

# A Politics of Doubt: The Dissensual in *The Heart of Redness*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The relationship between faith and politics, between faith and democracy, between faith and resistance, and between faith and doubt has always been complicated. In “A Politics of Doubt: The Dissensual in *The Heart of Redness*,” Grant Farred demonstrates how South African author Zakes Mda grapples with these issues in his novel about the nineteenth century “cattle-killing episode,” an event that divided the amaXhosa people. *The Heart of Redness*, however, uses the historic “cattle-killing episode” to reflect on the politics, both in a narrowly economic but also in an environmental sense, of post-apartheid South Africa. It is to the historical, political and ideological differences that the novel addresses itself, attempting to find a ‘solution’ to the differences within the contemporary black community in the resonant past.

Using the work of Jacques Rancière to critique the notion of a consensual democracy, this essay demonstrates the range of philosophical issues that are raised, often, only implicitly, by Mda’s novel. Following Rancière, “A Politics of Doubt” explains why a dissensual politics – a politics grounded in fundamental, sometimes irresolvable difference – might be more ‘true’ to ‘democracy’ than the politics of perpetual compromise. The conflict between the “Believers” and the “Unbelievers,” located as it is in a deeply antagonistic history, speaks of a tension that will not allow for easy reconciliation. Recognizing the historical value of these differences, and how they continue to impact black life in post-apartheid society, creates the possibility for a dissensual politics that is potentially democratic.

**Keywords:** politics of doubt, dissensus, faith, post-apartheid literature and society, history

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[. . .] for there is no Covenant with God, but by mediation of some body that representeth Gods Person; which none doth but Gods Lieutenant, who hath the Sovereignty under God.

(Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*)

## 1. Introduction

One of the most deplorable aspects of the postmodern era and its so-called 'thought' is the return of the religious dimension in all its different guises: from Christian and other fundamentalisms, through the multitude of New Age spiritualisms, up to the emerging religious sensitivity within deconstruction itself (so-called 'post-secular' thought) (Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*).

The theocratic is, almost invariably, the space of the politically dissensual precisely because it attempts, vigorously, to suppress dissent. It is that public site that, despite its desire for conformity, opens up – sometimes only in the most inconspicuous ways, sometimes as full blown opposition – into disagreement, contestation, conflict and possibly even violence. Because of its declared adherence to the multitudinous, observant One (say God, g-d, or Allah) as the apex of the hierarchy, the theocratic cannot function as anything but the space of inequality. It is here where transcendentally-derived or socially-authored hierarchies order existence, where those hierarchies are most strictly enforced, where the relationship between God and humans, priests (holy men, prophetesses, shamans) and followers, the faithful and atheists or agnostics, men and women, or some combination of these and other inequalities, structure daily political life; the theocratic determines public morality and culture, and it scripts the community's history.

The crucial paradox inherent in the theocratic *res publica* is that it marks the space where fundamentalism, in Žižek's terms, is not most assured but, on the contrary, most concerned about its articulation, about how it is practiced as a faith, and about whether its orthodoxy holds. The theocratic is the repository of anxiety because of its aporetic<sup>2</sup> nature, because of how it operates in that crucial gap between the (regrettably) impure condition of the now (the condition of living in imperfection) and the anticipation of an immanent transcendence (the perfect eternity that is promised to the faithful); it constitutes that space of politics, that

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<sup>2</sup> The *aporia*, which translates from the Greek as a 'puzzle,' is now more frequently taken to mean 'paradox' or an 'impasse.' It is used in this essay to play on the latter notions. However, it is precisely because the more established meanings suggest a 'gap,' what we might term a 'spacing between,' that it makes possible other, often contradictory meanings.

pregnant, contradictory historical moment in which the 'here' both obstructs the fulfillment of the eternal future and functions, through temporal force, as its only possible condition for fulfillment. The now is always the site of the ultimate theocratic stakes because it marks that moment in which the potential for failure is inconceivably high, where things can go fatally wrong, where the 'here-after' can be lost, ceded to other forces. The promise of the theocratic also, because of the potential political costs of damnation, functions as a threat to the polis. Transformed into a threat, the terms of the 'promise' provide the theocratic with the legal mechanisms, the technocratic language, and the moral and spiritual justification necessary to enforce the promise; the promise, in other words, cannot be delivered – it cannot perform its utopian possibility – without a coercive underside – in Christian terms, there can be Resurrection without the Crucifixion.

The 'fundament' of every religion, of course, is its promise of transcendence, the possibility – guarantee, we might say – of exceeding that faith's immediate, restrictive temporality and spatiality – which will be succeeded by 'eternity,' the time that has and knows no time, where past, present and future have no meaning whatsoever; it is that timeless construct named, among others, Valhalla, 'heaven,' or 'nirvana' – and establishing itself as the final, unending epoch. In his essay "Technologies of the Self" Michel Foucault argues that religions, especially Christianity, is "supposed to lead the individual from one reality to another, from death to life, from time to eternity" (1997: 242). In order to achieve its 'post-temporal' status, its fulfillment, every religion requires an event, normally one of cataclysmic, paradigm-shifting dimensions, which illustrates its truth, illuminates and elucidates its singularity, makes visible – physically manifest – the terms of its holy text, sets it apart from its rivals. The 'event' of the religion, such as the Crucifixion and Resurrection, is such that it reveals those other faiths to be untrue, establishing a hierarchy, offering salvation to and glorifying those who adhere/d, damning those who doubt/ed. It is the basic tenet of fundamentalism: it divides the world along the most simple, yet decisive, fracturing: the saved and the lost, those who have been redeemed and those who have been punished into perpetuity; or, more ideally, those who have never doubted and those whose doubt now, with the truth of the event apparent (or, the "Truth Event," in Alain Badiou's phrasing<sup>3</sup>), will exact the ultimate cost: the life, both in the here and in the after-life, of those who did not, who refused, to believe.

The desire for the primal, inaugural event (which is, of course, as Derrida argues in *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, "the impossible

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<sup>3</sup> See Alain Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, translated and introduced by Peter Hallward, London: Verso, 2002.

itself," but nonetheless political crucial for all – because of – its unattainability)<sup>4</sup> is inscribed everywhere in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*. It is there in the words of the amaXhosa prophetess Nonqawuse and in the longings for liberation that stretch across the centuries from mid-nineteenth century British coloniality (together with the contemporary, the novel's primary temporal moments) to the unfulfilling history of the (postapartheid) South African present. Most salient, however, in the novel is the insistent presence of the Fall. In *The Heart of Redness* there are only thwarted attempts at 'salvation,' at the 'resurrection' of the amaXhosa people. For the ironically named "Believers," those *The Heart of Redness* protagonists who reject modernity and Christianity (the two are often represented as commensurate; Christianity instantiates a destructive modernity), Mda's work offers little in return for their faith. Believers such as the 'historical figures' of the nineteenth century, the amaXhosa Twin and his Khoikhoi wife Qukezwa, and their contemporary heirs Zim and his daughter, the doppelganger, Qukezwa, receive nothing for their faith except what the novel terms a series of "Disappointments;" there is no "good news of the resurrection" (Mda 2000: 131, 133). The notion of sacrifice is, in this way, constitutive of both 'faiths': the "Believers" and the "Unbelievers" recognize the importance of the transactional nature of faith, the need to sacrifice something in order to receive in return or to achieve something greater, more transcendent than their current condition. (The Christians are, in a deliberate irony, synonymous with the "Unbelievers" in *The Heart of Redness*' spiritual universe. However, not all the "Unbelievers" are Christians but they are all bound together by their faith in modernity.)

It is significant, however, that among the *The Heart of Redness*' chief Unbelievers, Twin-Twin (twin brother of Twin) and his latter day progeny Bhonco and his daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya, none are Christian. Notwithstanding this 'anomaly,' however, *The Heart of Redness* is suffused with, if not the ethos, then certainly with the discourse of Christianity. In his work on the "technologies of the self," Foucault – in his critique of modernist teleology – holds that the early Christian Church borrowed many of its practices and rituals from surrounding pagan religions – including a dialogic engagement on notions of the 'self' with the Stoics.<sup>5</sup> Foucault's is, of course, a reversal of the modernist logos that situates Christianity as the genesis of Reason and traditional practices. In the *The Heart of Redness*, however, Foucault's reversal is itself reversed, in no small measure because of his

<sup>4</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, translated by Patrick Mensah, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 'The improvisation of some inaugurality is, without a shadow of a doubt, the impossible itself' (1998: 66).

<sup>5</sup> See the essay "Technologies of the Self" (1997) and the interview "The Ethics of the Concern of The Self as a Practice of Freedom" (1997) in this regard.

work's familiar elision of the politics of colonialism and postcolonialism. The post-apartheid novel reveals how, often unwittingly (certainly against Mda's intent), the 'pagan' Believers took many of their prophetic cues from Christian religious practices; practices borrowed, absorbed, and rearticulated from the colonialist Christians who ruled them and the colonized converts with whom they shared, almost always antagonistically, a socio-political space.

The clearest expression of the Believers' 'cultural' debt to Judeo-Christianity can be identified in the discourse of the prophetess Nonqawuse, the movement's leading figure whose predictions to the amaXhosa constitute the basis of the novel's main narrative. In a pivotal moment, Nonqawuse issues instructions – via one of her spokespersons – to her followers in a language laden with the portent and promise of the Resurrection, blending the Mosaic foreboding of the Old Testament with the proselytizing prospect of the New Testament's St. Paul, himself of course a "convert" – because there is no evidence of this actual conversion, to Christianity from Judaism.

The new people who will arise from the dead will come with new cattle, horses, goats, sheep, dogs, fowl and other animals that the people may want. But the new animals of the new people cannot mix with your polluted ones. Destroy everything. Destroy the corn in your fields and in your granaries. Nonqawuse has told us that when the new people come here there will be a new world of contentment and no one will lead a troubled life again. (Mda 2000: 155)

In order to achieve the 'new' world, the old has to be completely, utterly, destroyed. Neither crop nor livestock of the old can be spared, the new can only be born, can only become, once all the material vestiges, the property, of the 'old' have been eliminated. Nonqawuse's promise of purity is reminiscent of, but not analogous to, the New Testament Jesus clearing the money lenders out of his Father's house, the act of making the physical site of the sacred holy again, cleansing that which had been contaminated by commerce. The relationship of the various 'faithful' to the material is, as this essay will show, problematic. Both the Believers and the Unbelievers embrace the ownership of property, the private and the public, and do not require its (full, permanent) renunciation as a precondition for their faith – as in Nonqawuse's case where it demands, at most, a temporary sacrifice after which full restitution is promised.

The 'new people' will replenish the cattle and refill the granaries, but only after all – the prophecy refuses the distinction that has emerged between the Believers and the Unbelievers – the amaXhosa have sacrificed their possessions. In addition to replacing what has been sacrificed with that which is uncontaminated, there is a further guarantee, a guarantee constitutive of the anti-colonial imaginary: "the spirits would arise from the dead and drive the white people into the sea. Who

would not want to see the world as it was before the white conquerors?" (Mda 2000: 77). However, not even a return to the pre-lapsarian – pre-colonial – condition is something every Believer, to say nothing of the Unbelievers, is willing to risk his property for; because of this intra-political 'disobedience' and dissent, the promised land cannot, per force, be achieved. The unfaithful Believers found themselves exposed to the felicitous wrath of the (overly) zealous Twin: "But chiefs who were Believers continued to cultivate their land. Their territories became targets of Twin's marauding destroyers" (Mda 2000: 112). This double splitting of the amaXhosa, first into Believers and Unbelievers and then into observant and unobservant Believers, makes evident a certain theocratic hollowness in Nonqawuse's prophetic conditionality, "As long as the amaGogotya – the Unbelievers – continue to unbelieve, the prophecies shall not be fulfilled" (Mda 2000: 107). Twin's raids show that it is not only the "amaGogotya's" recalcitrance, their construction of unbelieveing as a faith, that produces a tension between the two camps that endures over the centuries. It also suggests that the Unbelievers alone cannot be interminably condemned, except in fundamentalist terms, as the "enemies of the nation" (Mda 2000: 107). Moreover, the Believers' infelicitousness, the 'doubting' chiefs who hedge their material bets, suggests that the prophetic is unachievable, inarticulable, even, without a precondition: universal obligation. Fealty to the prophetic is not specific to the Believers. It applies, as a precondition for (the amaXhosa's) transubstantiation, absolutely, indiscriminately, to the entire nation. It is this absolutist politics that explains why the prophetic is historically unfulfillable: the prophetic requires complete transformation before (further) change is possible or, can be promised. The prophetic demands absolute re-constitution before absolute transubstantiation.

Because of the double dissensus that marks life in "Qolorha-by-Sea," the promise of Nonqawuse is historically unrealizable because it could only have been achieved by submission at the precise conjuncture, by following absolutely the dictates of the prophetess. The amaXhosa could, as it were, only have been liberated from colonial rule and born again, like Christ, if they had all forsaken all their material goods. However, unlike Christ, they were not required to sacrifice their lives, only that which they owned and that which they, had they been true to and in their faith, would have regained in the moment after their rebirth as a people, a people no longer contaminated, a people no longer 'polluted' by their past; unlike the Old Testament's Abraham, who was, even though with grave reservation, 'willing' to sacrifice his son Isaac in order to follow God's commands, the amaXhosa are not required to do violence to their children – or other loved ones; unlike contemporary anti-colonialists, such as the San Domingan *sans coulottes*, fighting under the direction of Toussaint L'Ouverture, they were not required to risk their lives in battle against the (French) colonialists; unlike the San

Domingan slaves, they did not achieve freedom and independence, although had they done so the amaXhosa's would have been without bloodshed. Nonqawuse's "cattle-killing" required nothing but obedience, the first tenet of faith, and sacrifice, another crucial tenet of faith. (Nonqawuse's prophecies are said to have culminated in the "cattle-killing episode," as the event is commonly known in South African history, which *The Heart of Redness* dates to 16 February 1857.)

This essay is a critique of *The Heart of Redness*' inability to comprehend fully the complexity of Christian discourse, especially Christianity's dialogic relationship to the prophetic tradition articulated by Nonqawuse.<sup>6</sup> Central to this argument is the role that the politics of doubt plays in the advocacy and sustenance of a faith. Despite Mda's underdevelopment of Christianity's theocratic status in *The Heart of Redness* and his sometimes prosaic rendering of it as the faith of the colonialists, as a secondary, out of place, structure of belief, this faith of some Unbelievers is saliently – and generatively – present in *The Heart of Redness*. However, the discursive force of Christianity is only available if the village of Qolorha-by-Sea, the post-apartheid community where Nonqawuse once lived, the place from which she as a pubescent girl issued her directives about the "cattle-killing movement" to the amaXhosa, is read as the site of theocratic dissensus. It is the place that pits one new system of belief against another, that comprehends more critically the modernity of both the Believers and the Unbelievers that emerges in direct response to the cattle-killing event; a hermeneutic that interrogates the political complications of positing amaXhosa 'culture' as the basis for a 'faith.' Qolorha-by-Sea is that political space where the Believers and the Unbelievers, after the suspension of struggle that was the "Middle Generations" (colonialism and the apartheid era), renew their battle. This time, however, Nonqawuse, now 'reborn' – or, 'returned' – in the person of the *fin-de-siècle* Qukezwa, is engaged in a different struggle with the Unbelievers: the environmental future of the region where she once, however briefly, 'reigned'; this time the struggle is between late-capitalist modernity and 'tradition,' between venture capitalists (a group of investors, whom contemporary Unbelievers such as Bhonco and his daughter Xoliswa Ximiya support) who want to build a casino complex in Nonqawuse's old territory and Believers who want to preserve their physical surroundings and their history. Most importantly, however, this essay demonstrates how a dissensual politics requires its own skepticism because it can, and does in *The Heart of Redness*, produce a politics fraught with the same potential for exploitation (of the historically disenfranchised) and cooptation (with global capital) as any politics of consensus that it is opposes.

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<sup>6</sup> In addressing the issue of Christianity and the role of women in the early anti-colonial/anti-apartheid struggle, *The Heart of Redness* recalls the 1930 novel by Sol Plaatje, *Mhudi*. Both novels ascribe centrality to a proto-feminist anti-coloniality, thereby inserting gender as a critical category of the post/apartheid experience.

## 2. Not Equal to Sacrifice

*Excess is the essence of the promise.*  
(Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*)

The discourse of the sacrificial is fundamental to Christianity, much as it is to any other faith. Sacrifice is part of an equitable system of exchange. In return for the Crucifixion, there is the Resurrection, the harbinger of eternal life for all humanity and not simply for God's own son, Jesus Christ; in exchange for faith, there is the promise of everlasting life. The concept of the sacrifice is what the Believers fail to grasp. The Believers' resounding critique of their counterparts, especially the Christians in the ranks of the Unbelievers, is the Crucifixion: "What else could one expect from people who were a product of different creation from that of the amaXhosa, people who were so unscrupulous that they killed the son of their own god?" (Mda 2000: 133). This inconceivability on the part of the Believers is a constant, but singularly unconvincing, refrain throughout the novel. It is, to say the least, a disingenuous position. After all, how could a community of believers willing to put all their faith, their future, and their material well being in the hands – or, words, more precisely – of a pubescent girl, not comprehend the possibility of a miraculous death and rebirth? Especially when they are willing to stake themselves on the mystical arrival by ship of those variously named the "spirits," the "Strangers" and even the "Russians" on an appointed, or, anointed, day?

In a paradoxical turnabout, Zim – chief latter day Believer – exposes the Believers' fallacy that the mystical, miraculous content of Christianity is inaccessible to them: "'If your Christ can walk on the sea and turn water into wine, so can Nonqawuse's cattle rise from the sea,' declares Zim" (Mda 2000: 245). The vernacularization of Christ's miracles reflects the depth of the dialogic between the Believers and the Unbelievers – the act of walking on water, to test the faith of his disciples, especially Peter's, who (much as at the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of the Crucifixion), fails the test; and, the first miracle of turning water into wine during the wedding at Canaan. These discourses have become so integrated into each other that one cannot function metaphorically without the other. However, more salient is the first miracle Zim invokes. Taken from the Book of Matthew (14: 22-33), occurring just after Jesus has fed the "multitude" with "five loaves and two fishes," it is a telling choice because it is all about faith, or, more specifically, about the lack thereof. Jesus urges his disciples to walk toward him on water (after he had walked to them in a choppy sea) and, following his directive they do so. However, when the sea again shows signs of turbulence, their trust in him wavers and they begin to sink. Jesus rescues them, but he adds a memorably gentle rebuke to Peter: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt: 14: 31).

While in the Old Testament God presented Abraham with (only) a test of faith (which, unlike Peter, he passed), Jesus' sacrifice – the Crucifixion – in the New Testament is so much more central to Christianity. The Christians could countenance, *post ipso facto*, the killing of "god's own (and only) son" because it represents the constitutive event of their faith, what Slavoj Žižek has named the "perverse core of Christianity": without Christ's death (the Crucifixion, always property, and unheroically, attributed to Judas) there would be no Resurrection, and without Christ's arising from the dead there would be no Christian religion.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, without the (failed) prophetic the amaXhosa could not have constructed a faith able to withstand its own non-fulfillment and the particular demands of its own historic suspension (the Middle Generations). It is through Nonqawuse's predictions, her scripting of a "new people," that the nation of the amaXhosa can be born. Just as Christ's death produces eternal life for Christians, so the near-death of the amaXhosa people (thousands starved, literally, to death because of the cattle-killing movement) produces a 'national' life out of prophetic failure. Nonqawuse's prophecies represent the death of those whose adherence to her utterances proved fatal, but mythically generative in the prophetic's capacity to sustain her followers a century and a half later; an amaXhosa life-in-death (the death of the promise of deliverance and Resurrection) that is also, like Christianity, a life-because-of-death.

The singular aspect of Nonqawuse's prophecies, which distinguishes it from Christianity, is that its notion of the sacrificial does not call for "self-renunciation" (Foucault 1997: 247). It is premised, instead, on the temporary (and communal) renunciation of the self; and the self's property, in order to gain a reborn, purified self now in possession of uncontaminated (and, presumably, bountiful) property. The prophetic does not so much require self-renunciation as self-preservation – the preservation of the self through a temporary social death that will soon be reversed by a more glorious rebirth. What is clear is that both the prophetic and the unbelieving have an intimate, non-renunciatory relationship to property; both faiths have as a central tenet either the preservation (Unbelievers) or the reclamation (Believers, of new, sanctified) of property. *The Heart of Redness* constitutes the theocratic meeting point of Žižek and Foucault: the novel advocates practicing faiths based on the 'perverse, non-sacrificial care of the self.' These are faiths that do not require the permanent sacrifice of the self's (or the community) property.

It is thus through the 'failed' prophetic that the amaXhosa nation enters modernity dialectically. It is, of course, out – and because – of the impurity and material deprivation of colonial modernity that the prophetic can be articulated. The crisis of colonial modernity provides the condition for the prophetic's

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<sup>7</sup> This phrase is the subtitle of Žižek. 2003. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

germination. This variegated historic dialectic makes what is theocratically at stake so apparent: how do two articulations of a critical faith, derived from the struggle to define a people in their encounter with colonialist modernity, occupy the same political space, a site surrounded on all sides by, in the novel's two historical moments, either the repressive practices of colonialism or the urgent demands of capital expansion?

At the most facile level, *The Heart of Redness* posits a struggle between those who have faith and those who do not, the Believers and the Unbelievers, between two modes of black anti-colonial life, those who seek a reflective return to Nonqawuse's 'redness' (which is, for the Unbelievers, the sign of the 'uncivilized,' the Conradian 'darkness' at the colonized 'heart' of the African) and those who stand on the side of post-apartheid 'progress.' However, while the Believers consistently represent themselves as the historic incarnation of those who came before, not simply as ancestors but as direct descendants of their theocratic legacy, the bloodlines of *The Heart of Redness* will not sanction such a claim because all the inhabitants of Qolorha-by-Sea trace their roots back to the same progenitor – Xikixa, father of the twins, the amaXhosa chief decapitated by the colonists: "everyone is always at pains to stress that Twin's and Twin-Twin's lines are distinct, even though they are joined at the top by the headless ancestor" (Mda 2000: 62). There is, then, no identifiable point of origin for either of these constituencies; because of their 'headless' beginning, these two groups remain invisibly, indissolubly linked to each other. Furthermore, the Believers and the Unbelievers are both movements founded and regenerated in response to historical crisis. They originate because of the increasing encroachment upon black life by the British colonists – governors such as Harry Smith, George Cathcart and George Grey want to bring the indigenous peoples more firmly under their control, giving the colonists direct access to their resources and their labor and quelling the regular rebellions on the frontiers of the colony. Similarly, a century and a half later, after the end of apartheid, the Believers and the Unbelievers are re-born because of the dangers to their community that derive from the new state's accommodation with capital. According to Bhonco, the Unbelievers are in favor of building a casino resort and accruing to the community a new source of wealth: "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" (Mda 2000: 92). The turn to modernity, that turning away from historic 'redness' (or, 'darkness'), also marks the moment of decision. Modernity trumps 'tradition' for the Unbelievers because they choose, not always with deliberateness (as Bhonco's rhetoric sometimes makes apparent), 'civilization' and 'development' rather than adherence to 'excessive promises' offered by the (return to) the legacy of Nonqawuse.

However, what binds the contemporary Unbelievers to the Believers, besides their common history and physical proximity, is a glaring lack of political acumen. Both groups suffer from an ideological blindness to the causes of black material deprivation in a post-apartheid society and a refusal to recognize that the vulnerability of Qolorha-by-Sea emanates only in part from outside (venture capital) because there is no internal economic structure that can sustain the community. However, Bhonco's endorsement of 'progress' and 'modernity' cannot be figured as simply the hollow gesture of the politician. Much as Bhonco speaks from a position that too readily enunciates support for the casino complex, his speaking is girded by a deeply grounded, even diabolical dialectical historical truth. The Unbelievers represent the struggle, which animated and sustained the anti-colonial project for centuries, against the mis-representation of the 'native' as uncivilized, or 'red,' in the iconography of Mda's novel, and therefore less than human – the very incarnation of the Conradian Other. However, by reiterating so vehemently their support for 'civilization,' by trying to escape the 'heart of redness,' the Unbelievers inadvertently give credence to the colonialists' representation of them. They add substance to one of *The Heart of Redness*' colonial governors, Sir George Grey's pronouncements, "They will give up their barbaric culture and heathen habits, and when they take over their chiefdoms they will be good chiefs. I want the chiefs to undertake to send their sons to school" (Mda 2000: 127).

Implicitly, by insisting upon themselves as 'civilized,' the Unbelievers acknowledge that dreaded, unspeakable *a priori* era of their own history: their moment of 'barbarism'; implicitly, by virtue of their opposition to the colonialists and to the Unbelievers, the Believers establish themselves as the protectors, full inhabitants, of the amaXhosa tradition, as those who reject modernity because of their principled opposition to colonialism's project of Othering – denigrating, exploiting, enslaving – indigenous communities. However, because of their pragmatism, their refusal of the sacrificial element of the prophetic, their belief in a rationalist materiality (self- and 'national' preservation), the Unbelievers cannot be simplistically figured as agents of complicity. They are not the Judases of betrayal, that scion of the nation who sold the amaXhosas for thirty head of cattle even though some of the Christians in their ranks accept the ideological terms of colonialism. There are Unbelievers willing to trade resources for the elimination of their own 'redness.' Speaking of Grey's policy of the appropriation of indigenous land, an Unbeliever defends the governor's actions: "Of course he had to take their land in return for civilization. Civilization is not cheap" (Mda 2000: 84). However, it could be argued, as Bhonco does in a conversation with Camagu, that Nonqawuse's was the real betrayal and that her standing has not been affected by her 'wrongdoing' because of the mythic status afforded her by history: "It is you learned ones who have turned

her into a goddess who must be worshipped. Yet she killed the nation of the amaXhosa''' (Mda 2000: 61).

This complex interplay between 'betrayal' and pragmatism, between loyalty and disavowal (of the prophetic), lends a hermeneutic indeterminacy to Bhonco and the Unbelievers' support for modernity, (post-)industrialization, employment (albeit of the most menial variety), and the production of ethnicity and pleasure for xenotropic consumption. If nothing else, it allows for their anti-environmental politics as a considered economic choice, as a historically conscious, contextually produced pragmatism. Without jobs, of one kind or another, Qolorha-by-Sea will become a ghost town, remembered only nostalgically as the place that houses Nonqawuse's pool. While he is no Colonel Kurtz, the white entrepreneur John Dalton does understand the economic benefits 'redness' – the allure of the xenotropic – might have for him. The Unbelievers are struggling against a new post-apartheid history that, as it were, has officially given them back their history of Nonqawuse without redressing the devastation suffered by the Middle Generation – a legacy which all of Qolorha-by-Sea confronts daily, from Bhonco who cannot obtain his pension from the state to his daughter, who finds her school's prospects (and her own chances of promotion) thwarted by bureaucracy and the town's distance from the provincial and the national capital. Bhonco's and Zim's town could easily become, as it already largely is, one run by the "white amaXhosa," John Dalton, the resident trader – the local storekeeper who doubles as an enterprising tourist guide – who organizes a small scale eco-tourist agency that takes mainly white (and often European) visitors to see Nonqawuse's pool. Within this entangled historical paradigm, the Unbelievers cannot be dismissed as merely representing the politics of the unfaithful. When the Unbelieving 'elder' proclaims, "'They want us to remain in our wildness! [. . .] To remain red all our lives! To stay in the darkness of redness!'", he is simultaneously raging against the Believers (who oppose 'progress'), unreflectively pronouncing on the failure of that self-same modernity, and venting the entire community's frustration and helplessness about their post-apartheid material lack (Mda 2000: 71).

In this way, Bhonco and Zim, Unbeliever and Believer, speak, together, discordantly, from that place Jacques Rancière names 'democracy.' In their rhetorical skirmishes, Bhonco and Zim inadvertently rescue the term 'democracy' from post-apartheid inanity and misuse and restore to it a philosophical veracity. Between the Believers and the Unbelievers, they redeem 'democracy' from its overdetermined political invocation, a modality of the anti-apartheid political that promised so much but delivered, to Qolorha-by-Sea and other places like it, so little. In Rancière's terms, democracy is "neither compromise between interests nor the formation of a common will. Its kind of dialogue is that of a divided community" (Rancière 1995: 103). The Believers and the Unbelievers are in this

difficult, potentially unresolvable 'dialogue': they animate the Rancièrian definition – the point is not to produce political consensus but rather to reject 'compromise' and any construction of a 'common will,' a shared political outlook. Democracy in Qolorha-by-Sea signifies a historic agreement borne out of enforced détente (Middle Generations) and decades of sustained strife: the institution of animus as the political *modus operandi* of the place, the insistence upon a dissensus as the only political practice worthy of (the name of) democracy. This is not, as Camagu, the interloper from Johannesburg, would prefer it, a place where the political combatants want rapprochement, let alone an enduring truce; this is a space that neither desires or makes possible consensus. (Camagu represents the failed returning exile, from New York, who cannot gain access to the new South African black elite; instead, thwarted in Johannesburg, he 'discovers' his own political genealogy in Nonqawuse's place of 'redness'.)

Qolorha-by-Sea is not the site where the ethos and ideology of the 'new South Africa,' with its insatiable appetite for public 'reconciliation,' obtains. *The Heart of Redness* town is, in the philosophically demanding terms of Rancièrè, the only democratic locale of substance. Its standing as a 'democratic' space is borne out by a telling exchange between Camagu and Bhonco. At a town meeting to discuss the building of the proposed gambling resort, the disagreement between these two proves revealing. Not only do they represent different generations of black South Africa but different modalities – the barely literate, untraveled Unbeliever and the educated, cosmopolitan, Believer-fellow traveler, although Camagu never fully adopts Zim's position. They stand for divergent ideologies, the former for unreflective capitalism and the latter for a problematic, environmentally grounded liberalism. (The construction of resorts is an economic strategy with a less than venerable history in South Africa. Pleasure resorts such as the infamous Sun City were constructed in the mid – to late – 1970's in the then-nominally independent black homelands, Boputhatswana, in this case, to lure white South Africans with gambling, prohibited in the nation proper, and X-rated shows, similarly prohibited by the Calvinist apartheid regime.) Camagu, proponent of liberal-democratic process, argues, "[t]hat is what democracy is all about. Citizens must first debate these matters. There must be consensus before a decision is taken." "Such are the ills of democracy!" remarks Bhonco" (Mda 2000: 95). Bhonco's response is, in part, a laconic, off-handed comment. Mainly, however, it stands in sharp contrast to Camagu's argument for 'consensus,' for the bridging of difference, for the reconciliation of the newly reopened split between the Believers and the Unbelievers. Camagu's is, in salient ways (despite his sense of himself as an outsider, the exile sans home 'at home'), the voice of post-apartheid South Africa's representative, accountable, democracy: the privileging of 'unity' over dissent. Camagu advocates a politics that creates very little possibility for dissent of the Rancièrian variety,

any politics that remains trenchantly dissensual, that regards democracy as the practice of holding unyieldingly to its own oppositionality. Political consensus, that mode of ideological engagement favored by parliamentary democracy, can be described as a politics without a genesis, without democratic substance because it works on the premise of a preordained terminus: it already knows where it wants to arrive, it presupposes its final articulation; consensus is simply a matter of following a prescriptive – and prescribed – political trajectory. Unlike a Rancièrian (and Bhonco-nean) democracy, where the struggle does not envisage its endpoint, where there is not the always anticipated meeting in the middle (which is nothing but the perpetual meeting of the middle), consensus concedes every potentiality of the radical. It is for this reason that it is not, as *The Heart of Redness* fails to recognize, Camagu but Bhonco who represents the democratic. He refuses Camagu's tendency to reduce democracy to the inevitable production of consensus.

For Bhonco 'consensus' represents, as an instance of the political, an 'ill' because it cannot conceive of either the practice (in the post-apartheid dispensation) or the continuation (from the strife-riven days of the twins) of historic animosity. Bhonco speaks for the retention and the sharpening of the divide, as problematic as his anti-environmental position is; his is an urging for the repeated reinscription of the ideological gap, the longstanding antipathy, that separates the Believers from the Unbelievers. It is a form of the political totally inconceivable to Camagu, not only an adrift returning exile but a figure who has neither, in the colloquial, a grasp of the political stakes – which Bhonco is so ardently arguing for – nor a complex understanding of how democracy might be conceived as anything other than a series of compromises.

Bhonco, and not Camagu, comprehends that this is a place – Qolorha-by-Sea, the town meeting, possibly even the post-apartheid state – where the history of age-old choices continues to hold with a rare absolutism, even an obstinacy. In Qolorha-by-Sea democracy means the capacity to sustain divisions, to bring Twin and Twin-Twin, and the differences they incarnate(/d), back to political life every day. Zim and Bhonco play out in post-apartheid society what happened centuries ago when families were torn apart: "Believers fought against unbelieving brothers. Unbelieving spouses turned against believing spouses. Unbelieving fathers kicked believing sons out of their homesteads. Unbelieving sons plotted the demise of believing fathers" (Mda 2000: 86). Qolorha-by-Sea's is the legacy of tumult, strife, and the most intense internal splitting so that, as *The Heart of Redness* makes clear, in this tiny corner of post-apartheid society, the universal franchise is new, but the history of division is old; it is, in fact, much, much older. This historic conflict contains within it, according to Rancièrè, the essence of democracy. For him, "Democracy is closely linked to tragedy – to unsettled grievance" (Rancièrè 1995: 102). *The Heart of Redness* is nothing, for both the Believers and the Unbelievers, if

not the narrative of repeated historical 'tragedy.' On that appointed day, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1857, when the Russians are supposed to rise from the sea but do not, "The Unbelievers went about their usual work. But for the Believers it was the day of the Great Disappointment" (Mda 2000: 211).

On the other hand, for Xoliswa, it is Nonqawuse who "killed the nation of the amaXhosa" with that precise injunction of the prophetic (Mda 2006: 61). It was the young prophetess who initiated the (un-)called for sacrifice, of not only crops and livestock but an entire way of life; it was she who inaugurated the division by marking, with a lasting historical emphasis, that moment before division from the moment that came after. It is because of Nonqawuse that the moment of Xikixa, whose time is symbolically and politically 'sacrificed' by Nonqawuse's pronouncements after he is himself 'sacrificed' by the British, now doubles as the moment before the political. The "Great Disappointment" was the prophetess's definitive and most consequential act because it divided the amaXhosa forever by setting families against each other; that act tore the amaXhosa's temporality into two. Such was Nonqawuse's effect that she doubled the two, making a "Twin" and a "Twin-Twin" out of Xikixa's twins (Mda 2000: 61).

However, Bhonco's anti-environmental position, even as it inscribes itself as "democratic," reveals a crucial paradox. A democratic politics does not guarantee a radical politics. As instructive and philosophical as his dissensual politics is, Bhonco's is explicitly an argument for capitalist expansion. Not only will the environment be destroyed, but Bhonco's lament, "The village itself lost a glittering gambling paradise that would have changed life for everyone. Instead it got a rustic holiday camp that lacks the glamour of the gambling city," is a shortsighted critique of the Believers' putative triumph (Mda 2000: 273). The "glittering gambling paradise" would have yielded very few, if any, decent paying, non-dead end, jobs. The democratic does not by itself constitute a sufficiently radical politics. Without understanding how globalization operates, democracy can easily find itself performing as a functionary for global capital. The democratic, as articulated through *The Heart of Redness*, may ironically be more dangerous to the economically vulnerable than a liberal environmentalist politics. *The Heart of Redness*, however, resists such a political palliative. At the very end of the novel, Camagu understands that the Believers' political 'victory' – and that of 'consensus' – represents nothing but a political stay of execution: "Those who want to preserve indigenous plants and birds have won the day. At least for now. But for how long?" (Mda 2000: 277). The casino, it appears, is an inevitable construction in Qolorha-by-Sea. And, with it, not an inauguration of the Raciéean democratic, but its liquidation – accompanying it will be the destruction of the environment and the elimination of Nonqawuse, as well as the history of the prophetic political she dialectically embodied.

Finally, it could be argued, the temporary liberal environmental triumph over capital reveals the conservative core of the prophetic. Nonqawuse's pronouncements, the Believers' struggle, is primarily about preservation, not rebellion – the ousting of the British colonialists notwithstanding. The cattle-killing movement turned on the exchange of property, old for new, not its renunciation or its redistribution. The Unbelievers too were focused on preservation. In the face of prophetic demands to destroy their property, they sought to save and protect, to refuse the promise of exchange because of their faith in (their) historic possession.

### 3. The Politics of Doubt

*Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is*  
(Corinthians 3:13)

The "cattle-killing" movement instantiated not only a social and material death but also – conceptually, speculatively – a rare historical moment: the equality of the amaXhosa. That is what is most important about that moment between the death of the nation's resources and the replenishing thereof by the "Strangers," the substitution of the new for the old, which is tantamount to an act of grace – of plenitude, of *agape*, "love as charity."<sup>8</sup> In the time of decision, always a moment fraught with political danger, madness and possibility, all the amaXhosa would have been equally bereft, equally vulnerable, and, potentially, equally felicitous, all equally true in their belief that Nonqawuse's promises could, and would, be fulfilled. In the act of social death, before the "entire amaXhosa nation" tasted the "sweet fruits of the resurrection," there was the potentiality for a brief equality of life (Mda 2000: 86). At the heart of the faith of and in redness there was, just for that brief instant, that prospect that Camagu desires and Bhonco (in his Rancièran fashion) dreads, the elliptical possibility for consensus: the capacity (of the amaXhosa) to act as One because they are, if only for that pre-16<sup>th</sup> February 1857 moment, united in their relationship to the promise, dependent upon it for their deliverance. Contained prophylactically in that instant is the amaXhosa's liberation from colonialism, from ethical contamination, from the past that saw them reduced to servitude, and from the future that would induct democracy as a tragic separation of the One from its Self.

<sup>8</sup> This term is borrowed from Žižek's *The Puppet and the Dwarf*.

It is in that Nonqawuse-inspired movement, which produces the Unbelievers in the splitting of the Xikixa-One into the Two, the doubling of "Twin" into "Twin-Twin," that the "unsettled grievance" is conceived (Mda 2000: 181). Of course, Nonqawuse's prophecies give rise to not one but two grievances. For the Believers it inaugurates their animosity toward the Unbelievers for their refusal to adopt the faith advocated by Nonqawuse – and a couple of other lesser prophetesses; for the Unbelievers, those Nonqawuse agnostics and atheists, it marks the origins of their dislike for the 'redness,' the 'uncivilized' propensities that are given full articulation by the 'thanatos' instincts – the death drives – of the Believers. This is what Twin-Twin understands as the unthinking tendency toward obedience that will bring about the physical death of the amaXhosa. In the terms of this grievance, and contrary to the position of the Believers, it is not believing that will save the nation but its exact opposite: unbelieving, the refusal of the prophetic as (the basis for) a faith, is what saves the amaXhosa by physically preserving the life of amaXhosa subjects from self-elimination. It is through the act of doubt, the activist rebuttal of the prophetic (organizing unbelieving as a viable, countervailing, life-sustaining faith), that the nation's life, if not its prophetic salvation, is achieved. In the struggle between believing and unbelieving, a doubly productive dialectic emerges out of the Unbelievers' doubt. According to Žižek's reading of the Crucifixion-Resurrection narrative, it is only through doubt, for which Jesus ironically chided Peter, that God – as Jesus Christ – can redeem Humanity: "But in that terrific tale of the Passion there is a distinct emotional suggestion that the author of all things (in some unthinkable way) went not only through agony, but through doubt" (Žižek 2003:15).

On the one hand, it is because of Twin-Twin and the Unbelievers' doubting Nonqawuse's prophecies that the "Cult of the Unbelievers" can harden into a faith in rationality, as an interrogative device for questioning the prophetic, of putting it to the (materialist) test and then rejecting it (Mda 2000: 5). On the other hand, it is because of the threat posed by the Unbelievers' doubt that the Believers can affirm their faith. As Zim says, "It is an honor to pine on behalf of those who waited in vain," conjoining in that moment the discourses of the absolute and the sacrificial (Mda 2000: 177).

Zim's felicity, however, is Sisyphean and without the equivocation that would make his faith a more critical political tool. He has never questioned why Twin "waited in vain" (Mda 2000: 177). He is, furthermore, performing the 'martyrdom' of the non-penitent believer/Believer. The Believer's is not, as Foucault would have it, the "affect of change, of rupture with self, past and world," a break with the past, but rather its opposite: a reconnection (an affective Resurrection, if you will), the suturing of the post-apartheid moment to its prophetic origins, the current act of mourning that elides the violent rupturing that was the Middle

Generations (Foucault 1997: 235). Zim's constitutes the theatricality of faith: making visible the affective costs of the prophetic, even if all that is patent is the futility of having "waited in vain," of having endured "Great Disappointment" after "Great Disappointment" (Foucault 1997: 245). This is precisely why doubt is at once the great impermissible for a faith and its most valuable facilitator, provided it is engaged and transcended. The overcoming of doubt, like conversion (which is what Twin, euphorically, undergoes), is a powerful experience – what the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Corinthians names a 'fire,' an acid test – because it signals the triumph over (temporary) un-belief, which produces a surer, more critical, re-embracing of the faith; now, most likely, as an Absolute Faith. The reformed, or re-convinced, doubter, like the Biblical Thomas, symbolically eviscerates un-belief and steps fully, reflectively, infinitely, into the Faith.

The most critical of the Unbelievers, among whom Twin-Twin numbers foremost, are not attracted by Christianity but by the rationality of modernity. It is Twin-Twin who had "elevated unbelieving to the heights of a religion" because he rejected the blind faith Twin assumed, and which consumed the believing brother (Mda 2000: 5). Twin-Twin, already skeptical of the discourse of the sacrificial, is firmly opposed to the irrationality of Nonqawuse's preachings; he is not willing to exchange his crops or his cattle for 'new' ones. For Twin-Twin it is rationalism, the ability to operate critically in the world, to resist the seductions of the spirit, that constitutes the core of 'unbelieving.' He will not trade in the unknown, he will not put his faith in "Strangers" or mysterious "Russians" or "spirits." Twin-Twin is, unlike his brother, a man of profound logic; he is, unlike his heir Bhonco, a consistently assiduous thinker, a historically conscious agent.

It is precisely Twin-Twin's strict rationalism, the deliberateness with which he acts, that makes him ill-suited for a radical politics. He is too much, epigrammatically phrased, the 'capitalist' to engage in a politics of risk. His proclivity for materialist calculation proves a double-edged sword: the refusal to endure property loss is precisely what makes him such a keen opponent and interlocutor of the prophetic but it is also, this tendency to tabulate gains and losses, what would make him recoil from the uncertainties, the lack of materialist guarantees, that is integral to a radical politics. A radical politics requires a critical dispensation that extends beyond the interrogative; it requires, as it were, an approach that is willing to engage in the act of potentially, more than temporarily, renouncing the self in order to revolutionize, not simply maintain, the polis. The radical demands creativity and imagination, not only the dissensual demos. It is appropriate, then, that Bhonco should be Twin-Twin's heir. Twin-Twin may lord over a larger domain and possess greater material resources, but they are both protagonists limited by – and satisfied with – minimum material gains. Twin-Twin is intent on maintaining the amaXhosa *status quo*; unlike the Believers he will not

engage in a politics of risk. Bhonco, operating under infinitely greater material strictures, is willing to trade his history and culture for the promise of a few jobs at a “glittering gambling casino.” The impossibility of a radical politics is the price of pragmatism. It is not so much that both Twin-Twin and Bhonco are, or would be, unwilling to pay this price, but that the alternative never occurs to either of them as a political possibility.

However, politically cyclopean as he is, Twin-Twin continues to represent, if not an entirely viable politics, then certainly a protagonist who emerges in *The Heart of Redness* as a figure of political challenge. Twin-Twin, as a historical actor who has witnessed, the effects of colonialism, Christianity, and the division of the amaXhosa, performs, ironically, a prophetic role in relation to the post-apartheid Qolorha-by-Sea. His grounded critiques suggest that the town, its history, its dialectical relationship to the prophetic, will not endure unless it confronts the consequences of the moment of decision, especially because it is living with the consequences of both historical moments. Nonqawuse’s old haunt will succumb, unless it can fashion a political practice that combines the dissensual and the radically creative, to the ‘twin’ inefficacies of a non-radical democracy and a politically impotent liberalism.

It is out of this difficult, dually inscribed temporal conjuncture between modernity and the ‘faith’ of Nonqawuse that the post-apartheid theocratic is born. It is out of the conflict among modernity, the prophetic, and the agnostically inflected pragmatic, that *The Heart of Redness* reveals itself to be a deeply eschatological text. It is, as Camagu finally reflects, a novel of grave endings, of impending Biblical catastrophe, an eschatology, crucially, that democracy as the practice of sustained division cannot avert. If the theocratic contains within its articulation nothing so much as its own incipient critique, then *The Heart of Redness* opens up – despite the author’s heavy-handed attempts to restrict the novel to a binarized politics – into a democracy of “doubt.” *The Heart of Redness* enables a ‘dissensual’ critique of democracy that fully understands the politics of division and a prophetic politics that is open to opposition from within.

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