CHAPTER NINE

ECOLOGY AND IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE NEGOTIATION OF “NATIVENESS”

JANE MULCOCK AND DAVID TRIGGER

The global business of “managing” biodiversity is, ultimately, as much about shifting cultural values as it is about environmental realities; human preferences for non-human species evolve as societal priorities change. Ongoing debates about the ecological and cultural place of “native” versus “exotic” flora and fauna provide numerous cases in point. In academic and policy literature and in the wider public domain, biological scientists and land managers increasingly emphasise the apparent threats that non-native “invasive” species pose to local biodiversity. Scientifically credible or contestable arguments for the greater belonging of some species over others within particular ecosystems¹ tell one side of this multi-faceted story. Anthropological research focuses on another side, namely, issues of cultural “belonging” and people’s non-science based perceptions of what (and who) belongs where.

The Oxford English Dictionary indicates that one of the definitions for “belonging” is “[to] be rightly or naturally placed [... to] fit a specified environment, [to] not be out of place”. Most notable here is the assumption that being “*naturally* placed” is synonymous with being in the “right” place. According to this common logic, “natural” is “right” and to be in the “right” place is to “belong”. In order to ask productive questions about “what belongs where” it is therefore necessary to first problematise the idea of “naturalness”. The two-volume edition of the OED devotes almost a full page to defining the word “natural”. As a cultural concept it is heavily loaded with moral values. According to the OED, to be

¹ E.g. Brown and Sax, “Biological invasions”; Brown and Sax, “An essay on some topics concerning invasive species”; Cassey et al, “Concerning invasive species”.

"natural" is to be pure, real, normal; to be unaffected, not artificial or constructed or cultivated, to be spontaneous; "*natural* justice" is supposedly based on "innate moral feeling", the instinctive sense of what is "right and fair". Comparative social research shows us, however, that perceptions of what is normal, right and fair are typically subjective and culturally specific. Does it follow then, that ideas about what is "natural" are also subjective and specific?

The OED also lists "native" as a synonym for "natural". At this point the trail of concomitant meanings becomes complicated by the fixed element of birth place. To be "native" is to "belong to a particular place or country by birth". Thus "nativeness", unlike "naturalness", cannot be understood as a subjectively activated category. This is an important point of widespread conceptual slippage. The OED uses "naturalness" to define "nativeness"; "native" plants and animals are found "naturally" in a locality; a "native" quality is "innate, natural", "belonging to a person or thing by nature or natural constitution" (p.1887). In this instance "native" and "natural" are conceptually wed so that what is "native" not only "belongs to place", but is also "natural". The problem here is that "native" is a statement of fact,² while "natural" is a value judgement laden with individual and cultural specificities.

This argument about the nuanced intentions of language may seem somewhat convoluted, but it illustrates a vital point. Subtle linguistic assumptions and conceptual slippages such as those that are commonly found in discourses about nativeness, naturalness and belonging can have significant implications. The conflation of "native" and "natural" effectively hijacks discussions about the "belonging" of species to places by attaching a moral value to an empirical "fact" (i.e. autochthony). The intersections of popular cultural understandings and scientifically-based arguments become clearly evident in any analysis of environmental management strategies—especially in instances where the values of the general public conflict with those of scientists and other decision-makers.

The debate about ecological belonging carries symbolic significance that inevitably overlaps with ideas about human belonging to place. Discourses about national identity, for example, frequently find their way into campaigns against invasive alien species. The idea of "nativeness" in human society can never be entirely separated from the related notion of "biological nativism",³ even if only for linguistic reasons.⁴ In fact, the

² There is contestation over the period of time that it takes to "become" native with respect to naturalized non-human species, but in a technical sense, to be "native" to a locality is to have evolved as part of that particular ecosystem.

³ Peretti, "Nativism and nature".

very conflation of “nativeness” and “naturalness”, which occurs so frequently in globally prominent discourses about biodiversity, provides the moral underpinning for arguments about “belonging” to place. Such notions of “natural” belonging are at the centre of the symbolic politics we wish to explore. A crucial question arises in this context. If flora and fauna (or people) are typically regarded as most “natural” when they qualify as “native” (i.e. autochthonous), how do we understand and manage the reality of ever-increasing ecological and cultural hybridity in nation-states?⁵ Is it justifiable to dismiss the validity or value of hybrid landscapes or hybrid communities, for example, on the basis that they are “unnatural”?

Growing interest in environmental nativism might justifiably be considered as part of a wider international trend towards an increased valuing of things indigenous, a trend to glorify the uniquely local and “authentic” in the face of globalising forces that favour hybridity and homogeneity over heterogeneity. Morley comments on how such a “search for indigenous origins”, a desire for “a sense of place-based identity” is often imagined as a rejection of postmodern cultural experience, which tends to celebrate movement, instability, flux and flow, hybridity.⁶ Allon takes this idea a step further by introducing the idea of conscious critique. It may be the case that a “nostalgic desire for ‘roots’ [...] for a sense of belonging to traditions and communities, for the recognition and maintenance of cultural memory and difference” can in fact be understood as “a way of moving forward”, of critiquing “the very forces which have produced the conditions of loss in the first place [...] and of negotiating the future ahead”.⁷

We consider the symbolic politics of flora and fauna as an example of how scientific discourses about maintenance and loss of native species potentially intersect with changes in broader cultural agendas. It is possible, for example, to detect a sense of ecological nostalgia in calls to revalue or restore indigenous biota, to return landscapes to their “natural” “native” states by privileging the species that truly “belong” over those that have colonised the environment in recent memory. Hage writes about

⁴ O'Brien, “Exotic invasions”.

⁵ Hybridity is surely a form of diversity in itself. The biological concept of hybrid vigour even suggests that it may be a very desirable and “natural” process in which a third, more successful, genetic line arises from the merging of two parental lines (Abercrombie, Hickman and Johnson, *Penguin Dictionary of Biology*, 135).

⁶ Morley, “Belongings”, 441.

⁷ Allon, “Nostalgia Unbound”, 284.

what he describes as “ecological nationalism” or “nationalist ecology”, in which:

[n]ature is perceived as a national value that needs to be exploited and/or saved [...]. [T]he ecological fantasy is part of the national fantasy and vice versa [...] otherness becomes both something that disrupts national ecological sustainability and a non-national/foreign otherness.⁸

Although the overt justifications for such efforts to protect and profit from native species are typically couched in terms of the need to conserve biodiversity, they can also be read, at least in some instances, as attempts to preserve difference in the form of remembered or imagined environments of attachment. Yi-Fu Tuan’s concept of “topophilia”, the idea that the natural environment can be “a source of assurance and pleasure [...] of profound attachment and love”,⁹ contributes to such an interpretation by suggesting an alternative (i.e. non-science based) set of motivations for trying to preserve certain species and landscapes over others, whether native or otherwise.

Stephen Jay Gould, internationally renowned professor of zoology and geology, points out that the notion of nativeness, at least in relation to plants, is highly problematic. Gould claims that the “concept of ‘native plants’ [...] encompasses a remarkable mixture of sound biology, invalid ideas, false extensions, ethical implications and political usages both intended and unanticipated”.¹⁰ He argues that the “superiority of natives” is much better supported by pre-Darwinian “natural theology”—in which natives are best “because God made each creature for its proper place”¹¹—than by scientific evolutionary theories of natural selection and adaptation on the basis of historical contingencies.¹² In their response to the campaign against invasive species in the UK, Cartwright and Jordan cite Charles Darwin himself reflecting on false assumptions of native superiority:

⁸ Hage, “White nation”, 168-7.

⁹ Tuan, *Topophilia*, p.xii.

¹⁰ Gould, “An evolutionary perspective”, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹² “Organisms do not necessarily, or even generally, inhabit the geographic area best suited to their attributes. Since organisms (and their areas of habitation) are the products of a history laced with chaos, contingency, and genuine randomness, current patterns (although workable, or they would not exist) will rarely express anything close to optimum, or even a ‘best possible on this earth now’” (*ibid.*, 16).

No country can be named in which all the native inhabitants are now so perfectly adapted to each other and to the physical conditions under which they live, that none of them could be still better adapted or improved; for in all countries, the natives have been so far conquered by naturalised productions that they have allowed some foreigners to take firm possession of the land.¹³

Citing the promotion of native species in German and American nationalist discourses, Gould also comments:

How slippery the slope between *genius loci* (and respect for all the other spirits in their proper places as well) and “my *locus* is best, while others must be uprooted, either as threats or as unredeemable inferiors”. How easy the fallacious transition between a biological argument and a political campaign.¹⁴

Australian scholar George Seddon recently made a similar point by suggesting that overly purist ideas about the superiority of native species can result in a kind of “wildlife xenophobia” in which species that are deemed not to belong are demonised and targeted for eradication.¹⁵ This phenomenon is often a very blatant component in popular and scientific discourses about introduced species, especially those that become “invasive”.

We link these observations to social theory. Morley explains how belonging is intimately associated with the ideas of “home” and “roots” and may be experienced at a variety of social levels (e.g. house, neighbourhood, nation) that interact and intersect and that are shaped and informed by a “politics [...] of social recognition” that allows “the issue of who [and what] (properly) ‘belongs’ where [to be] determined”.¹⁶ He focuses on the “destabilization” of “traditional forms of place-based identity” as a result of the “deterritoriality” or “virtuality” of contemporary experience, whilst also describing a parallel cultural process of “reterritorialization” “whereby borders and boundaries of various sorts are becoming more rather than less, strongly marked”.¹⁷ Morley refers to “forms of ‘strategic essentialism’ that disempowered groups” around the world engage “to defend their own fragile boundaries”.¹⁸ He observes that “at some moments, members of [such] groups will deliberately reify and

¹³ Cartwright and Jordan, *Alien Invaders*, 3.

¹⁴ Gould, “An evolutionary perspective”, 13.

¹⁵ Seddon, *The Old Country*, 7-9.

¹⁶ Morley, “Belongings”, 436.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 441.

'essentialise' their identities, in order to mobilise for political action and compete for resources".¹⁹ In our view, arguments about environmental management that vigorously emphasise the value of "going native" (e.g. Archer and Beale in their *Going Native: Living in the Australian environment*), prompt the question of whether such views similarly entail forms of "strategic essentialism" and "reterritorialization" in face of the threat of global environmental homogenisation through loss of desired local biodiversity.

Clearly, the joint reification of biological "nativeness" and ecological "naturalness" have important conceptual implications across many settings. In the post-apartheid South African context, anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff point out how "aliens—both plants and people—[can] come to embody core contradictions of boundedness and belonging".²⁰ In Australia, nativeness in plants and animals is similarly linked to ideas about national identity and human "indigeneity". Morton and Smith comment on "the power that contested images of nature hold in relation to an Australian sense of place".²¹ In constructions of national identity, they argue, "feral" flora and fauna "carry an enormous burden in the symbolic economy of nationalism".²² They show how conservationists "revile introduced animals and plants" in their efforts to recreate "indigenous nature".²³ Species regarded as "feral" to Australian environments are constantly attributed meanings and qualities that place them squarely "outside belonging".²⁴ The same pattern is repeated in New Zealand,²⁵ in the United Kingdom,²⁶ and in many other parts of the world.²⁷

Our purpose here is to provide examples drawn from three cultural settings that illustrate the parallel ways in which people's perceptions of introduced and native species, their biological and behavioural characteristics, are represented within and beyond scientific discourses. It is useful to locate this discussion initially in terms of the global scientific concern about invasive species.

¹⁹ Ibid., 442.

²⁰ Comaroff and Comaroff, "Naturing the nation", 7.

²¹ Morton and Smith, "Planting indigenous species", 154.

²² Ibid., 159.

²³ Ibid., 172.

²⁴ Probyn, *Outside Belongings*.

²⁵ King, *Immigrant Killers*; Milton, "Ducks out of water".

²⁶ Milton, "Ducks out of water"; Cartwright and Jordan, *Alien Invaders*.

²⁷ Global Invasive Species Program. <http://www.gisp.org/> (accessed 29 November 2007).

Invasion biology and the preservation of native biodiversity

The Centre of Excellence for Invasion Biology (CIB), based at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, describes invasion biology as a rapidly growing, but often misunderstood, field of ecology. Further defined, it is “the study of both the species that become invasive in a system and their impacts on the system they have invaded, as well as the remediation of such invasions.”²⁸ It seems that definitions are particularly crucial in this research domain; they appear repeatedly on related websites and in official documents and contain carefully phrased subtleties. The CIB (2007) defines “alien” (alias “introduced, exotic, non-native, or non-indigenous”) species as “animals or plants, or any other types of organism, that are introduced to a new area through the accidental or deliberate actions of *humans*” (our italics). This definition includes an added emphasis stating that native species which expand their range through “*natural* migration [...] due to environmental changes” are not considered “alien”. The CIB website explains that alien species can become “*naturalised*” by establishing a “reproductive population [...] over at least 10 years’ *without human intervention*”. It also points out that not all alien species become invasive, and that many “are highly beneficial to humans”. Rather, “invasive species are a sub-category of naturalised species [which] produce reproductive off-spring, often in very large numbers [...], and thus have the potential to spread over large areas.”²⁹

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Guidelines for the Preservation of Biodiversity Loss Caused by Alien Invasive Species (IUCN Information paper, May 2000³⁰), define biodiversity as the “variability among living organisms from all sources [...] includ[ing] diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems”. Technically, then, biodiversity is not essentially “native”. In this IUCN document, an alien species is described as “a species, sub-species or lower taxon (non-native, non-indigenous, foreign, exotic) occurring outside of its *natural* range (past or present) and dispersal potential” (i.e. the range it could inhabit *without human intervention*). Within this framework, an “[a]lien invasive species” is one “which becomes established in *natural* or semi-

²⁸ http://academic.sun.ac.za/cib/q_and_a.asp (accessed 29 November 2007).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ http://www.issg.org/infpaper_invasive.pdf (accessed 29 November 2007).

natural ecosystems or habitat, is an agent of change, and threatens native biological diversity.”³¹

We see here the opposition of what is “natural” and what is produced through “human” action (i.e. “unnatural”), a dichotomy that is difficult to sustain without denying the biological “naturalness” of *Homo sapiens* as a species.³² Logically, the implied distinction is actually between the biophysical environment that exists independently of people, and the world of (human) “culture” that constantly seeks to shape that biophysical environment to its own purposes. The difference may seem subtle but it is crucial to acknowledge the concepts of “natural” and “unnatural” for what they are (i.e. morally laden and culturally inscribed tools of communication) if we are to seriously consider the symbolic politics of nativeness at issue here.

Concern about invasive species is also strongly linked to economic incentives. The IUCN guidelines claim that “the direct economic costs of alien invasive species run into many billions of dollars annually”. The Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau International (CABI) website increases this estimate, arguing that:

Globally, the cost of damage caused by invasive species has been estimated to be £1 trillion per year—close to 5% of global GDP. In developing countries, where agriculture accounts for a higher proportion of GDP, the negative impact of invasive species on food security as well as on economic performance, can be even greater.³³

Despite such economic costs, social responses to specific invasive species are enormously varied. The IUCN points out in the report cited above that, regardless of their potentially negative impact “some alien invasive species [...] have [also] acquired positive cultural values”.³⁴ This broad ambiguity in lay persons’ responses to flora and fauna that are regarded negatively in scientific perspectives as “introduced”—“matter out of place”³⁵—is a core issue in our analysis. This issue can be addressed across a number of countries that seemingly constitute parallel cases.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Taylor, “Naturalness”, 441.

³³ <http://www.cabi.org/datapage.asp?iDocID=173> (accessed 29 Nov 2007).

³⁴ http://www.issg.org/infpaper_invasive.pdf (accessed 29 Nov 2007).

³⁵ Milton (citing Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*), “Ducks out of water”, 229.

Invasive alien species vs natives: an example from the United Kingdom

Perhaps the most well-known invasive species in the United Kingdom is the American Grey Squirrel. One writer suggests that the grey squirrel “will soon become one of the leading natural scapegoats for ecological change in Britain”. He states that grey squirrels are

[b]lamed for digging holes in lawns, uprooting bulbs, bark-stripping, scaring off birds from nut feeders, aggressive behaviour, and now the decline of our woodland songsters[. This] increasingly loathed “tree rat” is being turned into mammalian enemy number one.³⁶

The main reason for this growing public dislike seems to be what Tait describes as “the oft-quoted dislodging by the American invader of the pretty little native red squirrel”. He comments ironically on popular opinion about grey squirrels: “[h]ow typical of the Yanks. Over-fed, over-rated and over here”.³⁷ This link to discourses about national identities reveals some of the underlying themes present in the language of invasion biology—especially in terms of how it frequently gets translated into public discourse.

The greys are typically characterised as larger and more adaptable to changing environments than the smaller red squirrels whose feeding requirements are more specialist. The guide book to one wildlife park in England describes the greys, which were first introduced in the 1870s, as the “arch competitors” of the reds, taking food and nest sites “and introducing a killer disease called parapoxvirus, to which the reds have no defence”.³⁸

Red Squirrels have not always been in favour in the UK however. Harris reports that they were described in the 1920s as “one of the prime pests of the forester” given their high numbers and the economic damage they inflicted on pine plantations in Scotland.³⁹ One of the ironies of the red squirrel story is that the current population is the result of a series of reintroductions that took place in the 1780s after a previous extinction due

³⁶ Tait, “Grey area”, 25.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Wildwood Trust, *Discover Wildwood*, 64. Invasive species are commonly represented as carriers of disease, less discerning feeders and bigger and stronger than their native competitors. Such characteristics tend to become sensationalised in popular discourse but they are obviously also the signs of a successful organism.

³⁹ Harris, “The red has lost”, 38.

to massive forest clearances in the 15th and 16th centuries.⁴⁰ Interestingly, many of these animals were sourced from continental Europe, rather than from genetically “native” British stock. Nonetheless, they are now frequently characterised in highly positive terms that emphasise their national belonging. As Holm and Tew and Benvie illustrate, Red Squirrels are perceived by many to be part of Britain’s cultural, as well as its ecological, heritage.

The website of the Friends of the Anglesey Red Squirrels⁴¹ provides a good example of the sort of community feeling and participation that these animals can elicit. Its home page features a “Message of Support” from the group’s “patron”, Iolo Williams (described as a TV Presenter and a Wildlife Expert).

I remember red squirrels being common around my home in the village of Llanwddyn in north Montgomeryshire but when I return these days, I see nothing but greys. I have followed the success of the Anglesey red squirrel project with great interest because it is so heartening to see the reds striking back. Thanks to the dedication of a few individuals, our native squirrel can once more be seen in several Anglesey woodlands and eventually, I would love to see greys eradicated from the whole of Britain. This is unlikely to happen in my lifetime but with the work on Anglesey going from strength to strength, at least there is some hope for future generations.

Also included on the site is English children’s author Beatrix Potter’s well-known and fondly regarded story about Squirrel Nutkin—a bold character whose cheekiness results in having his tail broken by an old wise owl. This and other familiar red squirrel icons are part of the British imaginary. There have been strong sentiments associated with Red Squirrels, echoed in public outrage responding to proposals from science journalists;⁴² the journalists suggest it is now time to accept that the Grey Squirrel has won supremacy in the evolutionary process and to direct conservation resources into more sustainable projects than the preservation of small, isolated populations of Reds.⁴³

Running through the “great debate” about the rights of red and grey squirrels in the UK, are a set of assumptions relating to the “naturalness”, “nativeness” and moral hierarchies of belonging associated with the two

⁴⁰ Tew and Benvie, *Red Squirrels*, 9; Holm, *Squirrels*, 16.

⁴¹ <http://www.redsquirrels.info/index.html>, accessed 12 December 2007.

⁴² See for example, the Letters to the Editor on “The Great Squirrel Debate” in *BBC Wildlife*, October 2006, Vol 24, No.11, 94-95.

⁴³ E.g. Harris, “The red has lost”; Tait, “Grey area”.

species. In this instance, attribution of national identity to the animals in question—British squirrels vs American squirrels—invokes a deeply embedded cultural and historical tension between nation-states that distinguish themselves historically. In our view, this is as significant in explaining the issues as are models of ecological belonging.

Troublesome and contested natives: examples from South Africa and Australia

While invasive alien species tend to get demonised in popular discourses, indigenous species are not always well loved either. Their moral claims to belonging through autochthony, however, make them a source of much public contestation. Native flora and fauna have become part of the national imaginary in many nation states: they “belong”—but not everywhere.

Chacma Baboons living near residential areas around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa are troublesome natives in all sorts of ways. These troops are the only ones of their species that are protected in all of Africa.⁴⁴ A “Visitor’s Guide to Baboons” on one tourism website points out that: “There are only 360 baboons remaining on the Cape Peninsula. They have been on the Peninsula for 1 million years but are now threatened due to conflict with humans.”⁴⁵ This site entreats visitors to “help conserve the last baboons on the Tip of Africa” by resisting the urge to feed them, the reason being that this activity encourages the animals to become aggressive towards people by attempting to steal food. Such “aggressive” individuals are then targeted and removed from the population by “the authorities” to prevent further injury to humans. The website for tourists visiting Cape Point contains the following warning, with even more dire estimates of the animals’ plight:

Be wary of baboons in the parking lot; they have been known to steal food and can be dangerous if provoked. Unfortunately the indigenous chacma baboons are increasingly under threat, and in 2004 it was estimated that only 125 (98 females and 27 males in 10 troops) remain in the Cape

⁴⁴ http://www.sunsetbeach.co.za/cape_point/chacma_baboons.htm, accessed 13 December 2007.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Peninsula. Many baboons have been shot for raiding homes and stealing food. Baboon-feeding tourists only exacerbate this serious situation.⁴⁶

Another of their crimes is house-breaking—baboons frequently intrude into domestic living spaces and cause considerable havoc, making them unpopular with local residents. These are undisciplined indigenes—they belong, but they are not always welcomed by the human inhabitants of the areas they frequent.

Laura Pechey writes about the contesting representations of these animals in South African literature as symbols of indigeneity and belonging to place. The baboons have been cast both as “trespasser” and “original inhabitants”, depending it seems on the political position of observers.⁴⁷ Her analysis of these representations turns on a recognition of contesting post-colonial agendas:

The chacma’s destructive qualities cannot be denied; however, the sheer weight of metaphoric language used in describing chacmas—even in pseudo-scientific works of natural history—suggests the mediated nature of our reading of animals. The image of the chacma has been, it appears, enlisted into justifications of the colonial project and has featured as one way of figuring the feared black threat to white supremacy. The predominant image of the chacma is of a trespasser who threatens the territorial integrity of the white settlers and their descendants.⁴⁸

On the other hand, Pechey then proceeds to show how some South African writers with anti-apartheid sympathies have used images of the chacma baboon “to critique white claims to South Africa”.⁴⁹ She argues that the “baboon’s indigenous status underwrites [its] belonging”⁵⁰ and shows how this condition can be used as an analogy for autochthonous black African belonging to and ownership of land. The powerful symbolic politics of nativeness are clearly visible in this example drawn from a post-settler society where rights to occupy land are constantly contested. In this instance, as in many others, ecological models of belonging based on indigeneity and the “natural” order are complicated by other socio-cultural priorities—the South African Chacma Baboon is a troublesome native for some, and an iconic native for others.

⁴⁶ http://www.fodors.com/world/africa%20and%20middle%20east/south%20africa/cape%20town/entity_111101.html, accessed 12 December 2007.

⁴⁷ Pechey, 42.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

An Australian example exhibits some parallels. A species that is all at once iconic, prized by some and deeply despised by others is the dingo (native dog). Unlike the South African Baboons, however, the very indigeneity of the dingo is part of what is contested. Its status as a species of conservation interest is complicated by the fact that it is not endemic to Australia but came from southeast Asia some 3500 years ago.⁵¹

By one view, the dingo holds ambiguous cultural significance partly because it is thought to be "the latest pre-white non-human animal arrival on the continent" and hence referred to by some as "feral".⁵² Europeans encountered dingoes from the earliest period of colonisation. In 1688, explorer William Dampier described them as being like wolves, and during early stages of British settlement dingoes were reportedly hunted like foxes in England.⁵³ Dingoes are regarded as pests among pastoralists and, from 1912, a bounty was placed on dingo scalps in order to stop or reduce depredations on sheep. "Doggers" are still employed to trap and shoot dingoes on pastoral properties.

Peace explores the ambiguity of dingos as both charismatic and dangerous tourist attractions on Fraser Island in Queensland.⁵⁴ The animal is portrayed as an icon of the island's "wildness" and is typically photographed from a distance, looking docile and passive.⁵⁵ Peace also reports, however, that in mid-1998 plans were under way to kill selected dingoes on Fraser Island, due to the risk they posed to visitors. In fact, a number of dingo attacks on tourists have been reported, and in 2001 a 9 year-old child was killed by dingoes. This led to a cull of approximately 65 animals (despite reported protests from some Aboriginal people claiming traditional ownership of the island).⁵⁶

As with other case examples, the issue of whether the dingo "belongs" in Australian environments is germane to our interest in the related question of how negotiated cultural identities impact upon social constructions of "nature" or what is "natural".

Dingo both belongs and does not belong. For non-Aboriginal Australians who are wondering where they belong in this land and how to relate to the environment, the dingo may well be a useful metaphor showing ways of

⁵¹ Australian Museum Fact Sheets, available at <http://www.amon-line.net.au/factsheets/dingos.htm>, accessed 7 October 2006.

⁵² Instone, "The coyote's at the door", 458.

⁵³ Gould, cited in Marshall, "On the disadvantages of wearing fur", 18.

⁵⁴ Peace, "The cull of the wild", 175.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁵⁶ "Dingoes kill boy at tourist spot", BBC News Online, 30 April 2001.

finding a place, showing us how to go 'wild' and move away from our domestic European heritage.⁵⁷

The Australian dingo is clearly caught up in the symbolic politics of cultural belonging. Franklin suggests that Australians regard dingoes as "a naturalised introduced species". It has "served sufficient time to be counted as a native, but the precise criteria for nativeness remain vague and confusing".⁵⁸ Drawing on the innovative work of Smith,⁵⁹ Franklin comments that "dingo narratives" "affirm the notion that colonists can be indigenised"; the species has thus a "distinctive symbolic potency". In contrast to more recently introduced feral cats, for example, dingoes are now understood by many to "belong", a national breed of animal regarded as "our" wild dog.⁶⁰

Re-introducing natives for the nation: more from the United Kingdom

Questions about the possibility of "re-introducing" animals that have long been extinct is a widely discussed topic amongst wildlife managers in the UK, Europe and the United States. The IUCN (2000) document defines "re-introduction" in this context as "an attempt to establish a species in an area which was once part of its historical range, but from which it has been extirpated or become extinct".⁶¹

Buller writes about debates over the "reintroductions of wild species" into rural European settings as "a strategic site in environmental politics", part of a broader attempt to challenge "the constructed naturalness of the countryside by providing an alternative authenticity for nature".⁶²

⁵⁷ Instone, "The coyote's at the door", 458.

⁵⁸ Franklin, *Animal Nation*, 21.

⁵⁹ Smith, *Nature, Native and Nation in the Australian Imaginary*, 142.

⁶⁰ Smith, "The howl and the pussy", 301. The Australian Native Dog Conservation Society is an organisation dedicated to preserving the genetic purity of the dingo (<http://www.dingosanctuary.com.au/FSDingo.htm>, accessed 4 October 2006; and the Australian National Kennel Council recognised the species as a pure breed of dog in 1994. See discussion in the NSW Legislative Assembly of a dingo protection Bill that acknowledges the animal's formal status as Australia's native dog (Hansard transcript available online at <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/PARLMENT/hansArt.nsf/V3Key/LA19921029005>, accessed 4 October 2006.) Nonetheless, it is illegal to keep dingoes as pets in a number of Australian States.

⁶¹ http://www.issg.org/infpaper_invasive.pdf

⁶² Buller, "Where the wild things are", 131.

Arguments for returning “wild” animals such as grey wolf, brown bear, lynx, beaver, ibex, raptors and wild boar to rural locations they once inhabited prior to “being driven out or becoming extinct” are based on assumptions about the intrinsic value of trying to restore “natural pre-human intervention ecosystems”.⁶³ Buller suggests that central to such agendas is “a belief that wild animals are more authentic and, hence, more natural”.⁶⁴ He cites French scholars Vourc’h and Pelosse who write about the “emblematic character of the predator which ‘naturalises’ the landscape [and becomes] guarantor of the naturality of the milieu in which he lives”.⁶⁵ Many proposed re-introductions also seem to contain elements of nationalistic nostalgia in their references to a glorious and distant environmental past, a rugged landscape inhabited by native predators and skilled indigenous human hunters.

Such concepts are captured in the English notion of the “Wildwood”, a term which the Royal Forestry Society of England links to the time prior to 4000 BC, when “much of Britain was covered in trees and [before] Neolithic peoples began the process of clearing” the land for agriculture.⁶⁶ The Wildwood Trust, based in Kent, runs a wildlife park that aims to “tell the story of the changing wildlife of a Kentish woodland over the last 1000 years” by recreating “an ancient woodland that dates back to the Domesday Book”.⁶⁷ It includes a strong focus on Saxon culture in the form of a reconstructed Saxon settlement and fort and occasional costumed re-enactments of farmers and craftsmen defending their families from raiding Viking warriors.⁶⁸ Ideally the “wild wood” would be home to large wild animals—boar, wolves, lynx, beaver, Konik horses and even “fierce Heck cattle, descendants of the extinct aurochs which roamed Britain”,⁶⁹ at the time of tough, salt-of-the-earth Saxon people.

The idea of restoring the “Wildwood” evokes the notion of return to a glorious national past through the re-introduction of extinct fauna. The “Wildwood” park itself houses a combination native, threatened and introduced species—along with replicas of “formerly native currently extinct species [...] which used to live [there] but were hunted to

⁶³ Ibid., 133.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 137.

⁶⁵ Vourc’h and Pelosse, “Du bestiaire au paysage”, 51–58.

⁶⁶ <http://www.rfs.org.uk/thirdlevel.asp?ThirdLevel=2&SecondLevel=1>, accessed 13 December 2007.

⁶⁷ Wildwood Trust, *Discover Wildwood*, 4–5.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 17.

extinction".⁷⁰ Wildwood clearly appeals to romantic visions of an ancient heritage, a heroic national past of hunting and living "close to the land", when "man and nature [were] in harmony".⁷¹ The guidebook exhorts the visitor to:

Think of the wild savannah of Africa with elephants, lions and wildebeest sweeping majestically across their plains, or the tiger stalking and antelope in the forests of India or Siberia. Wild, exotic and so far removed from us in Britain ... or are they? Britain was once like that before we systematically exterminated all the large animals that lived in the UK.⁷²

A strong sense of national pride runs through the "Wildwood" discourse. Of the lynx, the Wildwood authors write: "This magnificent 'European Tiger' existed in Britain until it was hunted to extinction during the middle ages[; it is] the most stunning [of] natural predators". The pine marten is described as "the most beautiful of all British mammals" and wolves "last seen in Britain in the 1700s [were] respected for their intelligence, hunting skills and strong family bonds".⁷³ Wild boar are presented as an integral part of a rich cultural heritage. The guidebook states in celebration of this "ancient" species that "[o]ur ancestors were used to wild boar roaming the forests of Britain and boar hunts were a great way to test warriors' courage".⁷⁴

The reintroduction of "once-native predators"⁷⁵ has particular currency in the Scottish Highlands where the landscape itself is still wild enough and open enough in places to potentially accommodate large animals. Fair explains in his article on the possibility of the "return of the natives" that "as a signatory to the European Habitats directive, the UK government is obliged to 'study the desirability of reintroducing species in Annex IV'⁷⁶ that are native to [its] territory".⁷⁷ He describes one land owner's controversial plans to "release wolves, bears and lynx (as well as

⁷⁰ Ibid, 5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 6.

⁷² Ibid., 21.

⁷³ Ibid., 29, 30, 36.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 50. Wild boar do have a presence in the Kentish landscape due to farm escapes. Goulding writes that these animals are reminders of a "wild" and "glorious" past, describing them as "fascinating beast[s], which have honoured us with [their] presence once again" (*Wild Boar in Britain*, 8).

⁷⁵ Fair, "Howling in the Highlands", 34.

⁷⁶ "Annex IV is a 20-page document listing all the plant and animal species deemed to be in need of strict protection" (Fair, "Howling in the Highlands", 37).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

elk and wild boar) onto a newly created [fenced] reserve” in the Scottish highlands—for tourism purposes as well as ecological trials—as reminiscent of the Jurassic park model, commenting on the challenges associated with “getting local people on side”.⁷⁸

Re-introductions are complicated and fraught with contestation—as Lawson⁷⁹ points out in the case of just two species, boar would take a liking to everyone’s carrots and sugar beet. Similarly, beavers would “destroy hundreds of years of drainage pretty quickly.” And the realities of inhabiting a landscape newly populated with hungry carnivores are clearly problematic.⁸⁰ In the UK setting, the indigenous status of re-introduced species is questionable in fact. In most instances animals would be of general European rather than specifically British genetic provenance—but their symbolic value as remnants of a romanticised past remains powerful, regardless of the ecological arguments put forward to support such programs. As Lawson reflects:

The absence of wild horses, beaver, boar and cattle from Britain means that major pieces of our natural heritage jigsaw are missing. Now in an effort to right that wrong, ecologists are considering introducing them for the benefit of wildlife and people alike.⁸¹

Clearly, the idea of reintroducing natives is much more than an issue of reconstructionist ecology; it simultaneously addresses potent meanings about what contemporary citizens think of their nation’s identity, in the past, the present, and the foreshadowed future.

Conclusion: Ecology, identity & the negotiation of nativeness

The cases presented in this paper seek to reflect on several questions related to environmental preferences in current times: What is natural, what is native, what is invasive, what is to be preferred? Having begun by acknowledging that “debate around invasive species needs careful handling

⁷⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁹ Lawson, “Back to the Future”, 71.

⁸⁰ Fair, “Howling in the Highlands”. There have been a number of successful reintroductions of birds of prey in parts of Britain, specifically Sea Eagles, Red Kites and Ospreys. These less dramatic species have elicited considerable debate in the localities where they were released. Significant disputes over animals that are likely to have an even greater cultural and ecological impact are inevitable.

⁸¹ Lawson, “Back to the Future”, 66.

for both ecological and social reasons”,⁸² we have broached the issue that a key driver of people’s attitudes towards certain animals (and plants) is linked to a sense of belonging in place. This complicates any strictly ecological understanding of what may be regarded as good or bad for environments.

The particular cases we have discussed reveal cultural patterns of talking and thinking about the significance of fauna for socio-cultural identities in three countries. We argue that issues of identity and associated senses of belonging greatly influence these views about which species “belong” in both nature and society. The material illustrates a contemporary contested politics of negotiation in relation to nativeness. In the UK, Australia and South Africa, we have depicted a range of assumptions and beliefs about invasive “alien” species, “native” animals that are regarded simultaneously as troublesome and iconic, and once present “indigenous” species that might be meaningfully reintroduced. We have endeavoured to show the inevitable links between what a society says belongs in its biophysical environments and public consciousness about the cultural identities of a nation’s citizens.

In our depiction of contesting sentiments about what we might term charismatic fauna, we raise the question of the efficacy of the scientific perspective of invasion biology on the matter of ecological belonging. While the ecological significance of local biodiversity is taken for granted in science, the implications of our work are that cultural issues are central to any adequate understanding of societal outcomes in environmental management. Attempts to change behaviour and/or thinking among residents of the settings we have discussed will require engagement with much more than a set of scientific findings.

We have pointed out a complex and ambivalent mix of assumptions and beliefs that are informed by general notions of what (and who) “belongs” in society. In both the post-settler countries of Australia and South Africa, and the British society that has sent colonising settlers to so many parts of the world, we find vigorous debates about nativeness in “nature” linked to key elements of imagined national identities. In our view, there is considerable conceptual slippage on this matter, such that a moral hierarchy of belonging is imposed on to a vision for particular biophysical ideals. Cultural analysis from Humanities disciplines such as anthropology thus contributes important insights to what may otherwise be seen as solely the domain of science.

⁸² Brook, “Making here like there”, 227.

References

- Allon, F., 2000, 'Nostalgia Unbound: Illegibility and the Synthetic Excess of Place', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 14(3). 275-287.
- Archer, M. & B. Beale, 2004, *Going Native: Living in the Australian Environment*, Hodder Headline Australia, Sydney.
- Brook, I. 2003 Making Here Like There: place attachment, displacement and the urge to garden. *Ethics, Place and Environment*. 6(3). 227-234.
- Brown, J.H. & D.F. Sax. 2004. An essay on some topics concerning invasive species. *Austral Ecology* 29. 530-6.
- Brown, J.H. & D.F. Sax. 2005. Biological invasions and scientific objectivity: reply to Cassey *et al.* *Austral Ecology* 30. 481-3.
- Buller, H. 2004 Where the wild things are: the evolving iconography of rural fauna. *Journal of Rural Studies* 20. 131-141.
- Cartwright, J. & Jordon, N. 2006 *Alien Invaders: a guide to non-native species in the British Isles*. Volume 1. Book Works. London.
- Cassey, P., T. Blackburn, R. Duncan & S. Chown 2005. Concerning invasive species: reply to Brown and Sax. *Austral Ecology* 30. 475-80.
- Comaroff J. & Comaroff, J. 2000 Naturing the nation: aliens, apocalypse, and the postcolonial state. *HAGAR: International Social Science Review* 1(1). 7-40.
- Fair, J. 2006 Howling in the Highlands. *BBC Wildlife*, 24(4). 34-37.
- Franklin, A., 2006. *Animal nation: the true story of animals and Australia*. Sydney, University of New South Wales Press.
- Gould, S. J., 1997. An evolutionary perspective on strengths, fallacies and confusions in the concept of native plants. In J. Wolschke-Bulmahn, ed. *Nature & Ideology: natural garden design in the twentieth century*, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library & Collection: Washington DC. 11-19.
- Goulding, M. 2003. *Wild Boar in Britain*. Whittet Books. Suffolk.
- Hage, G. 1998. *White nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society*. Pluto Press. Sydney.
- Holm, J. 1994. *Squirrels*. Whittet Books. Suffolk.
- Harris, S. 2006. The red has lost—so accept the grey. *BBC Wildlife*, 24(9). 36-39.
- Instone, L., 1998. The coyote's at the door: revisioning human-environment relations in the Australian context. *Ecumene* 5(4). 452-467.

- King, C. 1984. *Immigrant Killers: introduced predators and the conservation of birds in New Zealand*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- Lawson, T. 2004. Back to the Future. *BBC Wildlife* 22(10). 64-71.
- Marshall, A.J., 1966. On the Disadvantages of Wearing Fur. In Marshall, A.J. ed. *The Great Extermination: A guide to Anglo-Australian Cupidity, Wickedness and Waste*. Heinemann, Melbourne.
- Milton, K. 2000. Ducks out of Water: nature conservation as boundary maintenance in J. Knight, ed. *Natural Enemies: people-wildlife conflicts in anthropological perspective*. Routledge: London.
- . 2007. Possum magic, possum menace: wildlife control and the demonization of cuteness. Animals and Society Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart. July 3-7 2007.
- Morley, David. 2001. Belongings: place, space and identity in a mediated world. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. 4(4). 425-448.
- Morton, J. and N. Smith,. 1999. Planting Indigenous Species: A Subversion of Australian Eco-Nationalism. In K. Neuman, N. Thomas and H. Eriksen, eds. *Quicksands: Foundational histories in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand*. University of New South Wales Press, Sydney.
- O'Brien, W. 2006. Exotic invasions, nativism, and ecological restoration: on the persistence of a contentious debate. *Ethics, Place and Environment*, 9(1). 63-77.
- Parker, M., n.d. The cunning dingo. Paper presented at "Animals & Society Conference", University of Western Australia. July 12th-15th, 2005.
- Peace, A. 2002. The Cull of the Wild: dingoes, development and death in an Australian tourist location. *Anthropology Today* 18(5). 14-19
- Pechey, L.C. 2006. Problem Animals, Indigeneity and Land: the Chacma Baboon in South African writing. *Current Writing: text and reception in Southern Africa* 18(1). 42-60.
- Peretti, J. 1998. Nativism and Nature: rethinking biological invasion. *Environmental Values* 7. 183-192.
- Probyn, E., 1996. *Outside Belongings*. Routledge, London.
- Seddon, G. 2005. *The Old Country: Australian Landscapes, Plants and People*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.
- Smith, N. 1999. The howl and the pussy: feral cats and wild dogs in the Australian imagination. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 10 (3), 288-305.
- . 2000. *Nature, native and nation in the Australian imaginary*. PhD thesis, School of Sociology, La Trobe University.

- Tait, M. 2005. Grey Area. *The Ecologist* April. 25.
- Taylor, S. G. 1990. Naturalness: the concept and its application to Australian ecosystems. *Proceedings of the Ecological Society of Australia* 16. 411-418.
- Tew, T and N. Benvie. 1997 *Red Squirrels*. Colin Baxter: Moray.
- Tuan, Y. 1990. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Vourc'h, A. and Pelosse, V. 1993. Du bestiaire au paysage. *Etudes Rurales* 129-130. 51-58.
- Wildwood Trust (n.d.). *Discover Wildwood*. Herne Bay: Kent.