

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,  
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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.

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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.



# Introduction

This study attempts to reach a critical understanding of selected South African and Australian Aboriginal literary writing in English. It examines the literatures from two separate cultures sharing a colonised space created by British imperialism although with different colonial and postcolonial conditions. I have chosen South Africa and Australian Aboriginal literature primarily because they share a common history of colonial experience and in particular because there is, in each, a 'settler' community. However, I am fully aware of the fact that there exist more differences than similarities both in their history and in their post-colonial experiences. Thus, one aim of this study is not only to find points of convergence as the discipline of comparative literature would generally set out to do but also to appreciate the dissimilarities that exist in forging culturally individual identities.

The history of Australian Aborigines and the South African natives are complementing examples of European imperialism and its implications. Racism and the theory of white supremacy were the main factors on which the policies of apartheid in South Africa and segregation in Australia thrived. Even though colonial and imperial operations all around the world were somewhat similar in the motives and modes of operation, it is worthy of note that South Africa was the only country in the world which legalised racism and oppression on the basis of skin colour and formulated such practices into law. Also, the history of British colonies has always been told and written by the British and usually from their viewpoint as conquerors and civilised people in contrast to the natives who were portrayed as barbaric, uncivilised and savage. As the natives of these colonies gained political

independence, the conscious need to rewrite versions of these histories and realities often became like a national project. The themes of representation and historiography have been and are still much debated topics in postcolonial studies. The selected texts here aim, in part, to refute and rewrite accepted British versions of reality and History. The texts I have chosen are not paradigmatic of postcolonialism. They do not typically represent the wide-ranging field of postcolonial writing from both countries.

Indigenous writing in English has been chosen primarily because South African and Aboriginal writing have emerged from their pre-colonial oral traditions into English which became an imposed language as part of the colonisation process. The difference remains that only English is regarded as the national and official language in Australia whereas in South Africa, eleven languages, nine of which are indigenous, alongside English and Afrikaans are used officially. Also, traditional South African and Aboriginal cultures were oral until the imperial intrusion. English philosophy and ideals were imposed upon these cultures as part of the colonisation process.

Indigenous writers in both countries also mostly write in English because, in many cases, it has become a first language, although in South Africa, the country's literature is not strictly identified by English. Multilingualism is regarded as a normal feature of South African literature which is derived from the multiple influences of the local cultures and the alien impact of English and Afrikaans and other influences such as Indian, Malay and Portuguese. Secondly, the English language has become universal and is the most accessible medium through which indigenous literature can reach a larger audience. Since one of the aims is to 'educate

the oppressors' and indeed challenge the ex-colonisers, writers are often left with the better choice of employing this language.

However, employing the English language does not necessarily imply employing its literary traditions and forms. These writings are usually infused with traditional elements from the culture and the language in which they are written. This is an attempt to both protest at using the white man's tool and also to create an identity that has survived and is still surviving a change that is considered irreversible. This can be referred to as a natural process of decolonisation. Thus, in the words of Brydon and Tiffin, 'to decolonise is not simply to rid oneself of the trappings of imperial power; it is also to seek non-repressive alternatives to imperialist discourse' (12) (This is the focus of chapter one.) Hence, employing European-based literary theory would prove very restrictive in examining the literary merits of these literatures. Also, it would be equally ambitious to dismiss the current use of postcolonialism and hence, recourse to the unpopular proposed national models. Rather, a blending of European and indigenous approaches proves least restrictive and most productive for these writers. This might imply a negation of the western value of 'elegance' in literature or according to Brydon and Tiffin, a redefinition of elegance 'to dissociate it from its traditional links with qualities of symmetry, coherence and elitism' (20). I claim that the theories of postcolonialism prove effective in building a literary approach to writings of these regions.

The four texts chosen as exemplary focal points for this thesis are random. They are: *Heart of Redness* and *Woza Albert!* from South Africa and *The Kadaitcha Sung* and *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* from Australia. This is so because they serve as metaphors for the theme of the thesis. The texts chosen are not, as indicated above, paradigmatic of postcolonialism. They do

not typically represent the wide-ranging field of postcolonial writing from both countries. This thesis intends to engage each text carefully with specific relation to broader issues. I acknowledge that not all literatures that come from countries which come under the umbrella of postcolonialism are in fact engaging the 'centre' in the sense in which Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin describe it. However, the texts chosen and analysed in this thesis each in fact engage the centre in some definitive way.

For the purpose of this study, the word postcolonial is being used instead of post-colonial. I recognised that scholars and critics often use the words interchangeably and also that these terms have attracted so much debate that it is difficult to fix particular meanings to them. I have also defined post-colonial to denote a historical timeframe, meaning 'after colonialism' while postcolonial is a literary concept generally denoting literatures produced from regions that have encountered colonialism. This is not to suggest that I have solved the prolonged debate but that this clarification serves the purposes of the study.

The writings examined here do not include South African writings in Afrikaans or other indigenous South African languages. They also do not attempt to represent each traditional tribal group in indigenous Australia or South Africa but they have been chosen for their representative nature. The entire work may be read collectively as a whole or alternatively each chapter may be considered individually on its own terms. Whichever way they are studied, it remains to be said that they are written from a cultural outsider's point of view, a view that is an attempt to understand whether both countries that share a history of colonialism also share similarities in the philosophy of their literatures. Hence I am careful not to make exaggerating, bogus or 'authoritative' claims which may be forgiven an 'insider' and

I am also conscious of the fact that Aboriginal matters in Australia and black and white relations in South Africa have not yet reached a state of ‘perfection’.

In Chapter One, I give a brief survey of the concept of postcolonialism and some of the difficulties surrounding it. This chapter also attempts to justify my use of the theory of postcolonialism as one which must incorporate the local specifics of each text by taking a brief survey of some identifying markers of Australian Aboriginal and South African literature. This specifying tendency is advisable, rather than lumping all the texts together under the general signifier of the postcolonial. This chapter ends with my contemplation on the concept. I also justify my use of postcolonialism as a theory with several unresolved conflicts and debates and positions which provides me with a fertile ground for experimentation. That means I may not after all be finding common grounds for postcolonial expressions but I would rather celebrate differences which eventuate at protests of western hegemony. That is to say that Australian Aboriginal literature and South African literature share some of the general concerns of postcolonialism; in this case, an assertion of a cultural identity through concerns with historicity (confronting and rewriting histories) and the issues associated with representation. One striking difference I have discovered is that Australian Aboriginal writers tend to find recourse in the urge to rewrite the past and give Aborigines a voice and at the same time denounce white myths of nation founding while South African writers confront and question some of the myths upon which the South African nation was founded by white settlers.

In Chapter two, ‘Banished Reality: A Study of *The Kadaitcha Sung* and *Woza Albert!*,’ I use the term myth to refer to religious and cultural narratives that

are held to be true by the custodians and also to refer to philosophical and popular beliefs that cannot be proven to be ‘truth’ by scientific reasoning and analysis.

In this chapter, I examine the myths that are presented in the selected texts and how they have been reconstructed in fiction from normal everyday discourse and history. This reconstruction involves and focuses on how the writers have translated and transcribed local beliefs and woven them into fiction to present a viewpoint or show current social and historic realities.

In this chapter, I look at why myth plays a strong role in the selected texts. The question I confront is: why is the supernatural employed in *The Kadaitcha Sung* and *Woza Albert!*? In Australian Aboriginal literature, to be specific, myth is a defining element of their spirituality and it connects them to the land so its use is fairly common in literature. But Sam Watson takes a different approach from the usual presentation of myth in Aboriginal literature. The question is: why does Watson reconstruct several myths into one? What end does he aim to achieve? These are the questions this chapter addresses.

A brief summary of the texts, I think is necessary before I proceed to answer the questions raised. In *Woza Albert!*, a fictional myth of Christ’s return to South Africa is employed. A text which is overtly experimental, *Woza Albert!* reconstructs fictionally the second coming of Jesus Christ in the then apartheid South Africa in very figurative terms. *Woza Albert!* is a political text written while South Africa was still under the reins of apartheid. Its purpose is to condemn apartheid through an enacted exposé, to indict the government and to raise hope and a collective consciousness in the oppressed majority through identification with the figure of the biblical Christ. There is a strong sympathy with and an identification of the character of Christ with activists (black and otherwise) who rose up to resist apartheid and the

unfair treatment they received under the regime. Like Christ in his first coming, they are hated, treated cruelly, rejected and some are killed while others slowly die off. Just as the death of Christ paved the way for redemption, the death of these patriots is believed to be the seed of redemption. Unlike the other texts, *Woza Albert!* does not rewrite history but can be said to confront and portray its reality.

In *The Kadaicha Sung*, Watson masterfully rewrites history from an Aboriginal viewpoint and at the same time presents the plight of Australian Aborigines using Aboriginal cultural values as a counter discourse. He presents ‘an indigenous reality which is in opposition to the dominant scientific reality of the colonisers...with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality’ (Mudrooroo 97). In the text, indigenous peoples were destroyed not just by the way of life forced upon them by white control, but primarily because of a fragment in their metaphysical and spiritual world view. This underwrites social Darwinism’s theory of supremacy that proposes that when weaker nations are confronted by the stronger, they give way or die.

An Aboriginal creation myth is thus retold and reconstructed by Watson to underwrite this European myth of social Darwinism. The text proposes a solution rooted in Aboriginal cultural values and worldviews. Thus the invasion, settlement and eventual liberation are not just the result of white decision and action, but a spiritual battle that was once lost, with repercussions, first in the dreamtime before it is manifested in the secular world.

It is important to note that the creation myth which Watson employs here is not static but is, nevertheless, drawn from an Aboriginal philosophy. This is because cultural myths are often orally transmitted and are subject to certain changes that give room for reinterpretation and sometimes some level of subjectivity in the hands

of the narrator. Among Aborigines, there are several versions of this narrative. In certain areas, Biamee the rainbow serpent is said to be the guardian of the earth and not the creator of the Aborigines while in other areas he is said to be the creator as Watson captures it.

In the hands of good writers, myth is a powerful tool with a multiple uses. In this case, it is to retell history and present the plight of Aborigines and then assert a cultural identity while proposing solutions using Aboriginal cultural realities as a counter discourse.

In Chapter Three, I intend to examine the reconstruction of indigenous history to achieve a sense of being and responsibility. However, I realise that history in both texts has been reconstructed differently. In *Dr Wooreddy*, history is first reclaimed. It is this reclaiming which necessitates a reconstruction. In *Heart of Redness*, the author is not concerned with a reclamation but with an interrogation. Thus, his reconstruction of history is simply to use the past to both mirror and understand the present South Africa. While Mudrooroo Narogin calls for an understanding between Aboriginal people and mainstream Australia, Zakes Mda calls for an enlightenment which entails discarding stereotypes and the ‘blame game’ and forging a consciousness that is truly humane especially in the new South Africa where the issues of reconciliation, representation, progress and development are prime concerns.

The central focus of *Dr Wooreddy* is the rewriting of the history of the European destruction of the Tasmanian Aborigines. *Dr Wooreddy* is a striking and unusual blend of fact and fiction—one distinguishing element in the postcolonial novel. It carefully combines history and fiction and fuses it with Aboriginal myths. Like *The Kadaicha Sung*, it denies and punctures European ethnocentrism and



handed down versions of received history. It also underwrites social Darwinism's myths of racial supremacy. It reconstructs history by putting Aborigines in the forefront of the colonial struggle and describes the Aboriginal struggle to understand and overcome the powers of white hegemony.

It does this by drawing deep from the wells of Aboriginal spiritual and metaphysical reality. Mudrooroo (then Colin Johnson) not only reconstructs historical narratives through fiction but also reconstructs Aboriginal mythic beliefs.

In *The Heart of Redness*, the concern is a confrontation with history with an intention of forging a future for the new South Africa. This preoccupation with history is a trait that is peculiar to the writings of both South Africa and Aboriginal Australia. *The Heart of Redness* is a weaving of myth, history and fiction built between a world of contemporary living characters and their nineteenth century ancestors. Thus two time-frames are intermingled in the narrative.

The conflict among the villagers is born over plans of the government to build a vast casino and tourist resort centre in their town. In the nineteenth century, their history had divided them into 'Believers' and 'Unbelievers' and, under pressure, these serious issues divide the community again. This mythic inclination influences not only the decisions they had to make, but their entire world.

The story is in part built around Camagu who returns from America and has difficulty in finding a place in the new South Africa until he lands in the coastal village of Qolorha-by-sea in the remote eastern cape in response to his 'famous lust'. He is caught up in the village's turmoil but rather than take sides, he forges a pattern of self-reliance from which the villagers eventually profit.

Like *Wooreddy*, the story tells the local history of a group within South Africa (the Xhosas) but it can be said to be generally resonant. It represents tensions

in contemporary South Africa for blacks caught between westernisation and their traditional ethnic identities. Summarily put, the novel probes cultural and spiritual identities and the divisions attendant upon them in postcolonial South Africa.

I choose to visit, in brief, the question of Mudrooroo's Aboriginal identity because he is the author of one of the primary texts I have chosen and I have also made cross references to other works he has written. In my observation, Mudrooroo may be regarded as a writer of Aboriginality even though the politics of Aboriginal genetics may not qualify him as a 'blood' Aboriginal. To deny his vast influence on Aboriginal literary and critical discourse would in fact lead to a denial and disruption of the origins and the entire concept of an existing modern Aboriginal literature written in English. And to comment that the process of Aboriginal writing in English is itself hybridised, hence a tolerance of 'outside' influences would draw up a whole debate that is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the text and references used in this thesis were publications made before the debates about his blood and nativity come to light.

It is my desire that this thesis contributes to the body of knowledge that is postcolonial literature especially in locating the study in and across specific texts.

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## Chapter 1

# Postcoloniality and Indigenising Literature

*'Why should the word "postcolonialism" carry the burden of such meaning?'*  
(Ahmad 279)

### **Defining postcolonial literature: web or weave?**

It is almost impossible to undertake a study in postcolonial literature without acknowledging the myriad of problems and the critical attention that the term has attracted over time. However one can get lost in this maze if one only focuses on deriving a definition or stating a proposition over its methodology.

This chapter in the thesis will be of pragmatic importance in that it not only acknowledges the difficult ground upon which it is based but gives some justification for the use of postcolonialism. It also aims at celebrating fictions by South Africans and Australian Aborigines by drawing attention to general and significant differences that exist in what we understand as postcolonial literatures with culturally different and historical experiences. This is one of the frontiers of postcolonial studies: celebrating differences through comparative study. Helen Tiffin and Diana Brydon's *Decolonizing Fictions* and Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* propose situating postcolonial studies in their differences as one of the major frontiers of the theory.

However, for the purpose of situating this thesis within the field of postcolonial studies, I wish briefly to draw attention to some attendant difficulties that the field attracts and in spite of that still justify it as an enabling discourse in respect to my study. For the purpose of this study, I shall privilege, as indicated in

the Introduction, the use of ‘postcolonialism’ in reference to the theory over ‘post-colonialism’. However, I shall refer to the post-colonial to carry the historical implication of post-independence.

### **Towards a theoretical methodology**

One of the major difficulties of situating a study within postcolonialism, as I have already stated, has to do with what the concept connotes and the methodology or methodologies it employs. This challenge thus stems from a number of issues, issues upon which debates and critical attention have been focused since the moment postcolonialism began to gain recognition till the present time. Some of these issues are the linguistic implications of the term, regional and historical differences in the experience of colonialism, diversity of disciplines and interests locked together under postcolonialism and the debate surrounding western hegemony.

#### *Linguistic and semantic implications*

The term ‘postcolonial’ conveys different meanings to different scholars working in different fields. To scholars working on politics and history, it often connotes post-independence while, to scholars in international power relations and the global economy, it may carry the connotation of the nagging consequences and heritage of the colonial experience.

‘Postcolonial’ as a word calls to mind ‘post’ as a prefix and ‘colonial’ as the subject and this literarily would imply after colonisation. When the word was first used, it referred to the period after colonisation when nations who were once under colonial rule gained political independence from the colonising powers and thus it has its favour in economic and political contexts. Subsequent entries bore the meaning of the word as that which came after colonisation (Hodge and Mishra 276-

7). In some instances, the term today still carries the notion of the historical consequences of colonialism. The reason is that one of the proposed aims of the theory is to contest both the process and the aftermath of colonialism. The term has been effective in literary studies to indicate an elaborate study of and engagement with the aftermaths of colonialism. Simon During claims that the ‘seductiveness of the term ‘postcolonial’ makes it easy to forget that the word too has a history’ (340). It generally draws together the literatures written in countries which are ex-colonies of Britain.

Considering it from this perspective is perhaps simplistic and too restrictive, for it indicates only political independence and presumes that colonialism has ‘completely’ ended. If the writings of these once colonised nations are termed post-colonial, questions arise about settler nations like Australia and New Zealand in which, in relation to the indigenous people, colonisation is not said to have ended and in the political sense may still not be an option. I will return to this issue in a later section of this thesis.

Debates about the term ‘post-colonial’ span two parts. There is the debate about the ‘post’ and its relation to the notion of the ‘colonial’. Postcolonial theorists and critics have argued that the term ‘post-colonialism’ or ‘post-colonial’ be restricted to its political implication. That means it should be applied to countries that have gained political autonomy and now exist as independent states; while ‘postcolonialism’ could be employed in reference to the literary aesthetics of writings that proceed from countries that have encountered colonialism. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge propose and justify the replacement of post-colonialism with postcolonialism. They proffer that postcolonialism be viewed as ‘ideological orientations rather than as a historical stage’ (284). With this in mind, it becomes

easier to justify the seeming contradictions and opposing debates that appear to cloud perceptions pertaining to the category, post-colonialism. This move, however, does not remove all the problems that have been generated since the inception of post-colonialism, albeit redescribed as postcolonialism.

In early debates most critics used the term 'post-colonial'. The usage of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back (TEWB)* is a clear example of this. Recently, theorists and critics have begun to replace it with 'postcolonial'. Mishra and Hodge in an article 'What is Post(-)colonialism' and John McLeod's *Beginning Postcolonialism* propose the replacement of the term. Distinction in spelling also has hardly been uniformly maintained. Thus, it is spelled as 'post- colonial' or 'postcolonial'. However recent critical works as Robert Young's *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, McLeod's *Beginning Postcolonialism*; Bart Gilbert-Moore's *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* tend to favour 'postcolonial' rather than 'post-colonial'.

The tendency to equate the postcolonial with post-independence generated much controversy in the eighties and early nineties. This is because of the adaptation of the word from the literal political implication into the study of culture in literary studies (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (*TEWB*); Hodge and Mishra 'What is Post(-)colonialism?'). Tiffin argues that the post-colonial is not a synonym for 'post-independence' and that the term stresses 'the inescapable historical grounding in the practices and institutions of British imperialism and colonialism and the responses to and legacies of this history across a variety of widely dispersed and vastly divergent cultures' (158).

There is no doubt that the linguistic association of the word, in addition to its historical implication, contributed to this problem. Colonialism conjures up the

binaries of dominance and resistance, political, economic and military strength over weakness, hatred and peace, economic exploitation etc. while the prefix 'post' registers the meanings 'after', 'beyond', 'later'. It thus follows the lead of other theories such as post-modernism or post-structuralism. They, like 'postcolonialism' as a construct, are fraught with critical debates over meaning and the objectives they serve. A simplistic approach to the problem would be to construct postcolonialism as coming after colonialism and imperialism (bearing their linguistic denotation in mind) but still positioned within imperial and global hegemonic influences and consequences. One of the weaknesses of postcolonialism, I believe, is that it tends to collapse colonial and decolonial time frames into one with the 'post' prefix. It also is somewhat blind to the historical differences that exist between diverging locations. There were fewer quarrels with the term 'Commonwealth Literature' as a linguistic marker than there are presently with 'postcolonialism'. In spite of the association of the 'post' and 'colonial', one cannot deny that the deployment of the term carries its own history. I shall return to this in a subsequent section of this thesis.

It is fair to remark that current debates on postcolonialism have, perhaps, transcended the fight over the nomenclature post-colonialism or postcolonialism. This was the case at the inception of the theory because like any theory before it, structuring, classifying and defining often went through a process of time. At this point, it would be too presumptuous to declare that postcolonialism is now properly defined with a consensus on agreed methodologies. The postcolonial seems to have lost the relationship between 'post' and 'colonial' it once bore which constituted the debates over its meaning. Much of the recent concerns now transcend defining boundaries but they attempt to clarify what the critical practice entails and generate a strong call to attending to the local specificities of postcolonial texts. Works like

Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* and Eva Knudsen's *The Circle and the Spiral* address this issue in some detail.

*Postcolonialism, postcolonialisms: an umbrella?*

The field of postcolonialism has become, then, interdisciplinary in scope. It seeps into other critical theories and disciplines such as post-modernism, post-structuralism, marxism, feminism, cultural studies, linguistics, psychoanalysis, history, politics and recently into environmental studies. The fusion of all these critical practices makes it difficult to identify one particular standard methodology. It is fair to say that there is no single unified theory but several postcolonial theories. Sharrad and Griffiths argue that 'regardless of where one stands on the question, there is no single postcolonial theory, and no one critic can possibly represent, or speak for, the postcolonial critical field' (179). Critics like Quayson suggest that it has not only taken on but has 'in turn influenced a wide range of disciplines' (25). McLeod argues that 'such is the variety of varieties often called "postcolonial" that it is not very easy to find an appropriate point of departure' (2). Like Quayson, he observes that 'readings of postcolonial literatures are resourced by concepts taken from many other critical practices...Such variety creates both discord and conflict within the field, to the extent that there seems no one critical procedure that we might identify as typically 'postcolonial'' (2-3). But some critics see this liberal accommodation as strength for postcolonialism. Quayson for instance argues that this move across boundaries is so that it can 'adduce adequate criteria for understanding what are complex relations secreted both during the process of colonialism and its aftermath' (25).

The inspiration that postcolonialism draws from a wide array of theories and disciplines has helped it develop its own framework. This, I suppose, is fair



considering that theory generally is relative and even European critical theories are not as absolute as critics may tend to assume them. Some form of overlapping and hybridity is often involved. This hybridity is frequently reflected in the various traditional, European and other influences that exist together as a composite mould. Postcolonialism is thus interdisciplinary in range with one of the aims it shares with some of these theories being to challenge accepted and long-standing myths of Eurocentric essentialism. Hence, there is the obvious link to postmodernism, post-structuralism and feminism.

Postcolonialism shares with feminism the concern with marginality and the stress it places on difference. The colonial experience, much as it was different across and within continents, was also different in relation to gender. Boehmer argues that women were often ‘doubly or triply marginalized...disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also of race, social class, and, in some cases, religious and caste’ (224). As a result, their writing often differed in scope and concerns from their men and even from Western feminist writers, hence the demand for a different critical response to their production. On a more general basis, apart from the colonial experience, feminist writing still shares some resemblance to postcolonial literature in terms of its composite nature and the blending often of both European and indigenous forms.

The critical enterprise of postcolonialism is steeped in post-modern concerns. Some of these main postcolonial writers are Homi Bhabha, Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Spivak. Postcolonialism shares with post-modernism an overhaul that has to do with the ‘reshaping of dominant meanings’ to put it in Boehmer’s phrase, and therefore ‘demonstrate the fragility of grand narratives; the erosion of transcendent authority; the collapse of imperialistic explanations of the world’ (244). Boehmer

argues further that postcolonial and postmodern critical approaches cross in their concerns with ‘marginality, ambiguity, disintegrating binaries, and all things parodied, pichal, dual, mimicked, borrowed, and second-hand’ (ibid.).

Postcolonialism also draws critical inspiration from poststructuralist theory with specific relation to the use of language. The history of colonialism is no doubt linked to language use. As a legacy, colonialism left behind it cultural and language hybridity where the monolithic English language can now be termed ‘englishes’ because of the multiple uses to which it has been put. Besides, postcolonial writings developed using the former master’s tool, a use which reflected imitation localising grand recits and mimicry to more contemporary usages. Boehmer argues that ‘postcolonial criticism helpfully uses the post-structuralist concept of language as indeterminate, multilayered, and historically contingent to shed light on how anti-colonial resistance might work in texts’ (173).

These various critical voices have made defining and theorising a singular specific methodology very difficult. This is why critics like Quayson Ato have argued that postcolonialism be perceived as a process and hence hasty categorisations should be avoided.

*Whose postcolonialism?: Postcolonialism and western hegemony*

Postcolonialism gives a critical response to current global, imperial and neocolonial conditions and supposedly does not endorse the new world system. A number of critics from ‘postcolonial’ regions are particularly sceptical about this term. The belief is that the concept and practice of postcolonialism were fashioned and expounded in western universities. This was then imposed on literary criticism of literatures from zones classified as ‘postcolonial’. These critics also believe that postcolonial theorising is hardly used in contemporary post-colonial nations. Some

of these critics even accuse migrant intellectuals from these nations termed as ‘post-colonial’ as collaborators in perpetrating the theory. Meenakshi Mukherjee argues that the imperatives of postcolonialism are set outside of post-colonial nations mainly by migrant intellectuals in western academies (4) while Arun Mukherjee arguing along the same line call these ‘migrants’ and ‘exiles’ ‘informants’ of postcoloniality (17). For Harish Trivedi postcolonial theory is a western discourse ‘handed down’ to the ex-colonised (in this case Indian academies). Like Arun and Meenakshi, he blames third world intellectuals based in the US, UK and White Settler nations (242-4). The resultant argument is that postcolonialism is another form of colonialism where the ‘Other’ is being spoken for only this time in response to their literary texts. During, like some other critics, argues that the theory ‘does not appeal to those closest to the continuing struggle against white domination’ (348). This argument, however, is not altogether devoid of truth. This is because, a number of postcolonial critics and theorists who have helped to lay the foundation for postcolonial criticism have also been migrants in Western universities who have participated in anti-colonial discourses and debates, the likes of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Noticeably too, some of the texts being studied in critical discourses are works of notable migrants as Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Derek Walcott and Ben Okri. In Europe and the United States, postcolonial theory was mostly employed for its ‘radical political potential’ by a minority class of non-western intellectuals, the likes of Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Anthony K. Appiah, Gayatri Spivak, Aijaz Ahmad and Dipesh Chakrabaty. The contention is that the term is identifiable with Third World intellectuals who are positioned and empowered in the first World (Brewster 22, 26); those who have

either migrated from their lands and critics who in one way or the other are involved in the postcolonial debates.

Some critics also argue that not all literatures that come from these regions actually engage the empire in the postcolonial sense in which Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define postcolonialism. Hence, one of the faults of postcolonialism is that it assumes that the audience reads every literature coming from these regions in the light of the postcolonial as though this were the only structure within which they must be considered and understood. It presumes that all texts emerging from these regions have only one aim of engaging the empire in anti-resistance. This generalisation is perhaps one of the dismantling forces that attempt to paralyse the enabling quality of the term. For instance, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin justify its development to be that:

The idea of 'post-colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing. European theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by...false notions of 'the universal'. Theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies and value system are all radically questioned by the practices of post-colonial writing. Post-colonial theory has proceeded from the need to address this different practice (11).

This is a well-meaning and early attempt to explain the development of postcolonial theory and practice which in fact exposes the myths of literary universalism yet its eurocentric prejudices are obvious when it reveals that postcolonial theory proceeded 'from the need to address this different practice' (ibid). It separates literature into two models: 'European' and 'Other'. It makes all literatures irrespective of their political, historical, cultural, economic and gender positions function under the same mode.

*The Empire Writes Back* expands the term to include all English literary productions by societies who have encountered colonialism. In spite of some of its assumptions, this work is significant because it helped to tie together all the

arguments and issues that have arisen about decolonising literary practice. The text attempts to unite all these concerns into a critical exploration of theory and practice. They suggest that literature from once colonised countries was basically concerned with the aims of ‘challenging the language of colonial power, unlearning its worldview, and producing new modes of representation’ (McLeod 25).

The authors of *TEWB* also use the term post-colonial ‘to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day’ (2). They further acknowledge that postcolonialism is particularly concerned with ‘the reading of specific post-colonial texts and the effects of their production in and on specific social and historical contexts’ (194). Such readings, it is believed, would help in identifying theoretical concerns in the development of the theory.

They indicate three general features of postcolonial writing as:

1. the silencing and marginalising of the post-colonial voice by the imperial centre;
2. the abrogation of this imperial centre within the text; and
3. the active appropriation of the language and culture of that centre (183).

In their words, ‘These features and the transitions between them are expressed in various ways in the different texts, sometimes through formal subversions and sometimes through contestations at the thematic level’ (183).

There have been several criticisms of this work. Generally, critics agree it is inadequate because it imposes one theoretical mode on different cultural terrains while anticipating a singularisation of postcoloniality. Critics have also argued that it is built along a Eurocentric theoretical paradigm which neutralises the historical specificity of texts. Concerning the *TEWB*, Bruce King says that they ‘show how theory is applicable to the new literatures, but they too construct a demonized European tradition against which the empire is rebelling’ (20).

To insist that the essence of postcolonial literature is simply writing back to the former centre, Quayson argues, is to 'foreclose the possibility of a more complicated pursuit of the question by instituting a singular (and in many respects distorted) view of what postcolonial writing aspires to, and what kind of politics it imagines itself engaged in' (77). McLeod acknowledges that the term breaks down 'under the pressure of historical accuracy' (245). He further argues that much of the confusion surrounding the term comes from 'its use simultaneously to describe, on the one hand, historical, social and economic material conditions (Marx's 'base', if you like) and, on the other, historically-situated imaginative products and practices' (245). He advised that this could be avoided when the term is used to describe only the aesthetic practice of literature. This argument still bears down on the semantic implication of the word.

One of the questions that remain unanswered is: are all literary texts coming from post-colonial regions postcolonial in scope in terms of the issues they address? The answer, I believe remains a sharp but arguable 'no'. The questionable notion, perhaps, that there was something common behind the colonial experience laid the seeds for postcolonial studies. There is no doubt that *TEWB* is a groundbreaking attempt to theorise postcolonialism. In spite of the debates, criticism and shortcomings it reveals, it remains a commendable contribution to postcolonial literary studies. I must acknowledge that it represents one of the various angles the theory posits and I also agree with Sharrad who suggests that 'regardless of where one stands on the question, there is no single postcolonial theory and no one critic can possibly represent, or speak for, the postcolonial critical field' (179).

I admit that it is not only difficult but also a mistake to work on the assumption that postcolonialism is a unified theory, which espouses a singular

perspective. Ahmad's pungent remarks are to be considered when he says the postcolonial is 'simply a polite way of saying not-white, not Europe, or perhaps not-Europe-but-inside Europe!' (282).

### *Regional Differences*

One of the issues also often debated is the concept of colonialism in relation to its history. It is often asked if the history of colonialism was the same in every place where it was encountered. For instance, was colonialism the same within the African continent? Was colonialism the same within Asia? Was colonialism the same among settler nations like Canada, USA, Australia and South Africa? Even among this latter group, colonialism and post-colonialism experiences cannot be said to be the same process.

Using Maxwell's categorisation, former European colonies are generally classified into two major categories of settler and non-settler countries. Settler nations involve European populations that settled overseas by sometimes displacing the indigenous inhabitants of these countries. Examples of this category include Australia, Canada, New Zealand and, in some respects, South Africa. These nations were 'given' political autonomy after they agitated for self-rule from the imperial centre. Part of the provision of this autonomy required that each still pledged some allegiance to Britain, which was often regarded as the 'mother country'. Australia got its political autonomy at the inception of the twentieth century in 1901 while South Africa got its own in 1909. The Statute of Westminster removed the obligation to defer ultimate authority to the 'mother country' and they thus attained full governmental control of their individual colonies in 1931 (McLeod 9).

The fact that *TEWB* expands the term to include all English literary productions by societies who have encountered colonialism makes critics like Ella

Shoshat say that it bears too many assumptions. One of these is that it 'assumes that white settler countries and emerging third world nations broke away from the 'Centre' in the same way' (324). She queries the idea that white Australians and Aboriginal Australians are grouped under the same category. It is indeed an uneasy tie. She also argues that:

White Australians and Aboriginal Australians are placed in the same 'periphery' as though they were co-habitants vis-à-vis the 'centre'. The critical differences between the Europe's genocidal oppression of Aboriginals [*sic*] in Australia, indigenous peoples of the Americas and Afro-diasporic communities and Europe's domination of European elites in the colonies are leveled with an easy stroke of the 'post' (324).

In her criticism she calls for specificity to be paid to the concept of postcolonial theory. Postcolonialism is too generalising in collapsing settler and non-settler communities together under one common umbrella.

Anne Brewster argues that it is unsatisfactory as a general term and calls for a more limited use of the term, theoretically and historically. It should be, in her words:

mobilized in the service of small rather than grand recits, and in the context of Anglo-Celtic Australian rather than Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal people do not produce narratives of postcoloniality or even decolonization; although in their demand for self-determination they certainly articulate what Ngugi (1986) calls 'decolonizing the mind'. What they write and speak are narratives of continuing dispossession and surveillance (20)

In very strict terms of a definition, the United States should be described as postcolonial but it is usually exempted from this category of postcolonial studies. This, many critics think, is because of the imperial role in which the United States is positioned in the world today in relation to power, politics and the global economy. Other arguments exist as to why settler nations like Australia, New Zealand and Canada should be placed in this category with caution or excluded altogether.

While it is certain that countries grouped under the classification of postcolonial may share a common history of colonialism, their literatures differ



significantly in more ways than may be acknowledged by theorists and critics. As a result of these differences, no one critical approach seems legitimately probable. The term is also difficult because it clusters all these literatures together simply because they share the common experience of colonialism. It neglects the different political, cultural, historical and economic contexts from which these literatures have emerged. It not only neglects these differences within them but also between them with one quick 'sweep' of the 'postcolonial'. Martina Michel warns against homogenising 'the experiences of colonisation and the present status of the various former colonies within the world economy, which influences processes of production, circulation and reception of these literatures' (83).

No single approach to postcolonial theory and practice can be said to be preferable. This is because cultures are diverse and their experiences and responses to colonialism have been as diverse as they have been different. With the advent of colonialism came a significant change in the course of history and indeed the lives of the colonised. Unfortunately, many of these effects are still very much with ex-colonised people even after liberation. Though colonialism is a common experience for these people, the effects and legacies are different. Scholars have argued that a new form of control still exists economically, psychologically and in some respects, politically in many of these regions. A level of dependence still exists in some of the once colonising nations usually tagged 'First World', while the indigenous minority in Australia, New Zealand and Canada are still marginalised and are said to 'live on the fringes'. For them, Independence, in the political sense of the word, cannot be said to have been attained or even be part of a foreseeable future. The colonial experience still very much affects their responses to literary activities. The response to colonialism for the Australian Aboriginal artist is different than it is for the

African. This is because colonialism may be said to be the whole history for the former while it is not for the latter. The Aboriginal artist cannot boast of a post-colonial state in the political sense of the word.

Postcolonialism then assumes various forms in different countries. Independence, in non-settler nations, has provided the opportunity for self-determination while in 'settler' nations such as Australia indigenous peoples remain subordinates on many fronts. 'Postcolonialism' as a term becomes another form of colonisation. Knudsen sums it up when she says, 'having survived the traumas of one or two hundred years of European domination they are instantly aware of new variants of exploitation. Thus, naturally they are not willing to be defined again beyond recognition, this time by the literary critic' (Knudsen xi- xii).

Kathryn Trees points out that postcolonialism is a concept that most Aboriginal Peoples are very uneasy with, a certain 'postcolonial beast'. She wonders if it is an implication that colonialism has ended. She however agrees that the term 'does provide a point for discussion to interrogate the layers of racism that constitute it' (264-65). She further argues that in 'Australia where Aboriginal sovereignty...is not legally recognized, postcolonialism is not merely a fiction, but a linguistic manoeuvre on the part of some white theorists who find this a comfortable zone that precludes the necessity for political action' (265). She also asserts that postcolonialism is a white concept that has come to the fore in literary theory 'as western nations attempt to define and represent themselves in non-imperialist terms' (265). Her argument bears very strong weight when we consider the fact that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin had earlier posited that the development of the term postcolonial literary theory 'emerges from the inability of European theory to deal with the complexity and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing' (11). It

must be said that the postcolonial does not in anyway privilege the colonial. 'It is concerned with colonial history only to the extent that that history has determined the configuration and power structures of the present...and to the extent that the anti-colonial liberation movements remain the source and inspiration of its politics' (Young 4).

As much as this thesis is concerned with the postcolonial, I would like to give some attention to the local concerns of indigenous literature which have funded both the inspiration for and some of the major themes of postcolonial theorising.

### **Indigenising Literature**

Literary texts cannot be separated from the contexts out of which they are produced. These contexts are often the historical, social experiences, which have shaped the worldviews and identities of the countries and regions they come from. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin advise of the 'need to incorporate cultural context into any assessment of literary worth' (183). Boehmer also advises that a more appropriate approach to postcolonial texts would be to 'draw on specialised knowledge: to find out about local politics, for example, to read up on ritual practices, or to learn to decipher unfamiliar linguistic codes' (246).

Proposed regional critical traditions often stress their independence and difference from European models. They consider their literatures as distinctive and though hardly 'authentic', they are regarded as autonomous instead of being mere extensions of British literary tradition. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin acknowledge this when they state that: 'The development of national literatures and criticism is fundamental to the whole enterprise of post-colonial studies. Without such developments at the national level, and without the comparative studies between

national traditions to which these lead, no discourse of the post-colonial could have emerged' (17).

Every critical theory has its strengths and its shortcomings. It seems fair to argue that there is no unified postcolonial theory and many proposed national literary models like Negritude and other early nationalist models have been fraught with difficulties. I acknowledge it would be absurd to claim that postcolonial theory serves better in comparison to proposed national models. Perhaps in foreign universities and critical studies on the literatures of ex-colonies, it might seem arguably so, but postcolonial literary theory in a continent like Africa is unpopular and to impose the model may generate more strife than it would help the matter. I argue that more room should be made for these proposed national models to thrive under the same critical umbrella as the postcolonial. Indeed, part of the strength of postcolonialism is its inspiration from these models and other European theories to form a hybrid. It is difficult to deny that this hybridity is in fact enabling—a point that I will return to later.

Postcolonial theory and criticism can be said to have evolved gradually and to have been influenced by factors such as Commonwealth Literature and colonial discourse. Hence, Commonwealth Literature can be positioned as an antecedent to postcolonial literature. The activities that laid the foundation for current theories of postcolonial studies started in the 1950s when countries like India and many African countries began to gain political independence from the European powers that had dominated them for so long. In the 1950s, it was used to define and describe literatures written in English that came out of selected countries sharing colonialism as a common history. Their nations had either just gained independence or were on the verge of it. It was created as a special area of study in an attempt to situate the

vigorous literary activity that was then going in these nations. The study also considered via a comparative approach, the common concerns of these literatures.

This Eurocentric criticism, under the broad umbrella of ‘Commonwealth’, ‘New Literatures in English’, ‘Third World Literatures’, was often inclined to be absorptive and concentrated on drawing similarities with British literary traditions. The writer was faced with the Empire’s attempt to regulate her discourse and this mould has been what the writers and critics have tried to break away from while projecting their own theoretical framework so that they can produce an oppositional discourse. National critical traditions are radically conscious of the differences not only between their literatures and British literature but also among the various literatures within each nation. Hence, it comes as no surprise that indigenous writers have often sharply stressed their desire to be independent.

The field of postcolonial studies gained prominence from the 1970s onwards. Some scholars date its rise to Edward Said’s critical essay on *Orientalism* in 1978. In *Orientalism*, Said criticises western constructions of the Orient. His focus was on what theorists have termed colonial discourse which generally questions the textual forms in which western knowledge has codified knowledge about cultures that were under colonial control. Scholars like Griffith disagree with the claim that postcolonial studies started with Said. Griffith argues that that the use of the term to investigate a wide range of social practices, however, stems from Said (164). However, the appearance of *TEWB* in 1989 helped to ground and lay the foundation for many of the critical theories which function under the umbrella of Postcolonialism (Mishra and Hodge 276-277).

Since then, it is believed, previously-used terms like ‘Commonwealth Literature’, ‘New Literatures in English’, ‘Third World Literature’, have been

replaced by the term 'postcolonialism'. Postcolonialism has gained astonishing status over the years, yet it has been fraught with more semantic problems than most terms could possibly endure and still retain their currency. There continue to be substantial debates over definition, precision of structure and themes in this field. Shoshat believes that the term postcolonialism is not new but a replacement for 'Third World literature'. 'The terminology shift,' she claims, 'indicates the professional prestige and theoretical aura these issues have acquired, in contrast to the more activist aura once enjoyed by 'Third World' literary theory/criticism within progressive academic circles' (321-322). Postcolonial criticism predominantly explores how a literary work *disrupts* the bases of western worldview. This disruption takes place at different levels:

1. the literary convention
2. the language
3. the philosophical convention.

I argue that it is not only difficult but also a mistake to work on the assumption that postcolonialism is a unified theory, which espouses a singular perspective. Since postcolonialism may not be regarded as a theory, in the strict sense of the word, emerging national theories, cultural literary traditions, can be deployed to great effect instead of the hostility that has been generated by critics of the nationalist movements. Postcolonial theory is designed to deconstruct the ideological heritage of colonialism globally both within the West and also in postcolonial countries.

Just like postcolonialism, the nationalist model for literary evaluation is also fraught with problems. In several cases, 'post-independence' is stressed to describe the evolution and development of local cultures and societies in a decolonised, albeit,

modern era. This focuses mainly on independence rather than colonisation or its aftermath. It suffers from one or both of these: erasing pre-independence indigenous cultures or idealising them as in the case of the African Negritude movement of the forties onwards.

Many critics argue that a strictly indigenous-derived literary theory would only widen the cultural gap created by colonialism and keep indigenous writings in the peripheral global position they have been assigned to over time. At the same time, strictly European critical literary approaches do not entirely suffice. This is because it is difficult to account for the indigeneity that breathes within and through these writings. Postcolonialism, if it is to be effective, should be redefined in the words of Brydon and Tiffin as 'self-generating from a hybrid variety of sources rather than as deriving from English models alone' (22). This is indeed what postcolonialism in its present state comprises.

Hence in contemporary criticism and against a global perspective, postcolonialism can be said to be both an advantage and a strength. But this strength can only be enhanced when it takes into account and possibly merges the various emerging national critical models into postcolonialism. Another approach would be to situate postcolonialism into the local specifics of the national literature being considered. Hence, for a study like this, in which I write as a cultural 'outsider' of both South African and Australia Aboriginal literatures and also from within a 'western' institution, I would rather position my study within postcolonial literary theory bearing these local differences in mind and sometimes celebrating them. This may serve as a justification for situating my study of the select texts under the rubric of postcolonialism rather than emphasising the proposed national models.

In attempts to define their literatures, indigenous critics and theorists have proposed and tried to develop national critical traditions that have emphasised their independence from western, especially British, theories. One common feature of these models has been on revealing what is distinctive and unique to their experiences and writings. In the pages that follow, I will explore some specific and distinctive markers of South African and Australian Aboriginal literatures.

*South African literature: thoughts and concerns*

White and especially Black writing in South Africa up to the legal end of Apartheid was mainly born of protest. It was a literature that was largely preoccupied with exploring the evils and perils of the Apartheid regime. However, White and Black writing, with the common theme of Apartheid, were different in many ways.

White writing in the Apartheid era was mostly realist fiction. The fiction portrayed the ugliness and severity of the brutal and dehumanising Apartheid regime and the revulsion of many whites towards it. Some of the best known of these writers were: Nadine Gordimer, Arthur Nortje, Athol Fugard, Breyten Breytenbach, J.M Coetze and Andre Brink to list but few.

Reflecting on the development of South African fiction, one could say that white writings could more easily be classified within the literary traditions of Europe. Thus, a novel of Gordimer's like *July's People* can be more readily called modernist or postmodernist. A slightly different approach and some care must be employed when classifying Black literature from South Africa. This is because Black literature as well as the people suffered some form of literary Apartheid. This is easily seen in Black theatre where props and staging were usually very minimal. A series of laws imposed by the government of the sixties inhibited the association and collaboration of Whites and Blacks outside working hours and conditions. Black



audiences were banned from public performances in White areas and vice versa. With this situation on ground and with the availability of virtually no support and very little finances, the Black theatre of the day thrived on makeshifts. Props and staging were usually very minimal and seem to fall in place with Grotowski's recommendation for a 'poor theatre'.

One other factor that also aided the conditions of Black literature in South Africa is the role art was made to serve. Art was employed as a political tool, a weapon of both political and cultural resistance. The introduction of the Black Consciousness movement helped accelerate the influences on Black theatre. Writers under its influence forsook European based models 'in favour of black material—American, West African or Caribbean—and their own adaptations or indeed creation of material relevant to the black experience in South Africa' (Kavanagh 53). Jane Watts argues for a critical evaluation of Black South African literature that is different in scope, perspective, values and artistic aesthetics from that of White South African literature. She warns against the tendency of lumping White and Black South African writing together and calls for the need to 'abandon [*European*] literary critical assumptions and to forge a new kind of critical framework which will take into account the radically different forces at work within the literary production of that country' (7). Over the decades, this different approach to literature has developed in spite of the impediments that have thrived at negating the growth and development of Black literature under the Apartheid regime: poor material conditions, censorship and the absence of an established literary tradition. However, one could say that some general trends serve as defining markers of a politics of Black literature.

Black South African writing started as protest literature as early as the 1920s with the writings of Sol Plaatje and continued down through to the 1950s and 1960s. Protest literature was, at first, mainly directed to the white audience. With the advent of *Drum Magazine*, an African readership began to participate. Its aim, Watts declares, was ‘to teach, to inform, to motivate the reader or spectator directly as a condition of its validity as literature’ (32). From protest, it slowly evolved to Black Consciousness. Black Consciousness was both an assertion of identity and a political ideology. Part of its mission was that of unsettling white authority through a collective will. Watts believes that from Black Consciousness, arose a new trend which was one that had a more political clout and was less defensive—‘that of documenting the collective efforts of a people towards the removal of minority rule and Apartheid’ (32). This trend seemed prevalent in the eighties up till the official end of Apartheid. Slowly, new trends are still developing in a post-apartheid South Africa for writers began to ask themselves what was next, after Apartheid. For example Njabulo Ndebele in his text *South African Literature and Culture: The Rediscovery of the Ordinary* proposes a literature that is not overly preoccupied with demonstrating the obvious existence of oppression (160), one that gives ‘formal ideological legitimacy to their aspirations’ (160), one in which history and culture play a relevant role (120, 158) and one not overly preoccupied with the ‘Other’ (66).

In postcolonial South Africa, critics and scholars are trying to negotiate a definitive South African literature, one different in form and scope from Apartheid literature. Christine Loflin acknowledges that ‘questions about the construction of a South African national literary canon and its periodization are central to a rethinking of South African literature’ (205). Black post-apartheid literature has, so far, been concerned with nation building. Here one could posit a similarity to the literatures of

many of the ex-colonies of Britain just after Independence: the concern with nationalism and identity reconstruction. This general theme has been treated variously by different South African writers. Some have been, as is usual in most postcolonial writing, concerned with the theme of history. Often this is a rewriting of history from a 'native point of view' which is not necessarily a concern with oral mythology. Some others have also looked at the legacies of Apartheid in contemporary society. Others have been concerned with themes of reconciliation while yet others have looked at Black Empowerment and its neo-colonial implications. Post-apartheid writing has turned its fight against Apartheid to a focus upon its legacies; power, suffering, survival and the debates over reconstruction and reconciliation.

The dilemma in South Africa is similar yet in some ways distinctively different in others from that of Australia. As many critics would agree the difference that exists between black writing practice and contemporary theory is enormous and cannot be ignored easily. This is an indication that western literary theories cannot adequately be applied to Black literature in South Africa bearing in mind the historical, political, social and economic experiences that have influenced the literature so far. It could be more appropriately applied to white South African literature. Moreover, one question that lingers still is: should South African literature in the post-apartheid era still be separated into white and black literature? As part of the reconciliation process, would it not be appropriate to reconcile both white and black literature under one literary theory? Proposing a literary tradition for post-apartheid South Africa, Loflin advises that:

To use race, however, as an absolute category of division, to imply that white literature in South Africa is a separate field of study entirely from black, perpetuates apartheid. It also prevents us from seeing the ways in which writers, divided by race, were participating and interacting with each other within the nation-space of South Africa (219).

Loflin also believes that South African literature may at some point in time come to resemble Ngugi's vision of a multilingual society, one in which 'all national works are translated into all languages (219).' This is where postcolonial theory comes in to bear some relevance; accommodating differences and multiplicity in which allowance is made for the otherwise minority voice to be heard. Current literature in South Africa (Black and White) may then be characterised, loosely, as postcolonial.

The situation is however different in Australia. Some critics like Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that both white and black literatures in Australia are postcolonial, while others like Shoshat, for instance, argue that they cannot both fall under the same label of postcolonial. In Australia, Indigenous people are on the fringes of power and politics which is still very much in the hands of white Australia; while policies and the law are arguably western-inclined and defined so that a post-colonial status in the political sense of the word cannot be said to have happened literarily. Even though, by Maxwell's classification, South Africa and Australia are both settler colonies, it becomes obvious that within such continental groupings, there exist vast dissimilarities. In South Africa, the official ending of the racist regime of Apartheid and its policies has restored power to the indigenous people. Black majority rule now exists. The conditions are obviously different and one then wonders: can Australian black and white literature both be postcolonial?

Looked at from another angle, one can say that historically they are both postcolonial. Australia was a colony of Britain and existed so with total allegiance and dependence on Britain until 1901 when it gained its independence and began self-rule. Viewed this way, the country is postcolonial. But critics argue that is not enough for the country's literature to qualify as postcolonial in the same sense in

which Aboriginal literature is said to be post-colonial in terms of engaging the empire. I acknowledge that this illustrates how much allowance the concept of postcolonialism can accommodate and how much this accommodation can also cause some unease when boundaries are not properly defined.

*Aboriginal literature: thoughts and concerns*

Literature written by both black and white Australians is generally classified as Australian literature. However certain distinctions come in when references are made to the texts. This is not just because of obvious racial differences but differences also in cultural experiences and worldviews. Theorists of postcolonialism have also classified both literatures as postcolonial. But other critics have been quick to reject this claim as not only too generalising but also ‘uncomfortable’. Besides, indigenous critics and writers prefer to consider and define literature from their own point of view—that we may regard as an emerging national model.

My brief concern here is with what constitutes an Aboriginal literature, or, broadly put, an Indigenous literature. Writers and critics like Jack Davis and Oodgerroo Noonucaal have tried to define a literature of indigineity. They seem to unanimously agree that it is not one strictly tied to European critical traditions and conventions bound by the rules of aesthetics and structure. Allowances are given for hybridity because they acknowledge the fact that modern Aboriginal writing was born as a result of the contact between white and black at colonisation. Mudrooroo Narogin, for instance, claims that ‘the Aboriginal writer is a Janus-type figure with one face turned to the past and the other to the future while existing in a post-modern, multicultural Australia in which he or she must fight for cultural space’ (24). He further observes that that there is no such thing as a static and unchanging society, and that ‘all societies and cultures change and adapt, and this is fact not

theory' (21). This is to be acknowledged in the levels of hybridity which exist not only in postcolonial Indigenous Australia but indeed in all postcolonial societies. The argument is that Indigenous writers do not betray their indigeneity by adopting white forms; but they are however not bound by them.

Some of the debates over what constitutes an Aboriginal literature are similar to those that many postcolonial nations have faced or still face. The question remains: what makes a work African and in this case, specifically, Aboriginal? Jack Davies sums it up when he says that 'a book or article is judged, not by the name of its Aboriginal author, but by its special attributes and by its Aboriginal qualities. What makes it Aboriginal? That is one question Aborigines will need to ask themselves—perhaps not now, but certainly in the near future' (9).

His response typically reflects that Indigenous literature in Australia possesses certain 'vibes' or indigenous qualities and aesthetics which distinguish it from other groups of writing including European literature. Mudrooroo rightly observed that Aborigines cannot lay claim to a unique position in the world because they are only one of the groups that was caught up in European colonisation. 'The Aboriginal response,' he acknowledges, 'to this threatened drowning has been and is similar to that of many other peoples' (21).

Aboriginal Literature, like many other postcolonial literatures, is steeped in a preoccupation with history. Davis and Hodge, in an attempt to theorise Aboriginal literature as an independent methodology, propose that:

For all the Aboriginal writers, history is more important, more inseparable from literature, than would be the case for white writers as a whole. After all, for white writers, history is in safe hands, white hands, and...Aboriginal people have been excluded from the pages of white history, and denied access to the records of their own people. Aboriginal writers can not rely on anyone else to do the work for them (5).

Mudrooroo gives two more reasons why Indigenous writers engage history. He says first: 'The past is there only to explain the present and is of utmost importance in that it is the basis of all Indigenality. This may lead, on occasion, to an idyllic picture of a past Indigenous civilization before the ghost returned to haunt paradise' (40). Secondly, there is the need to 'write about the recent past to expose the hidden underside of Australian history in which indigenous people were butchered, bugged and beaten wherever they made a stand or attempted to retreat. This past is still with us' (40).

Mudrooroo attempts to develop a model in which he classifies Aboriginal Literature into six divisions. This is based on utilising historical events to mark periods rather than drawing on the characteristic features of the literatures.

1. The Time of the Dreaming: from the beginning to 1788;
2. Prehistory; before the coming of the Europeans.
3. The Time of the Invasion(s): a convenient cut-off date for this period might be 1901 and the coming into being of the Federation of the Australian colonies.
4. Punitive Expeditions and the Protection: the utter conquering and control of Indigenous peoples with the framing of restrictive legislation.
5. The colonial Period: Paternalism, then Assimilation: a convenient cut-off date is 1967 when a referendum was conducted which made Indigenous people Australian citizens.
6. The Period of Self-determination and Self-management: the official policy from 1967 to 1988.
7. The Period of Reconciliation and sharing cultures (4-5).

Robert Ariss' views corroborate those of Mudrooroo on Aboriginal preoccupation with history. He believes that a concern with history is meant 'to deconstruct European representations and to represent Australian history as Aboriginal history, history from the perspective of the oppressed, the indigene, rather than the colonialist' (134). The focus on Black Australian history will also help establish pride in the indigenous heroes and heroines of past generations. Thus, these

create a kind of empowering when a people take charge of their history so that forging a future could be responsibly pursued.<sup>1</sup>

One reason, I think, why the notion of African or Aboriginal literature has not been clearly defined may be that these countries are made of varying cultures so we could say that there is no single 'Aboriginal culture' in Australia. McGrath claims that 'prior to the arrival of Europeans, there was no unified indigenous consciousness or need for the use of a general term' (361). There were more than 500 languages spoken throughout the continent of Australia before the contact. The same is very much true for all African countries where many countries consists of several ethnic groups which speak different languages (in Nigeria, for example, there are over two hundred spoken languages). Post-colonial societies are more complexly multicultural than the European nations that colonised them.

In spite of the fact that indigenous critics have debunked and resisted the application of western theories to their literatures, there has not been noticeable success in reproducing a representational discourse to replace these paradigms. In the paragraphs that follow, I shall argue that in spite of the debates against postcolonialism it still remains an enabling practice and justify why I have had to employ it as a reading strategy in the production of this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Just like their Aboriginal men, Aboriginal women also share very similar views about the importance of history to Aboriginal writing. Like the men, writing is a tool for consciousness raising. Ruby Langford Ginibi, for instance, believes that women writing about aspects of the past is done so they 'don't get left out of the next lot of history' (Ginibi 108). This history is often presented as the truth and is meant 'to educate people (mostly non-Aboriginal people) about how we really are' (Ginibi, *Interview*).

Like Ginibi, Jackie Huggins also realizes the importance of recording oral history and testimony. She believes that Aboriginal writing places enormous importance on history and the Law. History is thus necessarily a central focus to the politics of Aboriginal identity. This focus on history is intended to 'shape the future in the light of an honest appraisal of the past. In acknowledging the past and our inability to change its course, it is both legitimate and useful to consider how and what extent we can redress the wrongs of that history and its legacies in the present' (Huggins, *Interview*).



### **Thinking postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism has generally come to be regarded as a methodology for examining, often through the medium of literature, what occurs when a people's culture clashes with the colonising culture within the period of colonisation and the effects of that history. Postcolonial literature and theory seeks to investigate what happens when two worlds clash and one dominates and imposes its ideology and culture on the other and indeed considers it superior. This implies that it unconsciously examines changed culture through its literature.

Postcolonialism excludes literature that represents British or European points of view and focuses on writings from formerly colonised and colonising regions. Hence, it is aimed at challenging implicit assumptions of western knowledge, history and values. Postcolonialism can therefore be seen as 'struggling to transcend the effects of colonialism through an engaged and situated practice?' (Quayson 25).

In spite of the wide-ranging debates that exist with regard to postcolonialism, it is quite clear that the concept still fails to address the issues of politics, economic, social and cultural specifics that need more careful interrogation. Stephen Slemon sums it up succinctly when he says that 'problems of definition, object, motive, ground, and constituency are however, exacerbated within the field of post-colonial critical theory' (178).

McLeod summarises the basic tenets of postcolonial theory and practice. He claims that it generally involves one or more of the following:

1. reading texts produced by writers from countries with a history of colonialism, primarily those texts concerned with the workings and legacy of colonialism in either the past or the present.
2. reading texts produced by those that have migrated from countries with a history of colonialism, or those descended from migrant families, which deal in the main with Diasporic experience and its many consequences.

3. in the light of theories of colonial discourses, re-reading texts produced during colonialism; both those that directly address the experiences of Empire, and those that seem not (33).

General themes that often reflect in postcolonial studies can thus be summarised to be: language, resistance, representation, nationalism, gender, migrancy and diaspora.

Critics such as Mishra and Hodge, Shoshat, Brewster and Slemon have argued that the notion of Postcolonialism has very limited appeal and use globally especially in ex-colonies and the countries whose works are usually termed 'postcolonial'. For Shoshat, its use in these circles is often restricted to the 'historical sense of naming the period immediately after the end of colonial rule' (Shoshat 106), while Hodge and Mishra argue that the term in the Aboriginal context 'has limited currency, and in smaller récits (narratives) may never be used' (412). Brewster sees it fit

in the context of Anglo-Celtic Australian rather than Aboriginal culture...where post-coloniality is a condition but not a political strategy in the way that anti-colonial and decolonising movements are...The discourse of post-colonialism, on the other hand may well imply a continuing relationship and complicity with various forms of colonisation (Brewster 19).

It is risky and difficult to completely refute and reject western critical theories as they affect the studies done in postcolonialism. One cannot completely with a wave of the hand dismiss postcolonialism as a purely western concept simply because it emerged predominantly from western academies from around the world. Even though (and rightly so) postcolonial theory is saturated with ideas from the West and certain critics have viewed it as a western recolonisation of the literary production of the 'Other', postcolonial discourse should be viewed as neither Western nor non-western. It is evidently, I argue, a hybrid product of the interaction of the West with the three continents in terms of the historical, the political and the cultural. It has developed from both western critical theories and the several anti-colonial and nationalism discourses from within these continents: a resistance that has been

projected from both within and outside them. This issue is addressed in some detail in McLeod's *Beginning Postcolonialism* and in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back*.

Postcolonialism as a reading strategy offers valuable insight as a critical discourse. It offers a critical analysis of the damaging influence and consequences of colonialism on indigenous cultures, worldview and mentalities and it creates an appreciation of the creative literatures written from once-colonised regions as distinct though hybrid. In this sense, it has offered them a 'space' in a globalised world-setting rather than positioning them in the shadows of European critical discourses. Critics like Young, Ahmad, and Anne McClintock argue that the material effects of colonialism densely exist in the present where rich nations have established economic structures which control much of the resources of these nations which are often termed 'post-colonial'.

As I have highlighted earlier in this chapter, no one approach to postcolonial theory and practice can be said to be preferable. This is because cultures are diverse and their experiences and responses to colonialism have been as diverse as they have been different. With the advent of colonialism came a significant change in the course of history and indeed in the lives of the colonised. Unfortunately, many of these effects are still very much with the ex-colonised people even after liberation. Even though colonialism is a common experience for these people, the effects are different as were the methods of the colonial practice. Scholars have argued that a new form of control still exists economically, psychologically and even in some respects, politically, in the regions. Levels of dependence still exist upon some of the once colonising nations usually tagged 'First World', while the indigenous minority in Australia, New Zealand and Canada are still marginalised and are said to 'live on

the fringes'. For them, Independence, in the political sense of the word, cannot be said to have been attained in the same sense as in South Africa. The colonial experience still very much affects their responses to literary activities (Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* and Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*). Postcolonialism should be tailored in an understanding of the immense changes that have occurred within the worlds of postcolonial states both during and after independence. In other words postcolonial theory should be focused on a historical analysis of these changes. It is not appropriate to work with an assumption of generalities when postcolonialism is seen as homogeneity politically classified as 'Third World'. While it is certain that countries grouped under the classification of postcolonial may share a common history of colonialism, their literatures differ significantly in more ways than may be comprehended and even acknowledged by theorists and critics alike. As a result of these differences, no one critical approach seems legitimately probable.

Postcolonialism also tends to deflect attention from the historical and cultural specificity that exists in different nations. It has further, the potential of directing attention away from the neo-colonial conditions that exist still in many of these termed 'postcolonial' regions (Young). Hugh Webb claims that 'the lack of cultural specificity in the notion...is a strikingly political feature...that seems to include all while particularly recognizing none' (33). 'The individual text,' he claims 'becomes separated from the indigenous-defined realities of its origins and cultural meanings' (33). This is what is popularly known as 'Europe and its Others'. Peter Hallward justifies the reason for the growing interest in this field as attributive to a 'dissatisfaction with and inability of western theoretical means of dealing with non-european body of literature' (20). But his arguments and reason only justify what

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin give and critics agree that this justification only amounts to globally defining literature into the binary of Europe and Others.

However, postcolonial criticism seems to be ‘united by a common political and moral consensus towards the history and legacy of western colonialism’ (Young 5).

Critics seem to be in agreement in calling for specificity in the field of postcolonialism. King, for instance, sees a future that ‘seems to require that the insights of recent theory be applied in the study of specific local tradition and to comparisons that can be discerned in and between them’ (176). Ato Quayson argues that postcolonialism be perceived as a process; and that as a historical and political condition it does not exist. Postcolonialism carries an import when it is best regarded as a process of ‘coming-into-being’ and of a struggle against colonialism and its after effects. In this respect the prefix would be fused with the sense invoked by ‘anti’. In this sense, postcolonialism could be regarded, in the words of Childs and Williams, as an ‘anticipatory discourse’.

There is no easy approach to the study of postcolonialism. Critics and scholars have from the beginning been at loggerheads over the implications and meaning of the postcolonial. Attempting to define suggestive structures and limitations to this critical practice, I must admit, would require another thesis. Hence, it is beyond the scope of my undertaking. Writing in the early years of the twenty first century, I recognise that many of these debates have subsided and the ‘postcolonial’, though still not distinctly defined, is already an established critical practice. I have been careful not to ‘take sides’ in the myriad of arguments for and against but have used one argument to either counter or corroborate the other as I laid down some of the arguments that make the term difficult to properly define. Nevertheless, I have also taken my cultural background into cognisance (given my

position as one emerging from a 'post-colonial' country and studying in a 'Western' postcolonial country) the critical practice as enabling and somewhat justified when put in a global perspective. However, I do believe that like many other critical theories, postcolonialism has its strengths, weaknesses and the capability to evolve. The words of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their revised edition appeal in making a conclusive summary of the concept:

Debates over its use have been fast and furious. But for all the vituperation and heat of the last decade, few would deny that the concept of the post-colonial has been one of the most powerful means of re-examining the historical past and re-configuring our contemporary world-wide cultural (253).

Indeed, the success of postcolonialism lies in the fact that it has helped to undermine the traditional concept of disciplinary boundaries and most importantly, in the fact that it has placed the non-west at the centre of its dominant discourse.

In turning to a study now of specific texts, I will have most in mind the analytical possibilities provided by the 'postcolonial' and, particularly, the notion of postcolonial studies as providing an 'anticipatory discourse' for these texts.

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## Chapter 2

# ‘Banished’ Reality: Mythic responses in Modern Reality A study of *The Kadaitcha Sung* and *Woza Albert!*

*Biamee was locked away in the astral plane and most of the Kadaitcha clan had been banished to the Dreaming Place (Watson 40).*

*Their own language was beginning to fade away and they knew nothing of their own Dreaming (Watson 261).*

An attempt to define myth is an almost impossible task because the use of the word is varied. Even among literary scholars, this difficulty exists and must be acknowledged. R.K. Priebe argues that ‘any survey of the myth scholarship done by linguists, anthropologists, folklorists, and literary critics reveals that a consensus of what the term ‘myth’ means has never been achieved within any of these fields, let alone among them’(12).

For the purpose of this chapter, my concern is not with definition but to explore a few of the uses the term has been put to. I use the term ‘myth’ in the general sense of ‘untruth’ referring to narratives and philosophies which cannot be subjected to scientific and rational analysis. In this general categorisation, therefore, cultural narratives like the Biamee, Kobbina and Koobara myth and the premise of Christ’s second coming to South Africa can be categorised as myths. It is chiefly upon these myths that the plots of these texts develop and project the intentions of the authors to the wider community.

Francis Ferguson acknowledges that ‘myth’ is ‘one of those words which have become almost impossible to use without apologetic quotation marks. Ill-defined for centuries, it is now used in many senses and for many purposes to mean

nonsense in some contexts, the deepest wisdom of man in others' (147). Its main concern with literature, he claims, is that it is usually brought alive in literary expressions. He also advised that the many arguments over the use of the term 'myth' can not be got rid of but 'we can beware of them' (2). Hence care must be taken, at this stage of the thesis, in the treatment of a subject that reflects religious and cultural beliefs. To a believer in Christianity, the person and the message of Christ is held as sacred and divine truth almost in the same way that Australian Aborigines hold the narratives of the Dreaming as true. What is classified as myth (or legend) by the Europeans is to the Aboriginal people held as 'literal reality' (Wallace 76). The sagas of the Dreaming are believed to have really happened. 'Myth' in this sense binds them to the earth in a religious sort of way.

In the pages that follow, I intend to demonstrate what the myths are and how and why they are used by indigenous writers. I also intend to argue that their reconstructive purposes are meant to instil hope and a sense of restoration to indigenous people by enabling them take responsibility for their past, present and future histories.

### ***The Kadaitcha Sung***

In *The Kadaitcha Sung*, Sam Watson stresses Aboriginal individuality while at the same time he subtly proposes a way forward for the Aboriginal condition in Australia. He stresses, I believe, through an alternate reality, that the Aborigines were not a race of weak people colonised because Europe was stronger and superior. Rather the colonial experience was a result of a split in the Aboriginal cosmos.

Watson achieves what postcolonial writers set out to do—undermine certain Western ideologies and counter them with values and knowledge developed elsewhere, usually from within their own worldview. Mudrooroo Narogin describes

the text as ‘the best example of how ‘Maban’ reality can be used to create an original work’ (1997, 97).

A text like *The Kadaitcha Sung* ‘subverts’ the imperial perspective, ‘creating from the tensions of their colonial legacy new fictions that generate new ways of perceiving’ (Brydon and Tiffin 29). This is because it opens up a different perspective of the colonial experience. In *The Kadaitcha Sung*, colonialism is presented as a cosmic split in Aboriginal history. In this sense, the writer helps to restore dignity and responsibility to the people he represents because the colonial encounter is captured not as a result of Eurocentric racial supremacy where the indigenous peoples were simply drowned in the colonial flood but that both the colonisers and the colonised equally share the responsibility. This perspective is both healing and enabling for it empowers the Aborigines to get past that split as healing is proffered and restoration is ultimately spiritual.

The story is essentially about Tommy’s quest to defeat Booka, his uncle and Kadaitcha sorcerer; a conquest which should restore Biamee to his rightful position as the cornerstone of Aboriginal spirituality.

#### *Presenting the myth*

The myth in *The Kadaitcha Sung* accounts, in part, for the creation of the world with particular reference to Australia. It also focuses on the events that fractured this cosmic order which results in the colonial invasion. The preface to the novel presents the mythic background upon which the plot is structured:

When time was still young the gods created substance from the firmament. They made the land and the waters, and then they made life...The men and women must worship the gods, and they must ensure that the natural order of all things was kept. One god, a greater being, made his camp on the rich veldts and in the lush valleys of the South Land. He was called Biamee and he loved all life...For many eons the land and the people basked in Biamee’s beneficence, and all was well. But there

came the time when Biamee longed for his camp among the stars and he made plans to return there. But the tribes became fearful. The world was still a savage place.

So the great one made a veil of mists that hung upon the South Land and hid it from all. Then Biamee called an ancient clan of sorcerers from the heavens to stand in his place. They were known as the Kadaitcha and they were powerful (1).

It is from this 'ancient clan of sorcerers' that the cosmic rupture occurs which the rest of the novel seeks to rectify. The cosmic rupture accounts for the colonial invasion. Kobbina is the Kadaitcha that Biamee chooses to represent him while he returns to his camp. He marries Meeyola, a 'handmaiden at the court of the moon spirit' and she bears him twins, Koobara and Booka. Kobbina must go to Biamee and so a 'Turrwan or high man' must be appointed in the custom of the eldest son. But an unfair judgement from both Meeyola and Kobbina in choosing Koobara instead of Booka, who is indeed elder, leads to fatal consequences for 'the law was such that only the oldest son could follow, but Meeyola loved them both and would not reveal which of the babies was first born' (2). Kobbina's judgement is swayed towards Koobara who was 'tall and fair, and even though he was only a novice, his wisdom was great and his patience legend' as opposed to the elder Booka who was 'squat and ugly, possessed of a violence that was fearful to behold' (2).

Booka's wrath explodes and is fully realised when he and his followers kill his father, mother and many other sub-priests. Biamee tries to stop the bloodletting but stops his descent by removing the Kundri stone which is the heart of the Rainbow Serpent, Biamee. The result is that 'the mortal plane was now isolated and godless' (3). Such is the force of Booka's fury, spite for Biamee and lust for power that he causes the mist of protection:

to lift from the land and other mortals saw its wealth and abundance; they came in their hordes and they slaughtered the helpless tribes with a monstrous lust. These new tribes came from all corners of the outside world and from all the families of man, but they did not know Biamee and they did not know of his laws. The fair-skinned ones laid waste to the garden and the chosen people. (3)

This new tribe refers to the European invasion and eventual settlement. Booka is swift to join alliance with ‘the new settlers so he would secure position within their order.’ (3) Koobara, through an ancient spell, ‘sings’ Booka to confinement ‘to a thin strip of coastal land that houses a new village called Brisbane and there he stayed while Koobara regathered the tribes and strengthened their defences against the invaders’ (3). Booka had shape shifted and taken on the ‘body of a white prospector’ (41). He is now the head of the dreaded Native Mounted police.

In spite of Koobara’s attempts to reconstitute the people and help them to ‘adapt to life under the new masters’ (34), he secures most of the sacred sites but is murdered before he succeeds in wresting the Kundri stone, the heart of Biamee, from Booka. This restoration to ultimate spiritual dignity which is embodied as the heart of the Rainbow Serpent is what the novel explores through the character of Tommy Gubba and his quest. ‘But Koobara’s son had been born of a white woman, and Biamee promised his people that the Kadaitcha child would deliver them’ (4).

The character of the Kadaitcha Tommy reflects the vision of postcolonial hybridity and pan-Aboriginality the author intends for the text. He is ‘the last Turwann...that perfection that Biamee intended for the entire clan’ (251). He is the promised redeemer who is ‘born of a white woman’ called to deliver and save his people from their fatal plight. He is a young ‘mixed blood’ Aboriginal raised on the Fingal Mission and later adopted by Fleur who in fact is his real mother. He is guided and trained by Ningi, the bird-spirit who had been his mentor from Tommy’s birth.

The son was called by a *miglo* name and raised in the south; Booka’s spies were everywhere, and so much rested on the fragile babe. Tommy was to be reared

in the mysteries and traditions of the Kadaitcha clan and in his twentieth year Biamee would call him and send into the world of people a number of lesser spirits to help the novice and to guide him (4).

Tommy has a double life: his physical day to day dealings and the secret spirit-life into which his destiny had been locked. Thus he is the only one vested with the adequacy to confront and defeat the renegade Booka and restore Biamee to his rightful place. Tommy's double life also has another postcolonial intention—his racial and cultural hybridity which becomes his most potent tool in the ultimate restoration. I shall return to Tommy's hybridity as a postcolonial intention later in this thesis.

This secret life of Tommy remains a closely guarded secret until the final moments when the bitter confrontation between the forces of good and evil takes place. This is a clever ploy to protect the Kadaitcha from exposure and destruction and the final triumph of the renegade Booka. Booka, who is in possession of the eight *moogi*, stones is desperate and needs the last stone to help break the spell that was cast on him by Koobara and which confined him to Brisbane. Booka's aim is to have absolute dominion over Uluru.

In his twentieth year, Tommy is initiated (5, 31, 36, 37, 39, and 213). The initiation is for Tommy Gubba a time of enlightenment, transformation and mandating. As he is transported from the world of the living into the world of the Dreaming and is brought face to face with Biamee, his physical body 'felt neither pain nor fear—he had been called across and he had gone' (31). There, Biamee instructs him and the whole picture of his assignment is laid bare before him. He is 'taken back, back to the vast and measureless void that existed before time began' (31). The whole story of the creation of the world, Biamee's activities and

involvement with Tommy's ancestors, the mutiny, fall and its consequences, of the Kadaitcha and the Indigenous people is brought to Tommy's understanding as the actual scenes replay before him. The significance of this is to heighten Tommy's understanding of the predicament and the nature and meaning of his assignment—to deliver his people and restore Biamee to his original place in the cosmos: 'the deity had to show the novice who he was and what he was because the future of all the tribes and the future of the land lay with him' (35).

After this enlightenment, 'he braced himself to receive the final initiation gift' (35). He is given an initiation cut while 'a blood-red pebble' is pushed 'into the centre of his wound' (36). This is the 'moogi eye, or death stone, the basic tool of the Kadaitcha, and the focus for enormous energy drawn from the universe and the ages' (36). This initiation marks a transformation in Tommy and with the metamorphosis comes the knowledge that 'he had been stripped of human weakness' (36). His status is thus elevated from that of a 'mere mortal' to a 'tool for the almighty' who is also one with the gods. He is thus allowed to look into the eyes of the other dreaming figures 'as an equal'. Tommy then becomes part spirit and part human. For Tommy, 'once he had received the Kadaitcha cut upon his body he was given licence to make war' (213). His assignment is spelt for him: Your main task is Booka' (ibid). He is further told that he must restore the heart of the Rainbow Serpent and to do this, he must defeat the fierce Bunyat, 'the gatekeeper of the path' (38) of the cave, hidden under Booka's fortress where the heart of the Rainbow serpent is.

The significance of Tommy's initiation lies in the fact that it is only after this that he is credited with supernatural power and his assignment is clearly spelt before him. This is because in many Aboriginal cultures:

a boy cannot become a man until he has undergone initiation. Until he is initiated, it follows that he lives only a part life as a child. Ritual initiation thus allows him to be

'reborn' into a more complete life as an adult...initiation, therefore, represents an important point of transition to a more metaphysical world-view for the Aborigines (Cowan 54, 60).

Before then, he was regarded as immature and was completely under the tutelage of the bird-spirit Ningi.

An important claim that Watson stresses by the reworking and deployment of myth is that Aborigines had a civilisation before the advent of white colonisation and their civilisation was a deeply religious one in that every aspect of life was governed by the 'Law'. The 'Law' is that which is believed to have been laid down by Biamee at the creation or 'Dreaming'. The Dreaming 'is, first and foremost a metaphysical condition denoting the working of divine principles dressed up in the garb of totemic heroes. The myth is their expressive vehicle' (Cowan 21). The Aborigines thus express their relationship and identity to the Dreaming by their totem. This totem, Cowan claims 'is both his alter ego and a metaphysical landmark which orients him while he lives' (36). Aborigines without a totem are believed to be consigned to an inferior existence for they have no connection to the Dreaming. 'It is this need to be linked to the Dreaming by way of a totem that makes life acceptable, indeed bearable, both in the social as well as the spiritual sense...to deny its existence would lead to a loss of personal identity which would make life intolerable' (Cowan 36-37).

Every person in an Aboriginal clan is born into a 'totem' which usually bears the name of a natural object—plant, animal, natural phenomenon etc. A person's Dreaming in this sense, becomes all that they 'own'. 'This concept has connected Aboriginal people inextricably to the land and all of creation and into a set of obligations and cultural practices that ensured the conservation of the natural



world...Thus it is that Aboriginal societies across Australia have a culture that accords metaphysical primacy to place rather than time' (Grievies 1).

Tommy's role is emphasised by the presence and contributory role other characters play towards fulfilling his destiny. Through a series of events and gradual revelations, Tommy comes to learn the real nature, meaning and implication of his mission of which these persons play vital roles. Pinni is Tommy's 'tribal sister' who is under the care of Jesuit fathers who run the Native Compound at Cribb Island. 'Ningi had sent her to Brisbane to be at Tommy's command' (81). She assists Jarro in clearing the abandoned pipeline that eventually traps Booka and sends him to Biamee's judgment (293-4). Jarro is a guard who seems to be everywhere that Tommy finds himself. 'Jarro was a sub-priest of a fierce southern tribe and Ningi had ordered him into Brisbane as well' (95, 293-4). He watches over Tommy with a keen eye and often participates in Tommy's violent escapades (141). He is prepared to give his life at any time to protect and preserve the *kadaitcha* Tommy.

Boonger is an Aboriginal ex-convict who participates in nearly all of Tommy's physical clashes. Even though his direct spiritual connection to Biamee is not emphasised and Tommy is not revealed to him as Kadaitcha as he is known to Pinni and Jarro, Boonger helps Tommy in his 'war against the miglo' and even accompanies him when he goes to pass execution against Sambo. He is practically an accomplice who plays out his role in helping without consciously knowing that he was destined for it (103, 284-6).

Ningi is the bird spirit who is responsible for rearing Tommy and acting as the mediator between Tommy and the Dreaming world before Tommy's initiation (25, 153). Ningi very well remains Tommy's consultant, adviser and confidant all through his short life. His role in Tommy's life cannot be underestimated. He also

acts as a moderator in curbing Tommy's excesses and most information and revelation of his task as it unfolds comes through Ningi (162, 250-251, 291-293). Ningi also helps in the ploy to trap Booka when he transforms into old Banjai, the witch doctor who is also Jelda's father, confronts Booka and relays a damnable message to him (302-4). Ningi also acts as a transcendent between the past and the present. He represents the average Aborigines that Watson proposes in a postcolonial Australia—as one must draw inspiration from the past and adapt to today's world without losing or denying his spiritual essence. Jonjurrie is the spirit whose clan had wronged Biamee and is thus cursed with large genitalia and a continual itching which could only be eased by sex. He is spiritually to Tommy what Jaroo is physically to Tommy—a guard and helper. Purnung is the great dingo spirit who plays the role of conveyor and watchdog to Tommy. Mary is the most significant of all these human characters. Part of Biamee's plan to heal the land lies in his relationship with Mary who is a student pursuing a social works degree in the university and a volunteer worker in Aboriginal Charity League until she was sexually abused by a group of Aboriginal men. Her deceased parents had been originally from South Africa. As amateur anthropologists, they had desecrated a sacred crypt from an African clan and stolen a sacred stone (214).

Mary had been placed at his [Tommy's] disposal so that he could meet her mother. From her mother he had learned of the existence of the spell, and now the unknown white had left the very stone for him here in Stephen's house! The beauty of the design was overpowering. Biamee had manipulated destiny with the skill of a true master. But then, Tommy realised, the Old one was master of all the words (215).

### *Reconstructing the myth*

Watson reconstructs the Biamee myth to echo a call for unity among the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. He proposes a Pan-Aboriginalism that unites at the forefront in dealing with the past injustice and forging a fortified future for generations to come.

The distinction between secret and public is a major distinguishing mark of Aboriginal Law. And to tell public stories is often the right of the individuals who own the Dreaming. Watson in this strict sense possesses neither the right nor the rites which entitle him to claim the Dreaming of Uluru and he is well aware of that as a Brisbane Aborigine. What he does is simply take the symbol of Uluru which in contemporary times can be said to be accessible to 'all' by virtue of it also being a popular tourist attraction. He develops the Koobara and Kobbina narrative into the Biamee and Uluru myth and modifies it with fiction into a neo-myth. This is the encapsulation Mudrooroo calls 'Maban Reality', fiction infused with traditional mythic plots and narratives, which draws its inspiration from the 'speaking' land.

Watson's reconstructed myth is a marriage of different Aboriginal groups to form a singular identity. In presenting the myth, Biamee and the All-Father is one person. His relationship is not simply tied to Australia alone but is related by virtue of creation to other gods of the earth:

When time was still young the gods created substance from the firmament. They made the land and the waters, and then they made life...Men and women were created to have dominion over all...One god, a greater being, made his camp on the rich veldts and in the lush valleys of the South Land. He was called Biamee and he loved all life. (1)

Central to Aboriginal Dreaming is the belief in the Rainbow Serpent. Almost every Aboriginal group throughout Australia has some sacred link with this being. Legends about the rainbow serpent differ slightly in narrative but he is credited with having created the earth and the Aboriginal people.<sup>1</sup> It is no wonder that even in the neo-myth that Watson creates; the serpent still remains as a central figure in the texts. The Rainbow Serpent (or Rainbow Snake as some Aborigines refer to him: I

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<sup>1</sup> At Uluru, *Kuniya* (woma python) is the most important mythical creature of the 'Tjukurpa - The Creation Period' for the Anangu Aboriginal people. **She** lived in the rocks at Uluru where **she** fought Liri, the poisonous male snake. The battle is forever etched on the walls of Uluru.

shall stick to Watson's term 'serpent') is the most 'universal' spirit being among Aborigines. From the North through South and West to the East, this mythical being is identified by different names by different groups which all point to the same being: 'Jurapiri...a supreme spiritual entity...Baiaamee in Eastern Australia, Mangela around Pilbara, and Pundjel in Victoria' (Cowan 19). According to James Cowan, the Serpent is generally believed to be 'second only to the all-Father Ungud' (19). It is believed that the Rainbow Serpent continues to live on in a secret sacred location watching over the Aboriginal people and is very much revered by the Aboriginal peoples of today (Ellis 9-12).

Uluru located in central Australia, appeals as a central symbol of Aboriginal spirituality—hence Watson's reconstruction as a pan-Aboriginal metaphor. Knudsen claims that Watson's reconstruction of Uluru is no mere co-incidence, because Uluru represents the emblem of Australia to the international world and it represents 'national, pan-Aboriginal and local identifications' (282) in contemporary Australia.

In the reconstructed myth, Uluru is presented as 'open' to all of Aboriginal Australia. It is not an exclusive right of the Anangu Anangu people of Central Australia who can be said 'own' the traditional myths and narratives of Uluru. Uluru in fact 'owns' all of the Aborigines and is in this sense 'open' as a uniting force to bring them together and restore their spiritual essence, healing and dignity through and in the 'speaking' land. With this aim in mind, no particular mention is made to any of the Aboriginal groupings or their languages spoken in Australia. Hence, Tommy marvels when he learns that it was from Uluru that Biamee 'had changed from his manifestation as the Rainbow Serpent and had been transformed into his true form as a deity in a blaze of light' (28). The author invites all to participate in this neo-myth of pan-Aboriginality.

The Dreaming ‘deals with space and also with Time, and takes in both the past and the present’ (Gibbs 3). Time is divided into two layers: secular, current time and Dreamtime (past and usually at the beginning of creation). The Aboriginal concept of time contrasts normal understanding of linear time. It connects past, present, future with people and actions. Thus, in *The Kदाitcha Sung*, the past and present are so intertwined that it could become confusing. The primordial contemporary character, the Bunyat, exists in both time frames and Tommy is also able to go back and forth in time.

The Dreaming or Dreamtime can be defined as ‘the English name given to the intimately connected but distinct strands of Aboriginal belief; they refer not to historical past but a fusion of identity and spiritual connection with the timeless present’ (Grieves 1). Hence, in *The Kदाitcha Sung* Aborigines ‘saw themselves as only a very small part of time itself. Their culture, their beliefs, their every action were based on that which had gone before and that which would follow’ (204). Individuals can also be said to possess their own Dreaming. This is so important because this is what defines Aboriginal manhood. An individual cut off from their Dreaming is regarded as cursed and lost. In the extreme situation of the payback, ‘Teapot’ loses that which defines him as a man. ‘You are no longer a man!’ Tommy said. ‘Your spirit and your Dreaming are forfeit. Once you have been dealt with, you will be banished to the eternal pits. You no longer belong to the blood of Uluru’ (123). It is thus difficult to separate Aboriginal Dreaming from their culture and history. The ‘Dreaming’ is regarded as myth by Europeans and scholars while to the Aborigines, it contains ‘truths forming the basis of social life’ (Gibbs 67).

Narratives told by Aborigines of spirit ancestors and of the formation of the earth and the transmission of the Law are often firmly believed to be true events and

not fable or myth as they have been classified by European anthropologists. Thus fiction is not essentially an integral structure in Aboriginal narratives. However, with the advent of writing and the need to recapture their history and culture, also came the need for fiction; hence fiction for Aborigines can be said to be a modern reality. Where fiction crosses with the narratives of the Dreaming, a hybrid, which Mudrooroo calls 'Maban Reality' and which he relates more keenly to magic realism, is created.

Maban reality might be characterised by a firm grounding in the reality of the earth or country, together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality. It is difficult for many these days to accept...so-called...European sciences, when it relegates much everyday experience to the realm of superstition, when it is precisely this supernatural or magic which keeps spilling over the country (1997, 97).

Narrating the events of the Dreaming in a neo-myth built upon fiction may be a term with which the traditional and conservative Aborigines may not be comfortable. A fictive narrative, it may be argued, would undermine the 'authority' of the myth. Gelder and Jacobs argue: 'It is not that fiction is anti-authoritarian; rather, it is a genre of writing which turns the concept of 'authority' into a problem, not least because—since it is often so severed from place, community and presence—the 'cultural apparatuses which make it possible' can be difficult to determine' (103).

In *The Kadaitcha Sung*, Watson stresses Aboriginal individuality while at the same time subtly proposing a way forward for the Aboriginal condition in Australia. He stresses through the construction of an alternate reality that Aborigines were not a race of weak people colonised because Europe was stronger and superior. But they contributed as much to the colonial encounter as did the colonisers. The Aboriginal ancestors and forebears share as much guilt as the colonisers do. From a traditional perspective, the novel explores this in view of Aboriginal law 'The men and women

must worship the gods and keep the laws of the gods, and they must ensure that the natural order of all things was kept' (1).

It is the breaking of this 'natural order of all things' which results in the eventual colonisation and the need for another Kadaitcha to execute judgment and bring cleansing and healing to the Aborigines and their land. The payback is all round. All those who partook in breaking the 'natural order' are called to account while the Kadaitcha is the executor. In Aboriginal cultures a Kadaitcha is a 'magic' man who deals 'out payback or revenge on transgressors who break the law' (1). They are men of 'high degree' who are supposed to be custodians and keepers of the law. But the Kadaitcha men in Watson's text do not conform perfectly to this image of high moral values. They become the subject of Watson's fictional reconstruction. They break the law as much as they keep it. The Kadaitcha clan had in pre-colonial times 'interfered with the sacred order of all things' (220). In restoring the kundri stone back to its rightful place, Tommy is given the powers of a Kadaitcha to dole out 'payback' to all who had aided Booka in his evil design of the Aboriginal displacement and decimation. Thus Tommy wastes no time in executing justice by punishing 'Teapot' (Bunda of the Gulilee), Sambo who plays the role of Booka's personal assistant, Jelda's father (Banjai), who helped in the killing of Koobara. Several members of the popular Native Mounted Police and a handful of 'miglos' also experience Tommy's wrath.

The Tommy character is, of course, also Watson's construction. He is the fictional construct Watson infuses into the myriad of myths he ties together to achieve a purpose. Thus, while the text reveals a restoration in the Aboriginal cosmos, it employs hybridity as a postcolonial strategy to forge a future for contemporary Aborigines. While a return to pre-colonial times is an absolute

impossibility, making sense of and taking hold of the present would prove useful.

Ningi is quick to rebuke Tommy for castigating the inevitable change of lifestyle his people had gone through: 'They are still our people. They have just changed their ways so that they can survive. That's what life is about, Tommy. Survival' (250).

Tommy is a hybridised figure, one who is between 'two camps'; an Aborigine with a white mother therefore also related to the miglo. It is through the hybridised figure of Tommy (who is able to penetrate two camps) that Watson projects the restoration he proffers. Thus Tommy's hybridity becomes not a curse but a ploy, a ploy which is also a potent tool of survival.

Hybridity, in Watson's projection thus portrays a reality that can be transformed into strength for survival in contemporary times. Rather than resist it, he subtly calls for an acceptance of it as part of an inevitable change and certainly one that connects all creatures to a pantheon source (1). Smith warns that 'at the very least it is clear that we can no longer hold comfortably on to the notion of a closed national culture complete within and for itself' (243). Thus the gods created the world; Fleur has connections to an ancient clan of sorcerers while the African stone has potency that is connected to Aboriginal spirituality.

The notion of hybridity in early Eurocentric racial theory was derogatory and referred to the crossing and intermingling of racial stocks. Thus, in that plain historical sense, Tommy is hybrid since he is a cross between White and Black races. In contemporary cultural theory, it has become a 'progressive term', to borrow from Smith, which, he argues, repeats 'that familiar historical pattern in which a derogatory label, connoting regression and disintegration, is recuperated and used to disrupt the very patterns of categorisation and control which first gave rise to it' (250-51).



The narrative redefines Tommy, for the stigma of racial impurity is transformed into strength. Tommy is known as ‘yeller fullah’ and often wonders who he really is because he shares a biological connection to both races. At his initiation, he even protests that he is nothing but a mongrel hybrid. But this hybridity in the narrative’s construction of his character is intentional, both as a ploy for the execution of his assignment and as a basis for destabilising the ‘notion of cultural purity as fictitious and in destabilising notions of authenticity’ (Michel 93), for Ningi declares to him: ‘It is you, born of a miglo woman and our last Turwan, who has achieved the perfection that Biamee intended for the entire clan’ (251). Tommy’s hybridity and the neo-myth he represents emphasise Knudsen’s claim that: ‘The mixed blood Aboriginal person is no longer a displaced person if he or she shares in a Pan-Aboriginal Dreaming’ (304). His hybridity reminds the reader of Robert Young’s claim that the contemporary use of the concept ‘thus makes difference into sameness and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different’ (26). Postcolonial hybridity’s ability to undermine the ‘notions of fixed racial identity’, to borrow the phrase from Smith, thus become a potent tool Watson employs in the ambiguities that seem apparent in Tommy.

Just as they took part in the colonial experience, Watson stresses that they can also take their destiny into their hands and forge a positive future. Watson seems to subtly put it that the answers to contemporary Aboriginal problems lie within their reach and should come first from a spiritual healing (261). Hence before this healing can take place, there is a need to correct the imbalance that already exists, a form of justice that would ensure not a pre-colonial restoration but a restoration of the essence of Aboriginality. The payback is the only way to right this imbalance and

only a Kadaitcha has the power or means to execute this judgment for the gods had been 'locked out of this world through their own failure, and it is for you to correct their stupidity... The mortal race had grown so strong and the gods so weak there could be no other way. The blood of the Kadaitcha clan alone could not conquer the cunning and the evil of the beast.' (227).

*Reconciling the myth*

*Tommy felt immensely saddened by the boy... Yet children like Poddy had never walked upon their own land and they spoke English too fluently. Their own language was beginning to fade and they knew nothing of their own Dreaming (Watson 261).*

*The mission children... Should they be reminded of that horror?... Or should they not be encouraged and aided in the long-term rebuilding of their natural strengths? The miglo could not be put back into their ships and cast back into the sea, and the tribes would never again be able to hunt on the land beneath an empty sky (261).*

This, to me, accounts for the purpose of this novel. Much as it offers an alternate reality in the form of a mythic interpretation of colonisation, it is a cultural reaffirmation of an identity that is being rebuilt after the colonial bashing. The generations that have survived into the present should be encouraged. Thus, relating to the events of the past should not be to produce mourning but rather the past should be visited in order to forge a future. This visiting of the past produces what Nelson calls 'a sense of healing'. The Dreaming is not lost in a present and more logically accounted for reality if it serves as an inspiration and anchor for contemporary Aborigines to rebuild their lives. This one objective is the pivot within which the essence of the novel lies.

In this sense, Watson can be said to be a committed writer. He is one who believes in the value of fiction as a means of restoration, a primary element in Aboriginal writing. Mudrooroo articulates this succinctly when he claims that the role of the Australian Indigenous writer is to be:

deeply concerned with the problems of their communities even to the extent that community is stressed at the expense of the individual...these writers acknowledge that their primary goal is to understand their own communities—the basis of their literature- and from there to create a literature which will not only be of use to their community, but will help to spread a knowledge about the Indigenous people of Australia and their unique culture. These are their aims (1990, 4-5).

The healing which the text proffers is ultimately spiritual. It is believed that when things are righted in the cosmos, it will bring about the desired healing and stability which the Aboriginal people need. The spiritual healing and restoration then becomes the basis from which they will derive strength to rebuild their identity.

One of the achievements of *The Kadaitcha Sung* is to reaffirm, reconstruct and redirect Aboriginal faith in their spirituality. As a child, Tommy had heard of the narratives of the Dreaming without the faintest idea that they were real until his initiation. 'He had been told of these monsters since he was a child but he had never known they were real' (36). As Tommy also bade fare well to his Dreaming ancestors, he knew the greetings were 'largely empty, that they had no real power in the world of men. Biamee was locked away in the astral plane and most of the Kadaitcha clan had been banished' (40).

It is no wonder that, as Tommy talks with his nephew Poddy, he feels an immense sadness at the 'Modern' Aboriginal child who knew nothing of his history or heritage. Tommy's reflections, I believe, echo the author's task '*The mission children...Should they be reminded of that horror?...Or should they not be encouraged and aided in the long-term rebuilding of their natural strengths?*' (261 emphasis mine).

Three issues are addressed in the form of questions: '*Should they be reminded of that horror?*' (261). Watson explores the purpose of history while he subtly queries what it could so frequently lead to: '*Should they be forced back into the pits of despair and alienation?*' (261). Recounting the tales of colonialism and its

denigration often leads to infuriation and despair. While Watson, like most postcolonial writers, is not saying that history must be recollected for that purpose, his text explores the notion that History must be recollected and told with a definite purpose and that is to infuse dignity to the colonised and to forge a viable future: '*Or should they not be encouraged and aided in the long-term rebuilding of their natural strengths?*' The future being proposed is not a return to a pre-colonial past as the novel often intones 'the miglo could not be put back into their ships and cast back into the sea' (261). Neither does the novel encourage a denial of present realities, one of which is that 'the tribes would never again be able to hunt on the land beneath an empty sky' (261) but it proposes a future in which Aboriginal pride, dignity and essence (which indeed is their spirituality) is emphasised and respected. To do this in this present reality entails a call for unity, the kind of Pan-Aboriginality that Watson's reconstructed myth proposes.

*The Kadaitcha Sung* succeeds as a text because of the strong call for unity among Aborigines. It is generally estimated that there were at least 7500 Aborigines in 500 distinct groups using over 200 languages before the contact with Europe (McGrath 10). Subsequent attacks on them coupled with diseases crippled that population. Before the colonisation, Aborigines were not known by the term and certainly did not regard themselves as one nation. They addressed themselves by the languages they spoke, as Kurris, Murris, Nyungar and so on (McGrath, 360-61). In the text, 'The Rings of Bora were nine circles surrounding a dark centre. Tommy knew that the rings were made up of five hundred stones, each one representing one of the tribes that had been entrusted with Biamee's garden' (28). The historical upturn has however forced a redirection of events and a call to recognise the need to foster closer ties in a united front in the battle for land rights and an identity that

must be recognised. Tommy explains to Mary why he called Jelda his cousin: ‘Well, the truth of it is...I suppose every black person in Australia is somehow related to the entire tribe. I could go to any black camp in the country and I would be taken in. Our religion gives us a kinship system that’s survived everything,’ he explained, noting the interest in her face (147).

In *The Kadaitcha Sung*, Aborigines and Europeans are brought side by side and deliberately weighed in the scales. Lifestyles and values of European capitalism and Aboriginal conservative societies contrast when placed side by side. The Aborigines are presented as strong and spiritual while the Whites are presented as spiritually empty, callous and materialistic. Booka tells Sambo that white ‘magic’ is related to theirs because they do not have any spiritual connection to the land, hence they do not draw any power from there, instead ‘their special sort of poorie comes from deep within them. They are driven by a restless sort of energy that sends them onwards. They are ruled by greed, Sambo, greed and an evil sort of hunger that won’t allow them any peace’ (42). This conscious comparison is meant to reinforce difference and Watson is particular about this because, in a postcolonial way, it helps to reconstruct the Aboriginal self, just as Mudrooroo does in *Dr Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*.

Booka compares the drive between Aborigines and ‘miglos’ and expresses the deep connection Aborigines have towards the land. The land is a source of strength and indeed a life force. Tommy Gubba often drew strength by touching the land. Aboriginal conservation of the land may attest to this fact that archaeological findings could be said to be as much as forty thousand years old. It is also no wonder that calls are being made for the larger Australia to draw inspiration from Aboriginal land values. David Tacey, in *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*,

examines the spiritual connection of Australian Aborigines to the land. He further argues that spiritual change and political development in mainstream Australia are closely knit. Vicki Grieves argues that:

Aboriginal society has never been static but it has been essentially non-materialist and extremely conservative of the environment...By contrast, Aboriginal civilization has been notable for its survival over at least 80,000 years. The key to this survival lies in Aboriginal philosophy, expressed in religious practice that has been paramount in people's day-to-day lives, informing all their actions (2)

Comparisons are made between Aboriginal and British Law and the vast differences that exist between these two. It is no wonder, though, that combined with the prejudices of the miglo, Aborigines were always at a disadvantage:

Tommy did not fully understand the British legal system. Macow had followed tribal law and killed the man in retribution. So why was there any need for the trial? The blacks had no means of recourse to the white legal system...On the edge of his mind Tommy followed Finlay and Boonger as they talked about the vast differences between British law and black, tribal law (61, 102)

The text seems to be so preoccupied with these comparisons that it indirectly transfers some of the stereotypes Aborigines have been tagged with. It reaches the covert conclusion that the European colonisers are the real fringe dwellers whose lack of spirituality makes them numb to humanity; hence they can pillage, kill and destroy being driven by 'a restless sort of energy' (41).

### ***Woza Albert!***

#### *Presenting the Myth*

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue that the term postcolonial literature covers all literatures written during and after colonialism which engage the centre in some way. *Woza Albert!* is a typical text which was composed during the South African Apartheid era (1948-1990) and engages the centre in a postcolonial sense of resistance and defiance. It not only anticipates the death of the apartheid

regime and envisages a future of liberty for the oppressed black majority, but it also overturns and reconstructs the colour black from a symbol of oppression to one of strength and resistance which does not recognise colour as a basis of identification. This it does by structuring the plot around the doctrines of Black Theology and Black Consciousness.

*Woza Albert!* explores the ruthless political regime of Apartheid in the form of a parody. It is a play that identifies with the resurrected figure of Christ and goes on to assert that hope does not die; that the struggles against Apartheid and the death of countless men and women are, in fact fruitful. It tallies with that scriptural verse that says: 'Verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit' (John 12:24, King James Version). This is a theme that East African writer, Ngugi Wa Thiongo explores in some of his works—a concern with hope and the essence of sacrifice.

There is a similarity drawn between the life of Christ and the South African people under Apartheid. The life of Christ was given up and the Jews abused it by sending him to a cruel and guiltless death on the cross. But, out of that sacrifice came forth life, freedom and victory as the Bible account reveals. This is one of the cornerstone doctrines of Black Theology that evolved in South America (as Liberation Theology) and gained popularity and vigour in the United States and then gained sway in South Africa during the Apartheid regime.

Black South African peoples, during the period of Apartheid, were denied, brutalised and often killed, but the play envisions freedom and victory that will come out of the curse of Apartheid. Barney Simon, one of the writers of *Woza Albert!* summarises the aim of the play. He says it is 'very much reflective of my vision, which is a positive vision. It talks about the horrors of South Africa, but also the

strength of the Black people there. It talks about the gift of life and also the abuse of life' (1).

On another level, the play attacks the faith of a renegade white society which lives in mockery of the claims they make; the belief in God and the Bible upon which the fabric of most colonial societies, of which South Africa is one, were founded. This is so because Apartheid is often seen as the product of a Christian culture. At least Christianity played a vital role in the early foundation of these societies, particularly South Africa. Simon Barney, Percy Mtwa and Mbogeni Mgema themselves believe that '[m]ost of the South African government policies are the result, they say, of their Christian Nationalist principles. *Woza Albert!* is our fantasy of a Second Coming to South Africa by Morena, the Saviour' ('Introduction').

This is like an indictment that these principles are fantasy in the same way that the second coming of Christ to South Africa is the fantasy of the creative artists. This fantasy is the myth upon which the plot of the drama hinges. *Woza Albert!* emphasises a creative principle over a destructive one. The play is built upon the premise of Christ's second coming taking place in the then apartheid South Africa. The characters in the play reflect the possibility of how the black population would receive Jesus if he came to South Africa. They each had questions and specific needs to be met. The White ruling minority also had questions for Morena but their reception of Morena is portrayed as one of indifference.

The populace has different expectations of Morena's mission. This is clearly mirrored in the survey of responses different groups and classes of people give when they learn of Morena's coming. Their attitudes reflect a mixture of hope and expectation, disbelief and belief, indifference and cynicism. The prison scenes show



hope building up in a prisoner's heart as he announces that Morena is coming to South Africa. Morena is introduced here as a symbol of redemption and power to the oppressed where life under Apartheid is akin to a prison sentence. As in a typical survey, a lot of other people are interviewed. When focus is brought to bear on Fidel Castro, he expresses utter disbelief; his response reflecting the imperial role America has adopted and is still playing in the world today. The local musician simply shows indifference, the young meat seller wants good luck and also wants to go school. The response of Aunt Dudu, who seems to represent the very poor and downtrodden, is very interesting to note: 'If Morena comes to South Africa? That would be very good. Because everybody will be happy and there will be lots and lots of parties. And we'll find lots of foods here—(indicates bin)—cabbages, tomatoes, chicken, hot-dogs, all the nice things white people eat' (19). Her desires and needs at Morena's coming do not change much. She still wants the same things she is used to having but this time only desires that they be easy to find. Her perceptions and attitudes reflect a bit of indifference. Their requirements are the expectation of an average life a normal white has: access to food, education and employment. The expectation of change, however, may result in no change at all.

Morena comes to South Africa; least expected of all places and it is only the Black population who has any regard for his coming. Morena's return symbolises hope amongst black South Africans in the then South Africa for the end of Apartheid. In his biblical first coming, he comes as poor, ordinary and from a family who was the least known in Israel. He was also the expected king of the Jews. Under the Roman Empire, the Jews (Israel) were in servitude and were being oppressed. He becomes the Messiah they expect to physically deliver them from bondage and oppression according to the prophecies given in the Law (Torah) but it turns out that

he becomes a spiritual deliverer who dies for them so that they might gain life, are delivered spiritually and gain hope for a future eternal life.

Morena's mission to South Africa is to give hope and freedom to the oppressed South Africans and to give meaning to the sacrifices they have made for the cause of liberty. These sacrifices are like seeds that grew to freedom. In his reconstructed Second Coming, Morena identifies with the oppressed black of South Africa. The expectations he fulfils in *Woza Albert!* are very much the same he fulfils in his biblical first coming. The characters in *Woza Albert!* do not necessarily and physically get their demands met but Morena, the reconstructed Christ, gives them hope, a hope that strengthens their spirit and hence makes the struggle for freedom worthwhile. He infuses life and value into the death and sacrifices of the freedom fighters of Apartheid South Africa.

*Reconstructing the myth: Morena in South Africa*

*Woza Albert!*, as stated above, leans heavily on the doctrines of both Black Theology, which was then believed 'flattens religious and political discourses into a singular cry of liberation' (Chapman 354) and on Black Consciousness. Black Theology in South Africa evolved as part of the Black Consciousness movement that rose up to fill the vacuum left after the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress were banned in 1960 (Frederickson 298; Nicholson 201). When the Black Consciousness Movement was formed in 1967, it served as an umbrella to several bodies of organisation which subscribed to its basic philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Some of these bodies were the: South African Student Organization (S.A.S.O), Black Community Programme (B.C.P), Black People's Convention (B.P.C), and South African Student Movement (S.A.S.M) among a host of others which existed during apartheid.

In South Africa, Black Theology and The Black Consciousness Movement went together although Black Theology is said to have originated in the United States within the black slave community. Black Consciousness is said to have been initiated in South Africa by Steve Biko, the first SASO president who was killed in Police custody in 1967. Black Consciousness was aimed at and thrived on conscientising black people with a sense of their self worth and dignity. This movement also encouraged blacks to take responsibility for their deliverance and take charge of their own history. Black consciousness also placed emphasis on psychological rehabilitation as a condition for political resistance. Hence, the tie between Black Theology and Black Consciousness is often interlocked:

Passages in the New Testament that presented Jesus as the Champion of the poor and oppressed were the basis for a theology of liberation. Christ himself was black...in the sense that blackness had come to symbolize the state of being oppressed that He had been sent to overcome (Frederickson 305).

Black Theology in South Africa was more concerned with reflecting the Christian gospel in the light of the oppression experience and the need for freedom. Steve Biko's speech echoes some of the fundamental concerns that unite the Black Consciousness and Black Theology movements:

this realisation by the black man [*sic*]of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It is based on a self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man they are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black (208, cited in Nicholson)

Churches and organisations reflecting Christian values became vehicles through which Black Consciousness found a voice. One significance that Black Theology has is the emphasis it places on Black Consciousness and on its view of Jesus as the liberator from negative self-devaluation amongst black people. As Chapman states: 'What appealed to Black Consciousness...was Fanon's appreciation that the racially designated characteristic 'Black' had potency in the struggle to

liberate the human being, mentally and economically, from colonial denigration and oppression' (Chapman 328). Black thus become not a derogatory label but a symbol through which indigenous South African could assert themselves, take pride in and work towards rebuilding the future they envisage. Black now symbolised 'both the sense of liberation and the unity of all oppressed under one, positive defining concept' (Kunene 502). This knowledge was needful knowing that the 'colour bar' in the first place was the basis of the discrimination and the reason why the whole structure of apartheid was set up in the first place.

Black Theology identifies completely with the person of Jesus. It sees him as: 'human, yet as one who knew that God loved him and had a profound destiny for him' and it is in this knowledge 'that the needs for black consciousness are most powerfully met. This Jesus provides hope and evidence that black people can be victors, not victims' (Nicholson 212). In *Woza Albert!*, the biblical Jesus (referred to as Morena which means 'Lord') is the redemptive hero. But, unlike classical saviour figures, he is not originally a South African. He is a Jewish figure with whom the oppressed South Africans characters ally and to whom they look for redemption. But he becomes a South African by virtue of his identification with the oppressed majority who look to him for help and deliverance from the appalling situation of Apartheid.

In the text under discussion, what sounded like rumour turns into reality when Morena actually appears in South Africa. Bobbejaan and Zuluboy play some major roles in his activities and I would like to examine these characters in some detail. It is through characters like Bobbejaan and Zuluboy that the commentary about the apartheid condition in South Africa is revealed to Morena and indeed to the

audience. Daily life scenes are captured like a documentary and the contrasting and extreme conditions Blacks and Whites lived in are mirrored in vivid imagery:

MBOGENI. Boss Van-des-destuizen, eleven thousand bricks! Where do we stay?

PERCY. In a tin!

MBOGENI. In a tin! Like sardine fish!

PERCY. In a tin, Morena!

MBOGENI. Where do the bricks go to!? The bricks go to make a big house, six rooms, for two people. A white man and his wife! Angithi Bobbejaan? [Isn't it so, Bobbejaan?] Our fingers are breaking Morena! Is nie good kanjalo man [That's not good like that, man] (49).

Morena condemns Apartheid and laments the sufferings of the oppressed. His speech reveals the extreme living conditions Black and Whites live in under Apartheid

South Africa:

MBONGENI. No! Morena will say, what key is this? What place is this? This place where old people weep over the graves of children? How has it happened? How has it been permitted? I've passed people with burning mouths. People buying water in a rusty piece of tin, and beside them I see people swimming in a lake that they have made from water that is there.

[...]

MBONGENI. ...I pass people who sit in the dust and beg for work that will buy them bread. And on the other side I see people who are living in gold and glass and whose rubbish bins are loaded with food for a thousand mouths (60).

This description presents Apartheid South Africa as a place of extreme contrasts.

While some struggle to get a little water which is hardly ever hygienic, others swim in pools. It seems more like the proverbial case of 'monkey work, baboon chop' which is translated in English to mean 'the monkey works while the baboon eats'; an appalling reflection of the colonial ideology where to be Black is to be condemned to a life of servitude.

Morena's coming is not welcomed by everyone. While the Blacks rejoice at first, even though some are sceptical and cynical, they do not see a permanent

change (36). The government is suspicious and inhospitable. Morena is at first accepted, then rejected and arrested and those who associate with him are threatened with the sack (40, 50). The government then goes to great lengths to deter, undermine and silence Morena. He is arrested and sent to prison, but escapes (55). He is arrested again and locked in solitary confinement on Robben Island, the notorious prison that housed Black political prisoners. Thus Morena becomes a threat to the Apartheid regime since he is seen as a symbol of freedom and hope for the end of Apartheid for the blacks, which the government is opposed to. He thus becomes a political prisoner. The white boss of Bobbejann and Zuluboy accuses him of being a terrorist and communist who threatens the security of the country:

PERCY (enter as Baas Kom, stops at sight of Morena): En nou! En nou? Who is this? Who is sitting around eating lunch with my kaffirs? That's why you're getting cheeky, hey? Ja, you sit around and have lunch with terrorists!

MBONGENI. Hau! He is not a terrorist, Baas! He's a big man from heaven!

PERCY. This man is a communist, jong! Ek het van jou nonsense gehoor. Die hele land praat van jou. [I've heard of your nonsense. The whole country is talking about you.]

[...]

PERCY. Cannot understand Afrikaans? Stay where you are! (Retreats to his office behind the clothes) I'm calling the police. Fuckin' agitator! (50-51).

The populace is so despairing that their expectation of a change is limiting. For just after the anticipated change, the fear of a collapse loomed imminently:

MBONGENI [...] These will be days of joy. Auntie Dudu will find chicken legs in rubbish bin, and whole cabbages. And amadoda—our men—will be offered work at the Pass Office. The barber will be surrounded by white tiles. The young meat-seller will wear a nice uniform and go to school, and we will all go to Morena for our blessings. (Song subsides. Percy lies on boxes as sleeping woman. Lights dim.) And then...the government will begin to take courage again...The police and the army will assemble from all parts of the country...And one night, police dogs will move in as they have done before. There will be shouts at night and bangings on the door... (36)

Black Theology also emphasises that salvation is dual: salvation in this world as well as in the next world. In this sense it is more concerned about the practical issues of political and social freedom than the metaphysical implications. The relevance of the gospel is made to bear on the physical and challenging contemporary experiences of the people. Christ's relevance seems to be summarised in the question: what is the implication of Christ's relationship to the Black South African predicament? It is in to which the connection to the Christ figure is often strongly linked.

The lives of the heroes who died in the liberation struggle against Apartheid parallel that of Jesus because their deaths are seen as sacrifices in the fight for freedom against the shackles of Apartheid. This sacrifice is akin to that of Christ who is believed to have sacrificed his life for humankind's redemption. 'The dead heroes of the struggle are remembered in much the same way as martyrs in the early church. Their deaths are not only a matter of mourning and sadness but have considerable energizing power for those who come after' (Nicholson 244).

The definition of Black Consciousness included all those in the category of 'nonwhite' (indigenous Africans, coloureds, Indians etc) and 'white' as long as they were involved in or identified with the liberation struggle against Apartheid. 'Blackness then became less a matter of ethnic ancestry than of a raised consciousness' (Frederickson 301). Race thus became an existential issue rather than one determined by biological consequences. Thus a white person by colour who joins in the struggle against oppression may be termed black. Colour did not impose any barrier. 'To affirm blackness as a positive identity...was to be freed in spirit and committed to a struggle for liberation from physical oppression' (Frederickson 305).

This is evident in *Woza Albert!* when one considers the last scene when Morena resurrects some of the dead heroes back to life. He resurrects both black and

white people. I think Steve Biko's views in equating Black consciousness with Black Theology echo James Cone's understanding that 'Black Theology' is the theological arm of Black power, and Black power focuses on the political, social and economic condition of black people. Black Theology puts black identity in a theological context' (37). Cone's theology recognises two aspects of Blackness: the physiological and the ontological.

Bram Fischer and Ruth First were Afrikaners who allied with the Black cause against Apartheid. Bram Fischer was a lawyer who, according to the text of *Woza Albert!*:

led the defence in a number of political trials, including the Treason Trial of 1956-1960 and the Rivonia Trial of 1963-1964. In September 1964, he was arrested and charged under the suppression of Communism Act, but fled underground to continue his political activism. Re-arrested within a year, he was sentenced to life imprisonment, and died in 1975 (83).

Ruth First was born in Johannesburg into a politically radical family; she studied social science and was also an author and teacher. She worked with African mine strikers, Nelson Mandela and ANC members in the mid forties. In Johannesburg, she was editor of radical journals which were successively banned. She also became acting-secretary of the Communist Party. She was one of the 156 accused but later acquitted in the Treason Trial in 1956. Subsequently she was banned and placed under house arrest. She was held in solitary confinement in 1963 for 117 days. She became a leading member of the ANC and was killed by a letter bomb on August 17, 1982 while she ran a university department in Mozambique (84).

The sacrifices of these two among many others, are the seeds upon which the trees of freedom would indeed grow. In its liberation gospel, Black Theology did not discriminate between races nor was colour a barrier. 'One of the major achievements



of Black Consciousness cum Black Theology was to instil in many black people a new sense of self worth and competence that made traditional patterns of racial deference impossible to maintain' (Frederickson 303).

Some of the basic tenets of Black Consciousness are summarised as firstly, a rejection of White and Black stereotypes, secondly a rejection of the values and myths that justify and propel racism and Apartheid, thirdly, a conscientisation of African values, pride and dignity and a mobilisation of available resources to change their plight. Steve Biko was popularly known for this slogan: 'Black man, you are on your own' which echoes a challenge for the black people to take responsibility for their future. Finally, Black Consciousness emphasised self-reliance and solidarity among Blacks and indeed all peoples. Black Consciousness' 'emphasis on black consciousness-raising, cultural revival, initiative and self discovery and, above all, on the elimination of psychological and physical oppression of blacks, has allowed many black people as individuals to acknowledge and come to grips with the feeling of inferiority engendered in them by apartheid' (Sole 57).

While Black Consciousness emphasised these tenets, Black Theology was built upon several tenets. It depicted Jesus as a fighting God and as one who bears some solidarity with the oppressed of the earth. Thus Jesus is considered as both a saviour and elder brother. It also parallels the lives of poor and oppressed masses to the life of Jesus whose material poverty, it is believed, identifies him with them. Thus, several implications for the Black experience can be drawn from the life of Jesus. Hence Jesus is also a fellow sufferer (Thurman *Jesus and the Disinherited*). Black Theology also portrayed heaven as having a dual meaning. It refers to both a future eschatological life and also an earthly state of liberation in the present.

Black Consciousness helped in reconstructing the image of the black person. Apartheid robbed blacks of their identity and self worth. Black people were reduced to mere numbers and nameless beings who must carry passes that defined them. They must not only own a pass but must carry it all the time. Failure to do this made them liable to arrests, fines and imprisonments.

PERCY (under the song): Morena says throw away your passes and follow him to Soweto.

MBONGENI. We are not pieces of paper, man! We are men!

PERCY: Ja! Let them know our faces as Morena knows our faces!

[...]

MBONGENI: Let them look at our faces to know that we are men (35).

There is the cry to be recognised as persons and not as numbers in the text. Apartheid's construct of the Black was one of inferiority on all fronts—mentally, politically, socially. The use of the pass book became necessary as a result of this construct and became a vital instrument in the oppressive regime. The pass was necessary to gain employment outside the designated 'homelands' and for entry of any sort into 'South Africa' or the white zones. In 1951, a new policy, which was a basis for ethnic government in these 'homelands' to which the black population were banished, was established. It was enacted through the Bantu Authorities Act. Political rights of the Blacks were restricted to these places only. There were originally four of these 'homelands' and the whole idea behind these formations was denationalising Blacks from South Africa and indeed from any political involvement. Apartheid could never have been worse than this venomous act of racial segregation! The text presents a comment on this:

PERCY. You're fired! Bring your pass-book. I'm signing you off.

[...]

I'm calling the police! I'm calling the government buses and I'm sending you back to your homelands. Ek stuur julle na julle fokken verdomde, donorse, bliksemse plase toe! [I'm sending you to your fucking, cursed, useless farms.]

You don't like my work? You don't like my food! Go back to your bladdy farms! Go starve on your bladdy farms! (46).

Neither Black Theology nor Black Consciousness encouraged passivity in the fight for freedom. When Morena is going to be betrayed by the character Boobejaan, Zuluboy says:

MBONGENI...A man hits this cheek you give him the other. Aikhona, Morena! They are calling the police to arrest you now!...Huh? Forgive them, they do not know what they are doing? Aikhona, Morena! They know! They know! (He sings and performs a Zulu war dance, which ends with him thrusting his knobkerrie again and again at the audience in attack).

Qobolela njomane kandaba heya-he

Soze sibajahe abelungu he ya he

[Be ready you horses of the black warriors

Time will come when we'll chase these whites away] (52-53).

Upon his arrest and in a maximum security prison on Robben Island, a prisoner accosts Morena's perceived passivity and echoes one of the radical themes which make up Black Theology.

MBONGENI: ....And the New Testament tells me about you, and your family, and your thoughts. But why do they give us your book to read, Morena? They must be bladdy mad, Morena. This book only proves how mad they are....You've got all the power! How can you let these things happen?.... But I'm getting bladdy disappointed. How long must we wait for you to do something? Morena, I must tell you, I 'm among those who have stopped waiting. One day we'll have to help you. Phambiti nerihondo! [Power to the people].... 63

The truth, however, remains that Morena is not altogether passive. He openly and publicly condemns the policies of apartheid as an act that the practitioners ought to be ashamed of and calls on the black masses to throw their passes away and follow him (35). However, this non-passivity cannot be equated with violence.

The belief that the future of black people are in their own hands and they alone must muster the energy and means to eke out their deliverance, 'one day we'll have to help you' (63). Power to the people! That's what the whole conscientisation is all about, equipping black people with tools to attain their freedom, the tools of which psychological uplifting of Black people's spirits are prime. It is certain that this is the foundation upon which racism and colonialism thrived—the myth of racial supremacy wherein the white race is considered superior—mentally and otherwise while nonwhites (black in this text) are inferior and are often condemned practically to a life of servitude.

### *Reconciling the myth*

The performance of a play like *Woza Albert!* is meant to reinforce political consciousness among members of the oppressed group. It does this by depicting specific historical instances of apartheid oppression and drawing emphasis to blackness as a source of inspiration for black consciousness. It makes reference to the 1976 SOWETO riots. The SOWETO riots have been described as a peaceful protest that erupted into massacre when the police opened fire upon innocent school children. The protest was in reaction to proposed laws stating that all students must speak and learn Afrikaans in school rather than their tribal languages or English. Hundreds of blacks were killed making it the worst riot in South African history.

The text gives very accurate accounts of historical events and mentions the people who participated in them. For example, the account of Piet Retief, an Afrikaaner leader and King Dingane of the Amazulu tribe and the conflict which sparked off the conflict between them and the Afrikaners in 1837. The old man who retells the story in *Woza Albert!* compares that historical incident to what might

happen to Morena should he come to South Africa. A proper reception of Morena by the Apartheid government could not be expected.

*Woza Albert!* conforms to the theories of Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* in that it is a play with minimal cast, props, performed often under poor conditions. This concept Chapman renames in the South African context as a 'Black theatre model'. Many plays written by Blacks during Apartheid were, in the words of Chapman, 'apt metaphors for an ideology of poorness: for stage actions that can undermine the rich theatre and, in the poor condition, rediscover the human richness of the oppressed' (325). At this stage of Black South African writing, aesthetics and other aims of literature were not major considerations. This situation Haufffleisch suggests is because the 'writer now had the moral obligation to join the fight against the current evil' of Apartheid (406).

One cannot overlook the historical prelude to the Black Consciousness era. Black literature in South Africa slowly evolved from protest literature to Black Consciousness writing in the late seventies and continuing into much of the eighties. Protest literature was mainly directed to a white audience but with a then emerging black audience, Black Consciousness found roots though with a strong political motive as its end. Hence, many of the dramas produced during this period were sketchy with minimal props and so on, the reasons being that Blacks did not enjoy the privileges of entertaining and being entertained at proper cinemas, so they made do with makeshifts that resulted in mostly experimental works. The certain fact was that Apartheid was a complete grinding machine that destroyed everything in its path. The system was such that it prevented the talents of nonwhites from flourishing. The means of publication were often unreachable for the average black artist and even when they were, it was mainly the white population who had access

to proper theatres. Black creative artists had to be ingenious by resorting to experimentation in order to make their message accessible to the poor blacks who were often more concerned with surviving than getting entertainment. In this sense, art for them was much more than entertainment, it was a portrayal of the reality of the times and its values could be measured mainly in its ability to achieve a credible version of reality.

The confluence at which *Woza Albert!* meets with Black Theology is relevant in emphasising the anticipation of freedom that the text foretells. Reflecting on the immense results that Black Theology has made in the United States, Ron Rhodes acknowledges four important contributions which one could relate similarities of its success also in South Africa.

First, Black Theology has reminded us that theology—if it is going to meet the needs of twentieth century (and beyond)...must find practical expression in society. Second, Black Theology has reminded us that God is involved with His people in real life situations. Third, Black Theology has focused our attention on the need to reach out to others in the body of Christ who are suffering. And fourth, Black theology serves as an indictment against the racist views that have been all too often (but not always) present among white people. These contributions are important and extremely relevant (10).

He goes on to demonstrate that religion if it is to be useful must be practical and find relevance in the everyday needs of those who practice it. I suggest that *Woza Albert!* is a very successful text when it is considered in terms of these highlighted achievements.

### **After-Word: making a connection**

At this point in this thesis, I suggest it has become clear that drawing comparisons between the two texts is a rather difficult endeavour. The reason goes beyond the fact that making a comparative connection between a drama and a prose text is rather awkward and especially in this case where the text *Woza Albert!* is very

experimental for reasons I have highlighted in the sub-section ‘Reconciling the Myth’. Therefore, I would follow David Carter’s advice that, merely because all texts emerging from postcolonial regions do not meet the same postcolonial end, this does not necessarily mean that Postcolonialism is a flawed critical practice.

*The Kadaitcha Sung* and *Woza Albert!* are postcolonial in the sense that they are resistant and contain echoes of a cry for liberation. They are resistant in the critical and literary sense that they resist Western literary canons. Secondly, they also engage the empire in certain ways that deconstruct Eurocentric assumptions and concern themselves with reconstructing colonial history as a basis for self-healing and in the case of *Woza Albert!* for conscientisation aimed at liberty. They both reflect defiance in the face of opposition while emphasising hope in spite of the prevailing circumstances.

Two levels of reconstruction take place in *The Kadaitcha Sung* and *Woza Albert!* There is the reconstruction of the history which places a focus on the colonial encounter. Secondly, there is a reconstruction of the deity figures and the roles they are meant to achieve from what is popularly known in both religions. *The Kadaitcha Sung* is more effective in reconstructing the colonial encounter from an Aboriginal point of view, as a part of the history of Aboriginal Australia; hence this undermines the colossal loss by reducing that encounter to an event resultant from a split in the Aboriginal cosmos. It also probes the whole experience in traditional Law that encapsulates the Dreaming and introduces the Kadaitcha myth where ‘payback’ is required to balance out, wipe out the evil and cause a spiritual restoration.

Redemption in *The Kadaitcha Sung* is essentially spiritual. The plot of the novel revolves around ‘payback’ and restoration to Aboriginal spirituality. This spirituality—the cornerstone of pre-colonial Aboriginality—was affected by the

colonial intrusion and all the events that proceeded from it. A return to this spirituality, termed as 'The Law', is the basis upon which true freedom and a concrete identity can be defined according to the text. In realising this principal theme of Redemption, *The Kadaitcha Sung* also echoes other themes of unity in Pan-Aboriginality, healing and justice.

The plot begins with the prelude that introduces the myth of Aboriginal creation and the subsequent split in the cosmos. It is this split which accounts for the colonial experience. The payback is about bringing justice by exacting the 'Law' upon the Aboriginal perpetrators and restoring Aboriginal spirituality in the symbol of Biamee, the Rainbow Serpent. To carry out this immense and sacred task, Tommy was birthed, prepared, initiated and then given the task of restoring the heart of the Rainbow Serpent to its rightful place so that Biamee can commune with his people once again.

Redemption in *Woza Albert!* is treated on different levels: physical (political) and spiritual. However, the essence of the play is to infuse meaning into the sacrifices made by several who have died fighting for the liberation of South Africa from the rigours of Apartheid. In realising this theme, the play is built around this premise: what would happen if Christ appeared in South Africa for his Second Coming to earth? Christ returns to South Africa and meets the reign of Apartheid with its denigration and brutality. He also finds out that among the oppressed with their varying needs and desires, one common denominator is the subtle call for salvation—freedom in plain terms.

Just as in Christ's first coming, the material expectations of the people are not directly met by Morena, but he infuses hope and significance into the struggle against Apartheid. He denounces Apartheid and the South African government



declares him an enemy, and declares him wanted. He is caught and silenced just like his avatar in the biblical first coming. He produces redemption on a different scale from that which might have been expected by the oppressed.

*Woza Albert!* is less preoccupied with reconstructing history. Rather, it focuses on the perils of Apartheid, and anticipates its death. The characters think that the coming of Morena will certainly spell the death of Apartheid and ensure new beginnings even though some are sceptical. It is this anticipation that the text focuses on by reconstructing the Second Coming of Christ as occurring on South African Apartheid soil rather than in Jerusalem as the Bible predicted.

Both texts thrive in the way they fictionally reconstruct the deity figures of the biblical Jesus into Morena and the Central Australian Baiame into the fictional Biamee. It is a complex task to compare the mythological Baiame and Jesus in the real sense because while Jesus stands out as a central figure of Christian spirituality, the narrative of Baiame in relation to Uluru is 'owned' by the Anangu People of Central Australia and is thus not necessarily central to all indigenous people. Moreover, the narratives often told and the role the Serpent plays in them differs among the various groups of indigenous people around Australia. Some narratives credit the Serpent as being one of the Great Ancestors. Others see this being as second to the All-Father. In Watson's reconstructed discourse, he is both Creator and Law Giver. His purpose is to unite all these myths and build them around a central focus of pan-Aboriginal spirituality centred on Uluru. Hence, Biamee and Uluru play a central role in the formation and restoration of Aboriginal healing and spirituality. The reconstructed Jesus' place in South Africa is drawn, as demonstrated in the critique above, from the teachings of Black Theology which also draws inspiration from Black Consciousness. This philosophy identifies the Black experience with the

person and suffering of Jesus. Jesus is looked upon as both an elder brother and a saviour, hence an inspiration for liberation. Morena differs in very remarkable ways from Biamee in that Morena is not an indigenous deity to South African mythology or Theology. Rather, *Woza Albert!* succeeds as a text which uses a deity drawn from an 'imposed' religion to strengthen the Black course for freedom and the other hand it indicts by satirising a government which claims Christianity as a foundation. Hence, it is no wonder when the Prime Minister says 'we don't like Morena anymore' (40). He no longer fits Afrikaner Nationalist theology with its oppressive agenda but the shift in perspective implies a love which, when it met the terms of the oppressor, was once present.

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## Chapter 3

# ‘Scars of History’ A Study of *Dr Wooreddy* and *Heart of Redness*

*Why he has to be burdened with the scars of history, he does not understand*

(Mda 12-13).

### **Interrogating History**

In this chapter, I intend to continue on the same premise I established in my previous chapter where I recognised the difficult terrain I tread in exploring a subject matter like ‘myth’. However, here my concern with myth is chiefly as it is deployed in these texts, Colin Johnson, *Dr Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (hereafter shortened to *Dr Wooreddy*) and Zakes Mda, *The Heart of Redness*, as historical untruths. In this sense, I am examining some of the ideas upon which Europeans and in particular the British, carried out the project of colonisation and how the two selected writers here, Mudrooroo Narogin and Mda, have attempted to deconstruct and reconstruct the stereotypes that have been predicated upon these ideas.

History in relation to colonialism is a matter of contention for many postcolonial writers. In their texts, history is explored, reconstructed and that past is brought into focus in contemporary times. This is particularly so because nearly all indigenous postcolonial writings evolved out of the history of colonialism.

Aboriginal and South African writing, as in my case studies, are thus termed because of that history. Prior to the colonial encounter, literary communication was carried

out effectively as dancing, recitations, music, paintings but not through the English medium of documentation and writing which came after the colonial encounter.

History is then at the centre of much postcolonial writing. Even when history is not the main subject, it is often deployed as a theme or sub-theme. Among a school of postcolonial writers, the writer, it is argued, is a representative who speaks for their people. It follows that in the early post-independence era, postcolonial writers have been involved in the project of writing fiction which has plots deeply rooted in history. This preoccupation with history arose especially in Africa and Aboriginal Australia where the pre-colonial was represented by Europe as blank and hence was not significant in any respect. Stephen Slemon believes that ‘the project of understanding the colonized peoples as genuinely historical subjects, as subjects of their own histories, and not as passive figures in the burgeoning history of others, is of paramount importance to the field of post-colonial theory’ (192). With the explosion of postcolonial studies, postcolonial peoples came to be appreciated as genuine subjects of their own histories rather than as objects reflected in western histories and other bodies of knowledge. Thus, the postcolonial writer is often expected to ‘reclaim the history of his [*sic*] people from the ethnocentric imaginations of the colonialist historians. He has to salvage the past from the white discourses in order to re-form it’ (Nelson 341). This reformation often involves trying to recapture living experiences just before colonialism and presenting a cultural dignity and an established structure that was cherished before colonialism just as Mudrooroo achieves in *Dr Wooreddy*. At some other points, history is examined in order to understand the present and forge a future just like Mda does in *Heart of Redness* after the crumbling of Apartheid. Both texts therefore identify with the objectives of much postcolonial writing, which Elleke Boehmer summarises as

‘the quest for personal and racial/cultural identity, the belief that writing is an integral part of self- definition, the emphasis on historical reconstruction’ (Boehmer 228-229).

It is important to emphasise that the writing of history has been generally carried out by Europe and the West and thus, more often, in its favour and in pursuit of its ideological and economic interests. History (as a discourse) is thus a Eurocentric occupation and postcolonial writers often attempt not only to critique this but also to subvert it to justify their ends. Boehmer argues that ‘writers established a restorative connection with that which colonist discourse had denied—the internal life of the colonized, their experience as historical actors’ (195). Postcolonial literature seeks to question the Eurocentric notions of history. Hence, in indigenous postcolonial literature, ‘history becomes a central political concern’ because European history denied colonised peoples ‘both a past and a viable present’ (Tompkins 484).

The place of history in indigenous literature therefore cannot be overemphasised. Chidi Amuta argues that African history (in relation to colonialism) is a foundational element for evaluating modern literature from Africa. In effect, colonialism plays a central role from whichever angle one chooses to approach African literature ‘in terms of the evolution of consciousness from anti-slavery, anti-colonialism, to the contemporary neo-colonial stages’ (81). He further argues that even when African literature is studied from regional perspectives, focus is hardly given to specific experiences. The ‘inevitable conclusion’ remains that:

Modern African literature is a historically determined and complex admixture of art forms marked by a reactive stance towards major historical experiences (or misfortunes) such as slavery, colonialism, cultural emasculation, political corruption, apartheid, class antagonism and imperialism (81).

Countering European historical constructions of indigenous peoples with attempts to reconstruct their own history is also, for the indigenous writer, a way of achieving not only a cultural sense of healing but also a way of helping to assert their unique identities. It is then true that 'for a people shipwrecked by history, a story of the past even if wholly or in part a fiction, again offers a kind of restitution' (Boehmer 198).

*Dr Wooreddy* and *Heart of Redness* express concerns with history but they are in many ways more different than similar. A conventional study in comparative literature would usually emphasise points of similarities rather than differences. Anything otherwise may be seen as deviant. Postcolonialism is an umbrella, I suggest, that shields many 'breathing' subjects and disciplines. It therefore becomes one of the frontiers of decolonising literature from an indigenous point of view, which is aimed at emphasising differences when cross cultural studies are made within a postcolonial framework. John McLeod advises that 'attending to cultural, historical, social, political and geographical differences is paramount; but so is thinking *between* and *across* differences too' (258). One advantage of this, I think, is that by highlighting differences, Postcolonialism as a Western representation of the 'Other' is deconstructed and the individuality of each indigenous literature is emphasised. This does not mean that the basic canons of literary appreciation are thrown to the wind or excused.

Tying two texts like *Dr Wooreddy* and *Heart of Redness* together may prove a difficult task when following the strict principles that govern comparative critical study. I do not mean to express dissimilar concerns in both novels. Rather, my objective in this chapter is to present this study as two novels interrogating some of the myths of colonial history and reconstructing their different histories.



***Dr Wooreddy***

*Negotiating Identity*

*Dr Wooreddy* is a fine example of reconstructing history from an Aboriginal point of view; a view that reflects the culture, reality, worldview and response to the colonisation of Tasmania in particular and with general reference to Australia. The novel is particular about recapturing and representing the history of the Aborigines of Tasmania just before they faced probable extinction. It draws its inspiration mainly from the fragments of white documented history and of the diaries of G.A. Robinson. An unusual blend of fact and fiction, the novel asserts the author's claim that in terms of artistic definitions, Aboriginal culture 'lies outside European conventions' (Mudrooroo 170). The text shows the need to reclaim and reconnect to the past even if that past were in fragment form in order to understand the present. It is in this project of reclaiming, exploring and reconstructing history not just to a white readership but first to indigenous people that Australian Indigenous writing shares a central concern with other postcolonial literatures in general. It is in this sense that that they must be engaged with the 'scars of history'.

Mudrooroo is therefore in tune with other postcolonial novelists in his (re)construction of historical myths on which official history thrived and he takes on the burden and responsibility of being a teacher as well as an artist. Chinua Achebe claims that this responsibility entails that 'the past needs to be recreated not only for the enlightenment of... detractors but even more for our own education' (3). The 'our' could be extended to all indigenous peoples.

There are three broad purposes, which the text serves. First, it deconstructs the white myths of colonialism by replacing them with an assertive cultural one. Secondly, it reviews and reconstructs history from an Aboriginal point of view.

Thirdly, it subtly recommends a truce in the form of a call to an understanding between the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised.

*Dr Wooreddy* reconstructs myth by first deconstructing three colonial myths: the myths of Social Darwinism, *Terra Nullius*, and Aboriginal passivity and primitiveness (which in part is predicated upon the social Darwinian theory which has been part of white Australian official history) and then seeks to overturn the myth of *Terra Nullius* with a fictive attempt to reconstruct the history and cultural heritage of Bruny Island. The author replaces the myth of Social Darwinism with a cultural one by attempting to present and explain the cause and effect of the colonial contact and the process of colonialism from an Aboriginal worldview.

Social Darwinism invokes the philosophy of Charles Darwin in *The Origin of Species*. It was founded upon such premises as 'survival of the fittest' among a numbered lot. This was usually summoned to defend military, imperialist and capitalist positions in a global framework. The concept of Social Darwinism could be equated with racism especially during much of the nineteenth century. Racism in turn rationalised much of the imperialism that followed colonialism. The works and ideas of Charles Darwin in *The Origin of the Species* and *The Descent of Man* indirectly have been applied to society in the form of Social Darwinism. Social Darwinism postulates a grading of the races into a hierarchy. Part of this claim was that Blacks, African and Aborigines, were savages and were thus placed at the bottom of the scale, next to apes. The implication of this was that they were physically, mentally and socially inferior to Europeans. The application of this theory led to the use of such terms as 'savages', 'a dying race', 'child-like', 'child race'. Social Darwinism thus justified racial violence with the use of the concept 'survival of the fittest'. The various races were analogised to animal species that are

in constant competition to survive, where the strong preys on the weak to survive. Thus, the popular belief then was that, when two races encounter each other, the stronger and by implication superior, prevails while the inferior race gradually dies away or becomes extinct. Hence 'victory' over the Aborigines was seen as the fitness and ability of the white race to survive and progress. Social Darwinism only helped to confirm Europe's racism and served as a persuasive excuse for the violence involved in perpetuating their greed.

The idea that the Tasmanian calamity was merely a product of social-Darwinian experience is challenged, rejected and reversed in *Dr Wooreddy*. The concept of the Other, Boehmer argues:

is built on the thought of, *inter alia* Hegel and Sartre, [and] signifies that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to a dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined. The West thus conceived of its superiority relative to the perceived lack of power, self-consciousness, or ability to think and rule, of colonized peoples. Psychoanalysis, too, in particular as refracted by Lacan, has postulated that self-identity is constituted within the gaze of another (21).

In Mudrooroo's text, the colonisers become the 'Other' and the Aborigines (humans) view the Europeans through the same lens with which they were viewed. They become humans while the European 'Other' is reduced to a 'ghost' or '*num*'. The Aborigines become the subjects through which history is recounted and the Europeans are presented as secondary, the 'objects of curiosity' to the Aborigines who do the observations. This role reversal is striking because previous Australian history up till the 1960s regarded Aborigines as mere 'footnotes' and as an unfortunate minority whose worldview was termed 'primitive', their versions of history being classified as myth and never given a place with the dominant mainstream Australian history. Henry Reynolds, in *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* deals with this issue of European and Aboriginal misunderstanding at great length. There is a strong sense of reversal found in Mudrooroo's text. In *Dr*.

*Wooreddy*, the Aborigines are regarded as humans while the humanity of the European colonists is challenged when they are referred to as ghosts. At the onset of colonisation, European colonisers considered the original owners of the land they conquered as 'objects of curiosity' and in many cases as lesser humans. The natives then needed to be lifted up the cadre of civilisation. They were classified as 'primitive', 'crude', 'savage', 'uncivilised'. The novel reverses the roles and takes the indigenous characters as not only the main characters of the plot but reverses their roles. The very traits that Europeans are characterised with are transferred onto the Aborigines while the European characters are constructed as savage and primitive. Europeans thus become the 'other' in the Aboriginal space. This 'other' becomes the object of inquiry as they encounter the colonised.

In regarding the Europeans as *nums*, which is an indigenous word for 'ghosts', their humanity is being challenged. Their appearance and actions are not worthy of dignified humans with which the Aborigines consider themselves. 'They glared with such violence and absence of love that she realized that they had penetrated into one of the lairs of the ghosts and finally found them to be in reality as in theory: unhuman!' (80). When the Europeans first landed on the coast, they were believed to be the departed souls of dead indigenes. Hence, the overt connotation of 'ghosts' they are constantly referred to in the novel.

The *Dr Wooreddy* text deconstructs European supremacy by positing that it is not the military might or superiority of the Europeans that brought them to Australia using Tasmania as a specific case; but their succession was a result of the invitation and cooperation of Ria Warrawah, an evil element in Aboriginal spiritual worldview:

Once in the time of our grandfathers, a small piece of darkness, fashioned by the very thought of Ria Warrawah, came floating along on the sea. Ria Warrawah manifested himself as a cloud and pulled the island along. He pulled to Adventure Bay and left it there. Our grandfathers watched from the shore. They saw the black sticks by which Ria Warrawah had held it as he pulled it along. Then a piece of the

island broke away and came crawling across the sea towards them. Our hidden grandfathers watched on. The creature touched the land. It carried pale souls which Ria Warrawah had captured. They could not bear being away from the sea and had to protect their bodies with strange skins. They spoke and the sounds were unlike any that had been heard (3-4).

This text accounts for the cause of colonialism as a resultant effect of a 'split' in the spiritual forces that govern the mythic world of Aboriginal Australia. 'Ria Warrawah...had brought the num from their far islands to plague the humans. This was how things stood!' (13). Thus, in accounting for the invasion, only a challenge of the force of good by the force of evil could bring about this sudden change. The *nums* represent all that is evil to the Aborigines in Bruny Island and the only link they could possibly have, from the Aboriginal point of view, is Ria Warrawah. Colonialism, summarily put, resulted in breaking 'the tie between earth and man' for the Aborigine (Johnson 35).

Mudrooroo further denounces the *Terra Nullius* myth by consciously revealing the deep cultural values and systems that existed prior to and at the inception of colonisation. Bruny Island had an established structure of administration, kinship, marital, family, religion and other social lore. Mudrooroo also deconstructs the myth of *Terra Nullius* that justified the 'invasion'. He does this by reconstructing the life, values and customs of the people of Bruny Island. They are presented in the text not as a primitive race of no-good people but as a group of people with a high and sophisticated system of living. This is seen in their sense of courtship and marriage, and hierarchy in the leadership roles the people played. Also, within families, they had a system of survival laid down. A close look at the text reveals how particular the author is about this theme, so much so that in the comparisons he makes in examining blacks and whites, he indirectly but subtly is advancing the same myth of superiority the early settlers put forward.

Bruny Island, in the text, is described as a 'rich island' (1) with an established culture, a religion, an organisation and an equally rich language. The language of Bruny Island is described with exceptional care. Magana's conversation with Wooreddy is made in the 'rich language of an elder. It was part gesture, part expression, part pure feeling allied to a richness of words molded together in a grammatical structure complex with the experience of the life lived' (22). The colonial encounter not only stripped Bruny islanders of their lives lost and their culture but it also stripped them of their language which was a strong defining element in defining relationships and life and language is often a toll of identity. Bruny Islanders had an established culture where they referred to women as providers in the sense that they do much of the food gathering while the men hunted and partook in ceremonies and rituals (5, 22, 26-27). They also had an established system of courtship and marriage (45-48). They were also a deeply religious people. Religion ruled every area of their lives and this was often termed as Law. The Law regulated every aspect of their lives with laid down procedures for attitudes to elders, speech, family relationships and various other rites to mention but a few. This Law also inscribed punishment for those who deferred. The Land is a strong definitive element in Aboriginal spirituality. It is said to 'speak' in the sense that Aborigines consider themselves one with the land: 'He had not determined to return home, but forces had determined that he return home. One such force was that of the earth of his home' (19).

It can be said that this novel, in the words of Joanne Tompkins, 'offers a glimpse of a "new world" to white readers, and, more significantly, returns dignity to indigenous peoples' (496). Thus Mudrooroo can be said to have helped Aboriginal society 'regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration

and self-abasement' (Achebe 3). Achebe's prescription for the African writer seems to echo into Aboriginal writing. He suggests that the first task of writers is to represent truly the 'real' history of their people. Just like the African, he says they 'did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity' (8). This 'dignity', Achebe claims, is what was lost and the writers' aim should be towards reclaiming it and this they can do with 'a proper sense of history' (8).

The Aborigines were also stripped of the unique cultures that had been their identity and a strong source of strength for tens of thousands of years. Under the colonial system their culture was regarded as barbaric, inferior and savage. Colonialism spread European civilisation out to the other parts of the world. The results of this process are cultural changes and an introduction (sometimes assimilation in certain instances) to the culture and worldview of the colonist which led to hybridising the indigenes. This is popularly defined as 'civilisation'. This 'civilisation' often involved making the natives renounce their worldviews, customs and values and ways of life and adopt European worldviews. Thus, terms like 'primitive' and 'savage' found justification when comparing Europe and its 'other'. 'European colonisers held the conviction not merely that the world could be understood in its terms, but that the rest of the world also could and indeed should be encouraged to interpret reality in a European way' (Boehmer 79).

The *Terra Nullius* myth is a hotly contested term in Australian academia. *The Encarta World Dictionary* defines 'Terra Nullius' as 'the idea and legal concept that when the first Europeans arrived in Australia the land was owned by no one and therefore opened to settlement.' Reynolds posits that the Australian colony thrived

under this premise in furthering its political, social and economic ends during colonisation; hence no treaty was signed with the indigenous peoples as was the practice of the British Empire in several other places that had been colonised (81-86). Keith Windschuttle argues otherwise, claiming that ‘the Tasmanian Aborigines did not own the land. The concept was not part of their culture’ because they had no understanding of ‘exclusive possession of territory and the defence of it by law or force neither did they have words for “land”, “own”, “possess”, or “property”’ (110-111). Bain Attwood argues that the concept was never part of British Common Law but was a concept in International Law. By this he dismisses the concept arguing that it is unfair to transplant contemporary terms onto historical events. However, he acknowledges that ‘in historical terms the term *terra nullius* does encapsulate...Aboriginal people had no right to land so in that sense it’s not incorrect to apply the term *terra nullius* in historical terms’ (3).

In *Dr Wooreddy*, the Aborigines are constructed from passivity to activity in their resistance against White occupation. There is hardly any record of a collective Aboriginal resistance documented but records tell of instances where indigenes made ‘trouble’ for the early settlers and how they were dealt with accordingly. Some of the striking instances have been captured in Aboriginal fiction: Mudrooroo’s *Long Live Sandawara* for example. In *Dr Wooreddy*, at a point in time, attacking the ‘nums’ became part of a status marker of manhood—‘participation in an action against them had assumed the status of an initiation rite’ (16).

In *Dr Wooreddy*, this is more subtly put. The ‘nums’ are the destructive ones while the Aborigines only fight in defence of their culture. This is indeed contrary to many eurocentric accounts where they were presented as troubling savages. *Dr Wooreddy* represents them as a group of people who only fought in defence and



sometimes revenge as in the case where Truganana kills the sealer who once raped her and her sister killed the sealer who killed her baby. Wooreddy and the others carry a gun in case they are attacked for they were resigned that 'it is the times' for 'where the ghosts ruled, human life was constantly under threat, and familiar things were banished' (97). In another instance, the 'cynical Ummarraah reasons that since the numbs give them nothing but death, they must be on their guard and fight against this ghost and his pernicious lies' (117).

Aborigines in historical discourse have been presented as passive in trying to defend their territories and ward off the colonisers. It is reported that this resistance usually resulted in the cost of further violence against them and their tribes. This was partly because their weapons were no match for the technology of the colonisers. The Tasmanian frontier particularly saw very bitter struggles. They continued to fight even when their numbers were being depleted. The resistance was so effective that they killed more of the British than in other places in Australia to a ratio of one to four in Tasmania compared to one to ten (Reynolds 3; Ryan 122, 174). In the text, Wooreddy once faced the dilemma of using or not using 'ghost weapons' when he found himself confronting muskets and not the spears he was used to. The 'thought flashed through his mind that the group had passed beyond the theological argument of whether humans should use ghost weapons or not' (115). Reynolds argues that it was not the intention of the government of South Australia to exterminate the natives. He does not deny, like his counterpart Windschuttle, the fact that violent harm was done to the natives and that the natives fought back to defend their land. Windschuttle believes, however, that the movement of the Aborigines from Bruny Island to Wybalenna may have hastened their deaths for there their encounter with diseases killed them off faster than the physical violence of the whites. He argues

that 'there is no available evidence at all to suggest that it was the intention of the colonial government to affect the extinction of the Tasmanians' (85). Whatever the perspective of the arguments, it remains that the Aborigines suffered terrible loss of lives at the hands of the early settlers who out of a combination of both racism and a fatal terrible misunderstanding inflicted mortal injury upon them. Reynolds' text cited above is full of recorded instances of individual accounts of such ills.

Mudrooroo indirectly points out the preconceptions and misconceptions that cultures have of each other when they clash at colonisation. European classification, however, as history records, tends to underwrite the identity of the indigenous peoples. *Dr Wooreddy* seems to have achieved this same purpose in transferring these myths and stereotypes from the Aborigine 'Other' onto the European 'Self'. The White colonisers regarded as 'num' were at first thought to be agents of Ria Warrawah. Wooreddy with the passage of time realises that they are human as well and were capable of both evil and good though their actions in the text reveal that they were mostly prone to evil. The purpose is achieved especially through the focus it places on the central character of Wooreddy in relation to the character of 'Fader'.

Stereotypical myths with which Aborigines were circumscribed are revised and reconstructed here. The myths of passivity, savagery and unintelligence, particularly, are reconstructed. Whites and Blacks are placed side by side and compared. The negative stereotypes Aborigines have been tagged with are transferred onto European figures in the text. Conversely, the qualities by which Europeans are categorised and defined are consciously transferred onto Aborigines who are the privileged subjects in the novel. In deconstructing the *Terra Nullius* myth, the text also reverses roles. As Wooreddy studies the 'nums', he finds them contrasting to the normal expectations of being human.

The character of Wooreddy is the symbol of the reconstruction of the Aboriginal image. The novel focuses on his character in reconstructing the history of the colonial contact from an Aboriginal point of view. This is a conscious reversal knowing that European historical records of Tasmanian were often constructed around the figure of Truganini (known as Truganana in this text). Wooreddy is presented as a kind of shaman, a traditional doctor who is vested with traditional knowledge and healing powers and also has a sharp wit for studying (albeit scientifically) not only the new race, which has appeared on his land but comprehending traditional mysteries as well. Even as a young child, his intelligence was remarkable and outstanding:

Wooreddy was only a ten-year-old, but he thought such thoughts. Born between the day and night, he had a fascination for things that lured and threatened. He walked onto the beach thinking of charms and omens, mysteries and things hidden in the dark cave of the mind.

Though only a small boy, Wooreddy already had wriggled many times to the side of few irascible old men as they sat theorizing on life and its mysteries (2)

Wooreddy is presented as a seer with powerful foresight who can predict the ending of the world. 'Ria Warrawah...had brought the num from their far islands to plague the humans. This was how things stood!' (13). He is an intellectual with abilities like that of an anthropologist who is able to study the 'nums' while making sense of the events as they unfolded. 'In the long run, to survive meant accepting that the ghosts were here to stay and learning to live amongst them or at least next to them until—until the ending of the world!' (19). He not only could foretell events but also the fate of people.

As a shaman he can see into the future and foretell the end of the world. During the process of his initiation, he falls into a trance and receives a vision of the apocalypse of Bruny Island:

This account explained the ships sailing past to form the first European settlement on the Derwent River, but it did not explain Wooreddy's enlightenment which he now endured. Nothing from this time on could ever be the same—and why? Because the world was ending! This truth entered his brain and the boy, the youth and finally the man would hold onto it, modifying it into harshness or softness as the occasion demanded (4).

He is also shown to be an expert in tribal lore who participates in debates about issues of the Law that even effected a change once. He knew all the rites that marked and defined different stages of life and had the Law so ingrained in him that the times that marked the ending of the world could not erase the culture of his people. 'Even in these times as many as possible of the old ways should be kept up' (59). Hence, through Wooreddy the internal life of the colonised is represented through fiction. He is not one dull, witless and emotionless native but someone with deep intelligence capable of both good and evil.

It is mostly through the character of Fader that the myths that Mudrooroo aims at reversing and reconstructing are revealed. At different points in time, he refers to the Aboriginals as a 'pitiful race friendless and alone in a dark and hostile world', 'poor pitiful child', 'childman', 'sable friends', 'child-like creatures', 'poor creatures' (30, 40, 41, 49, 59). Fader is also the only European character that Mudrooroo gives a voice in the novel. His attitudes to the Aborigines are born of these revealed prejudices. He considers himself as saviour to the Aborigines, as superior to them and also as a father to and connotatively a leader of them. The assumption is that they were ignorant and thus needed to be put straight. Wooreddy is wise to spot these attitudes and feels insulted but resolves that it is 'the times': 'The Aborigines soon discovered that their ally considered himself superior to them. They were to be 'children' to his 'father'' (33). Upon Robinson's (also known as 'Fader') arrival at Bruny Island, his response to the Aborigines and the role he was to

assume as a consequence is reflected in the expression he makes when he shakes Wooreddy's hand:

The num grabbed, and succeeded in capturing Wooreddy's hand. It lay limply in the grasp, while the pink-petalled lips began fluttering out sounds, which were gibberish to the man. 'Such a poor, poor creature! Such a wretched being bereft of everything we civilized people hold dear. How right was I not to listen to my wife and friends who sought to dissuade me from this charitable and necessary task. No matter the hazard, it is truly the Lord's work and I will persevere (30).

Christian missionaries played a role in the whole process of colonialism in its mission to 'civilise' the native (who is termed 'primitive') by converting him or her to Christianity. This act of conversion usually involved denouncing all things that were culturally significant to the native and taking up European languages (English in particular) and ways of life. This was believed by the early settlers to have upgraded their humanity. Gregory Smithers argues that:

The desire to convert Aborigines to Christianity was consistent with a deep-seated British ethno-centrism. Ideas about religious difference constituted an important element in British racism, expressed through cultural forms like Christianity. This made it possible to come to terms with the duality of a religion preaching equality before God, but which presided over inequality on earth (498).

However, such efforts were often reached with disappointing results and with the belief that these races would gradually die out. Thus White history records accounts of the fervour with which anthropologists recorded some of these languages with the aim of preserving the remains of a 'dying race'. Anne McGrath claims that Tasmanian Aborigines have a 'strong sense of having been shaped by a particular oppressive and destructive history...viewed as inferior and socially excluded' (308-09). Hence, a knowledge of their past has been 'crucial to their regaining an even stronger sense of cultural pride' (ibid).

At the onset of European settlement, Aborigines were considered to be primitive, lesser beings. Historical records and diaries of early settlers', record that Aborigines were believed to have less mental capacity than their European

counterparts. They were to be raised to civilisation thus in *Dr Wooreddy*: ‘the Great Conciliator strongly believed that Aborigines should be segregated from Europeans until they could be raised to a superior stage of Christian civilisation’ (67).

Civilisation here, meaning: adapting to and assimilating into European ways of life. Mudrooroo records the events and occurrences of *Dr Wooreddy* with a certain level of historical accuracy. The characters in *Dr Wooreddy* bear the same names and encounter some of the same experiences, as do their historical forbears. They are reconstructed from history and made to serve the purposes of the author. Mudrooroo gives them a voice and a mind of their own, and an identity, which is hardly available in white historical records. In this sense, *Dr. Wooreddy* can be said to be a ‘novel of recovery’ because it not only positions the Aborigine at the centre of events but gives voice to a people who have been silenced since ‘contact’, allowing them to tell their side of the colonial story.

Historical records indicate that Mangana was chief of the Bruny Island tribe and father to Truganana (often spelt ‘Truganini’). Mangana lost his wife to death at the hands of British men and his two daughters, Moorina and Lowernuhe, were kidnapped and abducted. Wooreddy had two sons from his first wife who died and he later married Truganana. Walyer was ‘a six-foot tall woman...described as an ‘Amazon’; the tribal leader, she stood on a hill giving orders for the men to spear the whites’ (McGrath 317). *Dr Wooreddy* also mirrored other historical experiences. It records the first Tasmanian/European contact (4). It also records the activities of the sealers and their dubious activities with native women, and the violent conflicts between whites and Aborigines who often stood no chance with the Europeans.

It is this historical accuracy that makes it difficult to classify the text rigidly as fiction. *Dr Wooreddy* weaves history and fiction together while destabilising the

boundaries of fiction writing. Mudrooroo argues strongly that ‘Genres have developed as a European way of categorizing works of literature...The Aboriginal writer is led to believe that there are fixed categories of literature to which he or she must conform’ (170). *Dr Wooreddy* thus destabilises the western canons of established fiction writing. I believe there are two reasons why a ficto-historical novel like *Dr Wooreddy* is effective. First, I will echo the author who says that the awfulness of man’s inhumanity to man needed to be dealt with ‘until it becomes accepted as part of official Australian history’ (Mudrooroo 25). Secondly, it is necessary to make Aboriginal people realise that ‘many of their problems are based on a past which still lives within them’ (ibid).

### *Forging futures*

Mudrooroo indirectly points out the preconceptions and misconceptions that cultures have of each other when they clash at colonisation. European classification, however, as history records reveal, underwrites the identity of the Indigenous. In spite of the fact that the text is guilty of transferring the same stereotypes it wishes to denounce from the aboriginal ‘Other’ onto the European ‘Self’, it succeeds at ‘lessening the power of the White mind over the Indigenous soul’ (Knudsen 119). This it does by very consciously undermining the European stereotypes of Aborigines.

The Aboriginal characters in *Dr Wooreddy* see the world completely from their own point of view. Hence, the biases can be justified because it balances the representation and misunderstanding that existed and persisted at the colonial encounter. To the European characters, the Aborigines were primitive, savage and so on. In appraising them, Fader draws on the biblical account of the tower of Babel, and then dismisses it: ‘This caused him to frown and stare at the members of the so-

called child-race, supposedly primitive. He could almost picture them as the primordial parents, though this was absurd. These people had fallen from the heights of civilisation which had begun the construction of the tower of Babel' (63).

The Aborigines are not spared the transfer of this misgiving and misunderstanding. They regard the Europeans as 'nums' (spirit) and evaluate them as downgraded in relation to themselves:

He knew much more about the ghosts too. The good doctor decided to use the short voyage (and to keep his mind off the sea) by learning all he could about the ghosts from Ummarrah. He questioned him about the social structures of the num...'They have families as we do, but they are not very important to them. Instead they leave such natural groupings to cling together in clans called 'convicts', 'navy', and so on. You can identify which group they belong to by the colour of their coverings...' The information perplexed the good doctor. It needed analyzing as well as clarifying. A social system on groupings other than those of kin seemed impossible (61-62).

Mudrooroo is rigorous and committed in this approach to rewriting history as fiction because he not only tells events but also does some probing in the form of a psychological analysis of the colonial encounter between Europe and Indigenous Australia. He simply probes human nature by revealing what takes place when two different and strange races encounter each other. It is because of this misconception that one race can qualify and justify itself as superior and downgrade the other. By reversing the roles and making Aborigines Subject rather than Object and 'Other', Mudrooroo succeeds in deconstructing the myth of social Darwinism that Europe used in justifying the colonial encounter with Indigenous Australia.

The European view of the Aborigine was often one of contempt. They were said to have 'the very zero civilization' (Cunningham 11, 39). Thus through the character of Robinson, these biases become more vocally expressed. They are 'children' with 'primitive religious beliefs' and so they can be talked down to:

He talked down to Wooreddy on religion and much to his surprise found that these children of nature had some faint inkling of a creator god. Wooreddy equated the Christian god with Great Ancestor and gave the name: Parllerde...He did manage to learn that they also had the concept of the devil, called Ria Warrawah' (35).



Wooreddy's encounter with Waau and the eventual visit to the cave opened up a new world and experience for him. Wooreddy encounters in Waau a 'brother' with 'difference'—in terms of different perception and different worldview. Waau tells him that the opposite is true to his clan of what Wooreddy believes of Ria Warrawah. Unlike Wooreddy's clan, Waau's clan faces Ria Warrawah and gains power. Wooreddy's mythic mind enlarges when he realised that things were not the simple black and white he had known them to always be. He realised that 'everything comes in twos, but behind them stands only one' (196). Wooreddy is positioned in this discourse as a subject with a 'mythic mind' that is perceptive and can transcend the limitations of rigid stereotypes and preconceptions. This ability enables him to understand and accommodate new experiences, especially an experience so profound that it connects all beings to one essential source.

This realisation is a subtle call to all, White and Black alike, to enlarge their understanding to receive, comprehend and accept differences as an essential element in the human experience. The symbolism of this experience cannot be ignored or overemphasised. Prior to this experience, both Aborigines and Europeans observed one another with suspicion, fear, mistrust, and vagrant misunderstanding. The experience represents Wooreddy's epiphany and it is one that the writer invites all to participate in.

In spite of the less effective elements of the text, I believe it is a very effective work overall when considered in the light of the purpose the text set out to achieve and in the era in which it was first published. It was an era when Aborigines

began to assert their voice and identity by reclaiming their history and coming to terms with the dreary past of colonialism that they had encountered and survived.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Heart of Redness***

#### *Negotiating identity*

Colonial rule was also psychological and was just as damaging (and often more so) than the physical subjugation indigenous peoples were made to go through. The colonised is made to view the world from within the coloniser’s system. This radically altered the worldview of the colonised. This Eurocentric essentialism was often taught and imposed as the ‘truest’ worldview. The result is that the colonised is then made to see his/her cultural values as ‘uncivilised’, ‘barbaric’, ‘primitive’, ‘devilish’, and the pursuit to rescue them is done sometimes with ‘missionary’ zeal.

In *Heart of Redness*, the binaries of civilisation and primitiveness are drawn up with history and laid alongside the present and allowed to interrogate each other. Debates over the postcolonial themes of Europe and its ‘Other’ also strongly come to bear in this debate. The text also examines the legacies of colonialism in contemporary times.

The historical plot of the text is set in colonial South Africa in the 1850s that encapsulates the cattle killing episode. A young girl named Nonquawuse claimed in a prophecy that the ancestors had appeared to her at a pool and had called on the indigenous people to kill their cattle, tear down their huts and build new ones and not to cultivate their lands, after which they would appear to replace the losses and drive the Europeans into the sea. Not everyone succumbed to this message and a divide

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<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered that Mudrooroo (then Colin Johnson) wrote this text as an historical revision—to give a written Aboriginal version of their history and to restore their dignity. Deeper criticism can be directed at the adaptation of this text into *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*.

was created making the people into Believers and Unbelievers (in Nonquawuse's vision). A combination of this prophecy and the schism among the people enabled the Europeans eventually to win the war that had raged for over sixty years through a combination of colonial might and the devastating consequences of the Indigenous peoples' creed.

The contemporary plot is set in the recent post-colonial South Africa, now emerged from a white minority rule which was built upon the racial policies of Apartheid. This new South Africa is plagued by a new kind of divide between exiles and non-exiles who were around to 'dance the freedom dance' (31), then in Qolorha between the original descendants of the original division of Unbelievers and Believers. In the contemporary family who share a history of 150 years dating back to the 1850s, Zim represents the Believers while Bhonco represents the unbelievers. They are the twin sons of a Xhosa patriarch, Xikixa, a patrician of the great place of King Sarhili. Xikixa met his death at the hands of English soldiers who cut off his head for 'scientific enquiry' in the aftermath of which he was always referred to as the headless ancestor in the text. His sons, Twin and TwinTwin became divided over issues of belief in prophets and prophecies especially over Nonquawuse's vision and prophecies about the 'new people'. Bhonco is spokesperson and representative of the Unbelievers who claim to embrace civilisation in terms of development, which they equate with progress while Zim represents the 'red' people who bear more traditional, and community values. Their conflict is shown to intensify just as the conflict of the first generation ancestors did.

*Heart of Redness* reveals that colonisation is hardly ever completely 'post'; the legacies are as real as colonialism itself and reflect through contemporary global capitalism. The city developers for a vast casino resort map out Qolorha-by-Sea, a

small village, for their project. This proposal divides the people as much as it did over a century back when their ancestors tried to resist colonialism and were split by their allegiance and non-allegiance to the prophecies of Nonquawuse. They play out their tensions not only over the casino proposal but also in every day matters while issues of the past often infuse into the present and determine the values they hold. The feud between them is closely interwoven with the historical narrative and both plots mirror each other’s intensity. The contemporary fictional narrative becomes more like an inverted parody of the historical discourse.

The text invites us to cautiously examine the concept of civilisation.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that the word has a range of meanings and Robert Young argues in *Colonial Desire* that these meanings have their roots in one word—culture—which has gradually evolved over time into a range of meanings. The extension to equate colonialism with civilisation was slow but certain. Colonisation, Young further argues, ‘rests at the heart of culture, or culture always involves a form of colonisation, even in relation to its conventional meaning as the tilling of the soil’ (31). Hence to colonise means bringing civilisation across the borders of Europe into the hinterlands of the ‘primitive’. Young believes that the ‘social reference of cultivation was allied to the earlier distinction between the civil and the savage’ (32). Its meaning then evolved to embrace ‘the dominant Enlightenment sense of the achieved but still progressive secular development of modern society’ (32). A further

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<sup>2</sup> *Encarta World Dictionary* defines civilisation as:

1. HIGHLY DEVELOPED SOCIETY a society that has a high level of culture and social organization
2. ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY an advanced level of development in society that is marked by complex social and political organization, and material, scientific, and artistic progress
3. ADVANCED SOCIETY IN GENERAL all the societies at an advanced level of development considered collectively
4. POPULATED AREAS places where people live, rather than uninhabited areas
5. COMFORT the level of material comfort that somebody is used to
6. CIVILIZING PROCESS the process of creating a high level of culture and ending barbaric or primitive practices in a particular society or region.

expansion of the meaning defined it through racial difference, by what civilisation is not. White skin therefore became both a marker of and product of civilisation. This emphasis, Young claims ‘invokes the state of the other, historical or non-european, societies’ (35). Hence, he claims that at the height of colonisation, ‘civilisation itself had become identified with colonialism and the project of imperialism’ (ibid).

The text clearly explores the concept of civilisation and its opposite savagery. It explores that civilisation is not to be equated with being European and neither is being African with barbarism or savagery. The bringers of so-called civilisation express both barbaric and civilised tendencies just as much as the very natives in turn express both barbaric and civilised tendencies. This in essence deconstructs the myth of European racist supremacy that justified much of the colonising enterprise in earlier centuries. One of the things Mda tries to do in the novel is to explore what constitutes the binaries of savagery and civilisation. One of the ways he achieves this, I argue, is not by a direct transfer of stereotypes from the colonised native to the European coloniser, as Mudrooroo does in *Dr Wooreddy* but by exploring how these values came about and how they are reflected through the minds of the contemporary characters in the actions and decisions they make. It is important to consider that colonialism constructed the mind of the natives and made them in turn view themselves just as the colonisers viewed them—in comparison to the coloniser, inferior, uncivilised and ‘Other’ to the European self. This, Mda explores in the way he juxtaposes his characters with varying levels of perception. Of these characters, Camagu and Xoliswa stand out because they represent the young and educated South Africans in the new post-apartheid world who in spite of academic training construct themselves based on certain ingrained ideologies which reflect differently from what Mda encourages and what he rejects.

A text like *Heart of Redness* then, from a postcolonial standpoint, dissolves the binaries of civilisation and savagery. It becomes clear that both the black and white races are presented with civilised and savage tendencies. This is because the writer has no intention of essentialising any race. What Mda examines is that the constituents of civilisation are values that conserve, understand and appreciate differences and seek to understand and unify forces in ensuring a viable future. This is seen in the way the characters are structured in the text. Bhonco has some cultural conservation even though he equates civilisation with economic progress and development. Progress and development means having a casino in the village and making Qolorha look more like Europe. His wife, NoPetticoat is conservative of cultural attires and, though she is forced to give them up by her daughter, she sees nothing wrong with them. She, too, shifts position and not only begins to wear *isikhakha* skirts, use red ochre and smoke a long pipe but in the end she joins the corporation of women Camagu is running who makes these skirts. Xoliswa Ximiya, the school principal and unmarried only daughter of Bhonco presents an extreme angle in what she claims to be real civilisation. Civilisation to her is a complete denunciation of all things African so much so that she can talk of planting ‘civilized trees’ by which she means European trees to replace indigenous ones. Having the resort in Qolorha would definitely bring in tourists of the likes of Dolly Paton and Eddie Murphy. Civilisation to Xoliswa is denying and forgetting the past. ‘Xoliswa Ximiya freezes at the mere mention of Nonquawuse’s name. There is a very strong anti-Nonquawuse sentiment around the table. ‘Those people—why can’t they let that part of our shame rest in peace?’ she asked pleadingly’ (68). Xoliswa Ximiya has a distorted notion of civilisation. For her civilisation means the putting away of African culture and values and embracing economic advancement. Her character

reflects a 'colonial mentality'; one that associates white with everything good and black with everything bad. She represents the modern Xhosa woman—educated and civilised by which she echoes the kind of civilisation which Grey proposes, one in which the colonised adopt European ways of thinking and way of life and forfeit their own. Hence, she is swift to repudiate the cultural values and customs of the Xhosa people, which to her represent 'redness'. But Qukezwa, though less educated, is able to understand that economic advancement does not necessarily equate with civilisation.

Camagu is not presented as being a western clone, even though he has lived most of his life—over thirty years—in the U.S. He represents learning and unlearning in the new South Africa. At first, the prospect of building a tourist centre in Qolorha-by-Sea seems a good idea but examined from a different point of perspective, he willingly reconsiders his position. Initially, he wonders why the Believers were so bent on opposing development that the Unbelievers thought would benefit everyone in the village. After an encounter with Qukezwa, he realizes that:

The gambling city may not be the boon the Unbelievers think it will be. It occurs to him that even during its construction, few men from the village, if any, will get jobs. Construction companies come with their own workers who have the necessary experience. Of course, a small number of jobs is better than no jobs at all. But if they are at the expense of the freedom to enjoy the sea and its beautiful harvests and the woods and the birds and the monkeys...then those few jobs are really not worth it (103).

Camagu is also a symbol of self-reliance for the new South Africa. Not finding a job in the city because he would not 'dance the freedom dance', he follows his 'famous lust' to Qolorha-by-Sea where he ultimately settles. There he engages the women in a trading cooperative that fosters community spirit and welfare. He shows what true empowerment means by engaging not only himself but other members of the community. Camagu becomes first an observer and then an unwilling but influential mediator in the conflict between the two camps (105). His

willingness to undergo a re-orientation is a call for the new post-apartheid South Africa. It is a call to shed the colonialist mentality and stereotypes that have bound and limited Blacks up till the present. It is a call for all to examine not only the stereotypes but also the values and motives which empower them. In this sense, Ndibe claims that 'Camagu functions as Mda's incarnation of rebirth...the novelist's new man, a new voice as well as a new conscience for the village that has...the new South Africa. In him, and in the sense of community he strives to foster, lie the seeds of a regenerative humanism' (Ndibe 220). Camagu's postcolonial hybridity could be better appreciated when one considers too the hybridity of John Dalton, the English trader in Qolorha-by-Sea. He is described in the text as one who looks 'like the parody of an Afrikaner farmer' but in actual fact, he is the grandson of an English missionary. He speaks better isiXhosa than most people in the village and has been initiated and 'circumcised in accordance with the customs of the amaXhosa people' (7). One then wonders at the cultural influence and influx both characters have been exposed to without necessarily losing their identities. Hence, they both stand out as Mda's prescription for the new South Africa, one in which there is not just an acceptance of the complex cultural matrix that makes up the country but a breaking down of the cultural and racial barriers that once separated Black and White during colonisation.

To the Unbelievers, the Casino is a symbol of progress and a true sign that civilisation has at last touched the heart of Qolorha-by-Sea. To the Believers, their concern is community driven in preserving what is truly traditional. The fact, they explain, is that such a project would further enhance marginalisation and a possible exclusion of the local people from the economic benefits. The Unbelievers seem to



ally with the Eurocentric implications of the word ‘civilisation’ in the manner in which Grey posits in his colonising enterprise:

Grey was a great reader of the bible—the big book that talked about the true salvation of the true god. Grey believed that all men were equal—well, almost equal—as long as they adopted a civilized mode of dress and decent habits...the Land that he had grabbed in the process was really a very small price to pay for the wonderful gift of civilization (Mda 96).

Even among this camp, there are divisions as to the full implications of the word. The Believers, the red people, hardly ever use the word but their strong views on conservation (animal and environmental) reflect the kind of values that ‘civilisation’ should constitute.

Bhonco Ximiya’s family is an interesting prototype to consider in exploring how Mda and probes the word ‘civilisation’. Bhonco seems to have his own idea of civilisation; NoPetticoat has another, while Xoliswa Ximiya has one of an extreme kind. They all agree in equating civilisation with progress and development especially from an economic point of view, and a denunciation of and opposition to the values of the Believers—especially over the historical impact of Nonquawuse. To Bhonco, civilisation does not imply a complete rejection of his Xhosa ways but a rejection of the Nonquawuse past and a firm belief in economic progress. He, the progeny of TwinTwin, follows after his ancestor’s legacy of exalting unbelief to a cult status. It is a cult which did not support colonialism’s strategies but denounces so-called superstitions which were ‘damnable’:

The cult of the Unbelievers began with TwinTwin, Bhonco Ximiya’s ancestors, in the days of prophetess Nonquawuse almost one hundred and fifty years ago. The revered TwinTwin had elevated unbelief to the heights of a religion. The cult died during the Middle Generations, for people then were more concerned with surviving and overcoming their oppression. They did not have the time to fight about the perils of belief and unbelief...Bhonco, son of Ximiya, resurrected the cult (5-6).

In interrogating Eurocentric interpretations of civilisation, the text also draws attention to its opposite savagery. The text indicts European civilisation as also

encompassing various acts of savagery. Mda does not spare either race of responsibility for the historical participation in acts of savagery. It may sound like an overstatement to say that it is treated as a human condition. In the novel, one particular incident in the historical narrative echoes this theme. Twin and TwinTwin ran into a British camp where the ears of a dead umXhosa soldier were being cut off. TwinTwin asked:

'What are they doing that for? Are they wizards?...or is it their way of removing Iqungu?'

[...]

The amaXhosa believed that the British soldiers had their own iqungu. Therefore, they mutilated the bodies of slain British soldiers to render their iqungu powerless. This was considered savagery of the worst kind by the British, whenever they came across their dead comrades with ripped stomachs on the amathole slopes' (19-20).

Twin explains that it is simply the witchcraft of the white man who called those cuttings 'souvenirs'. Then, to their horror, they see 'the soldiers cut off the dead man's head and put it in a pot of boiling water.' 'They are cannibals too,' hissed Twin-Twin. After they attack the British camp, John Dalton whom they had taken as prisoner of war explains to them:

'We are civilized men, we don't eat people...'

'Those heads are either going to be souvenirs, or will be used for scientific enquiry'.

'"Souvenirs". "Scientific enquiry". It did not make sense. It was nothing but the witchcraft of the white man' (20).

On this account, both parties are guilty of acts of savagery as 'one act of savagery initiates another' (Peires 23). Jeff Peires counsels that 'atrocities breed atrocities, and it would be wrong for the historian to pass judgment on those who killed and tortured in this most merciless of all frontier wars' (23). It is also obvious too that Mda stuck to the version of Peires' account to whom he gives credit in the dedication of the novel as his historical source in constructing the novel. Peires

claims that colonial records do not mention acts of savagery inflicted upon the Xhosas while they were at war with them but the records subtly hint at them. However, details and accounts of body parts being taken for ‘scientific enquiry’ or Phrenology in the Victorian sense were documented. From the British point of view, however, these acts were not regarded as savagery but an analysis from a postcolonial standpoint dissolves the ‘double-voiced, dual perspective [and] splits the difference between Self and Other so that both positions are partial and neither is sufficient unto itself’ (Sewlall 341). Hence, both the acts of Phrenology and the Xhosas cutting up the dead could be regarded as savagery.

During Camagu’s housewarming party, Camagu’s remarks further fuel the war between the Believers and Unbelievers when he says of his visit to the Natural History Museum in London:

He had chanced upon some scientist from his university in the United States who had been given access to examine some items that were not on display. He was shocked to discover that there were five dried-out heads of the so-called Bushmen stored in boxes in some back room of the museum.

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

He complicates the feud further when he adds: ‘The heads of our ancestors are all over Europe...trophies collected in military actions and in executions,’ continues Camagu. ‘Not only heads. In Paris the private parts of a Khoikhoi woman called Saartjie Baartman are kept in a bottle’ (168). Tension rises as this past is revisited and Camagu bares its implication to the crowd before him. The past should be confronted in order for any kind of understanding to be made and hence a pathway to the future forged.

*Forging futures*

Some of the questions the text appears to be asking are: What should indigenous people do after colonialism is over? How should they construct or reconstruct their identity and values in a postcolonial world especially in the new South Africa?

Colonialism constructed the indigenous mind as savage, primitive. The colonised are made to look at their world and reconstruct their values and lives from a Eurocentric point of view. Thus to be civilised meant to renounce all things indigenous. All things indigenous involve manner of dressing, conduct, cultural practices and the adoption of the English language. Colonisation succeeded more through undermining the consciousness and psychology of the colonised.

There is no easy answer to this question, as the text itself reflects. *Heart of Redness* reveals that colonisation is hardly ever completely 'post'; the legacies are as real as colonialism itself and reflect through its contemporary—global capitalism. City developers map out a plan to build a vast casino resort in a small village named Qolorha-by-Sea. This proposal causes a deep division among the two camps just as much as they were divided over a century back when their ancestors tried to resist colonialism and were split by their allegiance and non-allegiance to the prophecies of Nonquawuse. The colonised protagonists play out their tensions not only over the casino proposal but also in everyday matters, while issues of the past often infuse into the present and project the values they hold. The Unbelievers always blame Nonquawuse, who represents their past, for their contemporary ills, hence the strong desire to bury the past and forget it. But burying and forgetting the past does not help to foster the true progress and development the people desire while at the same time, a rigid romanticising of this same past is akin to denying reality. None of these positions is healthy; hence a no-win situation occurs at the end for both Believers

and Unbelievers. The casino is not built, the government declares the place a national heritage site and a community co-operative is then run by members of the village.

The issues in *Heart of Redness* are complex. Mda is not suggesting a return to a pre-colonial past or even a complete acceptance of a postcolonial reality that in many ways reflects neo-colonialism. What I think he does is to propose that there is no easy way out to rebuild a nation in post-apartheid South Africa. He proposes that to pave a way forward, South Africans must confront their past, understand how it shapes the present and resolve the realities of conflict and division and work towards a more tolerant and progressive future attainable by unity and inward cleansing. However, it is recognisable that this is not an easy task. Thus Mda is subtle in his address of the theme of reconciliation.

In post-apartheid South Africa where the issues of forgiveness and reconciliation are still current, Mda proposes through this text the need to examine the past carefully before any progress can be made to the future. Thus, the past is drawn upon to illuminate the tensions of the present. Also, Mda's use of this past is very craftily employed. Contemporary characters bear the same names as their forbears and do in fact reflect some of the idiosyncrasies of their ancestors. There is for example, John Dalton, a contemporary trader whose forbear 'was a trader of a different kind. As a missionary he was a merchant of salvation' (8). Other characters that reflect this name 're-incarnation' are Qukezwa who takes after a maternal ancestor and Heitsi named after her son.

Historical excavation and reconstruction are often a concern for the project of Postcolonialism as I emphasised at the beginning of this chapter. This past can not easily be forgotten with a wave of the hand or dug out to reproduce suffering and

fuel further malice. It must be dug out, examined to understand where faults and successes lie in order to rebuild a viable future. This seems to be a preoccupation in *Heart of Redness* no matter the angle from which it is viewed. The text reflects this in the way the Unbelievers in a trance travel to the past in order to experience the suffering of their ancestors. Also of note is the comment Camagu makes when he defends his reason for digging up historical accounts even when it further fuels the conflict between the two sects as this sensitive issue is one that is shown to be consciously suppressed:

'You see now?' Dalton says to Camagu:

'That's what you get when you dig out the past that is best forgotten.'

'It is not the past,' says Camagu emphatically. 'It is the present. Those trophies are still there...today... as we speak' (169).

This is precisely one of the issues the text draws attention to: the fact that the past still lives in the present and that to forge a way forward, that past must be confronted and understood to realise not only a sense of healing but so that old myths that ruled the past might not be allowed to dictate the future. The fictional narrative situated in Qolorha-by-Sea could be seen as a parable for the new South Africa; the new South Africa to which Camagu returns and cannot find a place because he did not belong to the group who 'danced the freedom dance' (31); the new South Africa where getting a job is through lobbying rather than fair merit; the new South Africa where violence was a means of getting the authorities to act in certain circumstances; the new South Africa where Black Empowerment was merely a showcasing of black workers while their white masters still remained in the background. Jacobs summarises it thus: 'in Mda's novel the new African Renaissance is as compromised a creed as Nonquawuse's prophecy of the rebirth of the new people. Black empowerment means the enrichment of a chosen few, an elite clique of black businessmen, trade

union leaders and corrupt politicians’ (234). Ndibe claims that: ‘Mda wishes us to see that the past is never a category of antiquity but vitally potent in the present’ (216). He further argues that though the country ‘has officially left behind its odious brew of racial bigotry, the atrocious legacy of apartheid has spawned a disturbingly coarse and festering culture of violence and self-loathing’ (Ndibe 212). It is certain then that the nation ‘is caught in the throes of an implacable past’ (Ndibe 212). ‘Mda wishes us to see that the past is never a category of antiquity but vitally potent in the present...He seeks to show how particular ancient traumas dog contemporary lives, how they disfigure, dismember, and embitter the present’ (Ndibe 216). Hence, *Heart of Redness* is an examination of the ways in which the distant past has shaped and continues to influence the present and a call for change; a change located in postcolonial hybridity and a re-evaluation of creeds and economic, social and mental values.

#### **After-Word: making a connection**

It has become clear in the analysis of the individual texts that there are more differences than similarities between them, which I believe, highlights some of the fundamental differences between the literatures of both regions. However, both texts share the postcolonial concerns of historiography and representation. It is important to note at this point that the South African *Heart of Redness* exudes a wit that is satiric of not only the coloniser but also the native. Thus the satire is a double-edged sword directed at both colonialism and the post-apartheid regime of Black Empowerment. *Dr Wooreddy* also employs satire that is mainly directed at the colonising power. Both texts seem to imply that colonialism is a shared responsibility of the colonised and the colonising power, or at least a process in which each is bound in an uneven struggle.

*Dr Wooreddy* and *Heart of Redness* both engage history but for slightly different purposes. *Dr Wooreddy* does so to denounce stereotypes by reconstructing them and transferring those same myths onto the colonisers. It is a complete reversal of roles where the European 'subject' becomes the 'other' and vice versa. Mudrooroo also gives voice to the history of his people that has been silenced for so long. He rescues history from the books of white Australia by rendering a counter discourse to mainstream Australian history. He uses history to reconstruct the identity of his people and to restore to the Aboriginal soul the dignity that it truly deserves.

*Heart of Redness* engages the subject of history by also using old myths to interrogate present myths in a post-apartheid contemporary South Africa. By juxtaposing a historical narrative and a fictive contemporary discourse, the author reveals that the legacies of apartheid still haunt the present. The text seems to suggest that a collective will in confronting history and participating in a broad range of self-critique is necessary to make progress. Thus, history in both texts achieves the purpose of a literary sense of healing which seeks to forge a way forward by initially knowing and seeking to understand where the indigenous (once colonised) are coming from and then turning the gaze first, inward and around. *Dr Wooreddy* builds a strong voice in denouncing the *Terra Nullius* myth and stating that Australian history did not start with the coming of colonisation but that the indigenous people had a civilisation that had existed tens of thousands years ago. Mudrooroo captures this by positioning Wooreddy in relation to his society. The myth of *Terra Nullius* is not a concern in *Heart of Redness*. Both texts also deflate the Social Darwinian myth upon which much of the colonial encounter was premised. Sir George says, 'The advance of Christian civilisation will sweep away



ancient races. Antique laws and customs will molder into oblivion' (206). This statement seems to summarise what the colonial project was all about.

*Heart of Redness*, just like *Dr Wooreddy*, also deconstructs Social Darwinism. The treatment of this theme in *Heart of Redness* like other similar themes it shares with *Dr Wooreddy*, is subtle. The remarks, views and attitudes of Sir George Grey (who incidentally is connected to Australia and New Zealand historically), are captured in the following exchange:

'You know, in Australia and New Zealand I did the same thing, boasted Sir George. I built an important collection of the languages, customs, and religions of the natives. It is important to record these because they are destined to disappear along with the savages who hold them, don't you think, Gawler?'

[...]

'The advance of Christian civilization will sweep...

'It is already happening...

'...The ruder languages shall disappear, and the tongue of England alone shall be heard all around' (206).

The subtle deployment of symbols and the symbolic discourse is striking in both texts. The trope explored in *The Heart of Redness* is the eponymous 'redness' while the title seems to echo Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The setting of the plot stands out because of the significance it bears in the colonising history of its people. 'Redness' has a double layered meaning, on the one hand connoting backwardness, primitiveness and a reminder of the anguish and folly of the Xhosa people over the prophecies of a young girl which facilitated, albeit unwittingly, the eventual defeat and surrender to British colonial rule. On the other hand, it subtly represents cultural wealth and conservatism as the trope 'red' also represents blood and sacrifice—the life force of any thing living. Thus, it is an attestation to the resilience and survival of

the South African people, though plagued by conflicts and divisions, have survived the onslaughts of the apartheid monster.

In *Dr Wooreddy*, the trope that stands out is the reflection of the three colours at the end of the narrative:

The yellow setting sun broke through the black clouds to streak rays of light upon the beach. It coloured the sea red...Suddenly a spark of light shot up from the beach and flashed through the dark sky towards the evening star. As it did so, the clouds closed again and the world vanished (207).

Such a passage suggests success in spite of the doom that seemed to have completely pervaded the world of Bruny Island. It was a world that though ‘vanished’ yet paradoxically opened up a new one for hope. The subtle indications of resilience in the fictive characters attest to the hope of contemporary Aboriginal generations that have survived today in Tasmania. The colours indicated are symbols of the Aboriginal flag—yellow, black and red. It is certain that the ‘yellow setting sun’ has broken through the ‘black clouds’ of history which is one of denigration and loss and then to reflect a rebirth which ‘coloured the sea red’. The sea is symbolic of a reminder of the originator and bearer of evil, Ria Warrawah who bore the ‘pale souls’ that had come to plague humankind at the inception of the colonisation.

On another symbolic level, *Heart of Redness* hints at the prospect of a future that can be forged through the collective will of the people. In other words, Mda redefines the essence of Black Empowerment as more than just having a degree and getting a place in the South African polity by dancing ‘the freedom dance’ and then being showcased in a display glass. Lefa Leballo is caricatured as the symbol of Black Empowerment but he is actually in the shadows of his bosses when the real decisions concerning the people are to be made. This is in contrast to Camagu who would not play by the rules of the governing party; instead he involves the commoners in a collective and community effort to run first a cooperative and later

another co-operatively owned holiday camp when the village is declared a national heritage site. Mda emphasises that Black Empowerment should be about empowering the grassroots to rebuild their lives in the new South Africa instead of enriching a few corrupt politicians, businessmen.

Mda does not present any one version (Black or White) as the real truth. In this interrogation, Mda deconstructs colonial ways of thinking where civilisation is equated with western culture and primitiveness or barbarianism is synonymous with the indigenous peoples they sought to colonise. The interrogation reveals that civilisation and primitiveness are more like essential parts of humanity—that people are capable of both by choice. It could then be said that both novels ‘attempt to deconstruct colonial subjectivity and to interrogate...the institutionalized ways of colonial thinking so that no one view is presented as the ultimate truth’ (Sewlall 344). In *Heart of Redness*, the amaXhosa soldiers and the English soldiers are both guilty of barbaric acts by cutting off ears and ripping open stomachs of dead warriors. In *Dr Wooreddy*, Mudrooroo explores also this element; both Aborigines and Europeans are seen as being responsible for the misunderstanding that went on at the inception of colonialism. Aborigines downgrade Europeans ‘nums’ as much as they do the Aborigines. Wooreddy jumps at the opportunity of examining patterns of ‘num’ behaviour only to declare them ‘to be in reality as in theory: unhuman!’ (80).

Both texts, in my appraisal, are successful in reclaiming the dignity of Indigenous history and also in using history as a basis for interrogating colonial ways of thinking from a postcolonial view. They are both concerned with using the local history of the catastrophe of both groups against the backdrop of the larger society and proposing ways in which Indigenous people can both comprehend and hence

forge their history and future in the light of the legacy of colonialism and the present challenges which confront postcolonial societies.

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# Conclusion

This thesis has been one of discovery. It began as a question of curiosity; the passage has been one of discovery and the seeming conclusion is still to me, one of new openings. But this is just the beginning of a discovery; an invitation into the school of postcolonial enlightenment, I presume. My curious journey into the postcolonial started with a quest to understand and has thus led me back to the same quest.

In Chapter One, I have situated the study in a theoretical framework for the study of the selected texts. I justified my use of postcolonial theory and criticism as necessary since writing in English from once colonised nations is a hybrid product of the interaction of European theories and other local and cultural modes. However enabling and seductively attractive the theory is, it is still beclouded by some of the problems that have beset it from its inception till now. Stephen Slemon sums it up clearly when he says that ‘problems of definition, object, motive, ground, and constituency are however, exacerbated within the field of post-colonial critical theory’ (178). The critical practice still needs more careful theorisation with emphasis to be placed on local specifics. Hence, its practice should be situated in the local cultures from which these literatures have emerged. To do this would mean focusing more attention on the differences that write these texts rather than the common bond of colonialism which often inspires much of postcolonial criticism. In other words, postcolonial criticism should be situated within these texts rather than the texts situated within postcolonial theory. The texts should be the pivot of the postcolonial critical practice. Therefore in the next two chapters, I turned my critical

gaze to the specific literatures themselves and have used some of the generalisations of postcolonial theory sparingly.

In Chapter Two, I looked at how Sam Watson in *The Kadaitcha Sung* and Simon Barney, Percy Mtwa and Mbogeni Ngema in *Woza Albert!* employed myth in protesting hegemony while they attempt to restore dignity to the indigenous soul. Myth structures are deployed to emphasise an alternate reality which is counter to 'scientific', everyday reality of European discourse and thought. Both texts also contest very strongly Eurocentric representations of history and identity while attempting to define the intricate subject of identity. In *The Kadaitcha Sung*, hybridity, once a derogatory term, becomes a weapon of strength and pan Aboriginal unity which is only useful in juxtaposition with the 'other'. In *Woza Albert!* the subject of 'colour' is redefined and expanded to include all. Besides, the colour 'Black' that was a derogatory symbol becomes a source of pride, dignity and a weapon of combat through mass mobilisation.

In Chapter Three, I have argued that the task of rewriting history is at the heart of much postcolonial writing. I turned my gaze to two specific texts, *Heart of Redness* and *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*. In doing this, the authors, Mda and Mudrooroo boldly confront some of the ideological myths that founded both 'settler colonies'. Mudrooroo achieved this by revising and reconstructing the historical event of the colonial encounter through historical figures like G.A. Robinson, Truganana, Wooreddy and so on though, he clearly reverses the character of Truganana with Wooreddy (Truganana has been widely celebrated through history and literature). Through the character of Wooreddy, he reverses the negative stereotypes Aborigines have been tagged with onto the colonisers. What he achieves is restoring dignity to the Aboriginal soul. The author of the *Heart of*

*Redness* confronts history during and after colonisation and uses it to make sense of the present after the official end of Apartheid in South Africa. He succeeds in revealing how ‘ancient traumas dog contemporary lives, how they disfigure, dismember, and embitter the present’ (Ndibe 216). To do this, he deflates the myths upon which colonialism thrived and weighs it against the contemporary myth of a ‘free’ post-apartheid South Africa. I propose that Mda, the author, does an effective work at interrogating the myths and binaries of civilisation and savagery with which the colonisers defined themselves in relation to the colonised and upon which much of the colonising enterprise was carried out.

Interesting as it seems when deducing similarities between the literature of the two regions, one of the most striking discoveries in this project has been, for me, the realisation that if justice is to be done to the texts, differences must be highlighted and investigations must be made into the historical, social, political, economic, religious and cultural foundations which give rise to these literatures. I believe that it is strikingly difficult to ignore any one of these elements, even though emphasis may be laid on one or more of these elements at any given time.

South Africa and Australia have both encountered Apartheid if Apartheid is to be understood as a system of separating races with one dominating the ‘other’ or ‘others’ as the case may apply. The same policies of separation influenced and governed the government of both countries with the difference being that the ruling race in South Africa was in the minority while the ruled was in the majority; the reverse was the case in Australia. Simply put, the population of the indigenous peoples in both countries differed greatly. Also of significant difference is that South Africa legally endorsed its racism as a system when the Afrikaner ruling party came to power in 1948.



Another point worthy of note is that the ideas and philosophies upon which both indigenous groups draw inspiration from also differ though they may be said to meet in their concern and demand for justice, reconciliation and liberty. These ideas flourished in much of the 1970s and 1980s. For South African fiction, the influences were mostly Black Consciousness (somewhat akin to Negritude), Black Theology and PanAfricanism. These ideas found expression in avant-garde modes mostly imported from America and other West African nations such as Nigeria and Ghana.

In spite of the differences that exist among different postcolonial literatures, I agree with McLeod when he advised that ‘attending to cultural, historical, social, political and geographical difference is paramount; but so is thinking *between* and *across* differences too. Comparative modes of thought remain a valuable means of critique and need not lead to generality and universalism’ (258).

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