project of working for the government or a private firm that would not consider the interests of the locals. Moreover, through contact with the villagers, Camagu is able to progressively develop a sense of community and (re)discover his Xhosa roots – the heart of redness. Kissack and Titlestad analyze Camagu’s position of an intellectual in a post-colonial setting, arguing that “[Camagu] is unsettled and unsettles others... he is one who rigorously and courageously evaluates and modifies the inherited categories of understanding and who translates his understanding into actions that affect and transform his environment” (Kissack and Titlestad 2009: 166). Camagu attempts to find common ground between the modern and the traditional, shaping his own opinions and point of view and proposing an action plan that could help and be useful for the community living in Qolorha. Through many flashbacks, the narrative of past historical events is intertwined with the *bildungsroman* that unfolds in contemporary times. The many past and present characters who populate Qolohra-by-Sea, the British invaders, the modern urban changes, everything contributes to create a multitude of voices,

through which Mda introduces an extensive debate on the contemporary issues faced by South Africa resulting from colonialism and historical antecedents.

In the mid-nineteenth century the British held control of the Cape Colony, taken over from the Dutch towards the end of eighteenth century. The land east to the Cape Colony was mostly occupied by the Xhosa, gradually pushed eastward by the European, who wanted to expand their dominions. The lands of the native populations were being threatened, and gradually passed under the control of the British. The Frontier Wars followed one another for decades, until all the previously independent were annexed to Britain's colonial domains. Mda acknowledges in *The Heart of Redness* dedication that many events and characters part of the historical narrative of the novel are based on Peires' *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-57*². However, since *The Heart of Redness* is a fictional work, Mda has emphasized the dramatic aspects of the complex historical events narrated, with the aid of the analysis and narration of fictional characters' lives and the confrontation of those with actual historical occurrences and figures. Dealing with the British coming forward in their territory and importing a lung disease was hard for the Xhosa. In a time of political, social and territorial instability, the Xhosa were afflicted by other plagues: a deadly cattle disease, probably brought to South Africa by the cattle

2 Mda has asserted that the historical aspects are fictionalized in his novel, asserting that "*The Heart of Redness* is a work of fiction and not a history textbook. "Historical record is only utilized in the novel to serve my fiction – to give it context, for instance. In the historical segments the fiction centers on the patriarch Xikixa, his sons Twin and Twin-Twin, and his daughter-in-law Qukezwa. All these are fictional characters created from my imagination. But the world they inhabit comes directly from historical record (Jeff Peires's *The Dead Will Arise*) and from the oral tradition... [W]hen my fictional characters interact with historical characters such as Mlanjeni, Mhlakaza and Nongqawuse the events surrounding these characters come directly from Peires's book. This is why I have credited Peires in all editions and translations of *The Heart of Redness* as the sole source for all my material that comes from historical record" (Mda 2008: 200).

introduced by the Dutch in 1853 (Peires 1989: 70) and a terrible drought that struck the country in 1850. After being defeated by the British in the Seventh Frontier War (referred to as “The Was of Malajeni” in the book), in spite of the fact that the Xhosa prophets had been predicting the contrary, the Xhosa people separated in two factions: those who believed in the prophecies, and those who did not. After the drought, as their cattle was being culled by the disease, a young Xhosa girl called Nongqawuse prophesied that if the Xhosa slaughtered all their cattle and destroyed their harvest, their ancestors would come from the sea and smash the British invaders that were colonizing their land. The prophecy was spoken at the mouth of Gxarha river, in the land of Gcaleka Xhosa, a land that in the mid-nineteenth century was still independent from the British colonial rule. The prophecy caused a rift within the nation, who split into two groups: the Believers were those who believed the prophecy and prepared themselves to massively kill the cattle in their territories, while the sceptical Unbelievers chose to find another way to overcome their critical situation. The Believers blamed the misbelief of the Unbelievers for the ancestors not raising from the sea and the unfulfillment of the prophecy. Twin and Twin-Twin were brothers, respectively the ancestors of Zim and Bhonco. There was a clash between the two brothers when Twin decided to slaughter himself the cattle of Twin-Twin, who refused to. As a result of the starvation that haunted their land, Twin-Twin disowns Twin and his family. After months of famine, the 16th of February 1857 was established as the final date for the apocalypse. The sentiment of disillusionment that struck the Believers gave the death blow to the unity of the nation. During the following months thousands of Xhosa died, while many of the survivors chose to sacrifice their freedom in exchange for food in the Cape Colony. Once the power of the Xhosa was taken away, the Xhosa between the 1850s and 1990s become the Middle Generation,

identifying those who lived under the white rule. The social rift among the Xhosa can symbolize the way they consider their culture when confronted by a disorienting, external element such as the British colonizers. The Believers have faith in what they know from their tradition, they want to preserve and maintain the integrity of their cultural and historical identity, defending it from the invasion of the British occupation and attempting to reject them. On the contrary, the Unbelievers chose to struggle for their survival resorting to an alternative resistance to the British settlers, but their tragic situation lastly drove them to form an alliance with the British and who supported them. Some Unbelievers have even decided to ditch Xhosa traditions in favor of British culture and approach to education, which they considered superior. However, after the demise of apartheid, Bhonco and Zim reignite the ancient rivalry between Believers and Unbelievers.

The contemporary debate between the successors of the Believers and Unbelievers over the question of development was similarly provoked by the potential invasion of an external element that is likely to bring significant changes to the lives of the people belonging to the community. The two contrasting points of view on Nongqawuse's prophecy come back to life in the twentieth century through the leaders of the two opposing sides, who express different points of view on social and economic development implication that the construction of a luxury tourist resort on their shores would bring to their lives. In the past the Believers insisted on the importance of safeguarding their culture and the natural resources of their land, holding a conservative position. However, the successors of the Believers in the contemporary narrative show a radical attitude towards modernization. On the other side, in the twentieth century the attitude of the offspring of the Unbelievers resembles the position held by the Believers in the past. As Kissack and Titlestad

point out, Mda has ironically reversed the perspectives of those who believed, and those who did not: “The historical Believers in the prophecies of Nongqawuse express themselves as Unbelievers in the promise of progress and change, while the historical Unbelievers become Believers in modernization” (Kissack and Titlestad 2009: 159). When confronting with a new foreign challenge (the proposal of building a tourist resort, which embodies global capitalism), the two factions remain true to their allegiances, but there is a shift in their personal concept of “belief” and “unbelief” (Goncalves Pires 2013: 132). *The Heart of Redness* detaches itself from the early South African anti-apartheid novels of decolonization of the 1960s, which were dedicated to analyzing the consequences of acculturation and external influences. In *The Heart of Redness*, the main conflict addresses the perils of a dissension internal to the Xhosa themselves, even if caused by external causes, provoking an historical division between Believers and Unbelievers that lasts also in the modern world. In other words, the focus is not on the conflict between the white colonizer and the colonized indigenous people. Throughout the narrative, Mda takes into consideration the perspective of both sides, without giving preference or guilt to one over the other. As Gohrisch explains, “Mda does not only write back to the white colonial masters and producers of grand narratives to teach them a lesson about precolonial past and colonial history. Rather, he aims at his black contemporaries, to whom he wants to point out the contradictions and future potential of their own local history and culture” (Gohrisch 2006: 240).

As Lloyd asserts, “Mda’s outline of the epic tragedy of the Xhosa does not only allow him to outline two basic modes of thinking in the nation, it also gives him scope for a sardonic critique of British imperialism” (Lloyd 2001: 35). The premises of arrogance on which colonialism is based and through which reifies

people belonging to what were believed “lesser” cultures reveals itself in the episode in which Sir Harry Smith (who refers to himself as the Great White Chief) forces the Xhosa elders and chiefs to kiss his boots or, more subtly, when the soldier Dalton boils the head of Bhonco and Zim’s progenitor to store his cranium for phrenological analysis. As a consequence, the locals are also believed to have no right to their land, and the colonialists feel then entitled to take possession of it. As Spurr discusses, the action of naming is one of the processes through which appropriation begins: “The very process by which one culture subordinates another culture begins in the act of naming or leaving unnamed, of marking on an unknown territory the lines of division and uniformity, of boundary and continuity” (Spurr 1993: 5). This is the case of Sir George Grey, mocked by the Xhosa for his conviction of owning their land for having changed the name of some rivers and being called “The Man Who Named Ten Rivers”. Grey advises the Xhosa that he has come only to import the doctrines of the civilized Britain to “barbarous natives” (HR 96). However, there were Unbelievers such as Twin-Twin, who had not sold themselves to the British, that realized that the so-called “gift of civilization” would have implied also the losing of their land. Unfortunately, following the Cattle Killing, the Xhosa did not have the strength to resist the British forces.

The Heart of Redness opens with the contemporary argument between Believers and Unbelievers. The two factions have different points of view about accepting or refusing the tourist project and opposite views about the best proposal for their economic development: Bhonco is the leader of the Unbelievers, who look at the tourist offering as a natural implementation of modernization in their village that could potentially produce economic opportunities for the inhabitants of Qolorha-by-Sea. As Bhonco proclaims in front of his supporters, “The Unbelievers stand for

progress [...] we want to get rid of this bush which is a sign of our uncivilized 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” (HR 92). Bhonco considers progress as absolutely beneficial for the whole population, and uses the word ‘redness’ to describe the poor civilization and backwardness in relation to the red ochre, a distinctive element of their culture with which the Xhosa women used to dye their body and their traditional skirts. Mda indicates the novel’s central conflict by employing the word in the title of his novel, which clearly alludes to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Sewlall has analyzed both Mda and Conrad’s novels, concluding that:

Metonymically, the title *Heart of Darkness* functions as 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 civilizing mission of the West. *The Heart of Redness* also assumes metonymic dimensions as it is the equivalent of backwardness and absence of enlightenment (Sewlall 2003).

On the opposite side, Zim and the Believers distrust the promise of enrichment and growth: Zim considers any change that can be caused by modernization as negative, and fears that the resort would impoverish them even more because the major part of the population would be excluded from the benefits of the project, while having their natural resources over-exploited. Bhonco descends from twin-Twin, the leader of the Unbelievers, who have always been in favor of progress and civilization. The position of Bhonco towards the building of the resort is strongly

influenced also by Xoliswa Ximiya, his educated daughter, even repudiating several Xhosa customs and traditions, which he considers uncivilized: “The Unbelievers stand for civilization. To prove this point Bhonco has now turned away from beads and has decided to take out the suits that his daughter bought him many years ago from his trunk under the bed. From now on he will be seen only in his suits” (HR 71). Zim on the contrary is firmly attached to the Xhosa customs and traditions, and considers threatening everything belonging to modernity and foreign to the Xhosa culture. Zim is convinced that the guarantee of happiness for the village relies on the “pure” Xhosa traditions preceding the advent of the British colonizers: “This son of Ximiya talks of progress. Yet he wants to destroy the bush that has been here since the days of our forefathers. What kind of progress is that?” (HR 92). However, the concept of tradition can be considered from different perspectives that give it different connotations. Tradition is commonly defined in relation to the transmission of customs and cultural practices that are believed to constitute automatically a certain tradition, omitting the dynamic element brought by the transmission of traditions to the new generations, which is an active process of giving and receiving, of deciding to accept and keep, or to refine, or even to abandon certain aspects of such traditions (Goncalves Pires 2013: 135). In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda depicts the will of the Xhosa people to remain loyal to their historical traditions and the impact that modernity has on such traditions, both by means of the European settlers and the advancement of globalization in present times. Throughout the narrative, Mda is careful not to show any preference towards the opposing perspective of the Believers and of the Unbelievers, focusing instead on the inter-cultural connotation of the Xhosa culture.

The division between Believers and Unbelievers in the contemporary narrative retains many similarities with the narrative that takes place in the nineteenth century: in both times the question of maintaining or abandoning tradition is a constant, and the extremism shown by the two factions leads to an internal rupture that undermines the determination and strength that the Xhosa people need to resist to the forces coming from the outside. In both narratives, it clearly appears that neither the absolute preservation nor the complete abandonment of tradition is the right choice for the Xhosa people. The hostilities between Zim and Bhonco are reignited by the tourist project, and the conflict prevents the villagers to focus on the real issues that call for a discussion in order not to become a threat to the further marginalization of Qolorha-by-Sea. At first, when Camagu arrives at the village, he refuses to get involved in the dispute. But then, driven by the need to earn a living for himself, Camagu has the chance to contribute to the changing of the situation, with the aid of his point of view on progress combined with the perspectives of the other inhabitants of the village. As will be analyzed in the next chapter, Camagu maps out a project for the development of Qolorha that is founded upon its culture and complex history.

In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda employs two narrative strands to shed light and invite to discuss and reflect on complicated historical and contemporary issues of suffering and exploitation. Mda retrieves the historical episode of the prophetess Nongqawuse in its colonizing context and aligns it with the discussion on the matter of development of the end of the twentieth century, giving voice to the multitude of the contradictory and conflicting elements of contemporary culture and society of South Africa. As a historical character, Nongqawuse was held responsible for a tragic episode in the history of the Xhosa. In *The Heart of*

Redness, Nongqawuse in the end is recovered as a significant character, becoming the touristic attraction that helps the village and inhabitants of Qolorha to develop sustainably. As Camagu tells to John Dalton, “Nongqawuse really sells the holiday camp [...] When we advertise in all the important travel magazines we use her name. Qolorha is the place of miracles” (HR 276). Ashforth underlines how important is to revise biased representations and narratives of historical facts to prevent from being manipulated:

The context in which South African writing takes place is far from neutral. Since the 1950s, through the system of Bantu Education, a pernicious brew has been served to young black South Africans in the guise of history. The representations of the past embodied in Bantu Education, to say nothing of other official and semiofficial histories, were designed to buttress white domination and undoubtedly served to entrench ignorance... The production of stories about the past, then, that can empower people in changing the structure of domination in their present is of the utmost importance in the struggle against apartheid (Ashforth 1991: 590).

Producing writings that dealt with the past during the apartheid was considered a powerful and effective way to resist oppression, and during the post-apartheid period it was the responsibility of the new South African political situation to retrieve the histories of the past (Goncalves Pires 2013: 146).

In *The Heart of Redness*, the cattle-killing movement, Nongqawuse, the famine and the dramatic implications of 1856-1857 are intermingled with the narration of the contemporary condition of South Africa during the sensitive period of shifting

towards full democracy. Mda combines fiction and concrete historical facts to raise awareness and discuss the issues regarding South African postcolonial identities, which are represented as in need to be examined without excluding their historical memories. In the novel, Mda provides an insight on the difficulties affronted by the South African society both during past and present times by skillfully aligning two different story lines that teach the reader the importance of development, but also of understanding.

2.3 Ecology in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

Ecology is a relatively new branch of biological sciences. However, ecology can be meaningful also in the fields of literature, culture and in social contexts. In the last twenty years, ecology in South Africa has acquired a new meaning, changing significantly. Starting from the 1980s, a new environmental culture has been flourishing, generating many academic and activist ideas on nature which aim to move beyond the shaping force of the past political influence of colonialism and apartheid (Vital 2015). How do black authors represent ecosocial concerns, such as poverty and urban issues? Anthony Vital has read Zakes Mda's novels by taking this approach, critiquing Mda's *The Heart of Redness* to appeal in a distorting way to urban nature and "nature outside city-limits" (Slovic, Rangarajan, Sarveswaran 2015: 223) as a sort of getaway from urban modernity. Vital admits that the "political motives" of the narrative can entail less attention to the ways "urban mediation complicates social and individual relation to nature" (Slovic, Rangarajan, Sarveswaran 2015: 226). In brief, Vital considers an ecocritical perspective useful to discuss issues such as social inequity in urban spaces represented by black writers. Hovering between the ongoing influence of colonialism and the dominance

of Northern countries on the global order, ecology in South African context is profoundly embroiled with postcolonial politics. Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* is a recent work of prose fiction, which Vital reads from the perspective of the evolution of South African environmental culture. Relying on postmodern strategies for the destabilization of meaning, *The Heart of Redness* implicates ecology within the current social and cultural context (Vital 2015: 297).

The Heart of Redness brings attention to ecology through the events of the characters' lives, making it an ever-present issue throughout the progress of the narrative. Ecology is not treated as a central part of the plot, however the novel explores the importance of ecology in a postcolonial context, discussing the consequences of an ambivalent attitude towards Northern power. *The Heart of Redness* shares the same preoccupation of the environmental justice movement, which seeks to pose ecology in regard of South Africa's postcolonial context. Vital believes that reading this 'post-apartheid' narrative "against 'post-apartheid' developments in South Africa's environmental culture can [...] illuminate this shared perspective and at the same time delineate limits to the value assigned ecology by the narrative" (Vital 2015: 299). *The Heart of Redness* was written after the 1994 South African transition to democracy, however Vital suggests that the same approach can be employed also to read writings belonging to different moments of South Africa's history. Relying on what social, cultural and environmental history can offer, it is possible to assess how literature addresses the issues related to nature and environment and how passionate fiction can be about as a reaction to ecological and social questions.

Mda's novel finds in ecology a practical answer to problems that arise from the postcolonialist condition. It is a historical fiction that features the recollections of the brutality and devastation brought from nineteenth-century colonialism. The novel also shows a postmodern tendency by disrupting cultural notions which can be considered stable and standardized. Mda addresses a readership consisting of international readers, therefore his works are conceived for offering an intertextual reading experience that ranges among many different genres, crossing the boundaries between "[...] romance and realism, between history and modernity, between metafictional and factual storytelling modes, between individual and communal consciousness" (Fincham 2011: 10). Mda writes hybrid novels, and hybridity is an extremely important concept for postcolonial theory, because it allows to deconstruct colonial authority. Homi Bhabha states that "[H]ybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities. [...] Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power" (Bhabha 1994: 159, 160). Mda's text presents a deconstructive approach by choosing a non-linear narration, alternating between past and present and overlapping time and space. As Meyer observes (Fincham 2011: 51), *The Heart of Redness* reverses colonial binary oppositions:

It is fascinating that the inversion of binaries in Conrad is matched by the dismantling of polarities in many parts of Mda's text. This is because the hybrid, divided and multifaceted nature of communities

and identities prevents a clean separation between ideas of civilised and savage, moral and immoral, humane and brutal. For instance Camagu seems to embody and embrace both Western and traditional forms of knowledge. Pondering Camagu's situation, the man in the village "did not expect a man with such education, a man who has lived in the lands of the white people for thirty years, to have such a respect for the customs of his people" (HR 99)

The Heart of Redness introduces "an epistemological challenge to dualistic thinking" (Barker 2010: 20). Woodward affirms that *The Heart of Redness* can be described as "a postcolonial novel of epic proportions" (Woodward 2005: 287), in which traditional binary oppositions and dualities are progressively deconstructed.

By unsettling typical ideas of cultural difference, the writing strategy is in harmony with South African quest to go past the difficulties and the burden carried by colonial encounters and an ethnocentric attitude is liable to threaten a democracy founded on multiculturalism. Recognizing the unstable nature of this developing culture, Mda proposes it as one of the best responses to the conditions of a postcolonial belonging suitable to the changed times of the new era. The novel demonstrates a solid awareness of the uneven distribution of power in the capitalistic world and explores the complex dilemma of whether is best to be part of a society connected to the global economy, in the attempt to gather everything possible for the sake of locals' wealth (at great expense of what the world of capital could ask in return), or better to stick to the local as opposed to the global. The novel calls into question historical certainties; it explicitly recognizes the worth in the local, simultaneously pointing out where the value can be found even in a

specifically enclosed representation of the global. Big capital is based in Johannesburg, it is regarded as equivalent to capital in the USA and could represent a virtually disruptive threat (Vital 2015). The narrative's postcolonial ambivalence towards the global North is reflected in the representation of the USA, depicted as a provider economic knowledge and understanding to the novel's protagonist, providential to protect the local from the exploitation that could arrive from the outside. It is exactly the modern world altogether, supposedly the wealthy parts of South Africa included, that deliver the key element in the global economic scheme. This crucial component is ecology, which thereby is a strategic presence in the novel, because it enters the narrative in subordination to the economic and psychological well-being of human community (Vital 2015: 306). In this context *The Heart of Redness* recalls the aforementioned 'unrepentantly anthropocentric orientation' of the new environmental culture developing in South Africa. Indeed ecology has a significant role for what concerns handling and overcoming tensions throughout the narrative, however even ecology is implicated from the perspective of the novel's postmodern questioning. Ecology contributes to the narrative resolution showing its practical value in the stability of the daily routine in a small village, frequently resorting to the conventions of comedy to make compromises with the often abusive complexities typical of South Africa's postcolonial condition.

The most evident indication of Zakes Mda's postcolonial approach to his writing is to be found in the side taken by the narrative towards the category of the indigenous, whose value is asserted but at the same time raises many questions (Vital 2015: 307). By focussing on the development of the main character, the reader notices how the narrative delivers his transition from a condition of feeling

lost to a state of feeling included. The sense of belonging comes from people, who in their turn have a past history of inclusion in a place which he comes to consider his new home. As Vital states, “what is local, understood in terms of the indigenous, is given value through what it can provide psychologically to counter the effects of modern displacement”. However, as he continues, “the narrative in various ways marks the indigenous as problematic, raising questions of who belongs, how one belongs and whether the culture through which one effects a sense of belonging can be considered as having a clear identity” (Vital 2015: 307). In the light of this remark, the ecotourism project presented in the conclusion provides both Camagu and the people of the village the stability and security needed in support of a well-balanced sense of belonging. The narrative empowers ecology with a relevance comparable to the complexity assigned to the indigenous. In the postcolonial situation of modern South Africa the indigenous idea carries two sides of its burden: on one side there is the colonizing perspective, while on the other there is the perspective of resisting to colonization. The narrative presents a relatable duality for ecology, because ecology assumes the role of mediator between the conventional connection of a community risking to lose that sense of belonging, but ecology mediates also the same connection as a modern tendency to preserve which is sensed as something ‘other’. Preservation is important to local communities dealing with modernity, in a constant tension and negotiation between what is ‘indigenous’ and what is ‘modern’ emerging from the ambivalence to resist or not the immersion in modernity.

The narrative concentrates on this liminal space of negotiation faced by the characters. At the very beginning of the novel, the locals are represented as having long been split into two juxtaposed factions as a result of two distinct points of

view on the evaluation and interpretation of their land's past, where the local has been profoundly disrupted by the colonizers and the power of modernity they brought. The narrative unsettles the sense of union of belonging to the umXhosa people by representing a critical event happened in the region's past history: the episode of the cattle killing dated back to 1856/1857. These past divisions are proposed again in recent times, raising the issue of how to interpret prophets who want to protect amaXhosa communities during hard times. The question originates from the ancient division, proved as still staying alive in contemporary Qolorha, a region exposed to processes of "intercultural hybridisation' (Bank 2002) as a consequence of the encounter with the newly arrived British people, which influenced their socio-cultural unity. Throughout the narrative, the notion that the amaXhosa are the first that could claim their ancestors' land before the colonialists is also unsettled. In fact, the Khoikhoi came before the amaXhosa, recognized as the 'original owners' of the ancestral land only by some.

The narrative proposes the history of a place in which the sense of belonging implies further displacements and cultural appropriations. Referring to cultural exchanges and marriages among the Khoikhoi and the amaXhosa in a time prior to colonization, the novel places the contact of the amaXhosa with the British in the context of a cultural hybridization which has already begun in the past. The difference is that the exchanges occurred during precolonial times had not been traumatic, while the situation results distressingly different at the time of the contact with the British when Britain was leading the development and passage into modern times. This encounter results in traumatizing experiences of imposition, conflicts, and eventually conquest, turning out in an extremely crucial moment of major loss. Within a historically justified context, the narrative suggests that the

cattle killing is a way produced by the contact with the British to save the amaXhosa and protect their culture. The portrayal of the prophecies might seem as a manifestation of tradition. However, by analyzing the form of the prophecies more carefully, it is clear that it suggests a combination of ideas about ancestors and resurrection coming from the Christian tradition. In fact, Nongquawuse's uncle and mentor has spent some time with Christian missionaries. In the novel we acknowledge that some amaXhosa have regained strength by adopting British mindset in the 1850s (Vital 2015: 308). Camagu himself, in a meaningful passage, is given the chance to reflect the general position taken by the novel, asserting that "the amaXhosa people are not a museum piece. Like all cultures, their culture is dynamic." (HR 248). The representation of Qolorha in contemporary times underlines that this hybridization of culture is still alive and more prominent. Camagu is the last to arrive to the village when the narrative takes place, though he had spent his childhood there. After many years spent studying and working in America, he comes back and discovers that the local trader of the village (of English origin) is considered as an insider by the community and speaks isiXhosa perfectly.

Through the narrative of Camagu's journey we see from one side how the notion of a pure isiXhosa culture is undermined, and from the other how local culture can be preserved from subversions even in modern times, helping to reach and endure economic independence. The locals are represented as agents in their willingness to preserve their cultural and social stability. However, it is Camagu who is in the position to effectively channel their desire, thanks to an awareness originating from the knowledge of a wider world. By introducing the notion of ecotourism, Camagu gets able to help formerly-colonized people oppose the danger of a new, modern

colonization, this time in the form of the forces of global capital with headquarters in Johannesburg. Camagu therefore takes a contemporary form of the young prophetic of the previous century, proposing to the locals an integration into modern business more at ease with the moral respect for traditional values of the society and cultural memory. Camagu believes that the rejection of capital-intensive development would protect the work quality of the locals, as well as preserving the remaining elements dating back to the relationship with the land of pre-modern times. However, Camagu in the last pages of the novels reflects and underlines that he is not certain that ecology will be enough to protect local people. Precariousness comes also by the fact that not all the villagers agree and support Camagu's proposal. Either way, there is also the local trader's side project to compete with. John Dalton makes a 'cultural tourism' proposal, which elevates Qolorha's cultural legacies as a way to earning money. This would create an artificial version of a traditional village, populated by actors who perform scenes of everyday life to the benefit of tourists. Throughout the narrative, characters point out the degradation associated with this kind of tourism: for example when Bhonco gets upset with his wife following her performance for some tourists who recorded her "making a monkey of her... would they do that kind of thing to their own mothers?" (HR 163), or when Camagu argues with Dalton and identifies "the attempt to preserve folk ways" with "reinvent[ing] culture" (HR 248).

Through the representation of a community split in two sides in opposition to each other, Mda underlines that social life, since the incursion of modernity, was and will continue to be characterized by disagreement, discord and clashes. The narrative raises awareness on the fact that there is a modern tendency to undermine the indigenous and exploit the resources of their land, regardless of their cultural

heritage and social situation. Therefore, a character who disposes of enough knowledge of the modern world is needed to stand up against its force. This necessity makes us wonder who could consider the indigenous worth saving and why someone who lives in the modern world should care. In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda proposes us a plausible answer through the depiction of Camagu's journey. The main character returns from the modern world and reconnects with his native rural land in South Africa and with a pre-capitalist culture. Camagu nostalgically returns to the rural in the wake of his disillusionment for the modern revolution that he finds has failed "to live up to its democratic, modernising promise" (Vital 2015: 301). Camagu's drive to protect the locals and the landscape acquires an emotional resonance and becomes an element of his self-discovery journey.

Mda's novel focuses on some central issues that South Africa must face in view of an adjustment of identity, which must merge and find a compromise between modernity and traditions, negotiating cultural differences and questioning how rural areas can properly develop and flourish. *The Heart of Redness* represents a region of South Africa which has been (and continues to be) deeply influenced by the intervention of outsiders, whose contact creates an unstable situation hanging between loss and opportunity that requires flexibility, an inclination to deconstruct the certainties, and an inventive negotiation of different histories characterized by conflict. Camagu, coming from a modern environment, proposes the contemporary concept of ecology as a solution that would guarantee protection to a community rooted in a pre-modern era. In spite of the fact that intrusion and violation are inevitable, and in spite of the generation of different subject stories and positions caused by encroachment that give life to opposing views and incongruities that must be accepted, the inventiveness of the main character gives form to the expectation

that it is possible for locals, in their small way, to stand for the improvement of rural lives in Africa. Camagu keeps staying out of the inherited disputes of the villagers, always underlining that he remains neutral in the fight between Believers and Unbelievers. In doing so, the narrative tells us the will to “move beyond a sense of the present as determined by past conflicts” (Vital 2015: 312).

CHAPTER THREE

Colonialism and Landscape

Environmental history has been following a path that involves colonial and postcolonial discourses about Africa, determining the main issues of colonial environments by analyzing and re-establishing the former boundaries of historical knowledge (Brownell and Falola 2012: 2). Brownell and Falola distinguish between “environment” and “landscape” narratives: the first ones comprise scientific narratives centered on the production potential of the resources, while the second ones are focused on the depiction of clearly defined territories. In particular, in colonial landscape narratives, Africans showed a tendency to stand on the sidelines, deprived of any possibility of action. In fact, native populations were considered “people with ‘simple technology, [who] remain close to nature and shaped by it, rather than able to shape it” (Brownell and Falola 2012: 2). Colonialists justified the intervention they carried out to the native land, because they misconstrued that land as an unspoilt, virgin soil. African environmental history has proved how tragically the different environments with their own peculiarities have been tarnished as a result of Europeans’ superficiality and misinterpretation of landscape. Such misconstructions of African environments and populations have influenced for centuries our perspective and opinions, as well as shaping the territory itself and the approach and authority of Africans over their land. Extremely important for the colonial era were the many meeting points, struggles, conflicts and renegotiations between the Western idealized notions of an untouched, primitive Africa, and the forced introduction of technology, scientific

beliefs and land exploitation to fulfill the desire to “rationalize” the environmental diversity. As Luig and Von Oppen assert, “with advancing urbanization and industrialization of Europe, otherness was increasingly identified as ‘nature’ (for which, since the eighteenth century, ‘landscape’ was also used as a synonym) or ‘wilderness’, remote from the world of humans subsequently labeled as ‘culture’” (Luig and Von Oppen, 1997: 12). The encounter between Western technology and science on one side, and the idealized pastoral on the other, offer many insights into how colonizers approached Africa and the indigenous populations. The environmental transformations originated from the relation between the opposed forces of nature and civilization, a consequence from the displacement of the Europeans in response to the urge to ideologically and physically move away from the ‘artificial, civilized world towards nature, on the opposite side of the spectrum. These territories were considered as new spaces where colonizers felt entitled to impose their own knowledge, whose landscape could be rewritten “within the European pastoral ideal”, as places that could be “cultivate[d] as both wild and reservoirs of potential, waiting for technological intervention” (Brownell and Falola 2012: 4).

In 1975, at the University of Massachusetts, the Nigerian professor and novelist Chinua Achebe gave an unconventional, anti-imperialistic lecture on Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, one of the most significant novels of the twentieth century. Achebe commented on how *Heart of Darkness* was an insulting, despicable novel, which depicted the imperialistic “desire – one might indeed say the need – in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (Achebe 1990: 119). From Achebe’s perspective,

Conrad contributed to give a negative, stereotypical image of Africa as “the dark continent”, opposing it to the imperialistic cliché of a positive, liberal and civilized West. If we read *Heart of Darkness* from the point of view of Achebe’s critical lecture, it is noticeable how Conrad could not avoid recurring to the ideological structure of Western imperialism. In spite of condemning the barbarity of colonial exploitation, Conrad failed to understand the notion of cultural diversity, filling his novel with “a parade of popular fantasy, racial prejudice and cultural stereotype” (Stefan 2013: 10).

Postcolonialist studies, however, offer us a different point of view on *Heart of Darkness*, allowing us to read it from a broader perspective. By calling Conrad a “bloody racist” and accusing him to have reduced Africa to “a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity” (Achebe 1990: 145, 146), it is Achebe himself who, to a certain extent, grants Conrad the right to give a specific representation of Africa rooted in certain cultural codes, while reading *Heart of Darkness* from a postcolonial point of view gives us an overview on how colonizers misconstrued Africa’s environmental diversity and people. In this respect, we can identify Marlow as bystander who bears witness of the brutalities he observes from a distance during his journey. Marlow offers us a subjective, neutral point of view over the horrors he experiences, without becoming neither the victim nor the perpetrator within the colonial system. The whole novel is built on the metaphor of the heart, physically the nucleus of the body that provides the vital power. The heart is associated to the idea of darkness, which stands not only for the depth of African forests, or the symbolical plunge into the most ancient origins of mankind, but the word suggests also the blackness of the skin, therefore the phrase

“heart of darkness” can be understood as a reference to the essence of African identity.

In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies [...] (Conrad 1994: 96).

Black and red are two colors traditionally characterized by a strong negative connotation in Western Christian culture. They are related to violence, death, pain, moral transgression and, most importantly, otherness. Conrad portrays ochre body painting as a significant part of African otherness and, as Stefan affirms, “Zakes Mda appropriates the representation of the European ‘other’, or hetero-image, and turns it, through a change of angle that brings about an upside-down perspective, common in postcolonial and postmodern literature, into a positive (hall)mark of the African identity and, on the representation level, into a self-image” (Stefan 2013: 17). By changing a morpheme in his title, Mda seems willing to respond to Conrad’s canonical novel by starting with the traditional opposition between nature and culture: the South-African writer opposed the artificial “redness” to the natural “darkness” of the skin, offering a metaphor of African traditional, cultural customs and identity. The tradition of painting their bodies red with ochre is the essence of Africanness: this custom stands for culture, and it is an act that confers the true, distinctive color to African skin, whereas blackness is a negative imprint dictated from an outside society.

By paralleling a nineteenth century colonial invasion with a contemporary economic assault, Mda suggests that Western economic progress and the forces of globalization should not be automatically embraced as bringing benefits, but should, like colonialism, be treated with extreme caution and suspicion, because they pose much of a potential threat as they appear to offer benefits to local culture (Dannenberg 2009: 173).

Dealing with anthropocentric phenomena such as climate change, the damages caused by fossil fuels industry, deforestation, floods, the threats faced by endangered animal species and the precarious equilibrium of botanical biodiversity, it comes natural to think that the indigenous peoples' traditional, spontaneous tendency to respect the environment is evidence of "superior wisdom" (Thieme 2016: 101). Since the age of colonialism, the cultural practices that onetime used to be uncontested started to clash with Western interests. Particularly in recent times, when a global interest towards going back to a fictitious "purity" and an idealized pre-colonial age. Such discourses of the past have an immeasurable value to native authors from societies that have suffered from the consequences of colonialism: from such discourses, new narrative strategies can emerge to help them to maintain their culture alive and raise awareness and protect the environment.

3.2 Legacy of the Past

Mda's *The Heart of Redness* is a novel that explores the transformation that a place is subjected to over the centuries, pointing out the different responses to the events that change depending on the historical moment. The two narratives that flow into

two different historical periods depict the crisis and struggles faced by Qolorha's people, showing how challenging is to preserve the identity of a place and the society that inhabit it.

The main characters in the two different narrative lines share the same origins, because they descend from the same ancestor, Xikixa, the headless ancestor beheaded by the British. The characters belonging to the branch of the Believers have some traits in common that remain the same even in different time periods: for example, many Believers of different generations share the same names. This sense of recurring common features is a constant throughout the whole novel and until the final pages, in which we witness to a fusion of the identities of Qukezwa and her son Heitsi, two characters who carry the same name in the two different eras.

Qukezwa sings in soft pastel colors and looks at Heitsi. Qukezwa swallow a mouthful of fresh oysters and looks at Heitsi. Oh, this Heitsi! He is afraid of the sea. How will he survive without the sea? How will he carry out the business of saving his people? Qukezwa grabs him by his hand and drags him into the water. He is screaming and kicking wildly. Wild waves come and cover them for a while, then rush back again. Qukezwa laughs excitedly. Heitsi screams even louder, pulling away from her grip, "No, mama! No! This boy does not belong in the sea! This boy belongs in the man village!" (HR: 277)

The final passages featuring Qukezwa and Heitsi could very well be about an episode set in any of the two historical periods, inviting us to rethink about the relationship between past and present. The conclusion depicts an idyllic situation in

which the communion with the surrounding environment offers relief and peacefulness, revolving around the romanticized characters' connection with the natural world in contrast with the emphasis on material realities, strongly present throughout the novel (Thieme 2016: 113). The last sentences offer a view of a pure, uncontaminated place, external to the urge that modern societies feel about economic growth. Throughout *The Heart of Redness* there are recurrent disputes every other point, regarding ownership and usage of the land, and ethical questioning about the administration of the environment. Such controversies arise both from the misappropriation of indigenous spaces in colonial times and from contemporary neo-colonial action programs regarding local economies in the era of globalization.

For many of the contemporary Xhosa people, the young prophetess Nongqawuse “is an embarrassment. Some say she never existed and that the story is a lie concocted by the white people to defame blacks. Others say she existed but not in this village. She must have lived somewhere else, in Umtata or even in Cape Town. Another group says that even if did live in these parts, she was a liar and a disgrace. They don't want to hear or know anything about her” (HR: 150). Mda uses the strength of the 1850s catastrophe to build a “usable past for the formation of a Xhosa people to come” (Bogue 2010: 50). Intertwining two story lines, Mda brings back to light the rejected past of the Xhosa community, whose burden of the consequences weights also in the present-day world and is a threat to their culture and traditions. In the narrative of present times we assist to the potential effect of forces that could put the Xhosa people back in touch with their history, while at the same time help the community finding a solution to their social problems.

After the schism caused by the prophecy, Twin-Twin founded a Cult of Unbelievers. Twin-Twin turned his back to his ancient culture and traditions, represented by the prophecies he did not believe in, and Christianity, which the British colonizers were spreading among the amaXhosa. Twin-Twin invented “his own Cult of the Unbelievers – elevating unbelieving to the heights of a religion” (HR: 259), positing his opposition at the heights of a religious belief. Within the framework of the contemporary narrative, Bhonco restores the Cult of Unbelief, after being forgotten during the age of the Middle Generation. The tensions are newly awoken and the conflict escalates quickly; the split between the two sides deepens as the tensions in South African society intensify after the fall of apartheid and is particularly noticeable in Zim and Bhonco’s different reactions to the possibility of development faced by Qolorha-by-Sea, which involves the creation of a casino hotel and many other facilities typical of Western big cities. In both narrative lines the indigenous people and the outsiders are in disagreement on the possible advantages and benefits development could bring, staging an elaborate argument about environmental ethics that accompanies the reader through the whole narrative, “bringing postcolonial concerns into dialogue with traditional amaXhosa and more recent cross-cultural ecocritical thinking about place” (Thieme 2016: 114). One of the most interesting things about Mda’s novel is that, in its intricate plot, it succeeds in demonstrating the importance of bioregional ecological issues in the amaXhosa region over a time span that lasts over 150 years. The tensions confronted by the rural communities are represented from the inside, but also effectively put in connection to the invasion of the external agents: if in the nineteenth century the intruders were British colonizers, contemporary “colonists” are embodied by South African entrepreneurs that live in the city. Their aim is to

invest in post-Apartheid society for purposes of profit, and Qolorha-by-Sea suffers the impact of global forces influence, both in the form of colonialism and tourism.

The proposal to establish a gambling complex is the trigger that provoked the debates in the contemporary sections of the novel. The controversy caused by the project regards concerns about the implications of tourism and the effects it might cause on the landscape, the environment and the inhabitants of Qolorha and, more generally, wants to make careful readers reflect on the impact that tourism has on local economies worldwide, implying an analogy between tourism and colonialism (Thieme 2016: 118). *The Heart of Redness* successfully illustrates how land disputes resemble each other in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, during the age of colonial expansionism, and in the twentieth century, when South Africa experienced a period of apparent reconstruction spoiled by the opportunistic power of global capitalist manifestations, raising fundamental questions about the critical consequences of tourism.

3.3 Between Nature and Culture

One of the most interesting extensions of ecocriticism is the approach of cultural ecology, defined by Zapf as a theory that “posits ecology as a paradigmatic perspective of knowledge not only for the natural sciences, but for cultural studies as well” (Zapf 2016: 136). Different cultures determine the way people interact with nature, other forms of life and the physical environment around them: cultural ecology regards culture as a sphere which is interdependent with nature and ecology, although it acknowledges the peculiarities and different dynamics of the two worlds.

The narrative of *The Heart of Redness* revolves around a series of binary oppositions, between past and present, tradition and progress, foreign and familiar, faith and unbelief, nature and culture, but the boundary line almost always blurred. Many passages evoke an idyllic picture of amaXhosa society before the colonial encroachment of their lands as pristine and untouched, uncontaminated by outside invasions, but the conservation measures eventually adopted for the environment give space to an open ending, in which we are not sure about their future effectiveness. To deal with the nature-culture binomial, Mda investigates the tension that has always existed between modernity and tradition from a South African perspective. Mda revisits and contextualizes the concepts of progress and civilization, speaking out against the potentially disastrous implications that the chasing of the Western myth could bring, undermining the opportunity of pursuing a peaceful coexistence on our planet, respecting each other and the environment. Even though the race towards progress and transformation is unstoppable, it shall not authorize us to make choices unintelligently, carelessly and unwisely.

The world described by Mda is rooted in a specific place, and the reader can enjoy an accurate depiction of the setting because it is narrated by mutually engaging history, memory, culture and landscape. Such approach to the use of settings in his novels differs much from the typical Western approach, which considers landscape as an item which exists only to be subject to human will and power. On the contrary, in African tradition man is not considered as a separated entity from the land. For indigenous peoples, landscape is an integral part of a group's sense of social identity, which "cannot be separated from the ancestors whose past life created the topographical features inherited by their descendants" (Fincham 2011: XXV).

In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda shows again his concern and involvement in creating socially engaged creative works, conceived for making readers' reflect, raising awareness and stimulating "a critical interrogation of the past and the present, with a view to constructing a more democratic world of effective mutual respect, partnership and reconciliation" (Dolce 2016: 62). In Mda's narrative, the Xhosa community finds a space for the re-invention of their collective identity and the re-discovery of their past and legacy after the oppression, the destruction and the deprivation of their history brought by colonization. From a contemporary point of view, the novel reaches to the past to investigate its inescapable impact in the present and come forward with proposals for a better future.

The narrative revolves around the debate on whether local traditions should be protected and fully preserved, or whether it would be better if the community stepped into the intricate world of global economy, risking to lose something of their uniqueness. At the core of the novel lie the issues connected to the ever-changing nature of a cultural identity, which are closely related to environmental concerns. Therefore, the relationship and balance between nature and culture is one of the main concerns addressed by the novel, a kind of leitmotif that links the present with the past. In South Africa, land has always taken a distinctive stance, representing, as Dolce affirms, "the source not only of material, but also of spiritual life: it is the place of the affirmation and negotiation of collective and individual identities, a metaphor of oppression and dispossession, but it is also a symbol of renewal, rehabilitation and liberation" (Dolce 2016: 64). The alternation of two different timeframes, in which the names of some characters such as John Dalton, Twin, Qukezwa and Heitsi recur, stimulates the reader to cross the boundary line between past and present, reflecting on the threat posed by an overly optimistic

view on progress, which most of the time goes hand in hand with the endangerment of environment and ecological balance.

In the contemporary narrative John Dalton is the descendant of the British trader who lived in the nineteenth century and the current shopkeeper of Qolorha. His identity is hybrid: John Dalton speaks the Xhosa language and underwent the traditional circumcision surgery; he is the product of a process of cross-fertilization determined by colonization. If compared to Camagu, who, in spite of his background and his roots has taken the road to westernization, Dalton appears to be more intimate with the Xhosa culture. At first Camagu feels like a stranger to the political culture of South Africa, struggling to participate and understand the new, contemporary dynamics. Step by step he succeeds at “strip[ping] off the white mask of a Westernized African” (Bell 2009: 20), and starts recuperating his amaXhosa identity. Initially, Camagu is unwilling to participate to the quarrels and conflicts between Believers and Unbelievers, being careful in not taking either side. Camagu gradually changes, undertaking a process of inner change and growth: a little at a time he starts taking sides and getting involved into some specific choices that have to be made, exactly like every other member of the community. Camagu decides to abandon his passive position, from which he witnesses without taking action to the apparently harmless infiltration of Western economics into a world that relies on traditions and could be wounded again by the irruption of Western globalization, in the same way that it was plagued by colonialism in the past. Thanks to the experience and knowledge earned by his studies in the West, Camagu manages to plan and promote a “dignified and intelligent project of local development that preserves the specificity and peculiarities of the area without surrendering to the opportunities offered by foreign capital” (Dolce 2016: 66).

Camagu therefore can be considered a mediator between the traditionalism, that was part of his childhood and now is rediscovering, and modernity, with which he came into contact during his exile. Camagu finds himself in the position of mediating between traditionalism and modernism especially because, thanks to Qukezwa, he could understand the real meaning hiding behind the story of Nongqawuse and the true value of natural environment (Klopper 2008). With the aid of the ecologic theme, In *The Heart of Redness* Mda can weave together the concepts of modernism and traditionalism with the opposition between nature and culture. The Unbelievers stand for modernization, barely show ecological sensibility and find it difficult to see and understand the worth of their indigenous forest, which the Believers try to defend. Plans of modernization and development do not take into consideration the complexity and interdependent relationship of flora and fauna in a specific environment, and nature is considered as something wild and chaotic that must be tamed, exploited, instrumentalized and objectified. On the other side, as Klopper affirms, “for the traditionalists, nature has an inherent value independent of, though not necessarily excluding, human economic need” (Klopper 2008).

Camagu’s inner growth is influenced by some pivotal moments of confrontation with other characters. In particular, the two female characters represent the personification of two opposite perspectives on the world. Xoliswa Ximiya is a character constructed to embody an acquired westernization, and is described by her father Bhonco as a woman “prepared to die for civilization” (HR: 259). Qukezwa, the daughter of Zim, embodies the opposite side of the binary pattern and is described as a creature living in symbiosis with nature and the spirit of the land, and as a woman always ready to stand up for traditional values. The first

contrasting point that catches the eye between the two is their physical description: Xoliswa's figure respects all the Western canons of physical perfection, giving the impression of a stark, rigid beauty which is in strong contrast with Qukezwa's rotund and sensual body. Qukezwa shows an "earthly instinctual behaviour" (Dolce: 2016: 67) which at first leaves Camagu astonished, but then exerts on him an irresistible attraction:

Qukezwa sings in such beautiful colors. Soft colors like the ochre of yellow gullies. Reassuring colors of the earth. Red. Hot colors like blazing fire. Deep blue. Deep green. Colors of the valleys and the ocean. Cool colors like the rain of summer sliding down a pair of naked bodies. (HR: 193)

The cheerful, earthbound allure of Qukezwa, who lives in close harmony and in full accord with nature, stands out in striking contrast to Xoliswa's rigid control over her personality and body. Xoliswa is the local school principal, believes strongly in Western culture and celebrates blindly the dream of civilization, advancement and progress. Xoliswa considers the attachment to traditions to be toxic, assuming that traditions keep people trapped in a condition of backwardness. Speaking to Xoliswa and Qukezwa about the condition of the locals, their routine and traditions, about their perception of the concepts of progress, civilization and backwardness, Camagu progressively distances himself from the ideas and values impersonated by Xoliswa, whose exaggerated enthusiasm for the myth of cultural and economic advancement prevents her to understand the seriousness of the consequences that the advent of mass tourism could lead to for local people: "You have seen – she claims – how backward this place is. We cannot stop civilization

just because some sentimental old fools want to preserve birds and trees and an outmoded way of life” (HR: 67). When a snake appears in Camagu’s hotel room, he recognizes in the animal the totem of his clan, preventing his killing and earning the respect of the community, but at the same time arousing Xoliswa’s disdain: “You are an educated man, Camagu, all the way from America. How do you expect simple peasants to give up their superstitions and join the modern world when they see educated people like you clinging to them?” (HR: 150).

Qukezwa is the main carrier of Camagu’s inner growth, serving as a spiritual guide that helps him discovering the most intimate secrets and the holiness of the land. When talking about Qukezwa to Xoliswa, he asserts that “where you see darkness, witchcraft, heathens and barbarians, she sees song and dance and laughter and beauty” (HR: 219). Camagu’s relationship with Xoliswa starts to run bad when he finally figures out that he disagrees with what she considers backward practices and what she considers modern and progressive. Instead, Camagu finds himself to be always more attracted to the enigmatic, fanciful Qukezwa. Qukezwa is the bridge through which Camagu is able to reevaluate and cherish again his cultural traditions, deeply connected to nature’s laws. The fierceness and rebelliousness of Qukezwa’s spirit exert a magical attraction on Camagu, whose way into the “heart of redness” subverts Marlow’s unfortunate journey into the “heart of darkness”. Marlow depicts Africa as a fearful, howling wilderness, inhabited by miserable savages capable of the cruelest atrocities and the utmost barbarity; on the contrary, *The Heart of Redness* guides the reader into a completely contrasting world, regarded by Camagu as the most wonderful place on Earth, holder of a vibrant, enigmatic spiritual energy, almost some sort of work of art painted by a “generous artist [...] using splashes of lush colour” (HR: 55). Amongst other things, Qukezwa

knows all the details of plant and animal lives, has the ability to talk with birds and can ride her horse bareback, showing an extraordinary relationship of intimacy with nature. In many occasions Qukezwa shows that she bases her relationship with nature on reciprocity and mutual exchange, for example when she tells Camagu to “drink water from the sea when you are a stranger, so the sea can get used to you. Then it will love you” (HR: 139). “Qukezwa” is a term used to define a person chosen to preserve the unity of community. However, in the narrative she is also the unconventional character who turns things up, given the fact that her conception of traditionalism is not static and unalterable, but embraces the possibility to greet the potentialities of modernity. In fact, even if she defends her community’s tradition, she can be defined “a free spirit, solitary in her communion with nature, outspoken about the pretensions of modernizers, challenging in her relationship with authority, and disruptive in her sexuality” (Klopper 2008).

In the novel, nature is shown as an entity that cannot be assimilated or conceptualized. As Dolce argues, “the banal and oversimplistic polarity between nature and culture, constructed within the western imagination as dichotomical and irreconcilable, nurtured by the myth of progress identified with technological advancement and economic growth, is definitely called into question in *The Heart of Redness*” (Dolce 2016: 71). In his novel, Mda promotes a critical responsible approach when it is necessary to negotiate between nature and culture and therefore to find dialogic and enriching meeting point. Towards the end of the novel, Camagu asks Dalton to cooperate in helping to shape a new future, declaring that “the rivalry of ours is bad. Our feud has lasted for too many years” (HR: 277). Camagu has received a new kind of education during his journey into the “heart of redness”,

discovering again his origins and culture and growing “as a man and as a responsive and caring citizen of the world” (Dolce 2016: 72).

“You know nothing about love, learned man [...] Go back to school and learn more about it!” (HR: 194). Through Qukezwa’s words, Mda points out that too frequently Western culture, oriented towards individualism and selfishness, does not manage to educate conscious citizen, keen to collaborate and respect each others and the surrounding environment.

CHAPTER FOUR

Activism and Consciousness

In spite of the fact that nowadays many rich countries tend to encourage and support the urge to take action for an environmental healthy world, one of the most serious global problems involves precisely the establishment of pragmatic, targeted ecological policies. The survival and sustenance of humanity depend on the nonhuman world, and the exploitation and debilitation of natural resources justified by capitalism and consumerism are endangering not only the environment, but also our existence itself.

The greater part of African states only have a passive role within the global economy, and their resources are mostly exploited to fuel the economic mechanisms of the world's dominating countries. Africa did not take an active part during the industrial revolution, and even nowadays "African peoples [...] appear to be mere observers and consumers of whatever projects or products emanating from this ever present and evolving [technological and scientific] revolution" (Okuyade 2013: IX) launched by many Western countries in the twentieth century. The African continent is gifted by a natural treasure of inestimable value, but it is not easy to turn this abundance of natural resources into an economic gain that would benefit and empower local communities. The African environmental crisis can be attributed to the political system, to the moral corruption of the government and the inefficiency of bureaucracy, but the roots of this ongoing crisis are deeply embedded in what Nixon defines "slow violence" (Nixon 2011: 2), a kind of

violence that does not involve any bloodshed, whose consequences are not immediate, but rather “incremental and accretive” (Nixon 2011: 2).

In the past, ecocriticism served as a bridge between the humanities and other research fields, theorizing the environmental crisis and offering the opportunity to read many pieces of literature from a different point of view that establishes a more emphatic relationship between humans and the environment. The environmental humanities are born from the union of ecocritical and postcolonialist in the attempt to deliver a different overview on environment, that detaches itself from the objectification that entitles humans to exploit natural resources, rather than preserving them. Many species and also humanity’s survival are being endangered by capitalism, due to the unethical exploitation of natural resources, this is why raising awareness and demanding respect for the environment should be considered a task by every member of society. *The Heart of Redness* explores the socio-economic conditions of a community through the lively representation of environment, which, as Okuyade affirms, “is arguably part of what I call the cultural construction of the text” (Okuyade 2013: XII). Many African texts have contributed to constructively address the current global environmental crisis, challenging capitalism and condemning government policies that are not environmental friendly, sending the message that the development of a society can go hand in hand with the sustenance of a healthy, sustainable environment.

Environment is in the first place a source of sustenance for the human race, therefore caring for it should be a concern of primary importance for everyone. In addition to the impact of exploitation activities, environmental pollution is to trace back also to the inadequacy of policies for conserving biodiversity, forests, wildlife

and seashores to promote development, tourism and invasive building activities, that contributing to global warming are harmful not only to the locals, but also to the entire world population. Caring for the environment should be therefore a duty felt both locally and globally, by individuals and communities. Contemporary African literature includes many texts, which address not only sociopolitical issues, but also ecology and environmental problems in an attempt to enlighten the public about the dangers to which environment is exposed and to suggest the possible solutions. Mda is concerned with raising awareness about protecting and preserving the rich African biodiversity, suggesting alternative solutions to preserve a clean, healthy environment and respect the inhabitants. Gedicks provides a brief overview of the conditions of oppression of the countries where environment is deteriorating due to the exploitation of natural resources:

The close connection between native peoples and their land has made them particularly vulnerable to change their ecosystems. Because of their direct dependence on the earth for subsistence, they suffer more acutely than others when toxic materials pollute their lands [...]. There is an inseparable connection between the assault on the environment and the assault on human rights (Gedicks 2001: 42).

Through the actions made by the character of Camagu readers can easily find food for thought, understanding how the seashore and local people's rights can be preserved without necessarily giving up to development and the earnings brought from tourism, all without harming the welfare of the earth. *The Heart of Redness* is filled with accounts of the beauties of nature and wonderful landscape of Qolorha-

by-Sea, which is described through the eyes of Bhonco as a “breathtaking view [with] the wild sea smashing gigantic waves against the rocks, creating mountains of snow-white surf. On his left his eyes feast on the green valleys and the patches of villages with beautiful houses painted pink, powder blue, yellow, and white” (HR: 7). When Camagu first enters the village of Qolorha, he is enchanted by its atmosphere, and describes the surrounding environment as “a canvas of blue and green” (HR: 53), believing to be in “the most beautiful place on earth” (HR: 63). Later in the novel, Camagu fights for environmental rights, raising awareness among the people that inhabit Qolorha-by-Sea and preventing their resources from being exploited and controlled, and their natural treasures from being degraded and abused. The prospect of the arrival of mass tourism in the shape of a proposal to build a luxury resort, a project presented by “a big company that owns hotels throughout Southern Africa” (HR: 66), also supported by Bhonco and his daughter Xoliswa Ximiya, worries Camagu and many villagers, including Dalton, Zim and Qukezwa for the harmful impact it would have on environment and the villagers.

4.2 Biopolitics and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge

Haven't they heard that his head is rotten with education? He is so learned that he has reached the highest possible class in the world [...] the destination beyond which all knowledge ends (HR: 97)

In South Africa, the apartheid originated from the legacy of the violent acts of colonialism, taking the form of a white, privileged minority regime that intended to enrich themselves and dominate the population. The nationalist supremacy established their rules, imposing violent, racist laws, displacing communities and

enforcing biopolitical strategies. However, even if the apartheid regime was abolished less than 30 years ago, life in South Africa has not changed significantly as could be expected with the new laws and the election of a democratic government. It could be arguable that things in South Africa are improving in several ways, thanks to policies as for example Black Economic Empowerment program, but the truth is that these policies often bring benefits only to a small part of the population. Many writers and critics share that view, feeling “the promises made for a ‘new’ Africa to be largely unrealized” (Price 2017: 2). In South Africa, wild animals are in a precarious situation as well, because the way in which minerals are extracted to feed the capitalist system endanger their lives. The popularity among tourists of hunting wild animals highlights a persistence of the violent practice of trophy hunting dating back to colonial times. Capitalist biopolitics promote a neocolonial exploitation of the environment and dominance of populations to the advantage of wealthy, dominant classes. As the abusive exploitation of the environment, humans and animals continues to be supported, many works of South African literature offer a new perspective and invite readers to think differently, urging of more positive and sustainable ways of living. Mda’s *The Heart of Resness*, for example, recounts how capitalism threatens environment and local communities, and how ethics is often put aside when it comes to personal interests and earning potential. At the same time, the novel shows how indigenous approaches reject the Eurocentric way of thinking inherited from colonialism.

The Heart of Redness portrays the Xhosa community as they fight to protect their land from appropriation and the threat of an abusive, capitalist proposal for rich tourists, presenting a narrative that Huggan and Tiffin define as “[o]ne of the central tasks of postcolonial ecocriticism”, as they “contrast – also provid[ing]

viable alternatives to – western ideologies of development” (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 27). Camagu, with the help of Qukezwa’s awareness and knowledge of Xhosa culture and the local environment, offers a more eco-friendly alternative to the proposal of establishing a gambling city, more sustainable not only for the environment, but also for the profit of Qolorha’s inhabitants. Characters in the novel show to have a broader understanding of who and what belongs to community, including not only humans, but also flora and fauna, and Camagu proposes to establish a smaller resort, a solution that would attract a different kind of tourists, who appreciate nature and “like to visit unspoiled places for the sole purpose of admiring the beauty of nature and watching birds without killing them” (HR: 239). Camagu understands that the capitalist production model is neither positive nor ethical thanks to his relationship with the two main female characters of the novel, and his newly acquired environment knowledge arising therefrom. He diverges from Bhonco and Xoliswa’s views, according to which embracing the Western model of civilization would be worth sacrificing animals and environment; instead, Camagu aligns himself with the Believers’ conception of an extended community, which includes not only humans. Such notion becomes evident in the representation of the Believers’ attachment to their horses, Zim’s ability to communicate with weaver birds and in Camagu’s unwillingness to kill the snake he finds in his hotel room. Camagu proves to be at odds about “forms of development that position the developers in a parasitic relation to the environments and communities they develop, where they can better control and manipulate the community through their inclusion into the global capital system” (Price 2017: 209), rather sustaining proposals that could benefit the community and be valuable to local flora and fauna.

The proposal to turn Qolorha-by-Sea into a mass tourism attraction would endanger not only environment and biodiversity, but also cultural uniqueness and indigenous knowledge. As Braidotti asserts, not taking into consideration biodiversity “also threatens cultural diversity by depleting the capital of human knowledge through the devalorization of local knowledge systems and world-views. On top of legitimating theft, these practices also devalue indigenous forms of knowledge, cultural and legal systems. Eurocentric models of scientific rationality and technological development damage human diversity” (Braidotti 2006: 53, 54). Through the whole narrative, Camagu is taught many practices by the villagers, attempting at the same time to adjust the view of those who see the USA as an example of progress to look up to. Caminero-Santangelo asserts that “cosmopolitan bioregionalism” is posited in the novel as a way to resist Western development and neocolonial power by offering a point of view on the intimate relationship that can be established with environment:

If capitalism in its various phases has made space out of place, stripping away prior signification (deterritorializing) and reshaping in order to facilitate control and exploitation, then the process of imagining or reimagining a ‘place’ entailed by bioregionalism can be one means of countering threats of exploitation, environmental degradation, and disempowerment (Caminero-Santangelo 2011: 292).

In the novel there are many episodes that emphasize the different politics and points of view on the environment. While Bhonco and Xoliswa favor a Western model of development and despise most of traditional practices, Zim and Qukezwa

prove to have an intimate connection with the non-human world and reverence for the Xhosa indigenous knowledge. Among the different perspectives on nature, the indigenous knowledge and awareness shown by most locals have the potential to “challenge the instrumentalist views of nature offered by Western biopolitics and development rhetoric” (Price 2017: 213). Bhonco, for example, understates the respect that the Believers show for animals and native trees, defining “foolish to talk of conserving indigenous trees” and proposing to replace the latter with “civilized trees [...] that come from across the seas” (HR: 146, 147). Bhonco does not see the value of these trees, and affirms that “we want to get rid of this bush which is a sign of our uncivilized state” and that “these plants are of no use at all to the people. They are good neither as wood nor as food” (HR: 92, 93). Without siding with the ideas supported by any character or group and passing a judgment on them, the narrator offers to the readers a variety of different perspectives on ecology by opposing the different points of views of Believers and Unbelievers and individual characters, such as Camagu and Dalton or Qukezwa and Xoliswa. The theme of sustainability in *The Heart of Redness* is addressed by taking into consideration the environmental peculiarities of the site, recognizing the value of indigenous ecological knowledge. Sewlall underlines how local knowledge is represented in the novel taking as an example the episode of Qukezwa being judged by the local court for destroying imported trees:

What emerges at the village trial of Qukezwa is that the indigenous people of this land have always had their own laws to protect the environment. While Qukezwa’s actions are considered criminal because there are no laws proscribing wattle trees, there are

traditional laws in place which allow the destruction of noxious weeds and plants, such as the mimosa (Sewlall 2008: 114).

By listening to Qukezwa in spite of the fact that the “old law” (HR: 213) considers maidens as members of society who do not have the legal right to speak, the elders that administrate amaXhosa laws demonstrate not to see legislation as unchangeable and static, giving to Qukezwa the opportunity to take over the role of an “active teacher in the community” (Price 2017: 219). Qukezwa does not cut down foreign trees because she despises the foreign or for xenophobic grounds, as Bhonco implies by asking her if she was “going to cut down trees just because they are foreign trees” (HR: 216), but simply because she is worried about the diminishing water supply and seeks to preserve the resources for her community. As Qukezwa explains to the local court, “the [foreign] trees in Nogqoloza don’t harm anybody, as long as they stay there [...]. The trees that I destroyed are harmful as the inkberry. They are the lantana and wattle trees. They come from other countries [...] from Central America, from Australia [...] to suffocate our trees. They are dangerous and need to be destroyed” (HR: 216). However, as Wright affirms, the relationship with fauna could be read as a metaphor “for colonizers and colonized peoples” (Wright 2010: 14), and the episode of Qukezwa destroying trees as a “shortsighted solution to white intrusion”, since “removing all invasive plant species not only would be impossible, but also such an action can only operate on a metaphoric level” (Wright 2010: 51). When Bhonco replies that removing trees is against the law, Qukezwa plainly objects that the law perhaps should be reviewed, given that the wattle tree “uses all the water [and] is an enemy since we do not have enough water in this country” (HR: 216). Qukezwa autonomously chooses to cut down the trees that constitute a threat to her

community, adopting the same biopolitical choices of her ancestors, who chose to kill their cattle and horses to stop the spread of the lung disease imported from Europe. The British managed to colonize amaXhosa also with the help of the cattle disease, which “was brought to South Africa in September 1853 by a Dutch ship carrying Friesland bulls” (Peires 1989: 70) and served as a sort of “biological weapon” (Price 2017: 230). The introduction to the novel seems to clarify that the sacrifices of the Xhosa have managed to guarantee the sustainable relationship with environment that exists in present times and helps the future of the community: “Indeed, Qolorha-by-Sea is a place rich in wonders. The rivers do not cease flowing, even when the rest of the country knells a drought. The cattle are round and fat” (HR: 7).

While Qukezwa has a hospitable attitude, acts ethically and evaluates foreign entities depending on if they constitute a danger or a source of support and protection for the community, Bhonco’s choice for exclusions depends on his personal interest. At the beginning, when he thought that Camagu would have married his daughter, Bhonco warmly welcomes him. As soon as he understands that Camagu is attracted by Qukezwa, Bhonco starts saying that Camagu and Dalton should be distanced from the community for not being “pure” amaXhosa. When Camagu presents all the worst aspects that the touristic resort would bring, Bhonco asks him: “Who are you to talk for the people of Qolorha? [...] You talk of our rivers and our ocean. Since when do you belong here? Or do you think that just because you run after daughters of Believers, that gives you the right to think you belong here?” (HR: 200). Bhonco often undermines the authority of indigenous knowledge, preferring to base his biopolitical thinking on Westernized parameters. He expresses his disappointment to Qukezwa’s absolution, arguing that recently

some “white tourists” were arrested for “smuggling cycads” and some boys were punished for “killing the red-winged starling, the isomi bird” (HR: 216). The elders reply that “it is a sin to kill isomi. Yes, boys love its delicious meat that tastes like chicken. But from the time we were young we were taught never to kill isomi [...] We only desired them from a distance. [...] When we punish boys for killing red-winged starlings, we are teaching them about life” (HR: 217). Reminding Bhonco about their taboos and traditional laws, the elders show how much they take seriously animal protection, respecting their life to such an extent that they are considered as part of the community and proposing a completely opposite model from the capitalist one. Nature is considered a sacred entity that must be honored and preserved, and educate citizen to an ecological awareness is considered a necessity.

4.3 Ecotourism, Sustainability and Environmental Justice

Throughout the narrative, the same historical threat is presented in both story lines: the threat that someone from the outside would come to impose their own notion of civilization is a problem that exists today as it existed in the nineteenth century, when this imposition resulted in misappropriation of the land, which was taken away from the indigenous peoples. In the contemporary narrative of *The Heart of Redness* the debate between Believers and Unbelievers revolves around the proposal to build a casino complex by the shore, bringing out controversial opinions on the impact that tourism would have on people’s lives and on local economy. Those who stand in favor of a development according to the Western model and want to turn Qolorha-by-Sea into “a tourist paradise” (HR: 197) are part of a black economic empowerment company, skeptically depicted by Mda as

monopolized by the elitist club of the “Aristocrats of the Revolution” (HR: 36). When the chief executive of the company’s delegation come to visit Qolorha to plan the imposition of a form of a standardized mass tourism asserts that the project is a matter of “national importance”, Camagu replies that the project is “of national importance, only to your company and its shareholders, not to these people! [...] They will lose more than they will gain from jobs. I tell you, people of Qolorha, these visitors are interested only in profits for their company. This sea will no longer belong to you. You will have to pay to use it” (HR: 200), referring to the locals and suggesting that the community would lose all claims to their land and that the jobs that would be available to the locals would be few and not profitable for them. The loss that Camagu is talking about does not concern just the land, but it also refers to traditions, knowledge and local customs. Right away he offers to the villagers an environmental friendly alternative, a “kind of tourism that will benefit the people, that will not destroy indigenous forests, that will not bring hordes of people who will pollute the rivers and drive away the birds” (HR: 201). Mda recognizes that economic interests are the leading force that informs the decisions taken at national and international level, and endorses the environmentally sustainable project proposed by Camagu as “a viable alternative to the violent penetration of foreign capital and the commodification of the local by the globalized market ruled by the interests of the multinationals” (Dolce 2016: 70). By taking an approach at odds with the lack of interest demonstrated by many towards environmental issues, he invites the reader to reflect on how an ecological solution is necessary to contain the large-scale exploitation of the environment and the gradual destruction of local culture, traditions and collective identities caused by globalization. The development of Camagu’s character follows from the influence of two different worlds and their respective cultures. While he initially

maintains a neutral position, justifying his refusal to sides with his “hybrid” status, Camagu eventually understands how to take advantage of his background in support of his project. With the aid of the knowledge and experience gained by the instruction received in the Western world, Camagu realizes how the complexities and contradictions of the Eurocentric thought he will be able to figure out how to “recuperate a qualified form of the indigenous – and with it, a form of belonging plausibility available within conditions set by the late twentieth century” (Vital 2015: 308).

Camagu’s desire to preserve the well-being of the community stems from his interest in Qukezwa and their discussions. In fact, early in the novel Camagu does not really see the issue in the casino proposal, and changes his mind only after being influenced by Qukezwa’s teachings. However, it is not only the government representatives that are in favor of the building of the tourist resort. Chief Xikixa should be the one responsible for ensuring the safeguard of the land, but while it “is illegal to build within a kilometer of the coast” (HR: 68), he puts his own needs above the common good. He allows wealthy white people and “some well-to-do blacks” to build “right on the seashore” in exchange for some capitalist commodities of such as “bottle[s] of brandy” or “cellphones and satellite dishes” (HR: 68), making Qolorha a cheap trading good into the system of globalized capitalism and therefore endangering the future of the community. As Price argues, “the commodification of the lands of local communities and the disposing or harming of the interests of their residents, human and non-human, are thwarted through [...] the *postcolonial desire* of an assemblage of characters, a desire for the community in a broad sense that disrupts and resists the colonizing ambitions of capitalism and its adherents (Price 2017: 232). While the aim of capitalism is to

domesticate and take possession of nature, considered as a passive entity, for economic purposes, “*postcolonial desire* describes a potential of desiring machines that escapes, resists, or undoes this colonization in a line of flight away from capitalism’s reterritorialization of desire, reassembling communities around an ethics of sustainability instead of an accumulation of personal profit” (Price 2017: 232). Because of the impact of colonial legacy, some capitalists from developed countries see what they consider as backward populations or villages as a source of financial gain at the expense of those who are born and live in those lands, and the resistance depicted in *The Heart of Redness* is an example of how a community could possibly prevent the imposition of the capitalist machine.

The debate around which revolves the narrative is not focused on whether Qolorha should remain untouched by progress or not, but rather on according to which modalities development should take place. The different options are discussed by Camagu and John Dalton, who is against the building of a gambling city, but has also a different point of view from Camagu’s. In fact, Dalton’s proposal is that of a “cultural village” (HR: 247), in which the locals would give tourists an artifact, obsolete version of the amaXhosa culture, traditions and customs. Camagu does not agree with this staged representation, and insists on the importance of the dynamic nature of a society:

It is an attempt to preserve folk ways... to reinvent culture. When you excavate a buried precolonial identity of these people... a precolonial authenticity that is lost... are you suggesting that they currently have no culture... that they live in a cultural vacuum? [...]
I am interested in the culture of the amaXhosa as they live it today,

not yesterday. The amaXhosa people are not a museum piece. Like all cultures, their culture is dynamic” (HR: 248)

Dalton and Camagu share the idea that a development project should generate profit and benefit the community, but Camagu realizes the earning potential hidden in an activity regularly carried out by the women of the village: the harvesting of seafood. Supporting a sustainable development model, completely opposed to Western notions of capitalist development, Camagu wants to recruit more women and increase the harvesting, creating a cooperative and optimizing the distribution. He confronts Dalton about his ideas:

I am talking of self-reliance where people do things for themselves. You are thinking like the businessman you are... You want a piece of the action. I do not want a piece of any action. This project will be fully owned by the villagers themselves and will be run by a committee elected by them in the true manner of cooperative societies. (HR: 248)

His business would benefit from local resources and traditional activities practiced by locals, such as harvesting the sea and producing and selling traditional jewellery and clothing, and Camagu shows to be interested only in allowing the villagers to lead a qualitatively more satisfying life with a partnership founded on the principles of sharing and reciprocal support. However, in spite of the government promises in South Africa to facilitate the economic development of the small, local realities, for Camagu the path is complicated:

[...] the black empowerment boom is merely enriching the chosen few – the elite clique of black businessmen who have become overnight multimillionaires. Our trade union leaders who use the workers as stepping stones to untold riches for themselves. And politicians who effectively use their struggle credentials for self enrichment. [...] The cooperative society is not doing badly. Business would be booming if the banks were interested in assisting small-business people. [...] History is repeating itself. His cooperative society is on the verge of success. But the South African banks are determined that it should not succeed. So much for black empowerment! (HR: 172, 178, 179)

In *The Heart of Redness*, characters are essentially divided into two factions on the basis of the projects they have for the future of their land: while someone cannot imagine an economic development free from the protection measures that would guarantee the environmental conservation, many are interested only in the financial speculation. However, as we have already seen, even among those who cherish environmental protection and a form of progress accepted by the community there are different views. An episode that appropriately demonstrates it is the debate between Dalton and Camagu, who have opposing viewpoints on water distribution. Dalton has efficiently organized a water-supply project that would have provided clean water for the village, raising funds and proceeding with the construction of the facility. However the villagers, who were not involved in the process, refuse to pay for the water that has always been available for free, accusing Dalton of wanting to enrich himself. It could be argued that in his attempt to bring civilization and progress to native people, Dalton to some extent shows a similar attitude to the

one of the former colonizers. Camagu tells him that in his opinion the initiative was conducted in the wrong way:

“You went about this whole thing the wrong way, John. The water project is failing because it was imposed on the people. No one bothered to find out their needs”.

“That is nonsense,” says Dalton. “Everyone needs clean water”.

“So we think... in our infinite wisdom. Perhaps the first step would have been to discuss the matter with the villagers, to find out what their priorities are. They should be part of the whole process. They should be active participants in the conception of the project, in raising funds for it, in constructing it. Then it becomes their project. Then they will look after it”. (HR: 179)

Towards the end of the novel, Camagu comes up with the winning idea of turning the village in which Nongqawuse’s miracles took place into a “national heritage site” (HR: 269), that has not to be considered as a staged representation of the past, but rather as a dynamic reality, constantly transforming and changing, supporting “a kind of tourism that will benefit the people, that will not destroy indigenous forests, that will not bring hordes of people who pollute the rivers and drive away the birds” (HR: 201). However, proving that collaboration and support are essential within a society, it will be John Dalton the one who will actually take care of it, driving to Pretoria to obtain the court order that will officially prevent any action on their land and deny permission to build the tourist resort. The history of the area known for Nongqawuse’s prophecies and the Cattle-Killing movement enable the legal protection of the community and the land, declared a national heritage site by

the Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage. Although Nongqawuse's prophecies proved to have had devastating consequences for the amaXhosa, Mda provides an insight on the other side of the story, this time as a means of guaranteeing the protection of the community from outside threats and enabling a sustainable future. Camagu's development plan is the one that eventually wins, although he is conscious that it is only a temporary achievement and the evolution of his land will be of responsibility of the future generations and power games:

As he drives back home he sees wattle trees along the road. Qukezwa taught him that these are enemy trees. All along the way he cannot see any of the indigenous trees that grow in abundance in Qolorha. Those who want to preserve indigenous plants and birds have won the day there. At least for now. But for how long? The whole country is ruled by greed. Everyone wants to have his or her snout in the trough. Sooner or later the powers that be may decide, in the name of the people, that it is good for the people to have a gambling complex in Qolorha-by-Sea. (HR: 277)

The contrast between the casino proposal and the similar, yet different projects of Camagu and Dalton present a clear binary division, since both Dalton and Camagu's proposals are thought for the health of the community. *The Heart of Redness* remarkably shows how the colonial expansion of the nineteenth century presents significant similarities with the twentieth century land disputes caused by the desire to foster economic growth. Gilbert asserts that "modern tourism frequently functions as a form of neocolonial enterprise" (Gilbert, 2007: 51), while also questioning if also ecotourism could be considered an effect of the colonial

heritage. To support her argument, she asserts that “ecotourism in wilderness areas sells an encounter with ‘unspoiled nature’, but one which is structured so that visitors can wilfully ignore the fact that their mere presence is incompatible with the concept being sold, since “unspoiled” in this context implies outside the realm of human activity” (Gilbert, 2007: 51). Mda, on his part, throughout the narrative seems to support Camagu’s development of a kind of tourism conceived for those “who like to visit unspoiled places for the sole purpose of admiring the beauty of nature and watching birds without killing them” (HR: 239); However, *The Heart of Redness* presents an effective solution that a community can adopt to work towards an ecological modernization and preserve the well-being of people and environment, without succumbing to the threats of capitalistic political and economic processes and encouraging instead an environmental friendly perspective on a local scale. The outcome results in a better awareness that can lead the inhabitants to empower themselves and reinforce the protection of their land. Overall, the novel prompts the reader to question many preconceptions, demonstrating that not only during colonial times some sites were targeted by power games and fights for the ownership, attesting itself as a solid contribution to postcolonial ecological debates. As Dolce summarizes, “men’s greed and lust for power and wealth are [...] explored by the writer as representing, though with different manifestations and justifications, a continuum from the colonial past to the present. They are patent expressions of a system of domination” (Dolce 2016: 69).

Conclusion

If we consider literature as a form of cultural ecology, it can play a significant role in raising awareness on present-day environmental issues and push towards a more sustainable life style, encouraging readers to adopt a broader view of the relationship between humans, culture and nature.

The Heart of Redness deals specifically with the history of the amaXhosa and the dynamics of change in their relationship with environment over the course of history. Through Camagu's actions, Mda transmits the message that it is important to preserve and defend local culture. The amaXhosa are depicted as people whose indigenous culture was already altered during colonial times, as a consequence of the British conquerors' influence, rejecting the "myth of a pure, original and monolithic tradition and identity (Dolce 2016: 70). On the contrary, traditions and culture are fluid and constantly changing, in a process that is faster and more noticeable in contemporary times. We live in a rapidly evolving world, in which all cultures encounter and mutually influence each other. It is in this context that Camagu's proposal for a sustainable kind of tourism seems to make possible for the community to survive autonomously with the chance to protect their traditions and values, and at the same time operate within the world economy and create their own business system.

In his novel, Mda addresses sensitive issues related to ecology, consciousness, appropriation of indigenous spaces, environment and culture. When the apartheid regime collapsed, South Africa had to face the challenges posed by globalization and Western economic progress. The context reflected in the novel is common to

many other postcolonial societies, which find themselves hovering between the power of capitalism and the possibility of economic progress on one side, and the urge to defend their environment against the influence of Western progress. Sustainability is not just about a responsible approach to the environment, but also the way we engage with other cultures. The amaXhosa have a deep bond with the environment and the non-human world that is profoundly rooted in their culture. This point emerges from the story recounted in *The Heart of Redness*, which subverts the notion, widespread in the tourist industry, that the non-human world has to be seen only as something to exploit for economic purposes. Mda shows his concern in raising awareness towards the socio-political marginalization of indigenous people in the world's wealth hierarchy, whose leadership feels entitled to recklessly make profit from the resources of the non-human world, that is seen as an inferior entity.

In *The Heart of Redness*, the fields of ecocriticism and postcolonialism overlap and demonstrate how they can be influential in understanding the internal dynamics of modern tourism within the framework of post-apartheid South Africa, sustaining an aware and critical approach towards environment. After the democratic elections, South Africa had to cope with the effects of global capitalism and understand how to enter the globalized market. Mda effectively presents us a glimpse of how South Africa has dealt with the influence of the Western development model in the indigenous reality, focusing in particular on the impact of tourism, the negotiations on the ownership of non-human world and the importance for the indigenous to preserve their pre-modern culture. Colonizers have justified their invasion enterprise, with the subsequent appropriation of indigenous lands, constructing their reasons on binary oppositions. As Said affirms, "the essence of Orientalism is

the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority”. The colonized are “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’ [...]”, while the colonizers are “rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal’” (Said 1998: 880).

Climate change has to be understood as a geological transition caused by humans and this notion leads to a new consideration of history, deep time and non-humanity. The environmental humanities need to examine the different cultural forms of environmental knowledge and global ecologies from the perspective of imperialist practices. As Val Plumwood affirms, “our capacity to gain insight from understanding our social context, to learn from self-critical perspectives on the past and to allow for our own limitations of vision, is still one of our best hopes for creative change and survival” (Plumwood 2002: 10). Acknowledging our limitations is the first step to understand how different experiences of imperialism have produced different ways of seeing the environment, deviating from universalism and explaining mismatches between ecological knowledge and its concrete expressions and appliances. Postcolonial methodologies can help investigate further the issues analyzed by environmental researchers, taking into account historical contexts, cultural differences and inequitable power relations.

With the aid of a narrative technique that makes use of many flashbacks and relies on the use of two different timelines, Mda succeeds in showing how colonial mentality still persists today and how colonialism can be listed among the causes that have led us to the current environmental issues, demonstrating that not only many peoples and their cultures, but also the non-human world have been “object of othering” (Feldbruegger 2010: 152). The environment in colonized places was regarded in the same way as the indigenous, considered wild, savage and

uncontrolled, an entity in need of being tamed. The ideology supporting the Western civilizing mission finds its justifications in anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism, that made colonizers feel entitled to impose their “land forms and visions of ideal landscapes” and “see indigenous cultures as ‘primitive’, less rational and closer to children, animals and nature” (Plumwood 1995: 504). In *The Heart of Redness*, Said’s concept of Orientalism is reflected in the depiction of foreign culture and environment, considered by the Western civilized ruling power as inferior both in colonial and postcolonial times. Mda powerfully conveys a message that condemns the power relationship between environment and “the human ‘colonizer’, [who] treats nature as radically Other” (Plumwood 1995: 504).

Camagu, whose origins are rooted both in his American formation and his South African background, is given the role of the mediator who negotiates the two opposing forces of development and environment, presenting an ecotourism proposal that would bring gains and benefits to the locals, without causing harm to the environment:

The villagers who will come together to build the place will own the place. They will not be working for anybody but themselves. It will not be big and wonderful like the gambling city with roller coasters and cable cars. But it will be ours. (HR: 240)

With the implementation of this proposal, the locals are entitled to decisions on their own and participate actively in the economy of their country, and thus in economy on a global scale, making a profit from a sustainable form of tourism that respects their environment and traditions. Mda shows us that the advisable form of development is the one that works with the inclusion of those directly concerned.

To conclude, I would argue that Mda offers to his readers a convincing potential way of mediating between the pressures of a globalized development and the need to preserve the natural world, demonstrating that development also occurs in an environmentally conscious context. By means of a literary work, Mda presents the reader with an environmentally-conscious action plan that could be implemented to participate actively in the global economy without harming the environment and sacrificing the uniqueness of one's traditional cultures. An attentive reader could use *The Heart of Redness* as a starting point to reflect on the impact that tourism has on the locals and environment, realizing the huge potential of supporting an eco-sustainable and responsible form of tourism that would benefit the preservation of natural resources and the support of local economies.

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