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MOTHERS, MADONNAS AND MUSICIANS: A Writing of Africa's Women as Symbols and Agents of Change in the Novels of Zakes Mda.

By Nokuthula Mazibuko

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Department of African Literature, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

My dissertation interrogates the ways in which Zakes Mda has made women central to his novels. I argue that the women characters in Mda's novels are key to the idea of the re-birth of Africa (and the simultaneous birth of a (South) African identity) - a re-birth made necessary by years of dispossession through colonialism and apartheid. I will explore how on one level Mda, through magical realism, represents women as symbols of both destruction and construction; and how on another level he represents them as complex characters existing as agents of history. Mda's novels: *Ways of Dying* (1995), *She Plays With the Darkness* (1995), *The Heart of Redness* (2000) and *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) critique the top-down approach of the post-apartheid, post-colonial discourse of African Renaissance - a discourse which aims to reverse the damage done to the lives of Africans who have been brutalised by history. Mda writes an African renaissance (with a lower case "r"), which acknowledges and explores the ways in which people on the margins of power, recreate and transform their lives, without necessarily waiting for politicians to come up with policies and solutions. The renaissance of ordinary people privileges the spirit of ubuntu, whereby the individual strives to

work with the collective to achieve a more humane world. Mda's female characters are central to the debate on renaissance and reconstruction in that he questions existing gender roles by

highlighting strongly the rights still denied African women - his challenge to the discourse is whether a renaissance is possible if the humanity of women (and others marginalised by class, age, location, ethnicity, and other categories) continues to be denied. I ask the question whether Mda, goes further, and envisions women participating as leaders in traditionally male spaces.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university or institution.

Nokuthula Mazibuko

Dedication

Egameni lika Mdali, ngibonga ukuphetha lomsebenzi.

For my parents, Fanyana and Miriam Mazibuko, the completion of this thesis would not have been possible without your generous and loving support. Ngiyabonga bo Nzima bo Mwelase, vho Mangwane - ukukhanya nokuhle eningenzele kona. My gratitude is boundless.

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2003 29-30 November - presented thesis chapter titled: *Love and Wayward Women in Ways of Dying* at the Wits "Colloquium on Popular Literature"

2004 5-7 July - presented thesis chapter titled: *Love and Wayward Women in Ways of Dying* at AUETSA-SAVAL-SAACLALS Conference at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban Campus

2004 8-12 September - presented thesis chapter titled: *Silence and Violence in She Plays with the Darkness* at the "Imagining Texts: Media and Popular Literature in Africa" Conference at the Centre for African Literary Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus

2005 19-22 January - presented thesis chapter title: *Calling the Magenta Sun: A Writing of Africa's Women in The Heart of Redness* at the "Writing African Women Poetics and Politics of African Gender Research" at the University of the Western Cape

2005 3 June presented thesis chapter then titled: *Mothers Madonnas and Musicians: transforming space and time* at the Wits PhD forum

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Abstract----------i

Declaration----------iii

Dedication----------iv

Acknowledgements----------v

Contents----------ix

Introduction----------1

The Personal as Political – An overview of Mda's life and literature-2

Chapter 1: Shifting Identities----------23

Reading Mda's Gendered Renaissance---------- 30

"Gender on the Agenda" ----------52

Critical Appraisals of Mda's Novels of Transition----------65

Chapter 2: Love and Wayward Women in Ways of Dying----------76

Marginal, Magical Realities----------78

Wayward Mothers----------97

Laughter, Art, and Redemption----------118

Chapter 3: Silence and Violence in She Plays with the Darkness--------124

Historical Narratives as Resistant----------125

Political and Personal Histories----------126

Silence as Resistance ----------138

A Dialogue of Song and Dance ----------149

She Plays with the Darkness ----------159

Chapter 4: Calling the Magenta Sun – Womanhood and Nationhood in The Heart of Redness----------162

Poverty and Prophecy----------164

Womanhood and Nationhood----------179

Africa's renaissance----------186

Chapter 5: Mothers, Madonnas and Musicians – Transforming Space and Time in The Madonna of Excelsior----------193

Mothers in the Struggle----------194

Madonnas of Mahlatswetsa----------201

Healing and Reconciliation----------213

Conclusion----------220

Bibliography ----------229