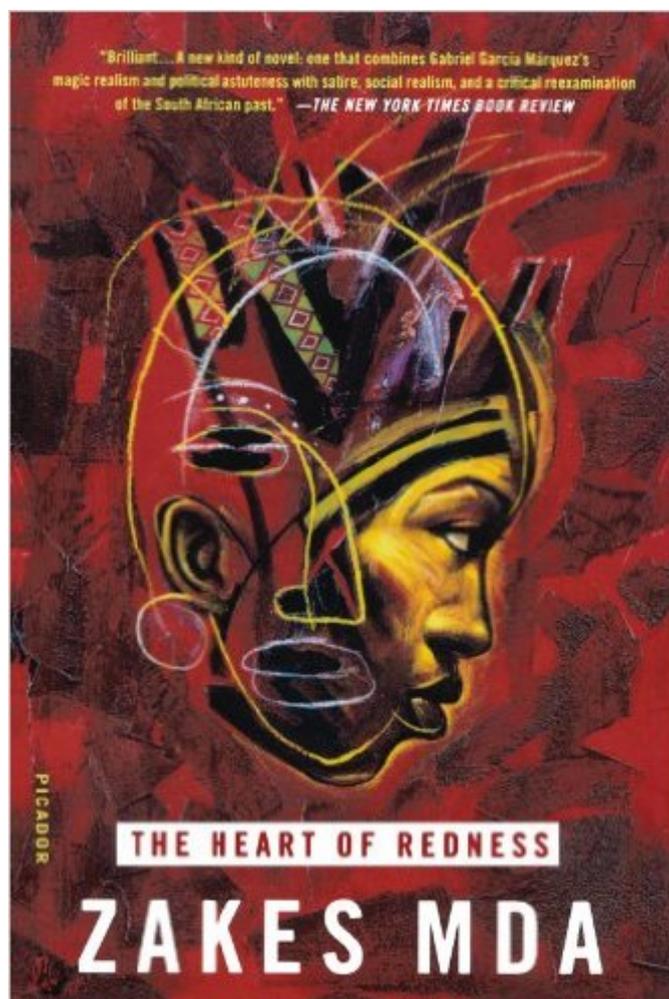


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# The Heart Of Redness: A Novel



## Synopsis

A startling novel by the leading writer of the new South Africa In *The Heart of Redness* -- shortlisted for the prestigious Commonwealth Writers Prize -- Zakes Mda sets a story of South African village life against a notorious episode from the country's past. The result is a novel of great scope and deep human feeling, of passion and reconciliation. As the novel opens Camugu, who left for America during apartheid, has returned to Johannesburg. Disillusioned by the problems of the new democracy, he follows his "famous lust" to Qolorha on the remote Eastern Cape. There in the nineteenth century a teenage prophetess named Nonqawuse commanded the Xhosa people to kill their cattle and burn their crops, promising that once they did so the spirits of their ancestors would rise and drive the occupying English into the ocean. The failed prophecy split the Xhosa into Believers and Unbelievers, dividing brother from brother, wife from husband, with devastating consequences. One hundred fifty years later, the two groups' descendants are at odds over plans to build a vast casino and tourist resort in the village, and Camugu is soon drawn into their heritage and their future -- and into a bizarre love triangle as well. *The Heart of Redness* is a seamless weave of history, myth, and realist fiction. It is, arguably, the first great novel of the new South Africa -- a triumph of imaginative and historical writing.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

To Bhonco, son of Ximiya, of the amaXhosa people of South Africa, redness connotes the backwardness of his ancestors. It refers to the red ochre "that women smear on their bodies and with which they also dye their isikhakha skirts". He strives to lead his family out of the primitive past,

out of the darkness of the redness , toward the rest of civilization. This he believes, can be advanced through the approval of plans for a new casino in his home village of Qolora-by-Sea; where tourists may flock, bringing sophistication and money and jobs. In his 2002 novel, *The Heart of Redness* (the title being an allusion to Conrad's classic novella) Zakes Mda, a South African, novelist, poet and playwright, not only recounts the true story of Nongqawuse, a young prophetess, and her supporters, the Cult of the Believers, but he also imagines the effect they had on modern day citizens of Qolora, her legacy to the amaXhosa. Bhonco belongs to the Cult of the Unbelievers, he follows the tenets of Twin-Twin, the original Unbeliever, who lived during the time of the great Xhosa cattle slaughter of 1856/1857 (see Jeff Peires' book *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* which Mda cites as the prime resource for this work). His distant cousin, Zim and his daughter, who live nearby, are Believers. They follow the philosophy of their ancestor Twin (Twin and Twin-Twin were brothers, son of the beheaded Xikixa) who were faithful to the prophecies: kill all your animals, cattle sheep, goats, and the great ancestors will rise from the ocean bringing fresh livestock and blessings for a fortuitous future. The two, Zim and Bhonco, as were their ancestors, are at odds; to join the modern or to respect the old ways, that is the question.

The novel *Heart of Redness* by Zakes Mda, tells a tale of rural integration and religious conflict of a village in post colonial South Africa. The novel reveals the metamorphosis of South Africans through an economic, social, and cultural lens in the 1990s. Africa is no long the primitive continent solely known for its vast concoction of indigenous cultures. Instead, it is an emerging economy with its people adjusting to modernity and the how the lives of many Africans coexists with the remaining colonial influences. This struggle for change and progress, versus preservation of the land and traditions, becomes the pinnacle feud between the Believers and Unbelievers. By folding different generations of stories with each character of the book, *Heart of Redness* becomes alive with vivacity. The story begins by introducing the Middle Generation that was lost to the colonial conflicts. Because of this great disturbance in African culture and history, the feud between the Believers and the Unbelievers drove the lives of many African decedents apart for decades. Camagu, the main character of the book, returns to South Africa for first time after being exiled to the United States for 30 years, finds himself to be a stranger in a land that he once called home. Camagu's character presented the readers an unbiased and western perspective as if the reader can experienced this story first handed. After being educated in the west and earned a repertoire of outstanding professions, Camagu's knowledge and experience were almost nonfunctional in South Africa. For

most jobs that he went looking for, he was overqualified. However, because he was not in the "elite" circle of the Aristocrats of the Revolution, he could not get into the jobs that would really allow him to make a difference.

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