Progress and Preservation: Rites of Passage, Art and Gender
in Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying, She Plays with the Darkness* and

*The Heart of Redness*

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Introduction

This dissertation examines the relation between art, gender and rites of passage in *Ways of Dying*, published in 1995, *She Plays with the Darkness*, published in 1995 and *The Heart of Redness*, published in 2000; three novels by South African writer Zakes Mda. He was born in 1948 in the Eastern Cape, and lived the first part of his life in Soweto. His father was involved in the formation of the Youth League of the ANC; a group which believed “that the dispossessed urban population could be mobilized in support of African nationalism through mass action, including boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience” (Berger 112). As a result, he had to flee the country to avoid being arrested. He moved to Lesotho and the family followed him. Zakes Mda lived and studied in Lesotho and Ohio until the first democratic South African elections, after which he returned to South Africa.

From the age of six, Mda had been writing in the Xhosa language. He made music, painted, and wrote poetry and plays besides studying law. As his paintings were starting to be noticed and his plays started winning awards – such as the Amstel Playwright of the Year award, which he was awarded for his plays *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* and *The Hill* in 1978 and 1979 – he decided to drop his studies and focus more on the arts. Because of the fact that Lesotho was an impoverished country without much of a theatrical tradition, Mda’s plays had to be performed in South Africa, where they were banned due to their anti-apartheid message (qtd. in Williams 66). When apartheid was abolished, Mda switched to writing novels as he felt that the political climate finally allowed black writers to write novels. The six novels he has written thus far have been well received internationally: *Ways of Dying* has won the M-net Book Prize, *The Heart of Redness* has won the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Africa Region and *The Madonna of Excelsior* was
selected as one of the Top Ten South African Books Published in the Decade of the Democracy (Williams 64).

The novels discussed here are the first three novels Mda has written. All three display a similar focus on socio-political transitions, art and gender, as *Ways of Dying*, published in 1995, is set in the years between the abolition of apartheid and the first democratic elections, in a city resembling Johannesburg, although this is not specified. It depicts a society in transition and the main characters, Toloki and Noria, seem to be in transition as well. Both have an oppressive past they have to come to terms with, and they attempt to find a way to approach their future. Art and gender play an important part in the passage they experience. *She Plays with the Darkness* is set in Lesotho and roughly spans the years between 1970 and 1994. In the novel, the socio-political transitions going on in the country may be compared to the transitions of the inhabitants of Ha Samane, especially Dikosha. The novel depicts the contrast between the characters’ lifestyles: Dikosha embraces her rich cultural past, whereas many of the other characters reject an important part of their cultural heritage. *The Heart of Redness* is set in the village of Qolorha, after the first democratic elections. It features a community which is divided over a past occurrence – the 1850s Xhosa cattle killing – and a more recent dilemma: whether or not to build a large casino and resort on their land. Significantly, art and gender play an important part in finding a solution towards this problem.

Both the socio-political transitions and the personal transitions of the main characters will be analysed from an anthropological perspective, using Arnold van Gennep’s and Victor Turner’s theories surrounding rites of passage and *communitas*. Rites of passage are the rituals that accompany important transitions, such as birth, marriage and death. *Communitas* signifies the common human bond people may experience during rites of passage. These theories, when applied in literary analysis, may help to specify the significance of the
transitions occurring in the novels and may shed some light on the relation between these
transitions and other important aspects of society, such as art and gender.

In the cultures presented in *Ways of Dying*, *She Plays with the Darkness* and *The Heart of Redness*, art is an important aspect of everyday life. This is reflected in the narratives as art is a recurrent theme: there is visual art such as figurines and drawings in *Ways of Dying*, cave art and murals in *She Plays with the Darkness*, and in *The Heart of Redness* there are elaborate descriptions of traditional isiXhosa costume. Furthermore, in all three novels song and dance are regular occurrences which are viewed as significant parts of the cultures. For instance, in *The Heart of Redness*, Camagu is unable to do the “freedom dance” and is therefore unable to find a job, even though he is fully skilled and educated. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, song and dance are Dikosha’s sole manner of communicating with her community, and as an escape she indulges in the San rock paintings at the Cave of Barwa. Furthermore, in *Ways of Dying*, Toloki’s choice to rejoin the community is demonstrated by his drawings and Noria’s release from the past is expressed in song.

These examples provide an impression of the multiple functions of art in the societies depicted in the novels, but this dissertation aims to demonstrate that there are still more functions of art, especially in relation to the occurring passages. In all three, art seems to feature in the tensions of a changing society. The characters are forced to find a balance between the old and the new – such as the patriarchal tradition and gender equality, tradition and westernization – and the transitions that are depicted are illuminated by the art forms that are present. Still, in order to fully appreciate the nature of the relation between art, gender and rites of passage, it is necessary to explore the theoretical background of rites of passage, *communitas* and South African art and literature. Therefore, chapter one provides the necessary information to exploring the relation between art, gender and rites of passage in
Ways of Dying, She Plays with the Darkness and The Heart of Redness, and chapters two, three and four focus on art, rites of passage and gender respectively.
Chapter 1 – Background

Mda’s literary heritage plays a significant part in his works. His writing reflects South Africa’s socio-political situation and has developed accordingly – dealing with life under apartheid in his earlier plays and discussing the postapartheid state in the novels he started writing at a later stage. Because of the fact that the socio-political history of South Africa is such a powerful presence in his works, it is of interest to know something about both his socio-political and literary background. Presenting an overview of South African literary history is a difficult task, as South African literature is made up of several separate traditions, which were greatly influenced by the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in 1652. At that time, native South Africans had several forms of oral literature, which were later written down under the influence of white missionaries. The extensive influence of the socio-political situation on literature can be seen clearly from the colonial era onwards. This chapter will present an overview – which, as it has to be brief, can never be comprehensive – of the literature that is directly relevant to Mda’s cultural and literary heritage and therefore to this dissertation: the literature created by the native peoples of South Africa.

The origin of black South African literary tradition lies in the oral literature of tribes such as the Xhosa, the Zulu and the Sotho, and includes Xhosa stories and proverbs, Zulu praise poetry, known as izibongo, which celebrates “the bravery of distinguished warriors or political leaders”, lamentation poetry which, for example, “lament[s] the downtrodden situation of women in the homes of their mothers-in-law, or recount[s] catastrophic historic events”, and historical narratives (Berger 18). Many of these stories and poems were collected and recorded in the nineteenth century, but as they were passed on from generation to generation, the date of their origin is often difficult to establish, except for the ones referring to particular historical occurrences. This tradition was influenced by the arrival of the British
in South Africa, as they brought missionaries who founded mission schools. Mphahlele states that the missionaries’ principal devices in their attempts to convert natives and promote western civilization were the church, school and printing press (43). One of the first results of this mission was the emergence of Christian natives such as Ntsikana, who was the first African to compose Christian hymns (38). However, there was not much interest on the part of the missionaries in these self-proclaimed native prophets, as is wittily illustrated in *The Heart of Redness* by the portrayal of Mhlakaza who becomes Wilhelm Goliath at baptism and whose profession entails carrying the missionary’s baggage and washing his clothes. Still, Jordan notes that these hymns were “the first literary composition ever to be assigned to individual formulation – therefore constituting a bridge between traditional and the post-traditional period” (qtd. in Mphahlele 40).

The missionary stations became the focus of education and literary production, as works began to be written in the Xhosa language and a journalistic tradition in the Xhosa language was born. There were newspapers and magazines such as *Ikwezi* and *Indaba*. Later journals added historical texts and collections of Xhosa proverbs. Christianity was expanding, but with the poem published by John Ntsiko in *Isigidimi* in 1884, expressing his disillusionment with Christianity, a new development presented itself, as Mphahlele indicates: “The African had found a voice. Xhosa literature was flourishing. Political comment, history, hymns and poetry were the main forms of expression in Xhosa and English.” (42). In the late 19th and early 20th century, an African educated class emerged, which was also a political elite. Among these writers, there was a “persistent pursuit of folkloric materials” including Xhosa poetry and Zulu praise poetry, and a merging of traditional and modern styles which can be witnessed in Mqhayi’s mock-praise poem discussing the Prince of Wales’ visit to South Africa (Mphahlele 44).1 Similarly, works by writers such as Mofolo and Plaatje – mostly pastoral works about historical events – illustrate that Christian natives chose to write
about the dilemma of being traditional and/or being a Christian (Mphahlele 47). This dedication to history and tradition was also evident in H. Dhlomo’s 1936 play Nongqause or The girl who killed to save, the subject matter of which is the focus of Mda’s The Heart of Redness.

These writers were seen by some whites as the embodiment of missionary success, but were also considered to be a threat to white rule, as educated and prosperous blacks were eligible to vote, and could possibly attempt to overthrow white rule if they achieved a majority. Furthermore, financially successful blacks had no need to work for white farmers and thereby reduced the supply of cheap black labour (Berger 79). To nip this development in the bud, laws were passed in the late 19th and early 20th century, such as the 1894 Glen Grey Act and the 1913 Natives Land Act, “forcing men without land to work as migrant laborers” and limiting the land assigned to Africans to 7.5 per cent (Berger 79, 89). Society gradually began to change as Malan’s Nationalist Party began to attract more voters, paving the way for the apartheid government that came about in 1948. This socio-political change led to a literary change as well, as “[m]ore and more writers turned to the socio-political problems of the time in their work, thus gradually opening a rift between themselves and the ruling government” (Hauptfleisch 404).

Nick Visser demonstrates that censorship was already present in South Africa throughout colonial times because of the fact that printing presses were controlled by the white population. Still, it was not yet codified in legislation before the emergence of apartheid (484-87). After the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, the government was determined to take action to ensure its preservation. Censorship was seen as one of the most important instruments to achieve “absolute control over the available forms of social and political discourse” (488). This resulted in the Publications and Entertainments Act 26 of 1963, “which formalised, codified and fully institutionalised censorship.” (488). The government banned a
significant number of South African writers whose works were considered dangerous or rebellious, among whom was Zakes Mda. By then, Mda and his family had already gone into exile in Lesotho.

As a consequence of these acts, black writers shifted their focus towards writing more poetry and plays, and fewer novels. In most cases, this was a conscious decision, as poetry and plays were seen as a more immediate and direct means of demonstrating the atrocities of apartheid. In describing this phenomenon, Mda claims that: “poetry and theatre communicated with the audiences directly. The black writer was in a hurry to pass on the message” (*Creativity After Apartheid* n.pag.). Following the Soweto student protests of 1976, the nature of the plays that were written began to change:

> directly preceding and following the 1976 trauma, theatre became highly propagandistic in style and content and the major works of the period clearly display a far greater commitment to political commentary than anything else. There was a clear feeling that at such times it was necessary provisionally to forget the aesthetic and other aims of literature, and that a writer now had a moral obligation to join the fight against the current evil. (Hauptfleisch 405-06)

At this time, Mda was twenty eight years old and serving his articles in Lesotho. He wrote his first play *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* in 1978. The play is set in a time and place very similar to South Africa then, but the time and place are not specified. This is a type of defamiliarization that Mda later uses in his first novel *Ways of Dying*, and that, as Hauptfleisch illustrates, enables him to
draw his audience into his play bereft of their normal expectations. [...] [T]he issues can be looked at without the expected stock reactions of either total agreement or total rejection. [...] By placing his characters at a kind of historical crossroads, he invests them with an ability to see the future in the light of the past (413). ³

The question central to the play is a question that is central to Mda’s novels as well, and Hauptfleisch expresses it as follows: “are the Wars of Freedom ever won? Are they perhaps not simply an ongoing struggle in which the system itself never changes, but simply changes hands?” (414). Through the suspicion of leadership that he exhibits in his first play, Mda transcends the kind of theatre that was also written at the time; the kind of theatre which he characterises as theatre which merely “appeals to the oppressor’s conscience” (Biko’s Children n.pag.). Through his plays, which mobilized people and gave them hope, Mda found an outlet for the political commitment that is also evident in his novels and his current developmental and educational projects in South Africa.

With the demise of apartheid came the demise of censorship. Also, the need for anti-apartheid art and literature obviously started to disappear. Mda describes apartheid as an author which provides artists with ample material to base their works on, and the effects of the abolition of apartheid as debilitating. He states that “[t]here was a lull in creativity while artists struggled to find a new voice” (Creativity After Apartheid n.pag.). He goes on to describe that while some of the ‘old’ artists were forgotten, others found a new voice, and that there was also a new generation of artists emerging, a generation that ha[d] not been contaminated by apartheid’s creative processes. [...] [N]ow the focus is no longer on uttering the right statements or on being politically correct. The demise
of apartheid has freed their imaginations to the extent that now they are able to address any other conflicts that beset society (n.pag.).

Mda is an example of those artists who found a new voice, as the end of apartheid freed his mode of expression: he started writing novels. He claims that artists could now “enjoy the luxury to sit down and write for months on end” (qtd. in Williams 69) His first novel, Ways of Dying, was published in 1995 and was followed by six others, all of which reflect the issues South African society faces nowadays, as van der Vlies points out: “Mda’s work speaks explicitly to anxieties about national identity, the aesthetics of South African ‘literature’ and the globalization of postcolonial identities” (15). Van der Vlies states that Mda has a large international readership and is viewed by many as the “leading contemporary black writer”, the one who has come closest to filling the void that was created by the abolition of apartheid (15).

Still, Mda’s novels have also raised critical responses, such as Farred’s article, in which he wonders if, in Ways of Dying, Mda is “mourning the postapartheid state already”, or Andrew Offenburger’s claim that The Heart of Redness contains “duplicity and plagiarism”, to which Mda has written a defence in which he explains his use of source material (Farred 182; Offenburger 164). In the New York Review of Books of January 2003, Rush evaluates Mda’s role as a black South African writer in this day and age, arguing that Mda’s first postapartheid work has attracted “overpraise driven by the emotion of welcome”: he feels that Mda’s work

did not deal adequately with the realities of the new nation […] Mda seemed relatively uninterested in the violent spectacle of the transition, and did not mention
AIDS – rendering his work more ‘fable’ than ‘parable’, and ultimately ‘an escapist dream’ (qtd. in van der Vlies 155).

Aside from Rush, van der Vlies and Farred, other critics have opted to focus on Mda’s role in a new South African literature after the end of apartheid as well, such as Jacobs, Chapman and I. Visser. Some of the other topics of interest have been his use of magic realism (Williams; Barker), the presence of death in his novels (Bell) and the significance of female characters in his works (Cloete, Lombardozzi). Cloete especially focuses on the role of patriarchy in traditional South African tribes and Mda’s tendency to empower his female characters to reveal themselves (37). Her focus on traditional patriarchy and its influence on the development of women reflects Mda’s focus on gender equality, which I explore in chapter three.

Although the above list gives an impression of the levels at which Mda’s work has been discussed, there has not yet been much focus on the fictional representation and significance of rites of passage in his novels, nor on the relation between art, gender, and rites of passage. Although Bell focuses on the presence of death in *Ways of Dying*, *She Plays with the Darkness* and *The Heart of Redness*, he uses literary theory and pedagogy as a background, whereas I take an anthropological and art historical approach to these novels. Cloete focuses primarily on female characters as she uses feminist theory to analyse *The Heart of Redness*, but her research differs from mine as she does not combine gender with the rites of passage and the art forms occurring in the novels. However, I feel that as rites of passage are an embodiment of change, they are quite revealing of the traits of the culture from which they originate. As we have seen, many critics focus on Mda’s role in a society in the midst of transition. By moving the focus to the transitions by discussing his works in the light
of rites of passage, we can change our perspective and possibly come to a new understanding of these novels.

Rites of passage are “the ritual process accompanying the movement of people from one social status to another, as from being a boy to a man or from being a married woman to becoming a mother” (Davies, Holm, and Bowker 1). The concept was first elaborated upon by French anthropologist, ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, in his work *Le Rites de Passage*, published in 1908, and is based on the idea that human life is defined by change, both physical and social. To clarify the concept, van Gennep observed that life could be seen as a house with several rooms and corridors. In life, people pass from one status to another, or in this example, from one room to another via a corridor. The rituals and celebrations accompanying these transitions are the rites of passage. Still, Van Gennep notes, the rites of passage are not simply tools to bring the transition about; they themselves are often “expressive, symbolic enactments of the transformation” (qtd. in Honigmann 602). Rites of passage also have an important social function, as they serve as a model of a well-functioning society (Turner 117). As individuals need their community to guide them safely through their transition, rites of passage illustrate the importance of that community.

Van Gennep claims that rites of passage consist of three components, or stages: the pre-liminal stage, the liminal stage and the post-liminal stage (Davies, Holm, and Bowker 3). The pre-liminal stage is a period which serves to separate the individual from its previous status and the people and things belonging to it. The liminal stage is a period of transition, in which the person undergoing the transition is neither in his or her former status, nor in his or her new status and/or group. The post-liminal stage is the period of incorporation into the new status. This is often accompanied by celebration. In the previous example, the pre-liminal state is when an individual leaves the first room, the liminal state is when the individual has left the first room but is not yet in the second room – “in transit”, as it were – and the post-
liminal state is when the individual has reached the new room (Davies, Holm, and Bowker 3). In the novels studied for this dissertation, these stages help to make the development of the main characters and their societies tangible: by approaching these developments from an anthropological perspective, we can divide them into three parts and understand how they are brought about.

A real-life example of rites of passage is the Xhosa initiation rite for boys, during which teenage boys are taken away from their community to be circumcised. In *South Africa in World History*, Nelson Mandela describes the rite as “a kind of spiritual preparation for the trials of manhood” (qtd. in Berger 13). At sixteen years old, “Mandela [...] experienced the painful circumcision ceremony that transformed youth into men – receiving a new name and undergoing a period of seclusion during which he was painted with white ochre to symbolize purity” (Berger 13). Long discusses the same rite, and stresses the significance of the ochre Berger mentions: white is associated with illumination and is worn by shamans, whereas red ochre is worn in daily life (n.pag.). Typically, the liminal period of this rite of passage is characterized by a move away from regular life, and it is only when the passage is completed that the initiates can literally wash away the white ochre and return to their homesteads and their families as men, rather than boys. Significantly, this rite is always experienced in groups of boys of roughly the same age, demonstrating how important an aspect communality is in rites of passage.

The communal aspect of rites of passage is one of the points of focus in the studies of British anthropologist Victor Turner in his 1969 publication *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Turner focuses on liminality and “liminal personae”, the people who are in the middle of a rite of passage together (95). He compares liminality to “death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon” (95). Liminal personae have nothing and are nothing – as they have no status –
and must behave in a passive and humble manner, obeying their instructors and accepting punishment without complaint (95). Turner claims that because liminal personae are in-between states, and therefore stateless, they tend to feel an intense sense of comradeship, a common human bond. He calls this phenomenon communitas. Communitas sometimes breaks through our regular structured life and is therefore the opposite of hierarchy, as “secular distinctions of rank or status disappear or are homogenized” (95). Spontaneous communitas occurs unexpectedly, when “people suddenly find themselves caught up in a shared sense of oneness. This may be because of a joy in triumph in battle, in sport, or […] in a musical event” (Davies, Holm, and Bowker 7). An example of communitas can be seen in Ways of Dying, when all the inhabitants of the settlement are drawn together by Toloki’s drawing and Noria’s singing. Turner further distinguishes ideological communitas and normative communitas, but these are less frequent and of a different nature, as ideological communitas refers to looking at past experiences or occurrences as an ideal and seeking to emulate them in the hopes of recreating the magical feelings that occurred then, and normative communitas is “a subculture or group which attempts to foster and maintain relationships of spontaneous communitas on a more or less permanent basis” (Davies, Holm, and Bowker 7; Madison 159).

Communitas, as said, can be triggered by several situations or occurrences. In African societies, this feeling of oneness is one of the effects or objectives of art, as in Africa art usually has a religious, ritual purpose. The art that functions in rituals demonstrates the cultural identity of the community from which it stems, and is thereby able, during these rituals, to fill the people involved in these rituals with that sense of oneness, of all belonging to the same group, that characterises communitas. The religious and ritual functions of African art become clear when we look at one of the earliest forms of art found in southern Africa: cave art from the Later Stone Age (16500 – 17750 BCE). Cave paintings are found in several areas in southern Africa, from the eastern Cape Province and Free State to the
Drakensberg area, and they depict the San hunter-gatherers and the animals that then inhabited this part of the continent. According to Garlake, the art of the hunter-gatherers of southern Africa “belied their so-called ‘primitive’ technologies and social organisation to develop an art expressing perceptions, concepts, and beliefs of extraordinary richness and complexity” (11). He demonstrates that anthropologists and art historians have claimed that “San beliefs were the keys to understanding the art”(22). These beliefs are shown by practices “associated with male and female puberty rituals, marriage, rainmaking, divination, but, above all, with many different aspects of trancing or shamanism” (Lewis-Williams qtd. in Garlake 39). In Mda’s novels, the significance of the cave art of the San is primarily shown in She Plays with the Darkness and The Heart of Redness, as Dikosha calls the San ancestors to life and experiences their rituals, trances and dances with them, and the Unbelievers use the powerful trance-dance of the San to make contact with their ancestors.

Most African peoples do not distinguish between arts and crafts, as all the items that are made have a function, ritual or other. When we study the several art forms that appear in African societies, this becomes evident. Gillow states that clothing and textile are also part of African art, as they have a ritual function besides their practical function:

[s]pecial garments are required for different stages of life, such as birth, circumcision, first menstruation, marriage, [ … ] or death. Even those African cultures that do not mark any of the other rites of passage with a special ceremony often provide a traditional shroud for a burial. (Gillow 9)

Gillow and Long demonstrate that the same is true for beadwork, as the decorations made from ostrich shell beads, and later from imported glass beads, are worn during important rites of passage, and both the types of beadwork and the colours that are worn are significant. They
are dependant on the person undergoing the ritual and on the stage of the ritual, as we can
deduce from the Xhosa initiation ritual for boys.

Although all the art forms mentioned here share a ritual function, a special mention
must be made of the art created during apartheid: resistance art. Resistance art seems to be
fully based on the concept of *communitas*, as it is built on the idea of uniting black South
Africans against the hierarchy that oppressed them and denied them their normal status and
rights. In *Biko's Children*, Mda states that black South African life “was converted into a
resistance culture” as artists turned away from merely protesting, “making a statement of
disapproval” and creating a “theatre of complaint, of weeping and self-pity” (n.pag.). The
movement’s very name, Black Consciousness, demonstrates how much it relies on the
concept of *communitas*, as it places the focus on making people realise their common ground.
In resistance art we are faced with a very direct example of the role that art plays in rites of
passage and the emergence of *communitas*. Furthermore, as the political system that
resistance art was directed at still heavily influences South African society in all its facets, we
can see that taking this anthropological and art historical approach in analysing the works of
one of South Africa’s leading writers could be illuminating and rewarding as these works are
placed against their political and cultural background.

The next chapters explore the relation between rites of passage, art and gender in *Ways
of Dying, She Plays with the Darkness* and *The Heart of Redness*. I would argue that, in these
novels, the transitions in the lives of the main characters reflect the transitions occurring on a
national level, as the novels all feature characters and societies that are experiencing a passage
towards maturity. In their passages, their cultural identity plays a crucial role, as passing
towards maturity means embracing cultural identity, but releasing the repressive patriarchal
tradition of the past.
Chapter 2 – Visual Art, Song and Dance

Art features significantly in the novels: there are many songs, dances, drawings and other art forms that are interwoven with the characters’ lives. This chapter focuses on the functions of visual art, song and dance in the novels, especially their spiritual and ritual function: the way they relate to the occurring rites of passage. Traditionally, African art functions on several, often overlapping levels. This is the case in Mda’s first three novels as well, as song and dance function as forms of protest art as well as forms of celebration. However, the art forms take on specific meanings in each novel. For instance, in Ways of Dying, the occurring art forms represent a painful past, but later become a key factor in the characters’ and the country’s passage to maturity. In She Plays with the Darkness, the art forms demonstrate the attitudes that exist in Lesotho towards custom, ritual and the Sotho cultural heritage. In The Heart of Redness, the art forms have a very dual character, as they at once celebrate cultural heritage and demonstrate the division of the community into traditionalists and modernists.

In Ways of Dying, the art forms that are most significant are drawing and singing, as these art forms accompany the important rite of passage that occurs at the end of the novel. Toloki’s drawings, Jwara’s figurines and Noria’s song all share a similar function as they collectively promote and facilitate the passage that Toloki and Noria are ready to experience towards the end of the novel. More specifically: visual art brings about Toloki’s and Noria’s healing process, Noria’s song encourages communitas and the joint purpose of these art forms is to accompany them through the liminal phase of their passage, as well as illustrating how their passage exemplifies South Africa’s socio-political situation at that moment. Towards the end of Ways of Dying, Toloki and Noria are on the verge of starting a new chapter in their lives. They are ready to leave their painful past behind and happily live together in the settlement. Their actual departure from their old state happens the night before New Year’s
Day, as they join together in a cleansing ritual which serves to separate them from the past. Now, on New Year’s Day, the second phase of their passage begins when Toloki returns to the settlement with art supplies and starts drawing again for the first time since his painful childhood. As Noria inspires him with song, their transition starts:

The drawing becomes frenzied, as Noria’s voice rises. Passers-by stop to watch, and are overcome by warm feelings. It is as though Toloki is possessed by this new ability to create human figures. He breathes heavily with excitement, and his palms are clammy. His whole body tingles, as he furiously gives shape to the lines on the paper. His breathing reaches a crescendo that is broken by an orgasmic scream. This leaves him utterly exhausted. At the same moment, Noria’s song stops. The spell breaks, and the passers-by go on their way. (199-200)

Clearly, they share this artistic experience on a spiritual level as well as on a physical level, as Noria’s voice seems to guide Toloki’s hand and Toloki’s scream ends simultaneously with the song. Their experience may be seen as cathartic, as they release their pent-up emotions and are purged by doing so. Furthermore, the experience makes Toloki’s passage tangible: he is not just changing symbolically, but actually transforming from somebody who was stuck in a hurtful past and cut off from contact with others into a person who lives in a community, expressing himself and sharing his artistic expressions with others.

The art forms play several very important parts here, as they connect people, temporarily make them forget about their problems and fill them with hope for the future. The fact that Noria’s song comes to an end at the same time that Toloki’s passage is expressed as an “orgasmic scream” suggests that Noria and Toloki are connected in this cathartic experience: like the first phase of their passage and the ritual accompanying it, they
experience this second phase of their passage together and may therefore be seen as fellow liminal personae (Ways 199). Therefore, it is not surprising that the healing experience binds them even closer together, and a feeling of *communitas* develops. This starts from the moment Noria starts to sing, and becomes increasingly clearer as passers-by and children gather around them and are “overcome by warm feelings” (199). For Noria, the healing effect of the art is very clear and very immediate: afterwards she is able to be around Danisa – the little girl who was involved in her son’s death – once again. It is clear that Toloki and Noria are no longer traumatised by their past, as they recover the two things that were unavailable to them for a very long time: art and harmonious companionship. As they share their art, they bring the two together in recreating a harmonious community. Viewed from an anthropological perspective, this can be seen as quite promising, as the choice to participate in community life suggests that the community is a healthy one which cares for its inhabitants.

In *She Plays with the Darkness*, visual art does not serve the same purpose as it does in *Ways of Dying*. The functions of promoting and accompanying a passage, healing and connecting people are largely absent in this novel as the characters are unable to fully appreciate and share their cultural heritage. As such, visual art serves to demonstrate a contrast between the characters in the novel: Dikosha, whom Jacobs describes as the personification of the Sotho songs and dances, lives for art and spirituality, as for her these are inextricably linked (71). The other villagers reject a significant part of their cultural heritage, and the part they do retain seems to primarily have a celebratory function for them. For Dikosha, art has many functions: it is spiritual, ritual, it unites her with others, allows her to celebrate her cultural heritage and identity, and it serves as a retreat for her when she cannot handle the realities of the community. The contrast between Dikosha and the other villagers is expressed within the novel’s first pages: “Dikosha’s loneliness was self-imposed, for people of the village lived in what appeared to be happy communion. […] She felt that if there was
neither song nor dance, there was no need to be bothered with people” (4). Clearly, Dikosha interacts with others purely to sing and dance with them. For most of the characters it seems that song and dance is purely a way to celebrate, whereas there are many more aspects to art for Dikosha: it pervades her life and is even present in her sleep, as her dreams provide her with all the new songs and dances she teaches the others.

Although Dikosha sings and dances with the other girls of the village, the contrast between her and the other characters becomes clear by the way she views the traditional Sotho ditema murals. In Blauer’s *Authentiek Afrika*, these murals are described as very important for the people who make them, as they are meant to ward off evil spirits and please the ancestors (107). Dikosha admires the murals, as they “overwhelmed her emotions in a way that she could not explain, that left her whole body tingling” (13). However, when Dikosha paints her house in ditema patterns, her mother is furious:

> ‘What is this you have done to my house?’ she demanded. Dikosha moaned softly in pain. ‘You want to make me a laughing stock of the village!’ Mother-of-Twins shrieked. ‘You are not satisfied with making a fool of me by getting yourself conceived at a night dance!’ She pulled Dikosha by the ear and ordered her to […] clean the frames she had messed up with heathen patterns (38).

Mother-of-Twins, like the rest of the people who live in the upper part of the village, rejects the custom of painting murals and cannot relate to Dikosha’s admiration of them. As Dikosha and Mother-of-Twins fail to understand each other, they illustrate the artistic impoverishment of their society and its failure to develop itself by experiencing communality through art.

The art forms that the villagers have chosen to retain have lost many of their functions, as the villagers mainly focus on the celebratory function of the songs and dances of their
ancestors. On the first page of the novel, the cultural identity of the villagers is illustrated by the fact that they are introduced through the mention of “the song of the pumpkin” (1). This used to be a song of harvest time, but it is now sung throughout the year. The other songs sung by the girls of the village are about everyday matters that they experience, and throughout the novel, they are accompanied by dances. However, although the villagers seem to engage in their cultural heritage by singing in the style of their ancestors, their songs lack the depth of the poetry of the past, which celebrates heroes or laments the atrocities of war (Berger 18). The same is true for dance: when they are dancing, the characters dance in the style of their ancestors. They do dances such as the famo dance and engage in traditional Sotho stick fights, but combine these to boast about their sexuality in what Jacobs calls a “fusion of Basotho social customs and Johannesburg gangsterism” (71). Clearly, song and dance are an important part of the villagers’ daily lives, but they are hardly ever used to accompany a ceremony or ritual. As such, song and dance seem to have retained only their celebratory functions for most of the characters in the novel.

The art forms illustrate the sharp contrast between Dikosha and the other villagers, as the ditema patterns, the cave art, and the songs and dances she spends her days with are her sole reason to live. As it becomes harder and harder for her to relate to the other villagers, she tries to find companionship with the San as she starts visiting the cave of Barwa. In the cave, there are rock paintings that Dikosha greatly admires. She summons the San dancers in the paintings to life and becomes entranced with their dances and magic:

She willed it to life, and summoned it to her. […] She had long been welcomed as a member of the family, and any member of the family had the right to summon help when the world was becoming too thorny. […] The dance they were performing was called the Great Dance of the Strong. Its purpose was to heal all the pain that racked
her body and her mind, and to banish all her misfortunes. The songs were healing songs (51).

The narrative depicts a trance-dance ritual like the ones described in *Early Art and Architecture of Africa*. The novel shows the healing aspect of the San songs and dances as Dikosha’s pain is visualized as arrows that are being pulled out of her by the dancers, who consequently die and go to make contact with the ancestors. In addition to healing her by removing her emotional and physical pain through a ritual trance-dance, the dancers also provide Dikosha with the sense of belonging that she lacks in the Sotho community, as well as food and strings of the white beads Long describes as being characteristic of liminality (n.pag.). As the art forms now provide Dikosha with everything she needs, the contrast between her and the other villagers is made even clearer as Dikosha and the Sotho community grow further apart.

In *The Heart of Redness*, the occurring art forms function primarily to celebrate the cultural identity of the Xhosa, but they have other functions as well, as they accompany rites and celebrations, and unite as well as to separate people. The importance of visual art is reflected in the novel’s title. ‘Redness’ refers to the ochre that the Xhosa traditionally use to dye their skin and textiles. It is significant enough to feature in the novel’s title because traditional isiXhosa costume – consisting of the *isikhakha* dress, several kinds of beadwork and jewellery, long pipes and turbans – and custom are illustrative of the major conflicts described in the novel: the fight about Belief and the present-day feud it has led to. In the novel we find that rather than expressing and celebrating cultural identity, the isiXhosa costume has been given a new meaning, as redness is referred to as backwardness, and choosing to wear isiXhosa costume becomes an indicator of the side that is being chosen in the conflict surrounding the building plans for a hotel and a casino in Qolorha-by-Sea. The
attitudes expressed in the novel towards traditional isiXhosa costume illustrate what Eprile calls Mda’s “brilliant critique of this cult of newness”, as the characters struggle to find a balance between the old – their cultural background – and the new, meaning a westernized lifestyle (9).

The visual art of the Xhosa is an indication of the conflict in Qolorha-by-Sea: the Unbelievers distance themselves from their cultural background to demonstrate their modernity. As a way of demonstrating their enthusiasm for the modernity the hotel and casino complex will bring to the village, the Unbelievers decide to do away with their traditional costume and wear western suits instead. Xoliswa Ximiya, the daughter of the leader of the Unbelievers, is at the head of this decision:

[T]o highly civilized people like Xoliswa Ximiya, isiXhosa costume is an embarrassment. She hates to see her mother looking so beautiful, because she thinks that it is high time her parents changed from ubuqaba – backwardness and heathenism. They must become amagqobhoka – enlightened ones – like her. (44)

When Camagu comes to the village and becomes involved in the conflict, he uses his knowledge of business and sustainable development to set up a cooperative society, in which the traditional isiXhosa costume is produced. As traditional costume is fashionable in Johannesburg at that moment, the business venture is successful and becomes part of an alternative to the casino complex, thus ensuring the preservation of the isiXhosa culture and the natural splendour of Qolorha-by-Sea. By celebrating culture as an important and dynamic aspect of society, Camagu manages to change the function of isiXhosa costume in Qolorha: he turns it into an instrument that can be used to bring traditional village life and modern city life together, as it is used to improve the future rather than being a reminder of a painful past.
This development is illustrated by the fact that NoPetticoat goes back to wearing her traditional costume and smoking her long pipe at the end of the story, as well as sewing for the cooperative society. NoPetticoat’s decision displays the new insight into the value of the isiXhosa cultural heritage that has developed in the village: it is possible to be an Unbeliever and still take pride in your cultural heritage.

The function of art in *The Heart of Redness* is also demonstrated through the role of dance in the rituals of the Unbelievers: as they use dance in their mourning rituals, it keeps them from developing and moving on to the future. In order to achieve contact with the ancestors, they do the traditional dance of the San – called the abaThwa in the novel – until they reach a trance. They do this in order to relive the miseries of the past, as the Unbelievers feel that everything that is wrong in society was caused by the cattle-killings resulting from Belief. In their view, reliving these feelings and focusing on the grief of the past is the way to effectively mourn the past. However, doing so means being stuck in the past. Their rituals serve as *ideological communitas*, as the Unbelievers make a tradition of reliving the miseries of the past together and turn it into their goal, their ideal (Davies, Holm and Bowker 7).

*Communitas*, however, is characteristic of liminality, and if the Unbelievers hold on to this state of mourning they can never complete their passage, leaving the village divided and conflicted. The fact that the abaThwa finally come and take back their dance, making it impossible for the Unbelievers to continue their rituals, indicates the inevitability of their passage: they must stop being stuck in the past and face the present.
Chapter 3 – Rites of Passage

In *Ways of Dying*, Toloki and Noria are both stuck in an oppressive past, a death-like state, which they cannot escape on their own. They need a community in which to experience their rite of passage, but as they have both fled the community in which they grew up, they are now alone and find it difficult to move forward. Noria does live in a community, but as members of this community have murdered her son, it is not the healthy community she needs. When Toloki and Noria meet again after a long time, they find the companionship they lack in each other. The safe basis they create together by confiding in each other gives Noria the courage to tell Toloki about the most recent hardship she has had to endure: the death of her son. By the time Noria has finished her story they are both emotionally spent: they have laid bare their painful past for the first time ever. At that crucial moment, Noria suggests they “both take a bath, as this will make them feel better. Although he does not understand how a bath will make them feel better, he agrees. He is willing to learn new ways of living.” (192).

Their bathing serves as a cleansing ritual, the first stage of a rite of passage: Toloki and Noria wash away their deathlike state and are preparing to enter a new stage of their lives. Before they run into each other at the start of the novel, both Toloki’s and Noria’s lives are “stagnant; unconnected to a future and cut off from the past” (I. Visser *Ways Ahead* 85). Toloki has given up the social aspects of life, having decided to live with nobody but himself, and Noria has been scarred by the first death of her child:

> when she learnt of the death of her son [ ... ] she lost all interest in men, and her body had not, to this very day, touched that of a man. The cruelty of the world had killed not only her uplifting laughter, but all human desires of the flesh (149). 13
Moreover, due to their past experiences, they have lost their ability to express themselves creatively. Toloki was a talented artist until his father ruined his ambitions and Noria used to give everyone pleasure with her singing until the death of her child. By talking to each other about their lives and learning from each other, they have started their own healing process. In other words: when all the information is out in the open, they are ready to move on to a more positive future. Noria’s suggestion to take a bath means the start of a symbolic rite of passage that, although it is not a literal rite of passage such as the celebrations surrounding a birth or a marriage, means an actual change of state for Toloki and Noria. The cleansing ritual is the first stage of this passage: it is a rite of separation. Rites of separation are meant “to ensure proper departure out of the prior status” (Cox xi). Toloki and Noria do this by symbolically washing away the past:

They dazedly rub each other’s backs, and slowly move down to other parts of their bodies. It is as though they are responding to rhythms that are silent for the rest of the world, and can only be heard or felt by them. They take turns to stand in the basin, and splash water on each other’s bodies. All this they do in absolute silence, and their movements are slow and deliberate. They are in a dream-like state, their thoughts concentrated only on what they are doing to each other. Nothing else matters. Nothing else exists. (192)

When they have finished bathing, they throw out the dirty water and splash themselves with perfume, replacing the smell of the past with a fresh new scent. They have washed away their deathlike state and they wake on New Year’s Day, ready for the next phase of their passage. Toloki’s sudden decision to visit his former home, the waiting room, illustrates the separation that has taken place, as he realizes he does not want to live there anymore. When he comes
back, he makes the separation from his old state explicit by telling Noria about his decision: “I will never leave you, Noria. I am even more convinced of that now that I have been to the city and have visited the places of my old life” (198). By expressing the separation that has taken place, Toloki shows that he really is ready to learn new ways of living.

Toloki’s and Noria’s cleansing ceremony comes at a crucial time: it happens just before New Year’s Eve. Cox explains the significance of ritual in African societies, and stresses the importance of setting for ritual. He concurs with Smith, who states that ritual is basically “a mode of paying attention”, and adds that setting – the time and place at which a ritual is performed – is an important factor in providing ritual with its power and making clear the contrast between the way things are and the way things ought to be (qtd. in Cox ix). Furthermore, van Gennep notes that calendrical rituals – among which are New Years festivities – are part of communal rites of passage (qtd. in Cox xiii). Thus, Toloki’s and Noria’s cleansing ritual, which is set just before the New Years’ festivities, during which society enters into “a period of liminality”, is the first stage of a rite of passage: separation (Cox xiii). As they are separated from their past by the bath they have experienced together, they are now ready for the second stage of their passage: transition, also known as liminality. The New Year’s festivities typically entail a “breakdown in the order of the society” as it is “neither in the old nor yet in the new” (Cox xiii). This clearly applies to Ways of Dying: “[t]his day is one of the highlights of the year, when we are all carefree and forget about the problems that live with us the whole year round” (195). Teenagers cross-dress, people drink, sing and dance, and there are parades with marching bands and drum majorettes to herald the new year. New Years Day is a time at which the regular rhythm of the settlement is replaced with festivities and celebration takes the place of the residents’ daily sorrows, creating a setting of liminality for the passage that is about to occur.
The cleansing ritual and its timing are symbolic for Toloki and Noria in the same way that their state is symbolic for their country’s state. The novel takes place between the end of apartheid and the first democratic elections, in a time Barker characterizes as the time between “the turbulent past and the (hoped for) tranquil future”, in which the country, like Toloki and Noria, has to address its past problems in order to procure a happier future (11). The New Year’s festivities combine the state of the country to the state that Toloki and Noria are in: the transitional period between two states, as both these characters and their country are waiting to be incorporated into a new beginning. Cox notes that “rituals are sources of transformative power” and for Toloki and Noria as well as for South Africa, the cleansing ritual does have transformative power: by demonstrating how two characters at the margin of society overcome their difficulties, the novel suggests that there can be a similarly positive transformation for the country (x).

In *She Plays with the Darkness*, the importance of ritual is illustrated by the lack of it. Throughout the novel, there are traces of traditional Sotho beliefs, customs and artistic expressions – mostly songs and dances – and also traces of Christian beliefs and habits, but at the same time, the villagers strongly reject an important part of their cultural heritage because they consider it old-fashioned and associate it with heathendom (13). This becomes evident by the contrast between Dikosha and the other villagers: her life is filled with spirituality and culture which she cannot really share with the others, making her an outsider and, as Cloete puts it, “a protector of Sotho traditions, rituals and art” (39-40).

Dikosha’s outsider status in her village is shown by the fact that the characters assign a lot of importance to the fact that Dikosha was not only born out of wedlock, but conceived during a night dance. There were no marriage rituals because there was no marriage, and as her mother cannot identify her father, her ancestry is uncertain. Douglas notes that “[r]ites of passage have an important social function: they tighten and strengthen the ties between
individuals and their communities” (qtd. in I. Visser Words 292). Keeping in mind this social function, Dikosha’s outsider status becomes more understandable, especially as the villagers seem to view Dikosha’s conception as something Dikosha chose to do and which now causes her misery, rather than something that happened to her mother. Because of this, Dikosha is viewed by the villagers with a mix of pity and reverence. Whenever something is the matter with Dikosha, someone invariably remarks: “Poor Dikosha! It is because she was conceived at a night dance” (38).

The disregard for ritual shown by Mother-of-Twins by having both her children outside of wedlock is carried on by her children: neither Dikosha nor Radisene marries. Dikosha does not get married because she “was determined to live her life in her own way. And her way did not include marriage. Boyfriends and courting did not feature in her world.” (5). She shows no regard for the way her community expects her to live, and makes her own rules for her own life. Similarly, Radisene does not marry either. He goes much further in his disregard for the customs and rituals of his village: he has left the village at a young age to go to school in the city and has not only lost track of its people and its customs, but has lost interest in it as well. This is shown when he is reprimanded for not visiting, and then scoffs the grandmothers of the village by refusing to accept their money. Although he means well, he fails to understand that this is a sign of disrespect to the grandmothers, who are held in high esteem by everyone because of their age. Throughout the novel, this occurrence is referred to by the villagers when they talk about Radisene, and no matter how hard he tries to win favour with the villagers, they cannot forget how he treated the grandmothers. Radisene is first and foremost interested in promoting his own fortune and status, and in doing so, he takes what he wants, without respecting his village’s customs or rites of passage.

Near the end of the novel, it becomes clear that Radisene’s attitude towards custom resembles the status of custom in the country as a whole. When he loses his fortune, he goes
out of his way to find a case and discovers that the competition overlooked something when
arranging the third party insurance for a widow: the woman who had collected the money had
been married to the deceased by custom, whereas the deceased had married his mistress in the
church. Due to the fact that a customary marriage is not acknowledged by law, Radisene is
able to rearrange the case in such a way that the second wife is given the money – and
Radisene keeps behind half of it, as usual.

Of all three novels, *The Heart of Redness* shows the most direct focus on ritual and
custom: there are many rituals and art forms that are elaborately described. They play an
important part in the lives of the characters in the novel as the adherence to the customs of the
Xhosa functions as an indicator of the side people take in the age-old fight about Belief. The
solution to the seemingly insoluble problem of having to choose between the past and the
present is symbolized by the marriage between Camagu and Qukezwa. These rites of passage
symbolize the coming together of two worlds: the industrialized new South Africa and the
pre-colonial traditional South Africa. Furthermore, the birth of Heitsi constitutes, as Barker
puts it, “the exploration of a “third way” towards reconciliation of incompatible ways of
being” (12).

In Qolorha-by-Sea, status is primarily determined by sex and education. As Camagu
is a middle-aged, well-educated man, he is seen as a catch. Qukezwa, on the other hand, is a
girl who has abandoned her education after secondary school and chooses to focus her energy
on the preservation of nature and of the culture of her ancestors instead. Eprile describes her
as “a true child of nature who rides bareback and still knows the ancient and beautiful art of
‘splint-tone’ singing; in other words, she represents the traditional way of life” (10). They
represent the two sides of South Africa that seem difficult to combine: westernized and
industrial, and traditional and rural. In Berger’s words, the novel discusses the growing pains
of the new democracy as it tries “to combine the nation’s multiple voices into a single story”
Because of their differences, Camagu and Qukezwa are viewed as an odd match by the villagers. Many feel that Camagu would be better suited to Xoliswa Ximiya, the most learned woman of the village. Still, they feel they understand why Camagu does not want to be with her:

“What else did she expect?” ask the wagging tongues. “She is a man in a woman’s body. That is why no man can tame her. That is why even a doctor like Camagu was afraid to marry her. He knew she was her own boss, and that she would not be controlled by any man.” (262)

These responses demonstrate how important it is for these separate worlds to merge: so that, like the marriage of Camagu and Qukezwa, the country’s past divisions can be released and a passage towards maturity can be achieved. This happens as the “child of nature” and the stranger from the city inspire each other and bring out the best in each other (Eprile 10). As Bell puts it: “Qukezwa’s marriage to Camagu unites her traditional knowledge with Western learning”, and the coop that originates from the combination of these two types of knowledge is a means to empower the village from within (105).

As the marriage between Camagu and Qukezwa is symbolic of the coming together of two worlds, the rituals preceding the marriage are indicative of the differences between those worlds. Camagu and Qukezwa have already agreed to marry, but they have to submit to elaborate proceedings to get permission from her family. There is much confusion as the circumstances are irregular, but Camagu still does his best to appease the elders so that he can marry Qukezwa. Both Camagu, Qukezwa and the elders work together to treat the traditions in such a way that they can fit the circumstances and so the marriage is arranged. The elders laughingly note that “young people like to change tradition” (243). The fact that Camagu and
Qukezwa respect these traditions shows that this marriage truly means a merging of Xhosa culture and modern city life. Camagu and Qukezwa decide for themselves that they want to be together and in doing so they go against the customs of the village, but by submitting to the proceedings that normally precede a Xhosa marriage, they do retain the traditions and rituals that express their cultural identity.

Heitsi’s birth and its circumstances further symbolize the coming together of South Africa’s two sides as Qukezwa and Camagu have to find a balance between tradition and modernity. Before the marriage proceedings take place, it has become clear that Qukezwa is pregnant. When her child, Heitsi, is born, the fact that he is born out of wedlock presents a problem when the birth rituals have to take place. Since it is unclear who Heitsi’s father is, there have been no birth rituals at his birth. Furthermore, the women accompanying Qukezwa do not know whether or not to allow Camagu in since only the father of the child is allowed inside, and Camagu is not married to Qukezwa. The elders feel that the child really belongs to Zim, as Qukezwa is unmarried and therefore also belongs to Zim. However, Qukezwa and Camagu do not agree and decide that Qukezwa and Heitsi will come to live in the cottage with Camagu. The fact that the elders adjust to this uncommon situation and allow the newlyweds to make their own rules illustrates one of the novel’s most important messages: that culture is, and should always be, dynamic and flexible, and that that is its way forward.

In all three novels, the endings demonstrate the relation between rites of passage and art in the novels, and the concept that characterizes this relation in all three novels is *communitas*. However, these endings also show that the function of rites of passage and art and the relation between them differs per novel: in *Ways of Dying*, we can see that art, through *communitas*, expresses the transition that takes place in the lives of Toloki and Noria, and in the development of the country by extension. In breaking away from difficulties of the past, the characters are able to allow the art to unite them and to promote the transition that
occurs at the end of the novel. Although the final stage of the rite of passage of both the characters and the country is beyond the scope of the novel, the development that has occurred provides hope for a positive future: true incorporation into a new beginning. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, art and rites of passage function differently: art cannot accompany Dikosha to a higher station in life, as she refuses the rites of passage of her community and therefore experiences no social move upwards. Instead, art functions as a retreat which, although it provides her with everything she needs, fails to unite her to the people around her. The lack of *communitas* shows the lack of companionship in her life, and her refusal to partake in the customs and rites of passage of her society suggests the unhealthy state of her society. This view is supported by the ending of the novel, as Dikosha ends up with nothing, illustrating the danger of her liminal state: she cannot safely experience her passage. As a true liminal person, she is nothing and has nothing, and there is no hope of improvement (Turner 95). In *The Heart of Redness*, art does manage to bring people together, as it becomes a crucial factor in the effort to empower the village from within. It becomes a source of joy and income to the village of Qolorha-by-Sea. The coming together of South Africa’s rich cultural past and its industrial present through the marriage of Qukezwa and Camagu and the birth of their child provides the answer to the age-old feud that has divided the village for a long time. The characters experience a true development as the past is accepted and the transition completed. As such, the endings of the novels show that the acknowledgement and celebration of South Africa’s cultural heritage may be the key to the completion of its rite of passage to maturity.
Chapter 4 – The Role of Women

As indicated in the previous chapters, the novels under discussion deal with the socio-political situations of South Africa and Lesotho through the lives of the main characters. Through the portrayal of the socio-political situations of these countries and their inhabitants, several aspects of society are being criticized, ranging from violence to black empowerment. However, of all the things that are being criticized, repressive gender patterns are most importantly and most urgently under attack. In the novels, the rites of passage illustrate how the traditional gender patterns are what keeps South Africa and Lesotho from experiencing a passage towards maturity. Although the novels are set in three different times and places, the criticism is the same in all three: these gender patterns need to change for both the lives of the main characters and society to improve. The novels function as examples of the effect of these patterns, as *Ways of Dying* and *The Heart of Redness* demonstrate that promoting equality means promoting a passage to maturity, whereas *She Plays with the Darkness* shows the devastating effect of failing to do so. When we compare the time frames in which the novels are set – *She Plays with the Darkness* taking place between 1970 and 1994, *Ways of Dying* taking place in the years between apartheid and democracy and *The Heart of Redness* taking place a few years after democracy – we can see that there is a development towards gender equality over time: inequality is most severe in the years portrayed in *She Plays with the Darkness*, but a development towards equality is taking place in *Ways of Dying* and *The Heart of Redness*. This passage is most evident when we look at the novels’ female protagonists. Dikosha, Noria and Qukezwa all have a unique position in their communities: they are all described as attractive women, who determine their own lives and refuse to be guided by others. As Lombardozzi remarks, Mda “empowers his female characters with the freedom to confront and articulate their emotions and perceptions” as they “speak for women
collectively” (215). Significantly, they also share their artistic talents and a set of supernatural characteristics and abilities which cause them to be viewed as different from other people.

The way that their otherness is dealt with by their communities shows the aforementioned development in gender patterns: Dikosha is a complete outsider who cannot properly communicate with the other people in her village, and as such she cannot effect any change.

Noria’s and Qukezwa’s talents are celebrated, but they still have to submit to patriarchal rules. These characters and the way they are viewed in their society illustrate the dual character of their situation and their country’s situation: they experience a rite of passage towards maturity and equality, but as long as traditional patriarchal customs prevail, this passage cannot be completed.

In She Plays with the Darkness, the rites of passage serve as a platform to demonstrate the deficiency of society and its gender patterns. The deficiency of these gender patterns is illustrated by the character and actions of Dikosha, as she refuses to take part in society’s rites of passage and retreats into the cave of Barwa with the San, where there is equality between men and women. The gender patterns of the Sotho were imposed on Dikosha from her childhood onwards, as she was denied secondary education because of her sex. Consequently, Dikosha has become disillusioned with the village, the school and the church, and has turned away from all of them. Because she is so restricted by the gender patterns in her community, she retreats from it altogether, only speaking or interacting with others through art.

Furthermore, as she feels victimized by the gender patterns of her village, she refuses to adhere to them by submitting to the village’s rites of passage, such as marriage rites (5).

However, as these rites and customs define people’s status in the village, this presents a problem. In van Gennep’s comparison of society as a house with rooms and corridors, “[a]n individual or group that does not have an immediate right, by birth or through specially acquired attributes, to enter a particular house and to become established in one of its sections
is in a state of isolation” (26). Dikosha, as she refuses to undergo the rites of passage, does not have any right to be established in one of the sections of this house. Van Gennep describes that this state of isolation causes the individual to be seen as a stranger, who is often feared, taken great care of, treated as a powerful being, seen as sacred and believed to have magico-religious powers (26). This description fits the way Dikosha is described in the novel, as she has a set of peculiar characteristics, ranging from the fact that she is stunningly beautiful and does not age in twenty five years, to the fact that she is clairvoyant, believed to possess the ability to kill by wailing at people’s homesteads and is not viewed as an eligible candidate for marriage, despite her good looks and marriageable age. Dikosha’s status as a stranger among her own people is the product of her strategy to escape the oppressive gender patterns by which they live, as refusing to submit to their rites and rules is the only possible way to live among them whilst determining her own life.

The fact that Dikosha refuses to participate in the community’s rites of passage automatically means that there is no social move upwards for her. Instead, she becomes a lefetwa, “a girl who had long passed the age of marriage. [ … ] It was supposed to be the worst insult that could be hurled in the direction of any woman.” (She Plays 5). Still, Dikosha is different from the other lefetwas in the village, as the fact that she remains exactly the same socially is reflected by her entire existence: nothing changes about Dikosha. From the moment her brother abandons her, she does not just stop speaking, but she no longer grows older, her dress does not wear out and she does not even seem to require food anymore. At the end of the novel, everybody has aged twenty five years, but Dikosha has remained the same. She has become, as Jacobs observes, “part of a chain with the past”, unable to move forward (70). However, the fact that she has remained the same and has exchanged her community for her own world of art has not made her happy. After all, she is stuck in liminality, as she has separated herself from her position in her own community and cannot be incorporated into the
community of the San because the graffiti of modern times has finally made it impossible for Dikosha to summon the cave people to life. In this respect, Dikosha’s life reflects the society in which she lives, as it has experienced no development, or passage, in gender patterns during these twenty five years. Her failure to experience a passage suggests that society too cannot complete its passage if it does not release its patriarchal tradition and develop towards equality.

The deficiency of Sotho gender patterns is illustrated by the contrast between the San and the Sotho. Like the Xhosa, the Sotho are a stratified society in which the roles of men and women are clearly outlined. Cloete illustrates the Sotho gender patterns through a Sotho proverb: “tsa etwa pele ke tsadi di wela leopeng (women lack leadership qualities)”, providing an impression of the views of women and their roles within the Sotho society (47). This impression is affirmed in the novel, as Dikosha is expected to behave according to the patriarchal tradition of the village. In the cave of Barwa, however, there is equality between men and women. She finds everything she needs at the cave: she is healed when she is sick, she is comforted when she is sad, and she can interact equally with men and women through the songs and dances they experience together. In the rituals that Dikosha experiences with the San, they may all be viewed as liminal personae, as there are no distinctions of rank or status (Turner 95). The “intense comradeship and egalitarianism” that Turner mentions as a characteristic amongst liminal personae characterises the common human bond that Dikosha cannot seem to experience in her own community, and can only find with the San (Turner 95). Also, when Dikosha chooses to engage in the rituals of the San when she cannot handle the reality of village life, she illustrates Turner’s claim that these rituals seem to cause the participants “to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” (95). Dikosha, however, does not move towards a new station in life, so for her the rituals just provide new energy to deal with the gender patterns
and expectations of her village. Still, the eventual disappearance of the San, their art and rituals and the feeling of *communitas* that Dikosha experiences with them is symbolic of the direction in which the Sotho society is headed: as there is no development in gender patterns, hierarchy prevails and drowns out *communitas*.

Throughout the novel gender patterns are being criticized, as girls are deprived of a secondary education and have to submit to the patriarchal tradition of the village. The rape of Mother-of-the-Daughters at the end of the novel illustrates the deficiency of these gender patterns, and the effects they may have. Although Sotho customs forbid sons-in-law to even shake the hand of their mother-in-law, Trooper Motsohi rapes his own mother-in-law, Mother-of-the-Daughters, because of the frustrations he has had to deal with: he was never able to control his wife and she finally left him for another man. As such, his status is diminished and he is humiliated. These circumstances lead him to the rape, demonstrating what these gender patterns can lead to. The responses of the villagers underscore once more the position of women in Sotho society: they all pass by Mother-of-the-Daughters to sympathize with her husband, and ask themselves questions like: “Who could do this to Father-of-the-Daughters?” (185). Rather than sympathizing with the woman who was raped, people wonder who could attack the property of the wealthiest man in the village, making it painfully clear how untenable the Sotho patriarchal tradition is.

The lack of equality between men and women is further illustrated by the occurrences following the rape: Tampololo, Mother-of-Twins and Mother-of-the-Daughters attack Trooper Motsohi and are put in jail for doing so. Trooper Motsohi, on the other hand, is never punished for the rape. Instead, the judge feels that
the victim must be flattered that at her advanced age she should be the subject of
desire of a handsome young man. [ … ] The victim is an experienced woman who was
not a virgin at the time of the crime, and therefore suffered no serious injury (187-88).

This scenario, added to the other, previously mentioned examples of gender inequality in the
novel, shows the deficiency of traditional Sotho gender patterns. This is illustrated further by
the fact that this is the only novel that ends unresolved: the women are in jail, Radisene has
lost everything, and Dikosha can neither live with the Sotho nor the San. Twenty five years
have passed, but society has not been able to pass to maturity, as it has not released its
oppressive patriarchal tradition.

On its first publication, Ways of Dying was described as a “feminist diatribe” (qtd. in
van der Vlies 158). The novel indeed criticizes traditional patriarchy and focuses on feminist
issues, as it shows a development in gender patterns compared to She Plays with the Darkness
and presents us with a female protagonist who represents and embodies this development, as
she experiences it herself. In Ways of Dying, the female characters break through existing
gender patterns as they are independent and work together to rebuild society. Noria is the
most important example of the treatment of women at the time in which the novel is set: she
has experienced harsh treatment at the hands of men, but she has risen above that and
developed into an independent, strong woman who has released herself from her oppressor.
Farred aptly describes Noria as a “feminist figure actively involved in improving life in the
community” (185). However, before she came to the city, Noria was subject to the traditional
patriarchy of the village in which she lived. For Noria, this meant being sent away from home
by her father, and losing her son because of her aggressive, drunken husband. Visser
concludes that “[t]he fathers in this novel, then, are particularly tyrannical, making the
critique of traditional African patriarchy the sharpest criticism in the book (I. Visser How to
live 5)”. Farred concurs, claiming that gender patterns are “the novel’s most salient critique of the postapartheid state” (186).

The only example of a woman who transgresses the boundaries of patriarchal tradition in those early days is Noria’s mother, That Mountain Woman. She functions as an example of feminism, as she defies the oppressive customs of her husband’s village, making her autonomous and self-sufficient, but she is also aggressive and disrespectful. The combination of her attitude and the rigid traditions of the village in which she lives mean that That Mountain Woman only inspires gossip and fails to effect any kind of development towards gender equality. As That Mountain Woman shows as little respect for her husband as he shows for her, she functions more as another example of oppression than as an example of a development in gender patterns. Noria, however, employs other, more subtle and respectful methods of achieving autonomy (Farred 197).

The state that Noria is in due to the patriarchal oppression she experienced in the village may be compared to the state of postapartheid South Africa in the novel. South Africa too has had to deal with many years of oppression, and when apartheid is finally abolished, the country, like Noria, has to deal with the consequences of this heritage. In discussing oppression in Biko’s Children, Mda illustrates how oppression leads to insecurity and self-hatred (n.pag). Both Noria and South Africa have arrived at a point at which they try to leave behind their past state and move on to a more positive future, but they are both faced with the consequences of the past – Noria is mourning the loss of her son and South Africa is divided by political violence – and will have to deal with these issues before they can move on. Both Noria and her country may be viewed as liminal entities, as they embody the previously described characteristics of liminal entities. Turner’s claim that liminal personae “are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life” is clearly applicable to
Noria and postapartheid South Africa as they are portrayed in the novel: they have left their previous states and the oppression that went with these states, and are waiting for the “new station in life” that democracy will bring to South Africa, and gender equality will bring to Noria (95). However, as gender equality and democracy are both new to the country, the novel suggests that achieving them is a slow and complex process.

Like their liminal states, their journeys towards autonomy are similar as well, as they are accompanied by violent setbacks. Noria starts her journey as she leaves her village. In doing so, she rebels against the customs of the village as well as its gender patterns, as she defies her father’s control over her in two ways: she literally goes beyond his control as she leaves the village and decides to marry a man he does not approve of, in a manner that defies the customs and rites of passage that would normally occur in the village. Noria and Napu run away together, but Noria cannot escape patriarchy by doing so, as Napu turns out to oppress her as well. Noria therefore takes a second step towards autonomy, as she takes her child and moves away. The pervasiveness of patriarchy is shown by the fact that Noria’s move towards autonomy is thwarted: Napu takes back his son and finally causes his death. Reflecting the national situation of internecine strife, Noria’s journey is not without setbacks. In an effort to remove male control from her life, Noria starts cooperating with the other women in the settlement and swears off men completely. Yet, both Noria and the country are not truly free from oppression as they are still struggling with the oppressor’s deeds. There is a need to rediscover themselves, and Noria’s attempts towards doing so consist of two important components: artistic expression, as illustrated in the previous chapters, and a breach of traditional gender patterns. As Noria’s situation mirrors that of the country, we can see how embracing cultural identity and working towards equality is the way forward for Noria as well as her country.
Noria’s singing has ritual significance as it triggers *communitas*, promotes Noria’s passage and illustrates her role in Toloki’s passage. Although Noria has released herself from oppression, she is stuck in liminality and needs to find a way to promote her passage to a new station in life. Both Noria and Toloki have been changing from the moment they meet at the start of the novel, but their change culminates in the New Year’s Day scene mentioned in the previous chapter. Their joint efforts bring about their passage, but Noria’s singing plays a particularly important part in this process, as it illustrates her role in Toloki’s passage. Toloki starts to change from the moment he meets Noria, and starts to allow other people back into his life. First, this happens simply through the fact that he shares the stories of his past with her, but as the novel progresses, he starts opening up to the point that he no longer wants to live in a waiting room, but wants to rejoin the community instead. Noria’s influence on Toloki is profound in other aspects as well: he is determined to remain celibate, as he feels it fits his profession. Yet, Noria awakens a sexual appetite in him that he finds hard to cope with. Furthermore, he admires her role in the country’s political struggle to such an extent that he finds himself being interested in politics for the first time in his life.

As illustrated in the previous chapters, Toloki is purged from his painful past in the scene in which his drawing and Noria’s singing come together to promote the passage that they are undergoing. However, without Noria’s song, Toloki’s passage could not have occurred, as she is the one who brings him back to the community, and only through what Kauer terms Noria’s “muse-like influence” and the influence of her song is he finally able to draw people again (qtd. in Barker 8). Noria is therefore crucial in Toloki’s transformation, as she helps to bring about a new kind of man: the kind who does not oppress women but respects them. For Noria, Toloki’s passage is very significant. As said, she has refused male influence in her life for a long time, as men were her oppressors. Seeing Toloki, a man,
become a positive force in the community in which she lives, allows Noria to pass to a new station in life as well, as it allows her to move beyond her pain and forgive her oppressors.

Noria’s new station in life is, therefore, the place at which we find her at the end of the novel: she has forgiven her oppressors and thus released herself from the oppressor’s influence. In Lombardozzi’s words, she has “independently [found] a solution to [her] problems by [her] own inner strength” (215). Noria now lives with a man in an equal and creative partnership and works with him to improve society. If their passage is completed, Toloki’s claim that “the salvation of the settlement lies in the hands of women” will no longer be true, as men like Toloki and Shadrack will not be “feminist aberrations”, but examples for other men (Ways 176; Farred 199). Noria and Toloki have found a new way to live in a new version of their society and the “novel of transition” ends at a point at which it is still uncertain whether or not their fellow South Africans will follow suit (Barker 11). Still, through the example of Toloki and Noria, the novel indicates that the end of inequality is the end of an immature society: if the country too is able to embrace the oppressors of its past and work with them to improve the future, society can truly become a mature democracy.

In the new democratic South Africa depicted in *The Heart of Redness*, the last phase of the passage in gender patterns shown in *Ways of Dying* has not been completed quite yet. The novel illustrates that villages such as Qolorha have a patriarchal tradition that is still prevalent, and although there is mention of women in powerful positions, the description of Camagu’s attitude towards his maid illustrates that equality is not the norm in the cities either. Clearly, South Africa is still awaiting the final stage of its passage towards gender equality. In the village of Qolorha, the marriage and initiatives of Qukezwa and Camagu show how the passage may be completed. By inspiring and teaching a learned man from the city, a “nondescript daughter of Believers” effects changes that promote gender equality as well as the preservation of the Xhosa cultural heritage and Qolorha’s natural splendour (*Heart* 249).
The traditional gender patterns of the Xhosa are an important presence in *The Heart of Redness*. The Xhosa society has always been a very stratified one, in which status is largely dependent on gender and age (Berger 12, 14). Berger notes the differences between the KhoiKhoi and the Xhosa in that respect, as KhoiKhoi women have always had the right to own cattle in their own name, and were therefore less dependent on their husbands or fathers (9). These differences are significant when we look at *The Heart of Redness*, as Qukezwa’s family is of mixed KhoiKhoi and Xhosa heritage, although she lives in a village based on the patriarchal tradition of the Xhosa. In the first chapter of the novel, these gender patterns are among the first matters to be discussed: the narrator states that it is the custom that “men walk in front and women follow”, Bhonco remarks that people thought he was crazy to send his daughter to school because she was a girl, and NoPetticoat worries that her daughter will not be accepted in her new post as principal because she is a woman (4, 5). The first introduction of Qukezwa already illustrates the narrator’s claim that she takes after her free-spirited KhoiKhoi grandmother, as she fails to show her father the respect he can justifiably expect due to his age and gender: she screams at him and scolds him for his behaviour. As she faces her community with what Cloete terms a “‘do your worst’ attitude”, she is viewed as a “rotten apple” by many of the villagers (46). Her disregard for the existing gender patterns of her village is further illustrated by the fact that she propositions Camagu on their first encounter. The novel shows that even a man who is well known for his “unquenchable desire for the flesh”, “is not used to being approached by women in such a manner” (28, 120). Camagu is intrigued and irritated by her behaviour, and becomes obsessed with her. Yet, in spite of the fact that she propositioned him in the first place, she keeps him at arm’s length, tempting him one time and ignoring him the next – creating a situation in which he cannot stop thinking about her and literally starts following her around. Clearly, Qukezwa not only disregards the gender patterns of her village; when it comes to love, she even turns them around.
By educating Camagu, Quzezwa brings about a development in the preservation of her natural and cultural heritage, and ultimately, in the gender patterns of the village. Due to these gender patterns, she cannot do much to protect her village and oppose the recent plans to build a hotel and a casino in Qolorha. Her claims that the laws need to be changed to protect the indigenous flora and fauna of Qolorha are met with laughter, and her passive father is not much help. She clearly needs the help of a person with a high status, who will be sympathetic to her cause. When Camagu comes to Qolorha, he is somewhat lost: “Camagu used to see himself as a pedlar of dreams. [ … ] Now he has lost his touch. He needs a pedlar of dreams himself, with a bagful of dreams waiting to be dreamt” (36). Although he is fascinated by the way Quzezwa approaches him, he is not at first physically attracted to her. Only when she starts educating him does he come to understand the method to her madness: “[h]e is grudgingly developing some admiration for this scatterbrained girl” (103). As Vital notes, Camagu slowly moves from a state of feeling lost to a state of belonging (307). When Quzezwa initiates him in the stories of the prophetesses, shows him the natural splendour of Qolorha and sings songs for him in the split-tone manner that is characteristic of the Xhosa, he comes to appreciate why she cuts down trees and opposes the casino plans. As she becomes his new pedlar of dreams by literally invading his dreams, Quzezwa inspires Camagu to come up with an alternative plan to attract tourists to Qolorha. The fact that Quzezwa’s ideas combined with Camagu’s business skills and knowledge of sustainable development create a solution to the fight that has been dominating the village is an indication of how well they are suited to each other. Significantly, this moment is the turning point in Quzezwa’s behaviour towards Camagu. She is content with his actions and stops stringing him along.

During his time in Qolorha, Camagu undergoes a rite of passage: he starts out as a man who has no respect for women and uses them as he pleases:
There is something about servitude that seems to set the crotches of men of Camagu’s ilk on fire. It must have been the same urge that drove the slave master [ … ] from his mansion to a night of wild passion with the slave girl in the slave quarters or in the fields. Of course it was wild passion only on his side. To the slave girl, consent was through coercion. It was rape. (28)

From this comparison it is clear that Camagu’s former approach to women was directed by lust and focused on controlling them. However, during the time he spends in Qolorha, he starts to change as he starts to appreciate Qukezwa and her wisdom. As he ponders his transformation, he realizes that “it is all because of the effect that Qukezwa has had on him” (229). The effect that Qukezwa has on Camagu’s transformation proves the extent to which a breach of gender patterns occurs: Camagu, who used to be defined in terms of education and success, finds himself redefined in terms of his female counterpart.14

Qukezwa’s role in promoting gender patterns becomes clear through her role in Camagu’s passage, which is most evident in both Camagu’s and Qukezwa’s approach to sexuality. Throughout the novel, Camagu’s as well as Qukezwa’s sexuality are a point of focus: Camagu’s sexuality is presented as a shameful part of him, as he uses women and cannot seem to control his urges. Qukezwa’s sexuality, however, is described as an integral part of Qukezwa’s character: she is fully ingrained in her femininity and her sexuality. Qukezwa is described as voluptuous and libidinal, and she is not afraid to show off her body in all its glory as she rides her horse naked and struts around in her underwear. As Camagu points out in the novel, his arrival in Qolorha means a literal turning point in his sex life, as he has been celibate ever since. This underscores the fact that he experiences a passage while he is there, as Turner repeatedly mentions “sexlessness” as an attribute of liminality (102). With
Qukezwa guiding him through his passage by educating him, he slowly starts to view women differently, as he starts working with them in the coop and starts falling in love with Qukezwa. The tendency to view women as sexual objects disappears as he realises that:

[j]is old self would have taken advantage of the raw talent that he encounters every day in this village. [ ... ] It is all because of the effect that Qukezwa has had on him. The effect that has even cleansed NomaRussia out of his life, out of his recurrent dreams (229).

The fact that Camagu uses the word “cleansed” for the effect that Qukezwa has had on him illustrates that pursuing NomaRussia was something that characterises “his old self”: chasing a woman he does not know because he finds her sexually attractive. It also shows that he has indeed experienced a passage: he has truly been separated from his old self, and the period of celibacy has prepared him for a new status: that of the new African man, who respects women and does not want to use or oppress them. His marriage to Qukezwa therefore serves as a rite of incorporation for him, and as a symbolic rite of incorporation for the country: by achieving equality in gender patterns, the country can leave behind oppression in sexuality as well as in other aspects of life.

The fact that Qukezwa chooses to effect change through an older, learned man shows her respect for the customs and traditions of the village in which she lives, while on the other hand illustrating the fact that Qukezwa refuses to live by oppressive gender patterns. Deciding to teach Camagu and to transform him into a man with proper respect for nature, culture, and women, allows Qukezwa to become a woman who lives within the boundaries of her village, but at the same time, according to her own rules. Or, as Cloete puts it: their “marriage of equals” consists of the “new African man” and the “new African woman”, and as such, serves
as an example of what the final stage of the country’s rite of passage in gender patterns should be: a combination of equality and tradition (45).
Conclusion – Progress and Preservation

My purpose has been to explore the relation between rites of passage, art and gender in *Ways of Dying*, *She Plays with the Darkness* and *The Heart of Redness*: to examine the role of each of these phenomenons and the influence they have on each other. To do so, chapter one has provided the necessary background as it deals with South Africa’s socio-political background and the influence of this background on its literary output. Furthermore, it provides South Africa’s art historical background and the theoretical background of rites of passage and *communitas*. This information is particularly relevant in this context as the socio-political transitions in South Africa and Lesotho have been and are still so profound that they influence every aspect of society and its inhabitants and therefore make interesting subject matter for the study of rites of passage and *communitas*. Furthermore, art has a significant position in South Africa and Lesotho, as it pervades each aspect of daily life and can be used in political statements as well. Studying the art forms in the novels illuminates the practitioners’ perceptions of the world around them, and when we combine this to the study of rites of passage and *communitas*, we are provided with a clear mirror of the workings of the societies and individuals depicted in these novels.

As art has several functions in African societies, it was my objective to explore its relation to the occurring rites of passage. Art has a specific function in each of these novels, which is significant in terms of the novels’ overall message. The role of art in the national and individual transitions is elaborate, as it illustrates and underscores the rites of passage that the countries and their characters experience – or fail to experience, as *She Plays with the Darkness* illustrates. The most important functions of the art forms in the novels are characterized by *communitas*, as the characters who experience *communitas* are able to experience a passage and thus move on to a new station in life, whereas the characters who
fail to communicate and do not experience *communitas* are stuck in their liminal states. Their countries mirror these situations. *Ways of Dying* and *The Heart of Redness* demonstrate that preserving cultural identity provides a meaningful and positive way to approach the future, whereas *She Plays with the Darkness* shows the fading of cultural identity, and the lack of progress that results from it. However, when *communitas* becomes an ideal, it no longer promotes the passage to maturity, to a new station in life, as I suggest through the example of the San dance in *The Heart of Redness*. *Communitas*, then, functions as an indicator of the status of the country and the characters. Therefore, *communitas*, through art, illustrates the overall message of the novels that preservation of cultural identity is essential to being able to develop and pass to maturity, for individuals as well as societies. As such, art proves essential as it represents individuality and authenticity.

The connection between cultural identity and the level of maturity of the societies and characters depicted in the novels is closely linked to the way gender patterns are approached. Therefore, when we focus on gender we find that the contrast between *She Plays with the Darkness* on the one hand and *Ways of Dying* and *The Heart of Redness* on the other hand is similar to the contrast noted in chapter two as cultural identity and gender combined illustrate the stage of the passage to maturity that the characters and the countries are in. I have argued that Mda’s female protagonists have a unique position in their societies as they determine their own lives and do not allow themselves to be limited by the patriarchal traditions of their societies. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, people are too unbending to accommodate these choices, making Dikosha an outsider in her own village. However, as Noria’s and Qukezwa’s narratives take place at a later time – the years in between apartheid and democracy and the years after democracy respectively – and as the people in their communities are more inclined to accommodate their lifestyles, albeit grudgingly – we can see that there is a development towards equality throughout the novels. Noria and Qukezwa manage to promote their male
counterparts’ passage to maturity and in doing so, they promote gender equality. The passage in gender patterns in turn promotes the passage of the country towards maturity, as the end of inequality means the end of immaturity. Evidently, the fading of cultural identity and the lingering oppressive patriarchal tradition in *She Plays with the Darkness* hinder the passage to maturity.

Based on these findings I conclude that the relationship between rites of passage, art and gender in *Ways of Dying*, *She Plays with the Darkness* and *The Heart of Redness* is the following: in order for the depicted countries and characters to complete their passage to maturity, they need to retain and value their cultural identity and promote gender equality. In other words: they must keep the aspects of their culture that promote *communitas*, growth and development, such as art, and reject the aspects of their culture that contain oppression, such as patriarchy. Furthermore, the connection between my three main foci may be found in *communitas*. *Communitas* proves to be more than a brief alternative to hierarchy that sometimes occurs; it turns out to be symbolic of the solution Mda envisions for the problems South Africa still faces today. After all, during *communitas* we become aware of what binds us, and the things that separate us fade to the background. For a practical application of this idea, we need only think of the example of *The Heart of Redness*’s protagonist: Camagu. Camagu’s opinions on black empowerment and his initiatives in Qolorha are reminiscent of Mda’s. In *Biko’s Children*, Mda formulates what he feels South Africa’s completion of its passage towards maturity should entail. He describes a new generation that wishes to improve the country through art: “[u]sing the arts as a tool of analysing their society, they are re-writing the script of their lives in a manner that defies their imposed identity of a lost generation” (n.pag.). This attitude, he argues, can be taken up by other groups as well, “if they embrace the ethos of self-development and self-reliance” (n.pag.). Rather than a government-imposed strategy of black empowerment, he suggests that “[b]lack professionals […] adopt a
village and act as catalysts or facilitators for its development, in the same manner that I did with my ancestral village of Lower Telle” (n.pag.). By creating a people-based development, autonomy can be promoted and oppression and inequality diminished. When that happens, literature may finally be able to renounce its political service and, possibly for the first time in South African history, be appreciated fully for its literary merit (Austen 2). That would mean oppression is truly over, and South Africa’s passage towards maturity completed.
Appendix A

“Here comes the Prince of Britain!
Offspring of the female buffalo, Victoria! –
Young woman who is a god in the land of the blacks.
Sprit-like, priest of war, wizard,
Here comes the boy son of George V;
Of the Royal House, a boy coming to men.
Dung-coloured one whose eye flashes lightning.
If it so much as touches you with a glance, it will blind you.
The dung-coloured one, who is a – it’s impossible to tell
by looking at him –
His eyes are like living creatures when they look at you.” (Mqhayi qtd. in Mphahlele 44)
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Notes

1 The poem may be found in appendix A.

2 Two more laws were created to reinforce censorship under apartheid; in 1974 and 1982.

3 Defamiliarization: better known as Verfremdungseffekt or alienation effect: “An effect sought by the German playwright Brecht and followers, aimed at the destruction of many of the conventions of theatrical illusion” (Oxford English Dictionary). Although Mda works in a situation entirely different from Brecht and his followers, we can see that Mda also applies defamiliarization for the destruction of conventions.

4 Van Gennep based the names of these stages on the Latin word limen, which literally means border, but is often interpreted as threshold or doorstep (Davies, Holm, and Bowker 3).

5 Long further notes that, although there is a Xhosa initiation rite for girls as well, it is hardly ever performed as it is deemed unnecessary and unimportant – which underscores the gender patterns of the patriarchal tradition of the Xhosa.

6 This is described in many works discussing African art, such as the works of Elsen, Blauer, Gillow, Garlake and Berger. Elsen specifically mentions “a purpose of unification”, which is applicable to African art (21).

7 In the San belief system, the universe consists of several realms, natural and supernatural, living and dead, between which shamans can mediate through trance experiences (Skotnes, Solomon, qtd. in Garlake 42).

8 This is illustrated in many works concerning African art, such as the works of Vansina, Garlake, Berger, Blauer, Gillow and Elsen.


10 The San are referred to as the Barwa people in the novel, but since they are better known as the San, I will refer to them as such.
The experiences Dikosha has in the cave of Barwa reflect Garlake’s description of the beliefs and practices believed to have belonged to the San (39).

As described in the works of Long, Gillow and Pauw.

Noria believes that her first child came back to her when she became pregnant for the second time.

Lombardozzi notes the development in the portrayal of female characters in South African fiction and demonstrates that, in the earlier years of their writing, both Mda and Fugard were wont to focus on the oppression of apartheid rather than the oppression of women, and that Fugard especially defined his female characters in terms of their male counterparts. She shows that Mda increasingly depicts stronger female characters in his plays throughout the years, and the fact that he now portrays women characters such as Dikosha, Noria and Qukezwa confirms this statement (215).