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**Indigeneity Today and Tomorrow:**  
The Construction of Contemporary Indigenous  
Identities in Selected Novels from Australia,  
New Zealand and South Africa

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I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references either in footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

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## 1. Introduction

On February 13, 2008, the Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd extended a formal apology to the country's indigenous population for the wrongs inflicted upon them by white Australian governments in the past. The apology in particular addressed the Stolen Generations, those Aboriginal Australians who were, as children, removed from their families and communities during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be brought up in white homes and church missions in an attempt to absorb them into the white Australian population and eradicate Aboriginal culture(s) once and for all. The central part of Rudd's apology is quoted below:

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.  
To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.  
And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.<sup>1</sup>

Australia's Aboriginal people are just one of the many indigenous populations of post-colonial nation states all over the world who are in materially and culturally undesirable situations as an ultimate consequence of European imperialism and colonialism. When the powers of Europe set out to conquer the "new worlds" they had encountered during the voyages of discovery, a long period of suffering for the native inhabitants of these territories began. The invaders took their lands and with them their economic independence, decimated them with imported diseases, and deemed them savage, barbarous, and unable to survive (and undeserving of it) if not converted to the coloniser's ways. They brought their religion, language and entire world view and forced them on the colonies' existing populations in schools and missions. Indigenous communities were broken up through active intervention or as the gradual development of urbanisation and the implementation of a new economic system.

As a result, many indigenous people, particularly those living in urban areas, have for generations been divorced from their heritage. Growing up in predominantly white neighbourhoods, their stories often involve learning of it only as adults – a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/rudds-apology-revealed/2008/02/12/1202760286861.html>, 29 May 2010.

testament to the shame that older indigenous people often associate with their heritage as a relic of colonial conditioning. The younger generations therefore experience a disparity between their heritage and their actual cultural experience and find there is a dimension to their cultural identity which is inaccessible to them.

A higher degree of awareness and conscious practice of indigenous culture exists in small-scale communities in rural and remote areas; their residents, however, as a rule are at best economically disadvantaged, at worst living in poverty and with hardly a chance to live a successful, fulfilling life. Their dire conditions threaten the survival of their culture as indigenous living becomes associated with a lack of prospects and often a willing distancing from one's own heritage is the consequence as young people turn their backs on their native communities and try to "blend" into the city.

Those in power may finally be acknowledging the wrongs of the last couple of centuries, but it is the indigenous people themselves who have to deal with this legacy of colonialism and its aftermath. For decades, activists have stressed the importance of indigenous people coming together, of learning about cultural heritage and recovering lost traditions, of practicing traditional culture and gaining pride in doing so, in order to ensure that indigenous culture(s) will have a place in the future – and of going about all this in a manner that will allow indigenous people in the new millennium to live lives with the same opportunities as their non-indigenous contemporaries. Formulating an indigenous cultural identity feasible and liveable today and in the conceivable future is seen as the "breakthrough" indigenous people need in order to live better with reference both to their material conditions and their mental and emotional well-being.

This process of cultural identity construction is a central theme in many works of contemporary post-colonial literature, and this paper discusses three contemporary indigenous novels - Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* about the Xhosa of South Africa, Kim Scott's *True Country* about Australia's Aboriginal people, and Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* about the Maori of New Zealand – with regard to this subject matter. Each of the novels depicts indigenous people and groups struggling with their own indigeneity for the reasons outlined above: some because it means little to them, others because they see it as the cause of their dismal living conditions,

yet others because they were taught to believe in the inferiority of indigenous culture in comparison to Western culture. In the fictional spaces they have created, the authors all set about to change this by exploring and testing ideas for contemporary forms of indigenous culture. This thesis is an attempt to compare these ideas and visions, focusing on selected aspects relevant to cultural identity addressed extensively in the novels, namely community and social organisation, place, (religious) beliefs and cultural practice. The last chapter, discussing modes of storytelling and the writing of history, will also, on the basis of the texts studied, explore how formal characteristics of contemporary indigenous literary traditions reflect and contribute to the construction of cultural identity. Essentially, this thesis is an attempt to find out whether, in these works, despite their discussion of different cultures and situations, a common thread can be found in these indigenous authors' drafts of "'world[s] of meaning' for the future"<sup>2</sup> for their people.

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<sup>2</sup> Jordan 109.

## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1. History before Colonisation

All ethnic groups discussed in this paper will be referred to as indigenous peoples, “indigenous” meaning “native of a particular place or land” (Owoahene-Acheampong 30). The Australian Aboriginal people (“Aboriginal” is derived from Latin “ab origine”, “from the beginning”<sup>3</sup>) and the Maori people of New Zealand are the earliest inhabitants of their respective lands. Australia’s indigenous inhabitants migrated to the continent via the islands of Indonesia; estimates as to when this occurred vary widely, ranging from 125,000 to 40,000 years ago<sup>4</sup>, which makes theirs the “oldest living [culture] in the world”.<sup>5</sup>

Australia's Aboriginal people were “semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers”<sup>6</sup>; they were organised in *bands*: relatively stable communities inhabited a fixed region while their subgroups (*local bands*) were flexible in composition and location (cf. King 31). At the time of European arrival, between 500 and 600 regional groups – also referred to as ‘nations’ – were living on the Australian continent, each with their own language and specific skills and cultural knowledge suited to their particular territory<sup>7</sup>.

In stark contrast to Australia, New Zealand has “a shorter human history than any other country”<sup>8</sup>; the current consensus is that the country’s first settlers arrived there from East Polynesia in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (ibid.). New Zealand’s indigenous inhabitants were farmers who had developed advanced horticultural practices (cf. King 24); their society was organised into *iwi* (tribes) and *hapu* (sub-tribes). Maori all over the country “spoke a common language and shared many cultural traits” (cf. Levine *Identity* 120).

Unlike the Australian Aborigines and the Maori, the Xhosa people of South Africa are not the first inhabitants of the region where they eventually established

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=aborigine>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. <http://media.uow.edu.au/news/2004/0917a/index.html>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/indigenous/>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/indigenous/>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/indigenous/>; Edwards 52-53.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.teara.govt.nz/NewZealandInBrief/History/1/en>, 29 May 2010.



themselves<sup>9</sup>. Descendants of Bantu speakers who originated in the Cameroons and gradually migrated into Eastern and Southern Africa (cf. Wolf 41), the Xhosa people arrived in what is today known as the Eastern Cape of South Africa between 1400 and 1600 AD; there they encountered Khoisan-speaking populations, who were absorbed into the culture of the intruders. As a result, “the modern Xhosa share physical and cultural characteristics with their distant Khoisian [sic!] cousins”.<sup>10</sup> King (203) characterises traditional Xhosa culture as “Cattle Area culture” – they were stock farmers for whom cattle had great significance, not as much for their food value as they were “a form of wealth [that] played a major role in prestige and exchange” (King 204). This is illustrated by a Xhosa proverb saying “Cattle are the nation; if they are dead the nation dies”.<sup>11</sup>

## **2.2. Colonisation**

First contacts between Europe and the *Terra Australis Incognita* (“unknown southern land”) were made around 1606; the British colonisation of Australia began in 1788, when the First Fleet under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip arrived in Botany Bay, seven miles south of what was to become the port of Sydney<sup>12</sup>. Phillip established the Colony of New South Wales, initially a penal colony. By 1842, all of Australia had been claimed for the British crown.<sup>13</sup>

Although Dutch explorer Abel Tasman was the first European to land in New Zealand – in 1642 – continuous contact between Maori and Europeans began only with the visits of James Cook in 1769 (cf. Levine *Identity* 120). New Zealand officially became a British colony in 1840; by then around 2000 Pakeha (Europeans)

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<sup>9</sup> Because of this, the Xhosa are not indigenous to South Africa according to definitions of indigenous peoples as the first peoples having populated the territory of their respective home country, which in the case of South Africa are the Khoikhoi and the San (cf. Wolf 41); however, this paper employs a looser definition which includes all population groups living in a particular area at the time of the arrival of the European colonialists. Although the situation of the Xhosa differs in some respects from those of the Aboriginal Australians and the Maori, as post-colonial ethnic groups they face very similar concerns regarding their cultures and cultural identities. “There is no question that all Africans are indigenous to Africa in the sense that they were there before the European colonialists arrived and that they have been subject to sub-ordination during colonialism”, the *Report of the African Commission’s Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations/Communities* (88) states, and it is in this sense all three ethnic groups discussed will be referred to as indigenous people(s).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.rhi.org.za/index.php?ref=articles&do=rd&artid=5>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. <http://www.rhi.org.za/index.php?ref=articles&do=rd&artid=5>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1P1-29435227.html>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/australianhistory/>, 29 May 2010.

– “a motley collection of whalers, sealers, traders, escaped convicts and missionaries” (ibid.) were living there.<sup>14</sup>

Portuguese explorer Bartholomeu Dias first circumnavigated (and named) the Cape of Good Hope in 1488<sup>15</sup>, but it was the Dutch under the command of Jan van Riebeeck who established the first European settlement in the area in 1652. From there, the colonists moved north and east.<sup>16</sup> The British first occupied the Cape and took over the rule from the Dutch in 1795; the colony changed hands between the two colonial powers twice more<sup>17</sup> before it was formally ceded to Britain in 1814<sup>18</sup>.

### ***2.3. Competition for Land***

The most immediate consequence of the European intrusion onto indigenous lands, apart from the numerical decimation of their inhabitants through the import of diseases they had no resistance to and technologically advanced weapons, which led to a much greater number of casualties in small-scale conflicts between different indigenous groups, was the loss of said lands for their populations.

Initially, contacts between the British and the native inhabitants of Australia were peaceful and hospitable – until the Aboriginals realised that the continued presence of the colonists interfered severely with their own access to land and resources. A number of attacks against the settlers between 1790 and 1810 followed. The issue of indigenous land ownership was ignored completely until 1830, when NSW Governor Sir Richard Bourke solved the problem by issuing a proclamation that declared the land newly settled by the British to be *terra nullius*, land that had belonged to no one before having been claimed for the British crown, thus denying Australia’s indigenous inhabitants any rights to their traditional homelands. This piece of legislation would remain in effect until 1992<sup>19</sup>.

In contrast to the approach to indigenous land rights taken in Australia, in New Zealand indigenous rights to land were initially acknowledged by the colonial powers. When the British, after initial reluctance, decided to add New Zealand to their empire, they sought the consent of the Maori. On February 6, 1840, the *Treaty*

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.newzealand.com/travel/about-nz/history/history-colonisation.cfm>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/general/1400.htm>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.southafrica.info/about/history/history.htm>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.southafrica.info/about/history/521102.htm>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/general/1800.htm>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/australianhistory/>, 29 May 2010.

of Waitangi (*Te Tiriti O Waitangi*) was signed between the British and over 500 Maori chiefs (cf. Levine *Identity* 74). This legal document asserted that the chiefs would cede the power to govern to the Queen, but retain “unqualified exercise of their chieftainship over their lands, villages and all their treasures” (Levine *Identity* 122). Inaccuracies in the translation from English to Maori gave the indigenous chiefs the impression that they were granting the British fewer rights than was actually the case, but the colonists did seem to accept the Maori as “partners in running New Zealand” (ibid.) in the first years of colonial rule; in 1845, under new Governor George Grey, however, their role in the administration was diminished. As the settler population grew, land became scarce and war broke out over the issue of more and more Maori land being sold to the colonists. As a consequence, in 1865 the government created the *Native Land Court* with the goal of converting communal – tribal – ownership of land into individual title so Maori land could be more easily transferred to settlers (ibid.).

In South Africa, the trek boers, white farmers moving into the hinterland of the Cape Colony in search for grazing land for their cattle<sup>20</sup>, around 1770 came into contact with the Xhosa, who at that time were living in the area between the Bushman’s and Kei Rivers. Conflicts over land turned into a war<sup>21</sup>, the first of a series of nine wars between the Xhosa and the Dutch and British settlers spanning a century between the late 1700s and 1800s which would later become known as the Xhosa Wars<sup>22</sup>, after the last of which all former Xhosa land was in the hands of the settlers<sup>23</sup>.

#### ***2.4. Discrimination under Colonial Rule and After Independence***

Since the colonialists considered the native populations “savages”, they saw it as their duty to either convert them to their own ways or keep the “races” from mixing, which would ensure, depending on the numerical status of the respective colony’s indigenous people, that their own people would not be absorbed into the native population or that the latter would “die out quietly” (Hunt 122). Commitments to assimilation, segregation or both can be found in the histories of all the countries discussed. Independence of the country concerned rarely improved matters for the

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh\\_trebu.htm](http://www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh_trebu.htm), 29 May 2010.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh\\_xhosa.htm](http://www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh_xhosa.htm), 29 May 2010.

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.emersonkent.com/wars\\_and\\_battles\\_in\\_history/xhosa\\_wars.htm](http://www.emersonkent.com/wars_and_battles_in_history/xhosa_wars.htm), 29 May 2010.

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh\\_xhosa.htm](http://www.southafrica-travel.net/history/eh_xhosa.htm), 29 May 2010.

indigenous population; rather, they saw discriminatory measures anchored in new constitutions, ensuring them even greater perseverance.

In Australia, case in point, the ‘Aborigines Protection Act’ of 1909, implemented eight years after the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia, not only enabled the government to force Aboriginal people to relocate to reserves where they were “under strict controls and surveillance” (Sissons 86), but also legalised a practice begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the removal of Aboriginal children – particularly those of mixed descent – from their families in order for them to be assimilated into ‘white’ society. The children, today commonly referred to as the ‘Stolen Generations’, were brought up in church or state institutions or in white foster homes; many suffered physical and sexual abuse as well as “rejection from the very society into which they were supposed to be assimilating” (Sissons 44). Aboriginal parents had no right to object to the removal of their children and had no means of maintaining contact with them. Between 1909 and 1969, “[10 to 30] per cent of all Aboriginal children were abducted and almost every Aboriginal family in Australia has been affected in some way by this deeply racist practice” (ibid.)<sup>24</sup>.

In New Zealand, linguistic and cultural assimilation of the Maori population was institutionalised with the establishment of a system of Native Schools under the control of the state two years after the inception of the Native Land Court. The goal was to transform “tribally distinct peoples into a homogenous class of English-speaking labourers and tradesmen” (Sissons 86). Schooling was in English and children prohibited from speaking their native tongue; if caught speaking Maori, they faced corporal punishment (cf. Sissons 98).

In South Africa, tribal structures of the indigenous population had been infiltrated since the beginnings of colonisation and racial discrimination had been at work in “a myriad of forms” (Clark 3) under the guise of the ‘civisiling mission’, but with the Union of the four Southern African colonies in 1910, these measures began to be institutionalised. Since the white government could not hope to succeed at assimilating the indigenous population due to their sheer prevalence in numbers, they attempted racial segregation in order to avoid the opposite scenario – absorption of

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Sissons 43-44.

the settlers into the native population. Numerous laws were drafted with the goal of keeping the latter in a position of political, economic and social disadvantage, most significantly the Land Act of 1913 which relocated black people onto reserves unless they could prove to be in white employment. This measure restricted 80% of South Africa's population to 20% of its territory<sup>25</sup>. In 1948, Apartheid, Afrikaans for 'separation', became official policy of the Nationalist Government: a comprehensive body of segregationist laws was drafted including the Population Registration Act, which "registered all people by racial group" (Ashcroft 14); the Group Areas Act, which created separate residential areas for the races; the Mixed Amenities Act, which segregated public facilities; the Immorality Act, which prohibited marriage between the different races (ibid.) and the Bantu Education Act, which had as its aim the creation of an inferior curriculum designed for the black population which would only enable them to serve the whites in unskilled labour positions or "their own people in the homelands"<sup>26</sup>. These native homelands or Bantustans were set up in the reserves; South Africa's native population was divided into 8 ethnic groups and each assigned a homeland. In 1970, the "Bantu Homelands Citizens Act" forced every black person to become a citizen of their respective "homeland" and removed their citizenship of South Africa.<sup>27</sup>

### ***2.5. Turning Points***

In 1962, all of Australia's Aboriginal people gained the right to vote in Commonwealth elections, and in 1967 a referendum was held in which an overwhelming majority of Australians voted for certain laws discriminating against Aboriginal Australians to be removed from the constitution. These stated that the latter required "special laws" and were not to be counted in the census.<sup>28</sup> The founding of government departments concerned with Aboriginal welfare followed, and in 1992, in a historic case it was ruled that Australia was never *terra nullius* and that native title "exists over particular kinds of land"<sup>29</sup>.

As New Zealand's Maori population became more adamant about their rights, the Waitangi Tribunal, designed to address grievances in relation to land, was established in 1975. In 1985, it was expanded to investigation of breaches of the

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/chronology/thisday/1913-06-19.htm>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>26</sup> <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.htm>, , 29 May 2010.

<sup>27</sup> <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.htm>, , 29 May 2010.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/publications/fact-sheets/fs150.aspx>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. "Background Briefing: An Overview of History".

Treaty since 1840.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the Maori underwent a cultural renaissance, and many institutions in the country adopted a policy of biculturalism, adopting Maori names, posting bilingual signs and holding opening ceremonies in Maori tradition, to name a few examples.<sup>31</sup>

Resistance against apartheid in South Africa was always significant, but it was only in the second half of the 1980s that internal protests against apartheid like violent uprisings in townships and external pressure on the South African administration could no longer be disregarded. Between 1989 and 1994, then-president F.W. de Klerk unbanned anti-apartheid groups and abolished apartheid legislation, a new constitution was put into effect, and on April 26-29, 1994, Nelson Mandela was elected as the new president of the nation (cf. Clark 110).

Mandela's election was a historic event and inspired a great deal of hope in the future of South Africa among his countrymen and internationally. He made the achievement of a "rainbow nation" (a phrase coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu referring to a nation of many different ethnicities living peacefully side by side) a significant part of his presidential programme (Johnson 213).

In order to overcome the past and reach that goal, in 1996 the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* chaired by Tutu was set up with the objective of dealing with any human rights violations committed under the Apartheid regime. Victims could voice their sufferings at a public hearing and perpetrators had the chance to be granted amnesty on the grounds that they gave full disclosure of their crimes in what was envisioned as a significant contribution to the healing of the nation; its success, however, is disputed (Johnson 216).

## **2.6. Current Situation**

Despite improvements in their legal situation, Aboriginal people are today still the most disadvantaged group in Australia. According to the Australian census of 2001, their life expectancy is "nearly 20 years below that of the total Australian population"; only 11% have a post-school educational qualification (in comparison to 31% of Australia's non-indigenous population); their unemployment rate is much

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.teara.govt.nz/NewZealandInBrief/History/6/en>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/the-new-zealanders/12>, 29 May 2010.

higher than that of the rest of Australia (40%, in some areas as high as 100%, as compared to 8%); and they are more likely than non-indigenous people to be victims of violence, to name only a few indicators<sup>32</sup>. The Maori people are in a similarly dismal position compared to the rest of New Zealand's population, being "overrepresented on all measures of social distress: imprisonment, disease, unemployment, lack of educational qualifications, etc." (Levine *Identity* 120).

While the situations of the Aboriginal Australian and the Maori people are remarkably similar, that of the Xhosa in South Africa is different in many respects. They are not a minority in their country, but "the second largest ethnic group [...] behind the Zulu"<sup>33</sup> with nearly 7 million speakers of the Xhosa language. Since the final abolition of Apartheid in 1994, South Africa's black population is in control of the government, and men of Xhosa origin have served as the first two black presidents of the nation. The changes in political power, however, have failed to significantly affect the majority of South Africa's black population. In Africa's economically most developed country, some 50% of the population live in poverty; around seven million live in shacks. Chronic unemployment and the highest HIV and AIDS rates in the world are additional indicators of the state of the nation<sup>34</sup>. While Knight blames the largely unchanged situation of the bulk of the population on the structural inequality that the ANC governments inherited from their Apartheid predecessors, claiming that they have tried their hardest in the face of practically insurmountable difficulties, Johnson judges the post-Apartheid black administrations much more harshly, finding that they were primarily concerned with holding on to their position and exploiting it for their own personal gain. Nelson Mandela, he argues, was an exceptional personality who managed to inspire hope in his countrymen, but in terms of actual leadership little more than a figurehead (cf. 211-212). His successor Thabo Mbeki, according to Johnson, sacrificed the well-being of the bulk of the population to his own staying in power. Although he succeeded at creating a black middle class, this redistribution of wealth led to the "absolute immiseration of many blacks" (227), and his grossly inadequate handling of the HIV epidemic led to a marked increase in the numbers of deaths from AIDS (cf. 221-

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. "Background Briefing: Introducing Indigenous Australia".

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.rhi.org.za/index.php?ref=articles&do=rd&artid=5>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>34</sup> <http://richardknight.homestead.com/files/SouthAfrica2006-ChallengesfortheFuture.pdf>, 29 May 2010.

228). Johnson writes that “the tragedy of South Africa is that it has always been ruled – and still is – by elites which seek their own group self-interest rather than that of the country as a whole” (232) – the very people Mda describes as the “Aristocrats of the Revolution” (cf. *Heart* 33). Mbeki resigned from his position following a call by his party after a High Court judge found him guilty of interfering in a corruption case against his rival and ANC leader, Jacob Zuma,<sup>35</sup> a decision which was later overruled<sup>36</sup>. Zuma, a highly controversial figure in South African politics, was elected president in May 2009<sup>37</sup>; the effects of his term remain to be seen.

This chapter has shown that similar treatment of these different indigenous cultures in the past has resulted in similar problematic post-colonial material conditions for the majority of their members; effects on their cultural identities will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>35</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7626646.stm>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2009-01-12-judge-nicholson-redcarded-by-sca>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>37</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1069402.stm>, 29 May 2010.



### 3. Cultural Identity and Indigenous Peoples

#### 3.1. Culture

Raymond Williams has famously defined culture as “a whole way of life” (XVI). Over a century earlier, Edward B. Tylor described it as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1871<sup>38</sup>). To Geert Hofstede, *culture* refers to “patterns of thinking, feeling and potential acting [...] learned throughout [a person’s] lifetime” (2) which are derived from their environment. Culture is specific to a group, in contrast to personality, which is specific to the individual, and human nature, which is universal; it is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (4). He groups the *manifestations of culture* such as the aforementioned custom, morals and art into *values, rituals, heroes, and symbols*; the latter three he subsumes under the term *practices*. (6-8)

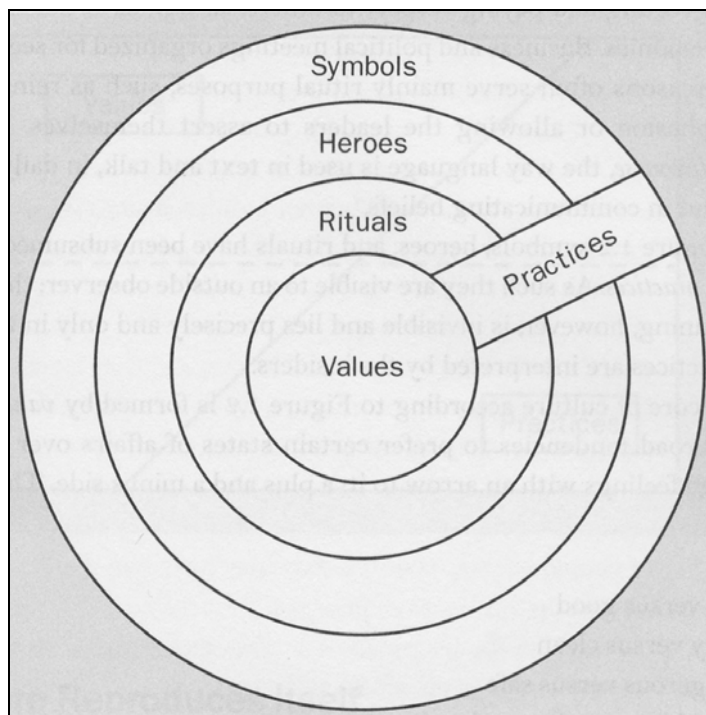


Fig. 1: The “Onion”: Manifestations of Culture at Different Levels of Depth (7)

*Symbols*, according to Hofstede, are “words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning only recognized as such by those who share the culture” (7). He

<sup>38</sup> [http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture\\_1.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm), 29 May 2010.

cites “words in a language or jargon” (ibid.) as well as dress, hairstyles and status symbols as examples. Symbols, to him, are the most superficial manifestations of culture since they are most easily developed and abandoned, and often copied by other cultural groups.

*Heroes* are real or imaginary persons whose qualities make them role models for members of the culture. *Rituals* are “collective activities, technically superfluous in reaching desired ends, but which within a culture are considered as socially essential. They are therefore carried out for their own sake” (8); examples are ways of greeting and religious and social ceremonies. All these *practices* are visible to outside observers, but carry cultural meaning only for members of the culture.

*Values* – “broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (ibid.) – form the core of culture. They deal with questions of “evil versus good”, “moral versus immoral”, “abnormal versus normal” and “dangerous versus safe”, to name only a few examples.

## ***3.2. Traditional and Modern Cultures***

### **3.2.1. Ideological Development and Its Effects**

In Europe, a number of cultural shifts around 1500 marked the end of the Middle Ages: The Renaissance, the Reformation and the “discovery of the ‘new world’” (Ashcroft 130). Technological developments and changes in human thought began to effect a number of drastic changes in social forms, and the period from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards saw the advent of “the nation-state, [...] the commodification of products and wage labour, formal schooling, the secularization of values and norms, and the predominance of urban forms of life” (131). Enlightenment philosophers strove to develop a “rational organisation of everyday social life” (Habermas 9, quoted in Ashcroft 132). These changes, in their entirety, would come to be characterised as *modernity*, an ideology centred on progress and on the individual, who now, at least in theory, for the first time had complete personal freedom and indeed the duty to fully realize his or her potential.

The cultures that the Europeans encountered on their voyages of discovery and their colonial missions were “traditional”, unfamiliar with the changes in Europe and fundamentally different from the way their “visitors” perceived themselves. Ashcroft explains these encounters themselves were significant in shaping modernism, as it

constructed itself against the mores of the “backwards” societies of the margins (cf. 131); one of the core ideas in modernist thinking was that a period superior to those before had been entered, the latter representing earlier stages of human cultural development still present in the “savage” societies of the “new world”. Modernist ideology subscribes to the doctrine of social and cultural evolutionism, which has at its core a hierarchy that “orders the different areas of the globe on a scale of progress leading to the industrial civilization of Europe”, creating an “ideological representation of the center/periphery/margins structure of our civilization as an evolutionary relation between civilization and its less developed forerunners” which is, Friedman claims, “a mistranslation of space into time” (5).

Since the perceived gap in development between the “civilised” and the “savages” was so great, the assumption on the part of the colonists was that “indigenous culture was doomed to disappear in the clash with western civilisation” (Kolig *Introduction* 10). Such expectations, however, “turned out to be self-fulfilling and action-inspiring prophecies” (ibid.), as the intruders set about to “civilise” the natives (which translated to assimilating them into Western society), effectively performing “culturecide and often outright genocide” (ibid.). Zakes Mda, incidentally, satirizes the hypocrisy of the “enlightened” British colonists setting out to destroy foreign peoples and cultures and acting in ways no less “barbarous” than those they feel superior to, addressing the British’ tendencies to exhibit body parts of indigenous people in museums, and thus deconstructs the civilised-savage dichotomy almost in passing:

[Camagu] has never understood this barbaric habit of the British of shrinking heads of the vanquished people and displaying them in these impressive buildings where ladies and gentlemen go to gloat and celebrate their superior civilization. (168)

The loss of their land marked the beginning of assimilation of indigenous peoples to the imported systems. Indigenous populations had lost the basis of their existence and became dependent on the intruders to sustain their livelihood. The colonists’ economic and social structures and their beliefs were imposed on them, which had a lasting impact on their traditional cultures, as

[t]he encroachment of traditional institutions by those of the West led to suppression and stripping away of rich resources in the development of traditional beliefs and practices. In other words, the development of traditional institutions was disturbed. (Owoahene-Acheampong 137)

Colonial education systems, controlled by church and state, were especially effective in creating Western hegemony as they interfered with the process of passing on indigenous cultural knowledge from one generation to the next and targeted the minds of receptive indigenous children, who were, through being taught a curriculum based solely on Western ideals, norms and knowledges, taken, in the words of Ngũgĩ, “from [their] world to other worlds” (12). Where they were not completely separated from their families, they became socialised into two different worlds without the feeling of truly belonging to either; as a response they withdrew into themselves and their communities effectively lost access to them as well. This is described by Scissons as being the case in the context of New Zealand’s indigenous inhabitants (cf. 87).

Measures to eliminate indigenous traditional culture in favour of a Western world view were unequally effective depending on various factors, but crucially on whether the invading Europeans replaced the indigenous population as the majority or not. In so-called fourth world nations like Australia, New Zealand or the United States, where the indigenous population had been relegated to a marginalised minority by the settlers, the theft of land and the breaking up of families and communities was much more successful at replacing indigenous with white ways than in “third world” nations, where the higher propensity in numbers of the indigenous population ensured a greater chance of resistance to colonial and post-independence domination and of persistence of indigenous tradition. The drunken speech Beth delivers to an imaginary audience in *Once Were Warriors* addresses a condition typical for indigenous urban dwellers in settler nations (who constitute the majority of indigenous people in both Australia and New Zealand), for whom only a vague idea of what indigeneity used to mean has survived.

I tellem what’s wrong with this world, with *my* world, with the MAORI world [...]. I tellem because it’s a big problem being a Maori in this world. We used to be a race of warriors [...]. And we used to war all the time, us Maoris. Against each other. [...] Tribe against tribe. Savages. We were savages. But warriors, eh. It’s very important to remember that. Warriors. Because, you see, it was what we lost when you, the white audience out there, defeated us. *Conquered us. Took our land, our mana*<sup>39</sup>, *left us with nothing*. [my emphasis]

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<sup>39</sup> *Mana* is best described as a spiritual power that is central to traditional Maori religious and cultural practice. It is a gift given by the ancestors and “gives a person the authority to lead, organise and regulate communal expeditions and activities, to make decisions regarding social and political matters” (<http://maoridictionary.co.nz/index.cfm?dictionaryKeywords=mana>, 29 May 2010). Other terms given to approximate the concept are “prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status [and] charisma” (ibid.).

But the warriors thing got handed down, see. [...] [I]n a mixed up sense it did. It was more toughness that got handed down from generation to generation. [...] Us Maoris might be every bad thing in this world but you can't take away from us our toughness. But this toughness, Pakeha audience of mine, it started to mean less and less as the world got older, learned more, and new technology all this fandangled computer, oh, but even before computers, it all made toughness redundant. Now thassa good word for a Maori, eh, redundant?

“True” Maoriness, for Beth, is a thing of the past, an anachronism in the 1980s, when the novel is set; daily encountering the ubiquity of drinking and violence as the main characteristic distinguishing the Maori of Pine Block from their white neighbours, the lack of positive forms of lived Maori culture in her life has made her adopt rejuvenated colonial beliefs that indigenous people are “remnants of a past doomed to extinction” and “innately obsolete peoples” (Dodson 28). Not all urban indigenous experiences are as overwhelmingly negative as Beth’s, however; as is the case with *True Country*’s Billy, they are often simply nonexistent.

The higher degree of traceable cultural continuity from pre-colonial times in the “Third World” can be seen in the novels in the contrast between the rural communities of Karnama in Australia and Qolorha in South Africa – while in Karnama the elders are, much like Beth, lamenting the loss of the “power” they used to wield and Aboriginal culture has become a one-hour subject on the school curriculum (which Karnama’s youth expresses little interest in), in Qolorha Xhosa culture is very much alive in the consciousness of even the younger generation and its practice a reality, threatened only by the lures of Western “civilisation”.

Globally, a significant shift in public consciousness occurred in the 1970s with the decline of belief in the ideals of modernity. “[M]odernist identity [...] began to dissolve into a cynical postmodernism or a search for roots” (Friedman 70). A loss of faith in the cornerstones of modernism – development and universalism – as a consequence of the increasing fragmentation of the world, growing awareness of the adverse effects of unrestricted development on the environment and disillusionment with the idea of a teleological history after World War II (cf. 70-71) - had people in the “crisis-ridden centers of the world system” (79) turn to what offered meaning and comfort: their own cultural roots. “Culture loomed large on the intellectual and especially the emotional agenda” (70), and rejection of the past in favour of creation

of the future was replaced by an interest in the past that Friedman refers to as “a new primitivism” (79).

This new “openness to tradition”, so to speak, worked in favour of movements of indigenous cultural promotion and revival. Parallel to the developments in the West, “in much of the ‘third world’ the ideology of development came under heavy attack and the ‘fourth world’ project of cultural survival began to strike home”, writes Friedman (71). Australia, where the 1970s marked the beginning of debates about Aboriginality, is a good example.

In the current wave of globalisation, the spread of the ideals and achievements of Western “civilisation” into even the remotest areas of the world and movements of indigenous cultural survival and re-establishment are tendencies which coexist “uneasily” – (cf. Kolig *Introduction* 7). The three novels discussed in this paper – published in 1990 (*Once Were Warriors*), 1993 (*True Country*), and 2000 (*The Heart of Redness*) – have to be read in this context.

Neo-colonial enterprises are taking place under the guise of empowering the people, like the hotel and casino project in Mda’s Qolorha; education systems controlled by Western interests are still serving to estrange indigenous people from their cultural backgrounds as evidenced by Xoliswa Ximiya of *Heart*, who rejects her Xhosa heritage and has become a dedicated advocate of the Americanisation of her native country and village; or, at best, failing to adequately address their experience – case in point is Gabriella in *True Country*, who notes that whenever she returns from university in Perth to her native Karnama she is reminded that “the bridging course she did at uni did not connect these two worlds” (79). At the same time, the (often cursory) outside interest in traditional cultures which has resulted in the relatively new phenomenon of cultural tourism is paralleled by the desire of indigenous people themselves getting to know their heritage or keeping their culture alive, depending on their specific situations, and sometimes managing to utilise the former in their endeavours.

### 3.2.2. Culture and Change

Where indigenous cultures have survived in direct continuity from the pre-colonial era, such as in Qolorha, they are naturally different from their pre-colonial incarnations. This alone is enough reason for some to deny contemporary indigenous cultures their validity and declare them diluted versions of their authentic, pre-contact forms. Proponents of such restrictive definitions, employing convenient logic, see the colonial-era belief in the doomed fate of indigenous culture confirmed by declaring “pristine” pre-colonial indigenous culture the only “real” form of indigenous culture and dismiss proof of the resilience and adaptability of indigenous culture by calling the resulting forms inauthentic.

At the root of such beliefs lies the assumption of *change*, central to modernism, being a concept entirely foreign to indigenous cultures. They were and are seen as by nature static and inflexible, which would imply, that at the time of first contact with the Western world they had, in isolation, remained exactly the same for, in the case of indigenous Australia, as much as 30,000 years. This, of course, is nonsense; in fact, Aboriginal trade routes existed all over the continent and different groups influenced each other and shared cultural knowledges<sup>40</sup>. The Xhosa people, as outlined in chapter 2.1, after their migration to the South of Africa absorbed the local Khoikhoi and San people and incorporated some of their traditions into their own culture. In general, Xhosa society has been characterised as an “open society”, receptive to new cultural forms<sup>41</sup>.

In fact no culture is a stable, fixed entity, culture being a “dynamic concept, always negotiable and in process of endorsement, contestation and transformation” (Wright 10, quoted in Kolig *Introduction* 13), and indigenous cultures as well as any others able to “develop and change as their conditions change” (Ashcroft 17).

It is clear that with the first arrivals from Europe, indigenous cultures encountered a significantly greater cultural difference than they ever had before and that this, with the active assistance of the colonists, often resulted in the loss of indigenous traditions. Xhosa culture has resisted, and Mda makes sure to state in his novel that “[l]ike all cultures, Xhosa culture is dynamic” (248). Camagu’s comment is prompted by John Dalton’s plan to build a cultural village which concentrates those

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.indigenoustralia.info/culture/trade-routes.html> 29 May 2010.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. <http://www.spiritus-temporis.com/xhosa/history-of-the-xhosa.html> 29 May 2010.

Xhosa traditions that can be traced back to pre-colonial times in one small space, in order to show tourists “how the amaXhosa of the wild coast live” (247). Camagu chastises him for presenting a distorted picture of contemporary Xhosa culture, and for helping propagate the notion that true Xhosa culture is that of the past, when the Xhosa clearly do not “live in a cultural vacuum” (248) and the everyday lives of the people of Qolorha are the best example of living indigenous culture (cf. chapter 7.1). The “authenticity” of Mda’s vibrant Xhosa community is undeniable, and as such it is obvious evidence for the adaptability of culture – however, the next chapter will illustrate that even where clearly a loss of culture has occurred, reconstructed cultural forms cannot be denied validity.

### ***3.3. Culture, Identity and Politics***

Cultural identity refers to “those aspects of our identities which arise from our ‘belonging’ to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and [...] national cultures” (Hall 274). At the same time, cultural identity refers to the collective identity of such a group. While cultural identity in the first sense remarks upon the individual’s conception of self, cultural identity in the second sense is probably best defined as a sense of belonging together on the basis of sharing a culture.

Cultural identity, therefore, is both an individual and a collective phenomenon. Sevänen distinguishes between practices and politics of cultural identity: Practices represent the individual level of cultural identity – “the ways in which people understand and define themselves, and with what they identify themselves” (22). Identity politics, on the other hand, take place on a collective level – they are maintained by groups and organisations, like a national minority seeking independence. The distinction, however, is not clear, because an individual’s identification with a collective often has political significance (cf. Sevänen 23). Following Huiskamp (399-400), Sevänen notes that “[t]he collective mobilisation of people often requires successful identity politics. Before people are ready to act together, a feeling of togetherness or a sense of common interests must, in many cases, have arisen between them” (23). Identity processes, therefore, “are fundamentally dual and comprise aspects of meaning as well as politics” (Hylland Eriksen 1993: 76, cited in Sevänen 23).



Identifying as indigenous (or refusing to do so) is, therefore, always a political act since indigenous peoples everywhere are struggling and trying to achieve goals as groups – whether they are trying to make a rural community economically viable or to organise themselves on a national basis in order to achieve more political force, and indigenous culture – that which supposedly unites them – has gone from a “way of life” or behaviour patterns naturally acquired from one’s social environment to a state of always being reflected upon; more extremely, in many cases, it has become a “strategic resource” turned to by the people to better their situation (cf. Kolig *Introduction* 16) – whether that refers to its usage in cultural tourism or to according it a symbolic function in a national indigenous movement.

Where, additionally, a break in cultural continuity has occurred and identification as an indigenous person is based not on the cultural framework an individual has been socialised into, but solely on descent (a, then, strictly biological characteristic) – with possible political implications – questions of authenticity once again arise.

A nationwide formation of the indigenous minority of a given country derives legitimacy from the notion that, based on their common ancestry, all its members have something fundamental and meaningful in common which distinguishes them from their non-indigenous contemporaries.

Looking at the example of Australia, one has a hard time locating this “essence of Aboriginality”. In fact, the cultural experiences of biologically Aboriginal people vary widely ranging from those living in rural and remote communities primarily in the North, West and Centre of Australia who retain some elements of pre-colonial tradition in their lifestyles and/or have, as members of the Stolen Generations, first-hand experience of colonial discrimination – in short, anything that would be regarded as distinctively Aboriginal experience – to those who have grown up in predominantly white urban centres, often have a link to their Aboriginal heritage only through a grandparent and may have learned of it only in their adulthood.

This is strikingly conveyed in *True Country*, an individual’s journey of discovery of his indigenous heritage: “This novel began with a desire to explore a sort of neglected interior space, and to consider my own heritage”, Kim Scott writes in an author’s note preceding the prose text. Following this note, Scott quotes the song

“The Dead Heart” by Australian rock band Midnight Oil (featuring both Aboriginal and white Australians), which has provided him with the title of his novel:

We carry in our hearts the true country  
And that cannot be stolen  
We follow in the steps of our ancestry  
And that cannot be broken

The song speaks of indigenous resistance, asserting that even though “White man came took everything”<sup>42</sup>, he could not kill the collective *spirit* of the Aboriginal people. Clearly, the *true country* is not obvious to Billy; he is testament to the fact that the spiritual connection to the ancestors *can* be and has been broken in many cases, and that confusion has ensued.

A key passage of *True Country* has Billy talking to Gabriella, a university-educated young native of Karnama:

‘Why are you here?’ she asked me.  
‘Because I wanted to. I think I wanted, I’m of ... my grandmother ... my great-grandmother must have been Aboriginal, like you, dark. My grandmother is part ... my father told me, but no one ... [...] But I don’t feel Aboriginal, I can’t say that. I don’t understand. Does it mean you feel lost, displaced? But doesn’t everyone? And I just wanted to come to a place like this, where some things that happened a long time ago, where I come from, that I have only heard or read of, are still happening here, maybe.’  
[...]  
‘[...] I think it’s sad here really, pathetic even maybe. People don’t know, and they pretend. They don’t know what they can do, or believe in. Little bit of this, little bit of that. But in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Aboriginal people don’t necessarily think like me either ...’  
‘Gabriella, I think ... Yes. A breakdown maybe. Could be an evolution of sorts, there’s something in common that must be offered ...’  
‘You think? What can we do? Look at it. Put the little bits together like one of the paintings? You know, how I’ve been brought up, I don’t know anything of the old ways; a few words, this and that. But there’s something there, that’s what I reckon. Should we try and put it all together and believe in it? Or try and rediscover things, like that Renaissance thing? Do like they say Walanguh could, you know, sing for this new world.’ [...]  
Maybe. But why? When you, I, we, don’t know quite who we are these days, why try to tell others this, or that something has gone wrong and the world is not quite right? Because otherwise we have to listen to them, be silent, watch their visions, feel our earth vibrate as they hammer it with thick ankles and well-shod feet, probe and jackhammer drill. (82-83)

This passage addresses all the important points in the debates about Aboriginality pervasive today – the confusion of the urban-raised individual with an insufficient

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.midnightoil.com/releases/08dieselanddust.do#deadheart>, 29 May 2010.

connection to his cultural heritage, which he nevertheless feels is a part of his identity, a part which he cannot access; the confusion of even people living in an environment where traditional culture is still “accessible through living memory” (Pascal 5); the reflection on just what it is that makes one Aboriginal in this day and age; the awareness that an objective, definable (cultural) characteristic does not exist, that commonalities will have to be constructed around a feeling of solidarity among a minority population; and the acknowledgement that political motivation, therefore, is a significant factor in such an endeavour.

In the face of great divergence in cultural experience among a group, the question often arises whether indigenous descent should grant the right to identify as indigenous despite a lack of lived indigenous cultural experience, and whether individuals like Beth, Billy and also (to some degree) Camagu – (often not quite) black on the outside, white on the inside, as some may put it – should be included in the endeavour of indigenous identity construction. Margery Fee addresses the topic in a response to an article by C.K. Stead, in which the author denies New Zealand writer Keri Hulme the ability to adequately represent Maoriness in her work, calling her a Pakeha (Hulme’s link to her Maori heritage is through her mother, who is “of Orkney Scots and Maori descent”<sup>43</sup>, and took her daughter on holidays with her extended family on the Otago East Coast). He argues that the Maori elements in her work seem “willed” rather than “natural” and thus essentially asserts that (biologically) indigenous individuals who have not grown up living indigenous culture on a daily basis cannot be “authentic” indigenous persons. Fee counters that

[t]o shift the argument from the biological to the cultural and linguistic [...] seems a move towards flexibility, but is, in fact, quite rigid. Many indigenous people with eight indigenous great-grandparents live in cities and no longer speak their aboriginal languages. The majority culture has either actively caused or passively allowed the loss of traditional indigenous languages and cultures world-wide. [...] For a member of a majority culture to try to deprive anyone of an indigenous identity just because of the success of [programs] of cultural obliteration is ironic at best. (243)

A satisfactory solution to balance Fee’s undoubtedly valid standpoint and simultaneously reasonable concerns about the propagation of an essentialist ideology of culture being “in the blood” (cf. Kolig *Introduction* 9) might be deduced from Friedman’s explanation of the distinction between *ethnicity* and *traditional ethnicity*:

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/hulmek.html>, 29 May 2010.

If 'cultural identity' is the generic concept, referring to the attribution of a set of qualities to a given population, we can say that cultural identity that is experienced as carried by the individual, in the blood, so to say, is what is commonly known as ethnicity. It is not practiced but inherent, not achieved but ascribed. [...] Traditional ethnicity is a very different kind of cultural identity. It is based on membership defined by the practice of certain activities including those related to descent. Ethnic affiliation can be easily changed or complemented by geographic mobility or by change in reference. Where a member of a group changes residence he is adopted or adopts the local ancestors and gods and becomes a practicing member of the new community. Here the social group is more like a congregation than a biological unit. (29-30)

The authors of all three novels appear to be advocates of shifting the emphasis from ascribed ethnicity to a traditional model of ethnicity where ethnic affiliation depends on the group that one considers himself to be a part of and can therefore be acquired. Friedman states that ethnicity can refer to biological or cultural descent (cf. 29); where (indigenous) cultural descent is not given, resorting to a notion of traditional ethnicity offers individuals the possibility of becoming part of a group that consciously practices indigenous culture. The key here appears to be the individual's willingness to immerse himself in an indigenous environment and participate in the culture, no matter what his cultural experience has been up to that point: "You believe you is, you feel it, you can be Aborigine all right. You believe, you belong." (247), an Aboriginal elder tells Billy, who has come to Karnama to find out more about his heritage, and ultimately Billy succeeds on his quest for his Aboriginality. And he is not the only one whose indigenous self has come to the fore through becoming an active part of an indigenous community; this applies to Beth and Camagu, protagonists of the other two novels, as well. These characters are the best examples of how exposure to and engaging with one's roots can positively affect a person – Camagu, "for the first time after many years, is a very fulfilled man" (139) – and that their newfound roots can in fact become meaningful to them, which ultimately applies to the protagonists of all three novels.

The last paragraph has presupposed an indigenous group well-versed in their specific culture helping a "lost" member gain or regain a sense of indigeneity for that person's individual benefit – if, however, an entire group of people is trying to do that very thing, the aforementioned political impact truly comes into play. If the construction of contemporary indigeneity is, as Kolig writes, "a calculated attempt [...] to utilise the best and practically most useful portions of the past and combine them with the opportunities of the present" (*Introduction* 16), does that mean the

results should be up for public contestation? Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have first investigated the “invention of tradition” which refers to reconstruction of traditional cultural forms after a complete loss of culture, with no means of verification – usually with a motivation beyond the mere interest in heritage (cf. Friedman 12). No such extreme case is described in the novels discussed, but naturally the cultural endeavours of Scott’s Aboriginal people, Duff’s Maori and Mda’s Xhosa are to a certain degree motivated by the desire to improve living conditions for the people concerned, and in this context, John Friedman’s defence of “invention” makes a valid point:

All cultural creation is motivated. [...] Invention is [...] grounded in historical conditions and necessarily in a social and existential continuity. [...] [A particular ‘invented’ cultural movement] can only function if [it] resonate[s] with the experiences of the subjects that participate in [it]. [...] There is no contradiction [...] between the global reordering of social realities and what might be referred to as cultural continuity. (13)

Thus, it is stressed again that if indigenous culture in the new millennium is believable for the people involved and lived with conviction, there can be no doubt about it being “real”. The next chapters will investigate, therefore, whether the characters in the novels (and the authors) succeed in “putting it all together and believing in it”, as Billy suggests in *True Country*.

## 4. Community and Social Organisation

### 4.1. Organisation of Indigenous Society through Time

Traditional indigenous Australia has three levels of social structure: the largest group, the linguistic or dialectical unit in Roland Berndt's classification, is often still referred to as a *tribe*. The politically, economically and socially most important unit is the local group, often called the clan, whose members are united by descent from a common ancestor. The smallest social group is the family, which has a separate residence and is economically independent; this family consists of two parents and their children and may be extended through different factors – polygamy, sons' families and finally the system of kinship, which allows every member of a language group to identify a relationship to every other member; an Aboriginal person's family may thus consist of 500 or more people (cf. Edwards 53-58).

Traditional Maori societal organisation was based on the myth of their ancestors' canoe journey from Polynesia. Maori society is divided in *waka*, *iwi*, *hapu* and *whanau*, the *waka* being the loosely bound organisation of the descendants of the travellers in one canoe. The *iwi*, then, is the tribe or chiefdom, the "largest socio-political organisation" (Mead 193), led by the *ariki*, or paramount chief. It was composed of several *hapu*, or sub-tribes, each reaching up to 300 people. The smallest unit was the *whanau*, an extended family group; it consisted of "three to four generation levels, which included grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren and numbered as many as thirty or more people. The whanau was the household unit in the village" (Mead 194).

The Xhosa nation is believed to have been united by the great chief Tshawe, the dates of whose reign are unknown. The chiefdoms which it consists of are in turn made up of multiple clans and led by a king or paramount chief. The clans are extended families with a patriarch at their head.<sup>44</sup>

During the colonial era, these systems of social organisation were largely disrupted, and many contemporary indigenous people are unable to exactly identify their descent. If social structures resembling the ones described above exist in this day and age, they are in many cases a product of the colonial period or its aftermath and do

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. <http://www.rhi.org.za/index.php?ref=articles&do=rd&artid=5>, 29 May 2010.

not exist in a direct continuation from pre-colonial days. In the case of the Xhosa, for example, the traditional social order was destroyed during the colonial period, but “re-instituted as part of the Homelands policy of the 1970s”<sup>45</sup>. The chiefs, however, were selected by the apartheid government and were effectively its puppets who had no support by the people they were supposed to rule<sup>46</sup>.

A product of the colonial era entirely is the nationwide indigenous community in settler nations, which, like the modern nation state itself, is an imagined community (cf. Beckett 2). Benedict Anderson describes the nation as an imagined community because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or ever hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 15, cited in Beckett 2). This applies to the Aboriginal and Maori people in their entirety as well. In Australia and New Zealand, a pan-Aboriginal and Maori consciousness arose only with the advent of the colonialists. As outlined in chapter 2.1, Australia’s indigenous population consisted of hundreds of linguistically and culturally distinct groups who only began to perceive themselves as sharing common traits in light of the much greater cultural difference to the European settlers. The Maori people, too, “came to conceive of themselves as a type of people” (Levine *Iwi* 73) only during the colonial era; the term *Maori*, meaning ‘usual’ or ‘ordinary’, began to be used for the whole of New Zealand’s indigenous population in the 1820s (ibid.). The Xhosa nation, despite having a longer history than the Aboriginal and Maori communities and dating back to pre-colonial days, resembles the former ethnic groups in being an imagined community.

Many small-scale indigenous communities that exist today do not reflect pre-colonial tribes, clans or extended families, but have their roots in the colonial era and are thus based on the larger ethnic group Aboriginal, Maori or Xhosa. This is the type of community which predominates in the novels.

The remote Aboriginal community of Karnama is a mission town; Father Paul claims that when the missionaries first arrived there, “they were dying out, in terms of numbers” (24). This community can be traced back to pre-colonial days, and its tribal

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.rhi.org.za/index.php?ref=articles&do=rd&artid=5>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. <http://www.rhi.org.za/index.php?ref=articles&do=rd&artid=5>, 29 May 2010.

affiliation is Nyungar; Karnama, however, houses individuals of other descent as well, and its population primarily identifies as Aboriginal. Kim Scott himself mentions in his author's note that his intention was to create an "appropriately 'typical'" community in order to be able to explore pan-Aboriginal concerns.

The settlement of Pine Block is perhaps most accurately described as a Maori ghetto – a desolate part of the fictional city of Two Lakes<sup>47</sup> which houses presumably all or most of its indigenous population (Beth refers to it as a "state-owned slum" – 7). The people of Pine Block feel Maori rather than allegiance with a particular tribe. At least some members of the community, most prominently Beth Heke, can, however, identify a native community, and Wainui, the village Beth grew up in, is the traditional counterpart to Pine Block.

In the case of Qolorha, a strong allegiance with particular ethnic groups within the Xhosa nation can be determined. Qukezwa is very aware of the Khoikhoi part of her heritage, the abaThwa people observe their own singular customs (one of which, a trance-invoking dance, is stolen by elder Bhonco for use in his own cult), Camagu himself is a member of the amaMpondomise clan; yet, as a whole, Qolorha is clearly Xhosa, not least as a site of great historical significance to the entire Xhosa nation.

Since all the communities at the hearts of the novels – Qolorha, Karnama and Pine Block – are either based on the larger ethnic group to begin with or welcoming to outsiders, one may draw the conclusion that the authors of the three novels share the opinion that the composition of a contemporary indigenous community may well reflect the changes in indigenous society over the last few hundred years and that the shared experience of being Maori, Aboriginal or Xhosa is more significant to a contemporary indigenous identity than the shared link to a specific ancestor.

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<sup>47</sup> Two Lakes is based on the city of Rotorua, where Duff grew up (cf. <http://biography.jrank.org/pages/4284/Duff-Alan.html>, 29 May 2010).



## ***4.2. Community and Belonging***

A common characteristic of traditional indigenous cultures is the orientation towards the group as opposed to the focus on the individual in Western societies. This value originates from spiritual traditions and the practical need to look after the fellow members of one's community in order to survive under often difficult living conditions. Paulson writes that for traditional Aboriginal society, "harmony and wholeness can only be fulfilled in community. Spiritual responsibility for creation can only be fulfilled in community. Social and economic survival can only be achieved in community" (91).

In *Once Were Warriors* this indigenous spirit of community is illustrated clearly. The community of Pine Block is in a dire situation socially and culturally; while a form of Maori consciousness is present in the settlement, it is not one that benefits or unites its population. Jake Heke and his neighbours feel solidarity on the basis of sharing an ethnic heritage, but this does not give them a positive direction; it only manifests itself in railing against their powerlessness in the face of their disadvantaged situation during daily visits to the pub and starting frequent fights and committing violence, always invoking their people's warrior past.

For the youth of Pine Block, the need to belong with other people is sated by gang membership (cf. 139), where members frequently turn on each other and the gangs as a whole do not refrain from turning their criminal activities on fellow Maori. The women of the settlement try to hold their families together, but often fail. Emotionally, all of them are isolated, unable to form supportive relationships with each other.

To this broken community Duff presents a contrast: Wainui. After her daughter's suicide, Beth has hardly comprehended what has happened, when her people reach out to her: The people of the village she hails from insist that she "bring her child home for a proper farewell" (120), a traditional Maori wake, and invite her to return to her rural home village. At first, Beth is unable to make sense of all this and feels uneasy in their midst, but she soon begins to derive comfort from the honest compassion of Wainui's people and their vocal and unafraid sharing in her grief.

People came; they stood in their little groups before the coffin with bowed heads and just the wail of formal weeping. [...] Then around the room rubbing noses in the old way: hongi. Getting to Beth and embracing her, sobbing over her, patting her back, mostly wordless, and then gone. Ghosts. Just nice ghosts being kind to a woman, not because they knew her but because she was one of them.

This occurring more and more to Beth, their kindness. (123)

The story of Grace's wake depicts one aspect of community orientation in traditional indigenous cultures: In Aboriginal and Maori cultures, there is no shame in showing vulnerability, whereas in Western societies, people are generally expected to put on a brave face in public (cf. Paulson 87; Mead 216). In the context of the Maori funeral ceremony, public grieving is expected - "respect [is] paid to those who are weeping and [...] care taken not to stem the flow of tears. The mourners have the right to weep in public. [...] The British value placed on the stiff upper lip in the face of adversity has no place in the tangihanga<sup>48</sup>" (Mead 216).

During the ceremony, Te Tupaea, the chief, also addresses communal responsibility:

an ancestor whose child was accidentally drowned ... blamed his wife, was going to kill her for her neglect ... the tribe with him ... wanting to kill her. But not so the great chief ... he told them no, they must wait ... discuss it first, your anger, and let the fire die down before you start talking of shedding your clothing. They did talk. For many days they talked. They decided it was all their fault ... since the child belonged to the whanau, them as a whole, it was all their responsibility. So the chief asking them: Now tell me who dies? (126)

In Wainui Beth finally experiences support instead of allocation of blame, and unconditional acceptance by people to whom the way they act towards her comes completely naturally, as part of their being Maori. Maoriness, for the first time in her life, acquires a positive meaning for Beth: one of kindness, unity, and a true feeling of belonging. When Beth returns to Pine Block, she organises gatherings with the paramount chief in order to instil this natural feeling of community in her people, and the collective performance of rituals does manage to give the Pine Blockers an idea of what Beth experienced in Wainui: "It was just the, you know, the sticking togetherness, eh." (192).

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<sup>48</sup> Funeral, rites for the dead cf. <http://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/index.cfm?dictionaryKeywords=tangihanga&search.x=36&search.y=10&search=search&n=1&idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=>, 29 May 2010.

Karnama, the Aboriginal community Billy encounters, cannot compare to Wainui in terms of strong and confident living of indigenous culture. There is some disassociation between the community elders, who still possess a strong Aboriginal consciousness, and the younger generation, who, similarly to Pine Block, is affected by alcoholism, violence and a lack of cultural direction. They are not particularly interested in the cultural knowledge the elders have to offer.

That community consciousness is still present in Karnama in the older generation is indicated through the narrative perspective of the novel, which alternates between Billy's and occasionally that of other characters and that of a communal Aboriginal voice, which represents the elders of Karnama and which comments on the happenings in Karnama and ultimately welcomes Billy into Aboriginal society. This first person plural narration, which opens and closes the novel and relays some of its most crucial passages, conveys the impression that Karnama's older generation is of one collective mind. They lament the situation – "Little by little Aborigine going down. Drinking and dying. Making circles, little and more little. [...] We want to fly up again." (124) and fear for their young – "They can't forget about our roots, they can't leave behind and go to the whiteman roots. That no good." (125; cf. chapter 8.2.1).

The sense of community described by Paulson is thus in danger of disappearing and becoming a thing of the past. The elders of Karnama want to reach the younger generation, and the beginning of a bridging between the generations is achieved when young people interested in keeping Aboriginal culture alive become active in Karnama – Billy and Gabriella. The project of writing down their history is crucial to the reclamation and strengthening of Aboriginal cultural identity in *True Country* (cf. chapter 8.2.1), and the old and the young collaborate on it: "So Billy is doing it with us now, and Gabriella too. We might all be writing together, really." (85).

The community of Qolorha is a strong one, where each individual has a place and is cared for and talked about; there is no doubt about their belonging. This experience is not portrayed as solely positive; Xoliswa Ximiya, for example, complains about the stifling nature of the village, and although her viewpoint is not one of authority in the novel, in fact being fairly often subject of ridicule, the reader is at times inclined to

agree with her. Gossip, ready judgment, and a sense of propriety by the community over the individual can make life difficult for those requiring a great deal of privacy and personal space.

Mda illustrates the importance of community in indigenous culture on a symbolic level: Xoliswa leaving Qolorha signifies the renunciation of her Xhosa roots, and the rifts in the community threaten Xhosa culture, because personal animosities and long-standing quarrels prevent constructive dialogue and influence peoples' decisions to an extent that the future of the village is threatened (cf. chapter 6.1). The Unbelievers "stand for progress" mainly to oppose the Believers, without truly understanding what they are advocating – Qukezwa, meanwhile, realises that the construction of a hotel and casino on Qolorha's coastline would mean the end of the (relatively) undisturbed living of Xhosa culture in the village, as Qolorha would then be dependent on the owners and operators of the development. It is up to the people of Qolorha to collectively realize that and work together to prevent the loss of their land, and come up with alternative ways of securing the amenities the hotel complex would bring, but this does not happen in the novel. Camagu darkly muses that next time, a similar development might not be able to be warded off; this is because the people of Qolorha have still not learned to put aside their pride and stubbornness in favour of acting like a community – instead, the fight between Believers and Unbelievers survives Zim's death and culminates in Bhonco attacking and nearly killing John Dalton out of bitterness over the Believers' "win" (cf. *Heart*, 274-277).

It is important to note that all the novels tell the story of individuals out of touch with their cultural roots who find, by accident or on purpose, a community where a collective indigenous consciousness is present. For all of them, this is the beginning of a gradual (re-)discovery of their own indigeneity. The alienation they have experienced in the city is contrasted by the communal life in the rural villages they visit, and community thus becomes the first building block to their own indigenous identity. The fact that two of these characters stay in the visited community and one attempts to recreate it in her hometown is testament to the fact that a contemporary indigenous cultural identity still relies very much on a strong experience of community in what might be contrasted to the individualism of Western society. One's indigenous identity cannot be lived in isolation; the imagined Aboriginal,

Maori or Xhosa community must be grounded in actual small-scale communities – be they rural with a long history or urban and consciously created – where there is regular interaction between the members and a communal practice of indigenous culture.

### ***4.3. Social Roles in Contemporary Indigenous Society***

#### **4.3.1. Social Status and Leadership**

How, then, do the authors ideally envision the inner workings of contemporary indigenous communities? The communal orientation of indigenous societies addressed in the last chapter, while having many positive aspects, has also meant that the freedom of choice of the individual with regard to living his or her own life has been limited. Where Western societies, at least in theory, regard personal freedom and self-realisation of the individual as of the utmost importance, traditional societies see the individual mainly in relation to the other members of the community – and his role in that community has often been determined from birth.

In the context of Australian Aboriginal society, Paulson (86) describes this value orientation as “status focus” as opposed to the “achievement focus” of Western society.

An Aboriginal person’s identity is determined by the formal credentials of his or her conception, skin and clan totems. They tell us who that person is. The identity of most non-Aboriginal people is determined by their achievements. They tell us what that person does. The amount of respect an Aboriginal person receives is permanently fixed because it focuses attention on his or her place within the kinship system and the fulfilment of the spiritual responsibilities of that kinship totem. The amount a non-Aboriginal person receives can vary according to his or her accomplishments or failures. In this system, attention is focused on performance. (Paulson 86)

Traditional Native Australian band society, however, has egalitarian social relations (cf. King 31) – in societies composed of chiefdoms, which applies to both the Maori and the Xhosa, Paulson’s ‘status focus’ manifests itself in much more restrictive conditions such as hereditary rank.

A traditional chiefdom unites a number of separate communities, led by one person, the chief, and always involves social stratification (cf. King 25). It is divided into elite and commoner classes, with each individual “born to a specific rank in society, depending on his or her kinship group or place in the birth order” (ibid.). Simple

chiefdoms contained two levels of hierarchy, with the chief having authority over the community chieftains. In a complex chiefdom, a third level of administration existed, with several chiefs owing allegiance to a paramount chief.

*Once Were Warriors* and *The Heart of Redness* are set in 1990 (cf. 105) and 1998 (cf. 31), respectively, but social structures that resemble elements of the pre-colonial organisation into chiefdoms are portrayed as a feature of contemporary indigenous society. *Once Were Warriors* not only features a paramount chief, but Beth's husband Jake knows his rank in Maori society. He is testament to Duff's belief that the hierarchies of traditional Maori society affect indigenous New Zealanders even today, and the author denounces this aspect of his traditional culture in his novel. Jake is clearly traumatised by the taunting and social ostracization he has experienced as a child from fellow Maori children and their families as a result of being the descendant of a slave, and through his story, Duff emphasises the need for contemporary Maori society to finally and truly overcome this class system of old. In a time of indigenous cultural revival and one where cultural elements that can be traced back directly to pre-colonial times are rare, such traces of heritage are often regarded as worthy of protection as a matter of principle; however, Hoskins, a Maori, stresses the need for indigenous people involved in the rebuilding of their cultures to take a critical look at them, too – from an inside perspective (cf. 37-38).

Hey kids. Know what I inherited as a Maori? [...] Slaves. [...] My family were slaves. [...] My branch of the Heke line was descended from a slave. A fulla taken prisoner by the enemy when he shoulda – he *woulda* – been better off dyin. In the fight. [...] Yep. Slave he was, this ancestor of mine. And Beth getting worried by Jake's tone.

When I was a kid – me and my brothers and sisters – we weren't allowed to play with many other families in our pa. No way, not the Hekes, man. Don't play with them, you'll get the slave disease. That's what they used to say. [...] See, kids, to be a warrior and captured in battle was the pits. Just the pits, eh. Better to die. So us Hekes – *innocent* – having to cop the shit from being descended from this weakling arsehole of an ancestor. [...] Five hundred years, that's what they used to tell us Heke kids. Five hundred years of the slave curse bein on our heads. [...]

So that's *your* family history on your father's side, kids. So Beth informing them all: Slaves, kids. Us Maoris used to practice slavery just like them poor Negroes had to endure in America. [...] Yet to read the newspapers, on the TV every damn day, you'd think we're descended from a packa angels, and it's the Pakeha who's the devil. [...?] (103)

Hereditary rank is in no way as pervasive in contemporary Qolorha; its only manifestation is the institution of a chief, who is characterised as useless and only interested in his own gain (cf. page 37): “The chief is a headless twit whose only function in society is to eat bribes” (115).

Te Tupaea, Duff’s Maori paramount chief, on the other hand, is a very capable personality, versed in the ways of traditional Maori and Western society, confident in himself as a Maori and intent on improving the situation of his fellow indigenous New Zealanders and giving them confidence in their heritage and culture. Despite Duff’s chief being a positive, admirable character, who has proven that he is not “just an ordinary man born with chiefly status” (124), both Duff and Mda are clearly advocates of personal freedom and democracy and renounce the notion of hereditary leadership. “I really don’t believe in leadership by birth. Rather I believe in leadership on merit”, Mda says in an interview<sup>49</sup>.

Duff agrees with Mda on this matter – he has dedicated chapters of his non-fiction work *Maori: The Crisis and the Challenge*, which contains his ideas and suggestions for a successful future of his people, to the issue of hereditary leadership, which he considers the bane of Maori society (5-6). Duff locates the source of the problems of contemporary Maori in the traditional Maori forms of social organisation, which, he argues, with their assigned and fixed rank for every individual discouraged personal creativity and ambition and, therefore, promoted what he calls “unthinkingness” (Duff *Maori* 6). His argumentation is flawed insofar as he ignores that hereditary rank is not pervasive in Maori society today, particularly not in urban areas and his implication that the Maori, as an ethnic group, have no work ethic because of traditional Maori social structures is therefore at best nonsensical and at worst racist; his basic argument against hereditary rank, however, can hardly be contested. It has to be noted, though, that Maori assignment of leadership was not completely rigid as implied by Duff and had some meritocratic elements – while only status could put you in a position of authority, adequate fulfilment of duties and support of the people was required to keep it (cf. Mead 199, 205).

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. [http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview\\_Wark.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview_Wark.html), 29 May 2010.

Mda's picture of Xhosa hierarchies is more nuanced – he has one of Qolorha's teachers explain that pre-contact Xhosa society, even though status was determined by birth, had democratic elements which were in fact eliminated during the course of the so-called "civilising mission":

Chiefs cannot just issue orders [...]. That is what democracy is all about. Citizens must first debate these matters. There must be a consensus before a decision is taken."

"Such are the ills of democracy!" remarks Bhonco.

"But it was like that even in the days of our forefathers," says the teacher. "Chiefs never made decisions unilaterally. That is why they had councillors who would go out to get the views of the people first. That is why they held imbhizos which all the men were obliged to attend. Things were spoiled during the Middle Generations when the white man imposed a new system on us, and created his own petty chiefs who became little despots of their masters." (*Heart* 95)

Despite their different positions on their respective cultures regarding this matter, Mda and Duff are unanimous in voicing that a feasible contemporary indigenous community needs to be built on democratic principles and that a leader who makes decisions for the people is undesirable. Both novels promote initiatives by the people for the people and stress the importance of actively taking charge of one's own destiny. Duff, having, with Te Tupaea, created a highly charismatic chief capable of inspiring group consciousness, stresses that the chief's role can ultimately only be symbolic and that the people of Pine Block will have to find their own way of doing things and act without the guidance of a leader figure. Not only should the chief not have political power over them, but in a cultural context, too, self-reliance and creativity is necessary. Te Tupaea can only give the people of Pine Block an idea of what they can achieve and how they can achieve it – the rest they have to do themselves. That they have trouble with this at first is obvious when they all readily join in the gatherings with the paramount chief (cf. chapter 4.2) to partake in the practice of Maori rituals and Beth's and the chief's project of injecting them with cultural pride appears to have worked, but as soon as the chief remains absent one day, they are thrown – "mumblin and whisperin and feet shufflin and head scratchin amongst emselves". Beth, however, asks them "What, we playin follow the leader or sumptin?" and starts singing a traditional Maori song, and eventually they all join in. At the end of the passage, it turns out that "all this time the chief was in a friend's car laying low" – and apparently his plan to have the Maori community of



Pine Block become independent of a Maori leader figure is beginning to achieve success (cf. 191).

Mda's work reflects a general mistrust of authority as his novel portrays all characters in positions of power as acting in their own interest rather than that of the people; the "aristocrats of the revolution", having overcome apartheid, are now mostly concerned about keeping their position and allow no competition, and chief Xikixa is abusing his position as the one in charge of land allocation around Qolorha for his personal gain, taking bribes from white and wealthy black people in exchange for plots of land on which they build holiday cottages, when the land rightfully belongs to the village population. Xikixa is therefore an example of the white infiltration of traditional structures; an outward traditionally indigenous, "preserved" structure masks the reality of outsiders being in control. Mda, like Duff, sees the future in the people helping themselves – and this requires personal freedom and a social structure that allows people to determine their own place in society.

Mda's attitudes towards leadership are expressed in the context of spiritual leadership as well; following a leader has not served the Xhosa people well in the past. Here Mda, like Duff, denounces a lack of critical thinking, although he is careful to contextualise it: "What I am saying is that it is wrong to dismiss those who believed in Nongqawuse as foolish. [...] Her prophecies arose out of the spiritual and material anguish of the amaXhosa nation" (245). However, the novel still points to the naivety of Belief in passages such as the following:

The fact that only Nongqawuse, Nombanda, and Mhlakaza could see or speak to the new people enhanced the prestige of the prophets. Many of those who were tempted not to believe were converted by this fact. (107)

As will be discussed in chapter 6.3, Qukezwa is written to be the present incarnation of Nongqawuse; she, however, refuses to be followed, encouraging people to think for themselves and act on their own. Her attitude becomes especially clear in her interactions with Camagu: she is patient in sharing her wealth of knowledge with him, but always encourages him to think about what he has learned, and when he, beside himself after the second demonstration of split-tone singing that has given him an orgasm, chases after her shouting of his love for her, she recognises that he is not thinking clearly, and rejects him. Mda's indigenous community is one of

independent, critical thinkers, actively taking control of their own destiny, and Qukezwa stands for that.

Australian Aboriginal society traditionally has no class division; social status is partly based on age – “Aboriginal people honor age over youth. It is always the elders who have the secret/sacred knowledge and have therefore earned knowledge and status” (Paulson 89). In *True Country*, the elders have the sacred knowledge, but the large part of Karnama’s youth does not accord them respect for it. The elders eventually make the younger generation take note of their power when they curse a young girl whose parents have failed to make her follow a cleansing ritual (cf. chapter 6.2); within the smaller group of those who take active part in the project of cultural survival, there is mutual respect, each generation recognising and appreciating the contribution of the other (cf. chapters 4.2, 8.2.1).

#### **4.3.2. Indigenous Women**

The role of women in traditional systems of social organisation varied widely and the notion that in pre-colonial indigenous societies women generally enjoyed less respect and fewer opportunities than in modern Western cultures is misleading, the best example to disprove such a notion being matriarchally organised societies where women wielded great power and influence. Additionally, as has been discussed, indigenous cultures for centuries have been influenced by the cultures of the colonialists and a disadvantaged status of women in a given contemporary indigenous society cannot simply be blamed on “traditional mores”. Ify Grace Achufusi notes, for example, that the popularly invoked quintessentially African patriarchy is a misconception – while an “inequality of sexes existed” (40) in pre-colonial Africa because of the division of labour between men and women and the assignment of domestic tasks to women, male domination and female oppression in Africa was enforced by colonialism and the religions of Christianity and Islam (cf. 40-42).

In the particular case of pre-colonial Xhosa culture, however, women did in fact have a low status in society and almost no rights.

A girl was trained to serve all the men and the older women of the household into which she married. A woman had no right to land or even to the grain that she had cultivated, except through men. She was a legal minor who had access to judicial action only through male representatives. (King 205)

Traditional Xhosa law seems to still determine life in contemporary Qolorha where women are concerned, since Qukezwa rebels against precisely what is described in the above paragraph. When she is caught cutting down imported trees in order to protect the native flora, she insists that she and not her father should be charged since it was she who committed the crime. The following scene takes place before the *inkundla*<sup>50</sup> – (“Since when do girls even attend an inkundla?” asks Bhonco.)

“I am twenty years old,” says Qukezwa.

“You are a minor still. Even if you were thirty or fifty you would still be a minor as long as you are not married,” explains Chief Xikixa.

“That is the old law,” cries Qukezwa, “the law that weighed heavily on our shoulders during the sufferings of the Middle Generations. In the new South Africa where there is no discrimination, it does not work.” (213)

Qukezwa might see the new South Africa more in its ideal than its actual state, but she sees clearly in her assessment that this traditional law still at work in Qolorha is in dire need of change or abolition.

In the idyllic village, bad treatment of women is no rarity. “Men are more comfortable with the kind of women they can trample under their feet” (97), the narrator claims with reference to Xoliswa Ximiya, an attitude exhibited during the incident that follows: NoGiant, a member of Camagu’s cooperative, having gained confidence on the grounds of her new employment, asks her husband for something she has never done before: to take a bath before receiving his “conjugal rights”, which causes him to explode in anger.

“You think that just because you now make all this money running around with educated people I am no longer good enough for you?” he yelled.

He was pouring paraffin all over the rondavel while ranting and raving about her unreasonable demand that he should wash his body. Since when have conditions ever been set before he could enjoy the pleasures of marriage? Where was the bath when he paid his father’s cattle for her? What gives her, a mere woman, the right to pass judgement on the state of his cleanliness or lack thereof?

He set the house ablaze. (220)

Her husband’s extreme reaction to NoGiant’s completely reasonable demand exposes the deep-seated patriarchal attitudes in Qolorha – and it allows Mda to address the difficult issue of balancing respect for tradition – which Camagu has been lauded for

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<sup>50</sup> Court; cf. <http://www.xhosadictionary.com/search.php?igama=inkundla&styp=general&lang=XE>, 29 May 2010.

– with a healthy assessment of what is beneficial to the people whose lives are determined by it. Camagu – as an outsider who is trying to fit in the indigenous village, additionally to having a true attachment to Xhosa tradition and the ignorant and judgmental John Dalton as an example of how not to act – is “disturbed that the success of the cooperative society is causing its members so many problems with their families”, which betrays an insecurity whether he did the right thing in shaking up the established order of things in Qolorha by initiating the project. Qukezwa, confident in herself and her status, sees clearly that this is a necessary change – and that the men will have to adapt: “You should not worry yourself about that. [...] Men are insecure when women make more money. It makes women more independent. Men will just have to get used to it.” (220) Mda’s novel asserts that for an indigenous community, just like any other, the ideal must be for women to enjoy equal respect and opportunities as men do – even if this should conflict with the tradition of a specific group.

Alan Duff expresses the same stance in his novel. His work does not explore the historical development of gender roles in the context of the Maori people, but implies that Maori traditional society is inherently sexist. We get to know the personal history of Beth, who has experienced discrimination of women as a part of her upbringing in a rural Maori community. The reader can follow her thoughts as she is trying to process the initially overwhelming situation she has found herself in at her daughter’s wake:

Beth half resenting the male elders, their privileged position, their secret language that only they and a few others knew; remembering that this very place, its cultural practices, had always been a mystery to a young girl growing up: a males-only domain. And only certain males at that. From certain families. From chiefly lines. And to hell with the rest, you’re here to serve us. That’s how a girl’d felt. And growing up to the knowledge that as a woman she was never going to have the right to speak publicly, as this man now was. (...)” (120)

Hoskins notes that among some iwi, women enjoyed equality with men, but that this is the exception (cf. 39); she essentially agrees with Duff’s position on the basis of her own experience, noting that she very rarely saw “women speak in formal proceedings within the wharenuī<sup>51</sup>” (42).

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<sup>51</sup> Meeting house; the main building on the *marae*, the “sacred reserve where people meet for ritual occasions and to host groups of visitors” (Sissons 64), cf.

Duff's novel sees Beth escape this passivity which has been forced upon her by taking matters in her own hands – she becomes the organiser for self-help initiatives such as providing food and a sympathetic ear for the youth of the community in order to keep them off the streets, and ultimately, she is the leader of the gatherings in her front yard after she and Te Tupaea have decided it is time to let the people of Pine Block explore their heritage on their own.

In both Mda's and Duff's novel, women are central to the futures of their indigenous nations – Beth, the planner driven by a desire to utilise her people's rich cultural history and tradition to improve their future, Qukezwa, with her combination of spirituality and traditional knowledge and practical thinking the model of a modern indigenous person.

In *True Country*, assertions about gender roles in a contemporary indigenous community are made without involving the past – there is violence against women in Karnama, but it is not related to indigenous tradition by the author as it is in the other novels; like in Pine Block, it arises from helplessness and alcohol abuse, but at no point is Aboriginal tradition invoked as a justification like Maori “warriorhood” is in *Once Were Warriors*. The main agents of Aboriginal identity construction in Karnama are to equal parts male and female, the older generation being represented by Fatima and Sebastian, the younger by Billy and Gabriella, indicating that equality of the sexes is, for Scott, an understood part of a future Aboriginal community.

## 5. Place

### 5.1. *Indigenous People and the Land*

Indigenous people are generally seen as possessing an “almost magical harmony with nature” (Strang 94) and as being “at home in the wilderness, spiritually attuned, wise about ecology, and deeply attached to their traditional lands” (ibid.). This conception results from a fundamentally different attitude towards nature than the one the Westerner recognizes – in Western societies, the role of the environment has long been that of a “resource pool for the benefit of humankind” (Hinch and Butler 14). In indigenous cultures, the natural surroundings are central to the existence of the people, not only in providing them with food and shelter, but also in shaping their very identity.

The meaning attached to the land and soil is best illustrated by creation mythology such as the Aboriginal *Dreamtime*. In this creation period, ancestral beings in the form of animal deities sang the landscape and its inhabitants into being and remain in the land they created, making it a “living, sentient landscape that watches and responds to human action and provides a source of spiritual power” (Strang 97). It is these sacred beings who became the totems for human clans, and since in a traditional Aboriginal cosmology, “human spiritual being emerges from these ancestral forces” (ibid.), every individual’s spirit is tied to a physical location from which it has emerged and to which it is ritually returned after death. The land is, thus, in a traditional Aboriginal cosmology, “the very basis of human ‘being’ imbuing it with spiritual meaning and emotive force” (ibid.).

Of the Maori and Xhosa people, too, it is said that they “do not ‘own’ the land, they ‘belong’ to it” (Kolig *Guardians* 112). Maori *iwi* and *hapu* have a lasting spiritual bond with their traditionally inhabited lands or even “with indigenous nature per se, regardless of location” (ibid.). It is the land that holds the spiritual power governing Maori society, as is expressed in Beth’s statement that the Pakeha “took our land, our mana, left us with nothing” (cf. chapter 3.2.1). For both the Maori and the Xhosa, the burying of the umbilical cord and placenta of a newborn baby in the ground close to the homestead is an important tradition ensuring the “continual connectedness between the children and the land” (Kunnie, xi), a tradition referred to in *Heart* when

Bhonco is upset that his daughter wants to leave “the place where her umbilical cord is buried” (226). Kunnie writes that for the Xhosa and other indigenous peoples,

Land connects children with their past, as the home of their ancestors and their unborn sisters and brothers; with the present, as provider of the material and spiritual needs; and with the future, as the legacy they hold in trust for their children and the children of their children. Although Indigenous peoples around the world vary widely in their customs, traditions, rituals, languages, and so on, land is considered by all as the centre of the universe, a parent, a giver of life, the core of our cultures, rituals, and traditions. (xi)

Many indigenous people today, however, have grown up away from the traditional lands of their forebears and do not have their intuitive and meaningful connection with their natural surroundings. Colonial interference and its aftermath have added the urban area as another location of indigenous culture, which must be investigated on its own terms, as will be done in chapter 5.3.

## ***5.2. Affinity with Nature in Contemporary Indigeneity***

*The Heart of Redness* and *True Country* are both set in rural areas steeped in indigenous history, but if any character in the three novels embodies the elusive “magical harmony with nature” discussed in the above chapter, it is *Heart*’s Qukezwa, whose understanding of the Wild Coast and its flora and fauna is vast and whose connection to her natural surroundings transcends the ordinary. She knows the best time for harvesting the sea for mussels and oysters (138), and she knows which foreign trees harm the native ones (216). Like her father and other elders of Qolorha, Qukezwa can talk in whistles and communicate with the birds in their own language, “the language of the spirits” (117). She tells Camagu how he can acquaint himself with Qolorha’s environment – “When the storm comes it will sweep you away. You didn’t cleanse yourself when you first came here. You must drink water from the sea when you are a stranger, so the sea can get used to you. Then it will love you.” (122) – and her split-tone singing manages to capture her surroundings perfectly.

Many voices come from her mouth. Deep sounds that echo like the night. Sounds that have the heaviness of a steamy summer night. Flaming sounds that crackle like the veld fire. Light sounds that float like flakes of snow on top of the Amathole Mountains. Hollow sounds like laughing mountains. (152)

Qukezwa, however, is exceptional in this regard even in the indigenous village of Qolorha – she almost gives the impression of being a nature goddess. When she surprises Camagu on her horse at night, she is like an apparition to him; she appears

to be in a different realm and at the same time completely at one with her surroundings.

“They say when an owl of the night hoots at daytime, then we must brace ourselves for misfortune,” observes a silvery voice.

He is startled out of his reverie. A silvery beast stands right in front of him. She is sitting on top of it, all silvery in her smug smile. As usual, she rides on Gxagxa bareback and reinless. Over her shoulder she is carrying an *umrhubhe*, the isiXhosa musical instrument that is made of a wooden bow and a single string. [...] (151)

Qukezwa obviously possesses mythical qualities that the average indigenous person cannot hope to achieve, and her experience and connection with her natural surroundings is not one that most people will be able to emulate.

That both authors do, however, consider an intimate attachment to nature achievable to some degree and essential to “feeling indigenous” is proven in the form of the experiences of their male protagonists, Camagu and Billy.

Both men are aimless and adrift – Camagu, not having found NomaRussia, sees no reason to stay in Qolorha, and Billy is so troubled by the negative developments in Karnama and his own inability to deal with them that he has taken to drinking alone in the evenings – when both of them, at this point of crisis in their lives, are able to draw strength and hope – and a connection with their own indigenous self – from a spiritual encounter with nature.

Camagu, upon discovering a brown snake in his hotel bed,

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. (98)

It is this visit by Majola which makes Camagu realise how much his traditional upbringing is still a part of him, and it is Qukezwa’s tour of Nongqawuse’s valley that has him decide to stay in the village at least for a while, because, as he tells John Dalton, “[his] soul has been captured by this valley” (116). He also continues to attribute his successes to the visit by his totem snake as the novel progresses: “It is precisely because I was visited by Majola that my fortunes have changed for the better. The house... the business...” (161).



Billy has been troubled for a while by his inability to “feel Aboriginal” when he suddenly has an epiphany: As he observes a personal ritual, going fishing on the weekends early in the morning, he encounters a crocodile. Fascinated, he watches it, until it begins to make for him. On his way back along the river to the community, he sees the crocodile again, swimming upstream, and catches himself thinking “no barramundi maybe, but I caught myself something. I know that crocodile now. He was excited and happy.” (213)

For both men their indigenous roots have suddenly become tangible, as Billy catches a glimpse into, and Camagu is reminded of, the spiritual dimension of the natural environment, an invaluable experience for both of them. For Billy, the encounter with the crocodile is only the prelude to a much more significant episode, his final discovery of his Aboriginality: In the final chapter of the novel, significantly entitled “...And Knowing”, he is fishing once again, but is not successful. As he is looking for a better fishing spot, he passes a dead crocodile, and wanting to get away from its stench, he follows the river along further than he has done so far, and uses a shallow crossing to get to the other side. As he is exploring the former site of the mission and looking at Aboriginal artefacts in one deserted hut, it starts to rain suddenly and heavily. “Billy smiled. Caught in this shell, and yet within the roaring wind and rain, he felt a part of it all. Within it, but sheltered and safe.” (253) The rain, however, shows no signs of easing, and Billy decides he will have to cross the river back to the mission in order not to worry anyone. As soon as he steps into it, he is pulled into the water.

The river coiled around him, took him, wanted to swallow him.

Billy knew it as a snake. It threw him about at the same time as it wrapped around him, pulled him to it and deeper, stilling his struggles. [...] Twisting. Muscles spinning him, holding. Light distant, a circle of light at the end of a long tunnel. It was a throat. Quiet, warm, soft darkness. He was swallowed and within. (253)

Then he is rescued, and as he is lying in bed with his friends surrounding him and stammering incoherent sentences, “[a]t the foot of the bed, his long-dead father in work clothes”, and his grandmother too,

Billy feels Walanguh beside him, they’re mute and grinning, they’re drifting out the window together. Lifted by a desert wind, high in a moonless sky,

they're drifting in silence, each as if alone, but all the time looking, trying to see, searching for a place to land.

Billy in a blue sky, clouds cobwebbing his vision, sun on his back, the air sharp, the shadow of clouds gliding across the scrubby ground below. The shadow of him. He cannot take his eyes from his shadow. The sun shining right through him, warming burning charring insides to black coals as his shadow fades. And he knew who he was, he recognised the land below him. The river snaking across burnt earth sprouting bits of green, that pool in the bend of the river, the green mission grounds, the cross of the airstrip... (254)

It is clear that Billy's interaction with the river has brought him a long way towards his own Aboriginality. Like he felt a connection with the crocodile before, he recognised the river as a spiritual being. Pascal writes that "[i]n the climactic episode, Billy has either died by drowning or had a near-death experience" (9), but the fact that Billy, after his final vision of himself and Walanguh flying together in a blue sky, is woken by the actual weather – the rain "[spitting] in the window, onto his face", and narrates "I felt it" (255), strongly indicates his survival.

He has therefore survived his interaction with the river without struggling; it seems that the river, or the snake he recognised in it, never meant to harm him, but to teach him, to shake from him all the confused and disillusioned thoughts clouding his vision and preventing him from fully immersing himself in the Aboriginal world. Other forces and beings of nature contributed to Billy's experience: The dead crocodile, which may be the one Billy had encountered before, ensured Billy would reach the river crossing and the torrential rains, for the first time, made him feel at a part of the Aboriginal world of Karnama and then ensured that he would have to enter the river. The entire chain of events almost appears to have been orchestrated for Billy's benefit.

After Billy has come to understand the spiritual dimension of the environment, he has also gained access to other aspects of his Aboriginality. In the patient's room, the living and the dead unite, and he finally feels the connection with his ancestors. Additionally, his flight with Walanguh has Billy acquire, in a way, one of the mythical capabilities of the elders (cf. chapter 6.2) that he has only heard about before. He has emerged from the river a man confident in himself as an Aboriginal person; "Welcome to you", the communal Aboriginal voice tells him (255).

Nature and place have everything to do with Billy's Aboriginality, as they do with Qukezwa's, but one cannot only consider these two unique cases. Can an affinity with nature as Qukezwa possesses it, and as Billy now begins to and both their elders do, be passed on to future generations? And what does this imply about the physical location of indigenous cultures?

A precondition for the passing on nature affinity to the younger generation is their willingness to make the effort to become involved with nature and understand it on a spiritual level. That this is not always a given is illustrated in *Heart*: Qukezwa, with her intuitive connection to her surroundings that her namesake and ancestor from the days of the cattle killing already possessed, and her passion for educating others about the native environment, should be the ideal person to convey these abilities to the indigenous youth, but even she is having trouble: the ending of *Heart* tells us that her son Heitsi is afraid of the sea, and resists her attempts to acquaint him with the water and teach him how to swim.

Qukezwa sings in soft pastel colors and looks at Heitsi. Qukezwa swallows a mouthful of fresh oysters and looks at Heitsi.

Oh, this Heitsi! He is afraid of the sea. How will he survive without the sea? How will he carry out the business of saving his people? Qukezwa grabs him by the hand and drags him into the water. He is screaming and kicking wildly. Wild waves come and cover them for a while, then rush back again. Qukezwa laughs excitedly. Heitsi screams even louder, pulling away from her grip, "No, mama! No! This boy does not belong in the sea! This boy belongs in the man village! (277)

Mda's choice to end the novel on this note may imply that he believes that capabilities such as Qukezwa's require such a complex combination of circumstances in order to flourish, not least a high level of commitment of their holder, that it is likely that they will continue to diminish from generation to generation. The boy's tendency away from nature and towards the "man village" is most likely meant to imply that Heitsi, son of the woman most capable of contributing to the survival of indigenous tradition, too, will one day want to leave Qolorha and build a life in the city instead of contributing to the sustainable growth and development of both his home community and its Xhosa tradition, which continues the pessimistic perspective of the preceding paragraph, in which Camagu predicts that eventually a developer will succeed at acquiring the Qolorha coastline.

It could, however, also be read as a reminder that Qukezwa's idea of indigeneity involving a traditional relationship with nature is not going to encompass every Xhosa person and that living in the man village is a reality for many indigenous people, many of whom do not have the option of leaving the urban area permanently for the countryside in search of their roots, and that, therefore, urban forms of living indigeneity are worthy of exploration.

### ***5.3. Urban Indigeneity***

As has been mentioned in chapter 3.2.1, a majority of people of indigenous descent today live in towns and cities – yet theirs is an experience much more contested than that of rural indigenous people. Many non-indigenous people still maintain that the countryside is the only true location of indigenous people because there they can live as closely as possible to their pre-colonial, “authentic” lifestyle, whereas they are ill-equipped to survive, materially and culturally, in the city. Urban indigeneity is mainly associated with people living on the fringe of society, dependent on government handouts, succumbing to alcoholism, drug abuse and crime as a consequence of their marginalised situation. Jasmine, a young white woman who has come to Karnama in the hopes of acquiring some direction in her life, exemplifies this attitude:

This was real. This was Australia, she thought. I am living a unique existence here, among these rocks and paintings, in this shade and breeze, beneath this sun, with these people. Aboriginal people. She hadn't really known Aboriginal people before she came here. Well, not real ones. Just some in towns mostly, down south, walking along the streets, sitting together in the distance, waiting at the end of queues. (227)

Scott's and Mda's novels do not contribute much to the dispelling of such notions; *Once Were Warriors* is the only of the three novels to portray indigenous life in the city, and the initial situation is dismal and confirms most of the assumptions outlined above. As has been touched upon, Pine Block's Maori population lives on the fringes of society and cultivates violence which partly manifests itself in gang activity, which is one area where the indigenous minority in New Zealand dominates the Pakeha majority (Sissons 69). Sissons calls gang culture “one of the more creative (if also destructive) responses by indigenous men to urban alienation” and argues that “these gangs provide an alternative status hierarchy to that of the dominant urban community” (ibid.) and, with their own complex of entry rituals and symbols of identity, a sense of belonging and group consciousness for the disillusioned

indigenous youth, albeit one that is built on very shaky foundations. Duff portrays gang activity in all its destructiveness and disassembles every warped perception a gang might have of its own noble rebellious cause when he details the “Brown Fists”’s brutal attack on a fellow poor Maori citizen and his wife (156-158), as well as their objectification of women – one scene depicts the only girl at this particular gang meeting subjecting herself to a gang-rape, something which is apparently a regular occurrence and the main reason for the presence of women at the gang headquarters (“anytime there was a sheila for blocking [...]” – 193). The sad culmination of gang activity in the novel is Beth losing another child, her eldest son Nig, who is killed in a fight with a rival gang.

Acknowledging the reality of indigenous people’s disadvantaged conditions in towns and cities, Sissons emphasises the potential of the urban area as a location of indigenous culture. He attacks the notion of indigeneity being an “essentially rural condition” (61), when it has in fact been present in the city for centuries.

It has too readily been assumed that indigenous cultures are too fragile to survive in the cities; that they need to be nurtured in rural backwaters where people know who they are and where they belong. Indigenous cultures need to have their roots in the soil, it is said. Indigenous urbanization is seen as a fatal uprooting, the final stage in a long process of assimilation into the heart of the post-settler nationhood. But cities do not magically strip indigenous people of their cultural distinctiveness in order that they might join the working masses or the ranks of the unemployed. [...] *What the nostalgic view overlooks is that indigenous people are as culturally creative and adaptable as anyone else* [my emphasis].” (Sissons 62-63)

Sissons highlights the role of urban national centres as bases for national indigenous movements. The city is the place where indigenous struggle is articulated on a national basis (cf. 74) and indigeneity is located in a more prominent place within the “imagined national community” (66). If, however, the dominant role of indigenous urban dwellers is that of coordinating political movements, the question of the cultural self-image of the urban dwellers arises – if there is no form of distinctive indigenous culture actually lived in the city, urban indigenous peoples are reduced to a position of being representatives for something that has no personal significance to them.

How, then, could the urban Maori experience manifest itself? Is there cultural creativity in *Once Were Warriors*? Sissons mentions that “enormous efforts are now

being made by urbanized indigenous peoples to revive languages, to learn more about traditional medicine and calendars, religious rituals and traditional dances, and to pass this knowledge on to their children” (77). This is the development that Beth has been championing. She has experienced the dedicated and confident living of Maori tradition in Wainui, and she wants her fellow Pine Blockers to be able to access and draw strength from their heritage in the same way (cf. chapter 4.2). To this end, she turns her front lawn into a meeting space and thus effectively into an urban version of the *marae*, the ceremonial gathering reserve essential to every traditional Maori community, and invites her paramount chief to teach her people about the Maori cultural heritage. She thus engineers a direct transplant of rural traditions into the city which the people of Pine Block react positively to:

every Saturday, man, don't madda if it's rainin or even fuckin *snowin*, man, ya gotta do it. I mean, he's the *chief*. The CHIEF of all our tribe. And anyrate, he's doin it for our sake. To givus, you know, *pride* in ourselves. No questions asked though, man. Just turn up at number 27 Rimu at nine *on the dot*. Rain or snow or what, *be there*. Be there and listen. And take it in. (167)

...and there woulda been a hundred, oh, over a hundred ofem gathered there on the front adjoining lawns of Numbers 27 and 27B Rimu Street... (178)

Still, it is obvious especially in the reaction to Te Tupaea's absence one day (cf. chapter 4.3.1) that the traditions introduced to the people do not yet feel like their own and will likely require some adaptation in order to become truly meaningful to them. “The crucial issue for indigenous advocates of urban cultural change [...] will be finding ways to maintain strong alliances with rural communities while at the same time developing new ways of being indigenous”, writes Sissons (82). Beth has initiated the former in Pine Block; the latter is a challenge that she and her fellow Maori have yet to live up to. The creation of distinctive urban indigenous cultures appears to be one of the greatest challenges facing indigenous people today, and Duff's novel acknowledges that it will be a long process.

## 6. Religion

### 6.1. *The Significance of Religion*

Religion has always been a part of human existence (cf. Idowu 1) and has provided countless generations of man with a meaning to life and a moral universe. As such, Idowu considers it to be beyond culture: “[W]hile culture covers the whole of a people’s scheme of life, religion gives direction and complexion to the scheme.” (Idowu 5). According to Hofstede, beliefs and values form the core of a culture (cf. chapter 3.1). Either way, a strong cultural identity seems inconceivable without a set of beliefs; after all, “rationalization makes the world orderly and reliable, but it cannot make the world meaningful” (Ashcroft 132).

The novels certainly espouse this view; Beth’s assertion in *Once Were Warriors* that when with the Maori land, their *mana* was taken, they were left with nothing (cf. chapters 3.2.1 and 5.1) attributes to this spiritual force the power to hold a society together; its loss, according to her, began the decline of Maori culture. During a discussion in *True Country* between Billy, his wife and Father Paul about the beliefs in Karnama, the priest declares a lack of “real beliefs” in the community and speculates that they may yet develop, but Billy, disillusioned, mumbles “Or just nothing. People shrivelling in this inhospitable land, within an inhospitable, wider society” (221), indicating that Scott agrees with the notion of the lack of a solid theological foundation preventing the people of Karnama from having successful cultural futures.

It is not a (perceived) lack of beliefs or elaborate spiritual traditions that plagues Mda’s Qolorha: *The Heart of Redness* extensively portrays the ways the villagers deal with the legacy of the prophetess Nongqawuse, the child prophetess who almost extinguished the Xhosa nation by, in the midst of their war with the British, instructing them to kill all their cattle and burn their crops with the promise that their ancestors would arise from the dead and come to their rescue, a prophecy which never came true. *The Heart of Redness* tells the story of the twin sons of the great chief Xikixa, one of whom, Twin, believed in Nongqawuse’s prophecies, and the other, Twin-Twin, renounced her instructions. In the face of the great destruction wreaked upon the Xhosa people and the lack of help by the British and convinced that Nongqawuse was manipulated by the colonists,

Twin-Twin went away to brood on the dangers of religion.

Ned, Mjuza, Dalton, and Gawler had all tried, at various times, to convert him to Christianity. But he told them he could not join a religion that allowed its followers to treat people the way the British had treated the amaXhosa. He was indeed disillusioned with all religions. He therefore invented his own Cult of the Unbelievers - elevating unbelieving to the heights of a religion. (259)

Both the belief in the prophetess and its counter-movement have survived into the present day; in fact, elder Bhonco, father of Xoliswa Ximiya, has resurrected the cult of Unbelief and dedicated it to the remembrance of the effects Nongqawuse's prophecies had on the Xhosa nation. The members are supposed to attain happiness by means of a ritual adapted from the abaThwa people – a dance capable of “inducing sadness in their lives, so they may have a greater appreciation of happiness” (75). The grieving aspect of the cult, however, appears to be overshadowing this: Most of the Unbelievers “spend most of their time moaning about past injustices and bleeding for the world that would have been had the folly of belief not seized the nation a century and a half ago” (3).

The leader of the Believers, Zim, derides Bhonco and his cohorts who “take glory in the pain of yesterday instead of savoring the pleasures of today” (118); meanwhile, he and his fellow Believers still think it is their opponents' ancestors' fault that the Xhosa were befallen by a tragedy of such magnitude; had they carried out the instructions of the prophetess, they maintain, her prophecies would have come true. Zim's own traditions regarding his own cult are not so different from Bhonco's: he has “revived another age-old practice: that of standing on the hill and watching the sea for the approach of Russian ships<sup>52</sup> (176). Zim “knows the Russians will not come. But he waits for them still, in memory of those who waited in vain. [...] It is with a sense of pride that he stands on the hill. That he pines. [...] It is an honor to pine on behalf of those who waited in vain.” (176-177)

While the elders clearly experience gratification thanks to their cults, their obsessive, singular focus on Nongqawuse and the sufferings caused by, depending on the viewpoint, those following or those disregarding her instructions, causes Believers and Unbelievers alike to spend great amounts of time escaping the present, and prevents them from focusing on the challenges awaiting the Xhosa people today.

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<sup>52</sup> “In the days of Nongqawuse the Russians were black and were the reincarnation of amaXhosa warriors” (*Heart* 176).



The obsession with Nongqawuse must end in order for the people of Qolorha to move forward, that much is clear; however, some form of reconciliation with her memory must be achieved. That a complete suppression of this part of their past will not work is proven in the person of Xoliswa Ximiya who despite her abhorrence of the prophetess has somewhat tragically become a prophetess of doom herself. Her endorsement of the construction boasts parallels to Nongqawuse's prophecies – like the child, she offers wonders to the population of Qolorha - the wonders of civilization

(Mr. Smith talks of the wonders that will happen at Qolorha-by-Sea. There will be boats and waterskiing and jetskiing. People from across the seas will ride the waves in a sport called surfing. [...] There will be merry-go-rounds for the children, and rides that go up to the sky. Rides that twist and turn while the riders scream in ecstatic fright – 199)

and like her, she does not realize the full implications of what she is suggesting. The difference between the two is that Xoliswa almost succeeds at leading her people not into actual, but into cultural suicide. The dangers of materialism, of which Xoliswa is the advocate, are thus also thematised in the novel. Clearly, this chaos of spiritual traditions is not conducive to the future of Qolorha, and here the challenge is to establish a belief system that all the villagers (and by extension all Xhosa people) will be able to identify with.

## ***6.2. Traditional Religion in a Contemporary Indigeneity***

Traditional religions are, among other factors, characterised by the belief in spirits. In chapter 5.1, it has been noted that traditional indigenous peoples consider the land to be animated; this is due to its every material component being inhabited by spirits who “manifest their presence and actions through natural objects and phenomena” (Idowu 173). Spirits are difficult to define – they “may be anthropomorphically conceived, but they are more often thought of as powers which are almost abstract, as shades or vapours which take on human shape; they are immaterial or incorporeal beings” (Idowu 174).

Veneration of the ancestors<sup>53</sup> is another significant part of traditional religions. The deceased have influence and power over those on earth (cf. Idowu 179), and must be respected and sometimes appeased. Indigenous belief systems may also involve clearly defined deities; Maori religion, for example, is polytheistic<sup>54</sup>, whereas the Xhosa people worship one supreme God, Qamata, who is mentioned in *Heart* several times.

Perhaps the most significant difference between a traditional indigenous and a Western cosmology is the holistic nature of the former; rather than compartmentalize information, Aboriginal people “look at the whole picture” (Paulson 85), as do tradition-oriented peoples all over the world. Indigenous religion is thus accorded a great significance:

Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. (Mbiti 2, quoted in Owoahene-Acheampong 121)

The belief that transcendent forces affect everyday life all the time is reflected in both *Heart* and *True Country*; both novels include supernatural elements in their mostly realist narrative in what has been described as the school of magical realism in the case of *The Heart of Redness*. Asked to comment, Zakes Mda has stated that while scholars are free to file his work under that category as it may bear all the relevant characteristics, he never made a conscious decision to adhere to this school of writing (cf. chapter 8.2.2);

he explains that

the magic of my magic realism is something that my characters live with in their real-life situation. You find that, in their lives, there is no clear line of demarcation between what you’d call objective reality on the one hand and the supernatural on the other. They live with these things. Scientists can’t explain why Sykes has this affinity with snakes<sup>55</sup> or how people whose totem is a crocodile have an affinity with crocodiles. They would rather consign all that to superstition. Yet, to the people, this is part of their reality. The magic is part of their day-to-day lives. That is why you find that those stories of mine that have

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<sup>53</sup> Idowu and Mda both note that the ancestors, at least in African religions, are not worshipped (cf. Idowu 178; “the ancestors they’ve been narrated not worshipped” (Pesenhofer-Yarnton 142)

<sup>54</sup> Maori gods are Papatūānuku, Mother Earth, Ranginui, Father Sky, and their many children cf. <http://kupu.maori.nz/Browse.aspx?kcid=34>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>55</sup> This refers to Mda’s previous recounting of Indigenous Australian writer Roberta Sykes ability to interact with venomous snakes without being ever being bitten – cf. [http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview\\_Wark.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview_Wark.html) , 29 May 2010

a lot of magic, or magic realism, are set in the rural areas, where people still live that kind of life. I draw from their beliefs and from what exists in those societies. There is very little magic that is created by my own imagination. Well, there is some, but not as much as the magic that is created by the beliefs of the people themselves.<sup>56</sup>

The word “magic” as it is used in this chapter denotes both the ubiquitous supernatural happenings and powers actively enlisted by the people with the help of rituals. This magic carried out by the people can be good or evil: Black or illicit magic, the employing of destructive powers, is often referred to as *witchcraft*, its perpetrators being witches or sorcerers. Even though “essentially religion is for the individual and social well-being of man [and] magic could be for man’s well-being or for man’s undoing [and] serve for social benefit or be anti-social” (Idowu 194), magic is a phenomenon inseparable from religion – magical powers are “spiritual, even if lower in the hierarchy of forces than the gods” (Owoahene-Acheampong 64).

The all-pervasiveness of traditional indigenous religion entails the readiness to believe in spiritual causes for regular events, particularly undesired ones – they may be attributed to either beings of worship, meaning that they are regarded as a punishment for not following sacred law, or to the malevolence of fellow members of the community.

It is those beliefs that are referred to by the derogatory terms “superstition” and “mumbo-jumbo”<sup>57</sup> in the novels by the whites and those “civilised” indigenous people who reject their native cultures, most prominently Xoliswa Ximiya. The novels contain many such beliefs, and the credence (and therefore the viability in the context of a contemporary indigenous cultural identity) the authors accord them varies.

In *Heart*, for example, the Unbelievers blame spells and “a powerful potion” (217) for Camagu’s infatuation with Qukezwa and perceived desertion of Xoliswa Ximiya, when the reader knows that Qukezwa has in fact enthralled Camagu with her talents, knowledge and insight; similarly, Bhonco is convinced that NoPetticoat, his wife,

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. [http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview\\_Wark.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview_Wark.html), 29 May 2010.

<sup>57</sup> for example: *Heart* 190; *True Country* 24.

has been bewitched to join Camagu's cooperative society, which is dismissed by Camagu: "Your wife joined the cooperative because she wanted to" (235).

In *True Country*, unnamed elders attribute the boy Franny's handicaps to mythical reasons, which angers Gabriella:

Francis, Franny, you know him have Moses for father? Well, Moses not really his father, he just act like he is. And he love him like a father. That boy not right, you know. Understand? Well, his father, his real father, he no longer with us here. So... that's why Franny be like that, like he is. Little boy with big body, not right and bit silly. Can't see too good and little bit deaf too. That happens when people got no respect and don't listen to what they're told to, understand? [...]

I looked at Gabriella; her jaw clenched, her stare not here. (69-70)

In *Heart*, this mythical reasoning is thus portrayed as an instrument of the denial of free will; in *True Country*, it serves to blame a human being's disability on the perceived misconduct of his parents. In the case of these episodes, the traditional beliefs are rejected; not all similar beliefs, however, can be and are as easily dismissed.

Both *Heart* and *True Country* address the connection between religion and medicine as an example for the presence of religion in every aspect of life: illness is often attributed to supernatural forces. One case in point is that of *Heart*'s NomaRussia: this young woman whose presence initially so captivated Camagu that he came to her hometown of Qolorha from Hillbrow to find her returns to her native village towards the end of the novel, suffering from advanced cervical cancer which is causing her constant bleeding. Years ago, she had an affair with Qukezwa's father Zim and wanted the man to leave his wife and commit himself to her; to this end, she commissioned an igqirha to curse NoEngland. Her scheme, however, backfired, as the igqirha, loyal to Zim's wife, conspired with her to curse the girl instead by "working" her undergarments so that "whenever she [tried] to know a man [...] she [saw] the moon. Things [came] in gushes, like water from a stream" (41).

Now that Zim is dying, she believes that she can be saved by having him, after his having reunited with his wife in the afterlife, persuade her to remove the curse. To this end the dying woman spends her days camping in front of Zim's homestead and beseeching his daughter to help her.

The doctors at the hospital in East London gave her disease a name, she tells the men and women who are now surrounding her. Cervical cancer. They told her it was incurable. [...] There was nothing new in what they said. She already knew it was incurable, whatever one chose to call it. The igqirha himself had said so. Only the person who had caused it could reverse it. And that igqirha should know. He was the one who had “worked” her underwear for her to be like this in the first place. (251)

Camagu tries to convince her to go to a hospital so she can receive proper care instead of wasting away outside of Zim’s house, but NomaRussia vehemently refuses. His arguments based on Western medical knowledge do not help:

“Do you think just because white doctors have a name for a sickness that it was not caused by NoEngland?”

“No one can cause someone else to have cancer.”

“Then how come your white doctors did not understand how I got this terrible thing at such a young age? How come they said mine was an unusual case?”

“I don’t know.”

“You have a lot to learn, doctor.”

“In African villages, disease and misfortune are religious experiences and it requires a religious approach to deal with them” (122), writes Owoahene-Acheampong. He also emphasizes that the concept of naturally caused illnesses does exist in a traditional African cosmology, but that when an illness does not respond to treatment, people begin to consider explanations involving spiritual interference (cf. 131). If additionally it is known that the patient has broken a social rule, the illness is more likely to be viewed as punishment or revenge. In NomaRussia’s case, all of this applies; she does not doubt the “white doctors”’ diagnosis, but, to her, it does not conflict with her belief that she has been cursed; Western medicine does not offer a satisfactory explanation for her illness.

NomaRussia’s case can, however, only be read as a reflection of the high degree of significance that traditional Xhosa beliefs still have in rural South African villages; the author does not confirm them. Camagu, Mda’s alter ego, has been open to traditional beliefs and become more so through his interactions with Qukezwa; he draws the line, however, at spiritual causes of illness (cf. the above passage). Even when NomaRussia tells him that there is much he does not know about worldviews diverging from his own like Qukezwa has done earlier in the novel to great effect, he is not convinced, but just sadly recognises the futility of trying to dissuade NomaRussia from her endeavour. We will never know whether the removal of the curse may have affected the woman in any way, but no reason is given to believe that

NomaRussia's cancer, discovered early enough, could not have been cured employing Western medicine.

In *True Country*, the treatment of a spiritually caused illness is quite different: the young girl Beatrice undergoes a frightening transformation that her parents and teachers fail to understand – formerly a bright and friendly child, Beatrice turns into a troublemaker, stealing from the school and attacking other children and shows no remorse when reprimanded. It becomes apparent that Beatrice is not in control of her actions, as she falls into a trancelike state where she appears to be unaware of her surroundings with increasing frequency:

She tilted her head from side to side as if listening to an internal clock tick-tocking. Her eyes were wide and unblinking, a small smile touched her lips. She did not respond to Liz's questions. She seemed like in a dream. [...]  
She was crazy.  
She got crazier. Sometimes she just sat down, for a long time rocking herself, or crying, or with her face vacant and responding to no one. There was no one home there." (152-153)

Beatrice is brought to various city hospitals for tests, but no explanation for her condition is found. She continues to get worse, and it is only when her mother Stella is nearing a breakdown that "people [tell] her that someone did sing<sup>58</sup> her daughter" (185) because her parents failed to make her observe a certain cleansing ritual at the recent funeral of Walanguh. Karnama's elders are called upon; they are able to cure Beatrice, and an article about the incident appears in the newspaper:

#### GIRL SAVED BY BLACK RITUALS

An amazing series of rituals to rid a dying black girl of a tribal curse was carried out in one of Perth's major hospitals.  
The girl was believed to have been cursed by Aboriginal elders.  
A clinical psychologist became concerned that the child had been 'sung' and arranged for the Aboriginal tribal elders to perform an exorcism on the comatose child in Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital.  
Being 'sung' is a ritual similar to the so-called pointing of a bone.  
The elders, from the Kimberley, visited the child three times.  
The child has returned to her community and is fit and well. (186)

In contrast to Mda, Scott explicitly portrays Western medical knowledge as insufficient to deal with the incident at hand. The episode, in fact, reads as a triumph of Aboriginal healing over modern medical treatment, and by extension of

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<sup>58</sup> Singing someone is a way of cursing them cf. page 59.

Aboriginal knowledge over that of the West. “They fixed her up. So there are other ways, and other brains too, even if they may be going away, dying, these days.” and “The old people laughed, and told them there were many things they knew and understood that other ones did not.” (186) the communal Aboriginal voice tells us. While the existence of Aboriginal power, to harm and to heal, is officially acknowledged in the media, the triumph is hollow: Aboriginal power has only served to lift a curse from the child which it has burdened her with to begin with, and Beatrice, although pronounced “fit and well”, has not escaped from her ordeal unscathed – her mother is the only one who notices that “that little spirit inside her, it pass away. Finish. People could see. She was small now”. (187)

The issue of Aboriginal powers and magic is extensively engaged with in *True Country*. The elders of Karnama spend much time pondering these powers they once had and view their loss as the reason they are finding themselves in a disadvantaged position.

‘He had the power that fella. [...] With power, they can disappear, fly, you know. Sing things.  
‘Early days they been make magic. They can sing lightning too. Anything.’  
(48)

Old people used to have black magic. They used to kill or destroy anybody. Or they used to find out what animal killed that bloke and then go after it and kill it, you know. They dream it. They go and they sleep and they dream it and they go kill that thing, crocodile or shark or whatever.  
[...]  
Old people, they had that power.  
[...]  
Or they sing a song, you know, a magic song. Then a bloke has an accident in a car, or somebody just has to get silly and hit ‘im on the head with a rock and kill ‘im. (67-69)

The elders also know that the potential for powers of this sort still exists, and they see the reclamation of them as essential for their cultural survival: “They still do it today and they try keep getting their culture growing more strong”. (69)

Beatrice’s cursing and healing is just one example of the powers the elders of Karnama are still capable of employing. The brutal murder of aforementioned Franny by two white men and the complete lack of punishment for the killers by “white man’s justice” (205) is finally enough to unleash the full destructive force of

whatever latent powers still have been existing in Karnama, and the boy is revenged by his people. One of the two murderers is killed in a car accident in presumably having been cursed in the manner described above, and the other one is driven into suicide after they “put a special poison in his blood” which gives him nightmares and renders him unable to have sex with his girlfriend, which causes her to eventually leave him.

In his little place in Perth there he is like in a box. He start thinking about him being in a box, you know. Another box, small box that fit him tight.  
So we got him too. He makes a tube [...] that go from his exhaust pipe to the window of his car. He just sit in car then, start the motor, listen to radio.  
Him dead. We got him. Just like old times. Still got power, see?  
True. True story. Listen! We could do that. Could could could. (208)

The old people of Karnama are triumphant – after the white judicial system has failed them, they have been able to invoke their very own powers to settle the matter on their own. As they continue to become more confident in their mythical abilities, they also begin to employ them to drive unwelcome white people out of Karnama by having sharks and whales attack their fishing boats, causing them to be scared and to follow through on their plans to leave the community: “And about this same time, Gerrard and the builders had some trouble out in their little boats also. They left soon after that. See? We made them.” (223)

The Aboriginal people of Karnama have successfully reclaimed their traditional powers to assert their cultural strength and independence. Every incident of a successful utilisation of black magic is punctuated by a statement of triumph; this form of controlled spiritual interference has become their way out of a position of helplessness, and from this angle may be regarded as a positive phenomenon.

However, the punishment of Franny’s murderers, in particular, however, inspires a great deal of unease. On the publisher’s website, it is called a “joyous revenge”<sup>59</sup>, and it is undeniably gratifying to have some form of justice levied on the offenders – but does this mean to imply that lynch justice has a rightful place in contemporary Aboriginal culture? And can destructive powers ever be the pillars of a successful indigenous identity? Billy finds himself at a loss; the novel merely confirms Kolig’s assertion that “the strengthening of an indigenous identity is not necessarily always

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. <http://www.facp.iinet.net.au/teachingnotes/truecountrynotes.html>, 29 May 2010.



the warm fuzzy process which many people may welcome for alleviating their western post-colonial bad conscience” (*Introduction* 17).

Mda draws a clearer line between good and evil powers than Scott. Spiritual powers are part of the fabric of living in Qolorha, and here, no recovery of these powers is necessary – they are active and thriving. Never in the novel, however, are they painted to be truly harmful - spiritual interference with nature such as Bhonco and Zim harassing each by sending noisy birds after the other may not be the most palatable expression of Xhosa culture, but neither is it a matter of serious moral debate.

The main instance of black magic gravely affecting a person, the affliction of NomaRussia with a fatal disease, is never given credence in the way such incidents are in *True Country*; and even those who believe the curse to be real and the cause of the woman’s cancer, her friends, tell her that

Their parents have told them that the igqirha who “worked” their friend cannot be a genuine igqirha. A genuine igqirha does not harm people. An authentic igqirha is given only those powers that heal. (263)

Black magic is thus clearly separated from the core of Xhosa spiritual tradition; its perpetrators are outsiders of society.

### ***6.3. Christianity and Indigenous Religion***

The indigenous cultures discussed in this paper have been in contact with Christianity for centuries. Christian missions have had a profound influence on indigenous cultures which has often been destructive, but has also started natural processes of cultural adaptation and appropriation. And indigenous tradition has proven to be persistent, for even where indigenous peoples have adopted Christianity to cover their spiritual needs, it is not the same faith and tradition imported by the colonists – African churches, for instance, have extensively adapted Christianity to fit into their own indigenous cosmologies (cf. Friedman 28).

Christianity does not have much of a presence in contemporary Qolorha, but those passages in *Heart* detailing the days of Nongqawuse relay the interaction of Xhosa culture with Christianity in the past, and Mda appears to be of the opinion that this historical intertwining of the religions should be reflected in a contemporary Xhosa cultural identity. Even though Qolorha is rooted in Xhosa spiritual traditions, the

Christian faith is present in the consciousness of the villagers, which is noticeable for example when the chief's councillor, at Qukezwa's hearing, explains indigenous spirituality in Christian terms: talking about a holy bird, he states that "isomi is a living Christ on earth" (217). This and the fact that the religions of South Africa's indigenes and colonists have mythological elements and their basic structure in common (like Christianity, Xhosa religion is monotheistic<sup>60</sup>) provide a foundation for the inclusion of Christianity in a contemporary Xhosa identity.

Mda achieves this by referencing a core myth of the Christian religion – the Immaculate Conception – and assigning Qukezwa the role of an African (and Xhosa) Virgin Mary. Giving this role to Qukezwa has great symbolic significance as her character has many roles in the novel: She is a nature goddess doubling as an African mother of Christ, thus uniting faiths in her person. She, who already is both Xhosa and Khoikhoi, illustrates how the taking on of Christianity is just another addition to a Xhosa identity which will continue to grow and absorb outside influences, and be stronger for its inherent diversity.

Finally, Qukezwa is also established as the contemporary incarnation of the prophetess Nongqawuse. She has been groomed by her father towards that end – "Zim assures his daughter that if she works hard enough she will end up being a prophetess like Nongqawuse" (47) – and she has a dream about flying with the prophetess, which further solidifies their connection. Unlike Nongqawuse, however, Qukezwa is a positive figure who combines spirituality with practicality, and she is the one designed to help the Xhosa overcome the memory of Nongqawuse. Her role is emphasized by her rivalry with Xoliswa, in which she effortlessly has the upper hand – the new direction the Xhosa (the people of Qolorha) should take is hers, not that of the school director (cf. chapter 6.1), who eventually packs up and leaves. The Christian religion is thus accorded a part in the crucial overcoming of the memory of the prophetess.

Karnama offers some insight into the dynamics of an Aboriginal mission community, and if it were to be regarded as typical and representative, one would have to conclude that Christianity has not had much impact on Aboriginal Australians in

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. chapter 6.2.

terms of faith. According to the last Australian census, the vast majority of Aboriginal Australians who consider themselves part of a religious denomination identify as Christian rather than adherents of indigenous religions<sup>61</sup>. The people of the mission community Karnama, too, are officially Christian, but the faith seems to have gained ground only on a superficial level. The novel mentions some of the elders having been to see the pope in Alice Springs (cf. 77), but when they talk amongst themselves about deriving strength from a spiritual world, they speak of their own mythical powers discussed in the preceding chapter.

The missionaries claim that they have no way of working with the people of Karnama, and none of them seem to last very long in the remote community. As Father Paul is preparing to leave on sabbatical, he softens in his talk about Karnama's population, and instead of his usual dismissal of them allows himself some speculation on the theological future of the community:

“Maybe they, we, will end up with a new God here, some sort of major spirit from the Dreaming or whatever, who named everything and us – or should I say the Aborigines? – and created this special relationship. People, creation, the land.” (221)

Here, Father Paul proposes a true synthesis of Aboriginal religion and Christianity: unlike Xhosa religion, Aboriginal religion does not worship one supreme God, and Father Paul's idea combines the spirit beings of the Dreaming with a monotheistic structure. He thus proves more progressive and imaginative than many theologians who argue that Christianity and Aboriginal religion are fundamentally incompatible; however, his premise is not achieved in the novel, where the people decide to rely on a traditional Aboriginal spiritual universe.

#### **6.4. Religion in Once Were Warriors**

In *Once Were Warriors*, not as much mention of religion is made as in the other novels. This does not mean, however, that spirituality has no part in a future Maori identity according to Duff.

Grace's funeral in Wainui allows us to catch a glimpse of Maori spirituality; a *waiata*, a traditional lamentation, tells the girl to prepare herself for her “journey to

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. <http://religionandsociety09.blogspot.com/2009/06/towards-aboriginal-christian-theology.html>, 29 May 2010.

the Spiritworld” (132). The incisive event of Grace’s suicide also reveals that elements of traditional Maori belief have made it to Pine Block: a housestamping is performed on the Heke’s house, “to, you know, scare away the ghost of the departed<sup>62</sup>” (144). Jake, unable to address his grief, and his friends make a party of it, but one woman refuses to drink before the ritual has been performed, showing true allegiance to traditional beliefs: “What about the Maori priest? [...] Ya gotta get [the house] stamped of the ghost before y’c’n start boozing, mista, you oughta know that.” (145). The woman’s belief is employed by Duff as a positive contrast to the way the Maori men, primarily Jake, handle the situation. Maintaining Maori spiritual tradition and finding meaning and guidance in it thus seems to be a desirable goal in Duff’s novel.

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<sup>62</sup> A ghost is the wandering spirit of someone who was not buried correctly, or who died a “bad death” – like suicide; they are considered cursed and not admitted to the world of the afterlife (cf. Idowu 174).

## 7. Cultural Practice

In Hofstede's concept of culture, practices are those elements of a culture visible to everybody, but possessing a deeper meaning only to members of the culture. To him, practices include rituals, heroes and symbols, from deepest to most superficial layer of culture; the core of culture is constituted by beliefs and values (cf. chapter 3.1.). We encounter many of these elements of cultural practice in the novels, like song, and dance, for ritual purposes or pure enjoyment, and clothing; this chapter is going to explore the place of these rituals and symbols in contemporary indigenous culture.

### 7.1. Cultural Tourism

Marketing their culture is for many poor rural indigenous communities one of their few sources of income and therefore a reality and a necessity. As those elements of culture are most visible and accessible to outsiders, songs, dances and demonstrations of various rituals are likely to be utilized in the context of indigenous tourism; how does this affect the cultural consciousness of contemporary indigenous people?

The preceding chapters have mainly investigated indigenous people in isolation, determining their cultural identity among themselves; indigenous tourism, however, as it is directed mainly at non-indigenous people, may, in an ideal scenario, create a dialogue between cultures capable not only of helping non-indigenous people gain a better understanding of indigenous ways of life (cf. Hinch and Butler 5), but also giving indigenous peoples the option of exploring the meaning of their own culture as they present it to outsiders - a culture's existence, after all, is only determinable in its distinctiveness from other cultures. Friedman describes how the Ainu of Japan use cultural tourism as a form of establishing their identity:

The entire tourist project of an Ainu can be seen [...] as a manifestation via a commodity form of a larger constitutive process of cultural identity, one that must, of course, be manifested for others if it is to have any real existence. It is in defining themselves for the Japanese, their significant other, that they establish their specificity. (111)

In order for this exchange to work, however, an actual interest in the respective indigenous culture on part of the tourists is necessary, and this is often not a given. In reality, cultural tourists often have a short attention span and only want to satisfy a

superficial desire to observe an “exotic” people, with no willingness to truly engage with the respective culture. Thus, conveniently-sized morsels of “culture” are served to them, which are not only not going to challenge their perceptions and allow indigenous people to define themselves according to their own wishes, but instead further the *othering* of indigenous cultures.

This is the case in *True Country*, where the visitors to Karnama clearly have a set of expectations that they wish to have confirmed; when the people of the community deliver, they approve: “What an experience” (140), they say. That dialogue between the people of Karnama and their spectators is illusory is illustrated clearly by the only instance of communication taking place between the cultures: “The tourists wanted to be friendly, and shouted at [the inhabitants of Karnama], apparently hoping that they could communicate with the aliens by doing so.” (139)

Instead, cultural tourism acquires neo-colonial dimensions as the indigenous people are forced to perform what is expected of them and thus once again placed in an inferior position to the cultures of the West: While Hinch and Butler characterise the resulting dynamic as a “master/servant relationship” (3), Scott and Mda go one step further as they both invoke the same metaphor of dehumanisation in the context of cultural tourism. “Then I could maybe get rich, go on holidays like these tourists that come here, if I wanted to. But I wouldn’t expect the people, where I went, to put on shows for me like in a zoo or something” (141), school gardener Milton comments in *True Country*. When the tourists unashamedly take pictures, the collective Aboriginal voice of Karnama muses that “[t]hey think we monkeys maybe.” (142)

In *Heart*, John Dalton’s cultural initiative wherein two Xhosa women, NoVangeli and NoManage enact Xhosa tradition for the visitors, is frowned upon by Xoliswa. “Xoliswa Ximiya is not happy that her people are made to act like buffoons for these white tourists. [...] Her people are like monkeys in a zoo, observed with amusement by white foreigners with John Dalton’s assistance” (96). Xoliswa’s viewpoint is of course not one of authority in the novel, but in this case her sentiment is certainly valid.

Both novels illustrate the staged nature of initiatives of indigenous tourism: While “many times the tourists come to [Karnama], to look at the real Aborigine people” (142), they are not interested in witnessing the actual lifestyle of the population, but expect to see a show. When the people fail to entertain, such as when a dance promised to the visitors is not performed, they arrogantly disapprove: “Some of the tourists were shaking their heads in anger and disappointment.” (217). During one particular incident, however, Samson saves the day and lets himself become the clown:

Gerard hassled Samson. Samson shouted, laughed, stormed and blustered about half naked, with his body painted, and leaves rustling about his knees. He became a sideshow, he was the show. He growled at the tourists, and posed shaking a spear at their cameras and appreciative laughter. (217)

Displays of this sort are thus not only degrading to indigenous populations, but grossly misrepresent indigenous culture as it is reduced to a neat package deal for visitors: a cultural experience as different as possible from their own. Mda notes that African cultural villages show pre-contact indigenous traditions in one small space under the pretence of familiarising the visitor with current indigenous lifestyles<sup>63</sup>; in *Heart*, John Dalton has already been operating a venture which consists of his assistants, two women from the village, performing Xhosa culture for the tourists, and plans to expand it to such a cultural village.

NoManage pretends she is a traditional healer, what the tourists call a witch doctor, and performs magic rites of her own concoction. At this time NoVangeli and the tourists hide some items, and NoManage uses her supernatural powers to discover where they are hidden. Then the tourists watch the two women polish the floor with cow dung. [...] All these shenanigans are performed by these women in their full isiXhosa traditional costume of the amahomba, which is cumbersome to work in. Such costume is meant to be worn only on special occasions when people want to look smart and beautiful, not when they are toiling and sweating. And the tourists pay good money for this foolery! (96)

Xoliswa Ximiya’s cynical observation is contrasted by John Dalton’s earnest explanation that

Tourists like visiting such cultural villages to see how the people live. The village will have *proper* [my emphasis] isiXhosa huts rather than the newfangled hexagons that are found all over Qolorha. Women will wear traditional isiXhosa costumes that their forebears used to wear. They will grind

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. [http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview\\_Wark.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview_Wark.html), 29 May 2010.

millet and polish the floors with cow dung. They will draw patterns on the walls with ochre of different colors. [...] Tourists will flock to see young maidens dance and young men engage in stick fights. They will see the abakhwetha initiates whose bodies are covered in white ochre. They will learn how the amaXhosa of the Wild Coast live. (28)

It is clear that this is hardly a learning experience, and Camagu immediately puts his finger on that fact.

“The abakhwetha initiates? Right here in the middle of the cultural village? What will the initiates be doing in the village?” wonders Camagu.

“These will be actors, man, not the real abakhwetha.” [...]

“That’s dishonest. It’s just a museum that pretends that is how people live. Real people in South Africa don’t lead the life that is seen in cultural villages. Some aspects of that life perhaps are true. But the bulk of what tourists see is the past ... a lot of it an imaginary past. They must be honest and say that they are attempting to show how people used to live. They must not pretend that’s how people live now. [...]

It is an attempt to preserve folk ways... to reinvent culture. When you excavate a buried precolonial identity... a precolonial authenticity that is lost... are you suggesting that they currently have no culture... that they live in a cultural vacuum? [...]

I am interested in the culture of the amaXhosa as they live it today, not yesterday. The amaXhosa are not a museum piece. Like all cultures, their culture is dynamic. (247-248)

The ignorance of current indigenous lived realities in favour of confirming tourists’ exoticist expectations serves to firmly locate indigenous cultures in the past – they are once again denied the potential to change, adapt and thrive in today’s globalised world (cf. chapter 3.2.1). As Mda notes, what Dalton has created is a museum, an institution dedicated to the preservation of what would otherwise be lost; from this safe space, there is no potential of evolving. Mda leaves no doubt about his opinion that Dalton is therefore effectively declaring Xhosa culture dead by paralleling his discussion of the cultural village with Governor Grey’s attempt to record indigenous traditions because he believes that the culture is to die out soon:

“You will be happy, Gawler, to hear that I have commissioned an exhaustive research of native laws and customs in support of my system of magisterial rule in the eastern Cape. [...] [I]n Australia and New Zealand I did the same thing [...]. I built an important collection of the languages, customs, and religions of the natives. It is important to record these because they are destined to disappear along with the savages who hold them, don’t you think, Gawler?” (206)



Both novels thus discredit the notion that employing cultural practices in the context of cultural tourism is a viable means of identity construction. This endeavour as it is handled in Scott's and Mda's narratives serves mainly to reinforce outsiders' stereotypes of indigenous cultures to the detriment of these cultures themselves.

## ***7.2. The Significance of Cultural Practices for Contemporary Indigeneity***

The need to resort to past versions of Xhosa culture to show to tourists does not only strike Camagu as offensive, but also perplexing, since the Qolorha painted by Mda is a lively centre of Xhosa culture – a Xhosa culture that has interacted with other cultures for a long time. The village is a stronghold of Xhosa practices that positively affect people and are meaningful parts of their lives. In the community that Camagu is encountering every day, tradition is just happening everywhere he passes – people are dancing and ululating, and performing rituals that are celebrating their beliefs.

Qukezwa, especially, is a bearer of many traditional abilities and skills, and she embodies Xhosa tradition to Camagu – she has a special talent for performing indigenous musical forms: she is capable of split-tone singing and of playing the *umrhubhe*, a Xhosa musical instrument (cf. chapter 5.2):

She bursts into song and plays her umrhubhe musical instrument. She whistles and sings all at the same time. Many voices come from her mouth. [...] As if a whole choir lives in her mouth. Camagu has never heard such singing before. [...]

For some time he is spellbound. Then he realizes his pants are wet.

It is not from sweat. (152)

Qukezwa's joyful, confident nature is the ideal testimonial to the power of traditional practices to positively influence lives. The rivalry between Qukezwa and Xoliswa is once again resorted to in order to make a point: Qukezwa attracts Camagu with her traditional abilities, Xoliswa fails to do so with her "icy beauty" and Americanised views – and Qukezwa is much happier and at ease with herself than Xoliswa as a consequence of embracing her people's culture and traditions. "That child, as you call her, is not dismissive of beautiful things. Where you see darkness, witchcraft, heathens, and barbarians, she sees song and dance and laughter and beauty" (189), Camagu tells Xoliswa.

While Xoliswa's barrenness is a popular subject of village gossip, Qukezwa becomes pregnant without having sex; her singing causes Camagu to ejaculate in two separate

incidents, which not only illustrates its spectacular capability of affecting people, but may be indicative of the fertile ground Mda sees in indigenous traditions.

In the context of cultures which have experienced a loss of cultural continuity such as Australia's Aboriginal people and the Maori of New Zealand, one must pose the question how indigenous cultural practices can achieve meaning for the indigenous populations concerned. In settler cultures, more often than not they are not an integral part of the lives of the people, but rather something tangible grasped for in the hopes of recovering a largely lost tradition. Hoskins stresses the need for applicability of these practices to contemporary contexts in order for them to "be a central, meaningful guiding force within [indigenous] society and not relegated to a solely ritualistic function" (36).

*Once Were Warriors* offers such a context – the self-inflicted death of Beth's fifteen-year-old daughter. Beth's grief over Grace's suicide is only properly addressed and acknowledged at the *tangihanga*, the Maori funeral ceremony organised by the people of Wainui, and here, too, the affective power of indigenous ritual is demonstrated through the remarkable way in which her emotions are addressed and validated by the performance: the ceremony is the first time after her daughter's death that Beth feels capable of truly grieving for her daughter (cf. chapter 4.2).

The funeral and the demonstration of traditional Maori culture it represents can, however, also be seen as an assertion that cultural practices are significant even in a "solely ritualistic function". Their power is illustrated by a transition most extensively seen in Beth, but also happening to her fellow Maori people at the funeral: Beth is initially resentful against the Maori ceremony and the very idea of a Maori linguistic and cultural revival because she does not see where it touches upon her own experience:

What damn use your formal speeches, elders, in a tongue that most of us don't understand and never will understand even though they're drumming it into us from everywhere, on the TV, the radio, the papers, this kohanga reo stuff, what use when a race is tearing itself apart? (122)

Soon, however, something happens to capture her attention:

"The speaker breaking into a *waiata*, lament for something precious lost. Others joining in. And so collectively compelling they had a wretched mother's head lifting ... Drawn to it. [...] The *waiata* continuing its rolling rhythmic

throb. Quarter-tones. That's what a woman remembered from somewhere as this style of singing. *So moving*. (123)

The *waiata* and the subsequent speeches, songs and cultural demonstrations affect not only her, but all of those present, as they begin to access a connection to their shared past:

Ah, would ya look aтем: raptures. They're in raptures. Half of em with their eyes closed. In joy, pure joy at being Maori. Oh, aren't (they) we a *together* race when (they) we're like this? History, that's what they are. They are history and therefore so are we, and who needs anything else when you got the strength of history supporting ya? [...] On and on, a reincarnation of what was, a resurgence of fierce pride, a come-again of a people who once were warriors. [...]

Gone they were. Quite gone of this century and much of the last. Oh man. And a woman feeling, you know, her heart just *racing*, and proud. (I feel warrior too.) Inspired. (I feel as my ancestors must've felt.) Skin alive with power, stomach on fire with jolts of electric excitement. At the sight. This sight of what (she) they all must have been. Her mind no longer able to think – not in words. Filled as she was with this, this sense of ... STRENGTH. (Strong. I am made strong again.) (127-128)

The independent force of indigenous ceremony and ritual is demonstrated here as the initial cause for the get-together takes a back seat as the people of Wainui and their guest celebrate being Maori through song and dance; the people at the funeral are completely transformed and in a state of elation.

As these cultural practices are taken out of context completely and applied solely to strengthen a cultural consciousness among the people of Pine Block, however, a slight ambiguity in Duff's attitude becomes apparent: Although people soon willingly partake in "that neat cultural stuff" (191) that Te Tupaea shows them, they are lost without him (cf. chapters 4.2, 5.3). One can infer that an arrangement in which people draw their cultural identity purely from collective cultural practice might ultimately not be sustainable.

Whereas *Once Were Warriors* ultimately finds its indigenous characters ready and willing to engage with their cultural heritage, the same endeavour proves much more difficult in *True Country*. In *Karnama*, most of the children and younger adults are uninterested in Aboriginal culture. Indigenous cultural practice has been made a school subject without much success - *Karnama*'s youth has not grown up practising these traditions, and unlike the adults reflecting on their indigenous identities and embracing any form of cultural heritage we encounter in all the novels, they do not

see their relevance to their lives. As the performance of a traditional dance is being prepared,

[t]he adolescents were reluctant [...] Alex wanted the boys to change into the lap-lap things and be painted, to enter into the spirit of the occasion, he said, and not destroy the spirit of the young ones. One of the boys said, mockingly, 'We should do it or we'll lose our culture'. (21)

Sylvester points his finger to the fact that to the younger generation, the idea that they even have Aboriginal culture to lose is ludicrous. Simply learning a traditional dance, to him, is certainly not a valid way of accessing his Aboriginal heritage. Here, it is obvious that Aboriginal cultural rituals would in fact have to respond to a contemporary context in order to be accepted by the youth of Karnama as meaningful to their lives. This is further confirmed by the reactions to another attempt to familiarise them with indigenous traditions – lessons in Aboriginal handicrafts are met with a similar disinterest as the dance performances, until they are joined by Gabriella:

She arranged to join the older students for sessions in traditional handicrafts, which was when some of the community elders came and worked with the students doing slate and boab nut carvings, making tapping sticks and didgeridoos, or designing silk-screens based on the rock paintings in the area. Not surprisingly, most of us enjoyed the time spent collecting materials, but, until Gabriella volunteered her services and joined us, many of the students were reluctant participants. As Sylvester voiced most strongly, 'This is stupid, this is blackfella stuff' [...]. When Gabriella participated it helped the students consider it worthwhile. She was very skilled. (78)

This passage, too, illustrates, that an overt focus on cultural practice in acquiring a cultural consciousness is, in Scott's opinion, not the most conducive approach. What in *Once Were Warriors* is predominantly positively connoted – the accessing of indigenous identity through cultural practice – in *True Country* is deemed by Karnama's youth too stereotypically Aboriginal and not close enough to their actual lifestyles. Gabriella manages to make some headway by demonstrating her skills, making the lessons more of an artistic than a self-consciously cultural endeavour. Therefore, it can be concluded that while Duff considers traditional practice a fair way to access Maori culture due to its significant power of creating a collective experience (with some reservations), Scott emphasizes the need to individually engage with one's spirituality in order to feel truly Aboriginal (cf. chapters 5.2, 6.2).

### ***7.3. The Meaning of Clothing***

Both *Heart* and *True Country* place some emphasis on clothing in the context of a contemporary cultural identity. As symbols of culture, by definition the most superficial layer of a culture according to Hofstede (cf. chapter 3.1.), their employment as a means to an end is less disputed and controversial than that of other constituent elements of cultural practices.

Therefore, they offer a better and less potentially upsetting opportunity for cultural marketing than the exploitation of rituals for purposes of cultural tourism: “We are in the business of harvesting the sea and manufacturing isiXhosa attire and jewelry, not of milking gullible tourists” (248), Camagu tells John Dalton about the women’s artisan cooperative he has founded. Additionally, by producing Xhosa artefacts for sale Camagu is in fact continuing an indigenous tradition dating back to pre-contact times: Before colonisation, many indigenous groups produced objects to be traded with other cultural groups in order to achieve cross-cultural communication (cf. Smith et al. 13).

Mda does, however, certainly emphasise the strong cultural and personal significance traditional costume can have to a Xhosa person through the story of NoPetticoat, Xoliswa’s mother and Bhonco’s wife.

In *Heart*, people are exchanging their traditional clothes – the clothes they wear every day – for Western-style clothes in order to appear “civilised”. Camagu is happy to find that in Qolorha some people still wear their traditional costume:

It is sad, he thinks, that when nations of the world wear their costumes with pride, the amaXhosa people despise theirs. They were taught by missionaries that it is a sign of civilization, of *ubugqobhoka*, to despise isikhakha as the clothing of the *amaqaba* – those who have not seen the light and who still smear themselves with red ochre. (55)

Xoliswa, too, has shed her Xhosa attire, and wishes for her parents to do the same; to this end, she has bought them Western clothes to wear. Bhonco indulges her willingly because he enjoys the way he looks wearing a Western suit (“Bhonco is a suit man. He even cried when he saw his beautiful reflection in one of the big windows of Vulindlela Trading Store” – 71). NoPetticoat on the other hand hates European clothing passionately, as is revealed when she joins Camagu’s collective,

her “rebellion” (260). She becomes one of the best sewers at the cooperative, and returns to unashamedly wearing Xhosa costume.

[She] was adamant she was no longer going to stifle herself with soulless European clothes. They were an utter punishment for her. She loves the clothes of the amahomba. She has always loved them. She will always love them. (260)

Whereas her daughter and her husband, in their Western dress, are ultimately both unhappily caught in their circumstances - Xoliswa fleeing to the city after having been afflicted with the scars of history (cf. chapter 8.1), Bhonco embittered over having lost his final war against Zim and having received none of the prestige and the comfort that he campaigned for (cf. chapter 4.2) - NoPetticoat’s decision to proudly wear her traditional clothes and become involved in their production has liberated her – she is the only happy and content member of their family. Her clothes clearly are a significant part of her personal and cultural identity, which she has finally confidently claimed for herself.

Whereas in Mda’s novel, traditional clothing is rediscovered as a source of empowerment and isikhakha is becoming a popular way to proudly demonstrate Xhosa identity to the world – (“Even on television I saw some cabinet ministers wearing isikhakha at the opening of parliament.” – 160), Duff’s character Te Tupaea outwardly appears to concur with Xoliswa about the importance of Western clothing in order to achieve success in the contemporary world, taking great care in the selection of his suits:

And could he dress. Different suit every week on a six-week cycle, the observant noticed. Pinstripes. He favoured dark pinstripes. And different ties. Stripy ones, ones with club emblems, like rugby clubs. And he’d turn up with someone well known, a local Maori fulla who’d become an All Black, a Maori lawyer, a Maori lawyer, a Maori doctor, a Maori surgeon; and he’d prance these fullas out before the crowd there on Beth’s front lawn [...], tellin the crowd, *This* is what you can achieve. (191)

Pinstripe suits, to Te Tupaea, thus signify success, but unlike Xoliswa, Te Tupaea plays on the apparent contrast between his status as a proud Maori completely versed in his ethnic heritage and his Western attire.

Then he’d shuffle forward several steps in dancing warrior fashion. Bring to a halt. [...] An arm sweeping theatrically before him. His movements dance-like: a hand slicing the air; [...] both hands quivering rapidly and rolling back and forth across his suited chest. And so *dignified*. He’d come to abrupt halts of voice or posture [...]; his head might cock to one side like an alert bird,

which'd suddenly launch into symbolic flight with an outspread of dark pinstriped arms, and a flash of gold cufflink. Yet he didn't seem to belong to this century, nor of the culture whose attire he'd assumed.

In contrast to Xoliswa, Te Tupaea is deeply rooted in indigenous culture; there is no doubt that clothing is merely a power tool to him, whereas he draws his strength and inspiration from Maori history and spirituality. His choice of clothing prevents people from immediately stereotyping him; Maoriness, Duff appears to say, should not be identified with superficial factors such as attire, whether by insiders or outsiders.

By choosing to approach the subject of clothing in this manner, Duff also prevents the degradation of indigenous clothing to show costume. This is something that concerns Mda:

Even today the civilized ones condescendingly visit the clothes of the amaqaba, and wear them as curiosities during special cultural occasions. As their everyday attire the civilized ones wear German and Java prints that are embroidered in the West African tradition, but they still boast that they are African clothes. (55)

His manufacturing of Xhosa clothing functions to establish the status of Xhosa attire as dress to be taken just as seriously and as applicable to many different situations as other clothing from other African cultures.

## 8. Story

### 8.1. *Story and the Past*

The connection between indigenous past and indigenous identity lies at the heart of all three novels. Zakes Mda notes that “[I]t is clear that in *The Heart of Redness* I am saying that the past is always a strong presence in our present. Indeed our very identity is shaped by memory!”<sup>64</sup> What is true for the individual is true for the group: a collective memory is crucial to a group’s shared experience.

Lack of knowledge of their past is thus seen as a core problem of indigenous populations today. *Once Were Warriors* is very vocal in addressing their status as a “people without history”<sup>65</sup> as the main problem the Maori people of today are facing.

[...] the chief rapid-fired in a half-whisper a complex and endless mouthful of names, words... his ancestry – your ancestry, therefore, Beth, and mine – he recalls all these tupuna long gone yet still alive in the heart of every true Maori. He is saying, Beth, that we are what we are only because of our past ... and that we should never forget our past or our future is lost ... Beth wondering if perhaps that was what ailed her people: their lack of knowledge of the past. A history. (124)

The chief ultimately confirms Beth’s realisation as he is speaking at the first gathering in Pine Block:

And he was [...] tellin them all gathered at his feet [...] that their inheritance was the past and without the past they were nothing. [...] Hadn’t been for not so much us but what we bring, the knowledge – the *knowledge* – of your great history, your illustrious ancestors, then you lot [...] were gonna kill yourselves. [...] Dead in your heart, so dead in your minds. (178)

*True Country*, too, declares the Aboriginal present meaningless without knowledge of history: “You need history to understand all this, don’t you?” (170).

It is telling that when formerly displaced Maori people for the first time perceive Maoriness as something real and meaningful, the first concept they associate with this powerful experience is, again, *history*:

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<sup>64</sup> [http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview\\_Wark.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview_Wark.html), 29 May 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*.



And The People sat stunned. Stunned beyond all comprehension. You know, knowing they'd witnessed the profound, and knowing it was, you know, it was somehow *emselves* they'd witnessed. Emselves but with a different force behind em. History? Man, sumptin like that, I just dunno. (128)

“Pride in our past was a key to pride in ourselves. The repossession of our past is the repossession of ourselves”, writes Dodson (41-42). This does not only apply, however, when the connection to one's past has been lost due to colonial educational interference. When history has become a burden, the easiest way is to forget:

The sufferings of the Middle Generations are only whispered. It is because of the insistence: *Forget the past. Don't only forgive it. Forget it as well. The past did not happen. You only dreamt it. It is a figment of your rich collective imagination. It did not happen. Banish your memory. There is virtue in amnesia. The past. It did not happen. It did not happen. It did not happen.* (137)

It has been noted in the preceding chapters that the problem of the people of Qolorha is not the lack of knowledge of their history, but the refusal of some of them to come to terms with it. In the present, it is Xoliswa who is trying to escape her past and that of her people, which she can only associate with shame: “Why can't they let that part of our shame rest in peace?” (68) and “I do not know why they do not want to forget our shameful past” (88), she muses, desperately. Xoliswa wants to be free of history and to create herself anew in the city, an endeavour she is plotting throughout the novel. Towards the end, she is afflicted with the “scars of history”, a curse passed on from generation to generation of Twin-Twin's progeny, only usually just to males; Twin-Twin first received the scars defending his wife against the prophet Mlanjeni, who declared her a witch, and his followers.

[Xoliswa] wakes up one day and finds that the scars of history have erupted on her body. All of a sudden her ancestor's flagellation has become her flagellation. She rebels against these heathen scars. She refuses to believe that they are part of an ancestral vengeance. (261)

Mda, therefore, tells us that our history will always be part of our identity, and that running from it is not the answer. Someone like Xoliswa is in the fortunate position to be able to access her indigenous past and make sense of her heritage, and should not simply discard that.

In the above passages, history has been equated with the past, when in fact it is the narrative structuring of the past. Individuals and groups alike make sense of their experiences by turning them into stories - “we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, [...] myths, [...], and so on”, writes Bruner (4).

In traditional indigenous societies, the significance of narrative for negotiating and expressing identity is particularly clear; stories, orally transmitted, have always been a crucial part of their cosmologies.

Stories are central to the system of education in Indigenous society. [...] [S]tories were (and continue to be) integral to understanding how one both collaborates with and affiliates to the external world [...]. Similarly, stories are used to discern and interpret the ‘internal’ world, how a person perceives their identity or subjectivity in relation to dreamings, Country, other people and so on. Storytelling, songs, poetry and other verbal performances had, and have, an important function in all aspects of Indigenous life. (Westphalen 35)

Stories, in traditional cultures, ensured continuity between the past and the present, they allowed the constant recreation of culture and collective memory, and they gave people their role and place in society. *True Country* illustrates the importance of story as a basis of society clearly: The old people of Karnama claim that they have lost their power, influence and control over their future because of the disruption of their storytelling, the loss of their meaningful myths - “We got no stories, we got no punishments. We losing it. We losing that power.” (179)

The role of the storyteller is therefore one of the utmost importance and influence. He is in a position to shape people’s lives, of adding meaning to their experience. *True Country*’s Billy wants to tell the story of the Karnama and its people, but is unsure whether he is capable of that, and his train of thought illustrates the magnitude and significance of his task:

But Billy was not sure he was the man for that. Oh, he wanted to be. He wanted to be some sort of seer, a teller of tales, the one who gives meaning, and weaves the unravelling and trailing threads of the lives and histories here together so that people can be held up and together by the integrity and sense of the patterns. He who sings the world anew so that you know where you are. (169)

## ***8.2. Indigeneity and the Written Word***

### **8.2.1. The Role of Writing**

Writing has over millennia established itself as the dominant mode of conveying story in a global context; reading and writing are generally regarded as basic skills necessary to achieve success in life. All of the indigenous cultures discussed in this paper have originally been oral cultures, having come in contact with literacy only through colonial contact with the West, and two of the novels reflect this fact by showing the cultures they portray to have an uneasy relationship with the written word: In *True Country* and *Once Were Warriors*, literacy is treated as something slightly alien to the indigenous peoples concerned, at least for a significant part of their populations.

Beth starts thinking about the lack of concern for the written word on part of the Maori people as she realises that all the Maori homes she has seen in her life have been empty of books:

Why are Maoris not interested in books? Well, they didn't have a written language before the white man arrived, maybe that was it. But still it bothered her. And she began to think that it was because a bookless society didn't stand a show in this modern world, not a damn show. And I live in it, don't I? and my kids. (10)

Duff's whole work, fictional and non-fictional, reflects his desire for the Maori to become equal participants in "this modern world". Here, he presents his urban Maori characters essentially as functionally illiterate people, who will have to acquire the cultural techniques of the West in order to participate in the success of their Pakeha contemporaries.

Scott, too, addresses the lack of proficiency in and willingness to engage with literacy in *Karnama*: "No one here read books, except at school" (171). It is unclear whether even the younger generation of adults in *Karnama* can read and write at all - when Samson is officially appointed community ranger, he experiences a new self-confidence, and illustrates his new importance by ostentatiously writing in a notebook: "He [...] carried a notebook in his shirt pocket which he pulled out and scribbled in regularly. Could he write? He lost the pen, and that was the end of that." (170). Literacy, for Samson, appears to be a status symbol rather than a means of expression and communication.

The written word has a history of being employed as a means of discrimination of indigenous peoples by the colonial invaders: White history-writing took advantage of the fact that the oral peoples they encountered had no means to create permanent historical accounts comparable to those of the settlers and presented information as they saw fit, distorting events in the process. The mission journals of Karnama, for instance, manage to eschew telling the story of the resident Aboriginal population almost entirely – This is an Aboriginal community taken over by the church, its majority being indigenous people, and yet “[t]he captions rarely mentioned the Aborigines.” (36) The journals, as Fatima notes, only tell you “what one eye saw” (42).

For indigenous peoples, a pressing endeavour involving the written word is therefore the rectification of white historical accounts. Colonial history-writing has first deprived indigenous peoples of their story by discounting the validity of their own means of transmitting their past – in order to become part of the global narrative, indigenous people must embrace and “displace colonial histories” “as colonialist histories have displaced Aboriginal people, their experiences and what happened to them” (Martiniello 162).

Billy, with the help of Fatima and other elders, wants to record the history of Karnama from an Aboriginal perspective – ‘Sort of like what these books do, but more what you remember, or what you know.’ (36-37) The old people of Karnama, who cannot read or write, welcome the idea of having their story finally written down: “You can write what I say, what we say, all together. [...] So people will read it, and know” (43), Fatima tells Billy, and at a later date it we learn that the entire community,

Sebastian, Fatima, Samson, even the kids; they seemed happy that he wanted to do their stories. They wanted these things written down: That they worked hard to help build up the mission, that they were clever and proud, that they still knew some of the old ways, and that the old ways were good.” (170)

It becomes apparent that having their history written is something the Aboriginal people not only want in order to set the record straight for the rest of the world, but that they are also embracing the permanent quality of a written text in order to ensure

that their story will be known by their own progeny. Billy first suggests that the history of Karnama should be written down for their youth:

‘You like stories? You want I tell you story, about old people, long time?’  
[...] ‘Yes. [...] It would be good, I think, for the kids to read. To learn to read about things to do with here. And read it the way you speak, sort of.’ (29),

and the elders agree him about the potential of a written history to keep the youth of the community from completely rejecting their Aboriginal heritage:

They can’t forget about our roots, they can’t leave behind and go to the whiteman roots. That no good.

Our time, we never see all these things. When early people was alive, in their own land, we never see such things. When we were little children, when we grow big, all our life we see things get all mixed. We see wrong things for our people, so far for the Aborigine the gardiya make trouble. Grog, money, everything.

So. What we gunna do? We can only do, we can only say. They can listen to us. They can believe us, what we say and what we tell them.

That’s all we say. That’s what we ask.

That’s what Billy should write down and show those kids. (125)

It is, however, not only the final text, the written affirmation and record of Karnama’s collective memory, but also the process of writing a history that is contributing to indigenous identity building: As discussed in chapter 4.2, Billy’s project has the welcome effect of giving the generations of Karnama a common endeavour to strengthen the collective consciousness of the community: “We might be all writing together, really.” (85)

### **8.2.2. The Storytelling Novel<sup>66</sup>**

All the novels are contributions to the literary traditions of their peoples and as such themselves proof of the potency of the written word when it comes to express contemporary indigenous concerns. *True Country* in particular addresses the need and the demand for a distinctively Aboriginal literary tradition as young, educated indigenous people are searching for literature that reflects their own experience:

[Gabriella] said they gave her Aboriginal literature to read. Her voice inserted quotation marks. She said it was dreaming stories, and they weren’t so good to read, not like being told them. Or they were in a language that she didn’t understand and then in English which made them sound silly, or as if they were only for little children. Or it was history stuff. Or sometimes just like any old story, but with black people. Or off-white people. (78-79)

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<sup>66</sup> This phrase is taken from Pascal (7).

Aboriginal literature, according to Gabriella, is still confined to certain typical niches – it is missing works dealing with the spectrum of issues that actually and specifically concern indigenous people today. Gabriella's report betrays the notion that even Aboriginal writers have still not entirely appropriated the written word as a means of expression and have not yet fully employed it to their advantage. Scott certainly makes an attempt to make up for what many have failed to do in his eyes, pushing the boundaries of the novel as the genre he has chosen in order to create a narrative as modern Aboriginal as possible in form and content, the latter of which has been discussed at length, while the former will be addressed in the following passages.

Duff's and Mda's novels lack Scott's meta-textual commentary; what the authors intend to contribute to the indigenous literatures of their countries has to be deduced from the stories themselves. Alan Duff has enriched New Zealand's established indigenous literary tradition featuring writers such as Witi Ihimaera, Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme with a no-holds-barred exploration of the urban Maori condition; Mda's novel has to be seen in the context of post-Apartheid literature, where South Africa's indigenous literatures are finally free to explore concerns other than the devastating effects of and the resistance to that overpowering oppressive system<sup>67</sup>.

The choice of the novel for a contribution to a distinctively indigenous literary tradition is a potent one; this is a genre that is notoriously hard to define, and as such it lends itself to reinvention in the context of new indigenous literatures. The three works boast quite a few formal characteristics that can be said to specifically link them to the indigenous cultures that they represent, and they can all be traced back to a common source: The significance of the oral traditions of the respective cultures for structuring their societies has been noted, and there appears to be a consensus between the three novelists that an indigenous written tradition, even in the English language, must reference this oral tradition in order to create a distinctive indigenous text and do justice to specifically indigenous modes of conveying story. Pascal notes this with reference to *True Country*:

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. [http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview\\_Wark.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040608/www.zakesmda.com/pages/Interview_Wark.html), 29 May 2010.

[Scott's work] suggests that an Aboriginal appropriation of the European narrative mode, the novel, if it is to be infused with the ancestral cultural genes, should be not just a story in writing but a story telling-to the extent that a print text can be that. (6)

*True Country*, at times, makes this claim quite literally: The novel includes many stories told to Billy by the old people, transcribed "as they speak", as was Billy's intention, and all of them close with a reminder of precisely what they are: "That's no story, it's true story" (68), "This one was a real story" (243), "True. True Story. Listen!" (208), to name just a few examples. This novel, as well as the other two, however, employs many more ways of incorporating elements of the oral traditions of their peoples into the novels.

*True Country* utilizes narrative perspective as one means to emphasize the distinctiveness of Aboriginal culture against the West: Scott has multiple narrative voices relay his story. This serves as both an expression of the community orientation of Aboriginal culture itself (cf. chapter 4.2.) and an attempt to convey the communal nature of a traditional Aboriginal storytelling event in writing. One of the few assertions that can be made about the novel as a genre is that it is usually regarded as the product of an individual mind; Pascal notes that the rapid alternation between narrative voices, including that of a communal persona in the form of the elders of Karnama, "tacitly casts into relief the modern Western valorization of individualism over communality" (4). At the same time, it pays homage to the communal nature of Aboriginal oral "narrative construction and reception":

A story is not simply what is told, a free-floating text; rather, it is a telling, a social event. Just as any single storytelling event invokes a shared memory of the multiplicity of voices that have previously generated and revised the narrative, as well as a premonitory awareness of those that will do so in the future, so too must the storytelling novel. As a storytelling event is on one level a collaboration between the raconteur and the listening audience, so, too, the storytelling novel must be. (Pascal 7)

Another way of evoking oral storytelling in a written text is the use of non-standard English: So people can "read it the way you speak, sort of" (cf. chapter 8.2.1), as Billy puts it. "A written narrative rendered in a patois forces the reader to imagine vividly a speaking voice as such" (Pascal 5), and both Scott and Duff employ this technique. Whenever the people of Karnama speak and tell stories, or when the old people narrate a part of *True Country*, this is relayed in their particular variant of the

English language; Scott employs non-standard grammar (“They not drive together” – 27), frequently using sentence fragments, contractions, abbreviations and omissions.

*Once Were Warriors*, told almost entirely from the perspective of the novel’s Maori characters, is written in large parts in the informal English of the people of Pine Block’s speech and thought. Duff, here, employs largely the same devices as Scott, adding frequent use of profanity which enhances the atmosphere of violence in Pine Block.

Okay, I come from Mangakino. Where’s that? Bout fifty k’s from here. Middle a fuckin nowhere. It *sucks*. Place *sucks*. So what’s your olds like? What’s *your* olds like, busta? Old lady’s good. Old man’s a wankah. Yeah, well I don’t know who my old man was, and my old lady’s a cunt. Yeah? Ya bedda believe it, busta. (152)

The English used in the novels is also infused with vocabulary and concepts taken from the respective indigenous languages, an appreciation of the fact that these languages, too, are a significant part of the cultural identities of the communities they belong to. The colonial language serves as a lingua franca including those people who have never had the opportunity to learn the native language of their ethnic group, which applies to many especially in settler nations; however, it is acknowledged that many concepts exist in a particular indigenous language only and can only be circumscribed rather than translated, like Maori *mana* (cf. chapter 3.2.1). Other words can be translated, but are purposely not, such as *inkundla* (Xhosa: court – cf. page 39) or *tupuna* (Maori: ancestors). This device also serves to convey the speaking habits of the community, naturally embedding indigenous vocabulary in otherwise English speech, when, for example, addressing white people as *gardiya* in *True Country* and *Pakeha* in *Once Were Warriors*. Of course, the inclusion of indigenous vocabulary particularly without translation or explanation represents an appropriation of the language of the colonists and a distinction from English speakers of other backgrounds (cf. Mofin Noussi 293).

Chapter 6.2. has already discussed the pervasive influence of the supernatural in traditional cosmologies, which is legitimised as a part of contemporary indigeneity by Scott and Mda in their novels. This characteristic of traditional indigenous cultures appears to be inextricably linked to the oral tradition of the peoples concerned – Mda outlines, in his article “Babel’s Happiness”, that the treatment of



transcendent forces as objective reality is a feature of the oral tradition of his people and a part of the stories he was told as a child:

Magic! That was one quality of the stories that left a lasting impression in my mind. The supernatural existed in the same context as objective reality. And all the participants in the storytelling performance – be they the storytellers themselves or the audiences – took this phenomenon for granted. [...] History itself – preserved through various poetic traditions and passed from generation to generation in that form – was steeped in myth, legend and magic. The magic of storytelling endowed real life historical heroes with magical powers.<sup>68</sup>

This is also reflected in the above-quoted statement from *True Country*, “We got no stories [...] We losing that power” (cf. chapter 8.1.), wherein the existence of power is seen as dependent on the existence of stories.

As noted in chapter 6.2., attempts to incorporate the “truth beyond ordinary experiences” (Pascal 8) into a written narrative have been labelled magical realism; Mda notes that both his work and the “original” magical realist fictions from South America by authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez draw their inspiration from oral traditions<sup>69</sup>. Magical realism – for lack of a better term – therefore appears to be the obvious choice of mode for an indigenous written narrative in a traditional setting.

Oral communities, as Kateryna Arthur notes, have a different understanding of time than literate cultures. Arthur argues that history, “a white invention”,

depends upon a view of time as an unfolding “scroll”. History proceeds sequentially, following the same kind of course as written words on a page. Because Aborigines have a different understanding of time, they do not recognize history as a distinct category. “The Dreaming” for them connects the present with the past. They have this in common with other oral communities. It is impossible to reproduce cyclical understanding of time in a language whose grammar operates out of a different system. (Arthur 58-59, cited in McCredden 22).

*The Heart of Redness* proves Arthur’s assertion in the last sentence wrong as Mda’s English-language novel is certainly successful in at least evoking the notion of the

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<sup>68</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040631/http://www.zakesmda.com/pages/oraltradition.html>, 29 May 2010.

<sup>69</sup> “I learnt that Gabriel Garcia Marquez has credited his grandmother as the source of his magic, and has also mentioned that the grandmother got the magic from the stories that were told by African slaves” (<http://web.archive.org/web/20070806040631/http://www.zakesmda.com/pages/oraltradition.html>, 29 May 2010).

past being “an integral feature of the present, not a distinct abstraction” (Loring and Ashini, quoted in Smith et al 21). Through the alternation in his narrative between the story of Nongqawuse’s generation and that of the present-day population of Qolorha, Mda points out remarkable similarities between events more than a hundred years past and the happenings of the present in his text, giving an impression of events necessarily repeating themselves, as has been shown in some of the passages cited in this paper; characters share names and a great amount of character traits – Qukezwa Zim has the knowledge, wisdom and faith of her namesake, Twin’s wife, and the headless ancestor Xikixa lives in the present in the form of the selfish and disrespected chief, the “headless twit” (cf. page 35), to name two prominent examples. Especially in Qukezwa’s case, the idea that her ancestor is a constant presence in her life, inspiring and guiding her, is certainly tangible.

By employing these narrative techniques, the authors have created narratives that are vibrant and dynamic, and represent true appropriations of a Western genre.

### ***8.3. The Oral Tradition in the Present***

While there are many ways to infuse the written with a sense of the oral, the written word can hardly be a true means to keep oral traditions alive. It is asserted in all the novels that there is a place for storytelling in the traditional sense today, as well.

*True Country* emphasises the talent the old people of Karnama have for telling stories, but it is not only them; this affinity appears to have been passed on to the children of the community as one of the few distinctively Aboriginal elements in their lives: they are not doing well in school, but Billy has noticed that “Some things, generalising, they seem extra good at though. Special strengths. Maybe like telling stories, joking, sometimes miming” (92). It is implied that this talent has potential to be cultivated as Aboriginal cultural legacy.

In *Once Were Warriors*, Te Tupaea chooses to convey their history to his people in a way that appears to be a faithful recreation of traditional oral storytelling: During his gatherings, the chief tells the Maori people of their ancestors, and alternates between speeches and performances like songs and dances. This he does with great success in both the *marae* of Wainui and in Pine Block’s urban meeting space, proving the

applicability of storytelling in the traditional sense to a contemporary indigenous context.

In *Heart*, Qukezwa adds the role of the storyteller to her many others. In keeping with Xhosa tradition, she combines her teachings to Camagu about Qolorha's history and environment with demonstrations of her proficiency in split-tone singing and playing the *umrhubhe*, creating a dense and dynamic example of oral culture that is irresistible to Camagu and once again proves how relevant traditional storytelling can be today.

## 9. Conclusion

This paper has emphasised the changes in indigenous cultures that have taken place ever since the arrival of the first colonists to the respective lands; the degree to which indigenous and Western cultures have interacted and the former have adapted varies, and so does the value which the authors accord elements of the respective indigenous cultures in their pre-contact incarnations and of the world view imported by the colonists.

If one looks at the novels from the standpoint of the scope of change proposed for an indigenous identity today, it is Kim Scott whose conceptions of a contemporary and future indigenous culture are most radically modelled on a past in which Aboriginal people were uninfluenced by the West. *True Country* at times appears to entertain the idea of an Aboriginal community by its rules and beliefs incompatible with the dominant society, especially considering the novel's ambivalent stance towards Aboriginal mythical power; in this respect it is the opposite of *Once Were Warriors*, in which Duff clearly and methodically combines elements of culture according to what he deems beneficial to the cultural survival of the Maori people as a part of a globalised world dominated by the ideologies of the West. *The Heart of Redness* portrays the community closest to its pre-colonial incarnation in terms of lifestyle and culture; like Duff's novel it takes a pragmatic approach advocating the adoption of Western structures where this is beneficial to the community, but emphasises the option of appropriating them and making them distinctively Xhosa, since there are "indeed many different paths to progress" (*Heart* 227).

The novels focus on different elements of culture in terms of their significance as elements of a contemporary indigenous identity. *True Country* clearly accords a great significance to the interaction with nature on both a material and a spiritual basis, whereas *Once Were Warriors*, in its urban context, appears to have set its hopes on creating a strong Maori identity through the communal practice of traditional rituals and customs and the teaching of indigenous history. Mda appears to consider all these elements important as constituents of a contemporary Xhosa identity. All the authors see a strong local community as the basis of lived indigeneity.

They also agree that a successful contemporary indigenous identity needs to involve both an oral and a written literary tradition. In form and content, the novels assert that a specifically indigenous written tradition should include elements of the oral tradition of their peoples. This oral tradition itself is portrayed as having potential to flourish; all the novels feature storytellers in the traditional sense, teaching, passing on indigenous knowledge by relating their people's mythology, and theirs are some of the most effective ways of reaching people.

The three novels have something else in common: the emphasis on the need for a balance between knowing the past, but not letting it dictate the present and future; the need for embracing change and allowing and attempting constant renewal of all indigenous cultural achievements. Mda's novel acknowledges the importance of the past, but asserts in his powerful commentary on cultural villages the need for culture to be dynamic in order to survive; Duff's work declares knowledge of their shared history as essential for instilling pride in their culture in the Maori people, but stresses the necessity to allow this knowledge to be adapted to contemporary challenges; it is Scott, however, who makes his point most beautifully in the conclusion drawn by the Aboriginal people of Karnama in the ending of his novel: "We gotta be moving, remembering, singing our place little bit new, little bit special, all the time."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *True Country*, 255.

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## 12. German Abstract

Eine starke kulturelle Identität wird als Voraussetzung gesehen, um die oft problematische Situation indigener Bevölkerungen in postkolonialen Nationen weltweit zu verbessern. Durch koloniale Maßnahmen wurden diese Kulturen in ihrer Entwicklung gestört und oftmals beinahe eliminiert; die drei Romane, die in dieser Diplomarbeit untersucht und verglichen werden – *The Heart of Redness* von Xhosa-Autor Zakes Mda aus Südafrika, *True Country* von Kim Scott über die Ureinwohner Australiens und *Once Were Warriors* von Alan Duff über die neuseeländischen Maori – befassen sich mit der Identitätsfindung drei solcher Kulturen.

Die Ausgangssituationen der drei ethnischen Gruppen unterscheiden sich dabei in einigen Belangen – die ehemaligen Siedlerkolonien wie Australien und Neuseeland weisen größere Verluste an indigener Kultur auf als Südafrika, wo die indigene Bevölkerung immer die Mehrheit stellte; nichtsdestotrotz finden sich in den Romanen viele Gemeinsamkeiten in den Vorstellungen der Autoren einer zeitgemäßen indigenen kulturellen Identität. Alle untersuchten Kulturen weisen große Unterschiede zwischen Indigenität im ländlichen und im urbanen Raum auf und zeigen anhand der Erfahrungen kulturell unsicherer Individuen, welche Faktoren sie als wichtig erachten, damit sich jemand als indigene Person fühlen kann. Ebenfalls wird auf das kollektive Bewusstsein der indigenen Gemeinschaften, in denen sich die Protagonisten der Romane wiederfinden, eingegangen. Alle Autoren betonen die Wichtigkeit gelebter Indigenität im Rahmen einer Gemeinschaft; traditionelle Glaubensvorstellungen werden ebenfalls eingebunden, wobei die Autoren hier zu unterschiedlichen Ergebnissen kommen – während Xhosa-Religion im Dorf Qolorha so fest verankert ist, dass eine Synthese mit dem dort lange präsenten Christentum angestrebt werden kann, beruft sich Kim Scott ausschließlich auf traditionelle indigene religiöse Vorstellungen; Protagonist Billy findet seine aboriginale Identität schließlich durch intensives Befassen mit der Natur um Karnama. Letzterer wird in *The Heart of Redness* ebenfalls ein großer Stellenwert beigemessen; dass es schwierig ist, im urbanen Raum dafür einen Ersatz zu finden, zeigt *Once Were Warriors*, wo der Versuch gemacht wird, durch die kollektive Praxis von kulturellen Bräuchen einer modernen Maori-Identität näher zu kommen.



Die Wichtigkeit der Vermittlung und Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit und Aussöhnung mit derselben wird in allen Romanen betont; dabei haben sowohl die orale als auch die literarische Tradition ihren Platz. Geschichtsschreibung im westlichen Sinne wird in *True Country* übernommen, um koloniale historische Werke zu berichtigen und sicherzustellen, dass der Nachfolgeneration eine vollständige Geschichte aus der eigenen Sicht zur Verfügung steht; die orale Tradition, in moderner Form, wird jedoch auch in allen drei Romanen als auch in der heutigen Zeit wirksame Form der Geschichtsvermittlung innerhalb lokaler Gemeinschaften behandelt.

Indigene Literatur soll unterdessen, so kann man aus dem Werk aller Autoren ableiten, ihre Besonderheit aus Elementen dieser oralen Tradition beziehen; alle drei Romane nutzen solche Einflüsse, um Romane zu verfassen, die repräsentativ für ihre jeweiligen Kulturen sind. Dabei werden Erzähltechniken und Stilmittel wie eine kommunale Perspektive, englische Umgangssprache, magischer Realismus und eine nicht-lineare Chronologie eingesetzt.

Die möglicherweise wichtigste Gemeinsamkeit der drei Romane ist die Betonung der Dynamik von Kultur und der daraus folgenden Notwendigkeit für Beweglichkeit einer jeder konstruierten indigenen Identität; gerade für indigene Kulturen, denen das Potential für Fortdauer von den Kolonialmächten versagt wurde, ist die ständige Veränderung wichtig, und dies mit der Erinnerung an und dem Bezug von Kraft aus der eigenen Geschichte und dem kulturellen Erbe zu vereinen, wird letztlich in allen Romanen als die große Herausforderung an indigene Kulturen heutzutage gesehen.



## 13. Curriculum Vitae

### Persönliche Daten

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