Narrating the Environment in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to underline the relationship between the postcolonial narrative and environmental consciousness from the perspective of Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*. In other words, the paper stresses that the postcolonial writer, far from limiting his/her engagements to political issues, broadens their research to include the place of nature in the life of the postcolonial subject. Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, in line with the above assertion, romanticizes the natural environment, hinges on the interconnectivity of the human and nonhuman forces in place and, consequently, becomes a critic of environmental harm. The article, thus, investigates into the meaning of ecology and, then, defines its relation with its surrounding human species. With a tilt towards postcolonial ecocriticism’s paradigm as articulated by Arturo Escobar and a host of others, the paper analyses Mda’s environmental concerns in *The Heart of Redness* from four standpoints, namely: nature representation, nature-culture matrix, nature conservation, and a move towards ecological holism. In a nutshell, the essay argues that nature is an active agent to the wellbeing of the postcolonial subject and should not be abused and misused. The article contends that the development of a postcolonial space is the result of the respect for, and the sustenance of the environmental forces in place.

Key Words: Environment, Narrating, Nature/culture, Development, Postcolonial writer

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary African writers and critics have been caught in the web of the environmental crisis that is characteristic of today’s global society. These literary figures use literature to respond to the ongoing predicaments of global warming, excessive excavations and the extinction of national cultures. This is a tradition to which Zakes Mda belongs. In a number of his works, he has presented a palpable environmental perspective which consists of representing nature and culture, preserving nature and relating man and nature in society. In *Heart of Redness*, which is my focus in this paper, Mda writes from a space that is specific — the South African vicinity since the precolonial days. The geographical space is home to the amaXosas — a people divided into a multiplicity of clans, namely; amaMfeugu, ama Gcaleka, amapondo, ama Pondomise, amaqunukhwebe and the amagogotya. This is the space from where Mda points out his afore mentioned environmental engagements which, once more, consists of glorifying the natural world for its beauty, highlighting the entwined relation between human and other species and crying foul to the impact of the human species on the natural environment. This paper, thus, has as objectives the following, namely; to delineate the natural specificities of this South African vicinity, highlight the dependency of the ecological and the socio/cultural forces in that setting, and to advocate the need for a renewed environmental ethic in reflection of today’s multi-cultural and multi-racial South African society. These objectives are wrapped around two interrelated worries, thus; What is the basic consideration of an environment? Is the respect for environmental conditions necessary for the development of place?

*The Heart of Redness*’s overt environmental attachment has attracted lots of arguments from critics. Bartosch Roman (2013) holds that the text markets both the influence of the western educated elite on the African natural world and a vision of environmental sustainability. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley (2011) highlight the interconnectivity of the populace and the ecological communities definitive of Mda’s textual society. To Byron Caminero Santangela (2014), Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* x-rays situations of environmental injustice and, as well, conscientizes the masses on the need to stand against misusing environmental forces. These seemingly distinct ideas from the above critics narrow down to ecological preservation, nature/culture dependency and the ethical nature of culture and, therefore, become basic ideas discussed in my essay. The novel’s leanings on nature suggests a wider ecocritical reading of it but its postcolonial origin makes postcolonial ecocriticism its viable analytical tool given that postcolonial ecocriticism projects itself as a logical alternative to, both, western ideologies on development and the cultural appraisal of environments.

Postcolonial ecocriticism, once more, approaches literature from an environmental standpoint and most importantly, stresses on the significance of environmental components in discourses of place. It strives to resist difference by making connections across cultural and historical borders—a standpoint generated by its view of place as a temporal attainment that is constantly negotiated in the face of changes. As a theory, then, it takes self out of ecocriticism’s universalist discursive writing, into particularities; a perspective Rob Nixon, in “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” (2005) clarifies that ecocriticism’s notions of wilderness suppressed the histories of indigenous people while their transnational engagements reshaped places.
According to Arturo Escobar (1995, 24), Postcolonial ecocriticism, instead, investigates the uneven development of the third world that has arisen from colonialism and, as well, engages in schemes that eradicate poverty. These diverse but related views about the postcolonial environment raised by the above theorists, underline the development of the postcolony and, thus, lend credence to it as the toolkit of this paper. The next section of this paper will discuss the representations of nature in Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*.

II. NATURE REPRESENTATION AND NARRATIVE VISION

Environmentalists, as Zakes Mda seems to demonstrate in *Heart of Redness*, underline intrinsic relations in two domains, namely: among living organisms and, between these organisms and their physical environment. The novel, in a special way, harbors historical undertones in the lived experiences of the South African populace and demonstrates how their experience cannot be studied independent of the natural environment. The amaXhosas, whose history provide the setting for the novelist’s x-ray of nature, had a pre-colonial generation which ruled themselves and lived a self-sufficient life guided by the respect for, and the preservation of valued ecological elements. One of the main characters, the leader, Zim, reveres the wild fig tree in his homestead, whose trunk’s size is comparable to that of “his main hut” (37) for the simple reason that it is a heritage from his ancestors. He believes that this tree houses his ancestors. He holds it sacred for he believes it knows all generational secrets. Zim reads the “hundreds of birds” this tree shelters as his ancestors. At another level, Zim has termed the tree his “confessional.” Here, he daily meditates and enjoys “the song of the birds”, specifically, the “weaver birds.” These are birds he never nurses a thought of using for food. This fig tree, therefore, saves as a converging center for the living and the dead and, equally, brings to focus many of the belief systems of the people. The important place given to trees in the amaXhosa culture is further disclosed in the fact that all important matters involving elders and the naming of new born babies are discussed under trees. Within the frame of reincarnation, too, children and, even, grandchildren are seen as ancestors who have come back to continue with what they left undone. The South Africans have, no doubt, always cherished and preserved nature.

Mda, therefore, insinuates that the amaXhosas have always viewed the environment as a part of their existence. They have respected and preserved both fauna and flora, except where these ecological aspects prove worthless to the society. The plentiful tree species such as the “mimosa or the umga” (212), could be chopped, though, not without the permission of the chief. The local plant species, “inkberry” (215) too, because it’s poisonous nature, could equally be destroyed. The “red-ringed starling, the isomi bird” (217) was held sacred by the land and consequently considered an endangered species. Though its flesh was delicious, only its carcass could be eaten. Tradition holds that it was a taboo to kill the isomi. Equated to the status of Christ on earth, killing one of it was tantamount to embracing misfortune. Birds, therefore, assumed supernatural statuses and assisted humans in their search for supernatural evolution. Mda even exposes the elders, Zim and Bhonco, exploiting birds in their conflict with each other. Zim implores the “ing ang’ane birds, the hadelah ibis” (196) to laugh at Bhonco, an act that turned Bhonco into thinking of imploiring the “uthekwane, the brown hammer head bird” (197) to destroy Zim’s field of crops. Mda here posits that because the natives commuted with ‘unspoiled’ nature, they had to preserve it. At another level one learns that the “inkundla” or the council of elders has always ensured that the environmental harmony is not violated.

Bhonco, always glories in the beauty of Qolorha—by Sea’s each time he is on the climb to the Vulindlela trading store. The tantalizing natural landscape below nourishes him and renders him fatigueless. The beautiful scenes of the valley, for one, have various effects on him. In the wild sea that smashes “gigantic waves against the rocks”, he visualizes beautiful “mountains of snow-white surf”; in the patches of villages, full of old fashioned thatched “rondels” that look “tired and tested” Bhonco sees dazzling beauty. He prefers these rondavels over the modern houses—the “voguish hexagons” roofed with corrugated sheets. He equally savors the Gxarha River and the Intlambo—ka-Nongqawuse or the Nongqawuse valley and hails the latter for its fertility as all living things in it are well nourished (7). This is where Bhonco tended cattle while a youth. The elder Zim, Bhonco’s age mate, in nostalgia says its beauty remains in the imagination since the beautiful “aleos” and “reeds” that grew there some forty years back are no more (46). These textual examples of nature’s importance to man, bring to the limelight the danger of destroying nature, and at the same time, call for the need to preserve and protect it, in as much as it intersects with culture in the African environment.

III. THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN NATURE AND CULTURE

Mda’s *Heart of Redness*, as underlined above, delineates interwoven familiar and complex relationships which extend to the entanglement between nature and culture. The novelist somehow posits not only that man is an important part of the ecosystem of nature but also that nature coexists with the environment through cultural forms. Within this framework, the natural species is assimilated into the cultural plane and becomes reflective of a people. Mda spells out that the amaXhosa’s present is a consequence of their past. One hundred and fifty years back, the Prophetess Nongqawuse dictated that people kill all their cattle and destroy their crops as a precondition for the ancestors to come back and save them from Queen Victoria’s violent administration. Her voice became law and her followers were termed “Believers” while her critics were known as “Unbelievers”. Believers found solace in her words while Unbelievers took Nongqawuse for a lunatic. The believers impoverished themselves in compliance with Nongqawuse’s laws while the unbelievers did the
contrary. The amaXhosa, since then, have remained disunited as these two ideologies have remained characteristic of South the African landscape till date. A lot has, however, changed.

The major character in the text, Camagu who doubles as a PhD holder in economic development, is saddened by the fact that the once exotic “painful dance of slow rhythm” invented by the present day “Unbelievers” as a ritual for reviving the past culture of “Unbelief” has lost the trance that used to accompany the dance. Stuart Hall long noted that such cultural transformations are to be expected given that “cultural identities are the points of identification which are made within the discourses of history and culture” (qtd by Andrew Smith in Postcolonial Studies 256). Any silence on the history of a people, therefore, ushers in disruption in its culture, to the detriment of both the present and the future generations. Mda believes it is by revisiting such history that one can understand the relation between nature and culture in the South African context.

Now a returnee, Camagu only contacts his place of birth through memory. The reader captures that the place was a village situated in the mountainous inner parts of the country. It was defined by beautiful vegetation and the graves of his ancestors. It was a place full of beautiful houses; a village that was unfortunately silenced by the government as it forcefully displaced its inhabitants into some very small plots without a thought of compensating them. Such government action saw the hero and his parents re-locate to Johannesburg and later to America, making him, in the process, a stranger to his people. The creative writer here criticizes the British for both their twist towards altering the histories of imperial subjects and their orchestrated forced migrations that disrupted notions of wilderness and rooted dwellings in South Africa. According to Mda’s narration here, there is an understanding among all the natural elements in place and the happenings therein. Camagu, in a nostalgic moment in the novel, visualizes the many beautiful things he missed out on.

The hero’s nostalgia increases as he watches, while at Qolorha–by–Sea, teenage girls below the age of puberty in a cultural activity, the emayilyazana—a beautiful undisciplined dance, (59). Camagu finds the dance entwined with the physical and the spiritual environment for its “song rises and falls with the wind”, and at the same time “the wind carries the sonorous sounds of the sea and scatters them into the valley (59). This denotes reciprocity between man and nature. The dance, from every indication, blends with nature, becomes nature itself, and gives meaning to existence. The protagonist pities himself because the Apartheid government, in its development policy, took away this joy from him when it displaced his entire village—a displacement that killed the harmony between him and these forces of nature—“the voice”, “the wind”, “valleys and sea” that existed in that place. Camagu regrets that such “blissfulness” (59) was shattered by displacement— that the “lush plants in his father’s garden,” the “four–walled tin roofed ixande” beautiful houses, the “rondavels, the cattle kraal and the fowl run” that defined his birth place are no longer tangible. It is surely in quest for a community similar to the one that he can only construct out of memory that leads him to settle in Qolorha–by–Sea. It is this type of community that can help counter the feelings of isolation and regret in him.

Mda critiques the colonial energies that suppressed histories and forcefully displaced people from their environments. He defines those colonial activities as casualties for they turned their victims into living corpses. Camagu, created as one of these victims, left his birth place as a toddler and returned at the age of thirty; having missed the initiation into manhood, the “circumcision up the mountain” together with both the popularity it bestows on its initiates and the freedom that comes with it. He is now an outsider to his people; one chastised for being unfamiliar to South Africa’s problems. He was not there during their efforts to dismantle the Apartheid regime. It becomes really painful to him for he cannot prove to them that while out of the country he had stayed spiritually connected to their course. He did not only have a hospital circumcision in Britain but equally took part in anti-apartheid movements all over Europe. Unfortunately for him, his people now define him as an outsider, thanks to his lack of mountain circumcision and environmental skills that should guarantee him employment in the country. He is now an exile in his own country, worse still, one with no village to identify with; all these, consequent on the few strangers in his country. The colonial powers have forced his country into what it would never have been.

Together with the likes of him, Camagu can only find home at Giggles—a Johannesburg hotel. These creations of modernity are not only termed by their kin as over-educated for the country but are equally seen as mis-educated, from the perspective of the employment department of their country. It claims that these western educated South Africans did not focus their priorities on the local realities of South Africa. His doctoral degree in communication and economic development is therefore of no help to his people. Perhaps a degree in agriculture—a local reality that identifies with his country would have earned him a job. But Camagu soon discovers that “networking and lobbying” (32) and not meritocracy are the keys to employment in his new nation. Frustrated but determined to keep away from the corruption that has now enveloped his people, he, without any pre-thought, finds himself in one of the suburbs of the country, Qolorha–by–Sea where he becomes a success. Success with reference to Camagu, Mda seems to say, is the product of total belonging to an environment. It seems to accrue from the harmony that exists between the individual and the practices in place.

Ximiya, the elder Bhonco’s daughter, instead defines the traditional dance in which girls frolic about “topless” while putting on “traditional skirts” made of beads as barbaric and shameful. Such a consideration baffles Camagu, her educated peer who rather hails the girls for the pride of staying close to their culture. Like the girls, Camagu too, unites with the ways of his people by acknowledging and embracing his totem,
“Majola”, a brown snake which, according to the belief system, symbolizes his personal god. This single activity of acknowledging his origin gains him respect from the natives—a people Ximiya downgrades as peasants and barbarians. In highlighting the crucial link between socio/cultural and environmental issues, the creative writer, without doubt, advocates for environmental justice.

Environmental studies, as projected above, cannot be separated from the happenings in an environment, not even from the myths that define a place. Myths stand for a cultural strand unique to a people and a symbol of their belief system. King Sarhili’s (one of the many characters of the novel) belief to have seen his late father at the Kei River is an unvarnished tale that will sound fairy to a non amaXhosa. “I met my father among the wild mealies…He gave me the spear he was buried with.” (132). The gift of a sword, somehow, makes the tale authentic. The resurrection of this ‘headless’ father, together with the new people who are being awaited to liberate the black nation, is news enough, to fuel the natives’ steadfastness in the prophecies of their kin. No doubt then, the least they could do to hasten the arrival of such great salvation became the continuous destruction of cattle and crops, as Prophetess Nongqawuse had decreed. It is worthy of note that the Kei and the Gxarha environs, in their natural forms, represent the redemptive site where natives long awaited their ancestors to resurrect and restore the dignity of the land that had been trampled upon by the “uncrumpulous” British whose wrong thinking could be seen in the fact that the they killed “the only son of their god” (133). Christianity, to most natives, then, became a religion not to identify with. Those who detest Christianity are ready to undertake any sacrifice to liberate themselves from the strangers and their religion. Such sacrifices, they soon come to discover, are in respect of the political intrigues of some black and not in accordance with the revelations as the Prophets claimed. Mda does not, however, visualize stringent environmental frameworks as valid representations of Heart of Redness’s Democratic Republic of South Africa, given the fact that the place now houses varied environmental stand points.

IV. NATURE CONSERVATION AS NARRATIVE FOCUS

Mda, like Terrel Dixon (1999), pulls environmental concerns away from the abstract into the tangible when he focuses his ecological research on the South African space. He reads the natural, namely; trees, birds, animals, rivers and all their occupants within the framework of that which is familiar to the South African landscape. He sees an unequal relationship between imported natural values and the African landscape. Mda presents the British environmental laws in South Africa as offensive to the already existing environmental profile. The need for the revision of this new environmental plane is visible in the fact that British practices complicate the native’s way of life. The various British High Commissioners transported and planted British plants such as “bluegum”, “lantana” and “wrattle” in South Africa. These foreign plants are disseminated at the expense of local tree species that originally occupied those spaces they now occupy. It begins to appear as if, far from replacing nature, the British are destroying it. The need for the preservation of the local plant species is seen in the fact that foreign trees are not worth the indigenous trees they have replaced Bluegum’s obnoxiousness in this new space is established from two perspectives firstly, it is unknown to the forefathers of Africa and secondly, it is as poisonous as the unwanted local tree species, inkberry.

According to a research from Heart of Redness’s heroine, Qukezwa Zim, the inkberry plants “destroys everything” (215) around it. The council of elders, thus visas the destruction of this plant. But the importation, and the planting of its associate, bluegum, by the so called ‘emissaries of light’, as the British referred to selves, calls into question their positive intentions about Africa. Mda, however, associates a lesser danger to the bluegum since its location—the Nogqaloze forest is a considerable distance away from human dwellings. He launches a serious attack on the lantana and the wrattle plants that are planted closer to human habitats. These trees, as Qukezwa explains, “suffocate” (223) the local trees around them. The wrattle seed, like the seed of the indigenous tree, umga, from the perspective of Qukezwa hardly dies and ironically, needs not only fire to germinate but a lot of water for its growth. Qukezwa feels that the local laws surrounding conservation have to be amended. She avers that they “must be changed” (216), obviously, to include the wrattle, the lantana and the bluegum as non-endangered trees. This thought splits the natives into two conflicting groups. Some of them found gold in everything western as portrayed by the arguments of the elders, Bhonco and Zim, while others question western perspectives of nature conservation. The conflict underscores the dilemma surrounding questions of nature conservation in South Africa in general.

Bhonco in his mentally colonized state, sees native trees as symbols of primitiveness, as ‘redness’ (147) and therefore terms them unworthy of preservation. These indigenous trees, then, need to be replaced with “civilized trees.” These are the ones “that come from across the seas” (147). For Bhonco, these trees are civilized because they are “thorn free”, a quality which to him denotes beauty. His vision of civilized trees embodies the wattle and the bluegum. He is pleased with the manner in which the bluegum has been planted at the Nogqaloze forest—“in straight lines.” He finds, in this single act, enough reason to forgive the whites for suffering his ancestors of the second generation. Like the western environmentalist Bhonco views the African forest as an exotic natural tread associated with the concept of darkness. His idea on conservation and development pits him against elder Zim’s and John Dalton’s perspectives that in the postcolony a worthy environmental vision must take indigenous species into consideration.

Bhonco considers Dalton’s teachings on the preservation of the natural environment as anti-development. For him Dalton’s project is opposed to that of his father who doubled as a colonial soldier. John Dalton. Bhonco believes that
Dalton’s father stood for the development of the natives. Bhonco views his son, as a part of Believers—the red, (the primitive), whose doctrine will only take his people back to the beginning of time. Bhonco chastises Dalton for stopping boys from “taking the eggs of birds from their nests” and also for “banning boys from hunting wild animals with their dogs” (147). These practices, as Bhonco explains, have defined them “from time immemorial.” The observant reader will notice that Mda seeks, through Bhonco, to question those environmental belief systems that render the environment vulnerable. Bhonco’s environmental perspective is further shown to be at odds with that of the traditional council of elders, the inkundla, who stipulate that not all animals and birds are liable for consumption. If it had always been a taboo to kill the bird “isomi” (217), then obviously its eggs have always been considered untouchable and out of bound for hunters. This same Bhonco instigates the inkundla to levy a fine on Qukezwa for cutting down indigenous trees. Perhaps, far from being completely westernized, Bhonco, too, finds in this spirit of the wild something to be savored and enjoyed.

To the likes of Dalton, nature is irreplaceable and must be protected and preserved. This ideology leads Bhonco into wanting to tame a piece of land with strange flowers, notably, “wild irises, orchids, and usundu palms” (148). This thought stems from the fact that the land has rare indigenous plants that consequently stand for endangered species. But Bhonco, who sees the wild as uncivilized, instead destroys Dalton’s dream botanical garden with the intention of growing maize there. Dalton interprets Bhonco’s action as species loss but Bhonco calls it development, associated with the fight against hunger. This counter behavior from Bhonco launches Dalton into two negative emotional frames, namely: regret at the loss of a “rare fig tree” and pity for Bhonco since the site for his crop is a forest and “monkeys will eat” (149) the mealies. While Dalton here is the voice of the postcolonial environmentalist, Bhonco becomes a symbol of Africa’s poor who fall prey to the western destruction of their natural environment just for a few shillings to last them a few days. Their conflicting environmental frames expose the plight of the African environment. Dalton’s campaign slogan, “Let the wild coast stay wild” appears as a precondition for the sustainable development of the village—a concept that the western educated African elite, Camagu, “son of Cesane” (60) upholds.

Camagu and Dalton, as Mda puts it, are neither “Believers” nor “Unbelievers” (words that stand for primitive and civilized respectively)—from the perspective of the natives. He views them simply as individuals who appreciate nature for its developmental potentials on the environment. To these two characters, indigenous objects define a people, make them special in the eye of others and consequently place them on a higher marketing scale. Local objects are therefore worth preserving. Camagu, thus, wants the village Qolorha—by—Sea, to construct touristic houses out of “unspoiled nature” where visitors will live and eat “authentic” amaXhosa food (239). With an environmental vision that is decidedly postcolonial, Mda resists the mechanism of western domination. The novelist sees in the village co—operate initiative an alternative pathway that will enrich the villagers. He sees this as sustainable development unlike the government’s proposed “The Gambling City” whose acceptance is a precondition for the electrification of the village. Camagu educates the villagers into rejecting encroaching companies that destroy their beautiful natural environment in the name of development. Mda educates the natives that they can stop this government’s destruction of their natural environment when Dalton stops the construction of

The Gambling City with a letter for the village, signed by the “department of arts, culture, and heritage” (260), declaring the company’s chosen site as a national heritage. This site, the Nongqawuse Pool, with its natural wonders, namely; “a variety of eels, springer fish, and river otters” (50) remains the pull of tourists. As a development initiative again, Camagu establishes a cooperative with indigenous women for the marketing of sea products like the oysters, mussels, amaqonga and varieties of snails that they themselves “harvest” from the sea. And the cooperative soon takes a different dimension with the sewing and marketing isiXhosa—the amaXhosa traditional wear. These women are now able to cater for their families while the village develops under village initiatives. The environment features as the wealth of a people. Its proper eco-minded exploitation brings development. The environment therefore molds a people and becomes a core of their history, past, present and future.

From the novelist’s perspective, it is clear that the South African space now houses diverse ideologies manifested in the blended nature of its inhabitants. But a majority of the natives still live in hate of the British colonial administration for taking away the best portions of their land. To Twin-Twin, an Unbeliever, and an arm of the Apartheid government, Sir Grey’s (the colonial administrator) acts are tantamount to “taking food from the mouth of children” (123). This atmosphere becomes uglier because the natives are the descendants of those ancestors Sir Grey and his white ancestors had killed. Unlike Twin-Twin, Dalton measures all of Sir Grey’s projects in South Africa as compensation for all that the white man has taken away. Sir Grey’s educational project for South Africans, as projected Dalton, is a gift “that will last for a life time...that will be enjoyed by future generations” (123). The natives cannot understand why these strangers even change the names of their rivers. Twin-Twin like others, however, decide to stay close to these foreigners not for love’s sake, but for the sake of keeping an eye on them while waiting for the opportunity to strike back at them for their evil deeds. However, these diverse ideologies informing the South African developmental landscape from the perspective of nature conservation bring out the novelist’s environmental vision. But as Camagu and Dalton, who seem to embody the environmental vision of the novel, affirm it is
only in having a holistic attitude towards the environment that South Africa can be able to conserve its environment, as the last portion of my paper will indicate.

V. ECOLOGICAL HOLISM AS NARRATIVE VISION

Mda’s artistic presentation of the South African space underlines politics, families, culture, economy, human relations, like their activities, nature and habitats of natural organisms as ecological components that need to attain holism in a move towards sustainable development. Micheal Paul Nelson (2010,4) captures holism in literature as the idea of “emergent properties adhering to collectives” in a given context with the aim of creating a moral community for the good of the entire situation. Holism, thus, functions against constituents in a bid to create an inclusive environmental ethics for the benefit of all present, though there is no stated extent to which holism must be established. The South African vicinity, as Mda’s unrolls, has evolved historically from a place owned and ruled exclusively by Africans, through one occupied by both Africans and British under the exclusive rule of the latter, to its present state of independence, with the stranger as an inclusive part of its government. The South African vicinity, then, is now a place entrapped by two environmental perspectives, none of which can exclusively qualify it. The British colonial cultural stand point and its environmental perspective has distorted the beauty that once defined the South African environment. Some homesteads—the old fashioned thatched “rondavels” have been destroyed and replaced with white settlements, the “voguish hexagons” roofed with corrugated sheets. Some rivers now have English names.

In Bhonco’s nostalgia for the past, the novelist, no doubt, underlines the modernist activities as forms of violence on the environment. The beautiful past has been silenced and its history is now being echoed only in fragments. Mda hints that the colonial administration gradually and cunningly instituted this degrading atmosphere for its own benefit. Governor Sir George Grey, (whom we have noted above for having given English names to African rivers) testifies to Mda’s impression of whites being a self-centered and malicious lot when he told his magistrate that the Xhosa were “useful servants, consumers of our goods and contributors to our revenue” (259). This reveals the suppressive and exploitative position of this stranger government. Fortunately, it only succeeded to convert some natives but unfortunately, the act tore apart the unity of South Africa. The colonial divide and rule scheme has had a hold over South African natives since the Middle generation when the white government instituted the doctrines of Belief and Unbelief. These are conflicting ideologies that have remained characteristic of the South African society, capturing the cultural diversity of the contemporary global South African society, and are especially important to this essay from the different ways in which each of the groups relates to ecological factors.

Mda’s Heart of Redness emphases that it is a moral responsibility for man to preserve, forever, plants and animals with whom he shares the same environment. It argues that humans, like plants and animals are fragments of nature, with their histories yoked to the surroundings in which they exist. Replacing valued ecological fragments with artificial environmental structures in the name of development, will destroy or even render extinct endangered species and, consequently, undermine the present or even the future happiness of the human population. The textual ‘mist’ covered Gxarha River had for long been a touristic site and as such, has to be protected and preserved for posterity. Mda reads anti- developmental prospects in the government’s permission to a company, specialized in hotel business, the go-ahead “to build a casino” at the “mouth” of this river (66). From the government’s perspective the “water sports” that the company will introduce at “the great lagoon” will bring in sports fans from all over the world to the advantage of the nation. From the ethical perspective, this money from unscrupulous sources, (to think of who casino fans are) will introduce, or say, encourage moral decadence in Qolorha–by–Sea. The Unbelievers (constituent members of the South African government) see in the casino a “life time opportunity” (66) and, consequently, sustainable development. The Believers, with their nature conservation policies, think the government should locate a less naturally attractive site for this artificial touristic structure since the Gxarha vicinity, far from being important, only, for its natural beauty, is historically significant as the site where Nongqwuse and Nombanda led people “to show them the beauty, is historically significant as the place owned and ruled exclusively by Africans, from a place owned and ruled exclusively by Africans, to blacks and regrettable still, on the government’s perspective “water sports” to the advantage of the world always welcome any ideas from the west that will put money into their pockets.

The existing colonial controlled structure, the Blue Flamingo Hotel, acclaimed by the whites as an income generating agency to the blacks, is essentially, a refuge to white tourists. It offers only menial jobs to blacks and regrettable still, on seasonal basis: perspectives from where it contributes very little towards the wellbeing of the natives. It is indisputable that before the construction of the hotel these natives had no opportunities to earn the allowances they now earn— an angle from where Blue Flamingo Hotel begins to take the stand of an asset to the natives. But the opportunities to earn these meagre allowances accrue out of the condition that tourists (whites) have visited. And, interestingly, the point of interest for tourists is always the natural beauty of Qolorha–by–Sea, of which the Nongqwuse valley and all that it houses lie at the center. As a customer at the Qolorha–by–Sea Blue Flamingo Hotel, Camagu enjoyed both the comfort of its
“austere wooden bed” (61) and the beautiful atmosphere surrounding the place. The wonderful in-house beauty blended with the wonderful “cacophony of birds and monkeys and waves… from the surrounding woods” (60) each dawn, to his satisfaction.

The sounds of nature saved as song that nourished his soul. And at those fulfilled moments his mind would wander to the “toneless music” of Johannesburg’s modern hotel, “Giggles Hotel” (26), and back. Mda, thus, projects the Blue Flamingo, like its entire surrounding, as an advertiser of local colour, though to the advantage of the Apartheid government since the natives only occupied secondary positions for temporal jobs. This atmosphere, no doubt, underlines development as white created employment sites like the Blue Flamingo Hotel, as noted above, now employs black services; wonderful still, in the form of black ladies who, though, only function as “cleaners,” “babysitters,” and “waitresses” are now able to support their families. Some of these natives even save as guides to white tourists who are out to savor the natural beauty of the Gxarha vicinity. Ironically, this is the same spot the government is giving out for the construction of the gambling industry. But the novelist, so far, as stressed on the fact that artificial sites, though agents of development, should not be created at the expense of naturally inviting scenes.

Qolorha –by–Sea is now a multiracial setting where both whites and the other racial groups need to put their total energies for the growth of the environment. The once exclusively white residential area is now a mix that is representative of present day Xhosa land. It is now a community of whites and blacks with no restrictive black neighborhoods. Some blacks now possess the properties of the emigrated whites. It is a place where both the believers and unbelievers live together, contemplating on the foundations of their ideologies. It is a place where white tourists continuously stream in to admire the country’s natural beauty — those natural elements which to natives like Bhonco are a representation of the “country’s shame” (142) while to whites like Dalton are inviting because they are unspoiled” (144). It is a small place that echoes the complex concerns of ecocritical discursive traditions. These are concerns, which to someone like Susie O’Brien, are similar to postcolonialism’s objectives in that they do not only bring the local and the global together but “interrupts in and distorts the other” (“Articulating” 143). This is the same complementary relation Mda develops in the work under study. This can be read when he outlines the complex functions of the poisonous foreign plant, inkberry thus: it has “nice purple flowers,” each flower is a prospective berry and consequently a prospective “poisonous plant” and, the berries kill “animals” but act as “food” (90) for birds. This becomes an image of the entanglement of environmental particularities in place; that ecological holism which postcolonial ecocriticism advocates for the sake of sustainable development.

VI. CONCLUSION

Zakes Mda’s consideration of the postcolonial environment, from a study of The Heart of Redness, took into consideration the natural landscape, the external conditions influencing the development of people and things, and the factors influencing the living and the working conditions of the people at every given point in time. It integrated the physical, historical and social experiences of the South African space and hammered on the interrelatedness of those experiences. The paper, essentially, highlighted the ecosphere as an indispensable part of the human community — a perspective from which it x-rayed the imperial manipulation of the South African natural environment as a violation of the South African environmental thought. The development of a place was, thus, theorized as the produce of the harmony defining the physical, economic, psychological, cultural and social conditions typical of an environment. The article, most importantly, highlighted local community initiatives as alternative pathways for societal growth, given that these tasks did not only eradicate poverty but equally fostered culture. The paper, consequently, delineated the South African local community projects as foundations of environmental sustainability given that they, each, underlined ecological holism as a relevant vision for today’s contemporary South African environment.

REFERENCES


