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'War is a snake that bites us with our own teeth' : reading war in Southern African literature from 1960 to 2002.

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2011-06-23
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/10176

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ABSTRACT

1960 marked the beginning of a profoundly violent and unstable period in southern Africa's history. Central to the fundamental socio-political changes that took place in the region and many of its countries during this period were a number of wars, the last of which only ended in 2002. While the specific reasons for each of these wars were complex and varied, according to each country, the central roles these wars have played in the creation of the countries they affected – and the region as a whole – are evident to this day. It is, therefore, important to look at the position the writing of war holds in southern Africans' attempts to represent, define and imagine southern Africa and its component countries during and after the experience of war. With this in mind, this study examines the manner in which the texts under scrutiny form a web of creative engagement in the context of a violent and unstable region. The aim of the work is to illustrate that the region's writing of war can be seen to respond to both national and regional concerns and, in doing so, form a platform for an imagining of both nation and region. Methodologically, the research presented in this study is based on a close reading, through extensive contextualisation, of the selected primary texts with a view to understanding the similarities, commonalities and differences present in the region's war writing. It is divided into six chapters which, aside from the Introduction and Conclusion, include readings of texts from Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. The study finds war to be central to the selected texts' presentation of their imaginings of nation and, importantly, to the realisation, defence or dissolution of that imagined nation. Two factors are found to be key to these imaginings: the role of the moment in which the texts are written and the depiction of the role of the hero, in various forms, in the attainment or illustration of the nation. In terms of the study's contentions relating to southern Africa as a region, the readings illustrate that war is central to the manner in which the region

is also imagined by the texts' authors. Additionally, the study reveals imaginings of region that change over time and thus map the shifting configurations of southern Africa formed as political allegiances between countries were transformed, or restructured, by the experience of war. In response to these findings, the study suggests that as a region, southern Africa owes much of its current configuration to the shared experience of war between 1960 and 2002. Paradoxically, therefore, war in southern Africa, as the primary texts show it to function, can be seen to have been socially developmental through the forced creation of a sense of region. This view has implications for the manner in which regions are viewed in other areas of the African continent because, by way of a similar use of war as a point of focus through which to read region in primary texts, the imaginings of other African regions, such as that created by wars in Somalia and Sudan, can be conceptualised and configured.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Sean Anthony Rogers

_____ day of _____ 2011

DEDICATION

To my parents, Mike and Pam Rogers, and to my brother, Craig Rogers, with love and profound gratitude.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Every time I think of the sea off southern Africa's east coast I hear Sugu telling me, "Seani, it should be to start a story at the start". And so that is where I will begin. To Sugu, the greatest storyteller I have ever had the privilege to meet, thank you for teaching me to love stories and to listen to them. It was the long hours spent working with you on your *dhow* that I now recognise as the place where this study began. Sugu's stories were followed by many more which were to bring about my realisation that southern Africa, as I now know it, has a bloody and painful past from which we are slowly emerging. It is, therefore, that I feel a great debt of gratitude to Carl, John, Willie, Juma, Jurie, Morné, Augustine and the many others whose names, but not stories, I have forgotten. Thank you for showing me that the grand narratives of war are written at the expense of a web of countless wartime experiences and stories. I hope that you will find something of what you told me in the pages that follow. Alex, your stories are also there and I know you would have enjoyed finding them. I think of you, and them, every time I order a pink gin.

Throughout my experience as a postgraduate student I have been extremely fortunate to have been guided by caring and astute academics. Without such people I would not have made it beyond honours. Of those I have had the pleasure of being taught by at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I am particularly grateful to Cheryl Stobie, Jill Arnott, Stefan Helgesson, Catherine Woeber, Kai Easton and John van Wyngaard. The passion for literature that these wonderful teachers instilled in me was reinforced and deepened by James Ogude and Bhekizizwe Peterson at the University of the Witwatersrand and I therefore thank them for their advice and comments at various stages of my time at Wits. I would not, however, have thought to study African Literature at Wits had it not been for Isobel Hofmeyr's invitation to

present a paper to the department in 2005. I am, therefore, deeply grateful to her for the interest she showed in my work and for the outcome her faith in my ability has helped to realise. To Merle Govind, thank you for your help with the complexities of university beaurocracy and for joining me in the complaints and jokes. You warm smile has helped me through many frustrating situations.

I find it difficult to express the depth of the gratitude that I feel towards my supervisors, Dan Ojwang and Liz Gunner, but without their insight, dedication and understanding this thesis would have remained just an idea. Liz Gunner recognised my potential in 2003 and has been ensuring that I live up to it ever since. Liz, in many ways, this study represents the realisation of the belief that you have always shown in me and I will always be deeply indebted to you. Dan, without your assurances and conception of a plan designed to rebuild my confidence at a time when I was ready to walk away from this study, I would certainly not have continued with it. I am, therefore, very grateful to you for your guidance at what was a very difficult time for me and for the focus and attention to detail that you have always brought to my work.

I must also thank the many friends and colleagues – Mapule, Kwezi, Big Chris, Bigger Chris, Jacob, Sakhumzi, Eucludes, Reason, Senayon, Thabisani, Jendele, Mekusi, Jaki, Shepherd, Jennifer and Agatha – with whom I have worked and laughed at both the Humanities Graduate Centre and the department of African Literature. I am also very grateful to Sue van Zyl for the many opportunities that her appointment of me as a mentor in and coordinator of the Postgraduate Mentorship Programme have afforded. Her passion for research and teaching has resulted in an ever-growing awareness of many new areas of academic interest.

In a similar vein, I must thank Jayne Southern for the wit and insight she brought to her meticulous editing of my writing.

Margs, George, Mark, Debbie, Rudi, Rian, Murray and Sas, Willie and Christine, Grace, Dina, Larry, Nicci, Nikki, Grant, Paul, Gavin and Liz W., thank you for your understanding and enduring friendship. The knowledge that I have always been able to call on you has been invaluable as I have worked towards the completion of this thesis. I promise that you will be seeing a lot more of me from now on. To Jackie O'Donovan, thank you for the warmth with which you have welcomed me into your home. I look forward to more of your wonderful cooking served with great dollops your wicked sense of humour. For the friendship and good times, I thank Justin and Claire, Kevin and Seona, Jimmy and Sarah, Andrew and Michele, Jess and Pete, Tracey and Ryan, and Viggi. And yes Kevin, I have handed my essay in.

For the weekly reminder that stories and the writing of them should always be enjoyed, I am grateful to the girls of the St. Mary's School Writers' Circle. I sincerely hope you continue writing and deriving great pleasure from the stories you create.

The dedication of this work to you, my family, is a very small gesture which I offer in the hope that it speaks of a lifetime of thanks and appreciation for the love and support you unselfishly give me. Craig, I am particularly grateful for the boundless enthusiasm that you have shown for this study, even when you were going though an extremely difficult time, and for not letting me take myself too seriously. For the noise, giggling and a trip to the zoo, I thank my nephew, Conor, and my niece, Coral.

Prue, I know that it has not always been easy to live with the promises of next year or the complications that have come with being in a relationship with me and my thesis, but your consistency, strength, love and champagne have been a guiding light throughout the past five years. I love and thank you.

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