

*Into an Age of Cultural Contagion:
Vampiric Globalisation in Mudrooroo's Master of the Ghost Dreaming
Series*

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Abstract: This article revisits the work of Mudrooroo in a new and timely framework of globalisation. I argue that Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series comprises a globalisation narrative. The series performs a transmutation of the conventional postcolonial narrative in which the forces of colonialism are made known and subverted. It identifies a novel power within the Australian landscape. This new power, personified by the vampire Amelia Fraser, is more dangerous even than the white colonisers. Whereas colonial forces operate through bounded Orientalist discourses of self/other, civilised/uncivilised, white/black, Amelia's vampiric domination operates through, and is sustained by, a practice of uncontainability. Mudrooroo's vampire has previously been read as a metaphor for white predatorial colonialism. However, I propose that Mudrooroo's vampire Amelia is more adequately understood as the epitome of boundless cultural contagion. I consider that when thus reassessed within a global rather than a postcolonial framework, the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series provides an imaginative account of Australia's emergence as a space of (cultural) contamination. This space corrupts and collapses discourses of authenticity and purity, thereby engendering radically new visions of being-in-the-world as informed by multivalent experiential entanglements. Through a fusion of fantastic genres that interweaves maban, mythic, and European gothic modes, the series explores the Australian landscape as a site defined by (cultural) contagion.

Key words: Mudrooroo, Maban Realism, Gothic vampire, globalisation, cultural contagion

In this globalised era there are no more 'authentic' texts, only pastiches that are named from subject matter rather than form. Thus content determines form and this should be my final word on the authenticity of any text. (Mudrooroo, 2010: 2)

In 2011, Mudrooroo published the autobiographical essay "Portrait of the Artist as a Sick Old Villain". This essay was Mudrooroo's first publication after more than ten years of silence since he left Australia for Nepal in 2000. The essay constitutes a personal account of Mudrooroo's life that seeks to "set the record straight" (Mudrooroo 2011: 20). In it Mudrooroo asserts his affiliation with multiple cultural traditions and his attachment to several geographical locations. He describes his own sense of identity as a pastiche informed by experiential attachments to culture and place, rather than racial or national genealogies.

In Australia Mudrooroo achieved prominence as the first Aboriginal writer to publish a novel; he became a central figure in establishing Aboriginal writing. In time he came to occupy the position as head of Aboriginal Studies at Murdoch University in Perth and an established authority within the field of Aboriginal writing and culture. However, in 1996 Mudrooroo's genealogy was called into question in Victoria Laurie's article "Identity Crisis". Blacklisted as an alleged hoax, the validity of Mudrooroo's works was contested and he became a persona non grata in academic and in public life. In response to the heated debates that surrounded his person, Mudrooroo wrote the essay "Tell them you're Indian" (1996). Here he presents his personal identity predicament as symptomatic of an anachronistic condition of stagnation in Australia where identity debates in a global age continue to revolve around outmoded conceptions of cultural authenticity and racial genealogies. 'Authentic' culture, he writes, has been obscured beyond recognition and "filled with contradictions" (Mudrooroo, 1996: 265) as a result of globalisation as extensive cultural exchange. Indeed, in his 2011 autobiographical essay, Mudrooroo asserts that "[e]xistence is not singular (individual) and independent. Any identity we have is made up of our intricate relationships with our families (society), nature and the whole universe. As an *identity I* engage in a plurality of realities and the transitory nature of things in a constant flux of cause and effect. Everything is interdependent causally evolving and dynamic" (Mudrooroo, 2011:1). If thus understood in terms of individual entanglement within multivalent local, global, and even universal networks, identity cannot be reduced to an unambiguous and inherent affiliation with clearly delineated cultural communities. The contemporary global age is characterised by contamination and uncontainability. Thus, Mudrooroo expresses a sensibility informed by connectivity, one which sees the contemporary subject not as firmly embedded within unchanging cultural communities, but rather, as a single node within intersecting and perpetually alternating networks. In a 'globalised era', the subjective experience of being-in-the-world is informed by an awareness of continuous and inevitable contagion and transmutation through ever-shifting points of attachment.

Adam Shoemaker remarks that "what is often forgotten in the identity-driven debates about provenance is that Mudrooroo is—and was always—an international writer, one who was directly addressing global audiences and issues [...] There are no natural limits to this authorial strategy, nor to its representational potential" (Shoemaker, 2011: 3). After ten years of silence, it is time to reassess Mudrooroo's writing within a framework

that is not limited by restrictive identity discourses; one that sounds its global scope and border-crossing potential.

Accordingly, this article takes up Shoemaker's call to revisit Mudrooroo's work in a new, global framework. It engages with Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series, which is comprised of the four novels *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991), *The Undying* (1998), *Underground* (1999), and *The Promised Land* (2000). It offers a reading of the series as a globalisation narrative. The series constitutes a transmutation of the traditional postcolonial narrative within which the devastating forces of colonialism are made known and subverted. The series identifies a novel power within the Australian landscape. This new power, personified by the vampire Amelia Fraser, is more dangerous and cunning than the white colonisers. Whereas colonial forces operated through bounded Orientalist discourses of self/other, civilised/uncivilised, white/black, Amelia's vampiric domination and control operates through, and is sustained by, a practice of uncontainability. Mudrooroo's vampire has previously been read as a metaphor for white predatorial colonialism. Thus, Maureen Clark writes that Amelia is "a cruel metaphor for colonial excess" and that "her acts of penetration act as metaphors for (dis)possession and cultural enfeeblement" (Clark, 2006: 123). In a similar vein, Gerry Turcotte examines the figure of the vampire as a personification of "European culture" (Turcotte, 2005: 9); a symbolic "comment on the way Indigenous identity, mythology, spirituality and values have been fed on by European invaders" (Turcotte, 2005: 5). However, I propose that Mudrooroo's vampire Amelia is more adequately understood as an epitome of boundless cultural contagion. I consider that when thus reassessed within a global rather than a primarily postcolonial framework, the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series provides an imaginative account of Australia's emergence as a space of (cultural) contamination. This space corrupts and collapses discourses of authenticity and purity, thereby engendering radically new visions of being-in-the-world as informed by multivalent experiential entanglements. Through a con/fusion of fantastic genres that interweaves maban, mythic, and European gothic modes, the series explores the Australian landscape as a site defined by (cultural) contagion.

Maban realism, as defined by Mudrooroo, provides a counter-discourse to "the dominant natural reality" and it is 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" (Mudrooroo, 1997: 100). This genre is anchored in "the complex system of mythologies which underpin Indigenality" (ibid.) and is the employment of traditional storytelling content and structures. It is a genre informed by the Dreaming, a term employed in Aboriginal culture to refer to that sacred 'once-upon-a-time' in which totemic spirits created the world. Traditionally, the texts of Aboriginal culture are inscribed upon the landscape. According to Aboriginal mythology, mythic beings, the deities and characters of the Dreaming, who were the forerunners of human beings, emerged in the world through an act of self-creation. They moved all over the land and wherever they went they left physical reminders of their presence. Their tracks are 'songlines' that criss-cross the Australian landscape. These marks left by the Dreaming ancestors are imbued with a spiritual and cultural essence which can be drawn upon for particular purposes by human beings. Unsong land is dead land where the ancestors did not pass through, or where the Dreaming tracks in the land have been forgotten or palimpsestised. The Aboriginal characters in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series, Jangamuttuk, Ludjee, Wadawaka, and George, make use of this mythic force embedded

within the landscape to dispel the influence of the white colonisers. Their resultant powers are anchored in land and in ceremony, their Aboriginality a potent source of magic which rivals the destructive forces of Empire. As meticulously described by Eva Rask Knudsen, *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* relates the history of European settlement in Australia as experienced by these four shamanic characters, recounted through the genre of maban realism (Knudsen, 2004). In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, this colonial history is made known in Aboriginal terms; it is incorporated into a Dreaming reality, represented as the mythic tale of “Morning Star” which descends into a realm of darkness and despair:

Once, Morning Star had shifted from its course and had drifted far from the dawn. It continued to shine, continued to be a beacon, but became not the harbinger of the morning, of the light, but a marker of the density of the night which has overtaken us. It illuminates our misery and tugs our souls far from day. Our spirits roam the realm of the ghosts –an unfriendly land where trees and plants, insects and serpents, animals and humans wither and suffer. (*Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, 1)

Faced with the forces of European colonialism, the Aborigines have created a Dreaming myth in which the white colonisers figure as ghosts and Europe appears as a cold forbidding realm filled with suffering (32). Notably, the Aborigines have been relocated from their originary home to a mission compound on an unnamed ‘Island’. They do not know the Dreamtime songlines of this new country and the mission compound becomes a resultantly uncanny and chaotic space, a dead or unsung land wholly under the destructive control of the ghost colonisers. Harvey Birenbaum contends that myth is a way of experiencing the world that expresses the nature of the mind experiencing it (Birenbaum, 1988: 95). In other words, while myth cannot be understood in terms of linear logic and natural realism, the genre is nonetheless as real as any re-presentation of the world. Myth does not belong to the realm of logic or rationality in ordinary terms. Fantastical as it is, a realm of magic and miracle, gods and demons, it does not describe the world as we see it around us. However, myth reflects an alternative kind of realism: A “felt logic” and subjective reality of experience. In myth, the distinction between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ vanishes. Myth does not reflect the world ‘as it is’ but as it is experienced. (Birenbaum, 1988: 5-7) Jangamuttuk’s Dreaming story about Morning Star is created through this symbolic language of myth, which “makes reality look like what it feels like” (Birenbaum, 1988: 91). This language makes colonialism known in Aboriginal terms of maban realism, inscribing the history of colonialism into a Dreamtime narrative about the ongoing creation and transmutation of the Australian (cultural) landscape.

Jangamuttuk creates a ‘Ghost Dreaming’ ceremony which is carefully designed to render the ghost colonisers powerless and to dispel the destructive influence of European imperialism on Aboriginal culture. Like the myth of Morning Star, the Ghost Dreaming ceremony adapts and incorporates the European presence into a maban or Dreaming reality. To enter the state of trance that is necessary for the ceremony to succeed, Jangamuttuk must draw on the songlines within the land. However, because the songlines of the unfamiliar Island are unknown to him, Jangamuttuk appropriates and adapts the genre of convict ballads instead. He recognises these ballads as the first European songlines to inhabit the Australian landscape. Furthermore, he senses “that true ghost song. Contain whole meaning of ghosts” (*Master of the Ghost Dreaming*,

19). Jangamuttuk's use of convict ballads is a sly manoeuvre, as this particular genre often relates experiences of suffering, exile and dislocation. Seemingly, imperialism emerges as an intrinsically soul-destroying venture, devastating to colonised and colonising peoples alike:

Feeling his consciousness begin to slip, feeling the night and the dancers begin to . . . [Jangamuttuk] began the second stanza:

*'They made of me
A ghost down under,
Gave me a dram,
It tasted like cram;
Real as my dream,
Way, way under.*

*Under, plunder, thunder,
Way, may, nay, stay
Down, town, down,
Ghost ghost under,
Slam clam ram mam . . .'* (*Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, 5)

Jangamuttuk's chant allows him to enter the felt reality of the Ghost Dreaming; metaphorically to obtain a crucial insight into and intimate knowledge of the culture of the European colonisers. The content of the ballad echoes with the myth of Morning Star which also relates an experience of dislocation, thus linking European and Aboriginal experiences of displacement and suffering. The colonisers, too, find themselves far from home and in an unfamiliar and unsettling land. Through Jangamuttuk's appropriation of the European Dreaming, the self/other dichotomy presented by Orientalist discourses collapses, subverting the authoritative 'realistic' representations of the inferior Aboriginal other that legitimate and perpetuate colonial rule.

In myth, as in folktale, people, place and time are typically generic; events usually take place 'once upon a time' in a 'far-away land' and the characters tend to serve a particular function, to represent a single character trait rather than a multifaceted personality. Thus, the ghost colonisers who run the mission compound carry only generic names that display their intended role in relation to their Aboriginal charges. The Aborigines know their oppressors only as 'Fada' and 'Mada'. The names 'father' and 'mother' reflect the paternalism characteristic of the colonial Master discourse. By referring to themselves as 'Fada' and 'Mada' the duo indicate their superior position as a kind of 'foster parents' to their charges: They will be guides, teachers and rolemodels to their colonial subjects. Throughout the novel there is no specific reference to place. The land within which events are acted out is known to the reader and the Aborigines only as 'Island'. However, in contrast to the tradition of Western folktale, such laissez-faire attitude towards location is uncommon in Aboriginal story-telling practices because myth is inextricably linked to country in Aboriginal tradition. According to Berndt, "no traditional Aboriginal myth was told without reference to the land, or to a specific stretch of country where the incidents it narrates were believed to have taken place. No myth is free-floating, without some local identification" (Berndt 1994: 5). In order to understand what is told, the audience must know the geographical origins of the

characters in the story and the songlines they travelled by. Arguably, “Island” is so named in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* so as to emphasise that it is unsung, unknown land. Jangamuttuk’s mob were not born in the mission compound; they know none of the songlines or Dreaming ancestors of this stretch of country. Island is unfamiliar and therefore un-homely to Jangamuttuk’s people because its proper place within the Dreaming is not known. Though there are some places of “strong power” (*Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, 21) to be located on the island, their origin and history remain obscure; Island cannot be named. Moreover, the timeframe of the novel remains unspecified. This is because time is not *experienced* as chronologically linear. From a mythic or maban perspective time is flexible and spirals in a holistic sense. Perceived as an intrinsic criss-crossing network of stories, Dreamtime has been known always by Aborigines as the ‘natural’ perception of time. The experience of colonialism remembered in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* is not past but belongs to the present. When understood within the context of maban realism, the period of colonialism in Australia becomes but another part of a forever expanding Dreamtime scheme of events.

The generic representation of people, place, and time in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* induces an aura of traditional storytelling practices. The novel effectively decolonises and re-activates the literary heritage of Aboriginality. As a political statement, it poses a counter-narrative to the documents of the past, the records of the colonisers. Western realism calls for linearity and chronology and therefore cannot effectively represent Aboriginality which, according to Mudrooroo, is informed by a holistic, non-linear ontology. The past is reclaimed—or ‘re-membered’ in postcolonial theoretical terms—in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* when Mudrooroo resumes the indigenous right to establish Master narratives. Maban realism relies on the intertextuality of the landscape and the mythic narratives which are part of Aboriginal literary heritage.

Master of the Ghost Dreaming integrates the European presence into Aboriginal cosmology/mythology as it represents the ‘magic’ world of Dreaming reality. Incorporated into Aboriginal practices is the experience of the fateful meeting with European culture and imperialism. In refusing to adhere to Western genres, Jangamuttuk (and Mudrooroo) is able to express a maban perception of the world that reflects an Aboriginal experience. Fada’s natural ‘realist’ representations, his “strong paper” (*Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, 67) a metaphor for the imperialist power of the white colonisers, are powerless against the mythic Dreamtime sphere within which humans have the ability to metamorphose into animals, where time and space are non-linear and there is no distinction between sacred and mundane, abstract and concrete. Fada fails to properly comprehend the culture he observes. His representations of Aboriginal culture are void of any real meaning. They have not captured the maban essence of Aboriginality and therefore display nothing more than uninformed though imaginative interpretations of foreign practices. In a reversal of Foucault’s power/knowledge paradigm, the shaman Jangamuttuk appropriates Western culture, learns its wiles and sheds European control.

However, the three sequels to *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (*The Undying*, *Underground*, and *The Promised Land*) suggest a very different outcome of the clash between Aboriginal and European cultures. The power of the colonisers over Aborigines which was successfully annihilated by Jangamuttuk’s maban prowess in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* takes a new form. In these three novels, dubbed ‘the

Vampire Trilogy' by Gerry Turcotte, a new and even more fatal danger has entered the Australian landscape. The Vampire Trilogy chronicles the story of the further adventures of Jangamuttuk's mob. After Fada and Mada's departure from Island, Jangamuttuk's mob steals a schooner and by the seafaring skills of Wadawaka they, too, leave the mission compound and travel westward to arrive on the mainland of Australia. This place, Jangamuttuk foretells, will be their Promised Land, a fresh land untouched by 'ghosts'. However, his professed Promised Land turns out to be inhabited not only by thousands of ghost colonisers who arrive in Australia in ever-rising numbers, but by an unknown presence deadlier than any dangers they have previously faced. In the Vampire Trilogy, the Australian underground is filled with monsters, and the landscape is haunted by vampires and werebears who feed on Aborigines and 'settlers' alike.

In the Vampire Trilogy, European songlines have infiltrated the Australian landscape. In his shamanic animal form as Dingo, the young Aborigine George embarks upon a journey through subterranean tunnels and caverns in the new Promised Land. The Australian underground that he uncovers there bears a striking resemblance to the underworld of Hades, realm of the dead, as it is known from Greek mythology. Hades is a misty and gloomy realm to which access is gained through so-called 'hell-mouths'; caves, tunnels or lakes. In *Underground*, a cave entrance leads George deep into "the bowels of the earth" (*Underground*, 70). It is guarded by "a giant devil dingo" whose "slavering jaws as he poked his head out of the hole seemed wide enough to swallow [George] whole, either as human or dog" (*Underground*, 77). Once George slips past this Cerberus-like watchdog, he finds himself on "the banks of a fast flowing dark river" underground from which he drinks a "slightly warm and sulphur-tasting fluid with rising bubbles" (*Underground*, 84). A ferryman offers to sail him across the river that "goes round and round" in exchange for a "fare" (*Underground*, 85). The scene recalls the ferryman Cheron who sails the spirits of the dead across the river Styx that encircles the realm of Hades nine times. The Australian underground, George observes, is illuminated "with a uniform light that lacked the dazzling brilliance of the sun, the gentle glow of the moon, or the shifting play of cloud shadows from the world above" (*Underground*, 101):

Here, underground, the atmosphere was a clear, dry, whiteness, warm and humid. The origins of such illumination, which was both of greater intensity but also less than the sun, I was at a loss to understand [...] what might be termed the sky shifted and writhed like luminous fog. (*Underground*, 101)

The fog is really "the shades of the dead" which affect all around them with "their blank despair" and cause madness to the living that enter this realm (*Underground*, 134). Like Hades, the subterranean space that George travels through is home to "the dead" (*Underground*, 85), an ominous world inhabited by mournful spirits. George finds two pools which he hopes will slake his thirst: One is boiling hot, the other lukewarm. Drinking from the latter, he slowly but surely begins to forget about his life above ground, his "remembrance of things past was becoming hazy, affected by the mists of light" (*Underground*, 129). He gradually loses his memory of his life as an Aboriginal man and, for a time, remains trapped within the Earth as Dingo. In the underworld of Hades, existence is meaningless. Death is a repetition of life; the dead spend their time as they did when they were alive, but their labours in death are without result or purpose. Accordingly, when Wadawaka, who like George has also become entrapped in

this foreboding realm, takes to cultivate the soil, his actions are but a string of meaningless repetitions: In the dead soil of the underground Wadawaka “had planted mushrooms, each one spaced precisely apart” (*Underground*, 105). Moreover, he catches strange fish in the sulphurous waters of the river that courses through the underground in order to feed the hungry Dingo. However, the mushrooms are poisonous and the fish are inedible. George and Wadawaka both descend gradually into madness and apathy, until they become like living dead absorbed within the perilous Australian depths. Underground seems to function as a foundational myth of the Australia that emerged after the clash between European and Aboriginal cultures. The novel is an extension of traditional Aboriginal mythology as it adds to the ever-expanding Dreaming chronicle of the continual formation of the land. The Dreaming tracks of the ancestors intersect with European songlines, represented by Mudrooroo’s strategic use of Greek mythological references. Europe is inscribed into Mudrooroo’s record of the conversion of Australia into a contact zone that is the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series. Thus, the mainland emerges as “a new but ancient world” (*Underground*, 101): Europe has for all intents and purposes become an integral part of the Aboriginal experience. The traditional Dreaming landscape is overwritten with the story of two cultures clashing, each contaminating the other as a result. *Underground* sounds the rhythms of contemporary songlines in the Australian (cultural) landscape which are simultaneously Aboriginal and European. Aboriginal and Greek mythic elements merge symbolically within the landscape, hinting at a final con/fusion of previously distinct cultures.

During their first days on the mainland, Jangamuttuk’s mob meet another band of Aborigines, led by the shaman Waai. Waai offers to share with them a local ceremony as well as some of the songlines of the country. The ceremony is a new one fashioned to undo the disruptive presence of what Waai calls the ‘moma’. Waai informs Jangamuttuk that the moma has attacked and killed several of his mob. Moma, he explains,

has a hunger for fresh meat and blood, human meat and blood, and when he is overcome by his urge, he roams about hunting his prey. It is easy to recognise his tracks, for they are of a foot without toes and close together.
(*The Undying*, 43)

Jangamuttuk initially believes that he recognises this danger, since the footprints of the moma are similar to the boot-imprints of his former ghost colonisers. He professes that he holds no real fear of this beast since his intimate knowledge of the Ghost Dreaming makes him immune to its attacks. He soon learns, however, that the perpetrator is something different altogether: Moma is a vampire and therefore immune to Jangamuttuk’s Ghost Dreaming ceremonies which subverted the oppressive forces of European imperialism in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*. In the Vampire Trilogy, the mythic, maban reality of *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* is rivalled by another, competing narrative mode. While the first novel in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series is written within the context of maban or ‘mythic’ realism, the gothic genre of the late 19th century provides the framework for the three sequels. Indeed, the heyday of the gothic mode and the height of European settlement on the Australian continent coincide. As argued by Turcotte, the gothic mode lends itself well to reflect the colonial experience of dislocation, isolation and self-estrangement, as it tends to deal with the uncanny; “the familiar transposed into unfamiliar space” (Turcotte, 2005: 1). Australia seemed particularly ‘gothic’ in the European imagination compared to the other

colonies. The continent was a place of reversals: Trees shed their bark rather than their leaves, seasons were inverted and the land was inhabited by strange creatures and monstrous beings. More chilling yet, these features were considered to be metonymic of the kind of perversion that defined the “spiritual dis/ease” which pervaded the antipodes of Europe (ibid.):

Long before the fact of Australia was ever confirmed by explorers and cartographers it had already been imagined as a grotesque space, a land peopled with monsters. The idea of its existence was disputed was even heretical for a time, and with the advent of the transportation of convicts its darkness seemed confirmed. The Antipodes was a world of reversals, the dark subconscious of Britain. It was, for all intents and purposes, Gothic *par excellence*, the dungeon of the world. (Ibid.)

Australia has invariably nurtured the dark imagination of the gothic genre. The ‘undiscovered’ spaces of Australia were marked ‘Transylvania’ by cartographers, carrying strong allusions to the fabled homeland of Bram Stoker’s Count Dracula. Appropriately, therefore Mudrooroo has written the three sequels to *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* within the context of the gothic vampire novel. Yet, the gothic genre serves an additional function to that of inducing a chilling atmosphere that might capture the shock and trauma of colonisation. Jangamuttuk’s maban realism which overcame Fada’s discursive power in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* is in the Vampire Trilogy contaminated by the European Gothic. Like maban realism, the gothic a genre akin to magic realism. It does not conform to a ‘realist’ understanding of the world. It delves into the realm of the subconscious –of the psyche– and therefore enters the same mythical space of “felt logic” as maban realism. The gothic, too, suspends the borders that separate the natural reality and the mythical experience. Jangamuttuk’s primary weapon with which to combat Europe has thus been appropriated by dangerous forces. Like the shaman, Mudrooroo’s vampire Amelia is a shape-shifter and a reader of minds. She knows how to see the world ‘mythically’ and qualitatively. As Waai suspects, “she sees things as shamans do” (*The Undying*, 163) and is therefore able to resist shamanic magic. In the European gothic, the forces of empire have constructed a competing narrative that incapacitates the magic of the Aboriginal shaman. The gothic abides by chronology and linearity while also appropriating the trick of “felt logic” that constituted the primary mode of Aboriginal resistance in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*.

Amelia’s vampiric power is more dangerous and invasive than that of the ghost colonisers. Indeed, the ghost colonisers appear in the Vampire Trilogy in a suggestively dishevelled state. Thus, Sir George, who was known as ‘Fada’ in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, finds that the linen of his dress suit “had lost the snowy whiteness befitted a gentleman of distinction and means. Some sort of fungus had attacked the neat stitching and extended out to tinge the rest pale yellow” (*The Promised Land*, 186-187). In a similar manner, the governor of the settler colony “wore a semi-military jacket with tarnished buttons and, what was worse, let it gape open to reveal linen – no Indian cotton decrepit with age, and was it dirt?” (*The Promised Land*, 187). The governor’s wife, Mrs. Crawley, dresses in attire that is “years out of fashion”, and which has become “rumpled and battered” by the Australian “climate” (*The Promised Land*, 193). The colonists are far removed from the heart of empire and have been affected by their altered living conditions. The land and the climate have caused deterioration of their

imported finery. The wilds have symbolically breached the white defences, their pretence at civilisation, and taken up residence within the bounds of the colony. Though Aborigines and colonists attempt, each in their way, to create an unbreakable barrier around traditional culture, neither can be contained nor protected from the effects of cultural exchange.

Rather than policing the boundaries that supposedly protect and ensure cultural purity, Mudrooroo's vampire desires and *consumes* difference. Thus, Amelia prefers Aboriginal blood because of its "wild taste" (*The Promised Land*, 97) and "eucalyptus tang" (*The Promised Land*, 115). She lives also pleasurably off the white population. Among her victims are the white werebear Captain Torrens and Russian Jack, a white Russian immigrant to the antipodes who is a "giant of a man" (*The Promised Land*, 50). Her victims are meticulously selected:

I exult in the savagery that is surging in [Captain Torrens'] blood. The potency of his vital fluid makes me squeak and I almost lose my shape [...] his entire frame is flooded with vitality which makes me long to sink my fangs into the heavy vein that pulsates at the side of the neck. [...] his blood is an elixir filled with power. I gulp down the rich bear essence while I exult in his attempts to get free of me. I suck away his strength and it is the most wonderful experience I have yet had. (*The Undying*, 137-149)

Whereas Captain Torrens meets his end because Amelia desires the potent "bear essence" that resides in his blood, Amelia longs to sample Russian Jack because of his superhuman size and enormous physical strength. By murdering the Russian, it would seem, Amelia hopes to absorb his immense vitality:

How the blood rumbled through his veins [...] All too soon it was over, and she had gorged herself so much that she vomited up all over him. She lay there, feeling the last trembling as the spirit detached itself. As the final shudder began, she thrust her mouth hard against him, sucking up the remaining drops of fluid and, hopefully, his spirit. (*The Promised Land*, 125-126)

Like the Aboriginal blood which carries an exotic a tang, the vampire samples the blood of Captain Torrens and Russian Jack with the deliberate purpose to consume their essence of otherness which distinguishes them from the 'mainstream'. Cornelis Martin Renes observes that "Amelia indistinctly preys on all continental human life, no matter what social class, gender, race or creed" (Renes, 2011: 51). Amelia shows no sign of racial or cultural discrimination in her choice of victims; Aborigines and settlers alike appeal to the vampire in their individuality and distinctiveness. Thus, Mudrooroo's vampire cannot be understood merely as symbolic of European culture that feeds off Indigenous peoples, as suggested by Turcotte and Clarke (Turcotte; 2005: 9). She represents a new kind of danger that is similar to, yet essentially different from the imperialism and Orientalism identified and challenged by postcolonialist theory and criticism. Amelia conceives of otherness as providing an exotic flavour to the world within which she moves. The new vampiric danger carries numerous resemblances to European imperialism –this is why, when he first comes upon Amelia's footprints, Jangamuttuk thinks to recognise the predator— but ultimately stands apart from it in her

consumption and *absorption* of otherness. If Amelia represents the force of imperialism, as argued by Clark and Turcotte, she is imperialism in an altered form. Significantly, Mudrooroo's female vampire looks remarkably like the simultaneously liberating and destructive forces of globalisation as conceptualised by Michael Hardt and Anthony Negri in *Empire* (2000). Hardt & Negri use the concept of 'Empire' as a trope for understanding an unprecedented form of sovereignty. While the sovereignty that emerged from the European imperialist project of the 16th century onward "conceived space as bounded", policing its boundaries carefully by sovereign administration and Orientalist discursive figurations, Hardt & Negri's 'Empire' presents a planetary order that accepts no boundaries or limits. They argue that "the fundamental characteristic of [the new] imperial sovereignty" is that "its space is always open" (Hardt & Negri, 2001: 167). European imperialism, "constructed a Leviathan that overarched its social domain and imposed hierarchical territorial boundaries, both to police the purity of its own identity and to exclude all that was other" (Hardt & Negri, 2001: xii). 'Empire' however, "establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers". Indeed, 'Empire' is conceived as "a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (ibid.). In contrast to European imperialism, 'Empire' does not strive to reduce diversity to unity, but to consume and absorb it; to incorporate everything under its overarching rule and feed off of this diversity. Amelia moves freely between the two factions of Aborigines and colonists; attached to neither though highly implicated in the transformation and contamination of both. She is an epitome of uncontainability. Free of conscience and bound to no one and no place in particular, she travels across oceans and over the vast Australian landscape. She is able to manipulate and control most of the characters in the trilogy. In *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* a perpetual "click-clicking" of Jangamuttuk's clapsticks signifies his maban control and manipulation of events. Throughout the Vampire Trilogy, however, a constant "shook-shook of giant bat wings" implies that the vampire, who has the ability to transform into the animal form of a bat, has appropriated supreme control of the now gothic narrative. When Amelia first enters Australia in *The Undying*, she retains a strange need for the solidity of earth and a longing for her native land:

This earth, this ground is alien to me. It is not my earth and the ground here cannot be my resting place. I need my rich loam to survive [...] need my own earth, thick and loamy and extending down to the earth's core. (*The Undying*, 90-91)

Like the other characters in the series, Amelia is bound by a strong connection to country, to the specific geographical context from which she originates. In the first novel of the Vampire Trilogy she always carries with her two bags of earth which she has brought with her to the Antipodes from the Mother country. Yet, as she infects an ever increasing number of victims, consuming and absorbing their distinctive essence and powers, she experiences a gradual but radical transformation:

'It is strange that I came here as a thing limited to my own patch of earth and the darkness of the night. Within her, I gained the power to face the burning blast of the day and freedom from the tyranny of the sun. I was reborn in her depths.' (*The Promised Land*, 226)

At the end of *The Promised Land* Amelia has obtained an unlimited freedom of movement. Unlike any of the other characters, the vampire is wholly unrestricted by geographical, cultural, and magical limitations or attachments. She therefore signifies the ultimate indeterminacy of origins. The vampire disrupts social organisation and transgresses accepted means of behaviour. She is beyond the judgement of the established order. Amelia embodies the ultimate breakdown of dichotomies and, like the gothic genre, she transgresses the boundaries between morality and immorality, reason and emotion, order and disorder. She travels freely within the different (cultural) landscapes of Australia and contains within her both indigenous and invader discourses.

Clark suggests that the ultimate breakdown of dichotomies represented by Amelia is characteristic of Franz Fanon's decolonisation concept. For Fanon, Clark explains, decolonisation is a historical process that sets out to change the order of the world. By its very nature, that process represents a programme of complete disorder – a painful unsettling for coloniser and colonised alike. This is a process in which colonialism's systems of reference – and the violence such 'value' systems perpetuate in whatever form of representation they take – are challenged and overcome (Clark, 2006: 131). The chaos of decolonisation holds the promise of redemption in that it will bring about a new world order that cannot be contained within pre-existing modes of representation. Clark's argument is useful insofar as it asserts that Amelia represents the breakdown of pre-existing systems of reference and meaning and therefore necessitates a re-evaluation and revision of those representational systems. However, I suggest that Amelia does not contain the paradoxical combination of the roles of colonisation and decolonisation. Rather, Mudrooroo's vampire may meaningfully be understood in more general terms as the uncanny personified. I refer here to Samira Kawash's useful consideration of the figure of the vampire as "a threat to reality": According to Kawash, the vampire is a "spectral terrorist" whose presence "signals the possibility and the immanence of an epochal collapse of the law that constitutes this history and this reality, and an opening onto some otherwise and elsewhere" (Kawash, 1999: 254). If thus understood as a symbolical manifestation of revolution and transformation, Mudrooroo's vampire Amelia can be read as that which happens at the moment of culture contact, when familiar structures are challenged by an invasive, unknown presence. The clash between cultures means that traditional systems are challenged from the outside and inevitably metamorphose as a response to this intrusion. When the vampire bites, the victim is transformed by the attack. Accordingly, Kawash writes that "the vampire does not merely consume his victim", but rather "transforms his living victim into an animate corpse, one who walks and breathes, but whose life is 'ebbed away'" (Kawash, 1999: 247). Certainly, those of Amelia's victims who 'live on' after her bite are infected with an incurable and parasitic infection. This transformation is most potently exemplified by the experiences of George who, after Amelia's attack, has a thirst for human blood and is often subject to her powers of mind control. It remains uncertain, however, whether his blood thirst derives from his dreaming form as the predator Dingo or is induced by Amelia's vampiric bite. His allegiances are further obscured by the fact that he is at once the Australian Dingo, native to the landscape, and Amelia's lapdog, a pet and servant of the undead invader. The reader is ever in doubt as to the extent of Amelia's power over the characters she contaminates. In metaphorical terms, Amelia is the infectious virus that transforms traditional cultures and outlooks –Aboriginal and European. Amelia has consumed and now carries within her multiple subject positions, multiple ways of *experiencing* the world. She is able to freely enter the minds of her victims and of the shamanic characters in the Vampire Trilogy and see the world as they

do. The female vampire has access to the minds of the major characters, Jangamuttuk, George and Wadawaka. She possesses the ability to peer into other worlds and experience it through the eyes of the other: As she feeds off her victims, her own perspective expands and mutates.

The end note of *The Promised Land* is a journal entry purportedly in the diary of Queen Victoria. It is revealed that the monarch has invited Amelia to take tea with her at the palace, for as she notes, Amelia is “a strong-willed woman of the empire” (ibid.). Amelia’s presence at the very heart of empire is highly ambiguous. As we have seen, the female vampire may be read as an embodiment of the undecidable effects of culture contact and globalisation. When Amelia returns to London these effects bounce back to resonate through the centre of the British empire. The vampire has returned to contaminate the centre and to further obscure the boundaries between inside and outside, centre and periphery. Once set in motion, globalisation as cultural exchange will not be contained and makes impossible the policing of cultural and conceptual boundaries. The vampire has breached the defences of the centre. Amelia is a virus that infects all within her vicinity. Like Jacques Derrida’s conception of the undecidable pharmakon she is simultaneously poison and remedy. –Poison because culture contact has indeed been a juggernaut which trampled locality and infected ‘traditional’ culture; remedy because, as she wrecks havoc on the established order, she also personifies new possibilities. She facilitates de-territorialised and expansive ways of understanding being-in-the-world as manifested through experiential points of attachment rather than bounded and supposedly ‘authentic’ racial and cultural genealogies.

The ‘truth’ of myth, as we have seen, is not confined to a long-gone past but relates to and seeks to explain present conditions. The *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series enters into the colonial past of Australia in order to engage in contemporary globalisation debates. In the four novels the colonial period of Australia signifies the earliest beginning of the rebirth of Australia as a contact zone within which any claim to cultural authenticity has become obsolete. This period initiated Australia into a new state of con/fused identities, as once separate cultures began to intermingle and leave their mark upon one another. The *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* quartet does not suggest that cultural transformation was introduced at the moment of European contact. As implied by the cultural exchange of songlines between Waai and Jangamuttuk, such borrowings and appropriations of foreign elements are inherent in the dynamic nature of Aboriginal culture itself. The pattern of songlines which traverse the landscape necessitated continual cultural exchange. The custodians of country were the ‘owners’ of valuable ancient knowledge about the natural surroundings of particular areas. Some of this information was taboo and reserved for the initiated or the custodians of that area, but other information was passed on to visitors or travellers who needed to move through a particular stretch of country. By acquiring the proper knowledge, the right stories and songlines, it was possible to navigate immense distances throughout Australia; separate stretches of country were interconnected by the immense system of intersecting stories. Culture was fluid in that the vast mythic system which comprised the ‘texts’ of Aboriginal culture, crossed the imagined, insubstantial geographical borders of otherwise separate lands. Such a formation of the land not only invited but demanded cultural exchange. Yet, in the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* series there is a difference, it seems, between cultural change as it happened during the pre-European and the colonial periods of Australian history. A difference that is powerfully conveyed by Jangamuttuk when he notes:

Where once there was a unity and a wholeness, a going from one to another freely and easily, there has become a resistance and repulsion [...] It is the end of an age and the slow dawning of another. (*Master of the Ghost Dreaming*, 87)

When Europe entered Australia there was a true *clash* of cultures. Change was radical, disruptive and instantaneous. Cultural globalisation, or culture contact, in this sense trampled and altered locality in the form of Aboriginal culture. The presence of a foreign body inevitably provoked a counter-response, an adaptation. The intensification of cultural flows across the globe resulted in unsettling local transformation. Appropriately therefore, Mudrooroo's vision of culture contact is conveyed within the framework of the gothic and portrayed as the contaminating vampiric force of Amelia who accepts no boundaries or limits. Amelia—the epitome of uncontainability—undermines and infiltrates Aboriginal and European Dreamings. As Renes argues, “her indiscriminate spilling of human blood crosses essentialist boundaries of hierarchical race, gender and class distinctions, announcing an uncanny new Australianness that renders all identity fluid” (2011: 52). Mudrooroo's vampire thus unsettles and challenges pre-existing definitions of cultural identity. Significantly, this is also a defining characteristic of cultural globalisation; the transformation of locality and the resultant emergence of new and unprecedented modes of identification. Amelia is at once a dangerously soul-destroying force and the embodiment of a positive vision of unprecedented cultural fluidity. Globalisation discourses have made numerous attempts at a classification of these changes as either positive or negative. Mudrooroo's *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* quartet, however, does not pretend to pass this kind of judgement. The four novels compel the reader to acknowledge the fact of cultural transformation and amalgamation. The transformation itself is neither condemned, nor celebrated. Certainly, the conflation of maban, mythic, and gothic modes obscure the boundaries between such unambiguous classifications. The series may be read as a meticulous undertaking to catalogue cultural change. Thus, rather than providing a *prescriptive* mode of action in dealing with cultural diversity, the *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* quartet can be seen as a *descriptive project*: A textual exploration of the gradual disruption and transformation of the Australian (cultural) landscape and its emergence as a space characterised by contamination through exchange.

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