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SUP Preview

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# Decolonising Animals

Edited by Rick De Vos



SYDNEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

First published by Sydney University Press

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the  
National Library of Australia.

ISBN 9781743328583 paperback

ISBN 9781743328606 epub

ISBN 9781743328927 pdf

Cover image: *Dingo in the bush*, by Peter Waples-Crowe

Cover design: Naomi van Groll

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In addition, some quotations from scholarly sources may contain terms or views that were considered acceptable within mainstream Australian society when they were written but may no longer be considered appropriate. The wording in these quotes does not necessarily reflect the views of Sydney University Press or the authors.

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# Introduction: Unsettling subjects

Rick De Vos

In the prelude to Kim Scott's novel *That Deadman Dance*, the central character, Bobby Wabalingany, starts to write with chalk on a thin piece of slate.<sup>1</sup>

Roze a wail ...

These three words, defiant of grammar and spelling but anthemic to the novel, simultaneously inscribe the start of a new story, the remembering of a story told but never before written, and the narrative uncertainty of what the whale's rising means to Bobby. The spectacle of a southern right whale suddenly leaping from the ocean can be frightening, affirming, promising or disorienting, with the thunderous slap as the whale falls and hits the ocean surface echoing for great distances. Whales have a reason for rising and falling, but the action is beyond the control or complete understanding of humans. For Bobby, narrating the whale story serves different purposes for different audiences and in different spaces. The words relate to the presence of

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1 Scott 2010. Kim Scott is a descendant of the Noongar people of south-western Western Australia. *That Deadman Dance* is inspired by early contact between Noongar people and Europeans in the early nineteenth century near Scott's hometown of Albany.

whales, not merely as spectacle but as ancestors, kin, prey and capital. Fatefully, it is their absence from the space in which they traditionally lived, close to the coast near the King George Town settlement, that shapes Bobby's later reflections as he struggles to reconcile his cultural and familial ties to the whales, with his earnest and well-intentioned interactions and attachments with the colonial settlers and his part in the hunting and killing of the whales:

Too many people in this camp and this town should not be here. Once he was a whale and men from all points of the ocean horizon lured him close and chased and speared and would not let him rest until (blood clotting his heart) Bobby led them to the ones he loved, and soon he was the only one swimming.<sup>2</sup>

Southern right whales live on the margins of the colonial space but within the colonial imaginary. They provoke spatial arrangements that must be enforced in order to imagine them as possessions. Their bodies describe and endure subjectivity and subjection. While both their presence and their absence influence the natural and cultural world around them, their perspectives, intentions and desires lie beyond the grasp of humans.

In Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*, the central character Oblivia Ethylene experiences, while still a young girl, a deep and unspoken bond with a group of black swans who arrive at the swampland where she is living, a bond that will endure for the rest of her life.<sup>3</sup> The attachment is a mutual one, the swans also captivated by her:

This child! The swan could not take its eyes away from the little girl far down on the red earth. The music broke as if the strings had been broken, and the swan fell earthwards through the air for

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2 Scott 2010, 160.

3 Wright 2013. Alexis Wright is a descendant of the Waanji people from the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. *The Swan Book* is a speculative, dystopian, multi-layered novel, set in the future, that responds to Australia's conservative, racist governance, border insecurities, social inequities and response to climate change.

several moments. Maybe, it was in those moments of falling, that the big bird placed itself within the stories of this country, before it restored the rhythm of its flapping wings, and continued on its flight.<sup>4</sup>

*The Swan Book* balances the narrative thread of the swans as guides for Oblivia with that of their distinct journeys and desires. While care and guidance characterise the relationship between the swans and Oblivia, the swans' actions and interactions exceed this relationship, bearing the weight of their own experiences and understandings, and their own connection with the swamp they recognise as their home.

The black swans in Wright's novel and the whales in Scott's novel provide readers with a glimpse of the indeterminate, unspoken (in human language) and yet profound agency of non-human animals. While filtered through the lens of human perceptions and perceived connections, both the whales and the swans are depicted as finding meaning and purpose in relation to their own spaces, to their own journeys, and to those with whom they share these spaces. Whales and swans are cast not merely as constituents of Indigenous Country but also as its active custodians.

Eva Meijer and Bernice Bovenkerk argue that non-human animal agency matters, both to animal studies and to the academy in general, as evidenced by the accumulation of research and the growing awareness of animal languages, animal cultures, animal emotions, animal cognition and animal politics:

In our view, in order to do justice to animal agency in our moral deliberations, we need a relational model that takes animals' perspectives into account, as well as the socio-historical context, and that does not measure other animals to a human standard.<sup>5</sup>

Animals have an interest in shaping their own lives. Without decentring humans, Meijer and Bovenkerk argue that it is impossible to come to any understanding of non-human animal perspectives. They offer a

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4 Wright 2013, 41.

5 Meijer and Bovenkerk 2021, 55.



preliminary working definition of agency as the capability of a subject to influence the world in a way that expresses will or desire. The swans and whales in Wright's and Scott's novels indicate the indeterminate yet profound nature of this ability when considered in specific spaces, times and social relations. In each case, this ability is revealed in response to an oppressive human regime and social order.

Animal perspectives, interests and personhood, and the ways in which they have endured in the face of colonial settlement, are a key focus of this volume, which brings together a set of situated analyses and case studies, by a diverse group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers and researchers, that focus on the lives of specific non-human animals and groups of animals, and their agency, experiences, knowledge and relationships with other animals as well as humans. *Decolonising Animals* presents a set of animals that in the course of their lives, their relationships and their responses to the conditions of their specific subjectivity disrupt and trouble colonial settlement narratives, processes and assumptions. The title refers to the agency of non-human animals in unsettling, disturbing and eluding settler colonial logics, as well as to the challenges for animal studies scholars in rethinking animal perspectives, knowledges and power in settler colonial contexts.

Colonialism and settlement shape and mark our shared landscapes and habitats, our ways of seeing the world around us and our relationships with others, both non-human and human. Colonialism privileges Western epistemologies, assuming patriarchal, capitalist, heteronormative, ableist and speciesist values and criteria. It produces persistent exclusions and inclusions, foregrounding some forms of life while obscuring others. Importantly, the memories and desires of colonialism are experienced within the conditions of our subjection, repositioning us in relation to political, social and scientific authorities. As a Sri Lankan–Australian resident currently living and writing in Naarm/Melbourne on Bunurong and Wurundjeri Country, I recognise some of the ways in which the experiences of my parents growing up in colonial Ceylon and my experiences of growing up as the non-white son of migrants in Boorloo/Perth on Whadjuk Nyoongar Country have shaped my sense of identity, my aspirations and my expectations of how others might respond to me.

Animals undoubtedly continue to be the subjects of colonial domination and displacement, the objects of colonial knowledge and at times the agents of colonial conquest and settlement. Non-human animals have been used and exploited in order to take over lands and exclude and eradicate existing animals as part of the process of eliminating Indigenous peoples. They have also been used and exploited in the imposition of imperial animal practices. In their refusal to recognise colonial authority and subjection, and the times and spaces of empire, however, non-human animals have also displayed resilience, resistance and persistence in the face of colonialism. Non-human animals disrupt history, politics, space, society and culture, and in doing so bring into question any seamless or dogmatic notion of resistance, subversion or decolonisation as exclusively human domains. The ethical demands of non-human animals mean responding to the ways they are defined, confined, displaced, translocated, excluded, consumed and eradicated in the continuing process and rationale of colonial settlement.

The chapters in this volume are not intended as qualified acts of decolonisation, nor do they assume that such a process can indeed be initiated in the absence of animals; rather, they constitute efforts to address specific contexts, centred around or marshalled by specific groups of animals, in which settler colonial structures and logics and the conditions of animal and human subjection can be identified and questioned. In particular, the stories encapsulated in these chapters seek to question colonial animal epistemologies. Each of the authors has attempted to position themselves clearly in relation to the non-human animals and other knowledge-holders with whom they have engaged. The discursive space marked out by *Decolonising Animals* is one in which non-human animal, Indigenous and European colonial knowledges and perspectives are brought into contact with one another in order to question previous and ongoing encounters and hierarchies. The perspectives, knowledges, experiences and representations of horses, dingoes, bison, dung beetles, fish, jaguars, birds in extant, extinct or hybrid forms, and other non-human protagonists are juxtaposed, acknowledged and explored, with a focus on the times, spaces and physical conditions of their subjection within settler colonial regimes, and on their diverse responses to the structures

and processes imposed on them. While each of the chapters may at first glance appear to address non-human animals in the wild, or at least animals that are free-ranging, each story as it unfolds reveals ties to colonial demands, animal agriculture and industry, or the process of settlement. Each is tied to specific political, historical and environmental relations and imaginaries.

This volume responds to and is part of a growing body of research addressing the positioning of non-human animals in settler colonial contexts. Animal studies scholars have in recent years attempted to reflect on the ways in which their research has benefited from the academy's colonial history and authority, and have sought to question their social and cultural positions in relation to Indigenous studies and decolonial studies. Connected to this is an increased focus on the experiences and consequences of settler colonialism for non-human animals. A provocative catalyst for this research has been Driftpile Cree writer and scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt's essay "Animal bodies, colonial subjects: (re)locating animality in decolonial thought", which challenges animal studies researchers to understand the conditions of subjectivity experienced by non-human animals within settler colonialism and to theorise animals as colonial subjects who need to be centred in decolonial thought.<sup>6</sup> Belcourt contends that most animal activism and academic animal advocacy continues to operate within and to perpetuate spaces of settler coloniality, while avoiding and deferring a reflective critique of the settler subject position in relation to animals.<sup>7</sup>

In the introduction to their recent edited collection entitled *Colonialism and Animality*, Kelly Struthers Montford and Chloë Taylor argue that Western settler colonial projects have assumed and fostered human exceptionalism in enforcing a restrictive conception of culture based on race, gender and species:

Dualisms such as nature/culture, body/mind, female/male, and animal/human have been used to mark those labelled as closer to nature, such as racialized persons, women, and animals, as less human and therefore a-cultural non-agentic non-subjects.

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6 Belcourt 2015.

7 Belcourt 2015.

The cultural position of animals has also been used as a marker of civility. Reverence, respect, and spiritual communion with animals and nature were used by colonists as evidence of the savagery of Indigenous peoples – a position used to justify the settler project.<sup>8</sup>

In their introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies* entitled “Animal Nationalisms”, Kathryn Gillespie and Yamini Narayanan emphasise the importance of the relationship between racism and anthropocentrism to colonial projects, in particular in regard to the ideologies disseminated in the building and maintenance of settler colonial nations.<sup>9</sup> They propose a “multispecies cultural politics that attends to racial/ethnic and species othering”.<sup>10</sup> Such a proposition identifies a key challenge for addressing settler colonial and decolonial relationships, one that feeds back to the challenge issued in Belcourt’s essay: to theorise non-human animals as colonial subjects with specific, multi-layered conditions of subjectivity, and to unravel the anthropocentrism bound within settler colonial logics, where the establishment of settler humanity occurs at the expense of animalities.

Animal agriculture, with its facade of benign pastoralism and bucolic normality, conceals a vast set of insidious, brutal and cruel animal practices deployed in the processing and killing of selected animal bodies while excluding and eradicating others. Such practices also implicate and exploit racialised and marginalised humans. At the same time, however, settler colonial states display an overt but selective objection to Indigenous animal practices, such as hunting and fishing, which are highlighted as barbaric and threatening biodiversity, at the same time ignoring Indigenous community practices promoting land, water and species protection. While it is clear that some animal practices have a more devastating and widespread effect than others, it might be reasonable to assume that non-human animals would prefer to avoid all practices entailing or leading to their killing by humans.

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8 Struthers, Montford and Taylor 2020, 8–9.

9 Gillespie and Narayanan 2020.

10 Gillespie and Narayanan 2020, 4.

Focusing on the colonisation of Australia as a human–animal practice, Fiona Probyn-Rapsey and Lynette Russell take up the challenge of addressing the incipient anthropocentrism that persists, and at times appears unavoidable, in conflicting settler colonial and Indigenous cultural perspectives on animals:

Disputes over animals are never simply between Indigenous and settler Australians, but also within and across these groups, with contestations framed by tensions around traditional/modern, conservation/ extinction, introduced/native, and human/animal, with animal advocacy and animal welfare issues (raised by both settler and Indigenous Australians) also frequently at odds with mainstream pastoralism, Indigenous hunting practices, and conservation efforts that include species eradications.<sup>11</sup>

They propose examining colonisation from distinct animal, Indigenous and settler colonial perspectives – a triadic approach that reasserts the interests of non-human animals while decentering human perspectives. Such an approach resists the tendency to exclude animal perspectives from consideration when examining colonial violence involving them, as well as the tendency to conflate all humans as a homogeneous group in relation to animals. Considering each perspective separately also allows for the interests of each perspective to be examined in more critical detail, without assuming that all non-human animals share similar perspectives, or that all Indigenous people or all colonial settlers do likewise.<sup>12</sup>

The advantages of such an approach for animal studies scholars include the provision of a discursive space for considering specific relationships between animals and groups of animals and their diverse, distinctive and multi-layered non-human experiences of colonisation, hunting and other interactions, while avoiding the tendency to view animals exclusively through their connections to humans or through species hierarchies, behaviourist models or larger environmental assemblages. At the same time, such an approach allows Indigenous

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<sup>11</sup> Probyn-Rapsey and Russell 2022, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Probyn-Rapsey and Russell 2022, 38–39.

animal knowledges and relationships to be examined without mediation by or comparison with Western science: “interrogating western frameworks is not the same as engaging with radically different approaches in Indigenous knowledges”.<sup>13</sup> It is in this space of critical thinking that the discounting or erasure of Indigenous animal knowledges can be seen as epistemic violence, as a strategic colonial practice, and that the aims and demands of a decolonial approach become clearer. Identifying the spatial, temporal and cultural limits of settler colonial knowledges and reasserting both Indigenous and non-human perspectives and knowledges is a conceptually unsettling project, one that does not seek simple resolutions but respects difference and incommensurability. One of the challenges for animal studies scholars, following on from this suggested approach, is to reconsider the way in which they position themselves in relation to Indigenous animal knowledges and the way in which they acknowledge the authority of these knowledges.

Kelsey Dayle John’s chapter in this volume engages with this process of erasing and silencing Indigenous and non-human knowledge. John presents a narrative of horses in North America that focuses on kinship and relationalities of care, utilising a Diné worldview that not only accommodates horse personhood but emphasises it as central to understanding the place of horses in ceremony and traditional knowledge. John’s decolonial history works against the grain of Western narratives of settlement that assume horses were introduced to the continent as agents of conquest and colonisation, challenging this idea by demonstrating how a shared landscape was marked, and a shared history erased, by a settler colonial regime that rendered the already-settled space “empty”, Indigenous relationalities non-existent and more-than-human knowledges confined to the category of myth. John’s account of Navajo horse relations speaks directly into that space of silencing, giving witness to the world created by horses and Navajo people.

The discounting of Indigenous knowledge of non-human animals and their relationships in settler colonial histories is also a critical concern of Rowena Lennox’s chapter. Through an examination of the

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13 Probyn-Rapsey and Russell 2022, 47.

representation and conceptualisation of dingoes in contemporary public contexts and in historical settler accounts of specific dingoes and their relationships with one another, with other animals and with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, Lennox presents an account of more specific and contextualised experiences and knowledges of dingoes. The concepts of epistemic injustice and prejudicial exclusion inform a reconsideration of the ways in which Indigenous knowledge of dingoes, and by extension the guiding principles of Country, are devalued and obstructed in settler colonial biological, historical and legal discourses. Lennox examines the differences in the alternative taxonomic names placed upon dingoes as a space of epistemological tension in settler colonial knowledge, with dingoes unsettling the norms of categorisation as wild/tame, native/introduced and keystone predator/feral pest, demonstrating how naming and writing work within Western and scientific knowledge systems to possess and dominate non-human animals and land, and create hierarchies and hierarchical ways of interpreting the world.

The importance of research approaches and methodologies to affirming Indigenous knowledge and resisting colonial structures and processes is an idea that the influential Māori (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou) scholar and educator Linda Tuhiwai Smith has highlighted and detailed in her work. Smith's Kaupapa Māori research principles reflect the fact that research methods require appropriate guiding principles and frameworks, and that Māori research should be undertaken by Māori, for Māori and with Māori.<sup>14</sup> Her critique of Western research demonstrates how the very concept of research is inextricably tied to and historically founded on colonialism and the annexation of Indigenous peoples, spaces and times, and that reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing and being requires careful planning, consciousness and commitment in conducting research.

The development and deployment of a decolonising methodology addressing animals, mass extinction and responsibility provide the focus for Katarina Gray-Sharp's chapter, which constructs an approach to the study of anthropogenic mass extinction grounded in Māori and Indigenous studies. This approach is distinctly interdisciplinary,

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<sup>14</sup> Smith 2015.

displaying openness and careful attention to all analytic techniques. Gray-Sharp's research framework utilises polyvocality, allowing for different voices to articulate and interpret the structure and meaning of anthropogenic mass extinction: scientific/mathematical, linguistic/etymological and philosophical/conceptual. While a Western colonial approach might assume or demand a separation of these discursive sites of inquiry, Gray-Sharp's methodology connects them as a set of constructs confirming the continuation of the current mass extinction event, an event whose discursive shaping can be viewed as structural violence, calling all researchers to respond to it in an ethical and responsible way. Gray-Sharp proposes suggestions for such a response based on mātauranga Māori and Levinasian ethics. Through this polyvocal process, insights are also revealed into the lives and deaths of extinct avifauna in Aotearoa.

While framed as critical responses from settler positions, two other chapters in this volume also engage with decolonising methodologies. The chapter by Susan McHugh works towards framing a critical methodology for literary animal studies, while the chapter by Ana Paula Motta and Martin Porr focuses on decolonial approaches in archaeology, considering how such approaches can structure and inform a specific case study of jaguars.

McHugh's chapter acknowledges two compelling and connected concerns: the marginalisation of race and racism in animal studies, and in particular literary animal studies; and the relegation and exclusion of non-human animal perspectives and interests in contemporary fiction and literary criticism. The chapter commences by posing an uncomfortably familiar question regarding the whiteness of animal studies. McHugh uses this discomfort as a springboard to examine recent debates regarding the relationship between speciesism and racism, using literary critical research on the influential African American writer Toni Morrison, in order to suggest a literary critical methodology that foregrounds and values different reading and writing experiences, highlights narrative paths of inequality, questions objectivity and mastery in textual reading and reasserts what is not known and what lies outside a reader's cultural knowledge. These "far reading practices" are employed alongside more recognisable close reading techniques in analysing Morrison's novel *A Mercy* and how



depictions of slavery and non-human animals may be read and interpreted. The chapter presents a case for practising more critical ways of accounting for the responsibility of responsiveness to animal-and-human-worlds.

Motta and Porr compare and connect the discursive and analytic practices of archaeology to those of animal studies. In emphasising the need for a stronger commitment to decolonial approaches, they advocate working towards more resistive and inclusive archaeological practices, highlighting recent archaeological work, particularly in the Global South, that questions how different species perceive the world around them and how these perceptions and responses have changed through time and space. Motta and Porr's case study of jaguars in Mexico and Central and South America examines Eurocentric and colonial conceptions, critically comparing and countering these with jaguar representations and meanings in Mayan, Olmec, Aztec and other Indigenous art, myths, legends and cosmologies. They explore how changing perceptions of jaguars influenced the way jaguars were interpreted in archaeology, as well as their conservation status and the contemporary knowledge held by Indigenous populations. The case study points to the notion of "walking with", in which knowledge is produced through experiencing and re-creating connections between people, land and existence, as helping researchers become more intimately aware of how coloniality is enacted in the process of research. Motta and Porr argue that in dismissing and discounting relational entanglements, colonial epistemologies erase both Indigenous animal and human bodies, citing the work of Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe scholar Vanessa Watts.

Watts' research provides a critical account of the persistence of animal agency in the face of colonial encounters.<sup>15</sup> Grounding her argument within Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe cosmologies, Watts describes the process in which shared agency (shared between the land, non-humans and humans) is an integral part of Indigenous environments. Natural environments are always also social environments, or societies: "Non-human beings are active members of society. Not only are they active, they also directly influence how

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15 Watts 2013.

humans organise themselves into that society.”<sup>16</sup> Watts identifies the framework in which land, non-humans and humans are connected, a framework formed by real Creation events, as Place-Thought. Western political and educational structures enforce a restrictive framework, the epistemological- ontological, in which knowledge and being are separated, with agency reconfigured as an exclusively human capacity. Watts argues that such a framework leads to alienation from the land and from non-human animals:

As Indigenous peoples, it is not only an obligation to communicate with Place-Thought (ceremonies with land, territory, the four directions, etc.), but it ensures our continued ability to act and think according to our cosmologies. To prevent these practices deafens us. It is not that the non-human world no longer speaks but that we begin to understand less and less. This is why, despite five hundred years of colonialism, we are still not fully colonized and we are still continuing to fight; we have within us the ability to communicate with the land but our agency as Indigenous peoples has been corrupted within this colonial frame.<sup>17</sup>

While the work of Métis scholar Zoe Todd has focused on fish and their relations with humans and with their environment, it has had resonances for animal studies researchers in thinking about human–non-human kinship in other human–animal contexts. Todd’s notion of fish pluralities – manifested in their various bodily states of existence, including as non-human beings with agency and knowledge, as food for humans and non-humans, as scientific objects of study and as sites of memories and connections – draws on the fact that fish can be known, recognised and made sense of in many different ways.<sup>18</sup> Todd’s concept of fishy refraction works towards understanding how spaces and sites of difference mediate the ways fish and humans engage with each other and with water and air.<sup>19</sup> Together these concepts

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16 Watts 2013, 23.

17 Watts 2013, 32.

18 Todd 2014.

19 Todd 2018.

help to build an understanding of how fish contribute to shaping their shared environments and demand ethical responses. Todd's interdisciplinary approach to understanding fish as kin who have been here before humans is framed in Métis legal traditions and cosmology, and focuses on specific groups of fish and humans in specific times and spaces in northern Canada.

Todd's notions of pluralities and kin, as well as Cree political theorist Kiera Ladner's conception of pluralities, are taken up in Danielle Taschereau Mamers' critical interrogation of bison's relational lifeworlds.<sup>20</sup> The chapter commences by considering a 1907 stereographic image taken by N.A. Forsyth. The image carries with it a set of assumptions about its discursive significance: the enactment of settler colonial power and the processes of extraction, the social and cultural hierarchy established by economic and colonial demands, the removal of a keystone species from a grassland ecosystem, settler colonial alienation in action. Taschereau Mamers' focus, however, is on the bison as a transformative presence, a subject with her own history and agency. The chapter draws on Indigenous multispecies philosophies, practices and protocols in positing an approach that shifts the focus away from a conventional critique of settler colonial state practices, alienation and infrastructure, and towards bison perspectives and agency. Taschereau Mamers interrogates the bison's entangled lifeworlds both in and outside their colonial contexts, exploring bison world-making and how their presence transforms their place of living, and speculating on the lifeworlds, pluralities and agencies operating in bison dung pats. Thinking through this leads to a way of attending to the unravelling and ending of these worlds.

My own chapter is concerned with fish, in particular how Western scientific knowledge of fish is shaped by a history of colonial violence that is often disposed of in its representation. Stories of miraculous discoveries, the overcoming of danger, the enduring of hardships and the commitment of natural historians and fishing communities provide the cornerstone for fish narratives, and for the establishment of Western science as the unquestioned reference for determining the status of fish, and their ultimate fate. Fish, however, can provide a problem for

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<sup>20</sup> Ladner 2003.

colonial authority and postcolonial demands, in the way they transgress the times, spaces and structures of colonisation. Their oceanic and fluvial movements and relationships can transgress the boundaries of nation or colony, their histories exceed the temporalities of colonisation, and their knowledges and perceptions surpass the determinations of science. Indigenous fish knowledges, by contrast, suggest less formal distinctions between fish and humans, less hierarchical relations of power and a deeper awareness of ongoing relationships of ecological and cultural connection and kinship. They also point more clearly to what fish know about us. My approach to cultural relationships with fish is informed by Zoe Todd's call for us to see the connections between terrestrial and aquatic environments and to be aware of kinship relationships and obligations in "fish-places".

Kirsty Dunn's chapter presents a critical reflection on the significance and potential of pūrākau in understanding human–non-human kinships and connections, in holding together alternative narrative perspectives, and in experiencing storytelling as a developing, ongoing process. While the Māori term pūrākau does not translate in an easy and definitive way into English, it is understood in this chapter to mean narratives that have been passed down through generations and that hold historical, geographical, genealogical and ecological knowledge as well as moral and ethical guidelines. Non-human kin are often addressed in pūrākau by way of shapeshifting, hybridity and more-than-human behaviours. Dunn analyses two short stories by Māori authors and their portrayals of birdwomen, mother birds and narrative perspectives: "Te Karaka o te Titi" by Karl Wixon, and "Kurungaituku", a provocative retelling of the story of Hatupatu and Kurungaituku the birdwoman by Ngahua Te Awekotuku. The stories are considered for the ways in which they represent specific, alternative non-human kin perspectives. Within these stories we see animals as observers, as adversaries, as kai (food), as tohu (signs), as guardians and protagonists with agency and their own perspectives. In keeping with the broader themes of this volume, Dunn's chapter calls attention to the way these stories foreground our inclusion and participation in human–non-human kinships and ecological relationships, and our obligations to non-human animals.

In a foreword to *Colonialism and Animality*, Dinesh Wadiwel posits a reminder that our relationships with non-human animals, as well as those activities that come together as animal studies (such as research, art and activism), are always already tied up with the settler colonial project.<sup>21</sup> Given this fraught attachment, Wadiwel questions how we might resist complicity with the project and avoid reflecting settler rationalities in presenting research about animals. A further question raised, one that is particularly relevant to this volume, concerns the efficacy of presenting alternative perspectives and alternative knowledges, and the extent to which they can bring about change. This is a daunting question with which to engage. While *Decolonising Animals* might seek to present case studies of specific animals and groups of animals that might trouble and unsettle the process of colonialism in specifically framed contexts, the question of radical change remains deferred, to other sites, other animals, other human–animal relationships. Perhaps making space for these knowledges, perspectives and relationships can serve as a beginning.

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<sup>21</sup> Wadiwel 2021.

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## 2

# “Red I am”: Names for dingoes in science and Story

*Rowena Lennox*

This chapter considers Western and First Nations epistemologies and ontologies to argue that decolonising white settler knowledge, attitudes towards and discourse around dingoes provides ways to reconfigure relations between the colonial settler state and the diverse cultures of Indigenous Australia. I came to writing about dingoes as a settler Australian who loved my kelpie-cattle dog. Through my research, I learned how ongoing treatment of dingoes parallels the colonial dispossession, killing and marginalisation of First Nations peoples,<sup>1</sup> although, as Driftpile Cree writer Billy-Ray Belcourt notes, “the animal and the Indigenous subject are not commensurable colonial subjects insofar as their experiences of colonisation are different”<sup>2</sup> Analysing white settler epistemology, ontology and actions around dingoes shows how “animal bodies are made intelligible in the settler imagination on stolen, colonised, and re-settled Indigenous lands”<sup>3</sup> and casts a stark light on the ongoing racism and epistemic injustice Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience. As Palawa sociologist Maggie Walter points out, colonisation pervades racial and social hierarchies in settler nations like Australia: racialised discourses define and position

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1 See Probyn-Rapsey 2020.

2 Belcourt 2015, 9.

3 Belcourt 2015, 1.

“the Indigenous peoples they [white hierarches] have dispossessed and from whose lands and resources the now-settler nations draw their wealth and identity”.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of epistemic injustice used here is theorised by English philosopher Miranda Fricker, who explores how social identity and power affect how knowledge is gained and lost.<sup>5</sup> Fricker is concerned with the ethical and political dimensions of humans’ epistemic conduct and defines epistemic injustice as “the wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower”.<sup>6</sup> Fricker’s focus on injustice – which, she argues, “is normal” in some spheres of epistemic activity<sup>7</sup> – is a way to think about epistemic justice, which, I contend, is a necessary step towards truth telling<sup>8</sup> and decolonisation. Epistemic injustice can be both testimonial, when one party is not considered credible because of prejudice, and hermeneutical, when, for example, a dominant group has defined how knowledge is constituted so that other forms of knowledge are not able to be articulated or understood as a shared epistemic resource.<sup>9</sup> Attempting to enact epistemic justice as a white person in a colonial context where, as Goenpul sociologist Aileen Moreton-Robinson points out, “invisible, unnamed and unmarked whiteness” is equated with humanity and has shaped knowledge production, demands that I consider how “the dominant regime of knowledge is culturally and racially biased, socially situated and partial”.<sup>10</sup>

With this aim, I critically examine knowledge about dingoes constitutive of Western fields of expertise such as biology, ecology and zoology in the sciences, as well as anthropology, cultural studies, history and literary studies in the humanities, with close focus on words, naming and epistemological blind spots. This endeavour requires, as literary scholar Clare Archer-Lean and co-authors write in their analysis of representations of the dingo in literary,

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4 Walter 2016, 84.

5 Fricker 2007, vii.

6 Fricker 2007, 1.

7 Fricker 2007, vii.

8 See Davis 2020.

9 Fricker 2007, 1.

10 Moreton-Robinson 2004, 80, 87–8.



anthropological, tourism/geography and scientific discourses, “transdisciplinarity and its close attention to scrutinising the ontological positions (and value assumptions) of the literature itself, rather than assuming the dingo to be the only ‘subject’ in question”.<sup>11</sup> Such examination shows how vocabulary that reflects and reifies hierarchies is essential to scientific and ethnographic ways of knowing and yields insights into colonialist relations and dingoes’ experience of colonisation. As education scholar Martin Nakata, from the Torres Strait Islands,<sup>12</sup> argues in his theorising on the Cultural Interface, these fields of expertise, like all systems of knowledge, are “culturally embedded”.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter aims to show how, in the still-colonial context, naming can be prescriptive rather than descriptive and functions as an act of possession and domination. In 1770, Lt James Cook and his crew sailed along the east coast of the land mass that is now known as Australia in HMS *Endeavour*. Irene Watson, a Tanganekald and Meintangk Boandik legal scholar, describes Aboriginal political, cultural and linguistic organisation:

At the time of Cook’s coming we had an Aboriginal relationship to this country now called Australia. It was a relationship to land which was shared by hundreds of culturally distinct and different language-speaking first nations peoples. Our lands were held collectively. Individual ownership was a very different concept to an Aboriginal relationship to land. However all Aboriginal relationships to land were deemed by British law to be non-existent.<sup>14</sup>

Cook claimed that he took possession of the east coast of this land for the British Crown from an island in the Torres Strait known to the

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11 Archer-Lean, Wardell-Johnson et al. 2015, 183.

12 The 274 islands now known as the Torres Strait Islands had names before Spanish navigator Luis Vaez de Torres sailed with Pedro Fernandes de Queirós’ expedition through the straits on his way to Manila in 1606. See Pearson 2021.

13 Nakata 2002, 286.

14 Watson 2009, 2.

clan groups of its Indigenous custodians as Tuined, Bedang, Thunadha, Bedhan Lag and Tuidin. The Kaurareg people, traditional owners of Tuined, maintain that Cook did not go ashore on Tuined, or raise the Union Jack there.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Cook renamed Tuined “Possession Island”. Cultural studies scholar Katrina Schlunke explains how this renaming of an island, which is already named, is a “distorting falsehood” that becomes part of the unconscious of our white nation.

The archive shows us Cook knew the land belonged to others as “we” (the white nation) still know it. Through this naming, this “linguaging”, the nation is granted something like an unconscious (the distorting falsehood) that leads to the national need to confirm our “reality” of possession. This is a daily, naturalised practice, the ordinariness of which belies the uncontrolled, unlawful things it is. A part of the ordinary confirmation of possession is the concomitant domination of the white human over plant, animal, sea and sky through the language that defers an ultimate meaning and orders our knowing into an “us” and “other” through the naming of place.<sup>16</sup>

These names are, as Schlunke puts it, part of the “domination of the white human over plant, animal, sea, and sky”. But, as Schlunke points out, within these attempts at “naturalisation” is the knowledge that settler possession of Aboriginal land is “unlawful”.

In this chapter, I attempt to decolonise my imagination and expand my capacity to understand dingoes and the networks of relationships with which they are involved with an appreciation of Aboriginal Law and Story.<sup>17</sup> Drawing on insights from Kombu-merri philosopher Mary Graham and white anthropologist and ecocritic Deborah Bird Rose,

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15 The Kaurareg had been warned by smoke signals and messages of the *Endeavour's* approach and they were prepared to attack if the mariners disembarked (Australian Museum 2021). In 1922, the Kaurareg were forcibly relocated from Tuined to Moa Island. In 1925, the Australian government erected a monument on Tuined to commemorate Cook's alleged landing (Naval Historical Society of Australia 2019).

16 Schlunke 2009, 8.

I re-read texts about Aboriginal dingoes produced by Europeans and settler Australians with attention to Indigenous knowledge and spirituality, including relationship with land, the custodial ethic, autonomy, reciprocity and sentience. I also re-read the dingoes in these texts allusively, including through fire and the colour red. My aims are (1) to position Indigenous dingo knowledge as a possible means for white people to understand the epistemic shifts necessary for structural decolonisation and (2) to enable a nascent consideration of dingoes as cultural mediators and agents of decolonisation.

### The Cultural Interface, dingoes and epistemic injustice

To appraise dingoes as both subjects and agents at the intersection of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems, or the Cultural Interface, as Nakata has theorised,<sup>18</sup> I consider how dingoes are conceptualised in “interwoven, competing and conflicting discourses”<sup>19</sup> where “contradiction, ambiguities, conflict and contestation of meanings” cohere (and coagulate) “to inform, constrain or enable what can be seen or not seen, what can be brought to the surface or sutured over, what can be said or not said, heard or not heard, understood or misunderstood, what knowledge can be accepted, rejected, legitimised or marginalised, or what actions can be taken or not taken on both individual and collective levels”.<sup>20</sup> Nakata’s reference to epistemology, to “what knowledge can be accepted, rejected, legitimised or marginalised”, brings me to questions of epistemic injustice. The legal proceedings subsequent to the 1980 disappearance of baby Azaria

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17 Regarding the notion of “Story” used here, anthropologist Jim Wafer, via ecocritic and anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose, defines the Arrernte term *altyerre* (or *alchera*, *altjira*) – the word for the concept widely translated in English as the Dreaming – as “story”. According to Wafer’s interpretation, events that happened in Story create phenomena that we can see today: rocks, mountains, rivers, cave paintings, petroglyphs and other artefacts and natural features (see Rose 1996, 26).

18 Nakata 2007; 2002.

19 Nakata 2002, 285.

20 Nakata 2007, 199.

Chamberlain from her tent in the campground at Uluru puts dingoes and epistemic injustice into the Cultural Interface. On the night Azaria disappeared, her parents, Lindy and Michael, claimed she had been taken by a dingo. That night and the morning after, Aboriginal trackers read and followed pawprints at the Chamberlains' tent, and pawprints and indentations on the nearby sand dune. A week later, when Azaria's jumpsuit, booties and nappy were found four kilometres away near the base of the Rock, the same trackers read and analysed pawprints at that site. But Azaria's body was never found. After two inquests and a trial, Azaria's mother, Lindy, was jailed for murder. A few years later, as the prosecution's evidence was discredited and more evidence came to light, Lindy was released from prison, and in 1986 the Morling Royal Commission of Inquiry into Chamberlain Convictions took place.

In her autobiography, Lindy Chamberlain describes in detail the Morling Royal Commission's adversarial interrogation of Barbara Tjikadu, one of the Anangu Aboriginal trackers who had followed pawprints at the Chamberlains' tent the night Azaria disappeared and at the site where Azaria's jumpsuit was found a week later, through her interpreter, Marlene Cousens.<sup>21</sup> This court room exchange shows how hermeneutical injustice can be compounded by testimonial epistemic injustice,<sup>22</sup> and is an example of how Aboriginal authority "is not respected or is simply disregarded". As a more recent group of researchers into the needs of Aboriginal mothers in prison put it: "We are usually 'experts' under duress and for the benefit of agendas other than our own. These forms of positioning are disrespectful and continually disempowering."<sup>23</sup>

Michael Adams, counsel assisting the Crown, asked Tjikadu about how she knew the tracks that she had followed after Azaria was taken were the tracks of a big male dingo. Tjikadu replied that "male dogs have big tracks".<sup>24</sup> Adams' line of questioning continued to attempt to cast doubt on Tjikadu's tracking expertise and her knowledge of dingo diet and hunting behaviour. She had to repeatedly explain the difference

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21 Chamberlain 1990, 634–8.

22 Fricker 2007, 159.

23 Sherwood, Lighton et al. 2015, 186.

24 Barbara Tjikadu quoted in Chamberlain 1990, 635.

between male dingoes’ and female dingoes’ tracks, between individual dingo tracks, and between mothers’ and young dingoes’ tracks; she also explained what dingoes ate and how they hunted. When Adams’ questioning tried to lead Tjikadu to say that the dingo could have been carrying a joey from the tent, Cousens, Tjikadu’s interpreter, responded, “You are talking your way with your ideas and you are talking about lies.”<sup>25</sup> When Commissioner Morling intervened to reiterate Adams’ question about whether the dingo could have had a joey and not Azaria, Tjikadu retorted, “Was a kangaroo living in the tent?”<sup>26</sup>

This pattern of questioning continued. Adams was questioning Tjikadu about whether it could have been a different dingo at the tent from the dingo at the site where Azaria’s jumpsuit was found when Cousens intervened:

“I would like to tell you something first before you ask questions like that. When Aboriginal people see tracks, they know who it belongs to, what person went there, because they know the tracks, whereas if all these people got out of the courtroom now and walked barefoot, you can’t tell, can you?”

“No,” exclaimed Adams.

The interpreter said, “Aboriginal people can.”<sup>27</sup>

I deem that Adams’ mode of questioning Barbara Tjikadu is an attempt at “prejudicial exclusion from participation in the spread of knowledge”<sup>28</sup> and demonstrates how “[c]olonization is not just an historical fact; it is a current strategy to exclude Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing from mainstream institutions.”<sup>29</sup> Tjikadu and Cousens seem to be aware of the work they are doing in the Cultural

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25 Marlene Cousens quoted in Chamberlain 1990, 636.

26 Barbara Tjikadu quoted in Chamberlain 1990, 636. The court laughed but according to Chamberlain, Tjikadu’s answer was not meant to be funny, and she and Cousens looked offended because, Chamberlain writes, they thought people were laughing at them.

27 Marlene Cousens quoted in Chamberlain 1990, 637–8.

28 Fricker 2007, 162.

29 Sherwood, Lighton et al. 2015, 185.

Interface. As Wiradjuri poet and scholar Jeanine Leane explains, “An Aboriginal person in Australia ... can see two epistemologies: the one you are born to – your cultural stance – and the introduced one – the colonial perspective.”<sup>30</sup> Tjikadu and Cousens resist the court’s attempts to diminish their credibility by educating those present about white people’s – not Anangu – lack of hermeneutical resources in this context. As well as calling out and correcting epistemic injustice, Tjikadu and Cousens show that reading tracks is a special form of literacy, as Leane explicates:

tracking is as much about anticipation as it is following. Tracking is about reading: reading land and people before and after whitefellas. It is about entering into the consciousness of the person or people of interest. Tracking is not just about reading the physical signs; it is about reading the mind. It is not just about seeing and hearing what is there; it is as much about what is not there.<sup>31</sup>

### Land, Aboriginal Law and names for dingoes

In reply to one of Adams’ questions about dingo diet, Barbara Tjikadu stated, “A dingo is a dingo, and if he wants a feed, he’ll kill to eat.”<sup>32</sup> Tjikadu’s knowledge of dingoes is based on empirical observation<sup>33</sup> and Aboriginal spiritual identity, which posits land as the basis of all meaning.<sup>34</sup> Kombu-merri philosopher Mary Graham writes about the concept of the custodial ethic, achieved through repetitive action, which reveres the land as “*the great teacher*”.<sup>35</sup> Land teaches people how to relate to land, and how to relate to each other.<sup>36</sup> Graham explains that Aboriginal Law was not legislated by humans but by Creator Beings,

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30 Leane 2014, 2.

31 Leane 2014, 1.

32 Barbara Tjikadu quoted in Chamberlain 1990, 635.

33 See Parker 2006, 122, 239.

34 Graham 2008, 1.

35 Graham 2008, 2 [emphasis in original].

36 Graham 2008, 2.

or spiritual ancestors, during the Dreaming. Like physics, Aboriginal Law is concerned with “the way the real world is perceived to behave” and according to Graham it cannot be “ideologised”.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Western scientific laws, which describe physical phenomena, Graham writes, Aboriginal Law describes both physical and spiritual phenomena that “continually interpenetrate each other”.<sup>38</sup> In this system, land is the constant: “Aboriginal law is valid for all people only in the sense that all people are placed on land wherever they happen to be, so that the custodial ethic, which is primarily an obligatory system, may be acted upon by anyone who is interested in looking after or caring for land.”<sup>39</sup> Graham explains how place-based identity, which “emerges out of the landscape with meaning intact”, differs from an ideologically derived “focus of identity” in which “[m]eaning is ... moulded to fit [an ideological] framework (rather than emerging intact from a place in the landscape)”.<sup>40</sup> This distinction between place-based or “locus” expressions of identity and ideologically focused expressions of identity is evident in Western and Indigenous understandings of dingoes.

Dingoes do not fit easily into settler Australian dichotomies and taxonomies such as wild/domesticated, native/introduced or harmful/beneficial, even though, as Archer-Lean, Wardell-Johnson et al. note, “extreme duality in perceptions of the dingo, even within the ‘objective’ scientific debates of wildlife ecology”, dominates discussion.<sup>41</sup> Dingoes’ resistance to categorisation unsettles norms of settler colonialism, which may be one reason why they polarise opinions and arouse strong emotions. Ontological uncertainty about dingoes is reflected in their disputed scientific names. One name, *Canis lupus dingo*, describes the dingo as a subspecies of the wolf, with whom it shares some characteristics, such as living in family groups and breeding once a year (unlike the domestic dog, who can breed twice a year). Another, *Canis familiaris dingo*, denotes that the dingo is a subspecies of the domestic dog. They do look like dogs, sometimes. This name accords

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37 Graham 2008, 6.

38 Graham 2008, 5.

39 Graham 2008, 6.

40 Graham 2008, 6.

41 Archer-Lean, Wardell-Johnson et al. 2015, 191.

with one of the current non-Indigenous theories about how dingoes came to Australia: that 3,000 to 5,000 years ago hunter-gatherers from south Sulawesi brought domesticated or semi-domesticated dingoes in boats to the Australian mainland. They may have been food for the voyage.<sup>42</sup> After they were released, or escaped, they formed commensal relationships with Aboriginal people and, according to archaeologist Jane Balme and co-authors, “colonised” the continent.<sup>43</sup>

These scientific names are attempts to describe dingoes’ prehistoric genealogy, and they also shape how dingoes are perceived and treated in the present. As animal psychologist Bradley Smith and an interdisciplinary team of co-authors note in their work on dingo taxonomy: “In wildlife conservation and management, using a particular species concept can substantially influence government policy, funding allocations, and management strategies.”<sup>44</sup> If the dingo is a subspecies of the domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*) it was once domesticated, but it is now “feral”, an invasive animal, a pest, and killable, as animal studies and feminist scholar Fiona Probyn-Rapsey points out.<sup>45</sup> Ostensibly, dingoes are killed because they prey on sheep and calves. Current attempts to eradicate them from large areas of the continent are aided by legislation, government agencies and policies, and financial incentives such as bounties. Spectacular forms of violence, such as hanging dingoes’ bodies from fences and trees after trapping, baiting and shooting programs, are common. Dingoes are also killed en masse in national parks with 1080 poison in “conservation” eradication programs aimed at dingoes (who are often called wild dogs in the literature that justifies these killings) and other animals classified as pests, such as foxes and cats. Deborah Bird Rose describes this “man-made mass death” as a form of biocide, to parallel genocide. She observes that this will to destruction involves “imagining a future emptiness and then working systematically to accomplish that

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42 Fillios and Tacon 2016.

43 See Balme, O’Connor and Fallon 2018, 2, 3. The employment of the term “colonising” for dingoes in Australia is not explained in Balme, O’Connor and Fallon’s article, but it is noteworthy here because it contends, implicitly, that dingoes, like settler Australians, are colonisers.

44 Smith, Cairns et al. 2019, 176.

45 Probyn-Rapsey 2016.



emptiness”.<sup>46</sup> Against this killing, some ecologists claim that, as Australia’s terrestrial “apex predator” (that is, the top of the food chain), dingoes perform an important role in maintaining biodiversity in fragile Australian ecosystems by suppressing populations of “meso-predators” such as cats and foxes (who are further down the food chain and usually more abundant), and that they may be a key to slowing Australia’s accelerating rate of species extinctions. Characterisations of dingoes as either blood-thirsty demons or proxy land managers are based on instrumentalist and normative values that infuse much so-called scientific knowledge about these animals. The language of hierarchy – “apex”, “meso”, “alpha”, “dominant” – is essential to these understandings.

When Barbara Tjikadu tells the Morling Royal Commission, “A dingo is a dingo”,<sup>47</sup> I interpret that she is denoting that the dingo is itself, not a cipher for settler ideology. This description accords with a third scientific name, *Canis dingo*, which describes the dingo not as a dog or a wolf but as a unique canid that has lived in Australia in isolation from other canids for millennia.<sup>48</sup> This name is supported by morphological analyses<sup>49</sup> and consideration of taxonomic protocols.<sup>50</sup> But I do not propose the use of this term as some kind of designation of so-called genetic purity.<sup>51</sup>

The names *Canis lupus dingo* and *Canis familiaris dingo* reflect the dichotomy between wild wolf and tame domestic dog, but there is ample documentary evidence that not all dingoes are, or ever have been, wild in the sense of living independently from people. The testimony and culture of First Nations people, and archaeological sources, show that some dingoes have had relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for millennia, at least.<sup>52</sup>

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46 Rose 2011, 82.

47 Barbara Tjikadu quoted in Chamberlain 1990, 635.

48 Ardalan, Oskarsson et al. 2012; Balme, O’Connor and Fallon 2018; Cairns, Nesbitt et al. 2017; Cairns and Wilton 2016; Oskarsson, Klütsch et al. 2011; Pang, Kluetsch et al. 2009; Savolainen, Leitner et al. 2004.

49 Crowther, Fillios et al. 2014.

50 Smith, Cairns et al. 2019.

51 Dingo genetics, which I do not have room to discuss here, is another field where ideological agendas inflect knowledge. See Cairns, Nesbitt et al. 2020; Lennox 2021, 16, 221–2; Probyn-Rapsey 2020.

Europeans have recorded a wide variety of relationships between Aboriginal peoples and dingoes.<sup>53</sup> The term “dingo”, first published in 1789 in marine Watkin Tench’s *Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*,<sup>54</sup> or “tingo”, used by midshipman Newton Fowell in a letter home to his family in 1788,<sup>55</sup> is thought to mean “tame” in the Dharug Aboriginal language.<sup>56</sup> Some ethnographers indicate that dingoes were taken from their dens in “the wild” into Aboriginal camps as pups and later they returned to “the wild” as adults and to breed.<sup>57</sup> Smith, Cairns et al. assert that “there is no evidence that dingoes were exposed to domestication or selection pressure by Aboriginal peoples”.<sup>58</sup> But anthropologist Norman Tindale claims that “[i]rregularly marked feral dingo pups”<sup>59</sup> or “odd coloured variants”<sup>60</sup> might become camp dingoes. Tindale writes about generations of camp dingoes; his photograph of a “tamed camp dingo” suckling four pups at Warupuju in the Warburton Ranges in 1935 seems to indicate that dingoes did breed in Aboriginal camps.<sup>61</sup> Relationships between Aboriginal people and camp dingoes may “fail to meet the criteria for domestication”<sup>62</sup> in current understandings, but descriptions of camp dingoes that require lexical contortions, such as “tame wild animals”,<sup>63</sup> seem to indicate lacunae in English that, possibly, render settler vocabularies incapable

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- 52 Balme and O’Connor 2016; Male Z quoted in Carter et al. 2017, 200; Gollan 1984; Finn Dwyer quoted in Lennox 2021, 171.
- 53 Bates 1985, 247; Berndt and Berndt 1942, 162; Chewings 1936, 32; Duncan-Kemp 1933, 24–5; Giles 1986, 19–20; Hamilton 1972, 293; Kimber 1976, 143; Meehan, Jones and Vincent 1999, 98; Mitchell, 1965, 347; Mountford 1981, 184–5; Smyth 1972, 147, 190; Tindale 1974, 109 and plate 80.
- 54 Tench 1789, chapter 11.
- 55 Fowell 1788, 23.
- 56 Breckwoldt 1988, 72.
- 57 Donald Thomson in Dixon and Huxley 1985, 170; Lumholtz 1980, 196; Meehan, Jones and Vincent 1999, 92–3.
- 58 Smith, Cairns et al. 2019, 186.
- 59 Tindale 1974, 109.
- 60 Tindale 1974, caption to plate 79.
- 61 Tindale 1974, plate 80.
- 62 Smith, Cairns et al. 2019, 186.
- 63 Smith, Cairns et al. 2019, 186.

of accurately describing and imagining the relationships between First Nations peoples and dingoes.

While many Aboriginal languages do not distinguish dingoes from domestic dogs, they do distinguish wild-living dingoes and dogs from camp dingoes and dogs.<sup>64</sup> In Butchulla, the language of the traditional custodians of K’gari (Fraser Island), dingoes who live independently from people are called wongari and companion dingoes are called wat’dha.<sup>65</sup> Nineteenth-century accounts record familial relationships between dingoes and Butchulla people on K’gari<sup>66</sup> and dingoes and Gingingbarrah people on the Caloola coast.<sup>67</sup> In interviews conducted in 2015–16, Butchulla people told geographer Jennifer Carter and her co-authors about their long association with the dingoes of K’gari<sup>68</sup> and emphasised “the ways in which dingo treatment was similar to the regulation of Aboriginal people by the settler society throughout colonial histories”.<sup>69</sup> Although the Federal Court of Australia recognised the Butchullas’ native title rights over K’gari in 2014, contact between all people and all dingoes on the island is prohibited, and dingoes have been routinely killed when they are deemed to pose a safety risk to people. The management of dingoes on K’gari falls under the *Fraser Island Dingo Conservation and Risk Management Strategy*,<sup>70</sup> but, as Carter et al. note, the strategy does not recognise the diversity and individuality of relationships between Butchulla people and dingoes. As one of their Butchulla interview subjects put it: “There are different interactions with dingoes and humans – they are diverse. There are dingoes who are semi tame or in captivity ... They are taking them as aggressive and therefore killing off all dingoes.”<sup>71</sup> Public education about dingoes on K’gari emphasises that they are “wild” – that is, wongari. According to a Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service brochure co-authored with a Butchulla ranger, the companion dingoes,

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64 For a summary see Lennox 2021, 17–19.

65 QPWS 2017.

66 Curtis 1838.

67 Parkhurst 2015, 38; *The Week* 1889, 14.

68 Carter, Wardell-Johnson and Archer-Jean 2017, 200.

69 Carter, Wardell-Johnson and Archer-Jean 2017, 202.

70 Ecosure 2013.

71 Quoted in Carter, Wardell-Johnson and Archer-Jean 2017, 201.

the wat'dha, disappeared as a consequence of colonisation and Aboriginal dispossession: "When the last of our people were taken off the island, all of the dingoes became wild."<sup>72</sup> Butchulla people I spoke with have different views about relationships with dingoes.<sup>73</sup> Ongoing decolonisation of relationships between Butchulla people and dingoes is and will be woven into other aspects of decolonisation across the continent. Epistemic justice and recognition that First Nations sovereignty – "the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature'", and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – has "never been ceded or extinguished"<sup>74</sup> are part of this decolonising process. "How could it be otherwise?" the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* asks. How can it be "[t]hat peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?"<sup>75</sup> A similar question could be asked about spiritual and kin relationships between First Nations people and dingoes on K'gari. Do the wat'dha cease to exist because of 200 years of colonisation?

## Balnglan

European observers understand relationships of utility between Indigenous peoples and dingoes that are based on warmth (the one-, two- or three-dog night to keep the cold away),<sup>76</sup> water (dingoes as water finders)<sup>77</sup> and food (dingoes as food<sup>78</sup> or dingoes as helpers in procuring food<sup>79</sup>). Balnglan, a dingo from North Queensland, fits into

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72 QPWS 2017, 2.

73 See Lennox 2021, 93–105, 161–72.

74 NCC 2017.

75 NCC 2017.

76 Hamilton 1972, 292–4; Meehan, Jones and Vincent 1999, 97; Meggitt 1965; Tindale 1974, 109.

77 Tindale 1974, 120.

78 Breckwoldt 1988, 65; Giles 1986, 20; Hamilton 1972, 288–90; Meggitt 1965, 14; Smyth 1972, 148; Tindale 1974, 36, 109. ?

79 Basedow 1925, 119; Bates 1985, 247; Chewings 1936, 32; Gould 1969, 263; Hamilton 1972, 291; Kolig 1978, 91; Meehan, Jones and Vincent 1999, 102; Meggitt 1965, 19; Smyth 1972, 147, 190.

this typology as a renowned hunter of the tree kangaroo, or boongary, as it is called in the Warrgamay language, of the lower reaches of the Herbert River. Without Balnglan, Norwegian ethnographer and naturalist Carl Lumholtz would not have been able to procure specimens of the tree kangaroo that now bears his name – *Dendrolagus lumholtzii*. When Lumholtz published his description of his time in North Queensland with the title *Among Cannibals: An Account of Four Years Travel in Australia and of Camp Life with the Aborigines of Queensland*, he was not the first to sensationally exploit European notions of Indigenous “savagery”.<sup>80</sup> As Eualeyai/Kamilaroi writer, film director and legal scholar Larissa Behrendt observes, Europeans’ obsession with cannibalism “explains more about the European psyche when vulnerable than it tells us about the cultural practices of Aboriginal people”<sup>81</sup> stories of Aboriginal people’s so-called barbarity came to justify colonial settler violence against them and genocide.<sup>82</sup> In much of his narrative, Lumholtz writes with little respect for the First Nations people who were indispensable to his search for the animals he made specimens of, even though towards the end of his book he admits that on Aboriginal country the European “actually is their inferior in many respects”<sup>83</sup> and he feels “deep gratitude” to his guide, Yokkai.<sup>84</sup>

Lumholtz describes close, affectionate and caring relationships between the people of the Herbert River and their dingoes: “The dingo is an important member of the family; it sleeps in the huts and gets plenty to eat, not only meat, but also of fruit. Its master never strikes, but merely threatens it. He caresses it like a child, eats the fleas off it, and then kisses it on the snout.”<sup>85</sup> Dingoes who associated with people

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80 The Butchulla people who saved Eliza Fraser and other shipwreck survivors on K’gari in 1836 are described in many derogatory ways in John Curtis’s *Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle* (Curtis 1838); such descriptions served to justify colonial violence towards Aboriginal people and reinforced for colonial settlers their superiority and the righteousness of their civilising mission. See Behrendt 2016.

81 Behrendt 2016, 193.

82 Behrendt 2016, 119.

83 Lumholtz 1980, 315.

84 Lumholtz 1980, 326.

85 Lumholtz 1980, 195.

could be very useful to their humans. A dingo's keen sense of smell allowed it to trace "every kind of game; it never barks, and hunts less wildly than our dogs, but very rapidly, frequently capturing the game on the run".<sup>86</sup> During his time around the Herbert River in the early 1880s, Lumholtz records Aboriginal people using dingoes to hunt half-grown and old cassowaries (*Casuarus australis*),<sup>87</sup> ground-dwelling yopolo or musky rat-kangaroos (*Hypsiprymnodon moschatus*)<sup>88</sup> and yarri or quolls (*Dasyurus maculatus*).<sup>89</sup> In Lumholtz's narrative, the word "yarri" also refers to the cryptid Queensland tiger, another animal he was keen to find. Lumholtz uses "dog" and "dingo" to describe Balnglan and other camp dingoes. But, once again, Western vocabulary appears to be lacking when it comes to describing the relationships between Balnglan and the people he was close to. In quotes from Lumholtz, I reproduce his terms "owner" and "master", which, aptly, deploy the notions of possession and control that are part of the colonising project. Drawing on Graham's explanation of the custodial ethic, I use the dingo's or Balnglan's "people/person", "family", "kin" and "custodian/s", which I hope in this context can shed connotations of dominance – because it does not seem that Balnglan's human kin dominated him.

The first time Lumholtz saw Balnglan, he was bounding down the mountain ahead of Nilgora, Balnglan's main custodian, and a party of hunters who carried the boongary Lumholtz had been seeking.<sup>90</sup> Lumholtz wanted to joint the hunt for more boongary early the next morning, but Balnglan "was afraid of the white man"<sup>91</sup> so Lumholtz remained in camp. Over ensuing days, Balnglan scented out more boongary, which his custodians caught – five young males and one female in all. Lumholtz was disappointed when Nilgora gave the joey from the young female's pouch to Balnglan rather than to him.<sup>92</sup> Lumholtz wished to continue hunting, but his hosts "tried to convince [him] that there were no more boongary".<sup>93</sup> Traditionally, boongary

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86 Lumholtz 1980, 195.

87 Lumholtz 1980, 108.

88 Lumholtz 1980, 192.

89 Lumholtz 1980, 204.

90 Lumholtz 1980, 245.

91 Lumholtz 1980, 250.

92 Lumholtz 1980, 266.

were not their only source of food, and after catching six of them in a short space of time it was clear that Nilgora no longer wished to hunt them. Lumholtz thought his Aboriginal hosts were "tired" of hunting for him and "cannot endure monotony".<sup>94</sup> When he disbelieved their assertion that there were no boongary left, they asked him: "Where is boongary, where? no, no! there is but one in the woods."<sup>95</sup>

Nilgora's resistance to Lumholtz's insistence that they take more boongary is, perhaps, an assertion of the principle of selective harvesting.<sup>96</sup> Anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose's Aboriginal teachers at Yarralin in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory regarded "their own country as 'good country'", which "amply provides for their needs".<sup>97</sup> According to Rose, in the 1980s, as far as possible, they managed their country by "burning off at the appropriate times, allowing fruits and vegetables to regenerate and to feed other species, and stimulating the reproduction of animal species through selective hunting and through ritual".<sup>98</sup> Lumholtz did not respect Nilgora's decision to stop hunting boongary, but because he could not hunt them without Balnglan and Balnglan's people, in this instance he had no choice.

Another principle that Aboriginal people taught Rose was that of autonomy, in which each part (which might be a group, country and/or species) of a system is "its own 'boss'";<sup>99</sup> no part is subservient to or dominated by another, and each part must pay attention to and respond to other parts.<sup>100</sup> Rose explains:

From the Aboriginal viewpoint a moral Australia is one which recognises the autonomy of individuals and groups. The key to autonomy is put forth in terms of land. [Before colonisation] all the land was freehold [meaning] that it was both owned and

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93 Lumholtz 1980, 263.

94 Lumholtz 1980, 263.

95 Lumholtz 1980, 263.

96 Rose 1996, 10.

97 Rose 1984, 26.

98 Rose 1984, 26.

99 Rose 1984, 37.

100 Rose 1984, 30.

inalienable. People, too, were free at that time. They were autonomous within their own country, in the sense that no country, or group, was able to dominate others.<sup>101</sup>

In Lumholtz's account, Nilgora appears to respect Balnglan's preference to hunt without the company of the European. Could this be respect for his dingo's autonomy? The dingoes Lumholtz met on the Herbert River were as individual as the people and behaved in different ways. Not all of them were hunters like Balnglan. Yokkai, Lumholtz's guide, had a dingo who "kept faithfully in the footsteps of its master and did not care to chase game".<sup>102</sup>

Eventually, Balnglan took a strychnine bait that Lumholtz had laid in an attempt to catch a large carnivorous yarri (which, in this case, I assume, is the cryptid Queensland tiger). Although Lumholtz poured tobacco and water down the dingo's throat to make him vomit up the poison (called "kola" or "wrath" by the local people), Balnglan suffered a seizure and died. Lumholtz blamed Yokkai and another Aboriginal man for Balnglan's taking the bait that he, Lumholtz, had laid. He offered them "two whole sticks of tobacco"<sup>103</sup> for Balnglan's body so he could preserve "its fine black skin with white breast and yellow legs".<sup>104</sup> Balnglan's black, white and yellow colouration is not uncommon for dingoes and would have provided good camouflage for him in the wet sclerophyll forests. Lumholtz records that Yokkai was concerned about Nilgora's anger about Balnglan's death. Lumholtz hoped Nilgora would be compensated for his loss by "giving him his woollen blanket and some tobacco".<sup>105</sup>

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101 Rose 1984, 38.

102 Lumholtz 1980, 235. Lumholtz also fed another dingo, who had run away from its person, in an attempt to persuade it to go with his party because he thought it might be useful to him. But instead this dingo took food from camp, "stealing the small piece of meat I had left" and disappeared. When this dingo "came stealing" back into camp, Lumholtz writes, his Aboriginal guides convinced him to shoot it (208, 225, 227).

103 Lumholtz 1980, 291.

104 Lumholtz 1980, 289-91.

105 Lumholtz 1980, 291.



In some ways, Balnglan is a cultural mediator between Lumholtz and his (the dingo's) Aboriginal family. Balnglan's role in the Cultural Interface is not fixed, but his story highlights how "particular knowledges achieve legitimacy and authority at the expense of other knowledge".<sup>106</sup> Lumholtz does not (cannot?) hear the principle of selective hunting his hosts are articulating; he does not see his responsibility for Balnglan's death. Lumholtz liked dogs – he took his female Gordon setter with him on his Queensland travels – and his observations of dingoes are, on the whole, more even-handed than his observations of Aboriginal people. Yokkai and Lumholtz met and became associates because of Balnglan: as one of Balnglan's custodians, Yokkai was instrumental in bringing Balnglan to join Lumholtz's hunt for boongary. In their travels Yokkai became "utterly indispensable" to Lumholtz, who "gained much pleasure and entertainment from his company"<sup>107</sup> and acknowledged the "many services he had done me",<sup>108</sup> including saving his life several times.<sup>109</sup> When Lumholtz left Yokkai to return to Norway, he writes, "many emotions crowded upon me". But Yokkai did not reciprocate: "I did not discover the faintest sign of emotion. He gazed at me steadfastly."<sup>110</sup> Yokkai's impassivity on Lumholtz's departure contrasts with the grief he expressed when Balnglan died in his arms: "Yokkai gazed at [Balnglan] for a moment, then turned away and wept bitterly. He sat down and wrung his hands in despair, while large tears rolled down his cheeks."<sup>111</sup>

Lumholtz used bribes of tobacco and the threat of his "double barrelled gun and an excellent American revolver", which his guides called "the baby of the gun", to achieve his aims.<sup>112</sup> Neither Nilgora nor Yokkai had had contact with Europeans before, and Nilgora, like Balnglan, was "very much afraid of the white men".<sup>113</sup> According to Lumholtz, Nilgora, and other locals, developed a taste for "white man's

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106 Nakata 2007, 195.

107 Lumholtz 1980, 314.

108 Lumholtz 1980, 326.

109 Lumholtz 1980, 238.

110 Lumholtz 1980, 325.

111 Lumholtz 1980, 290.

112 Lumholtz 1980, 117–18.

113 Lumholtz 1980, 264.

food”<sup>114</sup> – the salt beef, wheat flour and sugar Lumholtz took with him.<sup>115</sup> Lumholtz left the Herbert River with many specimens, including the boongary Balnglan had caught for him and Balnglan’s hide. He admits no responsibility for Balnglan’s death and remains oblivious to the inequitable exchanges of contact. How does one measure blankets, tobacco, salt beef, wheat flour and sugar against the life of the dingo Lumholtz describes as “the best dog for miles around” and “the most intelligent dingo I have ever seen”?<sup>116</sup>

### Ankotarinja/Erintja Ngoolya

Ankotarinja, or Erintja Ngoolya, is not like Balnglan. He does not help men; he hunts them, and women. Nor does he die. He is an Arrernte dingo ancestor or Creator Being from north of Alice Springs in Central Australia. Here I read two versions of his Story – one published in the journal *Oceania* in the 1930s by anthropologist and linguist T.G.H. Strehlow<sup>117</sup> and one published in a book called *The Feathered Serpent*, a collection of “The Mythological Genesis and Recreative Ritual of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia”, in the 1950s by poet Roland Robinson.<sup>118</sup> Mary Graham explains how stories are Aboriginal archives, “detailing how Creator Beings from under the earth arose to shape the land and to create the landscape”.<sup>119</sup> Before they arose, the Creator Beings slept just under the earth’s surface “in a state of potentiality”. When they arose from the ground, their “potentiality transformed into actuality”,<sup>120</sup> and they interacted with one another, fought, danced, ran around, made love and killed. During this time, humans who were asleep in “various embryonic forms” were awakened. The Creator Beings helped them and gave them “every kind of knowledge they needed to look after the land and to have a stable

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114 Lumholtz 1980, 266.

115 Lumholtz 1980, 114.

116 Lumholtz 1980, 289.

117 Strehlow 1933.

118 Robinson 1956, 69–70.

119 Graham 2008, 2.

120 Graham 2008, 2.

society”. Afterwards, the Creator Beings returned to the land where they sleep in the eternal sleep from which they awoke at the beginning of time. The places where they sleep are still regarded as sacred sites. The tracks and evidence they left determine the identity of the people, who have “part of the essence” of one of the Beings who formed the landscape. As Graham writes, each Aboriginal person “has a charter of custodianship empowering them and making them responsible for renewing that part of the flora and its fauna”; each human “bears a creative and spiritual identity which still resides in land”.<sup>121</sup>

Rose explains how, in Aboriginal thought, the land is sentient and, when people take notice of their country, communication between people and country is two-way.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, animals, trees, rains, sun and moon are sentient and conscious, observing and thinking about human beings. These other beings, like humans, are also concerned with law, which, as Rose defines it, is synonymous with morality.<sup>123</sup> All sentient beings possess and maintain knowledge of their own morality.<sup>124</sup> This morality is, I assume, the knowledge they need to look after the land, which Graham writes about. According to Rose, although no one “person, animal, tree or hill knows everything”,<sup>125</sup> and “the purpose of much that exists may remain obscure to others ... obscurity, from a human point of view, is not the same as purposelessness. There is a profound sense that this world was not created specifically for human beings.”<sup>126</sup>

Sentience and the specificity of who is a legitimate knowledge-holder are part of T.G.H. Strehlow’s rendering of what he calls the “myth” of Ankotarinja. Strehlow was the son of Lutheran missionaries and grew up in the early 1900s at Hermannsburg mission, known as Ntaria to its Arrernte custodians, in the MacDonnell Ranges in central Australia, speaking English, German and Arrernte. His interest in the relationship of religion to literature and art<sup>127</sup> is reflected

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121 Graham 2008, 2.

122 Rose 1996, 13.

123 Rose 1984, 25.

124 Rose 1984, 29.

125 Rose 1996, 13.

126 Rose 1996, 27.

127 Strehlow 1933, 199–200.

in his commentaries on his transcriptions and translations from Arrernte into English of the songs that are part of the ceremonial performance of this Story, and many others.<sup>128</sup> His version of the Story of “the ancestor of Ankota” starts with the same phrase as the book of Genesis:

In the beginning there was living at Ankota a man who had sprung from the earth without mother or father. He had been lying asleep in the bosom of the earth, and the white ants had eaten his body hollow while the soil rested on him like a coverlet. As he was lying in the ground a thought arose in his mind: “Perhaps it would be pleasant to arise.” He lay there, deep in thought. Then he arose, out of the soft soil of a little watercourse.<sup>129</sup>

The place where Ankotarinja wakes is characterised here as a hospitable place, and the earth is described in detail: soil resting on the Creator Being’s body like a coverlet; soil soft because it is in a little watercourse. Place is primary in the version that Tonanga, better known to settler Australians as the landscape painter Albert Namatjira, relates to Roland Robinson. Tonanga was born at Ntaria in 1902, six years before T.G.H. Strehlow, and grew up at the Hermannsburg mission. He was also initiated as an Arrernte man. Robinson describes how, in the presence of Robinson and several mature, responsible Arrernte men, Tonanga re-enacted the Story, called “Erintja the Devil-dog” in Robinson’s book: “on his hands and knees in the sand ... in the creek-bed under the ghost gums with the purple and violet and ochre-red mountains of Haast’s Bluff rising out of the spinifex”.<sup>130</sup> Robinson’s transcription of Tonanga’s version is full of place names, reinforcing anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner’s characterisation of the Dreaming as an “everywhen”.<sup>131</sup> It begins:

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128 Strehlow 1933; 1971.

129 Strehlow 1933, 187.

130 Robinson 1956, x.

131 Stanner 2009, 58.

Ungortarenga is the name of the place. What the white man calls Burt Well, where there is a well for cattle, lies close to this place. An old-man there has a shield and a boomerang. All the winds that blow, blow back to this one place where that old-man stays. The old-man lies down and the winds from all directions come and cover him up with dust and sand. When a bird calls out from a tree that old-man sits up out of the dust and sand and looks out everywhere. He thinks, he looks round, then lies down again. The winds blow from all directions and cover him up again with dust and sand.

The wind blew from the south. First the nose of the old-man came up out of the dust, then his head and shoulders. He rose on his hands and knees with the dust and the sand sliding off him. On his hands and knees he stretched forward, smelling the wind and looking out in its direction. As the old-man smelled the wind and stretched forwards he changed into the big devil dog Erintja Ngoolya.<sup>132</sup>

In both accounts, Erintja Ngoolya/Ankotarinja (I use both versions of his name in this summary) travels west and eats two tjilpa (Western quoll, *Dasyurus geoffroii*) women who were cooking frogs. He continues, keeping low to the ground, half burying himself when he sees a group of young tjilpa men making a corroboree at Kaimba rumbulla<sup>133</sup> or Parr’ Erultja.<sup>134</sup> There, in a fury of appetite, he eats, one by one, all the young initiates as they sleep in rows. A man from the west comes and – either by throwing a tjurunga (sacred object) at the nape of his neck<sup>135</sup> or by throwing a bull-roarer and cutting the dingo’s mouth open from ear to ear<sup>136</sup> – forces Ankotarinja/Erintja Ngoolya to disgorge the men he has eaten. Neither account mentions whether he disgorges the women. Strehlow describes the regurgitated initiates’ blithe relief as they “climb up on the rocky hills again, swing

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132 Tonanga in Robinson 1956, 69. Although it is unclear how much Robinson has changed and/or paraphrased Tonanga’s words, I have referenced this version as Tonanga in Robinson.

133 Tonanga in Robinson 1956, 69.

134 Strehlow 1933, 189.

135 Strehlow 1933, 189.

136 Tonanga in Robinson 1956, 70–1.

the bull-roarers merrily, and decorate their heads with green twigs and wallaby tails”.<sup>137</sup> They survive; they’ve been reborn. Erintja Ngoolya,<sup>138</sup> or just his head,<sup>139</sup> travels underground back to Ungortarenga/Ankota. Like other ancestral beings, he returns to the place he came from. He remains there forever, alive, sentient, conscious and with agency: he hears the birds, he looks, he scents the wind, thoughts occur to him.<sup>140</sup>

Neither version explains the symbolism, morality or significance of Erintja Ngoolya/Ankotarinja’s journey and actions in relation to other aspects of Arrernte life. These omissions may reflect Robinson’s focus on origin narratives and Strehlow’s focus on ritual rather than everyday life<sup>141</sup> and/or sensitivity to Aboriginal protocols about who owns and is authorised to transmit knowledge. According to Strehlow, the Ankotarinja myth, ceremony and song were the property of a small group of northern Arrernte men who once dwelt in the vicinity of Ankota. One of them was a reincarnation of the old ancestor. As Strehlow writes in his foreword to Robinson’s book *The Feathered Serpent*, “In Central Australia ... the traditions relating to any given totemic ancestor were the private property of the person who was regarded as his reincarnation, or of the heirs of this person.”<sup>142</sup> Before he died in Alice Springs, this man told Strehlow the Story. Strehlow explains that the general outlines of a myth might be known by people over a very large area, but the intimate details and traditional designs of the ceremonies are the personal property of a small group.<sup>143</sup>

Strehlow appears to have been more interested in transcribing and textually “saving” myths, songs and rituals than in elucidating the dynamics of how the Ankotarinja Story was transmitted, received and shared by Arrernte people, how it continued and continues to live.<sup>144</sup> This form of “salvage ethnography”<sup>145</sup> risks submerging and

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137 Strehlow 1933, 189.

138 Tonanga in Robinson 1956, 71.

139 Strehlow 1933, 189.

140 Strehlow 1933, 189; Tonanga in Robinson 1956, 71.

141 Gibson 2018, 6.

142 Strehlow in Robinson 1956, vi.

143 Strehlow 1933, 198.

144 See Gibson 2018.

145 Gibson 2018, 13.

marginalising Arrernte people who, Nakata points out, “disappear as people at the centre of their own lives as they are co-opted into another history, another narrative that is not really about them but about their relation to it”.<sup>146</sup> As Nakata notes in relation to Torres Strait Islanders, using culture to explain “what Islanders once were ... weakens – indeed hijacks – this notion of Islanders’ own construction of historical understanding into something apolitical ... lacking the politics of analysis and action and lacking too a reason and logic of its own that is as legitimate as others”.<sup>147</sup> Arrernte culture, like Islander culture, has always been “evolving and responding” to new and changing contexts.<sup>148</sup>

The myth that Strehlow’s *Oceania* article relates, the ceremony it describes and illustrates, and the song it transcribes and translates into English are not from a textual tradition. Similarly, Robinson transcribed an enacted telling. In his foreword to *The Feathered Serpent*, Strehlow, always finely attuned to language, leaves it to the artistic judgement of the reader to decide whether Robinson has succeeded in “blending certain pidgin English expressions with the higher quality English used normally in his final version”.<sup>149</sup> Strehlow devotes a section of his *Oceania* article to describing how the words in the spoken form of the song are “dismembered” and “rearranged” “according to formal and traditional verse patterns” in the chanted form.<sup>150</sup> In both written renderings, the Story appears autonomous and, for this reader, captivating, because it is mysterious, because it does not explain itself to me – but it might be explaining itself perfectly clearly to its intended audience. To me, it appears to rise like the ancestor it animates, independently, with no antecedents. I glean that in Erintja Ngoolya/Ankotarinja, many things are united: the ancestor being of a place, a spirit dingo man, quoll people, anger, hunger, excess, satiation, conflict, place. The spiritual, cultural, biological and ecological knowledge contained in the Story about Erintja Ngoolya/Ankotarinja and the

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146 Nakata 2007, 202.

147 Nakata 2007, 203.

148 Nakata 2007, 202.

149 Strehlow quoted in Robinson 1956, vii.

150 Strehlow 1933, 197.

places he travels, hunts and rests, and about relationships between people and animals, is situated, specific and ongoing.<sup>151</sup>

The Story of Erintja Ngoolya/Ankotarinja also offers other, less word-based knowledge. Both renderings convey the dingo ancestor's terrifying power and, implicitly, the need to take this power seriously. But he is not one thing. In Strehlow's translation, the song of Ankotarinja begins:

- 1 Red is the down which is covering me;  
Red I am as though I was burning in a fire.<sup>152</sup>

And ends:

- 18 Red I am, like the heart of a flame of fire,  
Red, too, is the hollow in which I am resting.<sup>153</sup>

In this translation of the song, fire and the colour red are united in this Creator Being. According to T.G.H. Strehlow's father, Pastor Carl Strehlow, red "is the colour of joy and happiness, it is the love-colour"<sup>154</sup> and "the favourite colour" of the Aboriginal people of Central Australia.<sup>155</sup> Carl Strehlow describes how people paint their bodies with

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151 Biologist Alan Newsome's (1980) work on integrating Indigenous knowledge with the ecology of the red kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*) is an early example of the increasing interest in integrating Indigenous biocultural knowledge with ecosystem science (see Ens, Pert et al. 2015). Newsome and his team also researched dingoes, but their research on dingo skull morphology, hybridisation between dingoes and domestic dogs, and predator-prey interactions did not take this path. Newsome's dingo research, supported by the CSIRO and the Australian Meat Research Committee and motivated by pastoralists' concerns about dingo predation on livestock, is an example of how the animal body is interpellated as "a colonial subject – that is, as a body subject to settler-colonial (mis)recognition" (Belcourt 2015, 5). As Belcourt argues, this misrecognition forecloses the animal body "within settler-colonial infrastructure of subjecthood and governmentality" (2015, 5).

152 Strehlow 1933, 190.

153 Strehlow 1933, 192.

154 Strehlow n.d., 1505.

155 Chewings 1936, 66.



red designs and daub their sacred objects with red ochre for festivities. The couple to be married are smeared with red ochre to celebrate their wedding. When a widow is daubed with red at the grave of her husband, it is a sign that her mourning time is over.<sup>156</sup> In central and south-eastern Australia, dingo pups were also rubbed with protective red ochre.<sup>157</sup>

Although Ankotarinja gleams “as though [he] was burning in a fire”,<sup>158</sup> according to Carl Strehlow, yellow is the colour of fire, the colour of anger, passion and a longing for combat.<sup>159</sup> I extrapolate that Ankotarinja’s association with fire and the colour red is important: the colour red for joy and fire for its multifarious life-giving roles, including for cooking and leaching toxins out of certain foods; for warmth and light; in ceremony; to clean up an area before camping; for healing (through warmth and steam using medicinal plants); in warfare; to drive away supernatural beings; for hardening spear points and digging stick points; to drive animals into nets or through a narrow gap or underground (in the case of burrowing animals) and to burn off groundcover so burrowing animals can be dug out; to attract animals to a place where they can be caught; and as a continent-wide system of land management.<sup>160</sup> Fire and smoke are part of rites of passage: birth, initiation, dispute resolution and funerals. People communicate to one another with fire; fire communicates that country is being looked after by people.<sup>161</sup> Fire is a friend.<sup>162</sup>

In another First Nation, dingoes are associated with life and rebirth. Aboriginal people at Yarralin taught Deborah Bird Rose that, unlike other Dreaming beings who walked the earth in human form, “originally Dingo and human beings were one species and their bodily shape was canine”.<sup>163</sup> Old Tim Yilngayari told Rose that humans are all descended from canids: “White children out of white

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156 Strehlow n.d., 1505.

157 Balme and O’Connor 2016, 777.

158 Strehlow 1933, 190.

159 Strehlow n.d., 1504.

160 Rose 1996, 64; see also Gammage 2012; Pascoe 2014, 115–23.

161 See Rose 1996, 70.

162 Gammage 2011, 278.

163 Rose 1984, 39, n. 4.

dog; Dingo for Aboriginal.”<sup>164</sup> As well as being involved in human origins, dingoes are bound up with the way humans die: Daly Pulkara told Rose that instead of being like the moon, which comes back as the new moon after a few days, humans follow the dingo way in that our death lasts forever.<sup>165</sup> But Yilngayari also explained how the Dingo ancestor is also the originator of the Beginning Law, which involves people coming back to life as lizards, kangaroos, birds, crocodiles or other animals after they die.<sup>166</sup> As Rose describes it: “Life wants to live, wants to be embodied, and keeps finding its way back to life. Life is always in a state of metamorphosis, across death into more life, crossing bodies, species, and generations.”<sup>167</sup> These “cross-species transformations”<sup>168</sup> keep humans and animals connected across birth and death.

In this chapter I have aimed to show how naming, and its close kin writing, work within Western and scientific epistemologies to possess and dominate land and animals, and to create hierarchies and hierarchical ways of interpreting the world. This project, Leane explains, is a necessary part of nation-building: “you do have to write nation. In contrast, you do not have to write Country because Country is ... In Australia, the nation attempts to write over many Countries.”<sup>169</sup> As Belcourt argues, the settler colonial nation “re-makes animal bodies into colonial subjects to normalize settler modes of political life (i.e., territorial acquisition, anthropocentrism, capitalism, white supremacy, and neoliberal pluralism) that further displace and disappear Indigenous bodies and epistemologies.”<sup>170</sup> Consequently, “decolonization is not possible without centering an animal ethic.”<sup>171</sup> A decolonial animal ethic, Belcourt writes, must re-orient animals “within ecologies of decolonial subjecthood” and re-signify them

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164 Old Tim Yilngayari quoted in Rose 2000, 47.

165 Daly Pulkara quoted in Rose 2000, 49.

166 Old Tim Yilngayari quoted in Rose 2000, 49.

167 Rose 2011, 137.

168 Rose 2011, 141.

169 Leane 2014, 2.

170 Belcourt 2015, 9.

171 Belcourt 2015, 9.

through “Indigenous cosmologies”.<sup>172</sup> Re-orienting knowledge of dingoes according to First Nations epistemology and Law reveals dingoes to be sentient, autonomous, moral beings – both subjects of colonialism and agents of decolonisation; re-signifying Aboriginal dingoes in settler colonial texts grounds and expands my (still partial and occluded) understanding of First Nations cosmologies.

A pragmatic reason for settler Australians to respect Indigenous knowledge about dingoes is that such respect would enable our understanding of dingoes and country to be richer, more accurate and less harmful. Balngan’s story, in which a real dingo dies because a white man wants to catch an imaginary animal, is emblematic of how settler Australians continue to pursue and kill imaginary “wild dogs” and create science based on preconceptions and ideological agendas, not empirical observation. Analysis of settler knowledge about and relationships with dingoes forces settler Australians to address basic and profound issues of justice. In spite of the incommensurate exchanges of contact between white settlers and Indigenous peoples, the myopia of settler epistemologies and ontologies, and the ongoing racism and epistemic injustice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, First Nations-led initiatives that may offer pathways towards decolonisation, such as the 2017 *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, are optimistic and generous about the two worlds that Indigenous peoples navigate. The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* recognises the legitimacy of the settler state and calls for moderate top-down reform:

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.<sup>173</sup>

My settler colonial understandings are fragmentary and distorted by cultural assumptions and misinterpretations, but it is clear that Balngan and Ankotarinja/Erntja Ngoolya are complex, conscious,

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172 Belcourt 2015, 8.

173 NCC 2017 [emphasis in original].

autonomous beings with their own skills, power, preferences and agency. In different ways their stories show how appetite, cooperation, happiness, vitality and the shared origins, lives and fates of dingoes and people are related.

I would like to thank Rick De Vos and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, which helped me to develop this chapter.

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