

2015

Dingoes and dog-whistling: a cultural politics of race and species in Australia

Fiona Probyn-Rapsey
fiona.probyn-rapsey@sydney.edu.au

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Recommended Citation

Probyn-Rapsey, Fiona, Dingoes and dog-whistling: a cultural politics of race and species in Australia, *Animal Studies Journal*, 4(2), 2015, 55-77.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol4/iss2/4>

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Abstract

For the last 30 years in Australia, the extinction of the dingo has been a subject of great concern. But what this usually means is not that dingoes are being pushed to the brink because of gunshot or baits (though such persecution is happening[1]). In fact, it is not even so much a matter of dingo death but rather dingo birth, or the queer[2] relations of dingo and domestic/wild dog, that is the major concern. As Laurie Corbett once wrote: 'cross-breeding is common and the pure dingo gene pool is being swamped'. His words (though he is by no means alone in expressing the fear of the genetic 'swamp'), have resonated well beyond the contested science of dingo 'purity' within the academy, such that panic over hybridity now characterises dingo discourse at large. Almost everything that is said about the dingo, from conservation biology to art installations, pivots around a seemingly unshakeable truth that the dingo is becoming extinct by hybridizing with domestic dogs. It is this particular interpretation or use of the word extinction that intrigues me. How did hybridity become tangled up with extinction in this way, and how did it come to have such explanatory power despite the fact that numerous studies failed to establish either a definitive test for dingo purity or a reliable baseline to begin with? The 'pure' dingo is a taxonomic spectre that was formalised in the 1980s by dingo biologists, specifically Laurie Corbett and Alan Newsome, as I will discuss in part II of this essay. Their early work successfully branded the 'hybrid' as a threat to the dingo, and this idea has gone on to dominate dingo research for the last 30 years. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the link between hybridity and dingo extinction forms the ideological backbone of 'dingology', which is a term I use in the spirit of Donna Haraway's 'primateology is politics by other means' (1984), to examine how dingology straddles a biocultural frontier, where race, gender and species intersect.

Keywords

Intersectionality; Australian race relations, dingoes

Dingoes and dog-whistling: a cultural politics of race and species in Australia

Fiona Probyn-Rapsey

University of Sydney

Abstract: *For the last 30 years in Australia, the extinction of the dingo has been a subject of great concern. But what this usually means is not that dingoes are being pushed to the brink because of gunshot or baits (though such persecution is happening[1]). In fact, it is not even so much a matter of dingo death but rather dingo birth, or the queer[2] relations of dingo and domestic/wild dog, that is the major concern. As Laurie Corbett once wrote: ‘cross-breeding is common and the pure dingo gene pool is being swamped’. His words (though he is by no means alone in expressing the fear of the genetic ‘swamp’), have resonated well beyond the contested science of dingo ‘purity’ within the academy, such that panic over hybridity now characterises dingo discourse at large. Almost everything that is said about the dingo, from conservation biology to art installations, pivots around a seemingly unshakeable truth that the dingo is becoming extinct by hybridizing with domestic dogs. It is this particular interpretation or use of the word extinction that intrigues me. How did hybridity become tangled up with extinction in this way, and how did it come to have such explanatory power despite the fact that numerous studies failed to establish either a definitive test for dingo purity or a reliable baseline to begin with? The ‘pure’ dingo is a taxonomic spectre that was formalised in the 1980s by dingo biologists, specifically Laurie Corbett and Alan Newsome, as I will discuss in part II of this essay. Their early work successfully branded the ‘hybrid’ as a threat to the dingo, and this idea has gone on to dominate dingo research for the last 30 years. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the link between hybridity and dingo extinction forms the ideological backbone of ‘dingology’, which is a term I use in the spirit of Donna Haraway’s ‘primatology is politics by other means’ (1984), to examine how dingology straddles a biocultural frontier, where race, gender and species intersect.*

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*'cross-breeding is common and the pure dingo gene pool is being swamped'.
(Corbett, *The Dingo*, 7)*

*'the one which is openly on the table (the animal group) and the one which is
hidden under it (the human group)'
(Guillamin¹, 260)*

*'the obsession with distinctions between the offensively named 'full bloods' and
hybrids or 'real' and 'inauthentic' Aborigines, continues to be imposed on us today'
(Dodson, 28)*

For the last 30 years in Australia, the *extinction* of the dingo has been a subject of great concern. But what this usually means is not that dingoes are being pushed to the brink because of gunshot or baits (though such persecution is happening²). In fact, it is not even so much a matter of dingo *death* but rather dingo *birth*, or the queer³ relations of dingo and domestic/wild dog, that is the major concern. As Laurie Corbett once wrote: 'cross-breeding is common and the pure dingo gene pool is being swamped' (7). His words (though he is by no means alone in expressing the fear of the genetic 'swamp'), have resonated well beyond the contested science of dingo 'purity' within the academy, such that panic over hybridity now characterises dingo discourse at large. Almost everything that is said about the dingo, from conservation biology to art installations, pivots around a seemingly unshakeable truth that the dingo is becoming extinct by hybridizing with domestic dogs. It is this particular interpretation or use of the word extinction that intrigues me. How did hybridity become tangled up with extinction in this way, and how

¹ Guillamin's early critique of ethology ('ethology *describes* animals but *explains* man 261), goes on to highlight the material effects of animal analogies on human societies, something which is relevant also to conservation biology: "The vague knowledge of the meaning of animality extends to actual human relationships and not only the symbolic, as is unthinkingly believed. In relationships between sex-classes, between classes, between peoples, between 'races', the frequent reduction of the dominated ones to animality is a social form. And for the social sciences it is desirable to recognize animalism as a social fact" (265).

² The Wild Dog Action Plan announces this plan. In forthcoming work I discuss the sheep industry as a major player in dingo politics. I suggest that it is not possible to consider the dingo without sheep.

³ Here I use 'queer' in the sense deployed by Elizabeth Grosz and also Karen Barad: 'queer is a radical questioning of identity and binaries, including the nature/culture binary' (29).

did it come to have such explanatory power despite the fact that numerous studies failed to establish either a definitive test for dingo purity or a reliable baseline to begin with? The ‘pure’ dingo is a taxonomic spectre that was formalised in the 1980s by dingo biologists, specifically Corbett and Alan Newsome, as I will discuss in part II of this essay. Their early work successfully branded the ‘hybrid’ as a threat to the dingo, and this idea has gone on to dominate dingo research for the last 30 years. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the link between hybridity and dingo extinction forms the ideological backbone of ‘dingology’, which is a term I use in the spirit of Donna Haraway’s ‘primatology is politics by other means’ (1984), to examine how dingology straddles a biocultural frontier, where race, gender and species intersect.

Part I: Purity and Violence

My purpose in this essay is threefold. One is to link two discourses of purity that stem from taxonomies of race and species to explain how dingo birth got so tangled up with dingo death. I suggest that the panic about dingo hybridity shares a genealogy with miscegenation discourses and Australian twentieth-century plans for biological assimilation of Aboriginal people; both sets of ideas featuring perceptions of mixed race people as living embodiments of extinction.⁴ I also suggest that the argument that hybridity equals extinction perpetuates and even predicts a violent logic of elimination, where ‘hybrids’ are deemed eradicable in order to conserve an imaginary purity. Given this link, I am also motivated to challenge and disrupt the apparent ease by which race panic, fear of racial ‘mixing’, makes its way back into everyday life by its appearance within dingo conservation discourse, one that is not explicitly speaking of ‘race’ and yet is somehow full of it,⁵ as the following examples show:

⁴ One example of hybridity and extinction connection comes from Josiah Nott and George Gliddon’s ‘Hybridity of Animals, viewed in connection with the natural history of mankind’ (1854) where they argue that ‘hybrids’ or ‘mulattos’ have ‘a tendency to become extinct when their hybrids are bred together’ (in Ifekwunigwe, 45). In their account, hybridity meant extinction because they believed ‘hybrids’ were less fertile. In the Australian context, the fear of racial hybridity is the opposite; it is extinction as hyper-fertility, surpassing the ‘parent stock’ (both black and white). This fear of the proliferation of ‘hybrids’ or ‘half castes’ was acknowledged by the ‘breeding out the colour’ policy, designed to biologically assimilate ‘hybrids’ into whiteness to reduce the threat of being outnumbered (see Wolfe; McGregor; Neville; Probyn-Rapsey).

⁵ It is not simply a matter of the wayward or casual use of metaphor, it is also evidence of the taxonomic synergies of race and species (see later discussion of Kim), both systems of classification and ordering that rely on theories of insider/outsider groups. It is the synergy between race and species as related taxonomies that makes them appear

‘Human activities threaten the pure dingoes’ genetic survival and the extent of hybridization is increasing at an alarming rate.’

(Oakman, 34).

‘a species fading from existence as a result of hybridisation’

(Dickman and Lunney, 6).

‘any wild dog is bad. If there is interbreeding between dingoes and some of the other breeds of dogs, it only gets worse’

(Wise, 88)

‘The dingo in the wild is endangered due to hybridisation with domestic dogs’

(Wilton 49)

‘The greatest threat to the survival of dingoes as a protected sub-species is hybridisation with other dogs...the pure dingo pool is being swamped’

(Fleming et al. 2).

‘while some pure-bred dingoes exist in eastern-Australia there is a high degree of hybridisation among the wild dog populations in these areas associated with the long periods of European

simultaneously, rather than one being a ‘mere’ metaphor for another. How we approach this synergy and simultaneity is something that needs to be taken seriously, rather than disavowed as incidental or ‘merely’ linguistic (an interesting narrative in itself), because as I go on to argue, it has implications for the everydayness of the ‘obsessions’ with racial purity that Dodson writes of, and the predictability of violence towards those (nonhuman and human) deemed ‘eradicable’.

settlement’

(Woolproducers Australia, 7)

‘Interbreeding with domestic and domestic feral dogs is now a cause for the decline of certain canids, chief among them being the Australian dingo’

(Rogers and Kaplan 202).

‘Did you know? One in every three dingoes is not ‘pure’ but crossed with a dog’

(‘Dingo’ in *Aussie Animals*, Collectable cards series for kids, Woolworths in association with Taronga Zoo, September 2013).

‘how do we stop the increasing menace of hybridisation sweeping the continent?’

(Denny 91)

‘the dingo’s taxonomic status is clouded by hybridization with modern domesticated dogs and confusion about how to distinguish ‘pure’ dingoes from dingo-dog hybrids.’

(Crowther et al 1)

‘The purebred dingo is now facing extinction due to hybridization’.

(Gerega)

On one level, this language speaks ‘plainly’ about the fear of dingoes being bred out by dogs. But in another register, it is mobilising a *fear of mixing*: *interbreeding, fading, swamping, menace*; precisely the terms that singled out Aboriginal people for assimilation into whiteness in twentieth-century Australian settler colonial rhetoric (see Dodson, 2003 for example, and also Ward, Wolfe, Langton, Anderson). The rhetoric of conservation could be seen as *haunted* by the language of miscegenation (maintaining a shadowy presence), but at the same time, it is precisely *not haunted*; it seems quite open about mobilizing the sort of race panic rhetoric that would, in other contexts, be understood and recognized as being

genocidal in its implications; heralding an extinction even in the face of the living. I am intrigued by what this mobilization of race panic within species talk means; how it is deployed without a sense of history, without a sense of the connectedness of the taxonomies of race and species. Do they know what they are saying? Does the audience hear only species talk? Or do they also hear race panic? I find it hard to imagine that these terms are being used unknowingly, and as Karen Barad writes: ‘There is nothing innocent about the playful stimulation of the fear response’ (27). If they do not hear the double meaning of race panic within this fearful speech, then what are we to make of the paradox that some champions of the dingo are seemingly deaf to *dog-whistling*?

Dog whistling⁶ is a term for Australian political doublespeak that is characterized by coded messages and implied meanings – most commonly used to describe a form of racist speech that contains ‘plausible deniability’, a subtext that can be denied: such as *I didn’t mean that, I was talking about this* (see Fear). Dog whistling as a form of doublespeak holds special significance within animal studies because this field analyses animals and animality at the intersections of species, race and gender (for a start). A number of animal studies scholars make the point that animality is at the core of dehumanization, such that dismantling dehumanization by reference to the animal benefits both humans and nonhumans alike (Anderson; Elder et al; Kim). Racism is ‘dogged’ in its determination. Chasing its deployment in different domains (like conservation biology) draws attention to its semiotic ‘stickiness’ (Sara Ahmed), where implicit racism sticks to bodies, linking them to nations *and* narratives in a way that has material effects. Because racism is semiotically ‘sticky’, comments about the menace of hybridity in one domain (dingo science), are also dangerous for another (the ‘obsession’ that Dodson refers to), because they put the rhetoric of purity/hybridity back into circulation, and lend scientific authority to the idea that hybridity is still a form of social death (still alive, but not counted); where a subject can be illegitimately alive, without a ‘proper’ (pure) category of belonging, and therefore eradicable. The point about this is that once it is mobilized, the language of ‘mixing’ coupled with ‘menace’, it can travel between human and animal bodies, regardless of the original intention.⁷

⁶ The term was used in Australia first according to Josh Fear, who attributes it to Mike Steketee’s newspaper article ‘Howard Steers a Course for Self-Reliance’, *The Australian*, 4 March, 1997. Fear includes many examples of the form that dog whistling politics can take, including the use of stock phrases such as ‘Australian way of life’ to *implicitly* make certain groups outsiders.

⁷ I am not suggesting that dingo scientists and advocates are *deliberately* mobilising racist language in order to offend Aboriginal people. But I am suggesting that once it is redeployed, it cannot be contained to ‘species’ only – there is

Making a connection between twentieth-century assimilationist views on Aboriginality and twenty-first-century views on dingo hybridity is tricky and complicated, not least because drawing this analogy risks repeating the perceived injury of dehumanization. To be clear, I am not arguing that Aboriginal people and dingoes are analogous. Rather, I am arguing that the logic of elimination which was used against Aboriginal people (and still is, as Dodson points out), and is used against dingoes is shared. I find the work of Claire Kim helpful here, as a way of making clear the distinction between the groups I am writing about while also drawing links between the taxonomies/logics that affect them. In *Dangerous Crossings* (2015), Kim argues that race and species are ‘synergistically related... taxonomies of power whose respective drives to discipline different types of bodies are intertwined in deep and enduring ways’ (18). She points out that these two taxonomies ‘sustain and energize one another in the joint project of producing the human and the subhuman, not-human, less than human – with all of the entailments of moral considerability, physical vulnerability, and grievability that follow’ (283). For Kim, it is not only that ‘[a]nimalization has been central not incidental to the project of racialization’ (18), but that also ‘sometimes the flow of meanings is reversed and certain nonhuman groups get racialised or imbued with negative meanings associated with despised human groups’ (18). Thinking about the synergies is tricky because raising them can be perceived as doing the work of dehumanizing. In light of this difficulty, we are often faced with choosing between defending the ‘interests and needs of racialised humans and the interests and needs of nonhuman animals’ (283). But Kim points out that this is a ‘false choice’ because it denies the ways that the ‘two taxonomies, intimately bound with one another, must be disassembled together in our efforts to meaningfully and radically rethink the category of the human’ (287). Kim is clear that this is not about putting all claims on an equal footing, in a way that ignores histories of material oppression; rather it is ‘a critical methodology dedicated to understanding and challenging racism, heteropatriarchy, speciesism, the exploitation of nature, and neoliberal capitalism’ (19). So she challenges single-issue movements – like those organised around gender only, or racism only, or animal advocacy only – to acknowledge these connections in order to prevent them from claiming ground for themselves at the expense of others, and also with a view to widening the potential for alliances to be formed. I find Kim’s work very useful for thinking about what is going on in statements about dingoes becoming extinct through hybridization. On the surface they speak plainly of species conservation, and are not explicitly concerned with ‘race’ and yet they are full of it. They also stake out the political claims

simply too much traffic between species and race as taxonomies, as analogies, to limit the meanings in advance to ‘only’ dingoes.

of conservation at the expense of *hybrids*, a word that sticks to human and non-human subjects, who are *dangerously crossed* over and back into the category of the living dead whenever that logic is mobilized.

My hope is that by the end of this essay I will have convinced the reader that it is not plausible to deny that a violent form of racialised species thinking inhabits dingology every time it draws a connection between hybridity and extinction. The broad significance of this is in the death that it brings to ‘wild dogs’ across the country, and also in the threat that this violent form of racial thinking remains available, kept in circulation, ready to re-attach itself to those who are subjected to the double-take of ‘authenticity’; to be judged by bloodlines, blood quantum, as were Aboriginal people by white authorities under policies of biological assimilation. ‘Dog whistling’ names the plausibility of this scenario, of keeping this ‘bad blood’ form of racism in circulation. ‘Dog whistling’ signals a simultaneous exchange and circulation of seemingly disparate taxonomies that keep racist logics afloat and available; available to become re-attached anew to human and non-human bodies. That we name a habit of dissociating from racism after the dog signals not simply another deflection of responsibilities, but also a continuity that reflects the dogged persistence of taxonomies of exclusion. As Colin Dayan’s *The Law Is a White Dog* attests, the dog has always been central to how ‘non persons’ have been made manifest: imagined and created:

If we were challenged to write a legal history of dispossession, we could find no better examples, both profound and ancient, than in the taxonomies of personhood when bounded and enlivened by the dog kind. Only with dogs before us and beside us can we understand the making or unmaking of *the idea of persons*. (209)

Part II: Making Wild Dogs Eradicable

Social science discussions of the dingo that engage with the subject of dingo extinction are prone to taking the science of dingo extinction on face value, without necessarily unpacking what exactly is meant by extinction (see Kaplan and Rogers, Rose, Franklin). Dingo extinction via hybridization is a point that is sometimes mobilized with a sense of irony, as in Haraway and Franklin’s discussions. Adrian Franklin writes that ‘recently the dingo achieved endangered status as a result of interbreeding with feral dogs’ (2006, 157), while Haraway writes: ‘the dingo has even achieved the mixed grace of becoming officially endangered as a result of its unblessed interbreeding with ordinary feral dogs’ (Haraway, 2008, 342). Deborah Bird Rose’s *Wild Dog Dreaming* describes the dingo as ‘not the first animal to be facing

extinction, and they will not be the last' (2). Given Rose's emphasis on seeing the dingo in terms of kinship, as 'vulnerable and dying members of the family' (4), I am confident that *dingo kin* (be they hybrids or wild dogs) would also be included in her reading; indeed, that would explain the 'wild dog' in the book's title. However, confusion remains because of the fact that, according to the *Red List*, the wild dog is *not* facing extinction: 'populations of wild dogs remain abundant in Australia' (Corbett 'Canis') (though plans to *eradicate* them are gaining traction⁸). To add to the confusion, *earlier* work published by Corbett, the author of the *Red List* entry on dingoes, provides enough grounds for us to conclude that the 'pure' dingo has never even existed except as an idea⁹, and one that foregrounds colonial science's attempts to precede itself into a 'pristine' pre-colonial past where domestic dogs were (believed to be) not around. So, if the wild dog remains 'abundant', and the pure dingo never existed, then how does dingo extinction come into the picture? We need to look back at early work done by dingo biologists (including Corbett) who established the idea that hybridization was equivalent to dingo extinction. This section provides an overview of dingo biology's interests in establishing dingo purity in order to show that significant cultural formations are at play where dingo purity is invoked. The point of this is not to suggest that *beneath* these cultural formations lies the truth about dingoes (nature uncorrupted by culture), but to suggest that the cultural and biological formations are intra-acting (to use Karen Barad's alternative to 'inter-acting', which presumes the presence of discrete entities). Taking inspiration from feminist science studies, my approach to thinking about the intra-action of cultural tropes with scientific data is not to suggest that they are trespassing, but to interrogate them and investigate their effects on *producing* and *developing* knowledge (see Barad; Karis Jackson; Gruen).

Corbett has worked on dingoes for 40 years and as a whole his work highlights the shifts and changes in scientific inquiries into dingoes, especially regarding the question of their purity. He prepared the last two audits of dingo management on Fraser Island (see Hytten and Burns), wrote 'the book' on dingoes, and is widely quoted in relation to the threat of hybridisation. Most of the studies that address dingo

⁸ see Woolproducers *National Wild Dog Action Plan*.

⁹ The pure dingo is beyond colonial science in two ways. Firstly in the sense of imagined to have been before colonial science was present (pre-European) and secondly, beyond it epistemologically (results are inconclusive). Recent work by Crowther et al. examines pre-European dingo purity through museum specimens. The emphasis on pre-European purity obscures the possibility that when the dingoes arrived in Australia, it was not a single event, nor a distinct group, but perhaps multiple and over the long periods in which the Macassan sea trade was active in North Australia. See Regina Ganter for discussion of Aboriginal and Asian sea trade histories, for example.

conservation refer to Corbett's warnings about the threat posed by hybridisation (notwithstanding his own views shifting on this). Between 1980 and 1985 Corbett and Newsome published a trio of studies that focussed on the 'identity of the dingo'. These three studies play a crucial role in dingology because, despite their limitations, they succeeded in setting the agenda on dingo purity for decades. What is interesting is how these studies achieved such agenda-setting success. It cannot be explained by the nature of their findings alone, because the skull morphology tests they devised offered, at best, approximations. Indeed, Corbett has recently written that there are 'currently no exclusive criteria that lend themselves to a definitive test' for purity (Daniels and Corbett, 215). While they were unable to establish purity, they did establish a sustaining belief that *hybridisation leads to extinction*. My view is that these three studies gained influence in the field because they managed to deflect attention away from the conceptual impossibility of establishing dingo purity by invoking another more affective drama: the melodrama of a dying race. Switching attention from the problem of establishing purity to the need to *preserve* purity served an affective purpose that is, still today, difficult to dislodge because it triggers conservation concerns, protective policies and *simultaneously* policies of eradication built on tackling boundary breaches, as I will go on to explain. It is worth taking a closer look at these studies in order to see how it was that such firm conclusions about hybridity equalling extinction were generated in the face of ambiguity. What follows is an account of how the investigative bias (hybridization = extinction) came to dominate the field, and the effect it has on shifting the 'hybrids' or the wild dogs to a category of 'killable' on the basis that they represent a *genetic* threat to their own kin.

Newsome, Corbett and Carpenter's first study, 'The Identity of the Dingo I: Morphological Discriminants of Dingo and Dog Skulls', was published in 1980 and was designed to establish skull characteristics for dogs and dingoes so as to differentiate between them. They caught 50 dingoes in Central Australia and took 43 domestic dogs from the Canberra pound, killed them, removed their skulls for measuring, and found that: 'dingoes have longer muzzles, larger bullae and main teeth, longer and more slender canine teeth, and flatter crania with larger nuchal crests' (615). The Canberra pound dogs that they chose for comparison included 32 kelpies and kelpie crosses, 5 blue heelers and blue heeler crosses and six border collies and collie crosses, all dogs 'kept commonly by farmers and graziers on or near country inhabited by dingoes' (616). They are also, in the case of kelpies and blue heelers, considered to have dingo ancestry. Two of the female blue heelers were 'discarded' because they were found to have particularly large bullae which ran counter to the expected gender norm and would have skewed the results. This selection, as well as the assumption that the dingoes they started with were 'pure', and the dogs 'dogs', and neither already 'hybrid', is something which critics later picked up on as a serious flaw (see Purcell; Jones).

Newsome and Corbett's second article in the series, 'The Identity of the Dingo II: Hybridization with Domestic Dogs in Captivity and in the Wild' (1982), describes an experiment that starts out with a principle of purity and then attempts to create hybridity in a laboratory setting. Between 1969-1975, they conducted 'breeding trials' using 8 dingoes and 7 domestic dogs to produce 41 'hybrids'. All apart from the domestic dogs (who had been 'borrowed' for the experiment) were 'sacrificed and their skulls cleaned and kept' (366). The skull measurements found that 3 of the dingo parents were outside of the 'norm' and therefore 'may have been hybrids' or they may 'represent the extreme range among dingoes'.¹⁰ Their study also found that 4 of the 41 captive bred hybrids had 'dingo-like' skulls. Hybridity and purity, dog and dingo were thus difficult to differentiate from the start. Corbett and Newsome then compared their group to 50 'adult unknowns' trapped in Gippsland and another group of 50 assumed pure dingoes from Central Australia. From their skull measurements, the authors diagnosed the Gippsland group as a 'mixed interbreeding group of dingoes, dogs and their hybrids' but with a 'preponderance of dingo genes compared with the hybrids' (372). While Newsome and Corbett admit that their identifications were based on a 'measurable level of probability' and can 'never be certain' (372) they did not let this get in the way of putting forward a particular view on hybridisation that made it equivalent to extinction: 'It is possible therefore, that pure dingoes may become extinct in Gippsland over time unless their fitness exceeds that of hybrids and that of feral dogs' (373). But having failed to establish conclusively the 'purity' of their baseline dingoes or the 'impurity' of their hybrid offspring, not to mention the regional differences between Central Australia and Gippsland, (see Purcell; Jones) their conclusion warning of the extinction of 'pure dingoes' works at a different register to merely 'objective' science; it is both moving and alarming. This was what gave their interpretation traction.

Their third study, 'The Identity of the Dingo III: The Incidence of Dingoes, Dogs and Hybrids and their Coat Colours in remote and settled Regions of Australia' (1985), made use of 1,668 skulls of 'adult canids collected from remote and settled areas of Australia' (363) including Gippsland, and compared coat colours of the animals classified as hybrid, dog or dingo. The findings on coat colour are inconclusive in relation to purity and hybridity. This article re-asserts their previous argument that the South Eastern regions of Australia, with more dense human settlement, contain the greatest levels of hybridisation.

¹⁰On balance, we accept that our original dingo parents were indeed dingoes, variations in skull shape being due to the small sample and to domestication'(Newsome et al 372).

Corbett's single authored monograph, *The Dingo*, opens with a description of the dingo as 'under threat of extinction' not primarily because of 'scalp bonuses, by hunting with trap and gun, and by poisoning and fencing' but by hybridity: 'cross-breeding is common and the pure dingo gene pool is being swamped'. He calls on 'everybody – governments, concerned societies, you' to act to 'stop contact between dingoes and domestic dogs' (178). He calls for the sterilisation of pet dogs in wilderness or rural areas, the maintenance of a ban on keeping dingoes as pets, and the registration of 'pure' dingoes via reputable Dingo Preservation societies. He also recommends islands, like Fraser Island, Bathurst, Melville Island, to preserve populations from contact with domestic dogs and to prevent them 'losing the war, thanks to their evolutionary progeny' (178). He calls on readers to 'take pride in dingoes as a native species whether they be Thai or Australian' (178). Evoking the sort of eco-nationalist sentiment that Adrian Franklin observes at work in much of Australia's conservation biology, Corbett is clear (though his view shifts later) that protection applies to the pure, even if that purity cannot be established by any of the current tests available.

Despite the unreliability of skull morphology testing, it is taken up by another team of scientists in 1996, Woodall, Pavlov and Twyford, in Queensland. Referencing the work of Corbett, they were also concerned that 'hybridisation with domestic dogs could lead to the eventual extinction of Australian dingoes' (586). Woodall et al collected 110 skulls from the Queensland Museum and dead dingoes from Fraser Island. They found considerable variation, which they explained as 'either the result of increased influence of domestic dogs or a reflection of local variation within the dingo population' (585). Given the lack of clarity, they call for the development of a 'biochemical or genetic marker' to 'allow the determination of status (dog, hybrid or dingo) in living animals'. Such a test would enable the 'removal of hybrids' to ensure the 'integrity of the pure dingo population' (Woodall et al, 586). This study is explicit about the purpose of establishing purity; it will enable the destruction of 'hybrids'.

Soon after this, Alan Wilton, a geneticist at UNSW, published work describing a genetic test for dingo purity. His tests were designed to improve on the skull measurement test of Newsome and Corbett which he describes as 'reliable for differentiating dogs from dingoes' but not reliable for detecting 'hybrid-dingo backcrosses, ie. 3/4 dingo – 1/4 dingo' (Wilton 49). Wilton's approach involved isolating a genetic marker for which 'the dog has types that do not exist in the dingo'. Because the tests are 'best at detecting recent hybridisation events' (55), the authors admitted that 'a definitive answer as to whether an animal has any dog ancestry and a guarantee of purity cannot be given' (55). Yet in the discussion that follows, Wilton indicates that purity is essential for conservation, stressing the need for such tests to help those 'holding the animal and they want to know whether to destroy it or not' (56). The lack of conclusive findings is not presented as an obstacle to making the decision to eliminate.

In 2003, Corbett and Mike Daniels published a paper that seems to take a different perspective on the link between hybridity and extinction. They argued that ‘introgression’ has itself made purity impossible to establish and so ‘protection should move away from efforts to affect a definition based on type, accepting that extensive introgression has already occurred’ (216). They suggested that the dingo should be conserved even if it exists ‘in a different form to their ancestors’ because of the following factors: the ‘public uphold an image of the dingo as a native Australian mammal of intrinsic and aesthetic value and expect it to be conserved’; secondly, because ‘dingoes have played an important role in Aboriginal life’; and thirdly as it is a ‘top predator’, a ‘strong argument can be made with respect to the role of the dingo in ecosystem function’. At this point, being hybrid is not treated as equivalent to extinction. Rather it is now an integral feature of dingo life, as they explain: ‘the conclusion that the wildcat or the dingo ‘no longer exists’ is erroneous. Both animals clearly do still exist, but in a different form to their ancestors’ (215). They conclude that ‘conservation measures for both wildcats and dingoes therefore should focus on their intrinsic and functional value rather than concentrating on their precise definition or concerns about their genetic purity’ (216). Daniels and Corbett argue that in ‘practical terms’ it is still important to ‘stem the flow of domestic genes into wild populations’. So, hybridity no longer equals extinction, but hybridity is under threat, this time from more hybridity. They suggest that controls should focus on feral dogs – which should ‘go some way towards addressing the concerns of...sheep graziers.’ And for the sake of tourist expectations, wildlife managers should be ‘promoting wildtype phenotypes’ by selectively culling animals not conforming to the ‘dingo phenotype’ (216).

More recently, a team in Queensland proposed to utilise all three types of purity test – skull, genetic and phenotypic – to determine dingo conservation for the purpose of dingo aesthetics and tourist desires: the ‘process of hybridization dilutes the proportion of ‘pure’ dingo genes present in a population and may result in colour and body form changes which detract from its aesthetic value’ (Elledge et al, 143). With Wilton and Corbett’s assistance with the skull measuring and genetic tests, Elledge et al tested wildlife managers’ success in visually distinguishing pure from hybrid dingoes. It turns out that wildlife managers are pretty good at visually determining ‘pure’ dingoes, except for the dingoes that confound the assumptions about genetic/skull purity and phenotypic appearance, i.e. some hybrids look like dingoes and some dingoes look like hybrids. Despite this, the team concludes that: ‘Culling obvious hybrids based on visual characteristics, such as sable and patch coat colours, should slow the process of hybridisation’ (812), and presumably *make* more ‘pure’ looking dingoes. They conclude that what is needed is a ‘breeding trial, such as that conducted by Newsome and Corbett (1982)’ to conduct further tests. They will look for ‘parental stock...ideally... animals from remote locations, such as central Australia, with no or negligible domestic dog genes confirmed by genetic analyses’ (818). So we find dingology going right back to 1982, with skull measuring, genetic tests and fantasies of dingo ‘purity’ still present, and dingoes,

dogs and hybrids still bearing the brunt of the desire to establish purity as a core principle of conservation and hybridity as a core principle of dingo extinction.

But why is hybridisation a problem? The closest to an explanation comes from Corbett in his book *The Dingo in Australia and Asia*, where he explains that hybridisation is problematic for four reasons. Firstly, because ‘unscrupulous breeders may promote and pass off hybrids to unsuspecting people merely for financial gain’; secondly, hybrids represent a ‘contamination of the dingo’s gene pool’ (175); thirdly, that with the potential to breed twice ‘they are capable of killing twice as many calves as pure dingos can’ (175); and lastly, hybrids are:

probably more dangerous to humans than most pure domestic dog breeds, at least if wolf hybrids are anything to go by. There have been eight human fatalities caused by ‘pet’ wolf hybrids in the past few years, and the California City Zoo terminated several experiments with wolf hybrids because more than 95% were too dangerous to handle. (175)

Points one, three and four are largely speculative, while the second is a pronouncement about species purity that does not, apparently, require explanation.

What is significant about these studies is that they demonstrate the selective infusion of cultural and scientific knowledge to shore up otherwise ambiguous findings. My intention is not to suggest that without the cultural influences the science would have been ‘more true’, but that with different cultural influences it might have been more just. As feminist critics of science studies have argued, the point is not to attempt to ‘remove’ all bias, but to own it, and explore interpretive and investigative biases (see Gruen) in a way that shows how they develop knowledge itself (see also Kasi-Jackman). A by-product of such an approach is to open up the terrain to minority views.

*'According to the shooter he was "a hybrid"'*¹¹

Two dingo scientists stand out as critics of dingo purity. Evan Jones, whose work in Gippsland (South Eastern Victoria) is directly affected by Newsome and Corbett's suggestion that Gippsland is where dingoes are fast disappearing, does not use the term 'hybrid' to describe the 'wild canids' there. He argues that studies that use Corbett and Newsome's schema will 'all suffer from classification errors' because of limitations in their design, assumptions about purity and the lack of attention paid to the potential for regional differences. While Jones sees the 'wild canids' as 'a single group of wild canids, from which 'pure' dingoes could not be differentiated' (2), Newsome and Corbett describe them as a 'mixed group of dingoes, feral domestic dogs and their hybrids' (6). Jones is deeply concerned that when the Victorian Scientific Advisory Committee recommended that the dingo be given 'threatened native species' status, they ignored his submission and instead used Newsome and Corbett's. The effect of this is as follows: either all the 'wild canids' are protected, or just those determined to be 'dingoes'. Jones's use of the term 'wild canid' and his insistence that the Gippsland wild canids are the result of consistent and varied intrabreeding of 'hybrids', raises the question of whether or not 'wild canids' are not in danger of extinction (but rather eradication), and whether or not they can attract conservation status.

Another dingo biologist, Brad Purcell, has done important work addressing the investigative bias of studies that seek to establish dingo purity. He argues that the 'notion of dingo "purity" is 'a construct of human thought' (30) and although he calls for the 'management' of the hybridisation process, he is concerned that the notion of purity is wielded to justify dingo killing. Purcell writes:

One genetically pure dingo in my Blue Mountains study was sable, his total length being outside traditional dingo criteria, and so too was his head length. The only reason we attained samples from him was because he had been shot by a local landholder after he had bailed up a kangaroo in a dam with other dingoes, and according to the shooter he was 'a hybrid'. In contrast, his canonical score also suggested that he was pure. The current measures for dingo purity obviously remain imprecise, and further research is required before conservation actions for the preservation of wild dingoes or culling of hybrid dingoes are implemented. (40)

¹¹ (Purcell 40)

Purcell believes that current problems with dingo management are largely cultural, based on ‘subjective judgement, anecdote and the resultant cultural transmission of behaviours between humans’ (130) and that these can be corrected by ‘objective scientific’ methods. The significance of his critique of fellow dingo biologists is thus slightly diminished by the suggestion that they were led astray by cultural beliefs; that their science mixed with culture and came out the worse for it. But such a view does not ring true. After all, doesn’t science sometimes benefit from these mixings? Doesn’t it also gain traction and persuasive power by such epistemic cross-breeding? Clearly dingo science is deeply embedded in biocultural beliefs about purity, highlighting the cross-breeding of science with culture.¹² It cannot be explained by its use of ‘objective scientific methods’ alone, but partakes in a white Australian repertoire on race, biological frontiers and the melodrama of loss or gain by genetic changes or numeric ‘swamps’.

The mobilization of hybridity in relation to the extinction of the pure was an idea put into practice in mid-twentieth-century Australia by plans to reduce the perceived threat of racial mixing by biologically/bioculturally assimilating Aboriginal people into whiteness, under a policy known colloquially as ‘breeding out the colour’. The assimilation of indigenous people was planned through a combination of child removal, the trafficking of Aboriginal women, and the administration of whiteness via white fathers (Probyn-Rapsey). One response by authorities (state but also religious) to what was described as the ‘half caste menace’ was to shift mixed race Aboriginal people to the white side of the frontier as quickly as possible. By shifting them from ‘protection’ to ‘assimilation’, mixed race Aboriginal people were then deemed to be no longer authentically indigenous and thereby denied any special claim to belong (see also Wolfe). They were neither protected, nor ‘properly’ Aboriginal and therefore imagined to disappear. The association between hybridity and extinction that can be seen in dingology intersects with these policies because both work/ed with the ruse of hybridity. In relation to the ‘wild dog’, the ruse of hybridity is that it enables eradication and conservation to act in tandem and not as opposites: conservationists need something to conserve; eradicators something to shoot at. In principle the two sides should be satisfied by such a compromise, because both, presumably, recognize the ruse at play; knowing that the other cannot help but shoot or protect the ‘wrong’ sort. It is a compromise that can and does have deadly consequences for the dingo ‘maybes’ caught up in it. The deployment of hybridity in this way thus forges a deadly boundary between the almost dead and the

¹² ‘biology is socially produced, thick with specific and accumulated histories, and always already culturally mediated in each situated encounter’ (Franklin 6)

illegitimately alive, and a line between who is grievable and who merely collateral in a war staged, paradoxically, *against* death/extinction.

Conclusion

In April 2013, *The Daily Mercury* reported a controversy concerning a photograph of a hunter posing next to the dead bodies of a dingo and her three pups. The photograph had been re-posted on the facebook page of National Dingo Day, an organization aimed at drawing attention to the ‘persecution of the dingo’ (Ochre Project). Online comments on the newspaper’s website debated the cruelty of both hunter and the hunted, the environmental role of the dingo as mesopredator controller, and what the display (the pose, the photograph’s dissemination) suggested about hunters/shooters and their role in conservation. In reply to the comments posted ‘the shooter in question’ sought to correct his critics: the dead were ‘WILD DOGS, not dingoes’. What angered his critics, he suggests, is the gruesome nature of the photographs and not the identity of the dead. For what kind of champion of the dingo, he seems to ask, would grieve for a ‘wild dog’? The problem is obvious: it is impossible to tell the difference between ‘wild dog’ and ‘dingo’ in those photographs and yet the moral arguments circling around wild dog eradication and dingo conservation depend on that distinction. Whether they are dingoes or wild dogs, the *dingo maybe* and her three pups materialize the effects of a frenzy for distinction, and the uncanny sympathies between shooters and conservationists who both target the ‘hybrid’ for death, even though these ‘hybrids’ are born from social lives that include agency, choice, mateship, all of which speak beyond any genetic formula that prejudges their worth:

In one case, a friend who ran a station south of Alice Springs had a white male Labrador dog which used to disappear in the breeding season. One time he followed the dog to find it was taking food out to a den of dingo pups that were almost certainly his. They were red in colour, which is genetically dominant to the white. In Gippsland we knew of a blue heeler which used to go several kilometers into the forest surrounding the farm. In fact we caught him there, having been warned by the farmer. (Alan Newsome qtd in Dickman and Lunney, 20)

It is thought to be mostly female dingoes who are responsible for these transgressive liaisons and hybrid offspring; female dingoes are sometimes chased away from the pack during the breeding season, forming these queer attachments to the ‘wrong’ sort. The genetic perspective offered by Newsome’s account appears blind to the complex social life that this interaction between dingo and dog shows; it appears as a story of wayward genetics. To me it suggests complex social interactions that go on between a dog who

lives between farm and dingo den, and an ongoing relationship with dingo pups and mate.¹³ From the perspective of the dingo and Labrador, the IUCN's red list entry that situates their queer relations and their pups as a significant threat of extinction must seem like the remote mutterings of an alien dictionary. It is a perspective that occludes the possibilities of dingoes and dogs having social lives that are more complicated than any taxonomy that relies on genetic determinations. In the context of the discussion from which this paragraph is taken, such an example of doggy style hybridity is couched as evidence for tightening controls on domestic dogs near dingo populations, to prevent such births. Her pups are a living example of her own extinction, by this measure. But it is a measure that is blind to the social worlds in which such relations are established and their broader synergies with a violent logic of elimination that was used to make Aboriginality a matter of colour and code, without culture.

The idea of extinction is profoundly moving; it allows us to pay respects to loss and acknowledge our complicity in that loss. But in the case of dingoes, where extinction is nigh but wild dogs abundant, the term extinction can distract from considering the choices that dingoes make: *their* decisions about who or what should live or die. When it comes to dingoes, we would do best to shift the emphasis from extinction to understanding eradication as a cultural process that starts not with bullets (or baits) but well before that, with older ideas and categories that predict their trajectory. Animal studies takes seriously the connections between the taxonomies of race and species, and in doing so it undoes the 'plausible deniability' that comes with 'dog whistling'. Taking 'dog whistling' from its usual domain (anthropocentric political speech) and situating it within animal studies brings the associations and connections between speciesism, racism and the 'synergistically related' (Kim) taxonomies of race and species into view. Dog whistling can now be redefined in animal studies terms as a form of hate speech that cultivates a space for social death at the same time that it makes claims to be civilised. It is speech with a forked tongue and locates its cut, its doublespeak along the faultline of the human/animal boundary, disowning and disavowing the 'bad' speech to the realm of the animal Other; it makes racism the home of the dog.

The lament over the extinction of the dingo is a dog-whistle; it feeds off race panic, it situates the hybrid as the already dead, already gone, ungrievable. Could we learn to dog-whistle differently, work on our

¹³ There is much more to be said on this matter of the social lives of dog and dingo here.

forked tongues, and get better at calling out and hearing the doubling up of race with species taxonomies? The possibility of reclaiming 'dog whistling' for anti-racist, anti-speciesist work remains to be explored.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the Animals and Society Institute and Wesleyan Animal Studies Program (ASI-WAS fellowship) at Wesleyan University, where I spent time in 2014 working on aspects of this paper. Particular thanks to Lori Gruen and Elan Abrell. I also wish to thank the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Research Scheme, University of Sydney, for research support 2014-2015.

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