The Fate of the Illegible Animal: The Case of the Australian Wild Donkey

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Abstract: The entanglement of donkey and human lives is both long and multidimensional, woven with the threads of economic inter-dependence, cultural and religious significance, militarism, friendship, ideas about and programs of conservation, and traditional Chinese medicine turned into a global industry. In this paper, we discuss four eras of entanglement of wild donkeys in Australia. During the first, now past, domesticated donkeys were exploited workers in the colonial project. In the second, present era, most Australian donkeys are unwanted wild animals, declared wildlife pests subject to mass eradication for conservation and livestock production. In the third emerging era donkeys are positioned as potential exploitable commodities in the feverish international trade and trafficking in donkey skins for the industrial production of the traditional Chinese medicine ejiao. In this paper, we look at the present and emerging eras and enquire what a just fourth future era could look like. We consider the extreme violence and cruelty inflicted upon wild donkeys under the guise of both permissive animal welfare legislation and discourses that position them as not simply 'killable' but 'needing to be killed'. We suggest that to fully come to terms with the impediments to building advocacy strategies on behalf of donkeys during this second era, we need to begin by recognising their status as animals without a status: 'illegible animals'. Finally, we imagine a third era of entanglements, where donkeys might flourish as the new wild megafauna in Australia, as respected workers in a range of valued activities such as land regeneration and fire prevention, and as friends who will nourish the project of continuing to build respectful cross-species relationships.

Keywords: Donkeys, entanglement, eradication, ejiao, rewilding

The entanglement of donkeys' and humans' lives is both long and multidimensional. It is woven with the threads of economic inter-dependence, cultural and religious significance, militarism, friendship, ideas about and programs of conservation, and traditional Chinese medicine turned into a global industry. Within the animal studies literature, the notion of entanglement has been widely mobilized to argue for a non-individualist basis for claims about ethical responsibility (Gruen). With respect to donkeys though, before we might draw on the ethical possibilities afforded by recognizing our mutual 'entanglement', we need first to make explicit, and free the relationship of the mess of existing tangles – including highly unethical ones – within which donkeys are caught. These are tangles of history, interpretation, classification, interest, assumption, association, ignorance and neglect. In this paper, we attempt to begin some untangling by reflecting on three schematic eras of exploitative entanglement. We do so in the hope that a way forward might emerge where humans can see a way towards permitting donkeys to flourish in Australia, a future we imagine as a fourth era of new, more ethical entanglements.

The first era of exploitative entanglements of donkeys in Australia sits squarely and self-evidently within the settler colonial project. If we take the classical meaning of colonialism as a combination of domination and expropriation on the basis of race, and the imposition of capitalist forms of land management and production (Maldonado-Torres), we can see that donkeys were intrinsic to the original Australian colonial project. Imported as unpaid labourers, they provided one of the means of material support for colonial settlers to penetrate the country and thus displace Indigenous peoples, terraform the land through European forms of agriculture and mining, work in environments that settlers and many of the other-than-human animals they brought to the country found inhospitable, and transport what was grown or extracted so it might enter commodity markets and build colonial wealth (Bough). In the theatres of war overseas, donkeys were similarly conscripted into ongoing imperial projects (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Donkeys in the first era of national entanglements.
Left panel: Donkeys at work. Donkey team at Wyndham circa 1928.
Photo by State Library of Western Australia.
Right panel: Donkeys at war. Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick with donkey,
Australian Army Medical Corps, ANZAC battlefield.
http://www.convictcreations.com/history/simpson.htm

With technological innovation and the creation of new types of social geographies, where the lives of most colonial settlers were 'cleansed' of animals, other than companion animals, or those who were 'made to live' for the production of food (Wadiwel), much of this unraveled. Donkeys were released or abandoned into landscapes that, from the settler colonial perspective, were imagined as useless, or, consonant with the notion of *terra nullius*, empty. The same qualities that made them amenable to human use, however – tremendous resilience and the ability to survive under harsh conditions – combined with Australia's particular ecology, which afforded an open and welcoming niche for megafauna, allowed donkeys to flourish across parts of northern and central Australia (Lundgren et al.). Indeed, similar patterns of domestication for economic purposes and subsequent release/abandonment have occurred in a number of parts of the world, and today, the descendants of these original donkeys, today known as 'feral', 'post-domestic', or 'wild' donkeys, have a wide global distribution across parts of North America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and several Indian and Pacific Ocean islands. They are estimated to number 5 million and to range over 5.5 million square km. No reliable estimates of the exact

number of wild donkeys in Australia are available, although it is believed to probably be the largest anywhere in the world (Wallach et al. unpublished data).

As the reach of settler-colonial interest expanded, the remoteness that once afforded most wild donkeys the protection of disinterest ceased to do so, ushering in what we might think of as the second era of deadly entanglements. Specifically, for some decades, donkeys have been subject to mass killing programs on pastoral land and in conservation zones, under the auspices of biosecurity and conservation. These two contemporary scenes involve inflicting extreme violence and cruelty upon wild donkeys. They are facilitated, respectively, by permissive animal welfare discourses and legislation, and restrictive conservation discourses, both of which position wild donkeys as not simply *killable* but as *needing to be killed*.

Though perhaps not as explicitly as in the first era, settler colonial logics persist in each of these contemporary scenes and underpin the imperative to kill donkeys. In the first case, this logic shapes the view that any interests that wild (undomesticated) megafauna might have to live and flourish are annulled where they come into perceived conflict with humans' interest in maximising profits accrued from wealth-generating animals (cattle and sheep) or other agricultural activity, carried out, for the most part, on pastoral land acquired and retained through colonial violence. In the second case, killing for conservation, the logic is apparent in the state's assumed sovereign authority to determine 'who ~~comes to~~ lives in this country and the circumstances in which they ~~come~~ live and die'.[1] Ostensibly, the decision to eradicate 'introduced' species in the name of protecting 'native species' in conservation zones constitutes a corrective to the vast ecological changes effected since colonization, and thus a decolonizing move. We would argue, however, that the insistence that 1788, the arrival of the British, marks the absolute temporal break between 'real nature' and 'the wrong type of nature' continues to centre settler colonialism, and to marginalize more complex and fluid understandings of identity, place and belonging that might constitute a decolonizing logic.[2] The view that the only real nature is that which existed in Australia before colonisation is driven by the same logic at work in the pernicious claim that the only real indigeneity is the type frozen in the pre-colonial era, with any subsequent changes framed as pollutants or corruptions of authentic culture.

Beyond these two contemporary scenes, a third era of deadly entanglement looms on the horizon. At the time of writing, plans are under development in the north of Australia to create a program for rounding up, capturing and transporting thousands of wild donkeys to holding stations where they will be bred, farmed, slaughtered and skinned for the production of ejiao, a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) product, to be exported to China or elsewhere in the Chinese diaspora. Now drawn into an emerging form of imperialism, wild donkeys in Australia face the prospect of their absolute commodification and assimilation into global capital chains.

Yet, despite these deadly practices and immanent threats, to date, advocacy on behalf of wild donkeys in Australia has been virtually non-existent. We suggest that to fully come to terms with the impediments to building advocacy strategies on behalf of donkeys, and more specifically to build the types of positive, empathetic entanglement that Gruen suggests as a foundation for advocacy, we need to recognise the risks and vulnerability that wild donkeys' particular situation creates. Although formally classified as pests in a number of jurisdictions, a more careful analysis of the position they occupy reveals that, absent any *use* value (as commodity, tool, or source of emotional labour), absent any recognised *aesthetic* value (as properly wild or beautiful) and absent any *identity-based* value (as an intrinsic part of a native or cultural environment), wild donkeys, that is donkeys who now live as *wild* animals, have become *illegible*: outside available frames of meaning. Not being considered properly wild, they are excluded from the (albeit often inadequate) legal protection available to native animals; and their inclusion in the (grievously inadequate) legal protections available to domestic animals would be dependent on their ceasing to be wild. Thus located, they come to occupy a place where, as a number of animal studies scholars (Stanescu; Wadiwel; Wolfe), drawing on biopolitical thought (Agamben; Arendt), have recently argued, anything can be done to them, without recourse to law, without concern, and even, for the most part, without our registering that anything happened at all. In the case of wild donkeys in Australia, this precarious or *illegible* status as we call it, can be directly linked to their invidious entanglement in classical and ongoing settler colonial practices and logics. In short, donkeys no longer serve the economic interests of wealth accumulation, nor do they conform with settler colonial fantasies about preserving pristine,

authentic and pre-colonial nature. They are thus relegated to a place that merits no place in contemporary Australia.

In the final part of the paper we suggest some possible, albeit imperfect ways forward for a fourth era of entanglements. Here, donkeys might become valued agents of megafauna rewilding, co-workers in agriculture, collaborators in land rehabilitation, and companion animals and friends.

Judas in the Kimberley

In Western Australia, the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (*BAM Act*), establishes a legal status for living organisms other than humans.[3] Amongst the implications of the status assigned to an organism is that it determines whether a person in charge of a place or being is required to take any measures to 'control' the organism. Under the Western Australian Organism List (WAOL), which sets out the declared status for organisms, one finds two different listings for identical names: *Equus asinus* (domestic) and *Equus asinus* (feral), each with a radically different classification. The former is classified as 'Permitted' and the latter as a 'Declared Pest', meaning that 'feral donkeys' may also be subject to control requirements. Section 22 of the *BAM Act* provides that the Minister may declare an organism a pest if there is reasonable ground for believing that it has or may have an adverse effect. Such effects may be, variously: on another organism or human beings in the area; on the environment, or part thereof in the area; or on agricultural activities, or related commercial activities, carried on, or intended to be carried on, in the area. As noted above, in the case of wild donkeys the ostensible justifications for their being declared a pest arise from putative interference with agriculture and environmental protection. Declared Pests are further classified as C1 (exclusion), C2 (eradication) or C3 (management). C1 is reserved for species that have not yet – but have the potential to – establish in WA. C2 is reserved for species that have just established in WA and may be small enough in number and area of the population to attempt full eradication. C3 takes in all established introduced species where it is recognised that they cannot be completely eradicated. Feral donkeys are listed as C3, meaning that the nature of their management has a

level of discretion. The classification does not require their eradication, but once an animal has this classification, the *BAM Act* can authorise this. Decisions about how an organism is to be 'controlled' or 'managed' (generally euphemisms for killing) are made by the WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development ('the Department').

Concern over the rationale and ethics of classification and 'management' of wildlife has led some conservation and animal welfare scientists to develop and advocate for transparent principles that should guide appropriate responses to challenges involving wild animals. Dubois and colleagues (Dubois et al.) highlighted seven key principles of 'ethical wildlife control', including a clear justification for the actions taken, achievable outcome-based objectives, a rationale for how the management plan addresses the identified problem, that the plan considers the humane treatment of the animal, and that, once implemented, it be evaluated with respect to the motivating problem. The animal's categorization (for example, 'pest') and the assignment of labels with negative connotations are not in themselves legitimate justifications for killing or any other particular control measure.[4] Consistent with these principles, the authors, who have been working on the issue of the killing of wild donkeys in the Kimberly in Western Australia, have sought information from the Department on any research or other processes that underpin their eradication programs or decisions, or evaluation of the programs. At the time of writing, we had received no information.

Once in place, control measures are then implemented by individuals, or by Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs), which are established in particular areas to carry out the actual eradication of declared pests.[5] RBGs are the Department's preferred partnership arrangement for carrying out their activities, and the government provides matched funding for their 'pest plans'. Given their limited resources, in cases where animals are 'Declared Pests', but not classified for mandated eradication, RBGs can work with the Department to set priorities. RBGs are required to have appropriate governance structures, to have legitimacy with the local (human) community and to promote 'best practice pest management'.

The Kimberley RBG was established in 1978, and since then, according to its own documentation, has killed over 590,500 donkeys in the Kimberley region alone (Pasfield).

Inquiries with the Department were unsuccessful in confirming this figure. According to the executive officer of the Kimberley RBG, it has completely eradicated all but around 1000 wild donkeys (Pasfield). As well as focusing on pastoral properties, wild donkeys are also intensively culled in the Kimberley's conservation areas. The Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC), for example, owns Mornington-Marion Downs, where the killing of donkeys and other introduced wildlife is a major ongoing conservation activity. The AWC boasts that thanks to its intensive culling program, it owns the largest and second largest 'feral herbivore-free area in Australia', including in the Kimberley.[6]

There are no particular strictures under the *BAM Act* concerning how one must carry out the job of killing wild animals.[7] Any legal restrictions concerning the treatment or killing of wild donkeys would likely be found under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* (WA, *AW Act*).[8] Section 19 of the *AW Act* forbids cruelty to animals, where cruelty includes (inter alia) torturing or maliciously wounding, tormenting, or otherwise ill-treating, the animal; using a prescribed inhumane device on the animal; or in any other way causing the animal unnecessary harm. It is, however, unlikely that that these cruelty provisions would apply in the case of the killing of wild donkeys authorised by the *BAM Act*. Section 22 of the *AW Act* provides that it is a defence to undertake an act in accordance with law, and Section 24 provides a specific defence to a cruelty charge regardless of any suffering caused, if the act was done in the course of attempting to kill pests, and where the person was attempting to kill pests in a manner that is generally accepted as usual and reasonable for killing pests of the kind the person was attempting to kill. Further, Section 25 provides a specific defence where the act was performed in accordance with a relevant code of practice. For this, one might look to the codes of practice for the capture and killing of wild donkeys developed by the Australian Centre for Invasive Species Solutions, but even bracketing the question of the ethical acceptability of these standards, they have no legal status, are entirely voluntary and there is no oversight regarding compliance with them.[9]

The technique that the RBG uses to kill wild donkeys is the so called 'Judas method'. This name should not be passed over. The Judas method is named after the biblical tale of Judas Iscariot (Hebrew יהודה איש־קריות) who is said to have betrayed Jesus to the Jewish council for 30

silver coins, which led to his crucifixion. This story sits at the heart of antisemitism and Jewish persecution (Crossan), coming through, for example in Nazi propaganda (see Figure 2). Where Judas betrays Christ, the Jews betray Germany. To be a Judas it to be a betrayer. In conservation, the Judas is an animal forced to 'betray' her friends.

Figure 2. Donkeys caught in the deadly second era of entanglements.
Left panel: Nazi propaganda comparing Judas' betrayal of Jesus to the Jews' betrayal of Germany. Photo by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Virginius Dabney.
Right panel: 'Judas' donkey. Photo by DAFWA (https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/pest-mammals/feral-donkey)

To be specific, the forced betrayal that facilitates the killing of wild donkeys using the Judas method works as follows. A wild female donkey (jenny) is captured and fitted with a radio collar around her neck. She is then released. When she returns to her herd, she unknowingly betrays them to shooters who can now follow her wherever she goes. The entire herd she locates will be killed, but she will be left alive to search for new companions, thus condemned to lead shooters to every other donkey she joins. The Judas method is used throughout the world to kill many other social other-than-human animals including wolves (to save woodland caribou in Canada), wild goats (to eradicate them from offshore islands), and racoon dogs (to

control an 'invasive species' in Europe) (Wallach et al. 'Summoning Compassion to Address the Challenges of Conservation'). Donkeys are deeply social, particularly females, and are thus ideal for the use of the Judas method, which depends on animals' gregarious nature (McIlroy and Gifford). She will witness her friends killed over and over again until she is left alone to be shot last.

We should pause here, to reflect first on the cruelty and second on the webs of meaning at work here. The most obvious cruelty is with the method of killing. Shooting a fast-moving animal from a helicopter is going to result in only a portion of the targets being immediately killed (Brook). The others will be gravely injured and left to die agonising deaths, shot in the jaw, the neck, the abdomen or the leg.[10] The deepest cruelty though is to the jenny, whose social nature is exploited, and who soon learns that she brings death to her tribe. As Deborah Bird Rose puts it: 'Judas work poses for her a double-bind: either turn away from others in order to show her care for them, or join them and see them die. …The jenny's options are devastating, and like a prism in the sun her choice continues to show the moral putrefaction of Judas work' (Bird Rose 66).

Total commodification

Just across the border, the Northern Territory (NT) has the highest species richness of introduced megafauna on Earth, including wild donkeys (Lundgren et al.). Here too, large scale lethal control and eradication efforts of 'feral' animals are common and ongoing, but it appears that the NT regime is less consolidated than that in WA.[11] Moreover, unlike Western Australia, where feral donkeys are legible only under the classification of 'pest', the NT government has, in recent years, begun to reclassify feral donkeys as a potential new export commodity. The market for donkey skins is being generated by an exponential industrial growth in sales of the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) product ejiao.

Ejiao is a gelatine made from donkey skin that has traditionally been used for a range of conditions. In recent years, the growth of a burgeoning middle class in mainland China and in the Chinese diaspora, combined with aggressive marketing campaigns, have seen exponential

elevations in the sales, the price of the final product ejiao and the prices of donkey skins (Humane Society International).[12] Since 2002, when ejiao cost RMB 100 (~US$15) per kilo, the price has been rising. In 2011, after price fixing was relaxed, the price rose by 60%. The price of ejiao from the largest company (Dong'e) was RMB 3,978 (~US$600) per kilogram in 2015 and RMB 4,730 (~US$700) per kilogram in 2016, an increase of almost 19%. According to the statistics of Shandong ejiao Industrial Association, the unit price of donkey hides, which was around RMB 20 (~US$3) in 2000, rose to RMB 1,500 (~US$200) in 2014, and within a year the price jumped again to over RMB 2,600 (~US$400) (Humane Society International).

The resultant demand for donkey skins has already led to the decimation of donkey numbers in China. It is estimated that the number of domestic donkeys in China dropped from 11 million in 1990, to 6 million in 2014 (The Donkey Sanctuary, *Under the Skin*). The Donkey Sanctuary estimates that in 2017 the number dropped further to 3 million (1 million annually). This has led to the development of source markets in other countries, particularly on the African continent, where, in a number of countries, donkeys have played a critical role in local economies, particularly as workers amongst the poor and women (Valette). Here the prospect of turning working donkeys into pure commodity, or immediate cash, as opposed to co-worker, combined with donkey theft and corruption, has underpinned the killing of hundreds of thousands of donkeys.[13]

In Niger for example, 27,000 donkey skins were exported to China in 2016. That number rose to 80,000 skins in 2017. In the years leading to 2017, the price rose from US$4 to US$50 per hide. A number of African countries have now outlawed the trade in donkey skins or the export of donkeys. In Burkina Faso, 45,000 of a total population of 1.4 million (3%) donkeys were slaughtered in just six months (Humane Society International). In response, the Burkina Faso government banned the live export trade. Several donkey abattoirs across Africa have been closed due to welfare or environmental concerns. While such developments can be seen as positive from the point of view of donkeys in these countries, the resultant difficulties ejiao producers face in locating and sourcing donkeys as resources in Africa, combined with a growing and highly lucrative demand for such resources, have led Chinese investors to court

new source markets. The current demand is estimated to be between 4 and 10 million skins per year (The Donkey Sanctuary, *Under the Skin*). China is only able to produce 1.2 million domestically per year, leaving the market looking for the skins of a further 2.8 million donkeys in other parts of the world, including Australia.

For the NT Government and Chinese investors and producers, the match seems ideal. According to the former Minister for Primary Industry, Ken Vowles, who visited China in 2017, the commercial ejiao company with which he met advised him that they are 'two million donkeys short' (Brann, 'Donkey Research Project Leaves Northern Territory Cattle Industry Shocked'). He told the ABC that more than 40 Chinese companies had visited the NT in recent times and boasted about a company whose profits were a half billion dollars per year. In promoting the creation of a donkey farm industry in the NT, however, political and industry figures need not solely rely on the pull of profits; they can also appeal to the push of cleansing the landscape of an animal clearly established in the public imagination as a pest, a drain on the profits to be gained through pastoral industries, a blight on the native landscape: a creature who does not belong there.

Capitalising on this economic and attitudinal environment, in recent years, the NT Government has released a number of scoping studies and guidelines on the development of an industry to produce donkey skins (Department of Primary Industry and Resources). The basic model involves capturing and bringing in wild donkeys and then breeding them to create a permanent source of donkeys for local slaughter and export. In 2018, the NT Government acquired a breeding herd of feral donkeys for a 'genetic improvement' study on the Kidman Springs Research Station west of Katherine (Brann, 'N.T. Government's Controversial Donkey Herd Settling into Research Station').

Given the devastating impact that the production of ejiao has already had on donkey populations and the human communities where they live, particularly in a number of African countries, a number of organisations focused on donkeys, equines more generally or animal welfare have, in recent years, mounted international efforts to stem the trade in donkey skins.[14] As a result of the networks formed between these organisations, the developments in the NT

have drawn international attention and provoked a number of efforts to prevent the development of donkey farms in Australia, or to regulate how they would operate. The two principal organisations involved in advocating on this issue in the Australian context have been the UK Donkey Sanctuary and the Humane Society International (HSI). In 2017, the Donkey Sanctuary prepared a report setting out the risks and dangers of the development of this industry in the NT (The Donkey Sanctuary, 'The Donkey Industry in the Northern Territory: Summary of the Donkey Sanctuary's Findings and Concerns'). It pointed to the significant risks to the welfare of donkeys, the environmental threats, and the potential damage to Australia's international reputation. More instrumentally, it also pointed to studies indicating that the economic modelling for the development of profitable production of donkey skins in Australia was flawed, largely because of the time it would take to build up a viable breeding stock. As such, even within the logic of profit through commodifying wild donkeys, it argued that this was a losing prospect.

The HSI has been campaigning on various fronts. In Australia, these include: supporting a Bill to ban live export (for slaughter) of equines including donkeys, sponsored by the Greens and awaiting debate at the time of writing; making Freedom of Information (FoI) requests concerning all negotiations on the development of the industry and asking for similar information in questions to Senate Estimates; and mounting a campaign for public protest against the trade.[15] At the international level, HSI has conducted research and surveys in mainland China to find out more about the operation of the industry and attitudes to ejiao. It has also mounted a series of campaigns for Chinese audiences, pointing to the animal welfare and environmental problems associated with ejiao.[16] RSPCA Australia has also expressed concern about the development of a live export market, and their representative stated that they are keeping a watching brief on the development of donkey farms in the NT (RSPCA, personal communication, 2018). In keeping with its mandate to ensure compliance with welfare standards, the RSPCA's concerns are however, limited to the methods of capturing, transporting, keeping and killing domestic animals.

While advocacy in relation to the development of an industry to supply the market for ejiao has been limited, the emergence of advocacy on behalf of donkeys in this context only makes starker the historical silence, even amongst animal advocates, in relation to the mass slaughter of donkeys in ongoing eradication programs. The basis of this silence merits reflection.

Figure 3. Donkeys trapped in the deadly third era of entanglements.
Left panel: A slab of ejiao. The traditional Chinese medicine is made from the boiled down hides of donkeys. Photo by Deadkid dk via Wikipedia.
Right panel: pen of donkeys at Dodoma market, Tanzania.
Photo by The Donkey Sanctuary.

The illegible donkey

In trying to understand the logics of some of the worst forms of intra-human violence, a number of theorists have suggested that such violence becomes unrestrainedly permissible when certain humans, or more accurately *categories* of humans, are held by those with the access to the means of violence to fall outside the conceptual categories used to classify and characterise humans as human. Most famously, in describing the horrors inflicted against people in concentration camps in Nazi Germany, Hannah Arendt described the gradual process whereby Jews were first

deprived of their status as juridical persons, or persons with legal rights, then of their status as moral persons, and then of their individuality (Arendt 447-455). At this point, anything could be done to them. Their killing was, in this sense, neither punishment nor murder, but mere elimination. Deploying the category of the *Homo sacer*, the person situated by the state as outside the law, Giorgio Agamben thematized this idea of comprehensive political exclusion as an intrinsic feature of modern sovereign authority (Agamben), again taking the concentration camp inmate as the purest example. As Achille Mbembe points out, however, the rationalities that gave rise to concentration camps in the heart of Europe, as well as some of the specific practices they adopted, found 'their first testing ground' in the plantation (slavery) and the colonial world (Mbembé and Meintjes 23), and in the context of comprehensive economic exploitation.[17] Critical to these analyses of the logics of extreme violence is the claim that even as humanist and modernist projects claimed their basis in a putative commitment to protecting and respecting the unique dignity of humans, they simultaneously reinscribed and created zones of exclusion, attributing to some humans the very animality that justifies the protection and superiority of others.

In recent years, animal studies scholars such Dinesh Wadiwel and Cary Wolfe (Wadiwel; Wolfe) have convincingly drawn on these bodies of work to theorise the systematic violence, not, as in the classical literature, against those humans deemed outside the human, but against the beings whose categorisation is literally constituted through exclusion from and inferiority to the human: other-than-human animals. Moreover, recognising that the line between the other-than-human animal and the human is historically constituted, and thus unstable, this work allows us to go beyond a totalising analysis of violence committed against 'animals' (understood as a natural category) and ask further questions about how it comes to be that certain animals, at certain historical moments and in certain social and economic formations, come to fall where they do within this classificatory geography.

Insofar as they shed light on the comprehensive exclusion of certain categories of being from protections afforded by law, these frameworks can help us think about the abject position that wild donkeys occupy in contemporary Australia. Specifically, we suggest that it is within the

specific rationalities of the ongoing projects of settler colonialism that we arrive at a position where, in the eyes of the state, there is no reason for wild donkeys to live, and many reasons to make them die. Not pets, not work animals, not farm animals, not companion animals, not experimental animals, not native animals, not 'real' wild animals, not exotic or aesthetic animals, the donkeys that run in the Australian landscape show up as nothing but negation. It is in this sense that we suggest the term *illegible*, unable to be deciphered within the operating categories of contemporary settler colonial Australia's political and economic language games for animals. Donkeys show up only as animals outside all legible categories, or still worse, animals seen to interfere even with those animals for whom settler colonial Australia finds a category, a place, a use. No longer useful as working animals, they represent a relic of our pre-technological, early colonial selves. Not grazing animals from whom we can profit in the ongoing agricultural projects of settler colonialism, they compete with those domesticated animals we wish to make live before they are made to die. But their worst offence is that they are not 'native'. Indeed, they are positioned as enemies of the nativist colonial project of recreating pristine pre-colonial nature.

This understanding of 'real nature', known as nativism, is the view that wildlife whose biological or geographic trajectories have been influenced substantially by human, and specifically non-Indigenous 'civilization' are not wildlife. Nativism is a new belief in conservation, but it has become increasingly influential in the past two decades. In Australia, it now forms conservation's ethical foundation. As in other regions that were colonised by Europeans, nature in Australia is now defined as the ecological state at the immortalized moment when Europeans stepped off a boat. Emma Marris calls this the 'white dude moment' (Marris). Any wild animals who fail the test of nativism because they arrived after this absolute temporal cutoff off (1788 in the case of Australia) are disparagingly called 'feral' and 'invasive' species (Wallach et al. 'Summoning Compassion to Address the Challenges of Conservation'). The European colonialists of the past viewed this as the moment nature became civilized. The European conservationists of today see this as the moment nature was destroyed. These two views are not so different. They both reflect the belief that the presence of European humans fundamentally eliminates nature. They also both reflect the belief that European humans are

completely different kinds of beings than the other humans who had shaped these landscapes for thousands of years and who, by implication, are part of that same static, ahistorical nature. Ironically, nativism also repositions the settler colonial state as the authority on how nature ought to look and who has the right to belong where.

Indeed, within this context, the work of conservation has developed with the aim to recreate and hold ecosystems in the image that immediately predated the arrival of European humans. So quite clearly, within this framework, there is no room in conservation for wild donkeys. Wild animals like donkeys have become symbols of everything the conservation movement has worked to protect against. Indeed, as a number of critics of nativism have argued, even though we now understand that ecosystems are dynamic, and that the 'native-versus-alien species dichotomy' is not useful in understanding the actual effects of different species on ecosystems, the distinction continues to drive conservation agendas and, increasingly, public policy and opinion (Davis et al. 153). Within this framework, wild donkeys come to be seen as the symbolic extension of settler colonialism's destruction of nature. Wracked with just enough guilt for the violence that has been wrought to feel 'we' need to do *something* – so long as it doesn't require any actual inconvenience to our comfortable lives – white Australia burdens wild donkeys with the responsibility for ongoing destruction of a world we fantasise we are creating anew.

Our argument linking conservation's obsession with nativism with settler colonial logics calls out for an understanding and recognition of what Indigenous Australians think about introduced species, and how they see their place in Australia. To date, there has been limited empirical research on this question, and the research that has been done points to a complex and variable picture. Given these limits and the careful treatment that Indigenous views on these issues merit, an adequate treatment of this question is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that research conducted on Aboriginal people's attitudes to wild donkeys in Central Australia some three decades ago indicated that the native/invasive divide taken to be absolute in contemporary conservation practices did not structure their views. Indeed, the drive to get rid of certain animals because they are not 'Australian' occurred as 'a

stupid idea' (Rose 116). Rather, as one person put it, 'they were born on this country and they belong to this ground' (Nugent 13). Other research confirms that some, though not all, introduced species have been 'included within the general intellectual universe of sentient beings that constitute 'country' in Aboriginal terms' (Trigger 636), and that in place of a 'simple one-dimensional cultural narrative built around a supposed authentic nativeness in society and/or nature…Aboriginal people construct[ing] complex senses of identity encompassing flexible visions of what 'belongs' (Trigger 641).[18] At the same time, the available research makes evident that views are not only variable amongst and between individuals, groups and locations, but also shift historically, both as relations between people and the animals in question change,[19] and importantly as the density of the animal population, and their impact on other animals and the environment increases (Altman, 'Kuninjku People, Buffalo and Conservation in Arnhem Land'; Vaarzon-Morel and Edwards). For now, we note the importance of developing richer understandings of how Indigenous peoples in particular places and contexts relate to and imagine their lives with donkeys and other introduced species.

The legible donkey: A fourth era

International and domestic advocacy efforts, combined with the likely unviability of a domestic industry to source skins for ejiao from wild donkeys will, we hope, prevent the emergence of this latest deadly threat to wild donkeys. As we have explained however, this new and acute threat is enabled by the position wild donkeys already occupy in Australia. Even if these campaigns are successful, the baseline situation, and all of the violence it entails, will persist. If we are to escape these deadly tangles, if wild donkeys are to show up as having some positive value in their own right, the schemas of meaning within which value is currently attributed need to be transformed. We thus conclude by imagining a fourth era of entanglements. In doing so, we will not limit ourselves to wild donkeys, or to donkeys imagined as wild, but will try to map out a spectrum of relationships between human and donkey lives that could accommodate the complex and overlapping patterns of human-donkey habitation.

Figure 4. Imagining a fourth era of entanglements based on kinship.
Left panel: A donkey as a friend and co-worker.
Right panel: Wild donkeys celebrated as Australia's inadvertent rewilding.
Photos from Kachana Station, Kimberley, Western Australia, by Chris Hengeller.

We take as a basic framework, but elaborate upon, the map that Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (Donaldson and Kymlicka) have sketched for the forms of political relationship that could include animals other than humans and allow them to flourish. Donaldson and Kymlicka suggest that different categories of other-than-human animals require different types of political status, depending on how embedded in, or separate from human communities their lives are. Animals who fall within their first category, domestic, ought, they argue, to be recognised as citizens within political communities.

While we certainly would not advocate for donkeys living in the wild being domesticated, there are already in Australia donkeys living with and working alongside humans and other animals in a range of spaces and activities. With respect to these donkeys, we might thus imagine what a transformation to inclusion could entail. It could, for example, be fostered by recognising or co-creating the social and economic roles donkeys are playing and might play in multispecies communities. While it is difficult to imagine how what have historically been highly exploitative relationships might become more reciprocal and mutually beneficial, there

may be opportunities to build on the particular aptitudes, inclinations and desires of donkeys to find niches where they could flourish and contribute to others and the community, at the same time as living lives they value. In agriculture, for example, donkeys have been successfully employed as guardian animals to protect sheep or other vulnerable other-than-human animals from predators. Presently, donkeys' guardian work serves the purpose of protecting other other-than-human animals maintained for human use in animal agriculture; but one might imagine them protecting other animals under other circumstances, thereby also eliminating the rationale currently used for killing predators such as foxes. In a similar vein, being highly social, inquisitive, kind and funny, donkeys could make significant contributions in the fields of aged care, working with people with autism, or in other therapeutic situations.[20] Such intimate domestic entanglements should certainly not become a substitute for donkeys' future as wild animals. Nevertheless, in so far as they provide an opportunity for intimacy, the knowledge and affective attachments that can be built through living together in these ways are likely to be critical in nourishing and sustaining humans' commitments to the flourishing of donkeys in larger worlds of just entanglement.

Donaldson and Kymlicka's third category (we come back to the second below) includes wild animals, who, they argue, ought not to be included as citizens in existing political communities, but rather recognised as sovereign nations with rights to live without interference in their own territories. For donkeys in Australia, the first step would be to recognise them as legitimate wild animals. Beyond challenging the politics underpinning nativist logics described earlier, expanding the temporality of our imagination would assist in this regard. The world used to be full of terrestrial megafauna, which are broadly defined as land mammals who weigh more (or much more) than 100kg. Many were lost at the end of the Pleistocene, probably due to human hunting. But today, around the world, megafauna are coming back. Introduced and feral megafauna have numerically replaced between 15% and 67% of species lost in the Pleistocene. Australia lost all of its megafauna species 50,000 years ago. There are now 8 introduced species in Australia, including wild donkeys (Lundgren et al.). Exploring this path of 'donkey rewilding' not only offers a way forward for donkeys, but also challenges some of the direr characterisations of the state of the planet that generally frame discussions about our

future. When we recognise wild donkeys as the wild animals that they are, we also discover a wildness on earth we are currently incapable of seeing.

Seen from this perspective, the resurgence of wild donkeys is nothing less than a miracle, and one of the biggest rewilding events in the world. Most equid species went extinct thousands of years ago, at the end of Pleistocene. The ancestor of the donkey is the African wild ass – a critically endangered species with fewer than 200 mature individuals remaining in the wild (IUCN). Wild donkeys are bringing back many of the ecological functions lost both in the Pleistocene and Anthropocene megafauna extinctions and declines. In Arizona, USA, wild donkeys dig wells of more than a meter in depth in the drying riverbeds of the Sonoran Desert. Erick Lundgren's research is revealing that these 'burro wells' increase water availability for more than thirty mammal and bird species, and become nurseries for riparian trees and amphibians (Lundgren et al.). Similar wells are known to be dug by Asiatic wild asses and wild horses.

Many other megafauna species that are endangered in their formal native ranges have similarly found refuge in new areas. Approximately a third of the Earth's megafauna have established introduced populations. Of these, half are threatened or extinct in their native ranges. These introduced threatened species could be thought of more as refugees than as invaders, with the proviso that thinking about them this way would be concomitant with what is owed human refugees under existing international laws, and not what is afforded to them in contemporary Australian practice.

The dromedary camel was native to North Africa and the Levant before going extinct in the wild 4–5,000 years ago. Today, a population of about half-a-million wild dromedary camels are rewilding the deserts of Australia. Aurochs were hunted to extinction hundreds of years ago. But they live on in the thousands of wild cattle of Australia, Europe, North America, South America, and several islands. The IUCN lists wild horses as surviving only in Mongolia. But there are hundreds of thousands of feral horses in the world, and most of them are in Australia. Even hippos have found a new home. Pablo Escobar, the archetypal patriarch, created his very

own private zoo at his Colombian estate. When he was killed, a small number of his 'cocaine hippos' escaped. Their offspring are now rewilding South America.

If species were assessed across their full range, 6 megafauna species would be globally delisted and 2 would be down-listed, which would reduce the number of megafauna species defined as threatened by 13% (Wallach et al. 'Invisible Megafauna'). Though catalysed by humans transporting other-than-human animals outside their native range, these incredible rewilding events did not occur by human direction and control. They are the result of the pioneering abilities of other-than-human animals that have survived human exploitation. Recognising how donkeys entangled in relationships of violence are also the agents of this rewilding would comprehensively alter how they show up for Australians.

The second category of other-than-human animals that Donaldson and Kymlicka consider in their model of multispecies politics are 'denizens', animals who live in the spaces occupied by human communities, but independently of them. Generally, here they have in mind creatures like pigeons or rats. While this category seems ill fit for donkeys, it is suggestive of a third possibility for a future entanglement, one that might be nurtured not in cities, but precisely in the lands where donkeys have been seen as interfering with human activities of pastoralism or conservation. Imagining lives for wild donkeys that overlap with human lives will be particularly critical given that the territorial borders we tend to think accrue to different nations are for the most part not available in this case.[21] In the Kimberley, for example, in the midst of all the death described earlier, there is now a new trial investigating the possibility of humans and wild donkeys who live on the same land working together on land rehabilitation. Chris and Jacqui Hengeller, the pastoral leaseholders of Kachana Station, are resisting the forced killing of the donkeys on their land. They do not believe that only 'native' wildlife has value, nor that other-than-human animals are only valuable insofar as they can be commodified as agricultural product. Rather, they believe that when they move across and fertilise the land, wild donkeys can make a significant contribution to land regeneration.[22]

Because the land regeneration model does involve some human interference with their patterns of movement, donkeys living on Kachana are not left, as per the sovereign nation

model, to live completely independently. Nor could they be considered domesticated as, for the most part, they still live independent lives. Rather, this is an experiment in loose entanglement, with the hope that it will benefit humans, the environment and the donkeys themselves. Certainly, many questions remain unanswered, such as how humans will live on this land outside historical economies based on animal exploitation. Moreover, the status of pastoral leases where native title has not been recognised remains an unresolved injustice. Nevertheless, we might think of this as a non-ideal model of multispecies flourishing, built as it is on conditions where animals other than humans, and in particular wild donkeys, have had no place at all.[23]

Conclusion

Since being brought to Australia, donkeys have been caught up in tangles of exploitation and violence. In the first era, donkeys had a place, but only insofar as they served as a tool for settler colonisers dominating and taming the land, such that the new nation might more efficiently reap the resources it deemed beneficial. In the second era, donkeys came to occur as invaders who did not belong, impediments to agricultural wealth accumulation or, like Judas, traitors to our new-found mission to proselytise the real religion of the native, pre-invasion Australian landscape. In the third, impending era, a plan is afoot to sell them into a new global commodity flow for something more than 30 pieces of silver. So long as our capacity to perceive them is mediated through these grids of meaning and power, the prospect of donkeys living and flourishing as wild animals in Australia remains dim. If they are to show up as animals who belong, alongside the others who are making a life here, we will need to reimagine what belonging means and how we might belong together.

Notes

[1] The original phrase was spoken by then Prime Minister John Howard in his 2001 election campaign launch speech in the context of restrictive immigration policy.

[2] This critique of crude nativism should not be conflated with the assertion that indigeneity has no meaning beyond being born in a certain place, and the deployment of this definition as an argument by settler colonial groups to deny the political, cultural and economic rights of Indigenous peoples. Nor, as discussed below, do we mean to imply that Indigenous Australians do not, in some cases, also object to the presence of animals introduced since colonization where they perceive them to have a negative impact.

[3] At the time of writing, there were a total of 56,003 organisms on the list, but it is noted that this is not a comprehensive list of all organisms in, or in danger, of being brought to WA.

[4] 'Decisions to control wildlife should be based on the specifics of the situation, not negative labels applied to the target species. When animals are labeled with terms such as introduced, abundant, and pest, broad approaches to control are sometimes advocated and little attention is paid to the specifics of the case. Wildlife control should not be undertaken just because a negatively labeled species is present' (Dubois et al., 5).

[5] RBGs are established under the *BAM Act*. Further information concerning their governance and practice can be found at Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (n.d.), Biosecurity Group Development Guidance Document, available at https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/sites/gateway/files/Biosecurity%20Group%20Guidance%20document%20final.pdf

[6] See Australian Wildlife Conservancy, 'Feral herbivores at Mornington-Marion Downs', available at http://www.australianwildlife.org/sanctuaries/mornington-marion-downs-sanctuary/feral-herbivores.aspx

[7] Section 188 (2) of the *BAM Act* provides that further regulations may be made to 'provide for, authorise, prescribe, require, prohibit, restrict or otherwise regulate all or any of the matters' set out under Schedule 1 of the Act, but none have been made concerning wild donkeys.

[8] *Animal Welfare Act* (WA). Act no. 033, 2002.

[9] See Model code of practice for the humane control of feral donkeys at https://www.pestsmart.org.au/model-code-of-practice-for-the-humane-control-of-feral-donkeys/

[10] The model code of practice for killing feral donkey cited above argues that 'There are three essential requirements for a pest control technique – necessity, effectiveness and humaneness' and then assesses the humaneness of various techniques, concluding that although some animals are left to die due to inaccuracy of shooting, aerial shooting is a humane method. See Model code of practice for the humane control of feral donkeys, https://www.pestsmart.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/donkeyCOP2012.pdf.

[11] The legislative regime is not concentrated under a single act as in the *BAM Act* in WA. *The Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* does allow for the government to order property owners to kill feral animals, but it appears that this power has not been exercised over private land. Nevertheless, largescale eradication has occurred both in national parks and on private land.

[12] The statistics presented here are all taken from Humane Society International, 'Ejiao: An Investigative Report', Humane Society International, 2018.

[13] According to the Donkey Sanctuary, every year 1.8 million donkeys used in the production come from China with a further 2 million coming from outside – 70% from Africa and the rest South America and Asia. Problematising the development of the market in donkey skins and its effect on existing practices should not be taken to imply that working donkeys are living in decent conditions or that they are not also exploited in this context. The contrast is rather between a living, working animal, and an animal bred purely to be killed.

[14] Some of the key organisations advocating on the issue internationally include The Donkey Sanctuary, the Brooke and SPANA.

[15] For some of the campaign material, see for example https://hsi.org.au/takeaction/australia-must-not-feed-the-demand-for-ejiao

[16] The advertisements can be seen at https://www.dropbox.com/sh/puvjz8ensx6np7r/AACha78XcGQHIA2HOJ26vLkJa?dl=0&preview=%E9%98%BF%E8%83%B6%E7%AC%AC%E4%B8%89%E9%83%A8%E5%88%860404%E6%94%B9.mp4 and https://www.dropbox.com/sh/puvjz8ensx6np7r/AACha78XcGQHIA2HOJ26vLkJa?dl=0&preview=%E9%98%BF%E8%83%B6%E7%AC%AC%E4%B8%80%E9%83%A8%E5%88%860404%E6%94%B9.mp4

[17] Although Arendt made this connection herself, her analysis nevertheless remained focus on the dehumanization of Jews and other victims of Nazi camps and subsequently Stalinist totalitarianism, and not their colonial underpinnings.

[18] See also Jon C. Altman, 'Hunting Buffalo in North-Central Arnhem Land: A Case of Rapid Adaptation among Aborigines', *Oceania*, vol. 52, no. 4, 1982, pp.274-285; David M.J.S. Bowman and Cathy J. Robinson, 'The Getting of the Nganabbarru: Observations and Reflections on Aboriginal Buffalo Hunting in Northern Australia', *Australian Geographer*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2002, pp.191-206.

[19] For example, as Vaarzon- Morel and Edwards describe, after initially fearing them, 'Aboriginal people's relations with camels underwent a profound change when people began working for Afghan cameleers and learnt how to handle camels for transport'. As they observe, 'the varying and complex interactions that arose between people and camels resulted in new cultural forms, attachments and adaptations' (67-8).

[20] The ideas suggested here are predominantly anthropocentric, but a fully developed multispecies community ought to include animals involved in activities that benefit their own kind and other-than-human animals.

[21] There are models for multinational states and recognition of national political rights without separate territories, but these fall short of full sovereignty and require areas of cooperation.

[22] On the Wild Donkey Project, see https://www.kachana-station.com/projects/wild-donkey-project/

[23] Kachana's holding out in this way has been a source of major frustration for the RBG, which sees that with only '1,000 left in the Kimberley' it 'is not too far off finishing up'(Dick Pasfield, 'K.R.B.A. Donkey Program,' edited by Chris Henggeler, 27 May 2018), a completion impeded by these surviving wild donkeys that represent a stain on the purity of complete eradication. However, in October 2018, the authors facilitated a successful meeting between the RBG, the WA's Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and local pastoralists which took a step towards resolving the major conflicts and enabled this trial to continue.

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