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Indigenous, Settler, Animal; a Triadic Approach

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Abstract

In his Indigenous critique of the field of animal studies, Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation) describes it as having an analytic blind spot when it comes to settler-colonialism, a blind spot that manifests through universalising claims and clumsy arguments about 'shared' oppressions, through assumptions that settler colonial political institutions can be a neutral part of the solution, and through a failure to engage with 'Indigenous studies of other than human life' (20). In the same article, he calls on decolonial projects to do more to include animality within their purview, to include critiques of animal agriculture and to incorporate critiques of anthropocentrism as 'a key logic of white supremacy'. Belcourt's critique of both Animal studies and decolonial projects on the basis of an unequal but mutual marginalisation is an important starting point for research projects like ours that hope to bring Animal studies and Indigenous studies approaches into dialogue about the cultural impacts of introduced animals. Our approach sets out to be 'triadic', always involving at least three sides; Settler- Coloniser, Indigene and Animal.

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Indigenous, Settler, Animal; a Triadic Approach

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*'We are never alone out there on the land, our relatives of nature –
the trees, grasslands, rocks, animals – they are our family; we treat them respectfully'*

Max Dulumunmun Harrison

*'those who write in the direction of animal freedom...
[should] tend to the incommensurabilities and interconnectedness of
Black, brown, and animal life'*

Billy-Ray Belcourt

Abstract: In his Indigenous critique of the field of animal studies, Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation) describes it as having an analytic blind spot when it comes to settler-colonialism, a blind spot that manifests through universalising claims and clumsy arguments about ‘shared’ oppressions, through assumptions that settler colonial political institutions can be a neutral part of the solution, and through a failure to engage with ‘Indigenous studies of other than human life’ (20). In the same article, he calls on decolonial projects to do more to include animality within their purview, to include critiques of animal agriculture and to incorporate critiques of anthropocentrism as ‘a key logic of white supremacy’. Belcourt’s critique of both Animal studies and decolonial projects on the basis of an unequal but mutual marginalisation is an important starting point for research projects like ours that hope to bring Animal studies and Indigenous studies approaches into dialogue about the cultural impacts of introduced animals. Our approach sets out to be ‘triadic’, always involving at least three sides; Settler-Coloniser, Indigene and Animal.

Keywords: Pastoralism, Australian Settler Colonialism, Animal Sovereignties, decolonising Animal studies, settler colonialism, Indigenous studies

Introduction

There is a story that we want to tell (not here, not now) about the cattle who escaped colonial captivity from Sydney Cove (Gadigal Country) in 1791, wandered out into Dharawal Country, (perhaps they followed rivers south-west) and established a herd that became known to settler colonists as the ‘wild cattle of Cowpastures’. A bull is depicted in a painting in a cave, now sealed off behind bars, near what is now a suburban area of Sydney. The bull appears to be dehorned, so is likely to be one of the original escapees, painted by Dharawal people whose Country would be violently impacted by cattle and colonisers. This story resonates with us for a number of reasons. How do we tell the story of the cattle in a way that highlights their agency and ingenuity? How do we tell this story in a way that highlights what they meant to Dharawal people and the violence of invasion and ongoing dispossession? And how to do this in a way that does not make the telling a re-inscription that privileges a dominant settler colonial¹ framing?

We come to these questions as two scholars interested in telling these kinds of stories, but with a sense of the difficulty in doing so. Lynette Russell (Wotjabaluk) is a Professor of Indigenous Studies, lives, works and writes on the unceded lands of the Kulin Nation, and has worked for decades bringing Indigenous people’s stories to the fore, including her own family histories, and histories of Aboriginal people who worked in colonial industries (such as whaling) as well as histories detailing how Indigenous knowledges were appropriated and erased by colonial zoologists and botanists. Fiona Probyn-Rapsey is a white settler/migrant, born in the UK, living on Gundungurra Country and a Professor working in animal studies, at the University of Wollongong on Dharawal Country. Fiona’s work has focussed on how settler colonial logics frame broader treatment of animals in Australia and how they are energised by fantasies of control. In some ways we are well placed to tell stories about introduced animals in Australia, like the cattle of ‘Cowpastures’, but we know enough not to jump straight in. In this article, we pause and consider what it means to bring our respective fields and interests together.

In what follows, we will examine sites of friction between animal studies approaches and Indigenous scholars and communities, and highlight the point that while animal studies scholarship is on the whole positive about the need for and importance of doing decolonial animal studies work, it is not there yet – *we* are not there yet. By decolonial animal studies

work we mean scholarship that is placed-based (on Country) that is fundamentally transformed by an engagement with Indigenous knowledges (see Pete) and rejects anthropocentrism. Our analysis (to come) of conflict involving introduced animals aims to foreground Indigenous ownership of Country (in the face of, or regardless of, settler-imposed law) and epistemologies therein. We discuss the literature central to our thinking, especially Indigenous scholarship from Australia, other settler colonial nations and First Nationsⁱⁱ and highlight the challenges involved in doing decolonial animal studies work via Billy-Ray Belcourt's (Driftpile Cree Nation) provocation to the field/s, noting as he does the broad 'incommensurabilities' and the 'interconnections' between animal studies and Indigenous studies. Belcourt describes animal studies as having an 'analytic blind spot' (20) when it comes to settler-colonialism, that manifests through universalising claims and clumsy arguments about 'shared' oppressions, through assumptions that settler colonial political institutions can be a neutral part of solution, and through a failure to engage with 'Indigenous studies of other than human life' (20). Belcourt also calls on decolonial projects to do more to include animality within their purview, to include critiques of animal agriculture and to incorporate critiques of anthropocentrism as 'a key logic of white supremacy'.ⁱⁱⁱ Belcourt's critique of Animal studies and decolonial scholarship on the basis of an unequal but mutual marginalisation is an important and challenging starting point for projects such as ours.

Decolonisation in Australia involves reclaiming Indigenous 'Country'; a concept that does not equate only to land (the fundamental importance of which to decolonisation is highlighted by Tuck and Yang), but which includes epistemologies and kincentric relational ontologies of humans, animals, plants, water, rocks. Every place in Australia is Indigenous Country.^{iv} We suggest here that Indigenous knowledges about animals highlight potentially more expansive capacities for animals, foregrounding their differences in ways that do not automatically assume human supremacy or the right to dominate. Animals have their own interests, their own 'stories' (Wright et al.), are not mere props, extensions, metaphors, pets or allies of human communities despite their 'domestication' which (to borrow from Ghassan Hage), is a process of 'struggle' (91) that involves domination *and* resistance. Like a spinning triangle that can't rest on one side alone, our approach here sets out to be 'triadic', always involving at least three sides; Settler-Coloniser, Indigene *and* Animal. Other studies of power relations use triangulation (see for example Tuck and Yang; Kim, 'Abolition') to destabilise

binary thinking and place guard rails against collapsing differences, including those expressed in identities (see for example McKnight's discussion of 'tripartation' of settler and Aboriginal understandings of Country). Here we also use 'triadic' as shorthand to indicate a break with a tendency for accounts of colonial violence involving animals to consider only the human sides of the story, or a 'human/animal' dyad that treats humans as a singular universal. Indigenous and settler colonial approaches to animals (worldviews) differ in profoundly significant ways, and a triadic approach reminds us that animal difference is another set of differences; not presumptively or necessarily the same as what humans say about them.

Colonisation and agriculture

The history of colonial conflict over animals in Australia is frequently framed as a two-sided conflict *over* animals. This is itself a largely settler colonial framing, given that it absents all but humans from the dynamic and as many Indigenous scholars observe, the colonisation of Aboriginal Country is both about 'land' but also Country, encompassing humans, animals, water, rocks, plants etc. The ongoing colonisation of Australia by non-Indigenous settlers has always been a human-animal practice. Bruce Pascoe (Yuin) argues that the introduction of 'livestock' animals such as sheep and cattle constituted a distinct form of colonial violence, rather than a mere by-product of colonization: 'No better device, short of murder, could ensure the weakening of the enemy' (18). The sheep and cattle that graze/d Aboriginal land ate/eat epistemes; not only an ecological disruption, but a disruption to working knowledge of Country, a complex assemblage of 'ecological, environmental and zoological knowledge' that made it possible for 'Indigenous people to survive and thrive over the millennia' (Olsen and Russell 8). This disruption did not end with the colonial period; rather, it continues and takes up specific forms highly dependent on place and the kinds of animals involved.

Belcourt makes the point that the impact of animal agriculture in terms of land theft and territorial expansion means that it 'should thus be a key object of inquiry and protest in decolonial thought as much as it is in CAS' (22),^v but that animal studies also needs to attend to the 'originary trauma of dispossession that undergirds all agriculture' (22). With animal agriculture accounting for over 55% of the continent's land mass (and a disproportionately large part of Australia's popular self-image), its effects are wide and enduring. As Warrimay historian

Victoria Grieves notes, it was the plough that was a ‘weapon in the war against nature’ with the added effect that ‘Indigenous custodianship of country was erased’ (82), a point also made by Max Dulumunmun Harrison (Yuin) where he describes heritage ‘wiped away’ by ‘bulldozers and ploughs and infrastructure’ (120). Anna Poelina (Nyikina Warrwa Traditional Custodian from the Mardoowarra) describes grazing, along with mining, as part of the ‘contemporary invasive destruction of our lands, living water systems, diverse people and cultures... a direct result of continuing colonisation’ (x). Acknowledging the role that agriculture had in the project of colonisation, as Grieves, Poelina, Harrison and Pascoe do here, unsettles the sense that animal agriculture is a neutral by-product or mere backdrop of white occupation. Indeed, agricultural expansion *was* the frontier (McGrath, Silverstein, Cushing) and continues to be.

Animals are heavily involved in Australian frontier violence, with conflict over (and against) ‘livestock’ featuring as one of two ‘key characteristics’ of the massacres tracked by the *Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788-1930* project (Ryan); 51 of the 271 massacres linked to reprisals for cattle killing. The cattle we mentioned at the start played a role in the Appin massacre (1816) where at least fourteen Dharawal people were killed by military order by Governor Macquarie, a result of escalating war between Gundungurra and settler colonisers over fences and ‘strange animals’, according to Dharawal Elder Fran Bodkin (qtd. in Foley and Read, 35). Thalia Anthony’s analysis of Indigenous law and the settler construction of Indigenous criminality begins with pastoralists behaving as a ‘law unto themselves’ in the Northern Territory (the focus of her study). Killings and massacres of Indigenous people by pastoralists were rationalised as a response to Indigenous people’s ‘barbarism’ and their threats to cattle/industry (32-36). Historians explain cattle killing as part of Aboriginal resistance but also an issue of sustenance, persistence of cultural practices (including hunting) as access to Country was deliberately constrained (Hokari, McGrath, Silverstein, Reynolds).

Writing about the New England frontier (in the USA), Virginia Anderson points out that ‘Livestock seldom figure at all in the narrative of colonisation, and when they do, they usually serve as part of the scenery rather than as historical actors’ (Anderson 2). Her research shows that ‘livestock had been instrumental in dislodging Indians from the land during the 17th century’ (10). Where the cattle went, the colonists followed, re-asserting their rights to ‘property’. As Anderson argues, colonists did not just import animals, they also imported *ideas* about animals, ideas that were conceptually foreign to the Indigenous people they encountered

and also likely at odds with the ideas that animals had about themselves and the humans around them (hence their preference for escape). John Fischer's *Cattle and Colonialism* also examines how the trade in domesticated animals shaped the colonisation of California and Hawaii; importing agricultural practices, principles of 'breeding' and pastoralism to deliberately interrupt Indigenous land tenure and increase the availability of 'edible' animals for imperialism's reach.^{vi} In Australia, agriculture and pastoralism constitute industries that Aboriginal people work/ed within, enabling a conditional, continual occupation of their own land (see McGrath and also Jebb), an important factor in the recent returns of pastoral stations to traditional owners, where the return of Country includes a requirement to maintain livestock, placing limits on what future decolonisation might look like.^{vii}

Colonialism does not create a conflict with only two human sides, with the introduced animals lining up with and alongside the colonists as their 'advanced guard' as Anderson puts it, or 'shock troops' (as Milton puts it) against Indigenous people. Introduced animals are not obedient extensions of colonial powers, nor exactly 'colonial subjects par excellence' (Belcourt 21), but they will be on their own 'side', with their own interests that are separate to the colonists and Indigenous people and epistemologies they became known by. In taking this triadic approach, we build on animal studies literature that explicitly addresses the relationships between Indigenous people, animals and settler colonialism.

Blueprints, bedrocks, anchors: Animality and subjugation

Animal studies approaches that explicitly engage with colonialism are predominantly focussed on demonstrating the complementarities and importance of including 'the animal' in related fields of inquiry, especially postcolonial studies, (see for example Chagani, Armstrong, Huggan and Tiffin, Chang, Robinson, Gillespie). Maneesha Deckha notes that 'most postcolonial scholars are keenly aware of the species subtext of colonial racial coding and have accepted that the concepts of race, culture, gender, and species in the 18th and 19th century we are deeply intertwined and generative of each other' ('Postcolonial' 283), and yet she points out that most postcolonial scholars still do not mention animals in their work, a point also made by Corman and explored by Narayanan and Chagani. Deckha argues that animal studies is infused with postcolonial critique because of its attention to the ways that race and culture are 'deeply mediated by

constructs of animality and species'. But the connection of these constructs of animality and species has not translated into the inclusion of animality and animals into the adjoining analytic frameworks in postcolonial studies ('Postcolonial' 280).

The neglect of animals as political subjects in what would appear to be fields well placed to consider them has been explained by Kymlicka and Donaldson as stemming from a persistent anthropocentric perception that animal issues distract from more important *human* issues. Claire Jean Kim makes the point that we are often faced with the 'taxonomies' of race/gender/species as distinct political choices, we are 'compelled to choose between the interests and needs of racialised humans and the interests and needs of nonhuman animals' ('Dangerous' 283). Elena Wewer also suggests that, in Australia, the 'contentious space between the fields of animal rights and Indigenous rights' (6) remains 'taboo due to a lack of animal-inclusive intersectionality' (5). Kim argues that when we are faced with choosing between human and animal interests we are presented with a 'false choice' that leads ultimately to the preservation of an anthropocentrism that supports and energises both racism and speciesism. It is in this sense that Belcourt suggests that *anthropocentrism* should be an important target that connects decolonial and animal studies projects.

Chelsea Watego (Munanjahli and South Sea Islander) highlights the significance of anthropocentrism in racism's garb in *Another Day in the Colony*, where she mobilises the rhetoric of animalisation to describe how colonialism situates Indigenous people as inhuman; 'we occupy a social world that refuses to see our humanity' (191) and 'they still don't deem us worthy of the category of the human' (205). Watego argues that any strategy based on 'convinc[ing] them of our humanness' has failed in the Colony (Australia) because it 'relegates our needs and aspirations as a people to the very bottom, the same place we occupy on the racial hierarchy...we remain enslaved in domestic service to those damn colonisers' (11). Instead, Watego advocates 'standing our ground' outside the colonial paradigms that set Aboriginal people up to fail, and argues for an 'existence framed on our terms' (214). Watego's rejection of the animalised racial hierarchy highlights the persistence and prevalence of this animalising form of erasure in settler colonial Australia, and it also highlights the connected problem of anthropocentrism, where whiteness makes the 'animal' its foil. Wewer describes Indigenous accounts of an animalising colonial subjugation in 'memoir, autobiography, interview, poetry, and song' as 'richly represented within Indigenous art and scholarly works, though academia

remains silent' (1). Harrison describes the way the 'government were putting people into the missions, herding us like cattle' (161), invoking the point that the creation of 'livestock' provided a blueprint for colonial control of its subjects. In the context of anti-black racism, Syl Ko describes the 'negative notion of 'the animal' as both 'anchor' and 'bedrock underlying the framework of white supremacy' (45). Given the synergistic relationship between racism and species, Kim argues that they 'must be disassembled together in our efforts to meaningfully and radically rethink the category of the human' (287). Katie Gillespie puts it this way: 'a decolonial project that does not recover or redefine the ontological violence of the animal may in fact leave intact a fundamental part of how these racializing, and anthropocentric logics sustain themselves' (251). Most approaches in animal studies view anti-racism and decolonial projects as being *enhanced* by, rather than undermined by, tackling animality as racism's 'anchor' and 'subtext'. This is an important step in a decolonial critique, part of which aims to expose and thereby undermine the frameworks of settler colonialism (Pete).

Animal studies scholarship tends to situate Indigenous knowledge of animals as a source of hope and inspiration for more 'harmonious, and non-violent ways of living with animals' (288) and a 'decolonising postanthropocentric ethic' (Deckha, 'Postcolonial' 289, see also McHugh, Gruen and Crary for an important emphasis on strategic alliances). Belcourt makes this vital point: 'Indigenous cosmologies might give glimpses to a more radical alternative to normative ways of thinking about the politics of animals' (21). Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka posit commonalities between *Zoopolis* and Indigenous perspectives, in that both 'condemn the instrumental property-based view of animals, the industrialized exploitation it has led to, and its underlying view of species hierarchy and (2) recognize animals as selves and subjects, worthy of intrinsic respect, who are agents capable of co-authoring human–animal relations' (Donaldson and Kymlicka 166). Such a project, to expose and shift the dominant settler epistemologies in favour of engaging with Indigenous knowledges is, according to Deckha, still 'nascent' within animal studies. This is partly due to the fact that, as Belcourt argues, much of the field shows that 'animality is conceivable only through settler epistemologies' (21) and that when solutions or political projects are launched to address animal exploitation, they are framed by dominant settler colonial institutions that do not wind back settler colonial power, but extend it. These include projects that seek to situate animals as subjects framed by multiculturalism, or as having constitutional rights recognised by the State.

Animal advocacy and animal studies approaches can also be critiqued for a tendency to follow species taxonomies and hierarchies in ways that privilege sentience, implicitly downplaying the significance of ‘less complex’ creatures, as well as individualising animals from other connections in place with plants, rocks, microbes, trees. It is also less common to see work on violence *between* animals (Heise, see also Faria), such as the violence that introduced animals inflict on native animals. Studies of animals are predominantly constructed on the basis of western science and the critique of its anthropocentric violence, its taxonomies – and while these contribute to the undermining of the view that western knowledge of animals is ‘best’, they are more postcolonial than decolonial.^{viii} In other words, as Belcourt’s critique shows, there may be significant grounds for agreement about the ‘metaphysical closeness of animality and race’ manifest in settler colonial thinking, but that does not mean that Indigenous approaches to animals simply join up, map on to already existing animal studies approaches. As Gaudry and Lorenz have usefully outlined in their account of ‘indigenization’, there is a spectrum of transformations that are possible where settler colonial institutions meet Indigenous ones, and they range from mere inclusion (minimal changes to accommodate) to reconciliation (seeking shared, common ground) to decolonisation (transforming the grounds of knowledge itself). Animal studies approaches are not by and large decolonial, and are yet to make good on the possibility that while racism and animality are interconnected, the epistemological grounds on which to undo them may still be incommensurable.

Vanessa Watts (Mohawk and Anishinaabe Bear Clan) argues that the animalisation of Indigenous people must be fought on Indigenous epistemological grounds, rejecting the view that animalisation must always mean what the coloniser says it will.

Watts writes:

our varied cosmologies speak to an intimacy with animals and mutual, recognisable agency. In the context of settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples are confronted with paradoxes of being: *we must fight against being animalized! we must fight for our animality! we are not subhuman! our beingness is intimately tied to animality!* The compass for resolution here is generated by settler colonial attitudes towards Indigenous and animal bodies. The view that humans are a superior species to animals is violently operationalised through the closeness between animals and Indigenous bodies. Yet, reconciling this with respect to decolonising animal studies must extend beyond granting humanity to

Indians. It is the perversion of the animal-human closeness that cultivates a space for violence against Indigenous peoples. Countering this with a farness of Indigenous bodies from animal bodies will not undo violence. With respect to Indigenous cosmologies, this closeness with animals is not a question of interest or principle, but of obligation. (Watts 119)

Watt argues here that if dehumanisation is met by granting ‘humanness’ it affirms a settler colonial *negation of animality*. For Indigenous scholars including Watts, Belcourt and Robinson (Lennox Island First Nation), it is not only that ‘animality and racism’ are interconnected, but that ‘the animal’ (and human) is to be rethought along the lines of, and with respect to, Indigenous epistemologies. Animal studies should take heed of Zoe Todd’s criticism of posthumanism (which includes a great deal of work described as animal studies). Todd observes that posthumanism re-discovers what Indigenous people have known for millennia: the ‘breathless ‘realisations’ that animals, the climate, water, ‘atmospheres’ and non-human presences like ancestors and spirits are sentient and possess agency, that ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, ‘human’ and ‘animal’ may not be so separate after all – is itself perpetuating the exploitation of Indigenous people’ (Todd 16). Todd observes that few of these ‘realisations’ acknowledge the Indigenous knowledges and philosophers, unmediated by white interlocutors, in their citational practices, contributing to Eurocentrism.

Rather than being content to point to the interconnections between racism and speciesism and stopping at that, we might do better by looking for an *Indigenous, placed-based approach to animals that always already exists*. This can help to highlight Indigenous approaches that are possibly complementary and tactically aligned. For example, Watts makes a vital point in relation to ‘animal rights’ discourses: ‘animals can be ‘filled’ with rights of agency, rights of care and rights for liberation. But these rights already existed and were particular to Indigenous places’ (124). Uncle Harrison’s ‘Yuin Declaration for Kangaroos’ is also an example that locates kangaroo sovereignty and culture in Yuin Country and seeks to hold all governments and citizenry accountable to it:

The kangaroo has inhabited the Australian continent for over 20 million years, living in peace and ecological harmony. The kangaroo coexists today as they have for millennia, in balance with the flora, fauna and living beings of this land. Today we

declare, from this day forward, all Kangaroos shall be justly protected from all harms caused by human abuse and exploitation. We vow to hold governments and their citizenry accountable for any breaches of this sovereignty. This ancient iconic native animal therefore claims sovereign rights above and beyond any human claims of dominion over them... We declare that there exists a living ancestral relationship, uniquely bound between Indigenous Australians and kangaroos, which shall be preserved historically, spiritually, culturally and environmentally for all times. (Harrison, 'Yuin Declaration')

Tactical alignments between Indigenous peoples and communities and animal advocates (including those working in animal studies) are possible, *because* animal/human relations are framed differently to *non-Indigenous eyes*, in ways that highlight the embedded and relational significance of animals in places, in Country and Law. For example, Ambelin and Blaze Kwaymullina argue that Aboriginal Law grounds and contextualises all connections between life and responsibilities for Country, 'part of a larger way of knowing the world, one which is formed by a living landscape' (198) and one that includes humans, animals, rocks, plants within it.

John Bradley has explored some of these issues with the Yanyuwa of the Gulf of Carpentaria where all non-human kin are ancestors designated grandparents. He notes that this human-kin perspective is based on each landowning group as 'a multispecies kinship group based on mutual life-giving bonds' (496). As Dinah Norman a-Marrngawi explains:

The Dingo is my most senior paternal grandfather, the Tiger Shark is my senior mother, the Green Turtle is my most senior mother's mother and the Wedge-tailed Eagle is my most senior father's mother. (Bradley and Yanyuwa families 84).

This is not a metaphor, it is kincentrism at work. This is for Yanyuwa an actual and a highly political enlivened way of knowing, a way of Lawfulness (in Yanyuwa it is *narnu-yuwa*). As Salmon highlights, with such a positioning life in any environment is viable only when humans view their surroundings as kin; that their mutual roles are essential for survival. The knowledge of how living beings fit is not just a body of information but rather it is a system of action, interaction and connection, that encompasses the personal, social, environmental, cosmic and

spiritual. Animals and birds are not just biological entities; they each have their own ontological, epistemological, and axiological premise at the centre of which is the relational. This is a philosophy that is often, in a western view, deemed as being mystical but it is rather a very pragmatic way of knowing, and only ‘mystical’ if reality is limited to what can be measured by western ways of knowing (Bradley and Yanyuwa families).

In their study of a tourist operation on Bawaka Country in North East Arnhem Land, Wright et al. note that ‘Animals are co-Creators of Country’ and that ‘like humans they too know it, feel it and sing it’ (512):

Country carries a place-based understanding that incorporates people, animals, plants, water and land. Yet country does not just encompass these people and things, but also what connects them to each other and to multiple spiritual and symbolic realms. It implies laws, custom, movement, song, knowledges, relationships, histories, presents, futures and spirit beings. Country itself is a sapient presence that can be talked to, that can be known, that can itself communicate, feel and take either benign or non-benign action. (Wright et al. 512)

In their next collaboration, the authors go on to list Bawaka Country as a ‘lead author and heart of this paper. Bawaka enabled our learning, our meeting, the stories that guide us, the connections we discuss and has, indeed, brought us into being, as we are, and continue to co-become, today’ (Bawaka et al. 456). They argue that for the Yolgnu, as opposed to dominant (instrumental) settler colonial frameworks, ‘animals cannot be understood as separate objects within a hierarchy of power and ownership that sees them subservient to, or there for the enjoyment of, humans’ (512). The authors also stress the point that ‘All animals have their own story about themselves and then a story about their relationship with other animals and humans. They have knowledge and wisdom as well as songs of their own’ (516). For this reason, Wright et al. observe that ‘examining “animals” ... needs to be framed as an ontological argument about fundamental ways of being in the world’ (507).

In terms of animal capacities and cultural knowledge, an important site of knowledge comes from Indigenous hunting, a subject that probably takes up a disproportionate amount of space in animal studies scholarship, even though it is an issue that Kymlicka and Donaldson describe as being strategically avoided because it ‘generates charges of racism and

misunderstanding' (170). In Kymlicka and Donaldson's reading, Indigenous hunting is an almost overdetermined flashpoint for dispute because it is structured by incommensurable views of the hunt as either involving two consenting parties in an act of carefully governed 'gift' exchange, or as an act of human domination and violence.

Part of the reason that Indigenous hunting takes up a disproportionate space in the discourse of animal advocacy (and animal studies) is that it conforms with a tendency within animal advocacy to campaign on specific animal *practices*, which is a mistake according to Paula Arcari. Arcari makes the point that when animal advocacy focusses on specific animal practices, the movement ends up with 'fractured' and 'incoherent' accounts of injustice against animals that fails to address 'common structural and ideological foundations that connect all animal use' (188). The focus on specific animal practices also leaves animal advocacy open to accusations of singling out minority practices for particular scrutiny. In Australia, there are numerous examples of animal cruelty cases that are 'heard' because they are amplified by settler colonialism's selective attention. Given the ongoing occupation of Indigenous country under settler colonialism and the unresolved illegitimacy of settler possession, it is not possible for animal practices involving Aboriginal people to be heard without racism's noise and energetic force. This is especially the case when animal exploitation is called out along with tacit or explicit calls to ignore the background noise and focus *only* on the animal, something which disavows rather than deals with racism, as Kim argues ('Dangerous').

Kim ('Dangerous'), Donaldson and Kymlicka and earlier work by Griffith and Wolch draw attention to the ways that cases of animal cruelty are routinely instrumentalised by dominant groups to scrutinise marginalised communities and maintain existing power relations. For example, where Indigenous hunting practices might be 'exposed' as cruel by those who have no interest in exposing the cruelties of industrial animal agriculture or aquaculture, instead choosing to instrumentalise animal welfare for the sake of racism. This is done not in 'good faith' (i.e., concern for animals) and more often than not involves ignoring complicity in animal exploitation by the dominant group (Donaldson and Kymlicka, *Zoopolis* 47-48). Animal advocacy organisations can sometimes find themselves caught up in these events, where animal cruelty becomes *visible* because of racism, an example of what Kim describes as the 'energising' of species and race and taxonomies of power ('Dangerous'). For example, in Australia, the last animal welfare scandal to involve the Federal government (and national broadcaster, the ABC)

involved Australia's Live Export of cattle to Indonesia and included horrendous footage of abattoir work. Part of the energy that propelled this issue (though it had been long standing) was that it exposed cruel treatment in *Indonesian* slaughterhouses, and it deflected attention from larger scale industrial slaughter routinely practiced at 'home' in Australia (see Probyn-Rapsey, 'Stunning', Dalziell and Wadiwel). The controversy worked with the instrumentalization of animal welfare issues in bad faith by a dominant group (Donaldson and Kymlicka, *Zoopolis*), but it also demonstrated how media representations and animal advocacy organisations gain traction by accessing racism's affective force. If the media was interested in animal cruelty *per se*, then they would spend the majority of the time covering local slaughterhouses, farms and backyards. The *disproportionate* coverage of animal cruelty cases that involve marginal communities does not reflect their numeric significance, but rather it reflects the disproportionate cultural significance attached to events where a dominant culture gains power by situating itself as less cruel to animals than Others (see Griffith et al.). Deckha describes this as a 'colonial logic that took such purported cultural indicators (i.e., the treatment of women and animals) as confirmation of the superior civilisational status of the West' ('Constitutional' 228). Not only is this discourse incorrect (as her own studies of non-western legal protections show, for example) it has the added effect of 'infect[ing] animal advocacy efforts with a colonial and racist mindset', does 'nothing to combat the whiteness of the mainstream animal advocacy movement in Western countries) and encourages the mistaken view that 'animal rights is a western belief' (228).

The focus on the animal practices of Others also highlights the role that epistemology places in determining what counts as violence, a point that Dinesh Wadiwel makes in *The War against Animals*. Wadiwel argues that three interrelated forms of violence, *inter-subjective*, *institutional* and *epistemic*, are central to human-animal relations and the 'totality of our war against animals' (35). He makes the point that animal welfare and animal rights approaches are still predicated on *human sovereignty* ('our' right to decide their fate and dominate animals completely) and also makes the point that these approaches are limited by an underappreciation of the reach of epistemic violence or how we decide what violence actually is: 'the act of violence, its recognition by perpetrator, recipient and witness is rendered visible by signification within the context of available knowledge systems' (33). This helps to explain why it is that some people are not moved by 'glass walls' on slaughterhouses because they do not accept that what is seen constitutes violence; industrialised killing shrouding itself by standardisation and

normalisation. It also helps to explain why it is that people who are *unmoved* by the industrialised killing of livestock animals are *moved* by Indigenous hunting practices; the latter not shrouded in the ‘invisibilising’ effects of normalisation. Attention to the epistemic nature of violence itself sheds light on situations where one group insists that violence is not occurring and another insists that it is. The recognition of epistemic standpoints is also crucial, as it encourages a greater attention to cultural self-reflexivity and an avoidance of totalising statements about ‘all humans’,^{ix} especially where exposure to marginalised or minority practices heightens selective attention.

An example of this heightened selective attentiveness and opportunities for tactical alliance will illustrate the point further. Dugong hunting in the Torres Strait has been a contentious issue in Australia, with arguments about whether or not endangered dugongs should be protected from hunting, though Native title legislation allows for it. Studies conducted with local communities draw attention to the complex ‘multidimensional benefits gained by the Torres Strait communities involved in traditional hunting’ (Delisle 257), and point to the possibility of correlations between Islander beliefs about dugong numbers and mainstream science observations on the ‘sustainability’ of the killing (Kwan et al.). Others draw attention to the practices of killing dugongs as ‘simply cruel’, and as poorly excused by ‘romanticised beliefs of Indigenous people as good custodians of the land merely by virtue of their race or ancestry’ (Thiriet and Smith). Such a view repeats calls for the practice to be banned because of being out of step with majority views on animal cruelty (Thiriet). The dangers in making such a call for immediate banning is that it skips potential dialogue between Indigenous community members, animal advocates and conservationists and as Kwan’s work observes, there may actually be more opportunities for agreement than first appears, including, we might add, decisions *not* to proceed with hunting. Ian McNiven argues that the intimacy between hunter and prey in the dugong hunt is created by rituals, songs, kinship and dialogue with the living and dead (both prey, relatives and past dugong hunters). He writes that the:

ontological proximity of humans and prey creates a situation where the killing of prey is ontologically ambiguous because it is killing a person, albeit a non-human person. Such spiritual and moral ambiguity calls for careful ritual intervention and spiritual control and management. (McNiven, 100).

It is the blurring of these boundaries that signal the possibility that either the killing goes ahead or does not. In more recent work, McNiven argues that dugongs and turtles are kin, and they participate in the decision to be hunted based on their understanding of a moral contract between hunters and prey. That is, animals ‘accept’ being hunted if they know that hunters treat the animals in a respectful way, including respectful treatment of bones at dugong mound sites. McNiven makes the point that these sites are for dugongs so that they might understand how hunters have treated their remains with respect.

Some anthropologists have also emphasised the idea that hunting practices rely on prey *literally* granting permission to be killed. Paul Nadasdy makes the point that the idea that animals consent to be hunted has been ignored as fanciful by anthropologists because it attributes agency and sentience to animals in ways that conflict with western views. Nadasdy proposes that his own experience of killing a rabbit (or, as he sees it, the rabbit ‘giving itself’ to him), can be explained by hunting as a form of respectful ‘gift exchange’ which, according to Hage’s reading of Nadasdy, is a good example of a ‘coexisting multiplicity’ where an instrumentalised, domesticated form of domination coexists with relational one. Kim finds Nadasdy’s view here to be an ‘all too human’ form of self-rationalisation that shifts responsibility for violence on to the animal themselves. Craig Womack (Creek Cherokee) adds an important perspective on claims of respect in hunting, arguing that there is ‘no respectful way’ to kill an animal: ‘it will never be a matter of respect – it will be a matter of moderating disrespect’ (12).

There is also another way of looking at this, which is to say that Nadasdy might have accepted the *literal* truth that animals do engage with humans over the issue of hunting, but that his choice to interpret the rabbit’s actions as agreement is still selective. Crucially, the idea that animals participate in matters of consent when it comes to hunting means that they do not always give it. Margaret Robinson makes this point in relation to Mi’kmaq stories that ‘characterise animals as independent people with rights, wills and freedom. If animal consent is required to justify their consumption, then it opens the possibility that such consent may be revoked’ (Robinson 110). Vanessa Watts also notes that in contrast to settler colonial (and specifically Deleuzian) schematic that sees the animal as ‘a body of accessibility without permission’, the Anishanaabeg are in a relation of rules, governance dictated by permissions and agreements. This is in stark contrast to industrial animal agriculture where the animal’s refusals (resistance, struggles and cries) are met with restraints, electric prods, captive bolt stun guns

and maximal speed killing ‘the system that ...maximizes disrespect of animals instead of moderating it’ (Womack 17). If we were to take the issue of animals’ consent and refusal seriously then there would likely be no industrial animal agriculture. Perhaps this fact helps to explain why Nadasdy’s fellow anthropologists refuse animal agency or treat it as merely metaphorical. If they were to believe that the animal has a choice, an uneasiness about eating animals would likely follow.

Kim’s discussion of the ways that Indigenous hunting is debated through racism in *Dangerous Crossings* is prescient here. Her analysis of the ‘Makah Whaling controversy’ centres on the Makah Tribal Council decision to resume whale hunting after 70 years. The resumption of whaling after a long hiatus was presented as a return to Indigenous cultural practices stopped by colonialism that interfered with culture, territory and sovereignty. Environmentalist and animal protectionists presented arguments that suggested that the Makah return to whaling was an abrogation of their responsibilities as protectors of nature, thus invoking the trope (and trap) of the ‘ecological Indian’. Environmental groups and scientists argued that whales were distinct mammals with high levels of intelligence, ‘special’, and should be protected from all humans, invoking international political agreements made by nation states such as the USA to protect the species. None of this sufficiently acknowledged Makah Sovereignty and ongoing dispossession, indeed it threatened to bypass Treaty rights by references to the equality (re: sameness) of all under a settler colonial state. The Makah tribal council criticised Environmental and Animal advocacy groups as perpetuating a form of eco-colonialism: ‘the continuation of historical colonialism in contemporary ecological garb’ (Kim, ‘Dangerous’ 232-233), something which motivated stronger support for the Makah’s claim that whaling constituted an act of cultural revival and political resistance. During the conflict both Makah leaders and environmental and animal protectionists ‘disavowed each other’s claims and perspectives in the course of political struggle’ (208). Kim describes the conflict in the following way:

In trying to prohibit the hunt, animal and environmental protectionists disavowed (to varying degrees) Makah claims about racism and colonialism as well as Makah leader’s ontological claims about humans, whales, and nature. Makah leaders and supporters, for their part, delegitimated the antiwhaling position and reduced it to a hatred of Indians or desire to control them. They, too, chose not to approach the conflict as a confrontation of two reasonable but incommensurable views of whaling, but instead

essentialised whaling opposition as racist and imperialist – *as not really being about whales at all*. ('Dangerous' 243)

Kim's analysis includes the whales, their migration patterns, their interactions with family groups, with humans and their cultural transmission of song. She cites research on whale species (humpback, fin back and toothed whales) showing that 'these whales had, on a parallel track evolved brain structures similar to our own, with specialised neurons called spindle cells that are linked to self-awareness, linguistic expression, compassion, and other traits' and that these whales 'exhibited complex social patterns that include intricate communication skills, coalition formation, cooperation, cultural transmission and tool usage' ('Dangerous' 214). Her approach to the analysis – giving space and context to the animals, moves them from contested property/object in the dispute between human groups who speak of them, to a third party with an interest in living for themselves. To do this, Kim calls for recognition that animal justice claims are not, a priori, always automatically secondary to social justice claims made by human communities. However, a criticism of Kim's analysis might be that it over-privileges western marine science (and reporting) in its account of the whale's subjectivity, and is therefore working within settler colonial epistemologies that speak for the whale in specific ways, such as highlighting their 'intelligence' and linguistic abilities, etc. There is proportionally less attention to the epistemological differences cited by Makah leadership and cosmologies in her account. There is also a tantalising question broached by Corman, about how to 'consider animals' (in this case whales') culture; how they behave as a group (not a species), distinct from other groups. Kim also points out that power relations that adhere *within* groups is as important as the analysis of relations between groups, hence her 'multi-optic' approach. The dissenting voices of Alberta Thompson and other Makah Elders who disagreed with the decision of the Tribal council to resume whaling provides an important insight into the ways that dissenting views about hunting *within* Indigenous communities themselves are not heard when a conflict is posed as a between two sides only, a point also made by Lori Gruen and Greta Gaard.

Lori Gruen asks, 'is there a non-imperialist way of justifying interference when women, minorities, animals and the environment are being disadvantaged or destroyed?' (17). Her answer is that to avoid legitimate resentment from members of communities, it is important to establish whether or not the conflict is 'intercommunity or intracommunity'. In the case of the Makah whaling controversy, she points out that the grey whales need not necessarily be seen as

only ‘inside’ the Makah community, and that the conflict between environmentalists, animal advocates and Makah and whales could be understood as between different communities (plural), with the whales’ needs separate to /outside of Makah culture. Gruen’s work also draws attention to the ways that objectors from within Indigenous communities (including Alberta Thompson) have less epistemic authority within their own communities, but are important voices from an animal advocacy point of view – representing broad areas of tactical agreement. But these are also ‘dangerous crossings’ (the title of Kim’s book) in that they raise questions about the selectivity of Indigenous voices and knowledge. ‘Dangerous crossings’ do not allow for a simple (two sided) story to be told and for this reason they rarely gain traction in a popular sense. It not surprising that media reporting overstated and simplified community sentiment; surveys revealed that 95% supported the Makah entitlement to whale but only 75% thought they should *act on* that entitlement (241). The obfuscation of this contributed to the sense that there were only 2 parties to the dispute: pro-Whaling Makah and anti-Whaling settler colonists. This was not the case.

Reflecting on the political failures of this episode, Kim concludes with recommendations for both ‘sides’. Makah leaders could have done more to understand the global context and ecological arguments made by the movement to protect whales, ‘not presumptively reduce all alternative perspectives to colonialism’, consider ‘whether their own cultural understandings, too, might bear traces of domination (and self-rationalisation)’ (250), and consider how the fight for sovereignty might be ‘uncoupled’ from the issue of whaling, as the dissenting elders had argued. (250). She also points out that animal advocates should have done more work to promote Makah sovereignty, understood the local and colonial context in which they themselves work, publicly rejected white allies who sought to undermine Makah sovereignty, appreciated their own racial situatedness and learned about the Makah’s ontological claims about human and whales.

Conclusion

Every part of Australia is Indigenous Country, there is no-one (animal, plant, rock, human) that is not already part of Indigenous knowledge and Law, there is no extension of colonial or constitutional protections to animals that does not occur on Indigenous Country and therefore

effect Indigenous knowledge. Animal studies scholarship can work to establish its relevance to Indigenous communities and scholars by working with and acknowledging the epistemic authority of Indigenous knowledges of animal-human relations in Country. As we hope to have highlighted in our discussion of Indigenous knowledges and relational ontologies, ‘we’ are not always speaking of the same human-animal when it comes to animal-human issues. Moreover, disputes involving animals are never simply *between* Indigenous and settler colonial Australians, but also *within and across groups*, (a point highlighted in Claire Jean Kim’s ‘multi-optic’ work) with contestations framed by tensions around traditional/modern, conservation/extinction, introduced and native (the latter driving much of the discourse on introduced animals in Australia). If animal studies looks to Indigenous epistemologies for better models of human/animal relations, (less hierarchical, less anthropocentric) then we also have to acknowledge and account for barriers to tactical agreement and collaboration, not least of these being the racism of the settler colonial context in which ‘animal issues’ are made salient, and a tendency to situate settler colonial institutions (knowledges and political structures) as holding the solutions, extending rather than unsettling settler colonialism’s reach. These factors create obstacles resulting in missed opportunities for tactical collaboration. The kind of triadic analysis we are proposing here would highlight the ever presence of Indigenous knowledges, animals ‘themselves’ and settler colonialist dynamics. A triadic analysis would not subsume animals as rhetorical devices in human-centred dramas. After all, ‘animals have their own story about themselves’ (Wright et al. 516).

Notes

ⁱ Here we use ‘settler-coloniser’ to refer to a diverse group of non-Indigenous peoples, dominated and framed in a way that privileges whiteness, who occupy Indigenous land.

ⁱⁱ This is not meant to imply that we seek a ‘pan-Aboriginal’ approach. There are debates within the North American context that are useful for us to consider because of a shared context of settler colonialism, and specific debates about how animal rights discourses relate to and impact on Indigenous communities that we have found helpful in formulating this discussion.

ⁱⁱⁱ Belcourt signals the interconnections with Black studies although his main focus, (and ours here), is on Indigenous critiques. See Neel Ahuja and her discussion of recent Black studies/animal studies work by Boisseron, Jackson and Bennett in Ahuja, and work by Claire Jean Kim (‘Abolition’) as well as Aph Ko’s *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft*, the latter engaging with colonialism but not specifically of Indigenous peoples.

^{iv} We refer to Indigenous Country here meaning both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

^v Belcourt names *Critical Animal Studies* (CAS) as his principal target of criticism, but also extends beyond it to include mainstream animal studies as well.

^{vi} A wide group of beings (including humans) may be ‘edible’ but not ‘food’, as Struthers Montford and Chloë Taylor (2020) point out. Hence colonists imported ‘food’ animals deemed ‘livestock’ despite the presence of the ‘edible’ in new places. This epistemological distinction between the edible and the eaten/food, is key to understanding the cultural meanings attached to ‘meat’ and also the transportation and introduction of ‘domesticated’ animals by colonisers.

^{vii} A topic of our future research, see for example https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/05/the-good-fight-roebuck-plains-station-and-its-return-to-indigenous-owners-photo-essay?CMP=soc_567&fbclid=IwAR2qYv1zGi6UoLTXHL0SbypMrmdtUUMj694WVslWpCD2phOVmn3T-BLs5HM

^{viii} For example, Fiona's work on 'dingology' has been largely postcolonial (that is, it takes aim at 'western science' in relation to dingoes) rather than decolonial one (which would prioritise Indigenous knowledges as part of a project to transform what counts as knowledge).

^{ix} Wadiwel's references to human sovereignty and domination of animals throughout *The War against Animals* do not preclude the possibility that Indigenous sovereignties might be different: 'scholars articulating Indigenous sovereignty, have argued not only for recognition of sovereignty claims within settler colonial societies, but left open the question of what this sovereignty might look like, suggesting indeed that there is a significant capacity to reimagine sovereignties, including through forms of co-existence and an ample ability to imagine sovereign pluralities' (21). Animal sovereignties, such as those proposed by Yuin Elder Max Dulumunmun Harrison for kangaroos, is a topic for future discussion.

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