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Towards a Dialogic World: Mediums at Work in Post/Colonial South Africa

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Abstract

This essay aims to explore how the concept of a medium serves as a productive narrative device in mediating the ghostly other/otherness and in re-imagining a dialogic society in two Southern African postcolonial novels: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*. Noting the medium's affinity—as a figure or a person who acts as go-between of the living and the spiritual world, I use the term more figuratively as an attitude that presupposes a mode of negotiation through which a subject approaches his or her internal and external alterity and establishes a mutual understanding with it. Since every ghost or haunting has its specificity as it appears in specific moments or locations, mediums also perform their work in a differentiated way. In the article, I elaborate how the main protagonists in these two novels represent two different kinds of mediums—the passive medium and the active one—as they encounter different historical and social situations. In other words, I demonstrate the varied ways in which these characters negotiate binary entities, such as the living and the dead, self and other, tradition and modernity, nature and culture, in order to settle down the present crisis and provoke a dialogic world.

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. . . every period has its ghosts, its own experience, its own medium, and its proper hauntological media. (Derrida 193)

Ghosts not only play vital roles in religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and everyday discourse, but also become an important issue in contemporary literary and cultural studies. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “ghost” as the synonym for “specter” that refers to “the soul of a deceased person, spoken of as an appearing in a visible form, or otherwise manifesting its presence, to the living.” It is usually referred to the scary spirit of the unsettled dead that disturbs the life of the living and haunts our unjust memories. The *Oxford Dictionaries Online* also refers “ghost” to “a slight trace or vestige of something.” According to this definition, Michael M. Bell employs the term in a broader sense and defines it as “*the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there*” (813) or the “a felt presence—an anima, *geist*, or genius—that possesses and gives a sense of social aliveness to a place,” a person, or a thing (Bell 816). As a figure of absent presence, ghosts are unintelligible and invisible to rational knowledge and science. However, they are still very real. There are thousands of different representations of ghosts in oral and written narratives, visual arts and popular culture. From benign ancestors, spooky family ghosts to fearsome otherworldly creatures, ghosts appear in a variety of forms throughout history and across cultures.

Postcolonial literatures are fundamentally intertwined with the presence of ghosts. In several postcolonial novels, ghosts are represented as otherworldly manifestations or principles of otherness that need to be lived with rather than exorcised. Sometimes they refer to everyday practices or ways of being that are associated with particular traditions and histories. As a figure beyond rationality, they are regarded as un-representable as well as un-assimilable. They are “real and terrible,” always reminding us “of the dead . . . and of our own dead, to assert a terrible continuity between the omnipresent past and the already vanishing present” (Punter 64). A problem arises when one reflects on the question of how to approach such “real and terrible” ghosts when they usually appear in an irrational or obscure way. Is

there a kind of figure who can bridge between the world of the living and the world of the dead, between presence and absence, self and other? In many religious and cultural beliefs mediums are able to receive messages from the dead and to travel between the living and spiritual worlds. I will, however, use the concept of medium figuratively as a mode of negotiation by which one is able to approach his or her internal and external alterities, and to establish a mutual understanding with them.

Since a ghost has many forms of appearance and each haunting has its specificity, a medium perform his or her work in a differentiated ways. I will demonstrate that the main protagonists in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* represent two different kinds of mediums—a passive medium and an active one. Set in different transitional phases of South Africa, these two novels depict “anti-dialogic societies” in which different ghosts linger and hang around.¹ For instance, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is set in an undefined time full of strife and unrest. Though both the setting and characterization are highly allegorical, the story has been interpreted as the history of political and racial conflicts between the white settlers and the black natives in the time of apartheid South Africa. In this case, I will suggest that the barbarians and their history are spectral existences to the Empire. They are perceived as mysterious and threatening manifestations of enemies or outcasts that need to be suppressed.

By being redolent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in its title and its theme of imperialism, Mda's *The Heart of Redness* juxtaposes the past and the present of the Eastern Cape, including the period of imperialism and the time of contemporary post-apartheid life of the Xhosas. It is set against the backdrops of realist and magic-realist events involving the ceaseless struggles between the Believers and the Unbelievers. These struggles span several generations, from the frontier wars between the British and the Xhosas, the tragic historical event of cattle-killing in the late nineteenth

¹ According to Paulo Freire's Marxist analysis the concept of an anti-dialogic and dehumanizing society refers to a society of “metropolitan” and “director” in which the distinguishing behavioural characteristics are oppressed under conquest, divide and rule, manipulation and cultural invasion.

century, to the present-day struggles over the development of the seaside resort at Qolorha-by-Sea. Similar to the symbolic meaning of Conrad's darkness, which marks "the Dark Continent, the African wilderness, a place which still awaits the civilizing mission of the West," Mda's idea of redness refers to the "backwardness" of Xhosa traditions (Sewlall 331). Because these traditions are associated with nature, ancestral spirituality and the prophecies of Nongqawuse,² they can be perceived as figurative ghosts that are in conflict with the Western view of Enlightenment and progress.

By dealing with the colonial and postcolonial periods in South Africa, the two novels illustrate well the struggles between the natives and the colonizers, between the traditions and contemporary ways of life. Since ghosts always roam when conflicts emerge, the figure of a medium becomes important. Looking for the figure or function of a medium in my analysis of these two novels, I will investigate two different ways in which the protagonists negotiate binary entities, such as the living and the dead, self and other, tradition and modernity, nature and culture. I will show how they settle down present crisis and initiate "the process of change" that will symbolically or literally "bring into being a dialogic society" (Bell 95).

The Magistrate as a Passive Medium in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

By experiencing emotional and social ambivalence in his encounters with his inner otherness as well as with other people, the main protagonist in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate, plays the role of medium between the Empire and the barbarians. At the beginning of the novel, the Magistrate appears as a careless official at the borders. After Colonel Joll comes, he faces a crisis caused by the nation's new policy toward the barbarians. By bearing witness to Joll's torturing of the barbarians, the

² Nongqawuse is the fifteen-year-old Xhosa prophet who instructed the Xhosa people to slaughter all their cattle in the 1850s and claimed that in return the ancestors would replenish Xhosa livestock and grain. Her prophecies cause the tragic historical event of cattle-killing and play an important role in the struggle between Believers and Unbelievers in the novel.

Magistrate is weighed down by a sense of guilt, shame, and sympathy. These complex emotions impel him to bring the barbarian girl back to his place and undertake different acts of mercy, such as feeding her, healing her, and washing her feet. Later this sympathy is transformed into the Magistrate's desire for the barbarian girl. He especially feels obsessed by her "twisted feet" and "half-blinded eyes" and is compelled to uncover what happened to her in the chamber (Coetzee 70). Her broken body is "a rune for him, like the enigmatic scripts he discovers in the desert" (Masse 169). He says, "It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (Coetzee 33).

Based on his various efforts to establish a connection with the barbarians, I will argue that the Magistrate plays the role of medium in the novel. However, as he is epistemologically and ethically constricted within an imperial cognitive frame, the Magistrate can only negotiate with the barbarian others in an involuntary way. One will find that his efforts to gain access to the barbarians always fail. For instance, he always loses consciousness in the ritual of washing the barbarian girl's feet, a ritual that shows his efforts to find answers to the questions about the scars on her body. He says, "I lose awareness of the girl herself. There is a space of time which is blank to me: perhaps I am not even present" (Coetzee 30). By acknowledging his impotence as well as the absence of his own subjectivity during the ritual, the Magistrate experiences a "spatial-temporal dislocation" in his self (Craps 64). He feels that "time has broken, something has fallen in upon me from the sky, at random, from nowhere" (Coetzee 47). This moment of contradiction causes the ground to shift under his feet and impels him to re-position himself in relation to both the barbarians and the Empire.

In this case, the Magistrate represents the figure of a passive medium that bridges the distance between the Empire and the barbarians in a passive way. The term "passive medium" can be defined as a person who originally belongs to the class of authorities, but is haunted by and becomes identified with the ghostly other through *a condition of trance*. By developing a negating reaction against the dominant narratives, such kind of medium re-locates his or relation to both the self and the other, and plays a prominent

role in re-imagining an open-ended and dialogic vision of culture and identity.

I contend that the condition of trance serves as an important phase when the Magistrate mediates his inner otherness and the alterity of the barbarians. *Oxford Dictionaries Online* defines “trance” as “a half-conscious state characterized by an absence of response to external stimuli, typically as induced by hypnosis or entered by a medium.” Regarded as an important strategy that a medium employs to communicate with the spirits from the other world, a trance also refers to the condition of letting the spectral other take over one’s body as well as entering a foreign space outside the realm of rational knowledge. Here I will use the notion of trance more figuratively as a means for the passive medium to identify with the spectral others, as a condition of unwillingly and simultaneously entering a foreign domain and becoming the other.

In the novel, when the Magistrate fails to interpret the stories of the barbarians into his consciousness as well as to maintain his self-certainty, he simultaneously undergoes different forms of trance, including (1) literally entering the zone of alienation in the journey to return the barbarian girl to her people; (2) experiencing himself as other in torture and imprisonment; and (3) falling into hallucination and dreams. I will elaborate how these three kinds of trance impel the Magistrate to leave his familiar community or to fall into degradation, so that he can involuntarily identify with the barbarians and negotiate between self and other.

The first kind of trance is the Magistrate’s entry into foreignness by delivering the barbarian girl to her people. The confrontation with the unfamiliar environment during his journey provokes in him a sense of alienation from his people and from “the tranquil familiarity of his interpretive community” (Saunders 225). It makes him rethink the Empire’s definitions of nation and history and gain awareness of their dubiousness and illegitimacy. He says,

We think of the country here as ours, part of our Empire—our outpost, our settlement, our market centre. But these people, these

barbarians don't think of it like that at all. We have been here more than a hundred years, we have reclaimed land from the desert and built irrigation works and planted fields and built solid homes and put a wall around our town, but they still think of us as visitors, transients. (Coetzee 55)

By illustrating how transient the Empire is for the barbarians, he also redefines the hierarchy between the barbarian perspective of cyclical time and the Empire's notion of linear and progressive time. He questions the Empire's concept of "the time of history" and its pursuit of immortality. He learns that the essence of history is nothing but violence. Through its oppression of the barbarians, the Empire constructs its civilization and fulfills its attempts of "how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era" (146). Entering the zone of foreignness undoubtedly provokes in the Magistrate a moral sense of time and identity. It urges him to challenge the credibility of the Empire's definition of binary divisions of civilization and barbarity, self and other.

The Magistrate undergoes the second kind of trance under tortures. After returning from the journey, he is arrested by his men, accused of treason, and forced to experience himself the life of the barbarians by living through the events of imprisonment, torture, and humiliation. He is not only forced by his people to wear a women's calico smock, degraded into a dirty, stinking clown, but also exploited severely in the public square. In his suffering, he begins to identify with the barbarians and gains critical awareness of the brutal quality of the Empire.

For example, his experience of imprisonment makes him acknowledge the otherness and barbarity within himself—how he daily becomes "more like a beast or a simple machine" (Coetzee 92). He learns that he is not superior, saner, or more competent in coping with pain than the barbarians. Likewise the experience of torture forces the Magistrate to confront his otherness and provokes an insight into humanity. When the rope tightens around his neck, the pains subjugate him into unconsciousness. Durrant argues that it is "a moment of . . . 'negative transcendence,' a descent that . . .

brings the self into an abject, bodily relation with itself” (Durrant 48). The torture not only reduces him to basic and feral needs, but also completes his entry into foreignness. He is degraded from a thinking human being into a gibbering and helpless body, “a pile of blood, bone, and meat” that is not different from the tortured bodies of the barbarians (Coetzee 93).

The Magistrate learns that the Empire’s hysteria regarding the barbarian is a kind of psychological illness. By violently mythologizing and falsifying the distinction between barbarity and civilization, self and other, the Empire tries to establish its authority and to enact the manipulation of the other. Thus, he argues that it is the Empire itself that is barbaric instead of the natives and responds to his interrogator: “We are at peace here,” “we have no enemies. . . . Unless I make a mistake Unless we are the enemy” (Coetzee 85).

The Magistrate falls into the third form of trance by figuratively entering foreignness and communicating with the other in his dreams. Durrant argues that the dreams can be regarded as “a site of witnessing.” It is a place where “our own desire is suspended” and where “other voices make themselves heard in our lives” (Durrant 35). Accordingly, the dreams function as a liminal zone where the Magistrate gets access to the barbarian others. By falling into his dreams, he not only builds a connection with the barbarian girl, but also enacts remembrance of the indigestible pains of the body. For instance, the Magistrate symbolically receives a transmission when “the hooded figure of the girl” keeps appearing in his dreams (Coetzee 57). Later, he also dreams that the girl is constructing a fort out of snow. Durrant argues that “the construction of the fort is a mute indication of the place where her history went down, providing the Magistrate with a topographical map of her pain, one that will eventually allow him to navigate his own experience of torture” (Durrant 46). The dream not only provides the Magistrate a channel for understanding the pains of the barbarians, but also provokes his ethical action to identify with them. The reception of the voices of the barbarians in his dream urges him to replace the otherness from the barbarians with his self. He allows torture to take place in his life and experiences his identification with “the unbearable proximity of other lives”

that is suppressed within the dominant discourse (44).

The Magistrate also symbolically establishes a connection with the barbarian girl in his dream. In his last dream, he is offered a loaf of bread by the girl, who is dressed like a priestess. The girl also symbolizes the barbarian girl, but in this dream, she is building an oven rather than a snow fort. The disembodied feet in the earlier dream are transformed into a “shapeless lump”—the loaf of the bread—which Durrant asserts as “the bread of remembrance, eaten in remembrance of another scene of torture and as a promise of salvation” (48). Based on his argument, the bread is referred to the signs of communication and peace offering that do not take place in the Magistrate’s waking life. Thus, his dream holds out hope for salvation and for the coming of the new community established by the mutual recognition between self and other.

During these three different forms of trance, namely, entering into the wilderness, living through indigestible pains, and falling into the realm outside of consciousness, the Magistrate tends to become enmeshed in uncertainties, doubts, and mysteries. As he is ostracized he undergoes a transformation and enters “an apparently permanent exile” away from the confines of the empire (Saunders 226). The condition provokes his inconsistent oscillation between self and other, unity and fragmentation. When he keeps experiencing such “an oscillatory process of transposition,” he arrives at a momentarily ethical understanding of the barbarian others, and begins to perform the work of a medium (Peeren and Horstkotte 12).

It is when the Magistrate is in these altered states of consciousness that he develops the skills of negation and mistranslation to mediate external and internal otherness, and revise the hierarchy embodying the Empire and the barbarians. For instance, he openly shouts the word “No!” when he witnesses the Joll’s public display of torture of the barbarian prisoners. The Magistrate’s “No!” here marks a counter narrative to the Empire’s physical and linguistic exploitation of the barbarians that attempts “to coerce the natives into assuming the identity of ‘barbarians’ and ‘enemy’ . . . in order to assert its existence” (Craps 62). And his reading of the barbarian as “miracle of creation” or “Men” later also questions the Empire’s values of its absolute

superiority in which he has been steeped (Coetzee 117). Though the Magistrate's words only appeal to the crowd momentarily, they succeed in creating "a hiatus, a disruptive and defamiliarizing lacuna, in the empire's performative reiteration," and in transforming "the empire's statement about itself into an uncertainty" (Saunders 230). His practices of negation and ambiguity unveil the problematic of imperial language and question the established relationship between his self and the barbarian other.

Mistranslation, or what Maria Boletsi's calls "infelicitous translation," is another strategy for the Magistrate to negotiate the binary relationship between the Empire and the barbarians (Boletsi 62). When Colonel Joll, who assumes that the Magistrate is communicating with the barbarians, asks him to translate the meaning of the wooden slips that he excavated from the site of an ancient barbarian civilization, the Magistrate employs this strategy to invite a radical rethinking of the epistemological framework of the Empire. For instance, by misinterpreting a barbarian character as a word referred to *justice* as well as *vengeance* or *war*, he imbues the term of justice—this "favorite imperial category"—with an ambiguous meaning and makes it appear "foreign" to the dominant narratives (66). Besides, by claiming that all slips "form an allegory" and "can be read in many orders" (Coetzee 122), the Magistrate invents numerous versions of barbarian characters and turns them into "signifiers of linguistic uncertainty and foreignness" (Boletsi 64). His acts of mistranslation here not only preserve the foreignness and the plurality of "barbarian cunning," but also reassess the Empire's fixed definitions of categories. It reveals how the Empire's linguistic code is as "impaired" as the noises of a barbarian language, full of internal gaps and confusion, and directs the readers' attention towards the problems of the established division between the settler and the native, civilization and barbarity (68).

The final strategy for the Magistrate to re-position his relationship with the Empire and the barbarians is to abandon the imperial practices of interpretation and narration. In the beginning of the novel, the Magistrate has lots of interest in deciphering the ancient history of the barbarian. He usually lingers among the ruins of the barbarian civilization, sitting there in the dark

to wait “for spirits from the byways of history to speak to him” (Coetzee 17). He is also writing a memorial to record his life among the barbarians. However, by falling into different trances, he gains an insight that he can never interpret the foreign bodies of the barbarians or learn the truth of their life when he is constricted to the imperial cognitive frame. He also realizes that what he has written is just like the barbarian slips, which contain “a message as devious, as equivocal, as reprehensible” (169). Thus, he decides to give up his hope to achieve a deeper understanding of history as well as his plan of writing the story. His resistance to a form of interpretation or narration enables him to get closer to the truth of barbarian others as the act preserves the foreignness of the other and to avoid the distortion of its meaning.

By conducting the practices of negation and mistranslation, the Magistrate escapes from “the identity mapped out for him by the Empire” and symbolically establishes a connection with the barbarian others (Craps 65). Though his rapprochement with the other and his departure from his previous “interpretative community” do not guarantee him a better life, they enable him to venture forward “into uncharted territory, an ethical space which opens up the possibility of a non-appropriative encounter with the other.” He begins to redefine the boundary between self and other and to imagine a not-yet-realized ethical space where the self and the other might achieve some sort of mutual understanding.

The novel ends with a scene that conveys such a symbolic and momentary glimpse of hope. In the final scene the Magistrate comes across some children who are building a snowman at the square. Durrant says: “While the dreams begin as a futile attempt to reconstruct, and to make reparations for, the past, the children’s work, which makes the Magistrate feel ‘inexplicably joyful,’ is emphatically directed toward the future” (Durrant 49). Though the novel doesn’t provide us with any real redemption in life, the final scene is symbolically messianic. As a witness and as the narrator of the scene, the Magistrate contributes to re-imagining a dialogic society to come in the promising future.

Active Mediums in Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

Compared to the barbarian others in Coetzee's novel, the ancestral spirits of the Xhosas in *The Heart of Redness* are fundamentally intertwined with the everyday life of the community. They are not the otherworldly manifestations that need to be exorcised, but represent the traditions or ancestral wisdoms that should be incorporated into the contemporary ways of living. In this context a medium plays an important role in negotiating between the supernatural realm of the ancestors and the daily life of the living, between past and present, tradition and modernity. He or she is similar to "the diviner" (amagqirha) in Xhosa society that Dirk Klopper defines as "a special person, elected by the ancestors to perform the function of mediator between . . . the human community with its established practices and customs and . . . the intermediate forces of nature" (Klopper 101). For his or her familiarity with both spiritual and human worlds as well as with the knowledge of different cultures, such kind of medium can be defined as an active medium. He or she is able to mediate in the real or symbolic battle between the oppositional groups or binary conceptualized domains.

The two protagonists, Camagu and Qukezwa, serve as good examples of active mediums in the novel. By employing the knowledge of the living and the dead, they settle the conflicts between the Believers and the Unbelievers and re-create a dialogic society in post-apartheid South Africa. Take Qukezwa as an instance. Embodying a sense of hybridity in spiritual, social, and ecological domains, she functions to mediate between ancestral wisdoms and modern knowledge, the natural realm and the human world. From a spiritual perspective, she is invested with a mythopoeic aura as well as with a trans-temporal identity. She crosses from the past to the present through her identification with an ancestor in the historical past, sometimes appearing as a Khoikhoi woman, the wife of the leader of the 19th century Believers Twin, and sometimes appearing as the modern daughter of the Believer Zim. As the novel progresses, the identities of the two Qukezwas increasingly merge. Jacobs puts it, "The two stories blend into a seamless narrative of the past and the present, and the two voices combine into a single, split-tone song" (Jacobs 236). The reappearance of the character on

different time levels endows Qukezwa with a mystic and prophetic power. It reveals her trans-temporal and trans-historical role in preserving and passing on the traditional knowledge from the ancestors to the living. In addition, the merging of two characters in the end serves as a symbol of a union of the present and the past. It draws our attention to an alternative way of life that highlights mutual communication instead of conflicts and struggles.

Qukezwa also embodies a sense of hybridity in a social domain. By combining different cultural and social traditions, both Qukezwas live up to the significance of the term “qukezwa,” which is referred to “the person elected to bring the community together, to facilitate social integration” (Klopper 101). Their multi-voicedness reveals that tradition is not unchanging and static, but embodies potential for social renewal. For example, the early Qukezwa brought the Khoikhoi religious and cultural traditions to the Xhosa society after marrying Twin, and used them well to save the people from the disaster of Cattle-killing. And the contemporary Qukezwa not only employs the indigenous knowledge of nature to help the local people develop a self-reliant industry of gathering shellfish, but also propels Camagu to come up with a promising idea of establishing the site of Nongqawuse’s prophecies as a national heritage by showing him the values of Xhosa traditions. In other words, by linking tradition with modernity, two Qukezwas function as active mediums between the Believers and the Unbelievers, Xhosa and Khoikhoi. They encourage the oppositional groups to give up binary thinking in order to figure out a solution for cultural and social conflicts.

From an ecological perspective, Qukezwa is negotiating between nature and culture. For both characters of Qukezwa, nature is not an object of understanding, but imbued with soul and the quality of subjectivity. Their relation with nature is based more on “mutual recognition and reciprocity” (Klopper 99). Being a Khoi woman, one of the aboriginal people of Southern Africa, the early Qukezwa retains a sense of African spirituality that is mostly imbued with the land and with nature. She dreams that she “flies . . . in the land of prophets” and “sings for soft pastel colours . . . in many voices” (Mda 312). She has passed such ability on to her descendent. The

contemporary Qukezwa knows the wisdom of trees, the sky, and the sea. She also has a talent for the dying tradition of split-tone singing, through which she can communicate with animals.

By bridging the gap between her knowledge inherited from the ancestors and the progressive views of modernity, Qukezwa finds an ecological balance between nature and civilization. Her opposition to the presence of foreign trees is an example. When she answers in court to defend her act of cutting down foreign trees, she combines modern rationality with the ancestral knowledge of the land of the Xhosas. Although dressed in a traditional red blanket, she states progressive ecological views:

I cut the trees, and I shall cut them again. . . . The trees that I destroyed are as harmful as the inkberry. They are the lantana and wattle trees. . . . The seed can lie there for ten years, but when fire comes it grows. And it uses all the water. Nothing can grow under the wattle tree. It is an enemy since we do not have enough water in this country. (Mda 247-49)

Capra states in *The Turning Point*, “Ecology awareness . . . will arise only when we combine our rational knowledge with an intuition for the nonlinear nature of our environment” (Capra 41). Qukezwa’s speech demonstrates this progressive “ecological awareness” by successfully combining profound indigenous knowledge about her ancestral land with modern rationality. It also raises questions about the binary divisions between backwardness (nature) and civilization (culture). Her seemingly reckless act of cutting down foreign trees is not uncivilized behavior. Instead, by conveying a strong ecological message, it is a protest against colonial and capitalist exploitation of the local environment.

As a figure with enigmatic aura as well as multi-voices, Qukezwa inspires Camagu to find his new interstitial identity as an active medium. In the opening of the novel, Camagu appears as the civilized intellectual and a returned exile from the United States, who lives a disaffected life in Johannesburg. After he arrives in Qolorha, he meets both the female

intellectual, Xoliswa, the daughter of the Unbeliever Banco, and Qukezwa, the daughter of the Believer Zim. In his relationship with Xoliswa, he gradually learns that he doesn't share her disdain for the regressive practices of Xhosa tradition and her approval of the project of seaside resort, which for her is the symbol of progress and modernity. In contrast, he feels he is drawn to the enigmatic girl Qukezwa.

As he sees Qukezwa delightfully riding on her father's beloved horse and strolling in the valley, he is fascinated and can't help joining her to experience the magic of the site of prophecies. In their moonlight bareback ride on Gxagxa, her split-tone singing imposes a spell on him. It invokes in his mind the vivid images of the earth, the sky, and the sea, and opens him up to a sensual enjoyment. After that, he experiences several symptoms that a novice diviner has gone through during being called to the profession of the spirits of ancestors, including withdrawal, dreams, and encountering an ancestral spirit in the form of a wild animal. For instance, he dreams that he becomes a river with water flowing through him. He is also visited by Majola, totem snake of his clan. Klopper argues that these events "points to the fact that Camagu has received a calling" (Klopper 99).

Thus, Camagu starts questioning his modernized identity. As a guy with a doctorate in modern communication, he paradoxically finds that Qukezwa's split-tone singing functions as a more effective and supreme way of communication. Her singing not only transcends the human language, but also marks a connection between the human and natural world. By learning to appreciate her talent and her wordless song, Camagu develops a broader vision of life and the world. He learns to appreciate the magic inherited in the site of Nongqawuse's prophecies. Instead of regarding it as the symbol of "redness" or backwardness, he gains insight into its beauties and historical significance. He says to Xoliswa when she questions his relationship with Qukezwa: "Where you see darkness, witchcraft, heathens and barbarians, she sees song and dance and laughter and beauty" (Mda 219). By accepting the spiritual aspect of African traditions, Camagu becomes an active medium between the living and the dead, modernity and tradition. He begins to live up the very word of his name—"camagu"—that means "Amen and be

Satisfied, O Great Ones” when a cow was slaughtered for worshipping the spirits of the ancestors in the Xhosa ritual (Peires 1987: 105). The meaning of this word implies that his modernized identity is deeply connected to the spirituality and traditional beliefs in Xhosa culture.

Mediating in different belief systems, Camagu develops an eco-critical, trans-cultural, and ethical vision of history and nature, and helps settle the local struggles over the tragic historical events and the development of the land. For example, by combining what he has learned about international business practices from his education in the United States with the indigenous knowledge of the local natural resources, which he learns from Qukezwa and the local women in the village, Camagu provides a self-sustained plan for the development of the valley. He establishes a cooperative society with the local women and helps declare Qolorgha-by-Sea the historical site of national heritage. His revisionary plan unmistakably disarms the threat of social and environmental damages a seaside resort might bring. At the same time, it solves the community’s struggles over land appropriation.

Camagu also succeeds in settling the conflicts between the Believers and the Unbelievers over the traumatic history of Cattle-killing and the Nongqawuse’s prophecies. He proposes a new pragmatic approach to revise the meaning of the historical events. He says, “Her prophecies arose out of the spiritual and material anguish of the Xhosa nation” (Mda 283). Abandoning a skeptical cosmopolitan attitude that dismisses the events as foolishness or as a crime, he regards the tragic events as proper responses to the colonial exploitation of Xhosa in the 19th century. In addition, he says:

Believers are sincere in their belief. In this whole matter of Nongqawuse I see the sincerity of belief It is the same sincerity of belief that has been seen throughout history and continues to be seen today where those who believe actually see miracles. (283)

Here he assumes that the destructive past might contain a transcendent

answer for the present crisis and that “the sincerity of belief” embodies hope for a better future. By integrating African spirituality into the modern framework of rational thinking, Camagu goes beyond the norm of binary thinking and creates an ethical, compassionate, and open-ended interpretation of the traumatic history.

Linking the historical past to the crisis of the present through the switching of time from present to past and vice versa, Mda creates Camagu and Qukezwa as active mediums in the transitional stages of Xhosa society. With sufficient knowledge of different cultures and beliefs, both of them function to recuperate a culture-nature/life-death/tradition-modernity dialectic. Without favoring one entity over another, they not only prevent particular thoughts from becoming totalizing, but also deconstruct the simplistic binary thinking that causes the trans-generational conflicts of the community. In addition, through their engagement with bringing the ancestral wisdom into the modernized world, or re-imagining the spiritual relations in terms of contemporary needs, they provoke a trans-temporal and trans-cultural dialogue between the Believers and the Unbelievers. It also helps engender a resolution of the social crisis. In other words, they reveal that tradition offers a generative value to the fast-changing world of the present. As soon as the livings learn to reconcile with the past and with their ancestral spirits, they are able to re-create their identities as well as a solution for ever-changing conflicts.

Conclusion

The established division between the past and the present, self and other, fills our world with social and emotional contradictions. A ceaseless dialogue or a perpetual oscillation between the binary entities is significant when one confronts various forms of otherness and settles the conflicts and pains of life. The two kinds of mediums I distinguished in this chapter represent two kinds of models of an ongoing and open-ended negotiating. Constricted to the dominant cognitive and linguistic frame, a passive medium is a person who involuntarily identifies with the spectral others by falling

into a condition of trance. In an altered state of consciousness, he or she gains critical awareness of the limits of self-knowledge and begins to re-position his or her relationship with the oppressed others. Thus, he or she not only functions to question the dominant notions of history and identity, but also prompts readers to look for the gaps concealed in the hegemonic discourse.

With sufficient knowledge of different cultures and knowledge, an active medium plays a role of the double-voiced agent in the struggles between oppositional groups. Negotiating between binary domains of the living and the dead, past and present, nature and culture, this kind of medium serves to integrate different belief systems and create a communal solution for the present conflicts. Except or these two kinds of mediums, there is still room for different attitudes in the face of different figurative or non-figurative ghosts. The concept of a medium is always diverse and useful in mediating internal and external otherness, and in re-imagining a dialogic world to come.

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