

Mythic Reconstruction:
A Study of Australian Aboriginal and South
African Literatures

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Master of Philosophy,
Murdoch University

2006

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Esosa O. Osaghae
December 2006
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To my Dad,
Education was not an option...

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the intention of postcolonial Australian Aboriginal and Indigenous South African postcolonial writers in reconstructing cultural and historical myths. The predominant concerns of this thesis are the issues of Representation and Historiography as they are constructed in the four primary texts namely *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, *The Heart of Redness*, *The Kadaitcha Sung* and *Woza Albert!*

It begins with a summary journey into the concepts of the postcolonial, presenting some of the challenges with which the concept has been confronted finding nonetheless it enabling as an 'anticipatory discourse' in appreciating the literatures from once-colonised nations such as Australia and South Africa.

I then take a cursory look at the concept of myth while focussing on how writers like Sam Watson and Barney, Mtwa and Mbogeni put such cultural myths as the Biamee deity in *The Kadaitcha Sung* and the second coming of Jesus in *Woza Albert!* to use.

In the next section, I focus on how the writers Mudrooroo (then Colin Johnson) in Australia and Mda from South Africa confront and reconstruct some of the historical myths upon which European colonialism was founded, using the texts, *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* and *The Heart of Redness*.

The achievement of this thesis has simply been one of the canonical expansions recommended of postcolonial criticism; the stressing an appreciation of the differences that exist even when postcolonial writers seek to achieve the same goal with their literatures.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Murdoch University for giving me the opportunity to undertake this research thesis and my supervisors, Drs Hugh Webb and Jenny De Reuck for having faith in me. This thesis and I grew as a result of your sublime patience.

To my hero husband, Ephraim, and blessed kids, Odaro and Efe (who was born during the course of this project); you were my strength. Oh! Mummy can play with you now without bending over to look at her books.

A Personal Statement

My more recent life-journey has involved first, a movement from post-colonial Nigeria in West Africa to postcolonial Australia and secondly, from a mode of literary study that was a hybrid of British and nationalist Nigerian to a view of literature from a perspective that is now postcolonial. These journeys have carried their own challenges, and for the major part of this programme, unravelling my identity and what it is that I have really studied, both in the past and present has been one of my most important achievements.

From a personal point of view, it is strange to appreciate the issues of multiplicity, divisions and tensions that cloud such a mode of study, having lived in Nigeria and having been born into one of the minority groups in the nation. Nigeria is a country which has over 200 languages and is divided into four regions—North, South, East and West. This division exists not only on the map but also at Educational, Social, Political, Economical and Religious levels. So much for the slogan ‘One Nigeria!’—the phrase often echoed in the National Anthem ‘one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity’ is sometimes an irony. This is not to deny, though, that it is a beautiful country endowed with many natural and human resources.

But my point is that I appreciate the ethnic multiplicity and hybridity that many postcolonial societies are made of and some of the struggles made against hegemony from within and without the country. However, this is not meant to claim

‘authority’ in building a voice for this thesis. I am neither South African nor Australian Aborigine but a ‘cultural outsider’ peeping through the windows of literature at these historical and modern experiences. However, I come from a society which also shares with these two countries a history of colonialism. It has been interesting to discover how different all these experiences have been; not to speak of the cultures.

This is the basis upon which this thesis began: an intellectual curiosity to find similarities in the literatures of these two regions. This curiosity has led to discovery that has been life changing for me—the realisation that my view of the world has been strictly narrow, one-dimensional and somewhat parochial. I have also learned that both objective and subjective realities exist and must be tested at all times.

I believe I have satisfied this curiosity—which is strictly the aim of this thesis and I see this exercise as a stepping stone, for me, to appreciate the distinctiveness of literatures coming from postcolonial societies.