Mudrooroo's *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World:* Appropriating and Undermining White/Official Culture from the Aboriginal/(Un)official Fringe'

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ABSTRACT

During the last three decades, the writing of Indigenous peoples in white settler colonies has emerged and developed as a potentially powerful catalyst in the undermining of the white official establishment. Since Aboriginal Australians also believe that writing is an important means to articulate self-definition, in their works they systematically strive to emphasize the importance of their own spiritual tradition and to bring to life Koori cultural memories. Yet, what turns out most striking is that they also see, and proclaim themselves, as still colonized, never free of a history of white occupation. In a word, they emphasize that Aboriginality forms a hybrid and quintessential part of Australia. The aim of this paper will therefore be to explore how Mudrooroo's novel Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World *oscillates constantly and subversively between what is native and the culture of the colonizer, and makes use of different registers and of a mixture of fantasy and humour in order to adopt and uphold ambivalence and hybridity as the most outstanding mark of identity of its eponymous seer-hero, thus making it obvious that nothing is absolute, that "truths" and "official knowledges" are never whole, pure and unquestionable. Paradoxically enough, then, it is the co-existence of the two cultures or, rather said, the subservient position of Aboriginal culture with regard to white culture that allows for the preservation of the Koori "cultural matrix" (as*

Mudrooroo puts it), and thus for the radical questioning of the very foundations of the white official establishment. (KEYWORDS: Australian Studies: Aboriginal Culture and Literature: Mudrooroo: Confrontation vs. Hybridity: Questioning of Stereotypes: Homi Bhabha's theories).

RESUMEN

Durante las últimas tres décadas, la escritura de los pueblos indígenas procedentes de colonias de ocupación blanca ha surgido y se ha desarrollado como un potente catalizador en el proceso de cuestionamiento del sistema establecido blanco. Puesto que los aborígenes australianos también han llegado a la conclusión que la escritura es un arma fundamental a la hora de acometer el difícil proceso de auto-afirmación y búsqueda de la propia identidad, en sus obras intentan de forma sistemática hacer hincapié en la importancia de su propia tradición espiritual, así como en la necesidad de resucitar sus más antiguas tradiciones culturales. Sin embargo, lo que resulta más chocante es que, por otra parte, también se consideran a sí mismos presos inevitables de ese mismo proceso de colonización del que paradójicamente intentan escapar. En una palabra, lo que afirman es que su condición de aborígenes no es otra cosa que un híbrido, que sin embargo constituye una parte esencial de Australia. El objetivo de este artículo será estudiar cómo la novela de Mudrooroo Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World *se debate de forma incesante entre lo que es propiamente nativo y la cultura del colonizador, y cómo hace uso de diferentes registros y de una mezcla de fantasía y humor para poder así proclamar el valor de la ambivalencia y la mezcla integradora como la señal de identidad más sobresaliente de su protagonista. Todo ello dejará patente que nada es absoluto, que las "verdades" y el "conocimiento oficial" nunca son completos, puros e incuestionables. Paradójicamente, es la co-existencia de ambas culturas lo que hace posible la preservación de la cultura Koori o aborigen y, por consiguiente, el cuestionamiento radical de los mismos cimientos del sistema establecido blanco.* (PALABRAS CLAVE: Estudios culturales australianos: Cultura y literatura aborigen: Mudrooroo: confrontación/integración: cuestionamiento de estereotipos: teorías de Homi Rliabha).

As is well known, during the last three decades tlie writing of Indigenous peoples in white settler colonies has emerged and developed as a potentially powerful catalyst in tlie undermining of the white official establishment. However, this does not mean that Indigenous peoples have found it easy to become visible in order to carry their controversial message across. As far as Australian Aborigines are concerned, they only number about 1% of the Australian population, which obviously implies tliat their history is, to say tlie least, a tragic one. As Robert Ross

explains (1991: 71-38), theirs is a history of extermination, marginalization and constant institutional control. For most of the last *700* years, dominant white Australian society has tried: firstly, to destroy them outright in the process of settleinei-it: secondly, to follow a policy of protection when they felt that the remnant survivors were part of a dying race, a primitive, and therefore "exotic" and "picturesque", race worth preserving: and finally to enforce a policy of selective assimilation when they did not dic. It n-as not until 1967 that Aborigines were admitted to citizenship within the Australian state. Then they gained rights, ai-id since tl-iat time they have tried to exercise them, ven often having to face up to political ai-id social intolerance on the part of the majority of white society.

Mudrooroo Narogin (Colin Johnson) has suffered this intolerance in the flesh.[2] When he published his first successful novel, *Wild Cat Falling*, one of the most important landmarks in the fight for the Aboriginal cause, there were few young Aborigiiies who, like hiinself, were familiarized with the works of European authors such as Sartre, C'ainus, Katka or Robert-Grillet, to give but some relevant examples. *Wild Cat Falling* was, over and above everything, an attempt to move across cultural white/Aboriginal boundaries. In this novel, he brought to the fore aii interesting set of issues which had for nearly two hundred years remained invisible in Australia. Namely, the very existence of black people and their predicament, and all in a ve— white and difficult Australia. *Wild Cat Falling* was an act of speaking, the discovery of a voice which would gradual ly acquire more aiid more strength. More than tl-iat, if was an act of writing, and thus of intrusion into tlie realm of white dominant discourse. The act of writing about who they were, and where they where, was personally liberating and, inost important of all, culturally empowering.

A new literature was emerging in Australia. A literature which dealt with the frictions betwen black and white groups. Although, at that time (the 60s), those frictions were somehow masked by the protests which young people of all kinds were organizing against authority, the barrier between u-hites and blacks was nonetheless iinpenetrable. The narrator of *Wild Cat Falling* is full of hatred and self-contempt. All he has known in life is orphanage, prison, poverty, stealing and humiliation. The importance of these memories lies in the fact that they cannot be simply labelled as personal, since they very well embody the situation which most Aboriginal Australians have suffered for most of the euphemistically called "post-contact" period. Significantly enough, white Australians have often distinguished between the terins "frontier" (associated with the romantic idea of adventure and conquest of the wilderness, that is, with whites) and "fringe" (associated with marginality and inferiority, that is, with Aborigines). By means of using that distinction, they have kept the frame of history/pioneer settlement for themselves, while leaving the Aborigines in the marginal notion of "fringe", a "nowhere space" which thus excludes thein from official culture and history.

Whatever white Australians understood to be history was not Colin Johnson's history. Whatever the official definitions of Australian society were, they did not include Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal people like him. Having been written out of white Australia, Colin Johnson set

out to write himself and his people into another Australia. a new Australia whose emergence u-as becoming a real. although faint. possibility in the late 1960s. The writing and publication of *Wild Cat Falling* was. not only the most important act of Johnson's life to that point. but also the engine of the by then emergent Aboriginal literary movement.

When Johnson returned from his voluntary exile. the clearest evidence of the difficulties that an Aboriginal writer had at that time. he was no longer alone. Many things were happening in Aboriginal Australia and. as a result. land rights and discrimination were eventually coming to tlie fore in Australian politics.[3] The most dramatic. and no doubt symbolic. gesture of this phase of Aboriginal activity was the erection of a tent embassy on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra in 1973. For tlie first time Aborigines. in a pan-Aboriginal sense. abandoned the definitions and the sites that had been imposed on them by Australian society. The consequences were almost immediate. The tent lasted for sis months before the police removed ii. but by the time it was dismantled Aborigines had already gained the sympathy of a Labor Party that was soon to become the government. In 1973 tlie government headed a Commission to examine all aspects of Aboriginal land rights. When the Commission submitted its Report in 1974. many Aboriginal probleins had already come to the surface.

What Johnson did then was to make contact u-ith his people (writers. dramatists. activists such as Kath Walker. Kevin Gilbert. Jack Davies. Bruce McGuinness. Denis Walker and Lionel Fogarty). and with white Australians interested in Aboriginal matters (Catherine and Ronald Berndt. Stephen Muecke. Hugh Webb. among others) in order to participate in the debate o11 Aboriginal Australia that was being for tlie first time conducted by the Australian official institutions and academia. and set about inserting the difficulties and the possibilities of those debates into fiction. poetn and criticisin.

This ever-increasing pan-Aboriginal impulse confronted the different and dispersed Aboriginal groups (urban. rural aiid tribal) m ith the task of constructing. not just a common front before the government and the mining companies. but also a common sense of who they were. They had to deal. like all marginal groups. with tlie politics aiid the poetics of identity. Yet. in their case. this was a particularly difficult task. since this 1% of the o\eral1 Australian population was split into different constituencies all over the country. which meant that they liad very different memories and experiences of their original Aboriginal culture. From the inid 1980s. Johnson's chief ideological project was to construct organizations. ideas and attitudes that might allow Aborigines to explain themselves to themselves. and to acquire more and more visibility and strength in the Australian socio-political arena. In general terms. Mudrooroo wanted to put tlie past and tlie present of Australian Aborigines in contact with each other. In literary terms. he wanted to use or create new cultural and literary categories. categories which could acconiinodate Aboriginal worlds and conceptions. and which prevented them from being intimidated by white/official power or knowledge.

Needless to say. this was not an easy task for an Aboriginal writer to carry out. For one thing the official recorders (anthropologists. historians. missionaries) were and had been white.

aiid the official institutions in which they worked and stored this knowledge (universities. museums. art galleries. etc.) were also white. Mudrooroo was very critical of white editorial interventions in tlie Aboriginal life histories tliat emerged as a11 important part of Aboriginal literature in tlie 70s and 80s. Moreover. in his well-known critical work *Writing from the Fringe* (1 990). Mudrooroo also criticized some contemporary Aboriginal authors. mainly because they had relied too much on standard English and received literary fonns. and because their works were. therefore. too distant from their people aiid too willing to please a white audience.

During tlie last two dccades. Mudrooroo's main aim has been to do away with the formula "some Aboriginal content in white forms",[4] in favour of a more determined defence of distinctively Aboriginal linguistic fonns. This esplains Mudrooroo's ever-increasing suspicion at anything that comes from white Australia. This suspicious attitude has also affected Iiis own early work. which he has come to regard as alienated. in so t'ar as it u-as too individualistic and lacked a basic emphasis on the very notion of community. so essential in black cultures. Mudrooroo has done his best to undermine standard white Australian readings of Aboriginal writing. which tend to rely on stereotyped assumptions about Aborigines. literature itself and Australian society in general. This esplains why Mudrooroo has sometimes made use of the theories put forward b; western mainstream critics such as Foucault. Barthes and Baklitin. among others. in order to articulate his own anti-canonical intentions. thus corroborating Salman Rushdie's famous phrase "the Empire writes back". To give but one relevant example. Mudrooroo's favourite quotation is from Barthcs's essay "The Death of the Author":

> a test is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of ihe Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings. none of them original. blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of cultures.
>
> *Barthes (1977* 1-16)

The attraction tliat this quotation had for Mudrooroo is understandable. After all. the whole debate on Aboriginality in tlie 70s emerged froin the unilateral imposition by wliite Australians on all Aborigines (living. dead. urban. tribal) of an all-einbracing and over-simplifying term. "Aborigine". with a very distinctive bias of content. Another interesting parallelism can be found between Barthes's faiuous contention of "the death of the author" and his aforementioned transition t'roiii Colin Johnson to Mudrooroo Narogin. This change of name illustrates very well his personal evolution: froin a11 initial dependence on white interpretations of society aiid history in Australia to a deeper conceni with understanding black Australia. He has given us an explanation for his change of name in "Paperbark":

> During the coming together of tlie trihes in January 1988 in Sydney. I spoke to Oodgeroo. and she esplained tome that her name Oodgeroo means *paperbark* and that as creative writers our totem. or dreaiiiing should be the paperbark tree. This seenied logical as the paperbark tree or white fella nanie *maleleuca*. or my country name. Mudrooroo. has always had an important place in Aboriginal life in that it has been used for *Wyas*. roofing niaterials. for bandages and for drawings. And so. this has

> become our *Dreaming*, or our secondary totem, or our functional dreaming. Thus Kath Walker has taken, or changed lier whitefella nanie to Oodgeroo Nunaccul, aiid I have changed my name to Mudrooroo Narogin. Kath Walker's last name refers to her tribal name, the Nuiiaccul tribe of Stradbroke Island, but in regard to my last naiiie it refers to my place of birth in Western Australia. I have used a place in that it is difficult to isolate the particular nanie of the tribe which owns that pari of Western Australia, as we have coalesced into one people, tlie Nyungar aiid possibly one tribe. ihe Bibbulman which I think refers more to tlie Swan River basin than to my area.
>
> (1990b: 389-390)

Colin Johnson was a name which clearly evoked a white, non-Aboriginal context. It was during the transition from the seventies to tlie early eighties that he used a double authorial reference: Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo Narogin). 1-lis Aborigiiial name first came to the surface, but in between subordinate brackets. It was not until tlie publication of *Doin Wildcat* in 1988 that "Mudrooroo Narogiii" took over, definitively conferring "Colin Johnson" a second-class status.[4] As can be easily deduced, Colin Johnson/Mudrooroo Narogin's life has been a constant re-shaping of selves (this is why he is often considered to be so difficult and changeable a writer). Many different cultures aiid discourses mark Mudrooroo's work, thus opening up new possibilities for tlie Aboriginal imagination. Generally speaking, tlie writings of Mudrooroo, like those of inost Indigenous peoples in white settler colonies, identify with the vision and objectives of other postcolonial writing: the quest for personal and racial/cultural identity; tlie belief that writing is a crucial means to atteinpt self-definition; and tlie emphasis o11 personal/communal and historical reconstruction.

Yet, at the same time, as Elleke Boehmer argues, "Indigenous u-riiers rightly remain wary of other implications of the postcolonial" (1995: 229). In particular, although Aboriginal authors have always tried to emphasize tlie idiosyncrasy aiid importance of their own spiritual tradition aiid to bring to life Koori cultural memories, they, Mudrooroo being no exception, have eventually "see[n] themselves as still-colonized, always-invaded, never free of a history of white occupation" (279). As Mudrooroo has put it, they are "indigenous minorities submerged in a surrounding majority and governed by them" (1985: 33). As a result, Aboriginality in Australia is usually defined as the conjunction of conflicting aiid hybrid cultural manifestations. Indigenous Australians nowadays see their own history of ihe last 200 years as inevitably linked to that of whites. Therefore, they also confess to complicity with the occupying culture: they einphasize that Aboriginality foims a composite (tliat is, something made up of different parts) part of Australia. Ironically enough, it is within the doinain of another culture that Indigenous writers biiterly reclaim their own "cultural matrix", to take Mudrooroo's well-known expression, their sense of the inythic past as still alive aiid present. As Maori writer Witi Ihimaera argues, biculturism, with its stress o11 the co-existence of tlie two cultures, is probably tlie best way of preserving a seiise of Indigenous cultural difference (the lesser of two evils).[5]

It is this apparent contradictioii that explains why Mudrooroo has often called his work "alienated": it inevitably (and bitterly) complies with white dominance: it is "white" in style and language; and it therefore lacks the complexities aiid subtleties of Aboriginal dialect oral forms.

In a iiovel like *Doctor Wooreddy*, Mudrooroo's emblematic saga about tlie extermination of Tasmanian Aborigines. Doctor Wooreddy's philosophy of stoic resignation or "blessed numbness" constantly emphasizes tlie iieed for surrender iii order to survive. To quote tlie protagonist's words:

> In the long run. to survive meant accepting that the ghosts [=whites] were here to stay arid learning to live amongst them. or at least next to them until —until the ending of the world!
>
> *(1996 19)*

Nevertheless. aiid in spite of its latent pessimisiii. Doctor *Wooreddy* succeeds in re-entering aiid giving priority to Aboriginal history aiid cultures mainly by retelling the "contact" story from the Aboriginal perspective of its eponymous seer-hero. Wooreddy's subversive reenactment of myth aiid historical legend manages to deconstruct the so-called "Australian dream", that is. tlie white/official projection of Australia as "an isolated paradise free from the errors and wrongs aiid lies of the Old World. a fresh start where all iiihabitaiits [are] equal aiid free. aiid. as such. a beacon of hope for other nations" (in Priessnitz 1996: 112).

To begin with. Doctor *Wooreddy* discloses the so many inconsistencies which lie at the core of white official religion aiid history. At one point in the novel, Mr Robinson. the well-meaning but pretentious English brick-layer who has iiiigrated to Vaii Diemen's Land in order to improve his social conditioii and becoine a man of worth by gathering and placing all Aborigines "in some secure place where they may be taught" (51)—as a matter of fact. what tlie colonial authorities wanted was "to remove the natives from the main island (129). that is. "to drive the hordes of naked savages [...] to be penned up on Tasman's peninsula" (127)—meditates on the primitive/ inferior conditioii of Aboriginal language by establishing a connection with the biblical episodc of the towerof Babel. and is in the end inevitably trapped by contradiction:

> The ghost nodded and thought of how God had changed the common earth language when sinful riian had sought to scale ihe very heights to heaven. This caused him to frown and stare at tlie niembers of the so-called child-race. supposedly primitive. He could almost picture them as the primordial parents. though this vas absurd. These people had fallen from the heights of civilisation which had begun tlie construction of the tower of Babel. Why had they fallen so low? Had their ancestors been the very leaders who had iiispired the mad folly of atteniping to conquer heaven? Suddenly. for an instant. he saw Wooreddy. Ummarrah and the others in a new light. Theymight be degraded. but they could iiot be primitive!
>
> *(63-4)*

On thc other hand. tlie novel also does away with well-known stereotypical visions of tlie Aborigines. while it relegates tlie so far white central/official culture to the margins by describing white customs and institutions as clearly inferior to theirs. that is. by disclosing that it is the colonizers that mainly partake of the very negative images aiid attitudes that they have

systematically used to refer to the Aborigines and their culture. Time and again, Aborigines are described by the white iiivader as lacking any kind of individuality: "All blackfellows look tlie same" (99): as "a buiich of savages, good for nothing, but mischief" (80): as being so dirty tliat "the sheep can't stan' tlie smell of 'em" (98): as being "too lazy" aiid mercenary, since "they take what they can get from you aiid give you nothing in return" (179): as devilish creatures whose "natural propensity" is "to lie aiid prevaricate on all occasions" (78): and are often referred to as "crows", that is, as mere animals, which caii therefore be chased after "with a whoop aiid a holler" (122), and sold mithout mercy: "tlie amount the government would have to pay [...] was f 5 for every adult aiid f 2 Sor the rai-e child" (124).

Yct, as tlie novel openly denounces, it is mainly whites tliat embody tlie violence and monstrosity which they are constantly attributing to Aborigines. It is whites that de\astate, kill, rape, aiid do all that with extreme cruelty and without showing the least sign of mercy, even towards Aborigines who have tried to help them. The following episode speaks for itself:

> four ghosts had beeii killed while trying to kidnap women [...] Only one ghost escaped with his life. He took refuge up a tree and shoi at a n one that canie within range of his pistols. Finally a u-oriiaii took pity on hini and helped hini to escape to thc beach. She was rewarded by having the male child she carried ripped from her arnis aiid dashed against a boulder. The ghost laughed as he did this. *(100)*

Not only are they destroying tlie land, that is, thc indigenous llora aiid fauna of the whole continent in order to serve their economic interests, but are also annihilating a whole race, both physically and culturally. Not in vain does the Aboriginal attitude to tlie land mean "a symbiotic existence which invests life and history into the land itself, creating a value out of tlie mystic alliance between thr land and its ancestors/ caretakers" (Doyle aiid Jenkin 1995: 77). Whites regard themselves as "superior" (33), "civilised" (121). However, from an Aboriginal perspective, they and their social organization look rather inhuman,[8] artificial and, to say the least, ridiculous, since they do not seem to attach any importance to tlie deeply-rooted Aboriginal feeling of belonging to such fundamental units as tlie family or the community itself:

> 'They have families as we do, but they are not ver! important to theiii. Instead they leave such natural groupings to cling together in clans called 'convicts': 'army': 'navy', and so on. You can identifj which group they belong to by the colour of their coverings. Convicts wear yellow or grey depending on their subsection. They are often mistreated by others. The army wears red 'coats'. They are a little like our elders and are treated with respect as are thc 'navy' who wear blue coats aiid sail the big ships. Then there are the black coats. I do not know their name or their status. They are above thc yellow and below the red, hui not always. Finally, there are those who are often thc subject of our attacks. They are the ones who live in our countries and look after tlie strange animals they have imponed. They seem to have no fixed place iii tlie social structure aiid mix with the other groups'. The information perplesed thr good doctor. It needed analysing as well as clarifying. A social system built on groupings other than those of kin seeiiied impossible. If it was indeed so, it raised the questions as to their origin and if they reproduced as did humans. It seemed highly unlikely seeing the unimportance of the family group. He questioned Ummarrah further and found out that sometimes

> a mature male and female with several iiiiniature ghosts did live together, but where these immature ghosts came from he did not know, or care for tliat niatter.
>
> *(61-2)*

White social organization reveals itself as simplistic aiid arbitrary when coinpared with the complex sophistication of the Aboriginal social hierarchy aiid mythical legends, and their multiple variety of magic dances, rites of initiation and stages of courtship, to mention but some of tlie most outstanding issues brought up in the novel.

To make matters worse, whites seeiii to be totally unable to help oiie another, they only care about their own individual interests: "the Aborigines had stared in ainazement, and then in consternation, at the lack of co-operation among tlie ghosts" (59). In addition, their leaders are shown no respect whatsoever. Mr Robinson, ironically called "Great Coiiciliator" by the Aborigines, is repeatedly accused of being totally ineffective: "The Great Coiiciliator, who still had done iio conciliating [...] The Great Conciliator, who still had iiot begun his work of conciliating" (73, 77) aiid, to make matters worse, for the convicts who are under his coinniand, "it was oftcii a mark of self-respect to disobey aiid hinder hiiii" (102). Significantly enough, it is Trugernanna, an Aboriginal woman, who saves him from starvation. Last but iiot least, Mr Robinson is always in a hurry, "he was passing over the land at too fast a rate to enjoy and discover things about it" (108). He never seems to know where he is actually heading for or what he is actually doing aiid for what purpose. In a word, he lacks self-confidence:

> He was always rushing this way in a fashion which the Aborigines could not understand. They might hurry to a warm meal, a festival or after game, but always with a goal in mind. [...] His haste and uncaringness for others iiiade him an object of wonder to them. [...] The Aborigines had tried to adapt to his ways, but often on finding things too rough and rude, they disappeared into rhe bush to achieve some serenity.
>
> *(102)*

These paradoxical contradictions no doubt bring to mind Homi Bhabha's famous definition of "stereotype" as tlie mechanism of representation which allows tlie colonizers to relate to tlie colonized in a "safe" manner by "produc[ing] tlie colonized as a social reality which is at once aii "other" aiid yet entirely knowable and visible" (1994: 70-1)." As soon as the otlier can he represented, it can be appropriated and controlled. Yet, as Bhabha goes on to argue, stereotyping is not only

> the setting up of a false image which hecoiiies the scapegoat of discriminatory practices. It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, nietaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity; tlie masking and splitting of "official" and phantasmatic knowledges to construct tlie positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse.
>
> *(81-2)*

It is this ambivalence that allows Bhabha to establish his well-known analogy between

stereotyping and tlie Freudian concept of sexual fetishism. As he sees it. the stereotyping impulse fornis part of a larger structure which simultaneously disallows its authority. To quote Bhabha's words again:

> The fetish or stereotype gives access to an "identity" which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety aiid defence. for it is a form of multiple aiid contradictory belief in its recognition ofdifference aiid disavowal of it.
>
> (75)

We feel both fear and attraction towards the other. simply because the other is also part of ourselves. that dark part which we refuse to confront openly. On tlie one hand. Aborigines are systematically despised aiid feared on accouiit of their savagery atid nakedness. On tlie other. their knowledge of tlie territory. not to mention tlieir physical strength and beauty. exert a tantalising attraction over the coloiiizers who. like Mr Robinson. cannot often help admiring atid desiring them (32).

There is one more aspect worth analysing. In order to make up for the white reduction and annihilation of most Aboriginal mother tongues. *Doctor Wooreddy* also focusses its energies on revising and deconstructing the language and nanati\-e styles of tlic colonialist or invader. According to tlie standards of official/white culture. the unquestionable centrality of the written word automatically relegated orality to the margins. The recognition of a different. but nonetheless equal. culture is simply impossible in logocentric and binary discourse. However. in Aboriginal culture orality is by no means regarded as inferior. On tlie contrary. it is tlie most powerful link. and obvious symptom. of Aboriginal spirituality. As Mudrooroo explains:

> Before the Europeans brought a system of writing to Australia. all literatiii-e was oral —that is. a spoken or memorised literature. Religious traditions aiid beliefs. legends and historical events which were considered important. were handed down from generation to generation. usually in the form of verse as it is easier to learn and keep straight lines of verie rather thaii unwieldy prose. Prose was used in the telling of stories. tales aiid sonie historical events such as did iiot need to he as rigidly fixed as those things dealing with religious beliefs. [. .] When the Europeans arrived with their system of writing. Aboriginal literature began to change froni ari oral to a u-ritteii one. [...] But too often the Aborigines were observed through British eyes aiid culture aiid put down in British forms. Aboriginal culture becanie asdistoned as others seen through British eyes such as tlie Irish. African. Indian and Chinese.
>
> (1985 22)

In tlie novel under analysis. it is once and again stated that tlie language and social organization of the Aborigines are. contrary to what white invaders think. rather more complex and elaborate than theirs. As a matter of fact. Wooreddy. when trying to communicate with Mr Robinson. must make a tremendous effort to simplify his mother tongue so that tlie white man can understand what he says. Besides. Wooreddy knows something about tlie invader's laiiguage. whereas the latter kiiows nothing about his:

> Wooreddy replied [to Mr Robinson] as best he could in a mixture of Bruny and Ghost. He was stripping his language down to the bare essentials in order to be iiiiderstood. All the honorifics, family designations and different grammatical constructions he would have used in conversing with aperson belonging to the highly stratified Bruny society were unnecessary.
>
> *(34-5)*

Later in tlie novel, when tlie process of extermination has almost come to an end, we are given more evidence of the sophistication of Aboriginal thought wheii Wooreddy feels tlie need to explain to his people that the strange feeling that they are now experiencing is nothing but alienation, something they liad never gone through until tlie arrival of the whites. In order to explain this concept to them, Wooreddy "began laying out a sacred ground of intricate design of logic and supposition [so that] concepts were tailored to fit into the designs of sentences" (84). What is being subtly suggested in these excerpts, namely, that Aborigines can be much inore efficient and clever than whites, is explicitly stated some pages later, when it is said that Wooreddy is able to read Mr Robinson's mind aiid thus arrange meetings between his people aiid him to tlie benefit of the former:

> Wooreddy [..] began to outline the way the meeting should be arranged as he knew the psychology of the ghost aiid the way he liked things to happen.
>
> *(86)*

White official culture and written discourse are again put to tlie test when Mr Robinson's letters prove to be totally ineffective. As can be seen in the following passages, irony is the usual means that tlie no\el uses to ridicule white pridc aiid patronizing attitudes towards Aboriginal culture:

> [Robinson] patiently explained to the good doctor that 'this letter' was magic arid so was the bark called 'paper' 'Put pen to paper', he declared. 'and tlie waggon begins to roll and the house to be built'. [...] How childlike they were. Kohinson thought. [...] Rohinson [...] wrote more and more. Nothing happened [...] Wooreddy began to doubt the efficacy of 'this letter' and 'this paper'.
>
> *(37)*

> Meeter Ro-bin-un [...] sat against one wall making the endless lines of marks on the soft white bark. They had watched him doing this before and it held no fascination for theni. not eren when he told them that anc day he would teach them to do it. Perhaps it was his way of making spells that enabied him to rush about like a madman all da! and then write niost ofthe night. Some roots had this effect; perhaps tlic mark-making had the saiiie result.
>
> *(68)*

Aware as Aborigines are of the ever-increasing objectification process that white official culture is inflicting on theirs, they keep their true ceremonies to themselves, thus preventing whites from dealing with their most intimate forms of spirituality as if they were a simple commodity on display for their sheer entertainment:

> We are the iiiasters of any ceremonies tierr. But we are doing only rubbish dancing today, just for ihe white fellows. When we daiice in the proper fashion it is a joy to behold [...] I am the best artist in these parts, hut I refuse to perform in such a rubbish enteitaiiinieiit. I do not waste my talents.
>
> *(180, 182)*

In addition, by using techniques and vocabulary which non-Aboriginal readers cannot understand, Mudrooroo succeeds in alienating or 'othering' non-Aboriginal readers. The novel's final incorporation of a traditional *corroboree* (Australian aboriginal festival held at night with songs and symbolic dances to celebrate important events), in which the few survivors from different tiibes gather, aiid in which Bruny words aiid soiip symbols are not translated for the benefit of non-Aboriginal readers (160-164), is by no means accidental, since it allows Mudrooroo to take revenge oii the white reader, at the same time as he contributes to preserving their endangered culture aiid asserting his own specifically Aboriginal vision. As Ummarrah affirms, "if you don't coniinue with the old ceremonies they will die out. [...] Ceremonies make us strong and keep us strong" (158). Not only does the *corroboree* "de-naturaliz[e] notions of the self grounded primarily on language", but it also "avoids privileging the performance of the inind over the performance of the body" (Gilbert 1099: 345), thus putting to the test the very foundations of white/official/logocentric culture. Broadly speaking, dancing can be seen as a poteiit tool to preserve Aboriginal communal existence aiid to resist white dominance. As Helen Gilbert explains:

> During the *corroboree*, individual identity is both created by, and subsumed iii, group identity as culturally coded movement that gives valance to each performer's dance, allowing participants to shed their everyday roles deteriiiiiied within white hierarchies of power. In this sense, the dance acts as a shanian exorcizing evil. It is also an occasion for the exchange of cultural capital between trihcs, and for thr contestation of white doiiiinatrd space.
>
> *(343)*

White/official culture is depicted as predatory and, most important of all, as decadent. Paradoxically enough, what was being labelled as backward, barbaric and irrational was at the same time exerting more aiid more attraction on the colonizers, who, still in an unconscious way, increasingly looked for myths, fetish objects and rituals from other cultures in order to illuminate their European psyche and nurture their fantasies of power:

> The Great Conciliator called in some of his sable friends to entertain his host with their primitive cerenionies. The scene was perfect and appealed to the romantic in the gentleman. Here in the wilderness far from all the comforts of civilisation, sitting in a rude habitation they were entertained by the primeval natives.
>
> *(112)*

As Dorothy Figueira sees it, the search for the exotic becomes, in general terms, the search for the esoteric, insofar as the colonizers chiefly strive "to invest [their] existence with

greater intensity" (1994: 13). According to Deborah Root. it was tlie capitalist system resulting from tlic expansion of industrialization and tlie empire and based o11 never-ending consumption that led. and still leads. the West to look for "new aesthetic aiid cultural territory" which could be "discovered" and "colonized". Consequently. tlie hegemonic appropriation of the other makes up for two different sorts of lack: economic and spiritual. aiid tlie West therefore reveals itself both as "hungry predator" aiid as "horribly confused aiid ill" (1996: 201).[10]

One more proof of Aboriginal superiority is given when tlie novel depicts the different ways in which they manage to imitate and. by so doing. not only defy aiid ridicule white ways of moving and speaking,[11] but also disclose —and learn!— tlie manipulative strategies upon which tlie colonizer's official discourse is built. The following passage speaks for itself:

> the singing leader [was] standing with Iiis hand on his breast. tlie otlier outstretched. and his face raised to the heavens. Ummarrah found it fascinating. Later. when he returned io his people. he would lift their spirits by mimicking this strange ghost and his ahsurd posiures.
>
> *(75)*

They can iinitate whites so well that. all of a sudden. whites start feeling afraid of them. If the colonized can become so similar to themselves. then their sense of individuality and power can be under serious threat. Bearing this in mind. Mr Robinson's fears are fully justified:

> 'Thank you. Chief Protector'. he said mimicking his accent so accurately that Robinson gave a stan. tle recalled that in Van Diemen's Land the people there too were yood mimics and had used the ability to learn English so well ihat they often spoke it better than some of the convicts.
>
> *(1751*

Again. Homi Bhabha's notions of "the mimic man" and of the subversive and utterly empowering tandem "mimicry/ mockery" inevitably come to mind when dealing with these passages. In his seminal article "Of Mimicry aiid Man". Bhabha takes as his turning-point Lacan's statement that "mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an itself that is behind" (1977: 99). According to Bhabha. mimicry can thus be seen as a new term for the construction of the colonial otlier in certain forms of stereotyping: a colonial self who will be recognizably tlie same as the colonizer but still differeiit: "not quite/not white" (1994: 92). Accordingly. although it is somehow reassuring for the colonizers that their colonial subjects should become in some respects "English". tlie production of mimic Englishmen also becomes utterly disturbing. because "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (86). Since tlie mimic man is not entirely like tlic colonizer w h i t e but not quite — he einbodies only a partial representation of him. As a result. the colonizer. instead of being reassured. feels threatened as he sees a grotesquely displaced image of himself. In this way. tlie familiar turns into the uncanny: imitation becomes subversive: aiid power relations begin to fluctuate. that is. "the *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing tlie ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (88). As Bhabha goes on to explain:

> [Mimicry is] a process by which tlic look of' surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of tlie disciplined. wherr tlie observer becomes the observcd and "partial" representation rearticulates the whole notion **of** *identity* and alienates it from essence.
>
> *(89)*

The colonizer makes use of certain strategies. such as stereotyping. to keep the colonized under control. but the ambivalence that inevitably accompanies this attempt to oversimplify and reduce the colonized to a fixed object of knowledge inevitably implies that the relation of power becomes much more uncertain. Mimicry has a double and contradictory effect: on the one hand. it enables power and. on the other. brings about tlie loss of agency. Consequently. as control slips away from the colonizer. the colonized. while complicit in tlie process. becomes the unconscious agent of menace. which provokes paranoia on the part of the colonizer. who will compulsively try to guess the native's sinister intentions towards him. In "Signs Taken for Wonders". Bhabha will take a further step when he displaces mimicry by the concept of the hybrid. which. being "the split screen of the self and its doubling" and thus "less than one and double" (1994: 114. 116). articulates both colonial and native knowledges. thus enabling active forms of resistance. Mimicry is accordingly transformed from being something which is simply disquieting for the colonizer to a specific form of intervention:

> To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare. mimicry marks those moments of' civil disobedienre within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. 1hen tlie words of' the master become tlie site of hybridity [...] then we iii a iiot only read between the lines but even seek to cliange the often coercive reality ihüi they so lucidly contain.
>
> *(121)*

Although it cannot be affirmed that *Doctor Wooreddy* develops tlie implications of Bhabha's terms to their ultimate consequences —not in vain does the novel deal with Indigenous peoples and the first phase oftheir colonizing process— it is undeniable that Mudrooroo's novel is very much awarr of their tremendous potential. and that it invites the reader to establish the pertinent connections.

The white intruder has deprived Aborigines of everything: their land. their families. their dignity. their innocence. their language. their culture. Aborigines are very much aware of it. but can do nothing against the overwhelming physical superiority of the colonizer. "It is the times". they repeatedly affirm throughout the novel. So deleterious has the white presence been that. to give but one example. Trugernanna. after having been cruelly rapcd by several white men. is totally unable to repard sex as a positive means to achieve individual fulfilment and pleasure. Sex has become yet another commodity. and there is nothing Wooreddy. her husband. can do to change Trugernanna's feelings and vien-S:

> The woman accepted her fate with a numbness worthy of Wooreddy. In the past she had found sex to be a weapon useful Sor survival aiid felt little pleasure iii it. She gave her body in exchange for

> things arid tliat was where the importance lay. Her hushand's love-making meant less than the rape that had been inflicted on her. She hated the nieii for doing that. and was indifferent to what Wooreddy could or would do. [...] Each day Wooreddy made love to his wife. but her lack of response began to bore hiiii. [...] Finally he accepted the fact that they were topether. not for love. but for survival. One needed allies duriiig tlir ending of the world [...] This had to be enough.
>
> *(47-8)*

Destroy people's capacity to enjoy sex. and you mill destroy. not only their pride and dignity but. most important of all. tlieir future. And the saine can be said of the gradual annihilation of their language. tlie first element that inakes people properly distinct and human:

> Wooreddy arid Ummarrah re-introduced themselves. this time using English. the coninion niedium. They explained tliat any misunderstandings had arisen because of the differences in language. 'We hope that we have caused no ill-feelings'. Wooreddy said. 'It is not our way to act roughly. but since most of our people are no more. we have lost touch with many of our customs. There seemed little iise in trying to keep theni up. The white man we travel with has told us to follow his ways and this makes us act in tlie wrong fashion'. Waau accepted tlieir apologies [...]
>
> *(180-1)*

Destroy people's mother tongue. and you will destroy tlieir culture. tlieir own signs of identity,[12] to tlie point that Aboriginal belief in "the unity of the three times" and their subsequent intimate communion with "the known circle of nature" and its "old ways", so far "eternal. unchanging" (95). will be reduced to the one aiid only remaining thing: uncertainty. hopelessness. fatalism. in a word. death:

> tlie times were changing and [...] tlie ghosts roamed the land. These real things had been used by the good doctor to sever tlie three times. They too began to feel alienated. The past. which was fixed. had fixed tlie present aiid the fuiure. just as the future had fixed the present and the past. All three endured together and had eiidured since that long-ago time when the seas had risen to capture vast areas of the land. Now that that long-ago past had become the present. the unsettled present filled with events as great as those of that long-ago past. aiid this niade tlie future hideous with uncertainty. Tliefuture then wound hach on itself like a serpent with its tail in its mouth. Wooreddy's edifice deniolished what they had always believed in. and now they could see that the principle of uncertainty ruled where once there had heeii certainty [...] Tlie only certain thing was the principle of uncertainty.
>
> *(84-5)*

Nature's laws have been replaced by white official law. which can only bring about destruction in a kind of bleak and lethal catch-22. Wooreddy's initial prophecy has therefore come full circle.

It seems clear that one of the most striking things about this novel by Mudrooroo is that it is a *Bildungsroman* in reverse. since Doctor Wooreddy. tlie protagonist. has his revelation or dark epiphany at the very beginning of the novel. which means that what follows is nothing but the sullen illustration and confirmation of its veracity. As young Wooreddy was leaping aiid bounding along the beach. he "landed on something slimy. something eerily cold and not of tlie

earth" and automatically reached the conclusion that "It was an omen [..] but what came from the ocean was evil. aiid so it was an evil omen" (3). Wooreddy's bloodcurdling enlightenment is as follows:

> the world was ending! This truth rntered liis brain and tlie boy. the youth aiid finally the man would hold onto it. modifying it into harshness or softness as ihe occasion demanded. Ilis truth was to be his shield aiid protection. his shelter from the storm. The absolute reality of his enlightenment took care of everything. One day. sooner rather than later. the land would begin to fragment into smaller and smaller pieces. Clouds of fog would rise from tlie sea to hide what was taking place from Great Ancestor. Then the pieces holding tlie last survivors of the human race would be towed out to sea where they would either drown or starve.
>
> (4)

Yet. in spite of the fatalistic feeling of utter extermination that words like these convey. it must be remarked that the novel's ultimate aim is not so much to replace white with black as to speak in favour of hybridity. Mudrooroo has managed to write an Indigenous story using white forms and means such as the novel and tlie English language. By means of oscillating constantly aiid subversively between what is native and the culture of the colonizer. and making use of different perspectives aiid registers which undermine fixed points of view. *Doctor Wooreddy* succeeds in challenging tlie supremacy of white/ official culture aiid advocating respectful integration.

As was stated before. there is a definitive difference that will always distinguish tlie work of Indigenous writers in the settler nations from that of other post-colonial writers: most Indigenous authors believe that they will never be able to achieve full political autonomy.[13] This again corroborates tlie main contradiction embodied by Indigenous cultures. Namely. to use Elleke Boehmer's words (1995: 231). "the way in which their distinctiveness lies in their hybrid status: *not* in the way in which cultural authenticity is achieved. but rather in how tlie non-Aboriginal is adapted and translated in order that Aboriginal selfhood may be expressed" and thus manage to survive. Hybridity is. no doubt. one of the main cornerstones of Mudrooroo's works from the inid 80s onwards. As he himself affirmed:

> 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 postmodern. multicultural Australia
>
> (in Boehmer 1995: 231)

The final revelation scene in *Doctor Wooreddy* clearly confirms Mudrooroo's emphasis on hybridity. As is ultimately disclosed. nothing is absolute. truths are never whole. and ambivalence must therefore be accepted. Wooreddy comes to realize that tlie Great Ancestor and *Ria Warrawah*. the principles of good and evil which have governed his life. come from a single source and are not diametrically opposed:

> Waau stated. 'Everything comes in twos. but behind them stands only one'. [...] '*Pulliyan* [the equivalent to Wooreddy's *Ria Warrawah*] controls all these waters. and Iie is neither evil iior good. tle only is. aiid is even kind to my Crow ancestor [the equivaleiit to Wooreddy's Great Ancestor]. He controls all tlie ocean. aiid loves the waters aiid in Iiis way loves the land too. [...] Wooreddy began to feel a terrible dread rising iii hiiii. It seemed tliat all that he had believed. tlie ichrnie that had supported his life. had been biit part of the trutli. Things were not the siniple black and white he had imagined theiii to be. [...] there was no conflict as he had always thought that there should be - tliat there Iiad tei be! And his skin did not itch at thr proximity of *Ria Warrawah*. and he did not feel threatened by the new truth. though he felt beyond his old life. *Ria Warrawah* and Great Ancestor caiiie from a single source [..] It was the origin of all things.
>
> *(196-7)*

In much the same way. Wooreddy's last enigmatic dreani leaves the reader with a bittersweet feeling which. nonetheless. allows for soine hope in tlie end. Making use of tlie Aboriginal ancestral spirit imagery of "Dreamtime". Wooreddy's reverie manages to bridge tlie gap between their golden past and their dark present and. which is even more important. to link Wooreddy's existence to that of his ancestors. thus claiming that. in spite of everything. some remnants of the old spirituality will always linger on in contemporary Aboriginal life in Australia:

> tle floated up through the darkness surrounded on all sides by the sparkling of countless canipfires. A steady hum vibrated all around. Strange. indistinct beings iravelled with hini. They strrtchrd hands towards him. tried to grab. bui could not. He inoved on. they dropped behind as he passed over a place beneath which all ihe land was ablaze in a greai circle of fire. Froni ihe fire projected lines of light like ropei leading further up. He caught hold ot'one of these and felt himself pulled higher. All around were campfires of his ancestors. but beyond was another land. The sireaniinp rays of light streiched up. tle cluiig on aiid was pulled higher arid higher until Iie was lost in a nothinpness. tle clung on to tlie light raq. cluiig on iii solitude in a iiothingness pierced by other rays biit without clinging figures. All was light and he awoke to the niorning.
>
> *(194-5)*

Wooreddy wants to accompany them. to cling on to tlie light ray of eternal life and ieach higher aiid liigher. but is not allowed to fulfill his desire. not yet. He must actually die to be transformed inio light. to get fused with the forces of the universe. to become immortal:

> Trugernanna siared towards the shorr The last male of Bruny Island was drad. There was a great hole in her which could riever be filled. [...] Now her husband was dead and lying in a shallow grave on tliat beacli. She wished that shc could have taken his corpse and burnt it in the proper way. Then she saw him with Iiis *num* clothing covering his shrunken old man's bodq and his shaven head. No. ihe real Doctor Wooreddy had disappeared before they could get to him and inflict further humiliation upon hiiii. [...] [she] watched the shore and the storni clouds clearing away. Thr yellow setting sun broke through the black clouds to streak rays of light upon the beach. It colourrd the sea red. Then *Laway Larna*. the evening star. appeared in tlie sky as the sun sank below the horizon. Suddenly a spark of light shot up froiii the beach and flashed through the dark sky iowards the evening star. As

it did so, the clouds closed again aiid the world vanished.

(207)

The ambiguity aiid ambivalence which these very last words of the novel convey are by no means accidental. Life implies death and viceversa. Aborigines will never he able to go back to tlieir original past, nor to recover their ancient culture as it was before being contaminated, curtailed and destroyed by tlie white invader. However, there is a positive and empowering side to this. Since they are, to take Bhabha's words again, "less than one and double", they must make the most of what the present offers them, and of the so many possibilities which their condition of culturally "translated" people[14] opens up for them. **As** Stuart Hall affirms:

> [A]s the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with —at least temporarily.
>
> (1993: 277)

On tlie other hand, this empowering hybrid and multifaceted status should not lead them to forpet that they have their own pride and history, and that their idiosyncratic values can he, and as a matter of fact are, a powerful engine in the development and configuration of a hettei and richer Australia. Black Australian literature, once an exotic oddity for tlie white reader, is no longer marginal. As Adam Shoemaker argues, "a sea-change" has taken place among Indigenous writers like Mudi-ooroo: "from an exploration of the "fringe" to o consideration of centrality; from an oppositional dialectic to one which supersedes and renounces opposites through what Mudrooroo calls "maban reality"" (1998: 346). In spite of having been apparently silenced and excluded for years and years, Aborigines have contributed to the making of contemporary Australia more than many people think. In Anne Brewster's words:

> Ahoriginal memory is transforming public perceptions of the pnst in post-invasion Australia. This memory proves to us that Aboriginal people were not simply tlie passive victims or onlookers of modernisation, hui rather the producers aiid makers of modern Australia through their labour and the knowledge of the country that they shared with the white 'settlers'. Modern Australia thus has a significant Aboriginal heritage.
>
> (1996: 6)

Mudrooroo and many other Aboriginal writers reassert their own resistant metaphysic in this apparently contradictory way, and come to terms with their ambiguity, their writing both for their people and for the conquerors of their people, although, aiid this goes without saying, in a self-conscious and inevitably uneasy way.

NOTES:

1. Tlie research carried out for the writing of this paper has been financed by the University of Zaragoza (Financiación: VI- Apoyo, Proyecto No 245-63)

2. As Robert Ross informs us at the very beginning of the chapter he devotes to tlie figure of Colin Johnson/ Mudrooroo Narogin (1901: 21), this polemical Aboriginal writer aiid critic was born at Narrogin in the southwestern partof Western Australia, in 1938. He changed his iiaiiie to Mudrooroo Narogin during the Australian Bicenteiinial Year of 1988 as a protest against tlie European occupation of Australia and as reaffirmation of his own tribal (Bibbulman) identity. Like iiiost young part-Aborigines, he was brought up in aii orphanage, thus complying with ihe aggressive assimilationist policies of a state government that systematically separated Aboriginal children from their Aboriginal relations. Mudrooroo was already writing when he left Western Australia for Melbourne in 1958. His first novel, *Wild Cat Falling*, was published in 1965. Hc speiit iiiost of tlie next ten years outside Ausiralia, travelling in Asia, Europe, aiid North America. Once he returned to Australia, he devoted himself to the defence of Aboriginal rights aiid culture. Among other things, he worked for the Aboriginal Research ('entre, studied at Melbourne University and received an MA degrce to later teach Aboriginal Literature ai Murdoch University and at the University of Queensland, and to become National Coordinator for the Aboriginal Writers Oral Literature aiid Dramatists Association.

3. To give some examples, in 1965, a freedom ride bus tour was organized through tlie towns of northern New South Wales to denounce ihe systematic discrimination practiccd against the Aboriginal population: in 1966 a group of Aborigines walked off the Wave Hill pastoral station in protest against the delay in paying them equal wages: there were also manifestations against tlie operations of some important niiniiig companies on their lands.

4. This is Mudrooroo's main bone of contention in his well-known article "White Forms, Aboriginal Content" (1985), which also claims thai Aboriginal fiction belongs to "Fourth World Literature", the literature produced by indigenous minorities aiid which, despite tlie inferior status conferred to it by white canonical culture, is a powerful weapon to forge an Aboriginal identity, however notional it might he.

5. It is the author's self-conscious change of name ihat has led me to make use of either one name or another, depending on the period to which I am referring on each particular occasion.

6. For more information on Ihimaera's constant use of bicultural combinations of Maori and English (also referred to as *Pakeha*) languages aiid traditions, see Susan Beckmann's "Language as Cultural Identity in Achebe, Ihimaera, Laurence and Attwood" (1981) aiid John H. Beston's "Witi Ihimaera, Maori Novelist in a Changing World" (1977-8).

7. As Tony Birch points out (1996: 182), the iiaiiie of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, who arrived in Portland in May 1841, was G. A. Robinson. Bearing this in mind, it might be no exaggeration to conclude that Mudrooroo is subtly asking tlie rrader to establish some connection between both figures, which adds further irony to tlie consideration of the character in the novel.

8. Significantly enough, whites are referred toas *num*, that is, "ghosts", a term which subtly manages to connect their pale complexion with their lack of humanity, while Aborigines call theniselves "humans".

9. A niost illuminating explanation of Bhabha's complex theories is that offered by Robert Young in his well-known work *White Mythologies. Writing History and the West* (1990: 141-156).

10 A similar argument is brought up by bell hooks in "Eating the Other" (1992). For hooks, in a capitalist/ consunier

society tlie "ethnic" is often used as a kind of "spice. seasoning that can liven up the dull dish tliat is mainstream white culture" (1992: 21).

11. Another good instance of subversive imitation can be seen when two teams of Aborigines are iiiade to play a cricket game. one of tlie "unquestionable" signs of "Englishness". by hlr Robinson. Instead of complying with white cricket rules. they adapt their forms of personal combat to tlie game. What liad been intended to teach them "the art of co-opcration in friendly competition" (137) turns into a fight in which "a good time had heeii had by all except the coniniandaiit" (138). who is thus ironically estranged from tlie game. and thus from one of his mother country's most well-known iiiarks of cultural identity.

12. This process is further reinforced when Mr Robinson unilaterally decides to change their Aboriginal names into English —and pompous!— ones (139). or when Wooreddy gets his liair cut. with the result that "much of his last vestiges of pride [vanish] with his locks" (136).

13. Significantly enough. Ummarrah and Walyer. the only two Aboriginal characters who are right from the stan in favour of fighting against whites. are finally forced to surrender. Whereas Ummarrah is finally executed by the white authorities. Walyer dies in prison as a result of the lethal effects of the "coughing demon".

14. As is well known. this term was coined by Salman Rushdie in his seminal essay "Imaginary Homelands". Relying on the etymological origin of the word "translation" (from tlie Latiii. "bearing across"). he positively concludes that "having being borne across tlie world. we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something gets lost iii translation; I cling. obstinately. to the notion that something can also be gained" ([1982] 1991: 17). In tlie case of Aborigines. it is obvious that those who have survived have remained on their continent. Yet. they have also heeii "borne across" it by their colonizers. and have had to cope with the white invader's faulty translation of Aboriginal culture into their own ideological and cultural standards.

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