

Critical Analysis of the Orakloric Resurgence in Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

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Abstract

The interplay of oral-lore in literary texts is gaining immense popularity African literary texts. This influence of African oral elements are common in novels, the short stories, poetry or drama written by most black African writers. Ngugi (1986) calls this phenomenon, orature, which means oral literature in Africa. This article endeavours to critically analyse the resurgence of orality in Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000). Mda's *The Heart of Redness* was purposively sampled from other novels by the same novelist because of its germaness to the study. It is a qualitative study which is undergirded by the Post-colonial theoretical assumptions. Firstly, this article defines and discusses the following interwoven terms: orality, oral tradition and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Secondly, this article critically analyses some of the salient characteristics of the oral tradition employed in Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, which are, totemism, symbolism and omen(s). Lastly, it (this paper) emphasises the use of oral forms and IKS in literary texts for the transformation of (South) African literature.

Keywords: *oral-lore, literary texts, indigenous knowledge systems, resurgence, orature*

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Introduction

Background

Africa is an oral continent. Its historical heritage is, therefore, oral. The ancient ancestors made use of oral forms for many different purposes. Therefore, it is normal to find influences of orality in the written texts of African literature. For Africans, before the adoption of the written word, there were storytellers (Mogoboya, 2021). Therefore, a writer who writes as if s/he is telling their story orally declares that s/he is descendant of the great storytellers of the African continent. Orality is a primary characteristic of Africa literature today. Its significance lies in its appeal to its immediate audience. Poems, plays, short stories and novels by black African writers are evident of the influence of orality in their creation.

Orality

Oral tradition, or oral lore, is a form of human communication wherein knowledge, art, ideas and cultural material is received, preserved and transmitted orally from one generation to another. The transmission is through speech or song and may include folktales, ballads, chants, prose or verses. In this way, it is possible for a society to transmit oral history, oral literature, oral law and other knowledge across generations without a writing system, or in parallel to a writing system (Finnegan, 1970:5).

Though it is an essentially oral continent, Africa also “possesses both written and unwritten traditions” (Finnegan, 1970:1). However, the written tradition is still new while the oral tradition has been with African people since time immemorial. Africans relied on oral traditions to store knowledge, information, to disseminate the knowledge for grave functions or entertainment. If Europeans are the people of the letter (literacy) and codification, Africans are people of the word-of-mouth (orality). In the ancient times, human beings did not have the blessing of writing; communication was oral, hence we speak of “orality” (Masoga, 2018). Ong (2002:2), cited in Masoga (2018) observes that the “human society first formed itself with the aid of oral speech, becoming literate very late in its history, and at first only in certain groups”. This article, therefore, endeavours to critically analyse the resurgence of orality in Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000).

Theoretical Grounding

This article is underpinned by Post-colonial theory guided by Afrocentricity. It is so in order to narrow the analysis of the selected text down to Africa and the African post-colonial experiences. Post-colonial theory is a theory that covers “all the culture affected by the

imperial process from the moments of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft, Griffin & Tiffin, 1989:2). According to Rakundwa and Aarde (2007), post-colonial critique (theory) can be defined as a dialectical discourse, which broadly marks the historical facts of decolonisation. Postcolonial criticism “bears witness to the unequal and universal forces of cultural representation” (Bhabha, 1994:171). Mogoboya (2011:31) opines that Post-colonial Theory “... deals with the previously oppressed people’s quest for identity on the basis of history, language, race, and culture”.

The approach of this critical analysis is Afrocentric. Afrocentricity, which is a strand of Post-colonial theory, is both an ideology and a philosophy, which centres on Africa and its issues. Marcus Garvey is “one of the most influential propagators of the ideology” (Chawane, 2016). Chawane (2016:78) contends that the philosophy gained momentum during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America. It must, therefore, be stated that even though the Afrocentric philosophy is about Africanness, it was first coined in the United States of America (Chawane, 2016). Asante (1999:1-2,4) defines Afrocentricity “as a critical corrective to a displaced agency among Africans” by “recentering African minds”. What Asante’s assertion indicates is the fact that there has been wrongs done against the African people. African people have been described in derogatory terms as uncultured and lacking of genius. That is why Afrocentricity is viewed to serve as an affirmation that Africans are capable of doing any other exploit that any person can do (Appiah, 1992). Thus, he views Afrocentricity as an approach in the service of righting these wrongs. Karenga (1994:404) defines Afrocentricity as “essentially a quality of perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interest of the African people”. This article is, furthermore, sustained by qualitative research methodology. The data collected from the text (novel) is critically analysed under the guidance of this research methodology.

Critical Analysis of Some Salient Characteristics of the African Oral Heritage in Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*.

Totem and Praise Name

A totem is an invisible and invaluable cultural pendant that people wear as a tag of their consciousness of the tribe/clan (identity) to which they belong. The totem, as a rule, is an animal, either edible and harmless, or dangerous and feared; more rarely the totem is a plant or a force of nature (rain, water), which stands in a peculiar relation to the whole clan. The totem is, first of all, the tribal ancestor of the clan, as well as its tutelary spirit and protector; it

sends oracles and, though otherwise dangerous, the totem knows and spares its children. According to Kgobe (1994:25),

A totem is any species of animal or plant that is regarded as a relative or ancestor to a group or clan of human beings. The plant or animal becomes the symbol of the clan's kinship identity. Moreover, a totem animal is a member of the clan, protected by taboo from being eaten, killed or injured, and intricate rules the possibilities of marriage between members of different totem groups.

A totem is used to refer to a person in salutation, greeting address or to bestow honour upon a person. When a totem is used to show honour and great veneration towards someone is regarded as a praise totem. A praise totem is that praise which is recited for a specific people who bear a particular animal name as their totem animal, and the name of the animal is used to praise the people, their clan.

In the African culture, people may have different surnames yet share the same totem. These people, by virtue of sharing of the same totem, are considered as one; they regard each other as relatives, descendants of the same ancestor carried by the totem name. It is natural to find people who share the same totem praising each other by that totem (Milubi, 1997). Totemism is the use of a totem animal as a symbolic object of their clan. Totemism is the belief that a close magical relationship exists between clan, family, or tribe and some animal, plant, or even some inanimate object.

A totem, in light of this, is a praise name form that uses animals to refer to a person or a people. The totems are termed praise names because, in using them, the people praise one another for belonging to a particular tribe (Kgobe, 1994). At times, one can confuse the praise name aspect of totemism with praise poetry because, in its praising, totemism exudes rhythm, musicality and the lifting up of the subject being praised. It could be said therefore, that totem praise is poetic, since it invokes images and figures of speech such as metaphor and hyperbole. For example, in totem praising, one person refers to another by the name of an animal, *tau* – lion – in Northern Sotho. Here, the person praising the other refers to the person praised as a lion. This therefore, is a metaphoric use of a totem. In line with this, Kgobe (1994:213) observes:

Metaphors are drawn from every sphere of life: animals, natural phenomena, and religion. Metaphors are evidence of the continuing vitality of the Northern Sotho language. The Bapedi can speak of *ledimo* (storm) or *tau* (lion) referring to Sekhukhune. In some paragraphs, Kgosi Mathebe was

referred to as *tholo* (kudu). This sustains the vitality of the language and still testifies to the richness of invention and imagination which have been at work over centuries of linguistic development. In fact, most metaphors are aligned with totem praises.

Ethnic groups are proud of their totems (Kgobe, 1994). A totem is an oral source because it is original spoken than written. Totemic text, as an oral form, is employed by Mda in *The Heart of Redness* to imbue his novel with a richness of the beauty of this oral characteristic. The protagonist in the novel, Camagu, is visited by a snake, his totem animal. In fact, the snake is first discovered by his hotel room housemaid who screams at the sight of the creature. However, when Camagu comes in to see what was the problem, he is elated by the snake's visit to his room. In the novel, the scene is presented thus:

He goes to the bathroom to take a shower while the woman makes up his bed. All of a sudden she gives a chilling scream that brings him scuttling out of the bathroom.

'What the hell?' he demands.

Even before she can answer he sees a brown snake uncoiling itself slowly on his blankets. The woman darts out shouting for help. In no time a battalion of gardeners, handymen and even a petrol-pump attendant rush in armed with spades and sundry weapons.

'Wait!' screams Camagu. 'No one will touch that snake.'

'He says we must not kill the snake!' shouts the petrol-pump attendant (Mda, 2000:112).

When people see a snake, their first instinct is to kill it, thanks to the Biblical teaching, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman... and hers will crush your head..." (*Genesis 3: 15, New International Version*). It is, therefore, normal that when a person sees a snake s/he "crushes" its head. And so, when Camagu protects the snake, it becomes shockingly curious to the reader. The shock is short-lived when Mda states:

'Why? Is he crazy like those Believers who want to protect lizards?' asks a gardener. 'No,' says Camagu. 'This is not just any snake. This is Majola.'

It begins to register on the men.

'You are of the amaMpondomise clan then?'

'Yes. I am of the amaMpondomise. This is my totem.' (Mda, 2000:112).

Camagu begins to praise the snake by calling it '*Majola*'. In essence, Camagu is praising his clan because the name '*Majola*' belongs to his clan, although his clan is known by another traditional name, amaMpondomise. Camagu praises his clan through the snake. This is called praise name done through a totem (Milubi, 1997). The snake is Camagu's totem animal, and '*Majola*' is his totem name, which if he were to come together with someone who shares the totem, he would use it in greeting or encouragement. Mda further avers:

Camagu is beside himself with excitement. He has never been visited by *Majola*, the brown mole snake that is the totem of his clan. He has heard in stories how the snake visits every newborn child; how it sometimes pays a visit to chosen members of the clan to give them good fortune. He is the chosen one today (Mda, 2000:112).

There is in the idea of totemism, an undercurrent of belief or religion. The belief that a visit from your totem animal will bring good fortune lends itself to religious undertones. Totemism, therefore, instils in one the sense of identity, dignity and a sense of belief. A totem is used to remind a person of their cultural and tribal essence. It is bound tightly with one's microcosmic identity in a society. It is important to note, in summary of this section therefore, that totemism is a characteristic of oral tradition in Africa culture; noticing it used in written texts such as the novel, points to the idea that the writer borrows from oral tradition to enrich their writing.

Symbolism and Redness

Anthropologists have long debated the fact that cultures, as symbolic systems, derive meaning largely from natural elements (Rival, 1998). According to Rival, natural elements are employed by cultures to embody in them symbolic knowledge and meaning. To expand and give gravitas to the fabric of that culture. Okpewho (1992:101) contends:

A symbol is a concrete or less familiar object that is used in reference, to, or as an explanation of, an abstract idea or a less familiar object or event. It is a particularly useful means of conveying certain important truths or lessons about human life and the problems of existence.

Symbols, according to Ashliman (2004), are things or acts that communicate meaning beyond themselves. Ashliman goes further to say that institutions of all types – clans, guilds, fraternities, religions, armies, and nations – develop sets of symbols that provide identifications and meaning for members (ethnic revelations and reflections through

symbolism/ or the construction of ethnic identity through symbolism)). Rival (1998:2) concedes that, symbols are internal representations of external reality.

The world is full or/and is made up of symbols. Moreover, these symbols communicate information about a thing, a person or a group of people, a culture and a nation. Writers, artists and politicians draw upon these symbols to make the point to their respective audience; even the church has its own share of symbols. Literature, like life, and since it is the reflection of life, is a body of symbols; producers of the corpus of literature employ, among other primal features of expression, symbolism as adornment or ornament, mode of expressing ideas and giving an alternative to the perception of reality and life. According to Harmon and Holman (1996:508), “*symbolism* is the use of one object to represent or suggest another; or, in literature, the serious and extensive use of symbols.

Symbolism, therefore, is a way of enacting and embalming man's consciousness of his knowledge about particular aspects and subjects of life, and through it creating either philosophical, sentimental or aesthetic monuments of that consciousness, realised, and consequently as a way to establish abstract reminders and remembrances of the meaning contained or deduced in the symbol in its reflection of the aspects or subjects of life. In addition, symbolism, in this regard, could be seen as a way of expanding the nature and significance of an object used as a symbol.

Symbolism is a rich feature implied and utilised in orality. Alternatively, it could be said that orality is characterised by symbolism as one of its primal elements of knowledge creation and storage. Symbols are embedded in the implications and suggestions that words carry and convey (Harmon & Holman, 1996). In the oral tradition, a word is not just a mere lexical unit but a mine of meanings that, among other aspects, emerge in symbolical implications of what it means or it points to or out. Therefore, in a written text, a writer dexterously chooses the right word that carries within it and with its phonetic and morphological aspects, a universe of ideas, meanings and symbol(s). Mathenjwa (2000:29) posits that a “symbol is metaphorical in the sense that if you look for its literal meaning it may lose its intuitive character”. In this regard, Shibles (cited in Mathenjwa, 2009) concurs that there can be no literal translation of the symbol without losing its intuitive character.

Symbolism is a very important characteristic of oral tradition. This is because it lends itself to almost an infinite interpretation. A symbol is like a flower, in that it is multi-layered in its meaning-interpretation (sprouting).

The sea

The symbolism carried by the word 'sea' in the novel could imply the vast of a particular people or the mystery of certain things. The sea could symbolise the ever-stretching road of many paths that constitute life (Biedermann, 1989). This is in this way because no one really knows the mystery of the sea in its totality, its depth and breadth *in toto*. The sea is like life, full of new discoveries, its substance however vaguely hinted at and almost unknown. Therefore, Mda employs the word 'sea' to bring about an imagery, in a symbolical sense or perspective, to project the idea that the sea is like life, unknown, terrifying, beautiful, unpredictable, formidable and perhaps, almost infinite. Moreover, the sea (as a word not object) could also carry the purpose of symbolising a place where things that people hope for can emerge to deliver them from certain social and spiritual needs.

The sea is a classical element in relation to symbolism, the mystery of the new people. The sea is symbolic of the unknown, of hope, of the future. The amaXhosa in the novel believed the Nongqawuse's prophecy that from the sea new people and cattle will rise to deliver them from the colonial pestilence and rid their cattle of the lung sickness. It is said that the "whole community will arise" from the sea (Mda, 2000:60). Mda, therefore, has used the sea to symbolise the mystery that accompanied the young prophetess' message from the 'strangers' who spoke to her from the sea and also the hope that came with the message. In addition, the sea could symbolise the 'pot' of creation in which human beings were made. In some religious beliefs, the sea is regarded as the place from where all humankind came from (Biedermann, 1989). Furthermore, since the sea is basically water, water is associated with the afterlife (Biedermann, 1989). Biedermann further says that water, as an elemental symbol is highly ambivalent, since it is associated with both life and fertility and with submersion and destruction. The prophecy and the people of the amaXhosa in the novel speak about the final destruction of the white colonialist.

Livestock as a symbol

Cattle are an important possession in African society or culture. Having cattle symbolises wealth in African culture, for that is what makes their livelihood, how they plough their field and how one got his leather blanket, and milk and meat for food (Idang, 2015). Indang (2015:109) further mentions: "As a man gets wealthier in farmland and herds of cattle, his children would provide the workforce". That is why in marriage, even today, for the *lobola* price (bride price), cattle are used as the currency. In addition, the possession of cattle can imply that a person has power. In the novel, the amaXhosa nation's possession of cattle meant that they were wealthy people, and that they had power over hunger and need. That is

why, therefore, their losing the cattle (wealth or power) rendered them poor and prone to death by starvation.

The sun is also brought into play in the novel by the prophesy of the young prophetess; Nongqawuse tells the people that there will be two suns in the sky, as a sign that a new age has come. The sun gives light. Other scholars such as Shorter regards the sun as a symbol of good fortune:

Sunshine and sky symbolism generally are rather obvious symbols of good fortune, especially among people who depend so heavily on the elements of nature, and the idea of the Supreme Being as the source of benevolence and luck is certainly present in the symbolism (Shorter, 1975:111).

The moon has deep symbolic meanings. First, the moon may symbolise warmth (Biedermann, 1989). There is a legend told in one tradition of a woman who sinned and was bashed to the moon, and the moon welcomed her (Biedermann, 1989). Biedermann (1989) goes on to elaborate by saying that is why in certain cultures the moon is associated with a woman, welcoming and warm, calm and friendly. In *The Heart of Redness*, the moon comes into play with the girl. The moon hints at the mysterious fertility of Qukezwa because the moon is associated or is said to symbolise fertility (Biedermann, 1989). In addition to the preceding statement, the moon is associated with a woman's menstrual cycle. Biedermann (1989) is of the view that the moon symbolises a woman (or it is female). This symbolism has to do with the woman's fertility and the fact that like a woman who receives a seed from a man, the moon is regarded to receive light from the sun. Therefore, the moon is the symbol of fertility and compatibility, and therefore, her readiness to receive and conceive (Biedermann, 1989).

On the night, Qukweza mysteriously conceived without receiving a seed from any man, the moon was up, as she rode the horse Gxagxa naked. The moon therefore, indicates that Qukezwa was fertile. Oral lore has a proclivity of using symbols to say and hide meanings or to make them more vivid. How certain objects stand as symbols for certain things has been established and made known to all people through storytelling, legends and myths. Mda draws from the rich embalmer of knowledge which is oral tradition. The soil with which the amaXhosa women smeared their faces has symbolic connotations. In general, soil may symbolise the connection that human beings have with the soil in a religious sense, that is, humankind was formed from soil.

Horse

The horse is a symbolic creature. Generally, the horse is regarded as an embodiment of power and vitality, higher than the bull (Biedermann, 1989:177). Biedermann further says that a horse is frequently associated with the realm of the dead. This statement on the symbolic significance of a horse speaks to Qukezwa's horse, which is an incarnation of the old horse that belonged to the ancestor Twin and his wife, Qukezwa. The young Qukezwa of the present time of the novel gets her name from the old one, her ancestor, and the horse she owns, Gxagxa also gets its name from its horse-ancestor, Gxagxa. The horse therefore, symbolises the connection Qukezwa has with the dead. It is no wonder that Qukezwa should be the one who inherits the old one's name and the horse; she (Qukezwa) is a strange girl who is not only beautiful but also has a sense of magic.

The colour red

Redness refers to a colour that has symbolic significance. The word 'redness' appears in the title and several places in the novel. The colour red could imply the aspect of love, symbolically, hence a red rose symbolises love; the heart which is a symbol of love is usually red in colour. This could be the reason why a red rose symbolises love. The heart, a symbol of love, is usually red in colour. The colour red in semiotics is said to symbolise passion (Biedermann, 1989). Another natural object/subject/aspect that is used in symbolism is colour. According to Ashliman (1998:8-9), "color symbolism is often suggested by nature". In Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, the colour red carries symbolic gestures and significance. Ashliman is of the view that the colour red symbolizes "blood" and "fire", and that "red might represent danger or courage" (8).

Furthermore, Ashliman (1998) says that the colour red is symbolic of "menstrual blood, and can thus suggest sexual maturity and fertility" (9). Having said this, a point can be gestured towards Mda's creating of the suspiciously allusive scenario of the Virgin Birth through Qukezwa, who, after the night of "riding the horse naked under the full moon" (194-195)– the moon is also suggestive of menstrual cycle – falls pregnant albeit having not slept with a man. Abstractly, Mda by the use of the colour red, it can be argued from an intuitive reading of the novel that he was hinting at Qukezwa's Miracle birth.

In the form of iron oxide (red ochre) it (colour red) accompanied humanity from prehistoric times onward, and it was used again and again in the cave art of the Ice Age. Even earlier, Neanderthals has sprinkled the bodies of the dead with red pigment as a way of restoring them to the "warm" colour of BLOOD and life. In general, red is thought of as the colour of aggression,

vitality, and strength, associated with FIRE and symbolising both love and mortal combat (Biedermann, 1989:281).

In the novel, the colour red is employed to imply the idea of connection to the soil, or earth with the people who wear red blankets. The belief that human beings come from dust or were moulded out of clay or dust comes from the Bible, Genesis 2:7. In the novel, redness is a symbol of tradition and backwardness (Mda, 2000). Xoliswa Ximiya makes it clear that *redness* stands for primitive or backward tradition when she says to Camagu:

‘I say it is an insult to the people of Qolorha-by-Sea,’ Xoliswa Ximiya screeches, ‘My people are trying to move away from redness, but you are doing your damndest to drag them back.’

‘To you, Xoliswa, the isikhakha skirt (*redness*) [*researcher's italics*] represents backwardness,’ says Camagu defensively. ‘But to other people it represents a beautiful artistic heritage’ (Mda, 2000:184).

Camagu supports the idea that the people of Qolorha-by-Sea still use their traditional clothing and still smear their faces with red ochre. Camagu deemed this significant in preserving a people's cultural heritage, but Xoliswa Ximiya was offended by Camagu's sentiments because he saw it as a movement to bring back the black people's culture and history into the new consciousness. However, Xoliswa Ximiya, the school principal, hates *redness* because it is the hue of the uncivilised. She loathes tradition. Xoliswa Ximiya protests:

‘It does not matter if the president's wife herself wore isikhakha,’ says Xoliswa Ximiya dismissively. ‘It is part of our history of redness. It is a backward movement. All this nonsense about bringing back African traditions! We are civilised people. We have no time for beads and long pipes!’ (Mda, 2000:84)

Mda elaborates the idea above when he says: “The curse of redness” (Mda, 2000:184); Xoliswa sees *redness* as a backward pull of a good thing, civilisation in Western terms or sense. Through Xoliswa Ximiya's eyes, *redness* is bad colour, the representation of things unwanted, things outdated. Camagu sees, however, *redness* as the symbol of a people's cultural heritage and identity. As a result, he admires those who wear their *redness* with passion.

The tree and the reed

The importance of the tree is [...] noted during rituals, when some of them are symbolically associated with certain notions of cosmology (Kipury, 1983). Trees or plants/vegetation are

used in the novel by Mda as significant symbols, through which arguments are made as well. A case can be drawn from the novel to illustrate this. We see characters such as Twin, the contemporary Twin, fighting alongside Camagu to prevent the cutting of certain trees because they are a rich heritage of symbolism and knowledge for the village; the trees stand as symbols of the amaXhosa culture. By being activists, protesters against the cutting of the indigenous vegetation, Camagu and Twin seem to regard the plants as embalmers of their culture, therefore, by cutting them down would be cutting the people's cultural tokens.

Trees in the novel carry a deep sentimental symbolism. Trees such as "reeds of various types are preserved because they are used for building houses and fish traps" (Ngubane, 2000:50; Burton, 1980). Mda shows the reed also used in *The Heart of Redness* "to put men at bay" (200:263) from the hut in which a new mother sleeps with her new baby.

Qukezwa gives birth to a 'miracle baby' and the old women put reeds on the roof part above the threshold:

'Do you see this reed? It means no man is allowed in this house.'

She is pointing at the reed that is jutting out from the roof just above the door (Mda, 2000:263).

Mda explains that until the reeds are removed, men, especially Camagu, are not allowed to enter and see the new mother. Camagu insists on entering but he receives a teaching about the meaning (symbol) of reed, and he is also criticised by the old women for trying to overlook the tradition of the reed:

He grew up in the land of the White man. He does not know that a reed like this means there is a newborn baby in the house and no man is allowed,' observes another woman sympathetically (Mda, 2000:263).

Camagu, and the reader are taken on a ride to know about the traditional beliefs of the people. Mda does this in order to show how much people like Camagu need to learn about themselves. Moreover, Qukezwa is taken to a traditional court (*inkundla*) because she had cut trees without permission.

'So do the trees I cut down,' says Qukezwa. 'They are foreign tree! They are not the trees of our forefathers!' (Mda, 2000:281).

The trees then, are in a way, connected to a people's identity because people identify trees that belong to their locale as the authentic trees, native like the people; they are native, in this

regard, those are the trees that should be protected and conserved. No wonder, then, in genetics what is called a 'family tree' is used to arrange a people's ancestry in order to show the connection people have with ancient ancestor. Trees therefore, are part of oral tradition, because through their knowledge people can trace certain events that point them to their ancestry. Thus, trees appear to be connected with people since they share the same native soil. Natural symbols reflect the dual nature of humankind as both animal-like (the body) and god-like (the mind). People, cultures, through language coin a plethora of symbols through natural objects. One such natural object that finds itself rendered into a symbol is a tree. Used as symbols, trees reveal or reflect, even reinforce the nature of a people's cultural knowledge, and can at the same time hint at their identity too. Human beings are predominately inclined to translating some of their perception about life and its phenomenon into the life, nature or power of objects. Durkheim (1976:236) regarding the man's inclination to translate or pour reality/thought into other objects for symbolic purposes "leads him to reflect on the relevance of externalization, materialisation and physicality for social theory, and to conclude that 'a collective sentiment can become conscious of itself only by being fixed upon some material object'".

In Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, novel, fauna and flora (trees) are used as symbols for their powers of regeneration. The implication of employing tree symbolism in the novel, therefore, is Mda's way to symbolize man's faithfulness or hope in the possibility of regenerating some of his eroded and lost consciousness, cultural values; a way to bring about the revolution of traditional regeneration.

Omens in The Heart of Redness

Omen may be described as an event regarded as a portent for good or evil; something that is considered to be a sign of how the future event will take place. We read from the novel, where Mda says:

They say when an owl of the night hoots at daytime, then we must brace ourselves for misfortune, observes a silvery voice (Mda, 2000:174).

This is regarded as a bad omen or a sign of misfortune. An omen or sign is something that has its origins in oral traditions; seers and prophets spoke of omens in their prophetic utterances. While an owl is a symbol itself, its appearance at a particular time of the day is a portent for a particular futuristic happening or event. The quotation above, from *The Heart of Redness* illustrates this view. What is interesting in the quote above is the person who speaks the words, Mda refers to the person as 'a silvery voice'. What he means is that a knowledgeable

person observes about the omen. The ancestors of the world read the sky for signs for rain, harvest; they observed nature for omen of either disaster or fortune (Okafor, 2016). Ancient African people, like other people of the world, in their own ways, received, interpreted and saw the manifestation of omens. They believed in omens as instructions to tread towards the future carefully.

Another example of an omen in the novel is found when the bees attack Twin's house. Bees are said by Ashliman (2004) to symbolize diligence, like their cousins, the ants. Furthermore, bees are regarded as a symbol of wealth, good luck and prosperity or a sign that one is awaited by the acquisition of wealth in the future. Since the bees were in Twin, Qukezwa's father's house, they pointed to the day Camagu came to ask to marry her. Mda writes that Camagu brought cattle to the household of Twin. Cattle are commodity signifying wealth in South Africa and Africa as a whole. Bees can be regarded as signifying fertility because of their legion quantity, their diligent workmanship. The aspect of fertility is confirmed by Qukezwa who fall pregnant and gives birth to a miracle child.

Conclusion

This article has endeavoured to critically analyse the resurgence of orality in Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) by firstly discussing the interconnected relationship between orality, the oral tradition and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). Secondly, it has explored some of the salient characteristics of the oral tradition employed in Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, which are, totemism, symbolism and omen(s). This article has, lastly, revealed that the infusion of oral elements with the literary ones revives and elevates a people's culture. In other words, emphasis should be placed on the use of oral forms and IKS in literary texts for the growth and transformation of (South) African literature.

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