

**COLOURLESS WHITENESS IN POST APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: ZAKES
MDA'S 'ECOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP' IN *THE BELLS OF AMERSFOORT***

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Abstract

Racism, by nature, is intricately bonded with migration; the first takes its evolution from the other, after a locus is established for the construction of the 'self' and 'other' binary. The South African experience, in its uniqueness, is best illustrative of other melting cultures globally. However, under such dispensations, while the people in the minority were transposed and made subservient in a new location, the migrated few in the South African case conquered, dominated and subjected the majority to servitude. Race, therefore, formed a centrifugal element in the coexistence of all the racial groups, defined by segregation and exploitation. As the vituperations against this trend best explain the literature in apartheid South Africa, the emerging order in post-apartheid literary engagements has promised a difference. One reflection of such development is the blurring of old racial defining lines as found between Tami and Johan in Zakes Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort*. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the formation of what is best illustrated by Helen Nicholson's concept of "ecological citizenship" (2005:33) in a character, Johan, who is ancestrally Dutch, but whose inclination is now to the scapes of South Africa. Given that this dramatic world could be taken as an "as if" of the South African situation, therefore, the paper seeks to argue that 'whiteness' is fast being threatened in the new South Africa, based on the preparedness of each individual to submit him/herself to the antics of "ecological citizenship".

Introduction

The idea of citizenship and identity defines the history of South Africa more profoundly than other countries on the continent. The conflation that characterises this description is found in some other spots like the United States of America. The cliché that has been hitherto synonymous to the nomenclature of the South African state, apartheid, putatively attempts both a redefinition of citizenship and ascription of identity. Little wonder that past struggles were launched purely on the indices and principles of exclusion, oppression and dehumanisation. However, while the story of the United States of America signals a defacement of the minority by the majority, the reality in the old South Africa appositionally paraded a situation where the majority was held in perpetual subjugation by the minority. It is saying the obvious that the minority blacks were seen in the United States of America as new comers and an oddity of a sort, while the minority whites in South Africa came with expansionist and exploitative tendencies. Details of such despicable treatments are best re-inscribed today through different archival documentations. While some are inherently probable; some others are conceived to be

explicitly disputable. Part of the negotiations and re-negotiations of these bits of memory have been done through literature, drama inclusive, which in apartheid South Africa was vulnerable to the reductionism of an element of struggle. However, such development is not absolutely avoidable going by the social commitment drama, just like other artistic media, is credited with. By so doing, drama is expected to continue its relevance by making a minimal paraphrase of the life of the people.¹ This is more so as there have been some unfounded apprehensions from some quarters concerning the possibility of post apartheid drama losing its bites, relevance and potency. Although this could be explained along the trajectory of the material that events in apartheid South Africa offered, such becomes misleading as it is capable of diminishing the existence of the people who produce these manifestations. What such a position implies is that there are no longer events and activities that could provide the needed materials for literary artists in the new South Africa. Recent engagements made by drama with the different permutations that help strengthen the new South Africa appear to dispel the initial worries attached to the place of literature, even drama, in the new South Africa. Although we should be reminded that the idea of the artistic imaginaries and the interactions it promises with factual realities have always been polemical, this paper seeks to locate an air of confluence between the two by making a reading of a play-text as a reflective experimentation of a social milieu.

The foregoing typifies the existence of the school of art-for-art-sake which sees the art work purely as an aesthetic material devoid of any correlation with a given or an imagined society. As no attempt is made at this point to investigate the different polemics that surround the interior and exterior looking emphasis with which a piece of art work is labeled, the effort being made here is to interrogate some of the strings of socio-political negotiations and re-negotiations going on in the imagined order found in Zakes Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort*. Although it might be difficult to argue that the issues of race and identity are strange to apartheid literature, the engagement made with it in the new South Africa imaginary calls for novel details that are derivable from the pervasive sing-song of "rainbowness", a metaphorical encapsulation of the elusiveⁱⁱ new South Africa.

Synopsis of the Text

Zakes Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort* is an intricately tied play-text that touches on happenings in three different worlds, the past, the present and the desired but unattainable future. The play is about the ordeals of a lady, Tami, a black South African, who has to go on exile in Holland following her arrest and torture by the apartheid agents. Her predicaments get worsened as a result of her unpreparedness to betray co-comrades who participated in the struggle, following her arrest, against the apartheid state. This arrest is coming up at the eve of her wedding to her heart-throb, Luthando. Her stay in Holland is full of high sense of physical and psychological disjunctions in spite of the deliberate efforts being made by her host to make her feel at home, as much as possible. All through her stay in Holland, she is haunted by the memory of her torture, personified in the booming of the bell of Amersfoort. In the midst of her drunkenness to attenuate the pains of her exile, another dramatic world, being the result of the segueing

technique deployed in the play, brings Tami face-to-face with Johan, a white South Africa with Dutch ancestry.

Tami's recognition of Johan as one of her torturers generates a huge, both internal and external, conflict which is dealt with extensively before the pseudo Truth and Reconciliation Commission convoked in the play. The confrontation between the duo re-enacts some of the activities of the Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu led Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Tami particularly desires confession and apologies from Johan who dehumanises her and jeopardises her wedding, but the latter informs her that that had been done before the TRC when Tami was not present. Apart from this, Johan blames his actions on his forbears who instruct him on what to do to stave off the excesses of the freedom fighters, like Tami, because of the threat they pose to the opportunities that have been hoarded for him. Johan, who hitherto looks forward to a home in Holland, gets disoriented and finds it hard to realise the spiritual rebirth he is seeking in wanting to take a degree in theology. Rather than concentrate on this, he gets involved in prurient relationship with Heleen, a black call-girl. At the end of the day, Tami and Johan choose to return to South Africa for the rebuilding project, following the demise of apartheid. On their return to South Africa, different realignments have taken place, with the emergence of new black elite class, which is populated by old comrades of the struggle. At the same time, some old white beneficiaries of the apartheid system have melted into the new emerging class. The consequence of this is that people who were involved in the struggle with Tami are now relishing in the opportunities offered by the Black Economic Empowerment programme, as they misappropriate what should ordinarily be used for the betterment of the lives of the disadvantaged blacks. Johan similarly feels betrayed by the white group as he willingly collaborates with Tami in improving the lots of people in the new South Africa. More particularly, Johan now sees home absolutely in South Africa as against the initial conception of Holland as his original cradle.

Peripatetic Agents; Migrating Identities

Identity politics in contemporary discourses is as convoluted and conflated as the preposterous intersections created by the various movements, displacements, and evacuations witnessed in human endeavours and interactions. This seemingly maneuvering is not limited to the sustenance of an old cultural hegemony but an ascription or localisation that is targeted at securing access to socio-political and economic opportunities as well as privileges of citizenship. Speaking at a round table discussion, Sunera Thobani,ⁱⁱⁱ whose propositions were tainted with a passionate inclination to the position of people of Aboriginal extraction in Canada, enthuses that the overt and implied dimensions to racism are citizenship, migrancy, dispossession, etc. Although the manifestations of these descriptions appear to be incongruous, they offer an interpolation that makes the reading of race relation and citizenship tendentiously polemical. Migrancy, no doubt, precipitates the process of dislocation and dispossession as the migrant suffers detachment from an undeniably familiar geographical locus; thereby losing the privileges his/her membership of such location confers. The issue of migration as mobility "has always been an inherent part of colonialism and industrialization. Sailors, soldiers, traders, administrators and settlers were sent out to manage and exploit the colonized others, who were constructed through racist ideologies

as being inferior and threatening” (Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson 2000: 8). Even though the tenets of citizenship prescribe the extension of privileges across the borders inscribed for the purposes of nation states that could not be said to be true in all circumstances. Therefore, as the migrant moves, he or she moves away from one racial and identity categorisation into another.

Race and human beings are inextricably tied to each other because of their interdependence. This goes to say, therefore, that phenotypical factors do aid the classification done within human groupings, which could be taken basically to be an effort at description. The foregoing is supported by the fact that “races have a long history but racism emerged only after different races came into contact, usually in colonial context” (O. T. Oomen 1997: 25). It is implied, therefore, that there is nothing inherently bad in the idea and issue of race. However, while race helps to describe and classify, but the manipulation of same to achieve socio-political and economic advantages is in itself fraudulent and unacceptable. It is merely saying the obvious that the state is always involved in the ascription of identity and citizenship as part of the maintenance of the *status quo*, which is often threatened by socially, politically and economically induced migrations. Little wonder that the state in apartheid South Africa employed numerous indicators of divisiveness to achieve what was considered desirable to it. Therefore, it is understandable while the state in the new South Africa is bent on blurring the lines of division constructed by the defunct apartheid order. By so doing, South Africa as “a geographical entity as well as a conceptual space” (Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn 2004: 8a) is metaphorically and politically (through the instrumentality of a negotiated constitution) generated today in the encapsulation of the “rainbow nation”.

Identity and the Physical Space

The South African geographical space is a melting pot of a sort considering the various racial conglomerations that have contributed to it. It is common-placed that any discussion to be done about the country must be driven along the trajectory of its history. The influx of people of Dutch, British, Chinese, and Indian ancestries in the seventeenth century and the subsequent settler colonial experience that the country had have left it a unique cosmopolitan centre. It is no accident, therefore, that the citizens in present day South Africa have had their identities hyphenated. This is illustrated in the use of Black/Indian/White/Coloured/Chinese, prefix to delineate citizenship in South Africa. What the above underpins is the history of the different migrants that constitute the present day South Africa. Although the elements of this nomenclature helps to achieve a categorisation as might be desirable for whatever reasons, it is also a reminder of the fact that the ancestors of most of the people, except black with greater ownership credentials, which belong to these categories are at one point or the other strangers/aliens in the geographical space. As a result, the inclusion that is being sought from this strategy inadvertently confers on the Blacks, who are supposed to be the descendants of the original occupants of the space, the identity of a stranger in their own land. This might, however, be explained as constituting a part of the spirit of reconciliation and nation-building. Recent discourses are enmeshed in different levels of conflation occasioned by the strains caused citizenship by varying migrating experiences. Either done for economic

or political reasons, the immigrant is constantly engaged in identity and citizenship negotiations, using the card of common will, when that of common culture, or acculturation, becomes either difficult or impossible.

No doubt, the politicisation achieved through race is carried out through the instrumentality of differentiation – that is, the distinction of individuals using indices that are socially constructed – even when there are biological manifestations as well. The preceding thought borders on inclusion and exclusion paradigms that are inherently, more often than not, tied to stereotypes and prejudices. This is more so because “throughout human history men have set themselves apart from others, making clear distinctions between those called ‘we’ and those called ‘they’” (Peter I. Rose 1970: 23), with the result being incredible tension and conflicts within particular societies. As a reminder of what has been stated earlier, this attempt at categorising is not outlandish by itself, but intricately problematic since “otherness is constructed on bodies” (Zillah Eisenstein 1996: 21). This process of othering using the body^{iv} pigments is in a way tantamount to commoditisation of same, and that is against the value of the personality that the body-construct houses. Other than the commoditisation of the body, Zillah Eisenstein (ibid) proceeds that “racism uses the physicality of bodies to punish, to expunge and isolate certain bodies and construct them as outsiders”. In another vein, but a related manner, it is apparent that the attempt at exclusion creates an identity for members within the group and thereby gives “some kind of meaning to an otherwise empty space” (Henri Tajfel and Joseph P. Forgas 2000: 55). The psyches of individuals caught in this socially defining and compartmentalising space would be configured in a way that he or she will have little control of and contribution to. This is reinforced by the fact that human beings as psycho-social animals are conditioned by not just the genes of their parents but the genius of the environment. The development of a psyche within the ambits of a particular social-cultural configuration is capable of creating in an individual the preponderance to see things in a particular way or manner. Within this psychic space, naming and interpretation of what is seen, and the negotiation and re-negotiation of fear, desire, and difference also take place (Zillah Eisenstein 1996: 22).

Prejudicial engagements with ideas are likely to be a follow-up to the remapping and recreation done to the minds of the individuals who are just trying to negotiate for a socio-political locus in the society, where they attain growth and nurturing. Prejudice “is defined as hostile or negative attitudes based on ignorance and faulty or incomplete knowledge. It is characterized by a tendency to stereotype, that is, a tendency to assign identical characteristics to whole groups regardless of individual variations” (Ali Rattansi 1992: 25). Defining stereotypes and prejudice in a manner that agrees with the definition given by Rattansi above but with an addition that the differentiations done at the level of grouping without recourse to individuality is driven on the basis of “physical characteristic (such as skin color, gender, or age)” (Charles Stangor 2000: 2). This means that every relationship shared with a member of the prejudiced group is preemptively tainted with suspicion and mistrust, and possibly hatred, the latter which is fueled, often times, “by fictive symbols, by pictures in the mind” (Zillah Eisenstein 1996: 23), or “a set of *unquestionable assumptions*” (Stuart Hall 2003: 91). These assumptions are generative of social inequalities that are usually characteristic of race, class and sex classification. However, reiterating the view of Homi K. Bhabha (1994b: 66) on the “ambivalence” of the colonisers’ stereotypes of the colonised, it was revealed that stereotypes are “a form

of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Papoulias Constantina 2004: 53). Bhabha, at any rate, proceeds to submit that this preceding view is illustrative of the 'authority' and 'limits' of the colonisers whose constant repetition of stereotypes exposes the non-fixation of same. This goes without saying, therefore, that perceptions are normally manipulated, even as "different and subordinate groups are not merely described, they are debased, degraded" (Jan Nederveen Pieterse 2003: 114).

The foregoing is reminiscent of the overt and implied dimensions to racism. Added to this is the fact that citizenship in most part of the world is today shrouded in complexities that are inherently implicit of the notions of migrancy and dispossession. Identity is now often times built on attachment to land and territory, with the state at times guilty of imposition. The participation of the state is a fall-out of the centrality of power which is harboured by the state. It should be noted that one of the instruments used by the state is multiculturalism which becomes relevant in view of the variegation that taints the conglomeration of people in particular space, following the sudden pressure imposed by movements across borders, therefore culminating in ethnic communities. Although we cannot pretend to be living in a borderless world, movements from the South to the North have characteristically been inhibited while those from the metropolises to the margins are usually done with something close to self discretion; the trend having been initiated in the explorative cum exploitative colonial incursions made to such locales. Given that multiculturalism allows for negotiations between different cultures, as the case may be, fairness in this process could not be said to be absolute as some actors assume domineering tendencies while others are pushed to precarious fringes.

The implication of this pigeonholing is that these people would be left with the Hobson choice of deploying supplication in place of assertion in various negotiating processes. Further to the above is the use of national identity to perpetuate racial politicisation. In spite of the fact that this measure of identity construction is a good instrument of the state, access to it is a little cumbersome for marginalised immigrants as against the ready accessibility that it offers to other group members within the nation-state. Caught in these complications of the power relations of race, the best option available to the marginalised is to name racism in order to resist it. However, the reaction of the marginalised immigrants to their situation is often times compromised by the lack of relevant information or history of their situation to generations after them, and as a result, they would resort to complacency as a survival strategy. This means that opportunities and privileges are still defined using the instruments of inclusion and exclusion, however implicit they might be. The idea of race, identity and citizenship, have been variously theorized using nomenclatures that range from multiculturalism to national identity, hybridity to creolisation. Sarah Nuttal and Michael Chery-Ann's (2000) preference for the latter is informed by what they call "an inflection beyond" (Distiller and Steyn 2004: 9) the former. The above indices, no doubt, are meant to facilitate negotiations, most especially by the state, between different cultures, as exemplified above.

There is no gainsaying the fact that identity in most narratives, both fictional and autobiographical, is constructed on attachment to land and territory; put differently, space, spatiality and mapping. However, the trend is now witnessing a redefinition to

include both the global and local. The transcendentalism of the local is often times propelled by the idea of the global community and an attempt to situate the 'homeless'. It must be acknowledged that these presumptions are not in themselves devoid of certain complications and contradictions. The fluid nature of identity and discourses around it are reminiscent of the view that "citizenship is a dynamic social practice, an identity that is constructed through networks of identification, open to change and renewal, rather than a fixed and immutable legal state" (Helen Nicholson 2005: 27). Nicholson's view presupposes that the individual has a major and significant role to play in the manipulability and fluidity of identity which is done to achieve intentions that are politically, economically and socially inclined. Apparently, the description of South African citizens using the hyphenated identities of Black, White, Asian, Indian and Coloured- South African is a perpetuation of the racialisation of the South African nation, which every effort is being made to eliminate. Even though this nebulous intention could be read as a strategy by the state to encourage a national identity through the dictates of nationalism, such commitment would at the same time reawaken the borders that are to be jettisoned.

Whitening or Blackening Whiteness

The tone of the various discourses of whiteness is set by the opinion that "although race has been a dominant feature of social construction since the eighteenth century it is significant that whiteness as a defining racial category has only recently emerged in the range of chromatic ideas of human difference" (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin 2007: 220). No doubt, the theorising of whiteness has assumed varying proportions in categorisation and explication. These have been done from the invisibility of whiteness to the idea of privilege. The duality of these explications is accompanied with the senses of embarrassment and guilt. The foregoing is implicitly indicative of the perceptions about whiteness which are oftentimes bereft of the realities of socio-economic, as well as political gradability that are inherited in the lumping classification of whiteness. This paper, therefore, is conscious of the different markers of distinction that exist within the larger category of whiteness; achieved through 'race' and 'ethnicity'. More specifically, the issue of whiteness being explicated in this paper is done within the ambits of the relationship shared between two racial groups, most especially propelled by the binary of skin pigmentation, Blacks and Whites, in the ontology of the South African state. Whiteness, as indicated in the short synopsis of the play-text being investigated, is constructed in the characterisation of Johan, who is a White-South African of Dutch ancestry. It should be stated that the white minority in South Africa are made up of Afrikaners who are original Dutch settlers that first came in 1652 and the English who originally emigrated from Britain and started settling down in 1820. However, both "the Afrikaners and the English...shared a colonial and apartheid domination and super-exploitation of non-Whites in a predominantly Black South Africa" (Jay A. Vora and Erika Vora 2004: 303-304).

The 'Interrogating Whiteness Colloquium'^v offered a good opportunity for a rereading of some of the assumptions and prognoses of whiteness. Central to these interrogations are the views expressed by Melissa Steyn, who was one of the keynote speakers. Starting with the idea of the global engagements of whiteness, from its

commitments to anti-racism, anti-colonialism, anti-apartheid, to the ignorance of white people of the privileging of race and its subsequent reconfiguration, Steyn posits what she calls the seven moments in whiteness studies. These are: the placing of whiteness on the radial screen, the eradication of the racial tropes of whiteness, the particularisation of whiteness, internalisation of whiteness studies — looking at power and the particularity of location, the configuration of different factions of whiteness to what it does from one place to another, the dynamics of whiteness as it travels globally — different deployments across different contexts and self reflexivity and the notion that whites who write about whiteness are simply writing about themselves. To this set of people, Steyn advises that they should not bring whiteness to their writing as they could be betrayed easily by their emotions. Steyn further opines that efforts should be made to interrogate what would happen when white people lose their privileged position in South Africa and try as much as possible not to be silent on the views of blacks South African about Whites. It is obvious that the propositions made above by Steyn fairly but concretely represent the situation of white studies across the globe.

The implication underpinned by the foregoing is reminiscent of the re-inscription of whiteness along the historical paradigm of dialecticism and intercultural entanglement of binary shadow, which leads to the reduction of whiteness to wildness, leading to the burden of moral rectitude (Leon de Kock 2008).^{vi} Whiteness is made possible by the idea of recognising difference which has “become a central concern to contemporary societies” (John Downing and Charles Husband 2005: 1). As this differentiation breeds distinction, it becomes almost natural that people would be gripped by the fear of hybridity which, in a way, is in furtherance of the blurring of the distinctions that have been identified. This agrees with the position that “whites would not be able to exist were it not for fears of race mixing, gender blending, class-passing, and other forms of hybridity” (Gwendolyn Audrey Foster 2003: 33). The apprehension generated by hybridity and the need to avoid it are exemplified in the fact that hybridity is race mixture which is perceived “as a process of inevitable biological degeneration” (Elisa Larkin Nascimento 2004: 863). This recognition is ineluctably tied to the need for differentiation; using what is called “the sorcery of color” (Elisa Larkin Nascimento 2004: 861). As a result of this construction of binaries, blacks have been viewed as savages and devoid of civilization, which makes their colonisation unavoidable and a necessity. The reason and implication of this is found in the fact that “identification with a dominant ‘self’ has, historically, created a marginalised and objectified ‘other’” (Helen Nicholson 2005: 73).

However, white, following the precipitation of a ‘post’, has become “haunting and haunted” (Meaghan Morris 2006: 11). The fact that whiteness could haunt and at the same time be haunted connotes that whiteness thrives on multiple meanings. As a result, whatever position being proposed on whiteness is devoid of univocal nature and absoluteness since contexts and agencies differ significantly from one point to the other. The misleading assumptions tied to whiteness have been touched on by so many scholars, and suggestive of the idea that people talk about whites as a group “when they may not share a common self-conscious identity” (see Amanda E. Lewis 2004: 626; Perry, 2002; Hartigan 1999; Gallagher 1997; Frankenberg 1993; and Waters 1990). This later finds agreement in the position that “white is a many shaded color” and, therefore, “whiteness

must become hyphenated” (Ernesto Pujol 2000: 98). Although in-grouping identification is acknowledged in the above position, it does not preclude the central place the individual occupies, which shall resonate in the analysis of the interactions between the two central characters that shall be examined in the play-text, *The Bells of Amersfoort*.

The huge caution some white people normally show towards the discourse of whiteness is as a result of the association of the process with racism. The beclouding albatross of the colour white has been explained based on the proposition that racism is constructed as an integral part of the people’s personalities. But this does not in any way negate the fact that these people seeking exceptions do have access to the privileges and power that are conferred by whiteness. It is further posited that “in spite of the widespread abhorrence of overt racism, the stubborn, unacknowledged belief in White superiority remains largely intact (Miller, 1995), shaping the institutionalized structures that reproduce race-based privileges and discriminatory outcomes” (Sharon M. Chubbuck 2004: 302). Instances of such denigrating outcomes are found in the exhibition of Africans such as Sarah Baartman, also known as “Hottentot Venus”, “who was displayed in Europe in the nineteenth century to ‘prove’ the anatomic difference between Europeans and Africans”. This reduction of human personality to mere chimera, and the commoditisation of the human body attain a dastardly proportion when white spectators could poke and prod not just her anatomy but “her supposed large buttocks and genitalia” (Gwendolyn Audrey Foster 2003: 14).

This experimentation is obviously an attempt to find biological justifications for the privileging of whiteness and the denigrating representations of incivility, savagery, ‘darkness’ that have always defined the naming, classification and categorisation of race. This racial devaluating conception is betrayed on the notion that “[it is] scientific to hold yourself aloof from a race with a lower civilization and...more limited intellectual powers...” (Donnarae MacMann and Yulisa Amadu Maddy 2001: 30). Apart from this scientific approach to the discourse, some socio-political dimensions are also involved. This socio-political maneuverings is aptly encased in the thinking that “race...[is] a worldview,...a cosmological ordering system structured out of the political, economic, and social realities of peoples who had emerged as expansionist, conquering, dominating nations on a worldwide quest for wealth and power” (Jane H. Hill 1998: 680). The failure of this process, however, is underscored by the fact that race is still socially defined, at least without provoking some controversies. Little wonder, therefore, that there has been “a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence are justified by their not being white” (Sharon M. Chubbuck 2004: 303).

The politicisation of skin colours, and most especially the privileging of whiteness is an externalisation of the myths of colour pigmentation that were designed and deployed to authenticate the sociological drive for superiority. By so doing, whiteness is hegemonically configured to cohere with “the norms that are arbitrarily seen as synonymous with all that is good, serving as ‘the unnamed, universal moral referent’ by which all other are evaluated and found wanting” (Sharon M. Chubbuck *ibid*: 304). Implicit in the view of Chubbuck is the fact that standards are set using the instrumentality of whiteness, most especially in determining goodness, and acceptable morality. Further to the several notions of privileged whiteness that we can find above, whiteness is at times conceived and described purely using the elements of domination

and superiority that are implicit in its conception. Even though some white people can take departures from these constructions in an attempt to exorcise themselves of the guilt of whiteness, the fact remains that it is merely saying the obvious. For instance, whiteness has been referred to as “a system and ideology of white dominance and superiority that marginalizes and oppresses people of color” (Alice McIntyre 2002: 31). The details of the prognoses of whiteness appear self-serving, shallow and unacceptable. Setting moral standard based on the pigmentation of skin colour, as we have been made to see above, is susceptible to ridicule as the fundamentality of morality, which borders on human personality, has been affronted and eroded. The condemnation of the process is reinforced more so that issues of morality are as variegated as the personalities of individuals. This is more so because of the pretension that allows a blanket approval for every person within a particular social group, carved on whiteness, as qualifying for utopianism. This is not only misleading, but a perpetuation of the commonality of untruthfulness. By and large, “it is all too easy for ‘whiteness’ to be equated with a homogenous way of life” (Mary J. Hickman and Bronwen Walter 1995: 5). This, to every reasonable extent, is not only polemical, but debatable.

Shifting and Ambivalent Whiteness in South Africa

It should be noted, however, that the place of Whites in South Africa is unequivocally a privileging one,^{vii} going by the opportunities offered by the apartheid regime. As a result, whiteness has been constructed in the South Africa context racially, socially, economically and politically. We should be reminded once more that the character being interrogated in the play-text, Johan, could not pass for a “representative in demographic terms of the white population” but a “representative of a certain historical tension within the white population and in the history of its relationships with black people” (Sarah Nuttall 2001: 116). The colonial and dominating norms attached to the presence of whiteness in South Africa, just like in some other locations on the continent of Africa, are an extension of the settler^{viii} connotation of such presence. This notion of settler is inherently tied to the idea and polemics of master-slave dialectic. According to her, this dialectic is based on the understanding “in which the settler occupies a position of power based on the conquest and the ownership of the land through violent means, leading to the dispossession and subjugation of the native owners of that same land” (Nuttall (ibid: 117). The foregoing captures, as succinctly as possible, the historiography of the experience of native people in South Africa. The subjugation and the dispossession witnessed in this trajectory led to vociferous militating actions which culminated in the birth of a democratic government led by the representative of the majority black. Consequent upon the delineation achieved by using the terminology of settler, it is presupposed that this set of people are “coming from elsewhere, rather than being of the place” (Nuttall Ibid: 118). Following the dismantling of the past dispossession, subjugation and domination of the apartheid era, conscious efforts are now being made to integrate people who were in the past divided along the lines of race. Therefore, “the term settler shifts as the move is made from the politics of conquest and subjugation to the politics of negotiation and belonging”^{ix}; separately belongingness that characterised the apartheid era, is given way to belonging together in post apartheid South Africa. The

negotiated South African democracy is inclusive of all those who share, in the words of Nelson Mandela, “spiritual and physical oneness” with the “common homeland” of South Africa and carried the pains of seeing the country being torn apart under the “the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression”.^x Through performativity^{xi} of power and governmentality^{xii}, there has been a transformation of the settler to a citizen. But this is a departure from Gerrie Snyman (2005)^{xiii}. Starting with the notion that whiteness in South Africa is akin to what is called “a status group category that resembles the existing international social structure of a bureaucratic class in the world economic system” (Wallerstein 1991: 189), Snyman bemoans the fact that the practice of “Africanicity” in Africa takes care of Arab nations to the exclusion of white settlers in the continent.

Snyman’s view, apart from removing the smokescreen from the identity and citizenship negotiations and renegotiations in Africa, as reflective of other melting pot all over the globe, reinforces the problematic situations precipitated by the borderless behaviours of migrants, which are wont to be explained off using the characteristic ontology of globalisation. This concurs with the thinking that “the figure of the citizen has, historically, been deemed either a resident of a nation or of the world” (Ivor Chipkin 2007: 13). The above point also raises some questions about nationhood and nationalism which are two veritable instruments of citizenship politicisation. Attempts have been made at a problematic differentiation between what is called “a citizen...and an authentic national subject”, with the argument that even if citizenship is constructed on the “principles of universal human rights...nation-building would have us to say that some citizens are more authentically members of the nation than others” (Chipkin 2007: 10). The latter part of Chipkin’s argument appears to be oblivious of other indices of citizenship practiced elsewhere in the world. Whatever the quantity of the privileging that Chipkin’s notion indicates, it leaves a wide room for avoidable complications which for instance are illustrative of certain elements of personality violations that the new South Africa is striving hard to eliminate. At best, Chipkin’s prognosis could be explained in the trajectory of abuse by the state or its agents in the administration of citizenship and the attendant privileges.

Citizenship and nationhood are particularly important to the new South Africa going by its past history of inequality and injustice in the naming of citizenship and the deployment of accruable opportunities. Other than the jabs thrown at forces who find it difficult to face the reality of equality and none racial, sexist, and gender dealings precipitated by the democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela in his inaugural speech as the president of South Africa also recognised the oneness of identification the people shared with the motherland as a unifying instrument for nation-building. The totality of this consilatory approach is threatened by other manifestations that are nameable in other interactions and endeavour. It should be emphasised that such are recognisable from the agents of whiteness and blackness alike. This trend is referred to as “pathologized nationalism”, which is to “associate with an ideology of exclusion, in which the outgroup is cast as a threat to the ‘purity’ of the nation” (Helen Haste 2004: 416). This goes to mean that human beings generally mark, categorise and name using shifting indices like race, ethnicity, colour, sex class, etc. For instance, the statement below made by Thabo Mbeki,^{xiv} cited in Chipkin (2007: 99), is replete with both the strategies for unification across racial lines and the inadvertent furtherance of such existing bifurcations:

I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape... I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land... In my veins courses the blood of Malay slaves who came from the East. ... I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, the patriots Cetshwayo and Mpephu took to battle, the soldiers Moshoeshe and Ngungunyane taught never to dishonour the cause of freedom.

A critique of this statement leaves us with so much. However, concentration shall be given to the first part as a result of its relevance to the idea of foreignness (whiteness) being investigated in this paper. Although the souls of the Khoi and the San are desolate as they wander and haunt “the great expanse of the Cape”, it is obvious that they are early callers than the migrants, who are encapsulated in a negotiated nomenclature as against other postcolonial terminologies such as invaders and colonisers. The idea of their finding a new home also reinforces the fact that they do not ordinarily belong to the new geographical space, and could as well have been accommodated subject to the various appropriate indices of citizenship. In a way, Mbeki has implicitly reinscribed the instruments of inclusion and exclusion even though the trajectory of his statement is a bridging fulcrum for the emerging multicultural interactions. The foregoing, therefore, exemplifies the experience of Johan, a white man with Dutch ancestry in *The Bells of Amersfoort*. His construction in the play is “one exemplar of how race works itself out biographically and personally” (Melanie Walker 2005: 129).

The biography of Johan in the play shows that he is an offspring of a family that immigrates into South Africa. He is therefore genetically constructed to assume the place of whiteness, and socially instructed to elicit loyalty and attachment to his ancestral home in Holland. Apart from these, Johan grows up to live in a politically mapped space that gives him opportunities over other people from different racial groups, and is schooled to protect these privileges from the ravenous eyes of people like Tami, who is coming from the background of dispossession and deprivation. Johan, therefore, emerges a personality that shares identification with a racial group and recognises differentiation with others. This identification then produces in him affiliation to the group which he shares some property with, and place him against the others. Therefore, stereotypes and prejudices are bound to begin to form. It is therefore arguable to hold that Johan is made to subscribe to an “involuntary identification” at this stage of his life since identity is “about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others” (Melanie Walker 2005: 133). However, the involuntary identification Johan has for the white group is open to other possibilities since identity is a shifting social project.

Postcolonial explications of identity have, at one point or the other, show that identity is not static, but unstable and shifting, most especially in the face of the various “mass migrations”^{xv} that attend dealings amongst people from different segments of the globe. Apparently, the construction of Johan within this trajectory is not just reminiscent of a fragmented identity, but a mobile one which responds to several indices to negotiate with other elements along the peripatetic dimension. It is also obvious from the

experience of Johan that homogeneity and bordering are fast been challenged in postcolonial interactions as cultures and capital keep moving to perpetuate the idea of transnationalism, even as the idea of the ‘nation’ tends to be as recalcitrant as possible. Johan’s sense of the transnation is reinforced by his inclination at transformation and the interpolation of the state as well as “the erasure of simple binaries of power” (Ashcroft, *ibid*). As a result, Johan is occupying what Ashcroft has called “the in-between-space” where people, nation and community’s definitiveness is suspended for eclecticism. Ashcroft goes further to submit that “in-betweenness is not a state of suspended subjectivity, but a state of fluidity, of porous boundaries, of travel between subject positions” (3).

By reason of this in-between space, it is obvious that Johan is embarking on the project of self-reconstruction. It is also obvious that Johan’s identity behaviours in the reading of the play-text are in tandem with some ideas of identity shared by Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha, in response to some other postcolonial theorists who claimed that identities and social communities are “shaped through boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘self’ and ‘other’”, argues that identities are “inevitably hybridized, because the spaces of social life are formed through a *rupturing* of boundaries and through-flows of illicit border traffic” (Constantina Papoulias 2004: 54b). Further to the above are Bhabha’s terminologies^{xvi} such as ‘hybridity’, ‘the in-between’, ‘cultural translation’ and ‘third space’^{xvii}. More particularly, Johan exhibits the first three possibilities as there are no indications to the effect that he manifests the last. The foregoing further reinforces the fact that “citizenship is a dynamic social practice, an identity that is constructed through networks of identification, open to change and renewal, rather than a fixed and immutable legal state” (Helen Nicholson 2005: 27). Out of the varying forms of citizenship that have been recognized in postcolonial identity discourses, this article seeks to apply the nuances of ecological citizenship in foregrounding the perceived pattern of behaviour of Johan in the matters of identity and citizenship.

Ecological (social) Citizenship and the Ontology of Johan

The recourse made to ecological citizenship^{xviii} in this paper is uniquely conceived going by the peculiarities it exudes in the discourses of citizenship. The concept has been used majorly by environmentalists and geographers to interrogate the processes of regeneration and commitment to the environment, most especially the need to halt the various degradations going on in the ecological space, and secure responsible interactions from the people on things that border on the environment. In spite of the novelty inhered in the application of this concept, several suggestions have been made as they affect the relationships that exist between citizenship and the environment. While making references to the different manners^{xix} by which these relationships have been interrogated, it is subsequently concluded that “the term ecological citizenship is not univocal” (Carme Melo-Escrihuela 2008: 114). When the constituent words (ecology and citizenship) are conceived separately, the first, that is ecology, has to do with the space and the other elemental components that make it adaptable for human existence. Adaptability is central in this case as a result of the many natural misbehaviours the natural and violated spaces promised in forms of disasters. The second constituent, citizenship, like every basic universal description given to it, involves the rights and responsibilities expected from an individual to the entity in which s/he is a member, most especially that

achieved through the mapping or imagining of space called a nation. The peculiar relevance of this concept in this explication is found in the version of it called social ecology “which involves the study of how social organizations work...” (Mark J. Smith 1998: 2). This classification is more important as Smith (ibid) further posits that “for much of its existence, ecology referred either purely to social organization or solely to natural relations”. So, this concept is being adopted in this paper to encapsulate what is conceived as “the participatory right approach and the personal duty approach” of Johan which leave him thinking global and acting local. Using the concept of ecological citizenship is made more desirable as it is perceived as “a mechanism for inclusion and political participation” (Carme Melo-Escrihuela 2008: 115).

In spite of the nuanced inclinations shown by ecological citizenship to the environment, some of the tropes used by scholars in discussing the term are instructive in this paper. For instance, ecological citizenship has been defined as “an inflection of post-cosmopolitan citizenship...a way of encouraging people to act more sustainably” (Andrew Dobson 2003: 3). In another vein, the view of Dobson on the post-cosmopolitan nature of the concept is reiterated with further opinion that ecological citizenship “recognises that as members of global society we are ‘always already’ obligated to others at a distance, a concept best expressed in the notion of ecological footprints” (John Huckle 2003: 12). The sustainability and responsibility inhered in the nature of the treatment of ecological citizenship, although targeted at the environment, should be first to man as he, like other elements of nature, could be endangered by the action of the agency; ecological citizenship. Dobson proceeds to talk about four principal characteristics of ecological citizenship which cohere with that expected from one citizen in the globe to the other. They are: non-reciprocal responsibility, non-contiguous and non state understanding of political space, that private arena is as much a sphere for citizenship as the public arena, and the analogy between citizenship virtues and that expected from ecological citizenship.

Johan in Zakes Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort* assumes two of these characteristics, significantly, in reconstructing himself after the initial conditioning and configuration done of him by his white group. The condition that sees him grappling with the complications of his ancestral home, Holland, and the quick assumption of the space of the new South Africa as against other whites who have melted into the new emerging privileged order resonate the ascription of the place of the individual and a display of non-reciprocity. It is posited in another vein that “ecological citizenship is a metaphor that suggests the complex, interdependent, interactive and often uneven relationships between local and global interests in the practice of citizenship” (Helen Nicholson 2005: 33). Johan's in-between space, as mentioned before, allows him to relate with the local community of South Africa even as he nurses the ‘imagined community’^{xx} of Holland in his heart. This type of unevenness would be a useful trait in every political citizen as s/he would know that even though his/her immediate political community requires a useful participation in her activities, there will also be the realisation that the ecological/political world/environment out there expects that s/he functions ‘responsibly’. This, in a way, takes a departure from borderless and global world/citizenship that has been canvassed. This is more so going by the fact that a citizen functioning within a particular mapped space and an uneven global interactions could operate reasonably and sustainably from

the platform of ecological citizenship, which though appears remote still seems near. Apparently, this finds an agreement in one of the goals of ecological citizenship, which allows an individual's participation as a member of a community and the pursuit of private interests which would not impact negatively on the environment/world around them (Andrew Light 2002: 15).

Conclusions: the Continuous Shifts

Zakes Mda's *The Bells of Amersfoort* exemplifies the idea of "communities of location: where networks are forged by people who live geographically close to one another" (Helen Nicholson 2005: 86), using the interaction between Tami and Johan. It also portrays the shifting of identity and citizenship as the individual negotiates along the ontology of social and political realities, even as the nation is "conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Benedict Anderson 1991: 7). It goes to mean, therefore, that the willingness of Johan to participate in the reengineering of the South African nation, as popularly canvassed by Tami a black South African, is evident of individual subjectivity in identity and citizenship politics when juxtaposed with the integration witnessed between the old white beneficiaries of the apartheid era and their recent elite black compatriots. Identity and the ascription of citizenship are, therefore, still irrevocably made ambivalent by identification and dissociation, materiality and opportunities. It is, therefore, plausible to argue that all identities in South Africa, most especially whiteness, are at the moment occupying what Homi K. Bhabha, calls the "third place of enunciation" or the "contradictory and ambivalent space" (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin 2007: 108).^{xxi} This ambivalence is underscored by the statement Johan makes in a conversation with Tami:

It is an insult to call an Afrikaner a Dutchman...The Afrikaner is an African and the Dutch are Europeans. Even though I speak the language. Even though I look like any Dutch person. I live for the day when I go back home (*TBA*, 144).

However, the identity and whiteness of white-South Africans is subjectively made more precarious going by the negotiations that are still ongoing in the 'globalised' South African space. While others like Johan are ready to compromise their whiteness for a new brand of identity, some other ones are unrepentantly committed to the purity of their beings. The trends in this play-text seem to raise the severe connotations in issues of race, citizenship and identity, and tend to be gravitating towards the notion of "nation-ness" which is "the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Benedict Anderson's 1991: 3). Going by the dictates in this play, most especially the conducts of Johan, it could be concluded that whiteness seems to be everywhere and nowhere in the new South Africa (Melanie Walker 2005: 50).

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End Notes

ⁱ Ato Quayson

ⁱⁱ I have chosen to describe this as such because of the suspicion I have for the process, as what obtains in reality is at variance with what this aphorism is meant to achieve.

ⁱⁱⁱ She was speaking at a round table chat as part of the activities of the Human Conditions Series Conference held in Barrie, Ontario, Canada, between May 2nd and 3rd, 2008.

^{iv} It has been submitted that "the human body is a powerful medium of expression of both inner, personal states and social relations" (René Devisch 1990: 115, quoting Jacobson-Widding 1983).

^v The colloquium was held on May 10, 2008, at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa.

^{vi} Leon de Kock made this submission at the 'Interrogating Whiteness Colloquium'.

^{vii} However, there is a report that some poor whites live in Bethlehem, which was visited by the ANC President, Jacob Zuma, as part of his reaching out to people from every shade, being part of the build-up to the contest for the presidency in 2009.

^{viii} Michael Chege (1998), cited in Sarah Nuttall (2001: 117) encapsulates whiteness identity in postcolonial African contexts as "Africans of European Descent".

^{ix} Nuttall (2001: 118).

^x These were contained in the statement he made at his inauguration as the President of the Democratic Republic of South Africa at the Union Buildings, Pretoria, on May 10 1994.

^{xi} Gerrie Snyman (2005: not paginated) quoting from Butler's book: *Bodies that Matter*. The term and that which follows it are used to encapsulate the negotiated process of democratisation in the drafting of the constitution and the establishment of the TRC, latter on.

^{xii} Foucault's formulation used in Nuttall (2001: 118).

^{xiii} Unpaginated.

^{xiv} He made the speech titled "I am an African" in Cape Town on behalf of the African National Congress on the occasion of the adoption of the Constitution in May 1996.

^{xv} Benedict Anderson (1992: 7), cited in Euan Hague (2004:18b), believes that this development as well as "mass communication" are closely linked to nationalism, ethnicity, and ultimately, capitalism.

^{xvi} These are meant, according to Constantina Papoulias (2004: 54b), to capture the rupturing and the slipperiness of the spatialities...and their irreducibility to conventional types of mapping" that Bhabha refers to in identity endeavour.

^{xvii} This term is used to capture the experience of "British Muslims and other displaced populations who negotiate often irreconcilable fragments of different traditions and make their temporary home at their limits. He goes on to further submit that the authenticity of the identity formed in this process is in great doubt as it is "both and neither at the same time" (Constantina Papoulias 2004: 55a).

^{xviii} A similar model to the concept is "planetary citizenship", put forward, according to Gill Seyfang (2006), by Henderson and Ikeda (2004) which is "about identifying with the earth as a whole and the whole humanity, about working towards a collaborative instead of a competitive world...".

^{xix} Amongst these several efforts referred to by Carme Melo-Escrihuela (2008: 114) are: "ecological citizenship" (Christoff, 1996a; Dobson 2005, 2003; Smith, 1998, Curtin, 2002, 1999), "green citizenship"

(Dean, 2001; Smith 2005), “environmental citizenship” (Dobson & Bell, 2006; Luque, 2005), “sustainability citizenship” (Barry, 2006), “environmentally reasonable citizenship” (Hailwood, 2005) or ecological stewardship” (Barry, 2002, 1999).

^{xx} As popularly propounded by Benedict Anderson.

^{xxi} It is posited that this space makes cultural purity impossible.