



Feminist Animal and Multispecies Studies

Critical Perspectives on Food and Eating

Edited by

Kadri Aavik, Kuura Irni, Milla-Maria Joki



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Kadri Aavik, Kuura Irni and Milla-Maria Joki

December 23, 2022

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Introduction: Critical Feminist Animal and Multispecies Studies

Kuura Irni, Kadri Aavik and Milla-Maria Joki

This book contributes to developing feminist perspectives on multispecies relations with a focus on food, food systems, and eating practices. The term “critical feminist animal and multispecies studies” reflects the areas of scholarship that we primarily draw on: critical animal studies, feminist studies, and multispecies studies. “Multispecies” refers to attending to the ways in which “[a]ll living beings emerge from and make their lives within multispecies communities” which are variably layered with “[h]istories of gender and race, of political economy and colonization” (van Dooren et al. 2016, 2, 15). “Critical,” for us, entails a variety of approaches that question the ways in which people, other animals, and ecological systems become exploited within current food systems, in particular as a result of capitalist, colonialist, extractivist, and anthropocentric endeavours, including unequal social relations. The book focuses on developing such critical feminist multispecies studies. The chapters draw on several broad, overlapping, and many-faceted strands of feminist thought, including ecofeminisms, feminist science studies, and new materialist, decolonial, race-critical, and Indigenous feminisms.

While on the one hand, we are inspired by contemporary feminist work, on the other hand, we draw inspiration from critical animal studies. Since its conception, critical animal studies, largely inspired by ecofeminist work, has attempted to be sensitive to feminist concerns and intersectional justice (Best et al. 2007; on intersectionality in critical animal studies, see also Matsuoka and Sorenson 2018, 4). From a critical animal studies perspective, tackling the exploitation of other animals on a mass scale and the grave consequences of this for nonhuman animals, human individuals, groups, and communities (in particular, those that are marginalised and vulnerable), as well as for the planet’s ecosystems, urgently requires a critical and engaged inquiry. Yet, not all contemporary work in critical animal studies has explicitly feminist and intersectional orientations or theoretical bases, despite the field’s original commitments to seeing and challenging oppressions as interlinked (Best et al. 2007).

A central goal of this book is to draw ecofeminism and current mainstream feminist theorisation closer to each other. Ecofeminism and other critical perspectives of Western animal agriculture and other animal exploitation have

been largely neglected within contemporary mainstream feminist theory, and we consider it important to find ways to integrate ecofeminist critique into contemporary feminism, while also modifying some of the conceptualisations and approaches that need rethinking in ecofeminism, for example, from the perspective of current transfeminist scholarship.¹ In this sense, we also attempt to broaden the understanding of feminism and feminist perspectives within critical animal studies.

Important sources of inspiration for the feminist animal and multispecies studies we promote, therefore, consist of queer and trans studies scholarship. For the animal and multispecies feminist studies we would like to see in the future, it is important to conduct research and activism in ways that are sensitive to the many-faceted phenomena related to sexuality and gender. This includes conducting studies in trans-inclusive ways,² as well as integrating Indigenous and decolonial critiques of the settler colonial imposition of binary gender systems, heterosexual norms, and nuclear families and connecting these issues to the privatisation and ownership of land (Miranda 2010; Rifkin 2011; TallBear 2020). One of the aims of this book is to highlight the richness of approaches and perspectives within feminist studies and feminist activism which can inspire critical feminist takes on animal studies, veganism, and activism. By introducing these perspectives, we seek to broaden the conceptual base of critical animal studies and animal activism, which have typically relied on rather narrow and masculinised understandings of activism.

The fields of study we are inspired by in developing critical feminist animal and multispecies studies include elements that are in tension with one another. Scholarly work in multispecies studies, environmental humanities, and feminist science studies, on which multispecies studies builds, typically focuses on the interaction or co-constitution of various species (for example, humans, other animals, and other life forms, including plants and fungi) and

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- 1 Vegan ecofeminist scholars (e.g., Adams 1990; Adams and Gruen 2014, 2022; Donovan 1990; Donovan 2006; Gaard 2002) have proposed links between the analyses of gender and species. Later ecofeminist and other critical works have complicated and problematised these analyses by, for example, questioning the approaches to gender and nature used by some of these ecofeminist classics and integrating race into the analysis. For more on this, as well as on rethinking ecofeminist work from transfeminist perspectives, see, in particular, Chapters 7 and 8 by Irni and Karhu. For attending to queer analysis in ecofeminist work, see Gaard 1997.
 - 2 See, for example, Giffney and Hird 2008; Irni 2020; Luciano and Chen 2015; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010; Muñoz et al. 2015; Steinbock, Szczygielska, and Wagner 2021; TallBear 2018.

ecosystems.³ Yet, this scholarship does not always take an explicit critical position on the exploitation of other animals for human purposes.⁴ Critical animal studies, on the other hand, explicitly denounces the exploitation of sentient nonhuman animals.⁵ Our approach seeks to combine the strengths of these fields: relationality and attention to ecological and other contexts from multispecies studies and engaged and political scholarship that explicitly challenges the exploitation of nonhuman animals from critical animal studies. The critical feminist animal and multispecies studies we seek to develop combines a strong grounding in feminist theorising and politics with a political and activist commitment to dismantle the exploitation of both animals and people. At the same time, it seeks to develop scholarship that assesses the ways in which race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability shape, and are shaped by, conceptualisations of species. Our goal in this introduction is not to offer a conclusive or fixed definition or a comprehensive overview of critical feminist animal and multispecies studies, but rather to sketch what we consider some key elements of this field of study, emphasising the diversity of ideas and conceptual traditions upon which this area of research is built. In the following, we explicate the starting points that variously inspire our approach to critical feminist animal and multispecies studies.

1 Interconnections, Co-Constitution, and Critical Relationality

Critical feminist animal and multispecies studies incorporates the insight from feminist theory that categories such as gender, race, and species are open to change, even though they seem extremely persistent. As sociologist Joanna Latimer (2013) has noted, inspired by, for example, the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, dominant Euro-American metaphysical thought that includes a particular mode of comparison has produced the idea of human exceptionalism. This *comparison* works by producing hierarchies and a negative or denigrated view of the Other. Seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes, and countless thinkers after him, have attempted to identify the part of “human” that would separate humans from other animals. In

3 See, for example, Haraway 2015; Hustak and Myers 2012; Kirksey 2014; Stengers 2005; Tsing 2015; van Dooren et al. 2016.

4 For critical discussion on posthumanism from critical animal studies perspectives, see Donovan 2018; Giraud 2019; Pedersen 2011; Weisberg 2009.

5 For one attempt to approach these contradictory issues, see Chapter 10 by Irmi on cat food in this book.

the dominant Euro-American thought, the idea of a “human” has been constructed as profoundly racialised and gendered, as a number of ecofeminist, critical race, and disability scholars have noted (e.g., Jackson 2013, 2020; Ko and Ko 2017; Taylor 2017; Wynter 2003). Additionally, it has been built on various negative comparisons with other animals, including controlling and despising “animal-like” behaviour in order to be counted as “fully human” (Latimer 2013). In addition to the centrality of how “animals” are conceptualised in contrast to “humans” in Euro-American thought, critical animal studies scholars drawing on Marxist thought have argued that speciesism and anthropocentrism⁶ are not just manifestations of Western ideas about nonhuman animals but also a materialist “mode of production” (Sanbonmatsu 2014, 31; see also Nibert 2002). In other words, human societies depend on the use of animal bodies which function as commodities in the capitalist system (Sanbonmatsu 2014, 31).

Feminist and other scholars have accounted for this Euro-American mode of thinking in various ways, and continue to theorise and make visible the tasks at stake in the present for reworking this dominant perspective. For example, new materialist feminists have attempted to transform the ways in which difference is understood in dominant Euro-American traditions, from a hierarchical, negative difference towards a more “positive” focus on a myriad of differences (e.g., Braidotti 2002, Grosz 2011). Indigenous scholars have, however, reminded new materialists and science studies scholars of Indigenous worldviews that all along have provided alternatives to Euro-American settler colonial metaphysics and the hierarchical differentiation of “humans” from nature and “animals” (TallBear 2017; Todd 2015).

Relationality and co-constitution can be regarded as conditions of existence, for example, via the notion of companion species (Haraway 2008). As Donna Haraway notes, a majority of cells in human bodies “are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm,” and in this sense, we “become ... adult human being[s] in company with these tiny messmates. To be one is always to *become with many*” (Haraway 2008, 3–4, emphasis in original). In this sense, “humans” are not ontologically distinct beings but material living processes that become

6 While the concepts of anthropocentrism and speciesism overlap in many ways, they also entail important differences. Anthropocentrism is a particular kind of speciesist bias in which human beings are regarded as superior to nonhuman animals, while speciesism could also involve assigning a higher value to some animals over others, for instance, to cats and dogs over pigs and rats (see Faria and Paez 2014; see also Sanbonmatsu 2014 for a discussion of speciesism).

with other forms of life. Analyses of relationality have also attended to environmental questions and Indigenous ways of life, analysing how Western and Indigenous cosmologies have differing consequences for more-than-human relationality (Escobar 2016; Zahara and Hird 2015). Transgender and other feminist scholars have also formulated a variety of approaches and concepts, such as “trans-corporeality” (Alaimo 2014), “trans*life” (Hayward and Weinstein 2015), and “interdependent ecological transsex” (Kier 2013), in order to assess material flows within and across bodies and environments. All these approaches effectively replace the understanding of individuated bodies existing *in* environments and call for politics and activism that recognise this co-constitution of humans within more-than-human worlds.

Within the feminist animal and multispecies studies we promote, a focus on this co-constitution includes a critical analysis of what more-than-human relationality means in an ethical sense (see also Pedersen 2011; Weisberg 2009). In line with the key tenets of critical animal studies and ecofeminisms, theorising multispecies relations or relational ontologies, for us, does not only involve the intellectual work of discussing interesting relationalities and co-constitutions but also the practical goal of improving the lives of people and other animals and more-than-human life through our scholarship. In line with epistemological and ethical commitments in feminist and critical animal studies work, this means that we support the dual position of scholar-activist/activist-scholar. Thus, though relationality is our ontological condition on a very bodily level, it is still relevant to critically discuss the ways in which relations are actively built and maintained, as well as to assess the violence involved in these relations.

Pointing to the problems of studying “relationalities” or “entanglements” without a critical perspective in Western contexts, critical animal studies scholar Helena Pedersen (2019, 8) has aptly noted that animals’ “‘entanglement’ with us usually means more dependence, more oppression, and more exposure to human-induced violence.” Attending to these problematics, it has been suggested that human-animal relations, even those that seem politically acceptable to the majority, are sometimes based on constitutive exclusions that need to be recognised and politicised (Giraud 2019, 171–82). Constitutive exclusions mean, on the one hand, questions related to who is excluded from or included in ethical considerations or political deliberation. For example, critical animal studies scholars who have engaged with political theory have criticised the constitutive exclusion of nonhuman animals from the sphere of the political because of their assumed inability to speak. Simultaneously, they have argued that, in fact, nonhuman animals do speak if their species-specific ways of communication are accounted for, and thus, nonhuman animals can

be viewed as political actors capable of expressing their needs if humans learn to listen (Meijer 2019). On the other hand, relations being based on constitutive exclusions means, for example, that “something constitutive”—such as breeding and conditioning—“plays a role in actively materializing particular ways of being,” which then enables certain animal-human relations to occur without animal resistance (Giraud 2019, 129, 175). An example is laboratory beagles who are bred, trained, and conditioned (disruptive animals are culled), after which these animals’ “lack of objection” is interpreted as proof that they are content in the situation (Giraud 2019, 128–32). In this sense, resistance can be constitutively excluded from particular human-animal relations.

Thinking through relationality, critical animal scholars have also emphasised the ethical potential of refraining from relations with other animals (MacCormack 2012; Pedersen 2019). For such purposes, relationality has been explored as not having to be tangible or proximal but “being alongside” (Latimer 2013). Relationality has also been theorised as attention that refrains from interference (Aaltola 2019) and that recognises the vulnerability of living bodies across species (Pick 2011). Scholars have also explored ethical ways of handling situations in which particular relations are unwanted from the human side. Franklin Ginn (2014), for example, provides an example of constructive intervention in a situation in which gardeners, slugs, and plants cannot thrive in the same location. Ginn found that instead of killing slugs, gardeners were willing to find other ways of keeping slugs at bay. As Eva Giraud concludes: “Ethical connection with slugs [...] was negotiated not through attachment but through finding alternative ways to detach slugs from gardens. [...] The desire for nonrelation [...] elucidates the inevitability of exclusion, then, but also its ethical potential” (2019, 10). Animal philosopher Elisa Aaltola, in turn, has found inspiration in the work of Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch and argues for the importance of letting go as a method of building ethical relations. This includes “forsaking of the subject–object distinction, within which we name ourselves as subjects and the surrounding world as objects to be utilized, and which thereby rests on the assumption that others are instruments for our own benefit” (Aaltola 2019, 199). Instead, Aaltola inspires feminist animal and multispecies studies by developing the notion of “letting be” that is “significant, as we are to leave others as they are, without agendas, expectations or demands” (2019, 199).

It is not possible to wholly detach oneself from being “in relation” within more-than-human worlds, as all societal life-enabling practices, including eating, housing, traffic, and energy use, have, in one way or another, effects on animal habitats and more-than-human life. However, alongside other critical scholars, we believe that various alternatives exist for approaching relationality

critically and changing violent practices to more resilient cohabitation and coexistence. Visioning and acting out these alternatives is an important task for critical animal and multispecies studies feminisms.

2 Intersectional and Contextually Sensitive Approaches

Postcolonial and critical race studies scholars have analysed the connections between animalisation and racialisation in defining the boundaries of the “human” (e.g., Chen 2012; Jackson 2013, 2020). Because of these connections, an analysis of the difference-making and relationality between humans and other animals must assess the co-constitution of race, gender, and species. The many-faceted ways in which animalisation, racialisation, gendering, and sexualisation intersect with the maintenance of animal/human hierarchies also pertains to the ways in which intersectionality is understood. Although this book argues for a serious assessment and critique of animal exploitation and a rethinking of multispecies relations, the question of intersectionality does not, for us, only indicate “bringing animals—or other species—in” as yet additional categories of analysis. While intersectionality is a key element of the critical feminist animal and multispecies studies we promote, we acknowledge the complexities and dilemmas involved in its definition and application, as conceptualisations of intersectionality differ and can be at odds with one another. For example, debates include whether uses of intersectionality should follow the idea, developed by Black feminist and critical race scholars in the US (Crenshaw 1989, see also Collins and Bilge 2020), in which the focus is on marginalisation through categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality and which fundamentally includes anti-racist politics in the analysis, or whether intersectionality could be a tool to analyse the intersections of any power relations, including those of privileged positions (Lykke 2003; Nash 2016). It has been suggested that the approach that focuses on any “intersections” can easily become apolitical and problematic, as it may, for example, silence the critique of racism.⁷

Contextual sensitivity is an important aspect of what we understand as intersectionally relevant analysis. From a critical feminist animal and multispecies perspective, it is crucial to always examine human-animal relations in context (Gibson 2019, 1; Gruen and Weil 2012, 493). This means both building theoretical approaches in relation to various geographical and societal contexts and

⁷ See, for example, Bilge 2013; De los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2003; Nash 2016; see also reflections on her previous work by Lykke 2020.

recognising that theories of animal exploitation and the political and activist practices that can change them cannot be universal. A generalised politics that focuses only on animal exploitation or nature conservation without seriously assessing, for example, poverty, colonialism, or other exploitation of people, does not belong to the strategies of critical multispecies feminisms.

Contextual sensitivity entails, for example, drawing from feminist decolonial and race-critical approaches in the analysis of animal exploitation and nature conservation (Deckha 2012; Kim 2015). A contextual assessment needs to account for the ways in which state policies, international politics, and economic actors, such as settler-colonial governmentality or multinational corporations, may have violently contributed to the conditions which call attention to animal exploitation. Proper assessment of the context at hand calls for attendance to struggles related to people's livelihoods and cultural existence, which may already be distorted by colonialism. Nature conservation or animal advocacy efforts may otherwise become enacted in accordance with the historical baggage of colonialist endeavours, an enactment of coloniality in the present rather than successful conservation practices.⁸ Contextual sensitivity, in other words, calls for combining animal advocacy and nature conservation with anti-racist and decolonial struggles.

Likewise, integrating an intersectional approach entails a critical analysis of how colonial and racialised thought is imbued in what is culturally recognised as "cruelty" towards animals (Deckha 2012). For example, White Western commentators problematising eating dogs in other countries as cruel but eating pigs in their own country indicates a problematic, racialised definition of "cruelty." It is also important to note that imposing a food system based on intensive animal agriculture has been a constitutive aspect of colonialism. When focusing on food, this has been specifically called dietary colonialism or Western food imperialism, which needs to be questioned as part of the critique of Western intensive animal agriculture (Chu 2019; Deckha 2012). Crucially, nonhuman animal oppression cannot be properly contested without critical resistance to the capitalist and colonial systems of power, as these structural relations of violence support and reinforce one another (Belcourt 2020; Chang 2020).

8 For nature conservation efforts that failed to avoid becoming part of a colonial history and present, and resistance to these practices, see, for example, Kuokkanen 2020. For elaboration on the importance and practices of considering animal advocacy and nature conservation efforts together with critical analysis of race and decolonial analysis, see, for example, Agarwal 1992; Deckha 2012; Kim 2015; Sturgeon 1997; van Dooren 2019; Weaver 2021.

3 Critical Assessment of Conceptualisations of “Human” and “Animal”

A paradox exists in the tradition of Western scientific thought: The category “animal” includes “humans” as animals, in the category of “primates,” while Western science has also put a considerable amount of energy toward trying to distinguish its particular construction of “the human”—that has first and foremost included affluent Western White men—as exceptional and fundamentally different from “the animal.” The category of “animal,” in turn, has historically included black(ened) people (Jackson 2020). We recognise that because of this, various terms used in this book, such as “human-animal relations,” “animals,” “nonhuman animals,” or “other animals,” understood as other-than-humans, are all problematic in the sense that they all perpetuate the assumptions of the exceptionality of “humans” as a species in contrast to all other animals, while not being able to capture the dehumanising and animalising practices and meaning-making that historically constitute the very category of “human.” The term “more-than-human” does not do much better, as it centres the “human” while all other animals, plants, matters, and agents appear as if mere additions to humanity, “more-than” effacing differences between, for example, sentient animals and non-sentient matters. As a number of feminist, critical race studies, disability studies, and other scholars have pointed out, “the human” is not an innocent or merely descriptive category of a “species,” but constructions of animality and humanity are saturated by meanings related to race, gender, sexuality, and ability (see, for example, Bryld and Lykke 2000, 33; Chen 2012; Haraway, 1989; Hayward and Weinstein 2015; Jackson 2013, 2020; Ko and Ko 2017; Taylor 2017; Deckha 2012). This means that when discussing or analysing “human-animal relations” or “multispecies” relations, it is important to not take the category “human” for granted but to critically examine it, as this category is already racialised, gendered, animalised, and imbued with other categories of difference and oppression. When we use any of these terms in the book, lacking non-problematic alternatives, we attempt to be sensitive to the question of who counts as “human” and who is animalised and dehumanised, and to what hierarchies, exploitative practices, and power relations these distinctions perpetuate. When analysing multispecies or “human-animal” relations, central questions to ask include which humans and in what contexts relate to which animals, which power relations are at work in these contexts, and how do these power relations define the very categories of human and animal?⁹

9 As Steinbock, Szczygielska and Wagner (2017, 4) ask: “Who can claim unproblematically their nearness to the animal, and who is positioned there? Who can theorize the non-human without mentioning the racializing and gendering assemblages at work?”

4 Care, Emotions, and Dependency in the Complex Web of Multispecies Entanglements

Drawing from ecofeminisms, critical animal and multispecies studies includes a feminist commitment to cultivate an ethics of care towards nonhuman others, to develop interspecies care and solidarity (Fraser and Taylor 2018), and adhere to “reflexivity, responsibility, and engagement with the experiences of other animals” (Gruen and Weil 2012, 493). Care has long occupied feminist scholars from numerous perspectives and is considered one of the prominent key concepts of feminist research and theory (see, for example, Hughes 2002, 106–29, as well as Donovan 2006; Gilligan 2003/1982; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Feminist approaches to care offer fruitful opportunities for analysing relations with nonhuman animals. The conceptualisation of care that feminist animal and multispecies studies strives to pursue is informed by contextual and intersectional considerations of complex caring practices. Donna Haraway’s (2016) suggestion to “stay with the trouble” aptly captures the impossibility of universal moral truths and attests to the imperative of ongoing and infinite redefinitions of care in the process of advocating for more liveable futures for various life forms¹⁰ on Earth.

Crucially, the focus on care that ecofeminisms have advocated for differs from rights theories and rule-based principles that accentuate the role of rationality and dismiss the relevance of emotions such as empathy. In line with feminist and critical interventions to such philosophies, critical feminist animal and multispecies studies takes seriously the role of the cultural politics of emotion in negotiations and constructions of care (see, for example, Aaltola 2018; Ahmed 2014/2004; Giraud 2019). In fact, in a time of self-centred neoliberal capitalism and environmental degradation, care entails radical potential for political resistance, mutual aid, and solidarity.

However, as disability scholar Sunaura Taylor points out, “feminist theory has devoted much attention to what it means to care, [but] less has been said about what it means to be *cared for*” (Taylor 2017, 205). A disability perspective assists in articulating the power imbalances inherent in caring relations and the potential to—deliberately or unintentionally—overstep boundaries and abuse one’s position of power. This concerns any caring relations across ability, species, and other axes of power.¹¹ However, a focus on disability is also helpful

10 In addition to life forms, a sustainable vision for a multispecies future also advocates for organisms and environments such as ecosystems, oceans, habitats, and so forth.

11 For a discussion on links between disability and animality, see also Jenkins, Struthers Montford and Taylor 2020.

in taking a critical stance towards the deprecation of dependency as a pitiable state of being.¹² Caring is not a one-way activity but a complex web of relations that incorporates all beings. A critical multispecies perspective recognises that not only is the survival of the human species dependent on the Earth's biodiversity and its vulnerable balances, but also that massive paradigm changes are needed, especially in the affluent West, to alleviate biodiversity loss and climate crisis. These concerns are heightened by the sluggish attitude of major powers, such as the United States and the European Union, toward climate action at a time when countries in the Global South and Indigenous populations are already witnessing devastating climate effects, and the sixth mass extinction is causing immense biodiversity loss.

5 Critically Assessing Assumptions Related to the Social, the Biological, and the Natural

Within feminist, sociological, and other kinds of scholarship, critical attention has been paid to how the very sphere of “the social” has been defined and separated from “the biological.” For example, critical animal scholar and sociologist Salla Tuomivaara (2019) has explored how the social came to be defined in the formation of sociology as a discipline by excluding other animals from the sphere of the social (see also Khazaal 2021, 25–6). Rethinking the social has implications for perspectives that discuss social constructionism and that assume that the social is malleable, while the sphere of the biological or material remains deterministic and stable.

As an alternative to the understanding of matter as stable and static, feminists inspired by various theoretical approaches, such as quantum physics or philosophy by Gilles Deleuze or Baruch Spinoza, focus on ontology by questioning the stability of biological and other matter, instead approaching matter as “intra-active” (Barad 2007) or “vibrant” (Bennett 2010). Feminists have also challenged the biological/social distinction, which was imbued in the sex/gender distinction for several decades. This problematisation has included, for example, philosophical and science studies work that has made redundant the sex/gender distinction by questioning the ways in which bodies are materialised by culturally assigning “sex” to particular organs and molecules and how

12 Such deprecation is demonstrated by, for example, ableist rationalisations that consider disability as something that should be eradicated or cured at all costs and the fetishisation of wild animals over domestic animals who are dependent of human care (see, e.g., Kafer 2013, 25–46; Taylor 2017, 212, 215).

these assignments and understandings of “sex” have changed historically (e.g., Butler 1993; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Irmi 2016; Oudshoorn 1994), sociological work that sees relevance in focusing on the sex/gender distinction by theorising the many possible interrelations of these terms (Hearn and Collinson 2018), and work that has analysed bodily and biological mattering as active processes, the theorisation of which does not require reproduction of the sex/gender distinction (for example, Barad 1998; Haraway 2016; Hayward and Weinstein 2015; Hird 2013; Irmi 2013; Kier 2013; M’charek 2010).

Yet another way to critically approach the biological/social distinction is to question the assumption of the malleability of (only) the social, instead acknowledging other animals as social actors. For example, bringing the analysis towards critical study of animals, biologist Lynda Birke has noted critically that the “flexibility implied by social constructionism extends only to human behavior,” while other animals are assumed to be “hard-wired” and “instinctively adapted to their environment” (2002, 430–1). Birke has also suggested that “animals learn to perform a role emerging from their relationships with people,” such as the role of a “companion animal” (Birke 2002, 431–2).

With queer theoretical insight, regarding other animals as active agents includes questioning heteronormative scientific accounts that tend to define “sex” through the normative lens of heterosexuality and reproduction. One example consists of a discussion about unproductive sex in other animals’ behaviour.¹³ Such observations problematise the ways in which normative accounts of gender and sexuality have affected existing science. These observations are also attempts to account for the variable ways in which “sex,” “gender,” and “sexuality” can be assessed in nature and animal behaviour (e.g., Ah-King 2013; Alaimo 2010; Hird 2013; Roughgarden 2005). In addition, these approaches complicate the human-animal distinction from the perspective of the agency of other animals (including sexual agency), whereby the understanding of “animality explodes the universalizing category of nature as homogeneous and predictable” (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 39).

Additionally, these discussions relate to problematising a range of arguments about “the natural.” For example, they challenge pick-and-choose descriptions of certain nonhuman animal behaviours in order to define

13 For example, science studies scholar Donna Haraway notes, when observing two dogs play in a particular situation: “None of their sexual play has anything to do with remotely functional heterosexual mating behavior—no efforts of Willem to mount, no presenting of an attractive female backside, not much genital sniffing, no whining and pacing, none of all that “reproductive” stuff. No, here we have pure polymorphous perversity [...]” (Haraway 2008, 193).

“natural” behaviour in a very particular way, and they problematise the ways in which such definitions of the natural are used to question a variety of sexualities and genders of humans that do not fit in the Western normative tradition of thought (e.g., Hird 2008; Willey 2016). When assessing “nature,” it is important to note that the notion of “the natural” has historically been connected to scientific racism and colonialism and that suppression of the varieties of sexualities and genders has been part of the processes of colonisation of land and people (Finley 2011; Miranda 2013; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010; Rifkin 2011; Tallbear 2018).

Moreover, critical multispecies feminist analysis attends critically to the ways in which the notion of the “natural” has been separated from “technology” and then utilised in trans hostile argumentation (for a critical assessment, see Hird 2008; Stone 2014; Irni, Chapter 7 in this book). Such argumentation is problematic not only for its trans hostility but also because it simplifies the nature/technology nexus and assumes that technology is the “property” of humans. This kind of thinking ignores the variable ways in which some advanced technologies were first at work in nature, which then inspired human technological advancements (Hird 2008; see also Barad 2014). The critical feminist multispecies analysis we wish to develop, in other words, recognises and critically assesses the many-faceted politics related to the intertwining of gender, sexuality, and race in defining, researching, and invoking the social and the biological, animals, nature, and technology.

6 Critical Perspectives on Food Production within Capitalism

This volume focuses on food and eating because by far the largest number of nonhuman animal individuals are exploited and killed for human food. Around 75 billion land animals are killed for human food annually (Chemnitz and Becheva 2021).¹⁴ Eating nonhuman animals remains one of the most normalised everyday practices, particularly in Western countries, and thus is one of the most difficult aspects of nonhuman animal use to challenge.¹⁵

14 In comparison, 192.1 million animals were estimated to have been used for scientific purposes worldwide in 2015 (Taylor and Alvarez 2020).

15 The research project “Climate Sustainability in the Kitchen” attempted to challenge animal-based food practices at the individual and institutional levels in Finland. We created an open-access recipe bank consisting of plant-based, nutritious and climate-sustainable main course meals for local food services, available at ilmastoruoka.fi. In the Finnish context, such food services offer employee-supported workplace lunches, subsidised lunches for students in various educational institutions, and free meals at schools.

The consumption of nonhuman animals for human food takes place within the global capitalist system which relies on and reproduces unequal global power relations established through colonialism (see Harvey 2004, 74). Because of the significance of global capitalism in the ecological crisis, the “Capitalocene” has been proposed as an alternative concept to the Anthropocene (Moore 2014). Capitalist institutions, such as the animal-industrial complex (Noske 1989; Twine 2012), which are dominated by elite Western White men,¹⁶ subdue alternative (e.g., Indigenous) modes of production and consumption (Harvey 2004, 74). This system assumes and reproduces inequalities and exploitation of both variously positioned humans and various species of animals. Those suffering the most under capitalism tend to be marginalised simultaneously through categories such as race, class, and ability (Wrenn 2017, 222; see also Nibert 2017).

Capitalist consumption of other animals is endorsed by social institutions and enforced through governments, as well as by the medical, health, and dietary establishment, including via the national dietary guidelines of many countries (Aavik 2017; Bertron, Barnard, and Mills 1999, 201; Stănescu 2018). Links between eating animals and constructions of Western masculinity, in particular, have been widely theorised and empirically established: eating meat remains culturally coded in the West as a masculine practice, with meat-eating men perceived as more masculine than vegetarian (Ruby and Heine 2011) and vegan men (Thomas 2016).

Ecofeminists have been critical not only of the killing of animals for food but also of the ways in which other animals’ reproductive capacities, such as childbirth and lactation, have been exploited in the food industry (Adams 1990; Cudworth 2011). Simultaneously, the practices of parenting of nonhuman animals have been erased (Wrenn 2017, 213). However, the ecofeminist focus on defining “female” or “women’s” bodies through reproduction can be seen as essentialist. Alternative, trans-inclusive approaches to ecofeminist milk studies and accounts of reproduction that do not maintain the women-female-reproduction-pregnancy nexus as an essentialist truth have, however, also been developed (e.g., see Karhu, Chapter 8 in this book; Lehtikoinen 2020). Approaches drawing from multispecies perspectives and postcapitalist

As approximately one-third of Finns eat daily lunches produced by food services, providing practical tools for moving towards plant-based eating, in the form of recipe planning and campaigning for the inclusion of plant-based meals in food services offers potential for transforming the local meat-based food culture (Kupsala et al. 2021).

16 For more detail on the links between animal oppression and capitalism, see Nibert 2017; Sanbonmatsu 2017.

approaches can also problematise the all-encompassing power of capitalist oppression and focus on how human-shaped landscapes may in some cases bring multispecies opportunities for survival and hope (Tsing 2014, 2015; see also Hyvärinen 2020). Decolonial feminist work, in addition, builds resistance to the colonial and capitalist food system while foregrounding alternative, local, and sustainable food practices (Rosendo, Oliveira, and Kuhnen, Chapter 11 in this book.)

7 A Contextually Sensitive Endorsement of Veganism

A central aim of the approach to multispecies analysis that this book promotes is to contribute through research to the flourishing of nonhuman lives and nonexploitative multispecies relationships. This involves challenging the status of other animals as objects of human consumption. Thus, veganism is an important subject matter for our analysis, particularly for scholarship that is concerned with food and eating, such as that featured in this book. From a feminist perspective, however, a critical approach to capitalism should also be applied to veganism, which can become a niche form of capitalist consumption. If veganism is endorsed first and foremost as a form of consumption, such endorsement can contribute to greenwashing capitalism and, in this way, can support rather than challenge inequalities (Fegitz and Pirani 2018). Multispecies feminist scholarship needs to take a critical stance towards the racism, maintenance of White privilege, and support of the colonial food system involved in activism that promotes veganism (e.g., Harper 2010b; Polish 2016; Rosendo, Oliveira, and Kuhnen, Chapter 11 in this book). Importantly, promoting veganism or plant-based eating should not be understood as a universal and decontextualised aim. We draw on ecofeminist, critical race, Indigenous, and other critical perspectives calling for veganism that is contextually sensitive.¹⁷ In advocating for a nonspeciesist decolonial food ontology, Struthers Montford and Taylor (2020), however, argue against a fundamental distinction between contextual veganism (advocated by, for example, Curtin 2005; Plumwood 2000), and ontological veganism, suggesting that all ontologies are political and contextual.¹⁸ They call for an alternative food ontology

17 See, for example, Curtin 1991; Gaard 2011; for a discussion on vegan universalism, see Twine 2014.

18 Food ontologies refer to (taken-for-granted) ideas and assertions about humans, nonhuman animals, and food (Struthers Montford and Taylor 2020, 135). Drawing on the work of Foucauldian philosopher Johanna Oksala, Struthers Montford and Taylor (2020) argue

that “would consider the logics of domination—rooted in humanist, ableist, White supremacist heteropatriarchy—that are produced through the consumption of nonhumans in contemporary societies” (Struthers Montford and Taylor 2020, 147–8). Taking into account the logics of domination entails careful consideration of historical and structural reasons, among others, as to why it may be more difficult for various disadvantaged groups and individuals (e.g., racialised, colonised, working class) to embrace veganism.

One of the most frequently used definitions of veganism is that provided by the Vegan Society, which conceptualises veganism as “a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose” (The Vegan Society, n.d.). Scholarly discourses and activist practices from a variety of perspectives have, however, complicated this seemingly straightforward definition, and debates on ways to understand veganism continue (for a discussion on definitions of veganism, see, for example, Linzey and Linzey 2018, 1–4). For instance, veganism has been understood as an identity (Greenebaum 2015; Stephens Griffin 2017), as a form of ethical consumerism (Beck and Ladwig 2021), as a practice that challenges exploitative human-animal relations, and as a form of political protest (Taylor and Twine 2014). In some recent discussions, veganism has been studied in relation to environmental issues, in particular as a strategy to combat climate change (Kemmerer 2014; Kupsala et al. 2021; von Mossner 2021). Debates are ongoing regarding what elements should be included in definitions of veganism and how widely the concept should be expanded. Dutkiewicz and Dickstein (2021) argue for a more basic, practice-based definition of veganism, meaning the practice of abstaining from the use of animal products in one’s daily life, and the exclusion of political and ethical elements from the definition. These multiple ways of examining veganism challenge thinking of veganism in one unambiguous way and in a decontextualised manner.

Although still a marginal topic in most mainstream feminist academic work, the philosophy and practice of veganism has been a key topic of discussion in vegan ecofeminist work (see, for example, Adams 1990; Adams and Gruen 2014) and in critical animal studies rooted in ecofeminism (see Taylor and Twine 2014; Nocella et al. 2014). In these critical fields, it has been examined from different angles as part of a larger project of challenging animal

that “ontologies are not given, but rather something we make and remake” (133). Thus, “[a]nimals, including human animals, are beings whom we may ontologize as edible, and this is an ethical and political decision, not an objective description of a fundamental reality” (Struthers Montford and Taylor 2020, 133).

exploitation. It also is the central subject of the new emerging discipline of vegan studies, which focuses on the meanings of veganism in culture and society (see Wright 2015, 2021). Vegan studies take a pro-vegan and pro-animal stance as well as make use of feminist perspectives. Yet, predominantly, the vegan subjects remain implicitly Western, White, and otherwise privileged.

Particularly in recent years, food consumption, food systems, eating non-human animals, and veganism have received attention from scholars who have examined these structures and processes from race-critical, decolonial, and Indigenous perspectives (for example, Bailey 2007; Chu 2019; Deckha 2020; Giraud 2013; Harper 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012; Ko and Ko 2017; Polish 2016; Robinson 2013, 2018; Wright 2015). This work views the consumption of other animals and people's ability to challenge it as interlinked with various oppressions within human societies. It questions White privilege and racism in contemporary vegan and animal advocacy movements, critically examines implicitly White middle-class vegan subjectivities and identities, and analyses questions related to food justice in colonial settings (e.g., Harper 2010b, Polish 2016). Race-critical and decolonial perspectives also point out that control of a nation's food supply by corporations constitutes a neocolonial imperial power (Chu 2019). Western diets high in meat are naturalised as the most appropriate diet for humans, "thus reinforcing a particular, historically white Western model of the 'human'" (Twine 2022, 234). Imposing such a food system on racialised people is one form of colonial violence, termed dietary colonialism (Chu 2019, 189). The farming of nonhuman animals on a massive scale is a central element of the contemporary imperial food system (Chu 2019, 187). In this context, racism, colonialism, capitalism, classism, speciesism, and male supremacy intersect, as working-class people of colour are disproportionately affected by food injustice and factory farming; access to nutritious plant-based foods can be limited, as food deserts and environmental racism attest (Bower et al. 2014; Mirabelli et al. 2006).

Decolonial food justice movements resist colonial legacies on a structural level, addressing entangled inequalities in access to food, exploitation of workers, racism, and environmental issues (Chu 2019). From this perspective, veganism has the potential to play a role in processes of decolonisation rather than only contributing to maintaining White privilege. Whether such a re-orientation of Western vegan practices and politics away from the promotion of consumerism and White middle-class lifestyles is successful is dependent on the ways in which veganism and scholarship that promotes veganism are able to critically approach the structural inequalities produced by colonialism and capitalism. Twine (2022, 237) argues that veganism offers potential for intersectional coalitions, as "both animal advocates and discriminated

communities have a shared interest in opposing a capitalism that instrumentalizes according to constructions of race and species via intertwined legacies of animalization and racialization.” However, it is also crucial to note that the cultural, social, and economic practices relating to the consumption and production of food are manifold, and the decolonisation of foodways entails various and at times contradicting efforts.¹⁹

An alternative definition of veganism that recognises the injustices produced by capitalism and colonialism might be more fitting for critical animal and multispecies studies than definitions centred on consumption and individual lifestyles. For example, Eva Giraud argues that veganism can be seen as an intervention into biopolitics, “the subtle mechanisms through which power is exerted over life itself—particularly within the agricultural-industrial complex, where both human and animal life is carefully regulated to maximise its productivity” (2013a, 51).²⁰ In this approach, the point of veganism is not first and foremost about an individual’s consumption or vegan identity, but veganism is understood as an activist *practice* which consists of “a complex

19 Potential tensions between Indigenous peoples’ and nonhuman animal rights and the question of the compatibility of veganism with Indigenous worldviews continues to be a debated issue. However, several scholars writing from Indigenous, intersectional, feminist, postcolonial, and critical animal studies perspectives argue that veganism and Indigenous cosmologies and ways of life are not necessarily or in all contexts incompatible (Chu 2019; Deckha 2012; Kim 2020; Robinson 2013; Struthers Montford and Taylor 2020). On the one hand, it is argued that some Indigenous foodways and traditions rely on certain animals, and as Kathryn Gillespie notes, “recognizing people’s rights to such traditions is central to feminist decolonization of the diet” (2017, 159). In the context of Northern Europe, the practice of Sámi veganism (that consists of, for example, consuming reindeer and hunted animals only in the Sámi homeland while maintaining vegan practices in other areas) provides one example of efforts to combine cultural and Indigenous survival with efforts to advocate for more just and compassionate food practices and resisting the animal-industrial complex. The editors of this book are not currently aware of scholarly research on Sámi veganism, but a bachelor’s thesis (2019) by Máren-Elle Länsman has shed some light on this practice. We also thank Stina Aletta Aikio for informing us about Sámi veganism. On the other hand, and in other contexts, some Indigenous authors maintain that their indigeneity is compatible with veganism. As Margaret Robinson notes, “[w]hen veganism is constructed as white, Aboriginal people who eschew the use of animal products are depicted as sacrificing our cultural authenticity. This presents a challenge for those of us who view our veganism as ethically, spiritually and culturally compatible with our indigeneity” (2013, 190). For more about Indigenous veganism from Maori perspectives, see Dunn 2019.

20 Giraud develops critically, among others, Michel Foucault’s notion of biopower in Cary Wolfe’s (2012) analyses of factory-farming and Donna Haraway’s (2008, 80) critique of making beings killable (Giraud 2013a, 2013b; see also Giraud 2019 and Giraud 2021 about veganism).

and concrete challenge to the naturalisation of contexts in which human and animal exploitation intersect under capitalism” (Giraud 2013b, 104). When integrated with the contextual sensitivity to colonial and Indigenous histories and practices suggested throughout this introduction, such a definition seems able to redefine veganism away from an individualised and apolitical White middle-class lifestyle approach and towards a decolonial approach, an approach that acknowledges the linkages between class, race, and gender in a multispecies critique of the exploitation of both people and other animals.

8 Linking a Focus on Exploitation to Environmental and Climate Struggles

It is now established that human consumption of other animals on a massive scale is one of the main causes of climate change (Arias et al. 2021; GRAIN and The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy 2018; Steinfeld et al. 2006). Despite the urgency of the crises in multispecies relations and climate, mainstream humanities and social science scholarship have largely failed to consider other animals and multispecies relations. This concerns even some fields that specifically deal with the social and cultural aspects of climate change, such as sociology of climate change and environmental sociology, as Twine (2020) notes. This omission is also evident in mainstream Western feminist scholarship. Twine (2020, 2) argues that “this exclusion could constitute an uncritical ontological framing which has a detrimental effect upon the ability to properly grasp the phenomenon of climate change.”

Intensive animal farming produces urgent ecological, ethical, social, and public health challenges in which gender and intersectional considerations are central. Gender, ethnicity, class, and their intersections shape patterns of food consumption (for an overview, see Modlinska et al. 2020), multispecies relations, global food justice, and climate sustainability. The current food system originated in European colonisation, in which the colonial powers radically altered ecosystems, including human-animal relations, in colonised territories (Lightfoot et al. 2013) and imposed a capitalist food system which relies on the mass production of animal flesh (Chu 2019 189). Privileged White Western middle- and upper-class men and hegemonic ideals of masculinity modelled according to their lives and practices remain the most harmful to the environment. Such men have historically been the key drivers of climate change, for example, as owners and managers of extractive industries (Hultman and Pulé 2018). The overall ecological footprint of men, particularly privileged men in the Global North, is on average much higher than that of women (see, for

example, Hanson 2010; Rätty and Carlsson-Kanyama 2010). This includes their carbon footprint from food, as men's global consumption of meat is higher than that of women (e.g., Prättala et al. 2007; Rippin et al. 2021; Wang et al. 2010). Beyond a direct negative impact on other animals, intensive animal farming, including the cultivation of fodder crops, has disproportionately adverse consequences for vulnerable groups and communities. For instance, work in slaughterhouses—one of the most psychologically harmful and unsafe types of work, with minimal standards of worker protection—is overwhelmingly performed by the poorest, most racialised, and most marginalised people in many countries, typically those of migrant backgrounds (Eisnitz 2006; Jenkins 2018; Khazaal 2021, 1–3; Sebastian 2018). The animal-industrial complex is implicated in environmental racism, as factory farms in many Western countries are located in the vicinity of racialised and low-income communities, which suffer adverse health effects as a result of pollution from this industry (see, for example, Mirabelli et al. 2006). Antibiotic-resistant bacteria (Landers et al. 2012), stemming first and foremost from the massive use of antibiotics in intensive animal farming (World Health Organisation 2017), and the spread of zoonotic diseases (Brown 2004; Chemnitz and Becheva 2021) are becoming increasingly serious concerns for humanity, as attested by the COVID-19 pandemic, adversely impacting vulnerable individuals and groups in particular.

Climate scholars have established that climate change is most acutely experienced by the most vulnerable nations, groups, and communities, predominantly in the Global South (Parks and Roberts 2006)—those who are the least responsible for causing climate change. Marginalised women in the Global South are most severely impacted by the effects of climate change (Roy 2018). Importantly, a perspective on veganism which focuses on an intersectional critique of capitalism and colonialism must also consider how plant-based products are implicated in the injustices of the global food system and environmental degradation (Caro et al. 2021; Harper 2010b; Howard and Forin 2019). These insights attest to how human, animal, and environmental flourishing are inseparable in a globalised world. Therefore, climate change and environmental justice should be important perspectives to integrate into critical feminist analyses of multispecies relations.

9 Critical and Creative Epistemologies and Methods

As the terms and conceptual approaches introduced above suggest, the theoretical basis of critical analyses of multispecies relations is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. This is also characteristic of the methodologies and

methods used by scholars conducting research from these feminist perspectives (e.g., Despret 2016; Giffney and Hird 2008; Giraud 2019; Hyvärinen 2020; Stengers 2005; TallBear 2017; Tsing 2015; van Dooren 2019). This methodological diversity, however, also includes some important epistemological linkages, which are inspired by and combine some key epistemological, methodological, and ethical principles from feminist (e.g., Longino 2017), posthumanist (e.g., Ulmer 2017), and critical animal studies research (e.g., Glasser and Roy 2014, 102–8; see also Birke 2014; Stephens Griffin 2014). Broadly, critical feminist multispecies methodologies stem from the understanding that Western anthropocentric and speciesist approaches are no longer sufficient or adequate in the current planetary crisis of sustainability (Ulmer 2017, 2). They seek to question frameworks and starting points that maintain colonial and extractivist capitalism, intensive animal agriculture, and all research frameworks solely based on the interests of privileged humans and to “recognize that non-human elements are always already present” in our lives and ways of understanding the world (Ulmer 2017, 2). By rethinking anthropocentric Western epistemologies and methodologies to include nonhuman animals and taking seriously their agency, feminist multispecies scholars challenge key assumptions behind anthropocentric and non-feminist epistemologies and methodologies, including those concerning human and animal subjectivities.

Broadly, critical feminist multispecies methodologies and methods are located within posthumanist, anti-speciesist, non-anthropocentric, and intersectional feminist commitments. They aim to contest multiple and intersecting oppressions of people and other animals and seek to identify and challenge intra-human hierarchies which sustain and are supported by animal exploitation. Such methodological approaches challenge various dualisms and hierarchies (human-animal, nature-culture, ability-disability, etc.), the theoretical and practical applications of which have long been particularly harmful to women/marginalised groups and nonhuman animals. Beyond theorising about nonhuman animals and marginalised people in relation to species and animality, critical multispecies scholars care about the material fates of these beings. Researchers must be accountable to their human and nonhuman research participants, meaning their ethical standards must include both the interests of the studied communities and a commitment to giving back to these communities and that “research must never construct those animals who are studied as objects, but as subjects” (Birke 2014, 81). Beyond avoiding causing harm to nonhuman animals and disadvantaged people in the course of the research, these beings and communities should (directly or indirectly) benefit from scholarly activities. In this sense, feminist multispecies research is

activist-oriented, seeking to make political interventions in the world; in other words, it is “theory in action” (Glasser and Roy 2014, 107).

Conducting critical feminist multispecies inquiry requires rethinking the notion of the “human,” rejecting the autonomous, rational, and disembodied subject modelled according to Western White able-bodied masculine subjectivities. Drawing on posthumanist, feminist, Indigenous, critical race, and disability studies and other critical work mentioned above, the human subject is conceived as “embodied and relational,” vulnerable and enmeshed in relationships of care with human and nonhuman others (Weitzenfeld and Joy 2014, 13). This subject is positioned within social hierarchies and power relations in particular ways. This situatedness shapes people’s relationships to other animals and to the notion of animality (see also Weaver 2021). Broadly, then, research committed to these feminist perspectives is characterised by a simultaneous critical examination of species, gender, race, and other intersecting categories on various levels of society, including medical science as well as scientific examinations of animal behaviour and ecological questions. This critical examination includes attention to speciesist institutions and social structures in which human-animal interactions take place. Inspiration for this can be drawn from vegan sociology, where an important critical focus lies on institutions that use and endorse the use of nonhuman animals (see, for example, Cherry 2021).

At least some research in critical multispecies feminisms aligns well with more experimental methodologies (see Vannini 2015), drawing on theory and methodology which “seeks better to cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds” (Lorimer 2005, 83; see also Thrift 2008). These methodologies that draw, for example, from new materialist theorisation seek to move beyond representational methods and text as the primary medium of academic work and to capture elements of life such as events, relations, (embodied) action, affect, performances, material objects, the more-than-human, and their entanglements (Vannini 2015).

Feminist multispecies scholars employ a wide range of methods, the choice of which depends on the particular aims and foci of the research and on the disciplinary backgrounds and expertise of the researcher. Research that includes living animals requires a different research design and set of methods than do studies dealing with representations of animals. Scholars may employ both traditional and more novel and experimental methods. Some such emerging methods aim to include other animals directly in the research, such as multispecies ethnography (see, for example, Gillespie 2019; Hamilton and Taylor 2017; Kirskey and Heimreich 2010) and other techniques aimed at “listening to animals’ voices” and understanding “the role of the animal participant as the

co-producer of [...] meaning” (Birke 2014, 75). Other, more established methods in the humanities and social sciences—originating from anthropocentric research paradigms—such as critical reading of texts (including media texts) and those involving the collection and analysis of empirical material (in the form of interviews, for example) are also used and adapted to include other animals and their perspectives. For instance, biographical methods, originally designed to gain in-depth insights into human lives and experiences, can be used to study the lives of individual animals (Stephens Griffin 2014, 119; Kupsala 2020).

Critical feminist animal and multispecies studies research involves a number of ethical and methodological dilemmas. For example, can other animals participate in our research in ways that do not exploit them? Major questions concern the agency of nonhuman animals. How can we conceptualise and consider animal agency in the research process (Birke 2014, 72)? Is it possible to obtain (informed) consent from nonhuman animals, and how should this be negotiated (see Birke 2014; Stephens Griffin 2014)? Given the methodological and ethical issues discussed above, feminist multispecies research assumes a high degree of researcher reflexivity throughout the research process, as in any other feminist research project, and an acceptance of messy, open-ended, and situated research relationships and an ongoing negotiation of research ethics.

10 Overview of the Book

The chapters in this book engage with the theme of food and eating in various ways, covering issues of food production and consumption, engaging with questions of food justice, and discussing eating practices in different social and geographical contexts, thereby expanding the scope of ecofeminist and critical animal studies scholarship, which is typically focused on Anglo-American contexts. Previous research from critical animal studies and other critical perspectives, as well as from many animal advocacy organisations, has extensively discussed and exposed the exploitation and suffering of nonhuman animals in industrial animal agriculture (see, for example, Potts 2016, 6–16). The chapters in this volume examine issues related to the use of nonhuman animals as food that have received less attention. In some chapters, the use of nonhuman animals for human food is more explicitly discussed (Chapter 5 by Alka Arora, Chapter 6 by Maneesha Deckha, and Chapter 9 by Kadri Aavik), whereas others focus on food produced for animal companions and their eating/feeding practices (Chapter 4 by Milla-Maria Joki and Chapter 10 by Kuura Irni). Some chapters discuss animals that are typically regarded as farmed “food

and commodity” animals but disrupt this premise with their theoretical and methodological frameworks (Chapter 1 by Marianna Szczygielska and Agata Kowalewska, Chapter 2 by Ezgi Burgan Kiyak, and Chapter 3 by Marie Leth-Espensen). Other chapters utilise different perspectives on food and eating via negotiations with ecofeminist theories and genealogies (Chapter 7 by Kuura Irni, Chapter 8 by Sanna Karhu, and Chapter 11 by Daniela Rosendo, Fabio Oliveira, and Tânia Kuhnen). Finally, interviews with feminist animal activists Panda Eriksson and Özge Özgüner provide intersectional considerations of the practical work of resisting unjust food systems.

The book is organised into six sections, the first of which focuses on GEOGRAPHIES, BOUNDARIES, AND RELATIONALITY. The chapter “Naive Boars and Dummy Sows: Porcine Sex and the Politics of Purity,” by Marianna Szczygielska and Agata Kowalewska, discusses biosecurity and the attempts to control the outbreak of African Swine Fever in Poland. The chapter describes how, in an effort to protect the pork industry, biopolitical measures of purity, “culling,” and order were employed with the aim of keeping potentially contagious wild boars at bay from domesticated pigs bred for human consumption. Drawing from queer and feminist material perspectives, Szczygielska and Kowalewska explicate the arduous measures taken to impose control over porcine sex in an attempt to maximise and protect product value. However, due to porous intra- and interspecies boundaries and power relations, even the most extreme operations have struggled to keep the lethal virus in check. The chapter “Eating with a Cow: Feminist Multi-Species Ethnography in the Kitchens of the Black Sea High Pastures of Turkey,” by Ezgi Burgan Kiyak, puts forward a multispecies ethnography of women-cow encounters in the context of rural animal husbandry. Burgan Kiyak’s chapter is based on fieldwork conducted in the Black Sea high pastures of Turkey, during which the author visited households and participated in the daily chores of animal husbandry with women living and working as farmers in the area. Drawing from, among others, the work of Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, Burgan Kiyak examines the relations between the cows and the women as well as the location of her study through the figures of *cows’ kitchen* and *intraspecies kitchen* with the purpose of disrupting the anthropocentrism of the notion of “kitchen.”

Section II, NEGOTIATING DEPENDENCY AND CARE, explicates relations between humans and domesticated animals reliant on their care. The chapter “Care in a Time of Anthropogenic Problems: Experiences from Sanctuary-Making in Rural Denmark,” authored by Marie Leth-Espensen, discusses the embodied and situated practices of care in the context of two farmed animal sanctuaries in rural Denmark. Drawing from Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s notion of situated ethics, she analyses the complexities of care in a multispecies

community of nonhuman animals who have not only faced previous neglect and abuse but also have been purposely bred only with their use value in mind. Farmed animal sanctuaries disrupt this notion by considering and treating these animals as beings worthy of care and flourishing, but the affective, ethical, and practical dimensions of care entail numerous compromises and challenging negotiations. The chapter “Negotiating Disability in Celebrity Cat Lil BUB’s Eating Videos,” written by Milla-Maria Joki, examines cultural negotiations about disability in the context of the disabled celebrity cat Lil BUB. Drawing from Eva Giraud’s notion of ambivalent popularity and disability studies, Joki analyses social media videos that exhibit BUB’s feeding practices and make her disabilities visible. She argues that Lil BUB’s brand works in ambivalent registers, as the videos simultaneously question and draw from ableist norms as well as advocate for responsible animal care by anthropomorphic and species-specific means.

Section III, REVISIONING THE POTENTIAL OF EDUCATION, examines ways to deconstruct speciesism and work towards a vegan future with pedagogical tools. In her chapter, “Pedagogy of the Consumed: An Integral Feminist Lens on Veganism in Higher Education,” Alka Arora attends to the dearth of attention paid to nonhuman animal exploitation in educational spaces and calls for the importance of pedagogical intervention in speciesist education. Arora draws on her experiences as a university educator and puts forth a vegan feminist pedagogical framework that not only works to increase student awareness of animal oppression but also pays heed to the emotional responses that “waking up to speciesism” and the sensitivity of food choices may stir up. Furthermore, Arora’s integral feminist pedagogy disrupts notions of veganism as a privileged activity of White, thin consumers and emphasises the versatility of the vegan movement by bringing the work of vegan and vegetarian activists of colour to the fore. Arora also draws from diverse spiritual and religious worldviews informing animal-human relationships as a method of troubling the notion of human exploitation of other animals as a universal order and providing her students with alternative ways of building ethical relations to the surrounding world. The chapter “Human Children, Nonhuman Animals, and a Plant-Based Vegan Future,” by Maneesha Deckha, discusses the urgency of the climate crisis and the possibility of transitioning towards a more sustainable vegan future by focusing on systemic childhood education before anthropocentric behaviours and ideologies have become entrenched. Deckha argues for critical animal pedagogies that not only disrupt othering narratives of nonhuman animals but also deconstruct gendered and colonial messages of human Others and of Earth as a resource for human exploitation. Deckha suggests cultivating empathy towards nonhuman beings and alternative

subjectivities and legal reforms to attain these as a basis for more compassionate societies.

Section IV, TRANS-FORMATIONS IN ECOFEMINIST THEORY, assesses ecofeminist genealogies from the perspective of trans and queer theory. In the chapter “Revisiting Ecofeminist Genealogies: Towards Intersectional and Trans-Inclusive Ecofeminism,” Kuura Irni examines conceptual inheritances of vegan ecofeminism from radical feminism as well as the telling of ecofeminist pasts. Irni starts by discussing the conceptualisation of nature and binary gender in ecofeminism inherited from radical feminism, and, drawing on transfeminism and Donna Haraway’s notion of naturecultures, proposes a trans-inclusive approach that also recognises the violences involved in the entanglements of nature, bodies, and technologies. They continue by problematising a top-down hierarchical understanding of power and accounts of violence that inherit an anti-pornography and anti-sex work stance, suggesting a trans-inclusive and queer feminist approach that also enables more nuanced readings of the dynamics of race, class, and gender. They then discuss the ways in which intersectionality is invoked in the telling of ecofeminist pasts and presents, and end by pointing towards possibilities for developing feminist animal and multispecies scholarship where trans, queer, Indigenous, and race-critical analyses proliferate. In the chapter “An Ecofeminist Critique of the Milk Industry: From Mammal Mothers to Biocapitalist Bovines,” Sanna Karhu assesses ecofeminist critiques of the milk industry and problematises the frequent analogy made between women and cows as empathetic “mammal mothers” in theories of the industrial production of bovine milk. Drawing from queer and trans theorisations of nursing, Karhu argues that, despite the efforts of ecofeminist theory to oppose gender essentialism, such an analogy risks dismissing the diversity of lactation and the lives of gender non-conforming people participating in nursing practices. Instead of reinstalling the gender binary to its pedestal by assuming the relation between the lactating mother and the infant as a pivotal source of empathy towards other animals, Karhu suggests that a feminist critique of biocapitalism provides a more fruitful and inclusive basis for a critique of the milk industry.

Section V, VEGANISM AND POSSIBILITIES FOR RESISTANCE, analyses vegan politics and activism. Kadri Aavik’s chapter, “Men’s Veganism: A Pathway Towards More Egalitarian Masculinities?” examines the potential of vegan men to foster more egalitarian masculinities in a world where the actions of White privileged men and masculine values have seriously contributed to ecological destruction and the exploitation of other animals. Drawing from interviews with vegan men based in Estonia and Finland, Aavik argues that men who were relatively guarded by other privileging features (Whiteness, middle-class

status, education, etc.) did not find their masculinity challenged by their veganism, which is culturally coded as feminine. Aavik suggests that men's veganism has the potential to challenge hegemonic norms of masculinity, at least on a micro scale, in everyday interactions. The chapter "Staying with the Trouble in Cat Advocacy: Donna Haraway, Vegan Politics, and the Case of Cat Food," by Kuura Irni, discusses the complexities of advocating vegan politics and the wellbeing of cats, *Felis catus*, who are called obligate carnivores. Irni calls for attention to Donna Haraway's rather implicit notion of *the political* as a site of dissent, in contrast to her food politics per se, which has been criticised by ecofeminists. Focusing on a Northern European, Finnish context and arguing against a critique of veganism as proposing a too "simple" solution to complex problems, Irni discusses three incompatible vegan political positions that support different cat-human naturecultures. Irni develops Eva Giraud's (2019) analysis of veganism as an intersectional critique of biocapitalism towards a multispecies feminist perspective to vegan politics that also accounts for animal agencies and ecological questions in the multispecies naturecultures that make beings killable. The chapter "Fractured Locus': Resistances in the Global South and Decolonial Ecofeminist Anti-Speciesist Praxis" by Daniela Rosendo, Fabio Oliveira, and Tânia Kuhnen, proposes speciesism as a component of critical analysis in assessing the effects of coloniality. Drawing from the work of María Lugones and her concept of the "fractured locus," they provide a decolonial ecofeminist and anti-speciesist framework for investigating possibilities of resistance to colonisation and commercialisation of life in the Global South. As a practical example, they especially discuss the case of The Favela Orgânica Project, a pioneering initiative in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil that promotes awareness of food cycles, environmentally responsible eating practices, and the decolonisation of taste.

Section VI, INTERSECTIONAL ANIMAL ACTIVISMS, includes interviews with intersectional feminist and animal activists. The interview with Panda Eriksson, titled "Toward Trans-Sensitive and Vegan Intersectional Feminisms," describes their experiences as a Finnish Swede non-binary activist invested in topics such as trans issues and equality within the healthcare system in Finland and provides thoughts about how they began to make links between animal advocacy, veganism, and the wider context of social justice. Finally, the interview with Özge Özgüner, titled "The Future Is Queer and Vegan!" provides an overview of their involvement in various activist struggles in Turkey, such as the animal rights and vegan movements, feminist activism, and anti-militarism. Özgüner describes their inspiration for intersectional activism and their work—bringing together people from different backgrounds with the purpose of discussing how different forms of discrimination relate to each

other. Altogether, by introducing feminist and intersectional forms of animal activism, these interviews provide new imaginaries for how we can simultaneously advocate for nonhuman and human beings.

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PART 1

Geographies, Boundaries and Relationality



Naive Boars and Dummy Sows: Porcine Sex and the Politics of Purity

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1 Introduction

Picture an extravagant bouquet of white flowers, rich in luscious textures and shapes, very much like something you would see at a wedding. Expecting a sweet smell, you approach the bouquet, only to be met with the sweaty musty odour of Boar-mate—a commercial synthetic boar pheromone used in pig breeding. To people, the smell of porcine pheromones is unpleasant—ruining the pleasure of being near the beautiful flowers. By entering into this arranged situation you have experienced *Naive Boar*, an art installation by one of the authors of this chapter, Agata Kowalewska. Sprayed onto the flowers, synthetic boar pheromones symbolise the unabating human attempts at strict control over plant and animal sex and reproduction. As plants' sex organs, flowers became powerful symbols of sexual desire and romance. Just as humans have been selectively breeding domestic pigs for more muscular bodies and numerous litters, some plants have been cultivated to grow enormous flowers. As part of the political and symbolic economy, such cultured plants and farmed pigs alike have their sexuality distilled, purified, and controlled in the service of human pleasure and profit. By juxtaposing botanical and porcine sexual cues that are harnessed for human aesthetic and culinary satisfaction, *Naive Boar* serves a grotesque sensorial clash. This shows how such “purified” sexual signals plucked from radically different domains of agriculture cancel each other out, thus exposing the limits of human control over nonhuman worlds. We provide this imaginative situation as the introduction to our chapter in order to bestow on you a multisensory impression of the modern factory farm. We hope through this simple exercise the lingering memory of Boar-mate as you have just imagined it will accompany you through this text, further marring the image of purity, hard stived-for by the industry.



In July 2020, the Polish Minister of Agriculture proposed a decree that would ban outdoor pig pens in those areas of the country most affected by the African Swine Fever (ASF). Since the 2014 outbreak, this viral disease has been decimating porcine populations in up to eleven European Union countries and is further spreading south and westward.¹ Worldwide, it has been destabilising global food trade, international relations, and financial markets. Separating livestock from wildlife is one of the biosecurity measures recommended by the European Food Safety Authority. It is aimed at preventing the spread of the deadly virus from wild boars to domestic pigs by minimising spatial interactions between the two closely related subspecies (Fernandez-Lopez et al. 2020). According to this scenario, the inside of the pig farm is supposed to remain clean and sterile, possibly sealed from the outside environment and its inhabitants that pose a danger of contamination. Free-roaming wild boars are believed to spread the lethal disease that seriously threatens the European pork industry, which reports nearly 1.4 million pigs lost to ASF between 2016 and 2020 (“ASF Report N°47: 2016 – 2020” 2020). These estimated losses are not just of animals that died from the disease, but also from the mass of healthy and potentially infected pigs culled preventively when an outbreak is reported on a farm. The number of wild boars killed by the ASF is more difficult to estimate, but with four times the number of outbreaks than in farmed pigs and given the large-scale extermination campaigns as one of the first responses to the epidemic, some 1 or 2 million wild boars could have perished so far (“Swine Health Information Center” n.d.; “Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations” n.d.).

According to Neel Ahuja “outbreak narratives obscure the important ways in which nonhuman animals are entangled in forms of government that attempt to manage bodily transition and risk” (2016, 10). Even before the incursion of the ASF to Europe, wild boars have been the target of eradication due to their recent geographical expansion and surge in population sizes. Their perceived overabundance across Europe is partially owed to climate change and patterns of crop production that affect the species’ fecundity and higher survival rates (Vetter et al. 2015). This metabolic connection implicates wild boars into the so-called “industrial grain-oilseed-livestock complex” (Weis 2013) as an outside intruder damaging crop fields and posing danger to the pork industry due to possible disease transmission. In the face of ASF, agribusiness considers the reproductive capacities of wild boars threatening because population density

1 In Europe, ASF was first detected in 1957 in Portugal and spread to Spain. In 2007, it was introduced into Georgia in Eurasia, reaching the EU member states in 2014. There is no vaccine available against ASF, unlike the classical swine fever (‘Hog Cholera’) which is caused by a different virus (OIE 2020).

is a major factor in disease spread. Paradoxically, wild boars' reproductive success endangers the farm pig herds whose own super-fertility is key for meat production.

Whereas most biopolitical analyses of meat production focus on the slaughterhouse and its deadly operations (Cronon 1991; Burt 2006; Lee 2008; Pachirat 2011), we propose to shift attention towards animal reproduction that sustains the agro-food system. At the same time, discussions of reproductive practices and technologies in wildlife management typically privilege endangered species conservation (Wildt and Wemmer 1999; Friese 2013; Comizzoli, Brown, and Holt 2019). But what about those wild animals who are not considered invasive species, yet became a source of conflict and thus mobilise the rhetoric of invasion (Subramaniam 2001), like the case of wild boars illustrates? What about pigs and wild boars belonging to the same species,² while occupying radically different ecologies? In this sense, we recognise the close interconnections between sex and reproduction in animal breeding and wildlife management as biopolitical practices. Therefore, what we broadly term *porcine sex* constitutes the main avenue of inquiry for unravelling the discourses of purity and sterility mobilised in Poland for the sake of biosecurity and population control. In what follows, the embodied ethical implications of livestock breeding and managing wild populations are discussed in the context of fears over economic losses due to the ASF epidemic. For the sake of this analysis, we use the wide category of porcine sex that encompasses three levels: (1) intimate practices, (2) reproduction, and (3) species categorisation, with particular emphasis on control over animal bodies targeting both domestic pigs and wild boars. Mobilising the notion of sex, rather than just reproduction, enables us to explore this porous intraspecies boundary as a site of power relations that are central to the politics of purity at stake.

Analysed together, pigs and wild boars inform us about the economic, social, and ecological dimensions of politics of purity, an approach criticised by queerfeminist philosopher Alexis Shotwell. She identifies purism as “a common approach for anyone who attempts to meet and control a complex situation that is fundamentally outside our control,” and one that is bad “because it shuts precisely the field of possibility that might allow us to take better collective action against the destruction of the world in all its strange, delightful, impure frolic” (Shotwell 2016, 8–9). A large part of this chapter is concerned with control over farmed animals whose lives and embodied experiences become an “absent referent” in meat-eating because the linguistic

2 Domestic pig (*Sus scrofa domesticus*) is considered a subspecies of the wild boar (*Sus scrofa scrofa*).

category of pork to a certain extent erases the pig (Adams 2015).³ We follow Shotwell's materialist approach to the embodied ethics of eating that complicates and muddles the hygienic forms of "classifying the eaten world and ourselves in it" (2016, 113). Such analysis needs to navigate the complexity of the particular agro-food system—pig farming implicates ethical questions of land ownership, use of water, energy sources, human labour, veterinary care and use of pharmaceuticals, crop production for fodder, which in turn uses soil fertilisers, herbi- and pesticides, waste management, etc. This reveals the material, environmental, and ethical mess behind any eating practices that are necessarily entangled in complex food production systems. By tracing the disturbed viral biopolitics at stake when porcine populations are managed inside and outside of the pig pen, we show that defending purity is a futile strategy for living together on a damaged planet (Tsing et al. 2017).

2 Growing Meat, Growing Apart

Domestic pigs (*Sus scrofa domesticus*) and wild boars (*Sus scrofa scrofa*) are deeply entangled not only through the epizootic event, or an epidemic in nonhuman animals, discussed here in detail. Most pig breeds derive from a Eurasian wild boar ancestor. Given multiple domestication events and continued selective breeding, this process is not fully over yet. Taking into account that "for thousands of years prior to the agricultural revolution, *Sus scrofa*'s relationship to humans covered a spectrum of possibilities, including fully feral, semi-feral, and domesticated" (Fleischman 2020, 162), farmed pigs and wild boars are embroiled in messy histories of mutual genetic exchange. Centuries of selective breeding changed pig bodies. Longer torsos with bigger rumps and smaller heads with floppy ears (no need to stay alert in a piggery) give domestic pigs a distinctly different shape than that of the formidable wild boar. Some have even argued that they are already a separate species, not just a subspecies (Gentry and Groves 1996).

Interestingly, domestic pigs that escape captivity often grow coarse fur and their appearance becomes much more similar to that of their wild cousins in just one generation: "if a young pig is exposed to hardship shortly after birth, and a series of transformations take hold—its skull and legs will grow longer, its ears will stand erect, and bristly hair and spiked mane will burst from the crest of its skull to its tail" (Fleischman 2020, 163). Such feral pigs seem

3 For a further problematisation of Carol Adams' ecofeminist perspective on meat-eating practices and factory farming vis-à-vis trans-feminist theory, see Kuura Irni in this volume.

to revert some of the effects domestication had on their bodies. Additionally, these escapees will sometimes mate with wild boars and propel what geneticists call hybridisation. It has been estimated that about 25% of wild boars are genetically part domestic pigs (Frantz, Massei, and Burke 2012; Frantz et al. 2013). This shows sometimes, when among the regular-looking greyish-brown boars there is, for example, a black and white spotted individual. The close entanglement between wild boars and domestic pigs serves as a good illustration of the porosity of species as a category and unit of scientific analysis, as well as the importance of reproductive sex within it. This is a reminder that there is no such thing as a genetically pure species and that domestication and wildness are interweaving in the evolutionary journey of many species.

Though they may share genetic material with wild boars, domestic pigs have been denied their cultures, practices and expertise accumulated over generations. In the industrial farm setting, the pigs' ability to pass on any newly formed knowledge or practices is often blocked by strict limitations on contact between animals from different age groups. Wild boars live in multigenerational matrilineal sounders, led by an older matriarch, consisting mostly of females accompanied by their offspring. Adult males are usually solitary. The reproductive cycles of sows in a sounder are often synchronised, and piglets are nursed communally (Canu et al. 2015). Wild boars can live well over 10 years and older individuals can pass on their experience. The ones living in Poland usually only reach 2–3 years of age due to high hunting rates. Intensive hunting can lead to disruptions in the transfer of experiences and practices because, unlike in the case of animal predators, human hunters often target older individuals. As long as some mature sows remain alive, however, these social skills can rebound because sounders often merge and accept new individuals, e.g., survivors of a harsh winter or hunting. Farmed hogs usually go to slaughter between the ages of 5 and 9 months. Whatever practices they accumulate disappear along with the hogs, as they do not get a chance to teach the younger generation. Kept in separate pens, farmed pigs cannot form multigenerational social groups. Even the intimate setting of birth-giving is stripped from porcine customs. The sows kept in small gestation and farrowing crates cannot build nests because most large farms do not provide them with straw. Similarly, farmed sows do not help piglets free from the membranes and often do not eat the placenta, and so this aspect of their reproduction—the immediate post-birth care—is also taken over by human workers (Powell 2003, 279). Industrial pigs and wild boars inhabit radically different worlds. However, as exceptionally adaptable animals, once pigs escape captivity, they form groups and sometimes join wild boar sounders, creating hybrid cultures (Iacolina et al. 2009).

Behavioural differences demonstrate a radical disparity between domestic pigs and wild boars; however, it is the body that has undergone the strictest control in selective breeding. After all, the humans who farm pigs are after their flesh and fat. An average wild boar sow weighs 35–140 kg (Komosńska and Podsiadło 2002, 98). Farmed pigs are much heavier—an adult sow of the Puławska breed weighs 200–280 kg. Additionally, the commercialisation of porcine reproduction gave rise to the industrial pig—a cosmopolitan swine that is more uniform across geographies, and whose body has been moulded according to the production process and the dietary preferences of the consumers. After World War II, when the demand for healthier fats grew, once popular traditional lard breeds were supplanted by pigs bred for leaner meat.⁴ In this sense, breeds are designed—they constitute material outcomes of artificial selection and are to be understood as socially constructed (Eriksson and Pettitt 2020). Intensifying pork production has led to genetic narrowing with some traditional breeds going extinct. In Poland, the National Programme for the Protection of Farm Animal Genetic Resources conserves the breeding stock of three breeds considered native: Polish landrace, Puławska, and Żłotnicka (white and spotted). Other non-native breeds popular in Poland include Belgian Piétrain, American Duroc and Hampshire, and Polish large white, which paradoxically is the result of interbreeding English and German pig breeds. This peculiar nationalised tableau of pig breeds is ambiguous: on the one hand, it cherishes the politics of purity (e.g., with higher meat prices for heirloom breeds), while on the other, it protects the genetic diversity of pigs from the homogenising effects of the global pork industry. Of course, it does so in the national interest by treating rare breeds as livestock heritage (Calvert 2013). Historian Margaret Derry points out that since the nineteenth century, in animal husbandry, “the idea of ‘purity’ was irrevocably attached to the concept of consistency of type and the ability to breed truly” (Derry et al. 2018). What is at stake in the purebred politics of pork are the reproductive capacities of the sows.

A few decades ago, before a number of factors which are discussed below came into play, a wild boar sow in Eastern Europe would typically have one litter per year with 4–8 piglets. For comparison, a modern farmed sow gives birth to around 30 piglets a year, with at least two pregnancies on average. The source of this bodily and behavioural discord between the two most wide-spread swine is human activity. On the one hand, intensive factory farming with captive breeding radically alters the pigs’ bodies (and narrows

4 During World War II, lard was used in the manufacturing of explosives and as an industrial lubricant.

the genetic diversity making them more susceptible to diseases), while on the other, human-induced climate change affects the wild boars' reproductive cycle. With milder winters and longer vegetation seasons, wild boars get easy access to agricultural crops, particularly to high-energy corn that is subsidised in the EU.⁵ As a result, sows bear larger and more frequent litters—twice or even three times per year (Tack 2018). In other words, human agricultural expansion fosters the superfertility of wild boars that now threatens one of its pillars, namely, livestock production. Moreover, the history of hybridisation with domestic pigs also affects the reproductive seasonality in wild boars (Canu et al. 2015). This feral quality (Tsing et al. 2020) further demonstrates the leaky character of human control over animal sex and reproduction. Whereas the booming populations of wild boars are considered out of (ecological) balance, the domesticated pig bodies are made superfertile in the service of agri-capitalism. In 2018, the estimated population of wild boar in the EU was about 10 million (Acevedo et al. 2020), while that of farmed pigs reached nearly 150 million, making it the largest livestock category raised for meat by millions of tons (Augère-Granier 2020). The wild boar “population bomb” discourse rests on a peculiar kind of sex panic over the wrong bodies reproducing.

This contrast illustrates how the logic of the Capitalocene (Haraway 2015; Moore 2017)⁶ inscribes itself differently onto the bodies of nonhuman animals categorised as “livestock” and “wildlife.” The biomass of all mammalian bodies consists in 96% of combined humans and livestock (dominated by cattle and pigs), and only 4% of wildlife (Bar-On, Phillips, and Milo 2018). At the same time, not all species that belong to livestock or wildlife share the same environmental history or visibility within the critical studies of the planetary transformations summed under the new epoch of the Anthropocene. Considering growing concerns over the rapid rate of biodiversity loss and declining wildlife populations, wild boars are categorised as being of least concern for conservation. Thanks to their incredible adaptability, omnivorous diet, and high intelligence, they became one of the most cosmopolitan species, which in evolutionary terms benefits from human-induced changes in the environment.

5 Some researchers report that a mycotoxin from a common kind of fungus growing on corn impacts the wild boars' hormonal balance, causing sows to faster reach sexual maturity and ovulate for a longer time and more frequently (Pałubicki and Grajewski 2010) although there is no consensus on the exact mechanism and effects on wild boar fertility (Nicpoń, Sławuta, and Nicpoń 2016).

6 Capitalocene is an alternative concept to the Anthropocene, or the geological epoch defined by human impact on Earth's natural systems. The concept of the Capitalocene is mobilised to draw attention to the role of capitalist economy in catalysing environmental destruction, biodiversity loss, and anthropogenic climate change.

Meanwhile, domesticated pigs were subjected to the modern dietary and agricultural transformation that put their bodies into industrial-scale production. Despite growing public awareness of the adverse effects of large-scale animal farming on the environment and increasing numbers of people choosing vegan and vegetarian diets, we observe a rapid global increase in meat consumption in the last decades (Godfray et al. 2018). With the growing demand for cheap meat, the numbers of pigs bred in captivity soar. Controlled reproduction ensures stable supplies of killable bodies within the capitalist logic of this agro-food system. Within this system, the fertility of pigs becomes a manageable resource.

3 Porcine Sex

A forty-millilitre bottle of Hog Mate Boar Odor Spray, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, can be used to effectively train up to fifty naive boars with a dummy sow. Another similar product named Boar-mate™ “creates the ideal insemination moment” (“MS Schippers: Boar-Mate” n.d.). These descriptions come from online stores supplying pig breeders with these and other similar merchandise essential for increasing and stimulating animal fecundity. The spray contains artificial pig pheromones that replicate the characteristic odours of a boar. Many animals secrete chemical substances as means of intra- and inter-species communication to serve various purposes, an important one of which is sex. Pheromones present in boar saliva accelerate and intensify heat in sows. In the case of Hog Mate and similar products available on the agro-market, androstenone is synthesised in a laboratory to be utilised in artificial insemination procedures such as heat detection in gilts and sows, and training selected boar studs for the collection of semen. For the latter process, another piece of breeding equipment is needed: a “dummy sow”, which is a simple rubber-covered metal construction designed to harvest sperm. The so-called “naive boars,” or young studs with poor interest, need to be tricked into mounting this abridged mating partner. This is when the boar odour spray comes in handy. The directions for use advise applying 2–3 sprays directly onto the boar’s snout for proven effects, including heightened attentiveness, vocalisation, and increased semen volume.

This swine aphrodisiac, along with its applications, brings attention to the practices and materials employed in human control over porcine sex. They rest on the commodification of one aspect of animal physiology through breeding as a form of genetic governance. In this case, animal sexual instinct is harnessed for the industrial mode of reproducing porcine bodies for meat

consumption by humans. In other words, extracting and manufacturing the sexual drive of boars constitutes just one stage in the capital-driven meat production that inevitably ends in the slaughterhouse. Engineered boar desire becomes a function of the system that massively reproduces pig bodies, from the beginning destined to be killed. Swine sex largely determines what ends up on the plate—in many ways literally. Male boars that are not used as breeding stock are castrated when very young, because the meat of uncastrated males has a noticeable boar taint disliked by consumers. Focusing on the technologies and practices of livestock breeding allows for shifting attention from thanatopolitics⁷ of the slaughterhouse to feminist analyses of the biopolitics of reproduction (Murphy 2012), which strongly rely on cultural ideas about human heterosexual sex.

However, as queer and feminist scholars show, matters of nonhuman sex extend far beyond the reproductive drive. Sex is crucial for the scientific definition of species as a way of classifying different forms of life, but also for the gendered and racialised economies of difference that permeate the species boundaries themselves. Sexual acts understood as breeding in livestock management involve the selection of individual animals deemed fit for reproduction. Breeders are always careful about pedigree. These breeding practices are often expressed through the non-innocent categories of “good” and “bad” blood (Ritvo 1992; Derry 2003). When breeding boils down to managing bloodlines, such distinctions between “purebreds” and “mongrels” or “razorbacks” inevitably mobilise discourses on purity. As Donna Haraway reminds us in her discussion on vampire cultures embedded in biological kinship categories of Western modern medicine, “where race and sex were, worries about hygiene, decadence, health, and organic efficiency” abounded (2004, 251). Is this the case for veterinary science and animal husbandry? Tracing exactly those moments when porcine and human racial discourses overlapped in the North American pig business in the early twentieth century, historian Gabriel Rosenberg argues that “hog breeding functioned as a popular laboratory of racial knowledge and biopolitical management” (2016, 51). The disturbing confluence between the categories of race and breed that easily crossed the species barrier allowed for spelling out and exercising popular discourses on racial decline and contamination in the arena of livestock breeding. In this context, “compulsory reproduction determined the lives and deaths of millions of swine and was embedded at the very core of the food system” (Rosenberg 2016, 50). From this perspective, the history of control over

7 Thanatopolitics, or a politics of death is a philosophical term that describes the power to “let die” for the sake of life within the biopolitical framework (Foucault 2003).

sex for improving the marketability of porcine flesh involves acts of sexual violence, and at the same time, implicates knowledge and practices of captive breeding in naturalising and solidifying racial hierarchies as yet another form of violence.

Nonhuman sex is not obscene as long as it serves the capital. In his later work on the modern history of antibestiality laws and animal husbandry in the United States, Rosenberg points to “the agricultural exemption” in the laws criminalising human-animal sexual contact that grants an exceptional status to meat animals to ensure the continuation of meat production. He argues that “it is this underlying reproductive economy that begs for critique precisely because it is the space in which humans and meat animals are still entangled and viscerally bound as life not yet irrevocably marked for annihilation” (Rosenberg 2017, 499). The same is true for dairy animals. This reproductive economy of the factory farm dictates how and when sows and boars meet, or even separates them completely.

When it comes to infrastructures of breeding, they rest on various types of enclosures. Those include “breeding crates” or “mating boxes” designed to restrict the sow’s movement during the act of forced copulation. These devices have been developed because in selective breeding boars often grow much bigger and heavier than the sows and can injure them during sex. In intensive factory farming, a sow that gives birth is often kept in a “gestation” or “farrowing” crate that gives piglets access to her teats, while keeping her immobilised to prevent crushing the piglets.⁸ This horrific system of crates restricts the sow’s movements and removes her volition, but also isolates reproductive and maternal behaviours into dedicated phases (and spaces) of meat production. In their ethnographic study of the Danish pig industry, Inger Anneberg and Mette Vaarst observed that “being confined as farrowing sows without the ability to turn around and then being brought back into heat as fast as possible to produce more piglets carries the price of a very short, often painful life, a life full of frustrations” (2018, 110).

Porcine sex and reproduction become compartmentalised. With new technologies, a sexual encounter between animals becomes obsolete for reproduction. Artificial insemination, which removes the risk of injury during sex, entered the pig breeding industry in the 1970s, but became prominent only

8 Since 2013, the use of gestation crates has been forbidden in the EU, with the exception of the first four weeks of a sow’s pregnancy and one week before farrowing. This means that for the majority of her pregnancy (114 days gestation period on average), sows are kept in group pens, to then be closed again for farrowing and lactation until the piglets are weaned, usually at around 3–4 weeks of age (Council Directive 2008/120/EC of 18 December 2008 (Codified Version) 2009).

around the early 2000s (Derry 2015, 124). The “dummy sow” that harvests sperm from the boar tricked into mounting this artificial sex partner is a perfectly immobile substitute for the living sow. It symbolically removes her from the crate, only to bring human workers into the picture to perform the work of insemination. In this capitalist human-porcine intimacy, the workers are also tasked with arousing the breeding sows (sometimes with the help of mare hormonal substances) to improve conception rates. Thanks to the “agricultural exception” human actions such as stimulating a boar, harvesting his sperm, arousing a sow, and inseminating her manually are not considered sexual acts.

In order to maintain the growing productivity of farmed pigs, both in terms of herd numbers and their body size, porcine bodies have been pushed to their limits through selective breeding, farm management, feeding, and medication. Paradoxically, this overstretching results in increasing fragility of pig bodies that are becoming more vulnerable to disease and stress. This, in turn, threatens the profit margins. In order to navigate this precarious balance, all the aspects of porcine lives on industrial farms are carefully controlled. But it is not just the animal lives that industrial farming governs, but also the lives of human workers (Porcher 2011; Blanchette 2020). They are targets of increased control, particularly with heightened biosecurity measures dictating what the workers can and cannot do when at the farm, as well as what they do outside working hours. Alex Blanchette, in his anthropology of U.S. hog farming, argues that “these interventions into human spheres are premised on reproducing the reproductive capacities of boars and sows. [...] People are coming to form kinship ties with the hogs they touch, as the state of hogs’ immune systems is conjoined to the everyday lives of individuals going about their daily routines” (2020, 49). He uses the figure of the machine to write about the industrial pig not to deny its status as a living being, but rather to frame the relationship of labour between human and animal bodies. It is not only the porcine body that is trained into submission as described earlier, but also the human worker who has to adapt to the body of the pig, to its rhythms and the logic of (re) production dictated by the profit-oriented pork industry. Such intimate choreography between human and porcine bodies, one worked out in the setting of captive breeding, forms the main avenue through which biosecurity enters into a wider array of human-animal relations.

4 Biosecurity as a Purification Practice

Radical control over porcine bodies requires them to be separated from the outside world to minimise uncontrollable factors and prevent disease. This means limiting access to pigs for both people and other animals, disinfecting

tools, clothes and vehicles, cleaning, and separating herds—these are the biosecurity measures which are part of everyday farm practices. They have significantly intensified and become mandatory during the ASF outbreak. Keeping pigs separated and controlling access constitutes the first most obvious facet of politics of purity at play. The study of pig farming in Poland in the context of biosecurity, sterility, and policing borders offers a narrative complementary to that of fully industrialised large-scale farms, which have been studied in greater detail (Anneberg and Vaarst 2018; Blanchette 2020; Dutkiewicz 2019), because only 1.2% of Polish farms that keep pigs have herds larger than 1000, and 55–60% of all pigs are kept on smaller farms.⁹ These smaller farms cannot afford investing in advanced biosecurity measures, technologies and procedures, and their operations are significantly more porous than those of large-scale farms—the same person is responsible for many tasks across the different stages of the pigs' lives, which in large-scale operations tend to be separated.

As we are writing this in early 2021, governmental requirements¹⁰ for everyday biosecurity measures against ASF in the regions that do not have active ASF cases include a strict separation of swine fodder from the pigs themselves, and away from any other animals, domestic or not. Similarly, pigs cannot be fed food waste because the ASF virus can survive for months or even years in contaminated pork products. Giving food scraps to pigs is commonplace, especially on the many thousands of Polish farms that only keep a few animals for sustenance, so breaking this food chain further separates these farmed animals from humans. Additionally, farmers need to keep track of people coming in and out of the piggery, making it a zone of high surveillance. Only authorised persons can come into contact with the pigs on a given farm, and the workers must wear protective clothing and sterilise it along with all the equipment they use before and after contact with the animals. Moreover, disinfecting mats need to be placed at all entrances. People who go wild boar hunting cannot come into contact with farmed pigs for 72 hours afterwards, and dogs that participate in

9 Industry data (Knecht and Jankowska-Mąkosza 2019). This means some 40–45% of pigs are kept on farms with at least 1000 of these animals. This number has grown significantly in recent years, as in 2000 only 16% of Polish pigs were kept at farms with at least 200 of these animals (data for farms of 1000 and more unavailable) (Blicharski and Hammermeister 2013). To put this into perspective, in Denmark, which has one of the highest concentrations of industrial farms in the world, around 97% of pigs are kept on farms with 1000 pigs or more, see (Augère-Granier 2020), in the US, according to the 2010 census it was 93.5% of all pigs, see (McBride and Key 2013), the number is likely higher now.

10 As posted by the Polish General Veterinary Inspectorate ("Główny Inspektorat Weterynarii" n.d.).

those hunts are strictly forbidden from being in any proximity to the pigs. Tall double-fences need to be put up wherever pigs are kept in outdoor pens, as on organic farms where the animals are often kept free-range.

Along with several other similar rules, the main message behind biosecurity in farming is to totally separate pigs from the rest of the living and non-living world and introduce strict control of those who come into contact with them. In areas of the country marked as yellow or red zones designating the risk of ASF, added restrictions further tighten this separation and are mostly related to the conditions of transporting pigs. Animals need to be tested by a veterinarian not more than 24 hours before they are moved, they cannot come into contact with other animals, and if they are to leave the higher-risk zone, they also need to be quarantined for thirty days. As mentioned in the introduction, there was also a plan to ban outdoor pens in red zones, but the measure was rejected. Many other European countries, where the disease is active, have introduced the ban on outdoor pens, in an attempt to seal the pigs entirely inside sterile buildings, filtering and controlling everything that comes in and out. As cultural anthropologist Bettina Stoetzer sums up such practices: “[i]ronically, further industrialization was thus deemed to be the cure for the disease” (Stoetzer 2020). Along with control over sex in breeding practices, biosecuritisation encompasses almost all aspects of porcine life and death.

Despite multiple regulations aimed at sealing the farmed pigs from the outside world and its dangers, the disease continues to slowly spread across Poland and Europe (Schulz et al. 2019). This is believed to be due to both human and nonhuman factors of transmission (Pepin et al. 2020). Biosecurity was recognised as a crucial tool for fighting the ASF epidemic because the virus is extremely resilient and survives in porcine excretions, blood, and other tissues for prolonged periods of time. Given the high tenacity of the virus, human mobility becomes the primary factor of its transmission, as it is often carried on boots or tires contaminated with swine blood or faeces, or in cured meat in uneaten sandwiches. According to the Polish Supreme Audit Office's report from 2017, the implementation of biosecurity measures was inadequate at 74% of the audited farms, and only 6% of the farms met the highest standards (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli 2017). The national biosecurity program failed to stop the spread of the disease, which by November 2019 reached the western part of the country. The report indicates that the programme also failed to meet its second goal, which was to limit pig keeping only to farms that fulfil all the biosecurity regulations. As part of the programme, compensation was offered to those farmers who would resign from keeping pigs because of being unable to introduce the biosecurity measures. It had been anticipated that the cost of their implementation would be prohibitively high for many. However,

hardly any farmers decided to claim the compensation. The report is highly critical of the programme's implementation, it did not provide any legal tools to close small pig-producing operations that failed to meet the biosecurity measures and could jeopardise the nearby industrial-scale farms. Sometimes the factory farms that complied with biosecurity measures ended up in a high-risk zone because of a single case reported on a smaller farm with just a few pigs. This further pitted big pork business players against small farmers who keep pigs primarily for sustenance. In this sense, biosecurity contributes to an increasing concentration and industrialisation of meat production.

In Poland, the discourse around the current ASF outbreak is perhaps equally marred by racism as it is by classism. While the disease itself is framed as the "beast from the East" penetrating the frontier of the EU, the Polish pork industry largely depends on the labour of migrant workers, mostly from Ukraine (Rabizo 2018, 68). Classism also plays out in othering Polish farmers in the bourgeois narrative claiming their backwardness and incompetence. The ASF epidemic and methods of dealing with it fall on entrenched divisions in society, where inhabitants of large cities are pitted against people from rural areas. In the media and on social media platforms, more liberal-leaning city dwellers, who are largely against mass culling of wild boars, argue that the responsibility of protecting farmed pigs from ASF lies with the farmers who should follow biosecurity measures. Paradoxically, arguing for greater freedom of wild boars, they call for stricter control of farmed pigs and human farm workers. This is another instance of how different the perceived ontologies of "wild" versus "domesticated" animals are, this time rehearsed in the liberal discourse.

Such complex social tensions and the ways in which politics of purification play out in the Polish context have been analysed by a feminist scholar, Olga Cielemecka, in her study of the conflict over logging in the Białowieża Primeval Forest. She demonstrates how "purity discourses form an elaborate and entangled web which helps to delineate and fortify such classed and racialized boundaries" (Cielemecka 2020, 67), that further exacerbate internal political divisions between environmentalist protesters and Polish authorities positioning themselves as the representatives of the normative national majority. In the case of the ASF epidemic in Poland, biosecurity forms a purification practice not only in the technical sense of enforcing stricter hygiene rules on the farm and outside of it, but also as a way of controlling human and porcine bodies. The everyday biosecurity practices that have already become standard in industrialised pig farming are now heightened and extended to all forms of human-porcine contact. The politics of purity rest on a critical tension between proximity that makes domestic pigs and wild boars vulnerable to the

disease on the one hand, and distance implemented via biosecuritisation on the other, which pushes them further apart both spatially and categorically.

5 Sanitary Hunting and the Invasion Narrative

Wild boars are the most commonly hunted animals and their meat is the second most popular kind of “game” consumed in Poland. Boars, therefore, play a double role in the context of food—they are both a source of meat themselves and a threat to pork production, although the scales of these two meat sourcing strategies differ by orders of magnitude. Since the report outlining poor results of the biosecurity programme came out, the attention of officials responsible for slowing down ASF focused on wild boars as the main suspects of disease spread. Mass culling of wild boar populations perceived as the reservoir of ASF have been introduced. Already considered to be agricultural pests because of raiding crops and transmitting other diseases, wild boars quickly became the number one enemy, portrayed as the main culprits of the new epidemic (Szczygielska 2019). With the government unable to force farmers to tightly seal their pigs from the outer world, strong emphasis has been placed on preventing potentially infected boars from coming anywhere near the pigs by creating buffer zones, where attempts are made to eradicate the boars entirely by indiscriminate and intensified hunting. The Chief Veterinary Officer commented on the national programme combating ASF: “[it] is not about putting out a bonfire, our task is to stop a wildfire. We must also think about prevention to stop the spread of the disease. [...] We want to protect the national economy” (“Wojewódzki Zespół Zarządzania Kryzysowego o ASF” 2020).¹¹ These so-called “sanitary culls” (in Polish *odstrzał sanitarny*) in the fight with ASF represent the same “cleansing with fire” approach towards unruly nonhumans that was adopted in the Białowieża Forest, as described by Cielemeńska, when the sanitary logging of trees attacked by bark beetles was employed to eradicate the “pest”. In some respects, the wild boar shares the fate of the beetle as “a politically charged animal body, a body trapped between its discursive, biopolitical, and material registers. The ‘cleansing of’ the Forest from the pest is entangled with an ideological cleansing. In it, social anxieties around groups considered unwanted or alien spill into existing conceptions of nature” (Cielemeńska 2020, 65–66). In the case of porcine bodies endangered

11 All translations from Polish to English are by the authors, unless indicated otherwise.

by the virus, these anxieties also encompass domesticated nature, given that farmed pigs feature as a protected life form due to their market value as meat. In contrast, the wild boar represents the unwanted and dangerous pest whose proliferation needs to be curbed. As such, killing wild boars is understood in terms of cleansing both as vermin control and ASF prevention. The danger that the disease poses to wild boar welfare is downplayed due to their abundance and the bumpy history of the human-boar conflict. Thus, hunting in this case serves as an immediate means of wild boar depopulation put in place to restore order.

As Haraway points out, “histories are complex and dynamic in the human-nonhuman animal relations called hunting and do not lend themselves to typological reduction, except for purposes of hostile polemic, dogmatic purity, and hackneyed origin stories, usually of the Man-the-Hunter genre” (2007, 296). Nevertheless, the discourse of hunting as a sanitary practice, mobilised in Poland in the face of the deadly virus decimating porcine populations, forms a distinct type of animal killing, representing yet another facet of purity politics. This is not just wildlife population management—hunting becomes sanitisation when more than just wild boars are at stake. In this sense, killing off wild boars *en masse* for their potential transmission of the ASF virus is an extension of biosecurity measures applied to protect farmed pigs from infection. This is while noting that hunters are also required to follow strict biosecurity regulations because they can easily become mechanical vectors for the spread of the disease. As opposed to the times when wild boars are hunted for sport, these sanitary culls permit hunting with no restrictions, including shooting pregnant sows, and for a hefty fee. Additionally, the use of silencing and night-vision devices is granted to allow for hunting at night and closer to urban areas. Since the first ASF outbreak in Poland, hunting legislation has been modified multiple times to facilitate the large-scale eradication of wild boar populations. Significantly, a special act from 2019 allowed the possibility of mobilising the military and police to cull boars (Mikos 2019). With a goal of killing up to 200 thousand animals, these mass hunts have been heavily contested by environmental activists who organised protests and direct actions to disturb the hunts. This lasted until another law imposed high penalties for such disturbances. Between January and September 2020, hunters killed 84.5 thousand boars out of which only 458 tested positive for ASFV (Ptak-Igłowska 2020).

Much like with the Białowieża Forest bark beetles, the anti-ASF hunts turned out to be an ineffective and often counterproductive strategy. This is because the highly contagious blood and other body parts of shot boars would often contaminate the hunters’ vehicles, clothes and equipment, thus posing

a greater danger of disease transmission to farmed pigs than the free-ranging wild boars themselves. In this sense, wild boar bodies are unruly not only due to their high fecundity, but also because they are leaky bodies. Hunting is a messy practice even when employed as a means of sanitisation. As anthropologist Garry Marvin observes in his distinction between “domestic” and “wild” killing, the latter kind “brought about in hunting is disorderly and certainly not inevitable, because it is based on the lack of continuous control of wild animals by humans” (Marvin 2006, 24–25). In terms of implementing biosecurity, it is predominantly human actions that pose the biggest challenge and are subject to control. Despite scientific reports on the low risk of transmission from wild boar mobility and higher efficacy of detecting infected carcasses (Podgórski and Śmietanka 2018; Taylor et al. 2020), culls in Poland continue to a manifestly military and nationalist tune. A new narrative on hunting emerges—the hunter becomes the defender protecting Polish agribusiness from an alien invasion. In this sense, an enemy at the gates helps to define the “we” of the national body. The foreign character of the disease is double: linguistically coded in its name as caused by a virus from Africa, and at the same time being widely reported as an invasion from the East, as it is believed that the first outbreak in Poland came from Belarus (Gallardo et al. 2014). As Sara Ahmed notes, “a good or healthy neighbourhood [or nation state] does not leak outside itself, and hence does not let outsiders (or foreign agents/viruses) in” (Ahmed 2000, 25). This narrative is also employed with regard to the increased presence of wild boars in cities, where they disrupt the orderly aesthetic, cause fears of zoonotic diseases, and break into people’s gardens, while also sometimes becoming objects of significant affective attention and protection, but only once they become “our local boars” (Kowalewska 2019).

The militarised defence strategy against a disease that brings economic losses to meat production is also realised through erecting physical barriers.¹² Denmark famously built a fence on its border with Germany to stop the spread of ASF. Polish authorities planned to do the same along the eastern border with Belarus and Ukraine, but the plan did not come to fruition.¹³ Meanwhile, with the disease moving from East to West, Germany erected 300 kilometres of fence on the border with Poland, thus marking the moving frontier of viral danger

12 For more intersectional perspectives on border securitisation, militaristic logics and nonhuman animals see (Khazaal and Almiron 2021).

13 Internal barriers are being put up, with a 40-kilometre fence on the border between Mazowieckie and Świętokrzyskie voivodeships. Information from a local government website (‘Świętokrzyskie odgrodzi się od Mazowsza 40-kilometrowym płotem z powodu ASF’ 2020).

zones. On yet another level, these operations disturbingly coincide with the openly anti-immigrant stance adopted by the governments of Denmark and Poland. In 2022, Poland constructed a 186-kilometre steel wall on that very border where the anti-ASF fence had been planned. This border wall is supposed to block the movement of refugees and migrants entering from Belarus. Therefore, such securitisation of national borders indirectly binds nonhuman and human others in the rhetoric of invasion. This is how one of the prime facets of the politics of purity plays out in racist undertones transposed onto porcine bodies: brown, hairy, and promiscuous wild boars from across the border are presented as the main threat to pink, clean farmed pigs. The fear of contagion turns the porcine body into a site of vital warfare. What these fears over immigration and wild boar mobility have in common is the anxiety over the unruly proliferation of foreign bodies that dangerously over-reproduce. This is how we circle back to sex as the primary site for the politics of purity at play.

6 Conclusions

In this chapter we have focused on the epidemic of ASF in Poland that marshalled discourses on purity via biosecurity measures implemented inside and outside of pig farms, thus implicating free-ranging wild boars as possible vectors of the lethal disease. The politics of purity is understood in this chapter not only as the sum of sanitary and cleansing practices, but also more broadly, as an ideological stance attempting to impose order, police borders, and sort out the messy intra- and interspecies relations. Despite such high concern over keeping things neatly separated, discourses on purity harbour gendered, classed, and racialised divisions that, ironically, cross the species barrier easily, implicating human and nonhuman animals alike. In his *Bioinsecurities*, Ahuja argues “for the need to account for orders of representation that cross the subject through the affective, that shape the forms of interface available to humans, animals, and viruses, and that subtly vest governmental force into the lifeworlds of interspecies contact” (2016, 15). Our analysis of the changing human-swine relations during the ASF epidemic in Poland demonstrates that control over porcine sex plays a pivotal role in the mediation of space, labour, embodiment, and risk. Optimised sexuality of pig bodies on farms, their life-cycles divided into manageable, quantifiable units of protein content, coupled with ever-tightening biosecurity, are all manifestations of the broader attempts by the capitalist production mechanisms to subdue sex and life (nonhuman and human alike) to its own logic of perpetual growth and accumulation.

In this process, the industrial pig breeding operations in Europe and North America are willing to transgress traditional Christian prejudice against sex and even stronger tabooisation of bestiality, as having human workers perform the act of insemination became the preferable strategy. This is both due to profit margins and the practical organisation of pig breeding, where the bodies of male and female pigs of high-efficiency breeds grow “out of sync” with one another, nearly unable to mate without endangering the sow. It is worth noting that altering pig bodies for maximum profit bears direct consequences for human health as well, given that the unprecedented amounts of cheap meat in European and American diets are believed to be linked to widespread obesity (You and Henneberg 2016) and a number of cancers, including invasive breast cancer (Lo et al. 2020) and colorectal cancer (Aykan 2015). Similarly, altering pig bodies also influences human health indirectly, as factory farming contributes to groundwater pollution and climate change (Nicole 2013).

Such immense control over porcine bodies renders them increasingly more fragile as they reach beyond-production limits. The increased risk of viral outbreaks seems to be the logical consequence of the industrial animal farm. With higher vulnerability to diseases, biosecurity becomes a necessity in everyday operations of factory farming. From surveillance zones, through “sanitary” culling, to anti-ASF fences, these biosecurity measures frame wild boars as invaders from the East, while domestic pigs as an endangered food resource, protected only to be slaughtered. In this context, biosecurity could be easily framed as one of the mechanisms for ensuring food security (Lougheed and Hird 2017), but we show that a lot more is at stake when purification practices and border policing are enforced on a large scale. Porcine bodies become a manifestation of ideological purity, even though the differences between wild boars and domestic pigs result from centuries of human intervention. The idea that wild boars and domestic pigs remain strictly separated from one another is merely a fantasy of purity and an illusion of control over nonhuman animals. Although they seem set apart by industrialised agriculture—with farmed pigs subjected to increasing forms of captivity and wild boars expanding their territories and becoming more present in urban and suburban areas—their ecologies still overlap. The main concern behind biosecurity measures mobilised in the face of the ASF epidemic relates to the spatial proximity between these animals. However, as of yet, the attempts to fully separate indoor pig farms from the outside world have failed. The impossibility of purity is manifested not only in the imperfections of human actions, but also as a result of the resilience of the ASF virus, livestock vulnerability in factory farming, and the agency of wild boars crossing national borders (or farmed pigs escaping captivity, becoming feral and joining wild boar sounders!).

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Eating with a Cow: Feminist Multispecies Ethnography in the Kitchens of the Black Sea High Pastures of Turkey

Ezgi Burgan Kiyak

1 Introduction

We should not kill, eat, torture, and exploit animals
because they do not want to be so treated, and we know that.
If we listen, we can hear them.

DONOVAN 1993, 185

In 2013, the Turkish government launched a project called Green Road, an approximately 1,600-mile highway¹ to link important high pastures and touristic areas in eight cities in the Eastern Black Sea Region.² Hydropower plants and mining sites were also followed the project despite the plan did not originally involve any infrastructure for buildings. Some locals and activists protested,³ arguing that “the project would impact the environment and harm the region’s natural beauty”, “affect the lives of several non-human animals”⁴ and “threaten the high pasture culture due to the constructions around the ways which are

1 <https://earthjournalism.net/stories/a-green-road-threatens-to-devastate-turkeys-black-sea-highlands>.

2 Making roads always affects the lives of species. The Eastern Black Sea region is known as one of the most important environmental areas of biodiversity in the world. The consequences of the project could be devastating. “Roads are a major contributor to habitat fragmentation because they divide large landscapes into smaller patches and convert interior habitat into edge habitat. As additional road construction and timber harvest activities increase habitat fragmentation across large areas, the populations of some species may become isolated, increasing the risk of local extirpations or extinctions” (Sari et al. 2016, 191; Noss and Cooperrider 1994).

3 During these protests, demonstrations were broken up by the police and many activists were taken into custody for blocking the road. <https://www.duvarenglish.com/environment/2020/07/13/turkeys-council-of-state-suspends-controversial-green-road-project>

4 “These mountains and forests are very important sources of water, habitats for species including bears and wolves, and ‘petrol stations’ where raptors and other migratory birds can fuel up.” Interview with Oğuz Kurdoğlu (Prof., Forestry Faculty at Karadeniz Technical University in Trabzon).

used during the seasonal migration to bring the livestock into the lush highlands to graze each summer”.⁵

I have always expressed solidarity with protesters against the threats of the project to the environment and the local people. In addition to their concerns, I was worried about the negative effects of the project on the lives of the cows and concerned about the possible changes in the relationship between cows and women farmers in the Black Sea high pastures. I was especially troubled by the project’s potentially violent treatment of cows in the area. One of the threats posed during the road construction period was stones falling on cows while they were grazing. I heard about many incidents where cows were injured by the stones in the high pastures of Rize. To me, it was also an obvious risk that face-to-face encounters between specific animals and individual humans would disappear due to the fact that high pastures would become tourist sites as result of the Green Road Project. Growing tourist interest has caused increasing numbers of households to change their earning habits: many have started serving tourists by becoming pensions, hotels, cafes and so on. Inevitably, these changes affect animal–human relationships, as some humans sell their elderly cows and acquire more cattle to increase the “productivity” of the cows and produce goods to serve tourists.

Fortunately, in July 2020, Turkey’s Council of State suspended the Green Road Project. Before receiving the good news, I had a chance to listen to an unconventional story about the relationship between a woman and “her” cows. The story was from Emine, a woman from the high pasture, who protested against the project with these words:

The high pasture is the country of the cows, not ours. The cows eat here, enjoy life here, and are free to roam all day long. They (she implies the government) will push us from here, and tourists will come to enjoy the area instead. What about my cows? What will I say to them (cows)? How will I look them in the face?⁶

Emine’s words described the lives of the cows and defended their right to live in the high pasture within speciesist animal husbandry practices. Her words also highlighted specific animals’ faces,⁷ thereby supporting my instinct that

5 <https://earthjournalism.net/stories/a-green-road-threatens-to-devastate-turkeys-black-sea-highlands>

6 The quotes have been translated from Turkish into English by the author.

7 Levinas stresses the power of the face: “The face, strictly speaking, does not speak, but what the face means is nevertheless conveyed by the commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’

one of the threats of the project was that the entire oral history of the relationship between cows and women would disappear, along with the stories of animal faces. In this chapter, inspired by the story of Emine, I aim to discuss face-to-face encounters between specific cows and women farmers.⁸ In the global food network, animals⁹ do not have faces; the lives of farmed animals are determined by their sex and fertility (see Szczygielska and Kowalewska, Chapter 1 in this book). Interestingly, despite using animals for their milk and “meat” some women (such as Emine) in the high pastures still mention animal faces. This made me wonder: under the hegemony of speciesist food networks, what kinds of encounters make the faces of animals visible for some women in the high pastures? Following this question, in the first section, I discuss my research methodology and share my own story as a researcher in three different high pastures where I conducted the fieldwork. Additionally, I also reflect on the “situatedness” (Haraway 1988) of the researcher.

In the second section, I explore the notion of “kitchen” and use this term as a figure (Haraway 2004) to understand the intersectional lives of cows. By deploying Haraway’s notion of “becoming-with”, I explore the possibility of eating *with* a cow. In the third and fourth sections, utilising the findings to focus on the meanings of eating among the smallholders in the high pastures, I discuss the following questions: How do women farmers in the Black Sea high pastures both uphold and question speciesism? How do social and cultural circumstances affect these moral negotiations in this context? Both questions provide us with a non-anthropocentric and critical approach to studying the relations between food, species, geography and gender in a “more-than-human world” (Abram 1997).

It conveys this commandment without precisely speaking it” (2004, 132). Following Levinas, Butler emphasises the “sanctity of all lives” (“the face is not exclusively a human face”) without crossing the border of adding the animal faces in the question. Taylor brings animals to the centre of discussion on the sphere of ethical consideration of Butler by reading Butler with Coetzee (1999): “Butler’s situating of the problems of violence and dehumanization disavows and obscures the manner in which the lives of non-human animals are also precarious, indefinitely detained, violated, derealized, grievable but ungrieved, and that these are concerns which Coetzee takes up” (Taylor 2008, 61). For further work on Levinas and the animal face question, see Atterton and Wright (2019).

- 8 At the beginning of the study, my research questions included animal–farmer relationships, but did not focus on women farmers. However, during the fieldwork, my observations suggested that the women farmers are mostly the ones who relate to animals through their labour and care.
- 9 Derrida (2002, 402) criticises the generalisation of the usage of the word “animal”: “the usage, in the singular, of a notion as general as ‘the Animal’, as if all nonhuman livings could be grouped without the common sense of this ‘commonplace’, the Animal, whatever the abyssal differences and structural limits that separate, in the very essence of their being, all ‘animals’, a name that we would therefore be advised, to begin with, to keep within quotation marks”.

2 A Daughter in the Barn

To establish an analytical and critical approach, I applied multispecies ethnography¹⁰ during the fieldwork. In 2017–2018, I stayed in the high pastures for 40 days and visited households¹¹ in different villages of the Black Sea. This enabled me to live, observe, and understand the various aspects of human–animal relationships in the context of daily household routines. I participated in the daily chores of women by cleaning the barn, walking with cows, and feeding cows and calves. This allowed me to observe the experiences of both women and cows in daily encounters. Multispecies ethnography enabled me to observe the different behaviours.¹² Benefiting from the possibilities of multispecies ethnography as a feminist, I aimed to understand the lives of women and cows in the high pastures and also to understand myself as a researcher, as a woman, and as a person whose life intersects with the lives of various animals.

On my third day in the Aralık high pasture, while we were preparing breakfast in the kitchen, I told Hatice (a woman farmer) about my desperate efforts to understand the cows' behaviours and experiences more deeply. She listened very patiently and said:

Tomorrow morning, when you come with me to clean the barn, wear my clothes. My daughters¹³ [cows] trust me, so when they recognise my

10 Since the 1980s, feminist animal studies have looked at the relationship between humans and animals from an interdisciplinary and critical perspective. This non-anthropocentric study not only adds the issue of animals, but questions the categories of “human” and “society” and how they are perceived as completely separate from the category of “animal”. These questions affect the ways of doing and seeing ethnography. In 2010, Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich called this approach multispecies ethnography.

11 To reach the participants of the study, I applied the snowball sampling technique. I asked my mother, the grandmother of a friend, veterinarians, a taxi driver, a colleague studying in other high pastures, and environmentalist activists to help find participants. As the circle of potential participants increased, I chose three high pastures between the cities that were under the risk of the Green Road Project. Alongside participatory observations, I conducted interviews with 40 women farmers using oral history techniques to collect the women's stories related to cows in the high pastures.

12 Many details about the behaviour of cows can be found in biology, zoology and ethology literature, e.g., Breed and Moore (2012), Albright and Arave (1997), Cooper et. al. (2008). Multispecies ethnography proposes a non-anthropocentric way to understand inter/intra-species relationships and questions our ways of accumulating information about animal behaviour.

13 Hatice was not the only woman who called the cows her daughters. This habit is very common in the high pastures among the women farmers.

smell on you, they will behave in a more friendly way towards you. They will understand that you are also a daughter of mine.

I was fascinated by the idea of connecting with the cows' feelings through smells.¹⁴ Hatice used scientific knowledge about animal behaviours derived from her own everyday experience. When I wore her clothes, I witnessed how some cows started to behave more warmly towards me by making eye contact with me, touching me, and even licking my hand. This proximity reminded me of Haraway (2016, 2), who proposes making kin as "oddkin", or choosing to cultivate close relationships with beings not included in the same biogenetic human family as you. She raises several questions to organise oddkin: "What shape is this kinship, where and whom do its lines connect and disconnect, and so what? What must be cut and what must be tied, if multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance?" These questions enable us to consider a close relationship between a cow and a human being as a choice and to discuss that choice-based kinship along with the question of situatedness. An enquiry following these questions could benefit from feminist multispecies ethnography.

To explore¹⁵ the feminist ways of doing multispecies ethnography, I use the notion of situatedness by thinking about gendering participatory fieldwork research and multispecies ethnography together. Gillespie (2018) has proposed three steps to conduct multispecies ethnography in the field: (i) discussing your positionality as a researcher in relation to the animals and humans you are studying, (ii) considering the geography of the research area, (iii) describing the characteristics of the animals you are studying. I would like to add questioning the hierarchies and stable ontologies of both gender and animals to these steps as a feminist way of doing multispecies ethnography. Following these steps requires looking beyond ontological positions based on Cartesian dualisms such as human–animal, woman–man, or mind–body.¹⁶ To apply

14 Colvin, Allen and Marino (2020, 5) point out that "cows (also) use smell to navigate social relationships, and they can detect the scent of stress hormones present in the urine of fellow cows." For other interesting examples about the senses of cows, see Young (2017); Cooper, et. al. (2008).

15 I called this exploring not because I explored a new method, but because every fieldwork has its own techniques. In this study, I tried to find techniques of my own through feminist animal studies and multispecies studies.

16 Many renowned ecofeminists, such as Plumwood (1993), have emphasised the importance of resisting Cartesian dualisms, but the human–animal dichotomy has rarely been questioned in early ecofeminist works. Greta Gaard (1993, 4) points out that "ecofeminist ethics in relation to animals is either marginalised or entirely neglected" in the early

Gillespie's first step, let us go back to Hatice's words. One layer of communication between us was the way she called me a daughter of hers. She described the cows as her daughters and made a plan to introduce me to them as another of her daughters. I admit that I was honoured to be accepted as her daughter, but as a researcher, I also felt slightly uncomfortable in this ascribed role.

Several ethnographers have discussed the challenges they have encountered in fieldwork because of their gender, especially when they have attempted to enter a "closed" community, or questioned the positionality of the researcher (Stacey 1991, Abu-Lughod 1993, Berik 1996). Here, remembering two questions of Caplan (1993, 78) may be helpful to escape the discomfort of crossing the boundaries between the researcher and participants: "Who are we for them?" and "Who are they for us?" From a multispecies approach, "they" refers to both women and cows: "Who I am—by the gaze of an animal?" (Derrida 2002, 372). In my encounter with Hatice, I felt that the answers to these enquiries were buried in the fact that I was a 32-year-old, single, woman researcher and expected¹⁷ to adapt to the field. Since I was called her daughter, I had to face my positionality in the field: I was trying to conduct research with "deep hanging out",¹⁸ so while I was cleaning the barn, preparing breakfast, washing dishes, serving tea to the family members, and playing with the kids, I was not seen as very different from any other daughter around. I was performing all these tasks with joy, with a desire to know the animals, women, and the relationship between them. At the same time, looking at myself as a daughter in the kitchen enabled me to see the gendered division of labour in the high

ecofeminist books, "but is addressed more fully in Andrée Collard and Joyce Contrucci's *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence Against Animals and the Earth* (1989), and the relation between the oppression of women and that of animals is developed in Carol Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990). Since the 1990s, more feminist animal rights activists and scholars have troubled the human–animal dichotomy and used intersectional approaches.

- 17 The women accepted me as a guest; a friend of the family. A Turkish saying is: "One can be a guest for three days". That means, after the third day, you can still stay there, but you are no longer treated as a guest. The household members have a right to have some expectations from you, such as getting involved in housework. The researcher's position may affect this expectation, depending on their gender, age, and marital status. I was disadvantaged in all these criteria: I was a single woman, in my early 30s and I had a friend with me, who was also a single woman in her early 30s. In this context, I was less of a researcher and more of a daughter or sister. Therefore, after the second day in the high pastures, the people began to call me "our daughter" as if I were the daughter of the entire village.
- 18 Clifford Geertz (1998) coined the phrase "deep hanging out" to describe the ethnographic research method of informal and prolonged immersion within a cultural group in order to understand actors from their own point of view.

pasture.¹⁹ Women were working with certain animals, mostly cows, and had specific responsibilities such as feeding, milking, herding, curing, and cleaning the barn. In other words, women are expected to maintain the lives of cows, whereas men are tasked with ending their lives—delivering death—in the gendered division of labour.

Ethical dilemmas become more intense when the researcher has a critical view of sexism and speciesism, particularly when they see connections between them. For example, Gillespie (2018) discussed ethical dilemmas when she witnessed violence against cows in the dairy industry. Despite the differences between industrial and rural animal husbandry, from a vegan feminist perspective, it is an ethical obligation to respect nonhuman lifeforms and listen to the voices of animals (Donovan 1993, Gilligan 1982, Adams 2010). Therefore, for the researcher, it is difficult to face the oppression of animals in animal husbandry. While I was doing daily chores with women in the kitchen or barn, I was ruminating on this question in my mind: *Cui bono?* (Who benefits?). As Haraway quotes from Star, “that it is both more analytically interesting and more politically just to begin with the question *cui bono*,²⁰ than to begin with a celebration of the fact of human/non-human mingling” (Star 1991, 43; Haraway 2004, 238). This viewpoint requires the situatedness inherent in feminist research practice and critical reflexivity (Haraway 2004, 278–79).

Research ethics, reflexivity, critical reflexivity and self-reflexivity have been distinctive terms that feminist ethnographers have discussed most often (Skeggs 2001, 434). Some feminist ethnographers have brought these discussions to critical animal studies (Moore and Kosut 2013, Taylor and Hamilton 2014). On the one hand, these questions imply our different positionalities in terms of class, ethnicity, geography, education, and our relations with animals. On the other hand, a common ground made me “a daughter”, which defines me as a woman in gendered relations. This shared position creates an

19 Wolf (1996, 42) points out that “many feminist researchers have drawn upon patriarchal relations to gain access and, at times, have played upon their race, their class position, and/or their status as women when it was useful”. This positionality can be a “strategic manner” to gain acceptance and it may create “more sensitive researchers and ethnographies”, however it also “tends to reflect inequality” between the researcher and research subjects. “This is particularly evident because the fieldworker has the ability and privilege to leave the field location once the research is over.” Because of this hierarchy, some researchers argue that ethical research is never completely possible (Patai 1991) or totally “non-violent communication” is a “positivist dream” (Bourdieu 1999, 608).

20 Referring to Haraway: “Rather than simply celebrate multispecies mingling, ethnographers have begun to explore a central question: Who benefits, *cui bono*, ‘when species meet?’” (Kirksey, et. al. 2014, 2).

understanding between the researcher and research participants. For example, none of the women questioned my dietary practice (vegetarian, at that time), and most of them were open to talking about their attitudes towards animals and dilemmas about eating animals. During the fieldwork, conversations about ethical dilemmas did not only enable me to understand how the women's views and practices were affected by the context in which they lived and worked but they also helped me to reconsider my own presumption that the local animal husbandry practices were always more about caring than exploitation of cows and women.²¹

This experience evokes the possibilities of situated knowledges to question our partial perspectives as researchers. According to Haraway (1988, 581), “[f]eminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*”. Although the human–animal divide could be seen as a significant factor in positionality, it was not so solid when Hatice reconfigured the notion of “daughter” as a trope and also as a relation. When a woman farmer identifies both a woman researcher and a cow as “daughter”, this woman farmer can share the mother cow position²² in her relationship with cows. In the next section, I discuss how situated knowledges enabled me to investigate the effects of the dynamic and relational character of the daughter figure and provide a critical view for a feminist multispecies ethnography.

3 Seeking Feminist Multispecies Figures of the Kitchen

Ecofeminist works within critical animal studies question the sexist and speciesist dimensions of the notion of kitchen (e.g., Adams 2010, Gruen 1993, Wilkie 2010). Who cooks in the kitchen/or who is responsible for using fire? Who eats? Who eats with whom? Whom do we eat? By questioning the nature–culture and other dualistic divisions, multispecies studies²³ seek for

21 Examples of the entanglement of care and exploitation are given below. For a critical animal studies perspective on the treatment of animals in small-scale local farms see Stănescu (2010).

22 For now, I would like to highlight that our positions are not solid; they can transform into other positions beyond the human–animal divide.

23 Multispecies ethnography studies “contact zones where lines separating nature from culture have broken down, where encounters between *Homo sapiens* and other beings generate mutual ecologies and coproduced niches” (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010, 546). They explore how “the human’ has been formed and transformed amid encounters with multiple species of plants, animals, fungi, and microbes” (Kirksey et. al., 2014, 1–2).

the possibilities to change the story²⁴ of gendered division of labour in the kitchen and contest the use of domesticated animals as sources of food. In this sense, “the goal in multispecies ethnography should not just be to give voice, agency or subjectivity to the nonhuman—to recognise them as others, visible in their difference—but to force us to radically rethink these categories of our analysis as they pertain to all beings” (Kohn 2013, 562). It is, therefore, valuable to explore animals’ eating behaviours to recognise their agencies in human–animal encounters. At this point, the important question is whether we consider the worlds of species to be related or separated from each other.

Words are irreducibly “tropos” or figures. For many commonly used words, we forget the figural, metaphoric qualities; these words are silent or dead, metaphorically speaking. But the tropic quality of any word can erupt to enliven things for even the most literal minded. In Greek, tropos means a turning; and the verb trepein means to swerve, not to get directly somewhere. Words trip us, make us swerve, turn us around; we have no other options [...] No alternative exists to going through the medium of thinking and communicating, no alternative to swerving. (Haraway, 2004, 200–1)

In this respect, as a multispecies figure, the kitchen is not just a place for storing food or cooking but also an environment where food choices flourish, and different agencies (Barad 2009) come together to feed, to be fed, and to socialise (van Dooren 2017). It is an area which is affected deeply by and affects our emotions. When we consider ourselves and cows as members of multispecies communities, cows’ kitchens and intra-species kitchens can be seen as figures to understand this multiplicity. These figures can reveal multispecies stories (Haraway 2004, van Dooren 2017) that carry the possibilities of *becoming-with* (Haraway 2008). In a conversation with Deleuze and Guattari’s *becoming* (1987), Haraway claims that “becoming is always becoming *with*, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake” (2008, 244). By highlighting “with”, Haraway emphasises the “response-abilities” in our relationships with “critters of all kinds” (Haraway 2008). Inspired by these theoretical and methodological communications, figurative kitchens listen to the stories of the encounters between cows and women at the high pastures. In this sense, cows’ kitchens and intra-species kitchens are not places

24 “the kindest were not necessarily kin as family; making kin and making kind (as category, care, relatives without ties by birth, lateral relatives, lots of other echoes) stretch the imagination and can change the story” says Haraway (2016, 103).

but figures about relations and stories that can create possibilities of making worlds with other species (van Dooren 2017).

4 Cows' Kitchens: The Geography of the High Pastures from the Experiences of Cows

Philo and Wilbert (2000, 5) refer to Noske's question: "Can a 'real' geography of animals be developed, rather than an anthropocentric geography of humans in relation to animals?" This question implies that just adding the animal issue to a study does not prevent one from having an anthropocentric view, as long as the agency is human, and the animals are seen as part of their environment. New animal geography or cultural animal geography criticises the ways of studying animals which applies the Cartesian dualisms such as animal/human, nature/culture, emotion/reason and so on.²⁵ This literature, rather, lies on interdisciplinary and intersectional views to explore the dimensions of space and place. For instance, Philo and Wilbert (2000) offered the terms "animal spaces" and "beastly places" to understand the geography of animals. While "animal spaces" refers to "the spatial ordering of animals by humans", "beastly places" describes the "the lived geographies and experiences of animals" (Hodgetts and Lorimer 2014, 1–2). Cultural geographers highlight the need to study "beastly places" in order to capture human–animal relationships from a non-anthropocentric view. The "kitchen", in this sense, cannot be just seen as a human place for preparing food. Rather, we can look at the animals' kitchens as "beastly places" as Philo and Wilbert offered. It means that high pastures are the kitchens for cows, calves, bulls, goats, and many other species. These animals do not just benefit from "nature", they also live through it. When we look at the high pastures not as nature but "naturecultures" (Haraway 2003), we grasp the multiplicities of eating behaviour in the pastures beyond the generalisations of anthropocentrism.

The mountain pastures in Turkey are the places to which farmers move animals (mostly cows) during the summer season (3–4 months) for "rural animal production". The geography of the high pastures offers a semi-nomadic experience to the farmers and animals. These high pastures are the areas where the cows can be free for a limited time before being in confinement in small barns in the villages. However, being able to walk and run freely in the pastures does not mean for cows that their life is free from oppression. Cows are

25 For a recently published collection that offers a fundamental critique of Cartesian dualisms with a focus on veganism and geography, see Springer (2022).



FIGURE 1 A cow, named *Aykız*, is eating her favourite leaf, *urtica urens*. (Photo by Z²⁶)

still exploited by the rural animal production system, which is not completely removed from industrial animal husbandry practices such as using artificial insemination or separating new-borns from the mother cow. It is, therefore, possible to define the high pastures as “animal spaces” organised by humans in order to use animals for animal husbandry. Yet, we still have the chance to see “bestly places” where cows socialise with other cows and species, benefit from the nutrients of the rich flora, and enjoy the food. There is the complexity and entanglement of places here (Barad 2007).

In order to understand the cows’ kitchen as a concept beyond anthropocentric views, multispecies ethnography asks questions about the experiences of cows. What are the ways of understanding cows’ experiences in the geography of high pastures? Van Dooren (2017, 60) proposes considering “three key questions about our modes of philosophical inquiry: how we know, what we know, and why we know”.²⁷ About how we know, alongside engaging with literature on animal behaviour, multispecies ethnography can obtain knowledge of inter/intra-species relations through observing, spending time with nonhuman animals, and talking to people who can share stories about human–animal

26 The photographer has given permission to use this image.

27 Similarly to situated knowledges (Haraway 1988), multispecies studies underline the importance of the listening and caring practices to know each other without differentiating between humans and other species.

encounters (van Dooren 2017, 62). About what and why we know, from a critical animal studies perspective, ecofeminists have focused on the exploitation and suffering of animals in human–animal relations (Donovan 1993). They have also questioned the connection between sexual abuse of women and animal farming within legitimised human superiority and speciesism (Gruen 1993). Following the path of multispecies ethnography and critical feminist animal studies, I observed the oppression of cows being normalised in everyday animal husbandry practices in the high pastures. The most common oppression related to the eating behaviours of cows is separating the new-born calves from their mother earlier to prevent the calves from getting more milk.²⁸ They let the calf stay with her mother for a few days, then they separate them and feed the calf from a bottle. This is practiced by many women farmers in the high pastures as well as in the villages. The only difference between the high pastures and villages is that wide and open spaces are used to separate the calf from the cow—while grazing during the day—in the high pastures.

Initially, one just sees lots of cows grazing in the high pastures, but when we look more closely, we realise that they tend to create groups who eat together. Group members always call to each other before grazing. If the members of a group live in the same barn, it is easier to go to the pasture as a group, but if they are neighbours, they choose to wait and call to each other in front of the barn. Because of this collective behaviour, women have to act synchronously with their neighbours in animal husbandry work in the mornings. In other words, all the women should wake up simultaneously, clean the barn, milk, and let the cows leave to the pastures. This synchronised act by the women is required to meet the cows' need to eat together. It was Nazime, a woman farmer in Bala-hor High Pasture, who first told me about the requirement of synchronicity. I then observed the very same phenomenon in different cow groups, yet not all women responded to the cows' requirements to the same extent.

Once they are at the pastures, various factors affect the cows' behaviours and eating habits. I observed how they handled difficulties with using the pastures and the various methods they used to maximise their food intake. A good example of this would be that when a cow grazes with a partner, they arrange the time when one stands and the other sits. I learnt from the women that there are two reasons for this arrangement. First, they want to defend themselves against any dangers. The second reason relates to hot weather: a cow offers shade to another cow, and after a while the latter offers shade for the former to cool down. While the first reason is related to biology and evolution as

28 This practice has been common in other geographies at different times, see Fudge (2018), Govindrajan (2018), Dobie (1961), Blunt (2002).



FIGURE 2 Neighbour cows, named Yaylagül, Sarıcan and Nazlı, going to the pasture together

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

described in zoology, the second reason refers to the cows' ability to think and care for each other. Observing this kind of behaviour is intriguing for a more in-depth study of eating from specific cows' perspectives in the high pasture geography.

Cows live in their environment in connection to other cows and other species. Some cows like a specific herb while others do not. Cows have special tastes and enjoy eating, and they can also reject their foods in some conditions. In other words, they may sometimes stop eating not only due to a physical disease but also due to social conditions. Based on the women's stories about cows, we know that when this happens, they are slaughtered or sold:

She [the cow] understood that we would sacrifice her and then she lost all of her joy. She started eating less a week ago. She was such a clever²⁹ girl...

MÜNİRE (KAVRUN HIGH PASTURE)

29 A lot of research has revealed that animals think or have opinions. For example, Despret (2015) points out that cows and sheep have opinions. Van Dooren (2016, 10) illustrates that crows can "move into cities and learn new ways of life, they conduct experiments in emergent forms of crow-ness".

This quote points out that the eating practices of cows are directly tied to their emotions, as women interpret them. It openly signifies that the relationship between women and cows cannot be seen just as a practice of care but also as an exploitative one. According to the women, another reason for rejecting food is when a cow loses or is separated from her calf:

Her baby was born dead. She stopped eating completely. She cried and cried. We tried and tried but we could not stop her crying.

ZEHRA (BALAHOR HIGH PASTURE)

After we sold the calf, she started eating less day by day. A day came when she was not eating anything. I looked at her, she was looking miserable.

HATICE (ARALIK HIGH PASTURE)

From these stories, we can see that eating is a social, relational, and emotional behaviour for both cows and humans. When we look in the eyes of a cow, we can see that our kitchens are just *next to* each other. But in some encounters, they are *into* each other, as I read as “intra-species kitchens”.

5 Intra-Species Kitchens: Eating beyond the Human–Animal Divide

Drawing on Karen Barad’s work³⁰ (2007), Moore and Kosut (2013) propose an ethics of intra-species mindfulness to examine the intra-actions in their research on bees.³¹ They use the term as “a practice of speculation” rather than a methodological tool.

Intra-species mindfulness is a practice of speculation about non-human species that strives to resist anthropomorphic reflections. It is an attempt at getting at, and with, another species in order to move outside of our

30 According to Barad (2003, 815) “The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the usual ‘interaction’, which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. [...] A specific intra-action (involving a specific material configuration of the “apparatus of observation”) enacts an agential cut (in contrast to the Cartesian cut—an inherent distinction—between subject and object) effecting a separation between ‘subject’ and ‘object.’”

31 “For us, and for other humans, the bee has its own historical and temporal social location – the bee does things to cultural life – just as the bee does exist as a real and material insect with a positionality” (Moore and Kosut 2013, 9).

human selves –while also recognizing that both ‘human’ and ‘other’ are cultural constructions. (Moore and Kosut 2013, 5)

Moore and Kosut suggest that as fieldworkers we need to resist thinking of ourselves “as static, bounded, and permanently fixed entities”. Instead, we need to see all actors in the field as bodies “that are in the world and whose boundaries are created through entanglements and conflicts”. Based on Moore and Kosut, I use “intra-species kitchens”³² to refer to the intra-actions experienced around food and eating. This is a space of entangled emotions of agencies becoming-with to re-configure the world. But, is it possible in the conditions of oppression and exploitation? Let me go back to the experiences of women that I quoted, claiming that the cows stopped eating after experiencing a traumatic event. How did the women perceive that the situation is sad for the cows? How did they relate the eating behaviours of cows and the situation they mentioned? Did they respond to the cows, and if so, how?

In the first experience of Münire, we can ask “how did women choose a cow to be slaughtered?” From a classical speciesist framework, the answer is that they chose cows who are not useful anymore. Within this framework; when a cow cannot be milked anymore or becomes infertile, she is labelled as useless and considered as “killable”. However, being “useless” is not the only reason for selecting a cow to be killed. There are also other factors that shape “high pasture speciesism”. In Münire’s experience, for example, one reason was the hygiene³³ behaviour of the cow:

32 New materialist perspectives on human–animal relations have been criticised by some ecofeminists. Donovan (2014, 2018) argues that they perpetuate anthropocentrism and remain indifferent to human domination of animals. Several works benefiting from new materialism and posthumanism create a critical standpoint against normative ideals of human exceptionalism, especially in queer studies (e.g., Irmi 2020, McKeithen 2017). In this chapter, I embrace the possibilities of new materialism to understand face-to-face encounters between animals and women. I believe that understanding “the other” as a living being can be useful to question the speciesist exploitation of them in our daily lives.

33 Women pay attention to keep cows clean for both the health of the cows and good breeding. They use water and soap to clean them. This practice requires extra labour and care. Therefore, many women complain that the cows are careless with their hygiene. Early modern animal husbandry literature contains several discussions on keeping animals clean (Gjerløff 2009, Fudge 2018) “In the 1970–80s there was a debate in the volumes of *Landmands-Blade* (The Farmer Pages) about how best to clean a cow. Modern chemistry had lent a hand to the farmers, and new remedies were advertised in the farmer magazines. A popular remedy against lice and other pests was arsenic baths: a solution of arsenic that killed living pests in the skin of the cow, but which could also be fatal for both cows and humans” (Gjerløff 2009, 177). Gruen (1993) criticises “the hygiene fetish of white



FIGURE 3 *Nazarboncuğu* (the cow) and *Hacer* (the women farmer) are sharing some bread.³⁴

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

She was such a clever girl, but we had to choose her, because she had a bad habit of always getting dirty. I told her many times, “My daughter, do not sit on the faeces, be clean”, but no, she did not leave this habit. Her milk was also decreasing, so we had to send her.

In the second experience, Zehra mentioned a very common method that was practiced by women when they encounter dead new-borns:

We took the dead baby away from her and found another new-born calf and gave her to our cow. She accepted the baby and started to lick her, so stopped crying finally.³⁵

middle class Western men” and discusses how “civilized sterility” affects both women and animals through the creation of toxic chemicals.

34 Hacer gave consent for her photo to be published.

35 I heard a different version of this story. A woman from the village told me that in this situation, they skinned the new-born, stuffed her skin with straw and put it in front of the cow. Similarly, they said that the cow began licking it and stopped crying. For similar examples, see Dobie (1961), Blunt (2002).

Finally, in the third experience, Hatice responded to the cow's needs in the following way:

I promised her at that moment. I did not know how I could explain it to my husband, but I told my cow³⁶ "I promise that I will bring back your calf and you will start eating again, deal?" Then I called the woman whom I sold the calf, I told her about the situation, and she said "Okay, but it is rainy, come tomorrow and get the baby." The day after was rainy too and also the next day. On the fourth day, we could not wait any more, I went to her house and brought her baby back as I promised. You should have seen their meeting after weeks! She started eating again.

In these experiences, the women try to find solutions for the crying cows due to speciesist interests. They know that when cows cry or are unhappy, they produce less milk. They also know that cows only produce milk to feed their young. However, I do not think that this knowledge is the only reason that leads the women to seek solutions. They also feel the suffering of and kinship with the cows. Women's animal husbandry practices—which require labour, daily chores, and understanding each specific animal's needs—differ from the mechanical work of industrial animal husbandry. During the daily chores of animal husbandry, the relationship between women and cows gets complex, as the practices of care and exploitation are intermingled. This affects the lives of women and of the cows, but it does not change the fact that these animals are used to further human interests. Therefore, it is hard to define their response as a response-ability because it is still within an exploitative relation of animal husbandry. However, it can be considered a possibility of mutual response. By possibility, I mean that such a response is not acceptable in a conventional animal husbandry practice, but it can flourish in face-to-face encounters between cows and women in the high pastures. Beyond the human–animal divide, women meet the animals in the intra-species kitchens when they observe the geography of the pastures. They build small gardens to grow vegetables and collect wild fruits and herbs to make medicinal recipes for themselves and their families. They observe the cycles of the seasons, know the type of the soil and learn the characteristics of a seed or a plant. At that point, shared knowledge between the species appears: the knowledge of the geography of the high pastures, the livelihoods of the high pastures, and the shared kitchen.

36 Women commonly call the cows "my girl", referring to the idea that they "belonged" to women. But in this case, she used the expression "my cow" to compare the understandings of her husband and cow.

This kind of knowledge comes from becoming-with in a shared world (van Dooren 2017). When you share a kitchen with someone, you need to agree on some rules; even if one or the other does not obey the rules, it still means that you are getting to know each other. This happens to cows and women too: they get to know each other better. Since women connect with cows by sharing one kitchen, accepting their flesh as food becomes harder for them.³⁷ During this connection and daily routines, women farmers and cows build a special language to communicate with each other. The women perceive each animal in the farm not as just a product but as a living being, therefore they often call the animals by particular names and they avoid eating “their” animals’ flesh. Even though they do not consume animal products often (most of the women consume only cheese) their everyday work was to make cheese, yogurt, and butter from the milk of the cows. When I ask why they produce these regularly, even though they do not consume them often, Hatice said: “I produce for my family.” She was living with her husband, and by “family” she referred to her married children and her grandchildren living in the city. On the other hand, women mostly choose to eat animals under some conditions:

I cannot eat one of my animals. If it is a cow I do not know, then I can eat. If it is a sacrificed cow, I can also eat. I get a lump in my throat, but I eat for God.

MÜNIRE (KAVRUN HIGH PASTURE)

She was not the only woman choosing these two criteria to eat animals in the high pasture. Most of the women explained their eating habits with similar words. Interestingly, the most common way that women farmers justify these oppressions is by making connections between their own and the cows’ painful experiences. A good example of this is when I asked Suşe (a woman farmer) about pregnant cows: “How did they give birth? Did you call a veterinarian?” She laughed and answered: “Did a doctor come when I was giving birth? Why would the vet come for her?” Then, she began to talk about her own and the cows’ suffering during the process of giving birth. Despite a normalised human superiority in her perspective, it was sometimes impossible to differentiate the story of Suşe and the cows. The women empathised with cows’ suffering from the perspective of their own experiences. Suffering is one of the powerful

37 Govindrajana (2018, 45–46) points out a similar intimacy: “It is through arduous everyday acts of labour for and on animals that women, and a few older men who are sometimes handed the responsibility of caring for the family’s animals, come to experience feelings of love and kinship for the animals they raise.”

entangled emotions between the cows and women. Therefore, the death of the animal is painful and worthy of grief for them.

Another common way that women justify the oppression is by applying their understanding of life and death in the context of their religion. According to their belief, interpreted in Islamic tradition, humans should treat animals well, but they are allowed to use them for their needs, especially during the religious sacrificial ritual. The sacrificial ritual makes this pain bearable for women because it approves their labour and care towards animals, giving a divine meaning to the death of animals.

6 Conclusion with One Last Story

“An analysis that links story, place, and the more-than-human world confronts several fascinating questions: how would we (humans) know that an animal is enmeshed in a storied-place and is participating in, shaping, and being shaped by that story?” asked van Dooren and Rose (2012, 5), who propose a way through “action” to deal with the question: “Where do animals go, and what do they do?”

Following the paths of the Black Sea high pastures, in this chapter, I shared the eating stories of some cows and women by learning from the women I cooked with and the cows I walked with. Having returned home with lots of echoes, I see no power in myself to change the world, but I think that stories have the power, because they are capable of making worlds (van Dooren 2017) and kin (Haraway 2016) with different species. To me, being a companion to *Yaylaçiçeği* the cow in her daily eating routines has been a great experience to meet different faces (including mine) emerging from cows’ kitchens and intra-species kitchens. During this experience, I realised that the figures of cows’ kitchens and intra-species kitchens can work together to further understanding of complex relations between species in shared worlds. These relations include dilemmas between care and exploitation, compassion and oppression, suffering and joy. Ignoring them empowers patriarchal and speciesist hegemonic relations. However, evaluating them as experiences particular to a place or a cultural group empowers hegemonic relations between humans and animals in a different way. In other words, these dilemmas do not signify the essence of the farmers in high pastures of the Black Sea, but the vulnerable encounters among species in the speciesist and gendered food production system. Understanding the ways that women justify and resist within this system is crucial for change. The cows’ experiences and women’s stories about them can provoke us to rethink our own relations with animals. If we can learn from cows’ and women’s knowledge that comes from their inter/intra-actions,

it can be easier to cope with the dilemmas of speciesist patriarchy altogether. I, therefore, finish with one last story of Yaylaçiçeği and Vesile:

This morning I left with three cows (Nazarboncuğu, Sisli and, Yaylaçiçeği) to go to the pasture at 6:30. There was only Vesile around (the woman farmer who is known as “crazy cow lady” by the young women in the pasture and does not talk to me). I said “Good morning” by smiling at her, but she turned the other way as usual! Two cows followed Vesile, but Yaylaçiçeği was looking for yellow flowers and going through the upper rocks to find them. I followed and called her, but she didn’t even listen to me. Finally, I gave up and sat down on a rock. Then, suddenly I felt a warm breath near my face. There she was! Looking at me. After a few seconds of shock, I began to stroke her chin just like I stroke cats. I think she liked it and brought her head closer. I remember that Vesile was scratching cows behind their ears, so I tried this with Yaylaçiçeği, and she loved it! I found the courage to walk with her again and call her to the road. She started to walk with me; I was the happiest creature on the entire mountain for a few minutes. Then, suddenly she just stopped. She didn’t want to go forward. A few seconds later I understood the reason: A bull was walking in front of us. Since I had heard the reputation of the bull (“sexually aggressive”), who came from another high pasture, and attacked the cows for sexual intimacy, I felt anxious. Then a surprise! The bull turned back and saw us. He yelled at us and started to walk towards us. I called, “Aunt Vesile! Help!” She said something that I could not hear clearly. Then I repeated “What should I do? Help me!” She said, “Cross the river.” I tried but the bull was still following us. I called Vesile again: “The bull, too, is crossing the river!” Finally, she turned and started to run over to the bull, yelling. It was an exclamation rather than words. The bull ran away. After this event, Vesile began to speak with me just in short sentences. She was keeping her long sentences for some cows (not only “her” cows). When we arrived at the pasture, she was scratching Yaylaçiçeği. I asked her a “stupid” question: “How do you understand her?” She answered: “She tells us everything. Don’t you hear?” (Fieldnotes, Kavrun High Pasture, 18.08.2017)

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PART 2

Negotiating Dependency and Care



Care in a Time of Anthropogenic Problems: Experiences from Sanctuary-Making in Rural Denmark

Marie Leth-Espensen

1 Introduction

In the autumn of 2020, I visited multiple sanctuaries for formerly farmed animals in rural Denmark, observing and participating in their everyday activities including partaking in open house and volunteer days. On one such occasion, I recall an incident that suddenly stopped our work as we were setting up a new fence. “No, stop! Maisja! Kiki! Stop!”. “NO STOP”. The power pistol and the welded wire roll were quickly placed on the ground. I looked across the densely vegetated garden through the old apple trees and past the chicken house trying to get a glimpse of what had caused this tumult. The pack of dogs was all excited, barking, running around, agitated. They were chasing something, or, as it transpired, *someone*: “Oh, the rabbit!”, the woman next to me shouted and then ran towards the dogs.

Luckily, on that sunny autumn day, the rabbit, a steel grey doe named Fanny, managed to escape. She disappeared as quickly as she had appeared through the same tunnel underneath the old brick wall. The danger of something like this happening is why the sanctuary—while being shared by multiple animals—geese, chickens, cats, dogs, rabbits, pigs, sheep, horses, donkeys, and human beings—is separated by hedgerows, wooden barriers, electric fences, and wire. As a place designed for different species to co-exist and grow old, the sanctuary is a troubled place in which flourishing is not easily attained but requires persistent efforts and compromises to be made.

In this chapter, I delve into the everyday experiences of sanctuary-making based on fieldwork performed at two Farmed Animal Sanctuaries (FASes) in rural Denmark. FASes strive to provide a permanent home for rescued farmed animals where they can live together with other members of their species and engage in behaviour that they would otherwise be denied: a place where chickens can scratch in the dirt and pigs can wallow in the mud. However, the care that is performed in the context of FASes involves several challenges: even after the animals have been removed from their immediate source of harm and

abuse, their lives are significantly impaired because of the way in which they have been bred for the purpose of farming. Life at the sanctuary also entails restricted freedom, the use of techniques pertaining to reproductive control and life-and-death decision-making. This means that the sanctuary caregivers involved in these practices are constantly forced to negotiate the terms of their own aspirations (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015; Abrell 2021).

This chapter sets out to explore caregiving in the context of farmed animal sanctuaries at a moment increasingly marked by humanity's toll on the environment including ecological degradation, species extinction, and general defaunation. Situated in the context of Denmark—one of the countries in the world with the largest number of animals consumed per capita and the largest percentage of agricultural land use, amounting to 62% of total land use¹—the study considers the activities of FASes in view of the growing concern about the devastating consequences of industrial farming and large-scale feeding operations on multispecies life both locally and globally. In doing so, the chapter resonates with the recent call for situated and local analysis in view of the increasing attention to the particular histories and relationships that comprise the broader *crisis of anthropocentrism*² (Chakrabarty 2020). More specifically, the purpose is to investigate FASes as concrete multispecies sites with the aim of contributing to the broader conversation of the potential for replacing current anthropocentric orders and practices of care.

Feminist scholars have long highlighted the fundamental role of care for multispecies justice and co-existence (Kheel 2008). For example, scholarship associated with the feminist care tradition of animal ethics has highlighted the importance of moral obligation emerging in face-to-face encounters (Gruen 2013). Moreover, previous research has highlighted how FASes might provide an optimal setting for exploring the potential for community and relationships of empathy in multispecies contexts (Jones 2014; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015; Gillespie 2018; Blattner, Donaldson, and Wilcox 2020; Abrell 2021). Against this backdrop, the subsequent analysis examines the everyday activities and experiences of sanctuary life in order *to learn from* the concrete practices of care as they unfold (Desai and Smith 2018). In addressing this perspective, I take inspiration from María Puig de la Bellacasa's (2010) seminal exploration

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- 1 The Danish Ministry of Environment and Food (2016). Additionally, in 2016, Denmark killed more pigs per capita than in any other country in the world, namely 3.2 pigs per human, according to *Faunalytics* (Sanders 2018).
 - 2 According to Chakrabarty, this crisis not only comprises the multiple anthropogenic issues regarding environmental degradation, climatic upheaval and species loss (the Anthropocene), it also poses a challenge to the humanities and the long-serving idea of humans as unique beings.

of “ethical doings” in *naturecultures* in which ethics become concrete *matters of care* and concerns for nonhuman ecologies and relationships entangled in a cosmology beyond the nature-culture dichotomy. In her study, Puig de la Bellacasa emphasises practices of ecological living promoted in the permaculture movement (e.g., regenerative agriculture and community resilience) to illustrate how personal ethics “born out of material constraints and situated relationalities” transcend the individual level (Puig de la Bellacasa 2010, 159). Furthermore, in arguing this point, she borrows from Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto’s celebrated definition (1990, 40) of care as “an activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair ‘our world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible,” thereby grounding her vision of a *situated ethics* in which care is simultaneously “a vital affective state, and ethical obligation and a practical labour” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012, 197; see also 2017).

However, interpreting Puig de la Bellacasa’s study in the context of the permaculture movement, I wonder what would happen to the analysis if it were conducted within a different domain regarding the collapse of the nature-culture dichotomy, namely, in the context of the practices of care performed at farmed animal sanctuaries? While I consider Puig de la Bellacasa’s analysis of the practices of permaculture to explore crucial dimensions of how ethical doings—i.e., when embodied and performed as everyday care—can help to cultivate alternative non-anthropocentric forms of care work for the collective, I am wary of her omission of the dualistic mindset that continues to prevail in environmental ethics and that privileges certain nonhuman natures over others.³ For example, permaculture does not necessarily preclude the use⁴ and consumption of certain (often domesticated) animals that remain largely excluded from the discourse of “nature” and therefore outside the promoted ethos of flourishing⁵ (Arcari, Probyn-Rapsey, and Singer 2021). In this

3 A similar issue comes up in environmental and multispecies studies. For example, scholarship inspired by Haraway, although importantly noting the complex entanglements of harm and care that inform human-animal relationships, has been criticised for failing to engage with the structures that produce inequalities between animals in the first place (Weisberg 2009; Giraud 2013).

4 Recently, a growing body of scholarship has addressed the potential of nonhuman animals to be included as a labour force in non-exploitative ways (Coulter 2016; Blattner, Coulter, and Kymlicka 2019). Recognising nonhuman animals as co-workers could be approached within the permaculture movement, but I have not encountered such discussions in a Danish context.

5 Despite these exclusions, the permaculture movement considers a much broader category of nonhumans, including microorganisms, thereby expanding mainstream ecological awareness, which is typically directed towards a very limited array of species such as “native” or “charismatic megafauna.”

way, permaculture illustrates how ecological awareness—although situating humans as part of nature—still often fails to consider and contemplate the complexity of the broader ethico-political and economic structures of what Nicole Shukin (2009) has named “animal capital.” As cultural theorist Eva Haifa Giraud (2019, 5) reminds us, anthropogenic problems are not only about mass extinction, climate change, and biodiversity loss, they are also “equally contentious issues surrounding everyday practices in farms and laboratories.” Thus, in placing my analysis in dialogue with Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s (2010) study of emerging forms of ethical doings in *naturecultures*, I explore the embodied and situated experiences of multispecies care that is unfolding in the sanctuary setting while also noting how certain animals often have been excluded from the analysis.

As noted, caregiving for formerly farmed animals is a complicated task and critical questions can be posed about life and care as they unfold in such locations. Thus, informed by these issues, this chapter delves into the practical labour of caring for animals bred and exploited in agricultural contexts. The analysis is divided into three separate sections: In the first section, *Sanctuary Place-making and Caregiving*, I briefly account for the basic tenets of FASes against the backdrop of the broader economic, legal and political structures that define their activities. In the second section, *Flourishing Across Species Boundaries*, I describe multispecies life and care as they unfold in the respective sanctuaries, particularly focusing on the conditions of intra- and interspecies life. In the third section, *Post-domestic Care*, I address sanctuary caregiving as a site of contestation in opposition to mainstream veterinary care and the ways in which human-animal relations are currently governed, for example, limiting the sanctuaries’ ability to care for old and sick animals. By applying the prefix *-post*, I do not intend to describe a situation that precludes other animals from the domestic domain nor a political aesthetics that rejects ‘the domos’ altogether (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015). Instead, I simply aim to point to the important ways in which FASes assist in developing new forms of multispecies care that disrupt the predominant ideas constraining care to conditions of captivity, commodification and human control.

In sum, the three sections offer a reading of the challenges and barriers to sanctuary-making, which aids in directing attention to the myriad ways in which animal capital impacts the potential for multispecies flourishing. From this perspective, sanctuary caregiving emerges as a form of resistance to common anthropocentric notions and practices governed and sanctioned by law. Together the three sections encompass the simultaneously idealistic and practical objectives of FASes in providing a refuge for rescued farmed animals. Overall, the analysis is based on the understanding that to meaningfully

explain, unpack and learn from the care labour provided in a sanctuary context, a deeper engagement with the broader social, political and economic structures that define animals as capital in the first place is needed. Following this point, I end the chapter by emphasising the critical role of sanctuaries in fostering non-anthropocentric foundations for care based on their recognition of other-than-human agentive beings in larger-than-human collectives. I argue that these emerging forms of *multispecies* and *post-domestic care* are fundamental to transforming and recovering human-animal relations in light of the broader anthropogenic issues.

2 Research Site, Background and Method

The Cornflower Refuge and Little Green Cottage⁶—the two sanctuaries that inform this analysis—are both situated in small rural communities in Denmark. The sanctuaries' residents comprise around 40 and 80 animals, respectively, including pigs, chickens, horses, donkeys, human beings, dogs, rabbits, cats, geese, sheep, goats, and cows. These sanctuaries that I have come to know through my field research can be placed within a broader global movement that is working to combat the exploitation and abuse of animals in the food and agricultural industry and foster change in the public's perceptions of and relationships with farmed animals (Abrell 2021). In Denmark, the first official farmed animal sanctuary was opened in 2015. Since this time, a few more FASes have been established.⁷

Unlike traditional animal shelters or rescue centres, which provide a temporary space for companion animals such as cats and dogs in need of care, FASes aspire to create a permanent home in which the rescued animals not only receive immediate care but are also able to roam and flourish together with members of their own species. Rather than being professional organisations with paid staff, these sanctuaries have developed out of grassroots activist environments focused on care while raising awareness through the use of various social media platforms and open house events.

The two sanctuaries informing this study are the private homes of individual members of the sanctuary collectives run by one or two primary caregivers.

6 The sanctuaries and their residents have all been given pseudonyms.

7 As there is no formal register that keeps track of the number of FASes in Denmark, I have relied on information I was able to obtain via the internet, social media, and from speaking to people involved in FASes. Due to the informal and grassroots ways in which these sanctuaries are run, it is difficult to know the exact number.

Several other people are also involved: volunteers who visit occasionally to take part in volunteer days or help administer the sanctuaries' social media accounts, as well as people involved in animal rescues, such as individuals who might happen to come across an animal who had escaped from a farm or a vehicle or possibly became involved in a case of animal abuse for either personal or professional reasons. Like the case with the broader animal liberation movement, women make up for most of the people involved.

The material presented in this chapter is based on semi-structured interviews and observations conducted throughout the autumn of 2020.⁸ The observations include everyday life at the sanctuaries as well as open house or volunteer days, which play an essential role at many sanctuaries. While the open house events might primarily be a form of outreach, the volunteer days are about both community building and basic maintenance such as mucking out, repairing buildings and fixing fences.

Performing the study and analysis in various multispecies settings presented me with a number of methodological and ethical challenges. In relying on traditional research methods of interviewing and observing, it was challenging to explore sanctuary-making as a process that involves both human and nonhuman animals, i.e., not simply consider the nonhuman residents as being passive recipients of care but as actively taking part in the care labour. In addition, I was confronted with the ethics of conducting research at more-than-human sites at which consent can only be approximated, never explicitly granted, recalling how the lives of other animals have often been negatively impacted by the presence and intrusion of researchers.

In order to critically reflect on the problems of human-centredness that permeate common research methods, I have relied on multispecies ethnography, a field of study or methodology that addresses "life's emergence" in more-than-human contexts (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Hamilton and Taylor 2017). As animal geographer Kathryn Gillespie (2019) has demonstrated, there are ways of accounting for the human-centredness of common research practices

8 A total of five observations were performed at two different locations where I spent between four to six hours on each visit. Fieldnotes about key incidents, details and descriptions of the general atmosphere were taken either during or immediately after the visits and subsequently turned into coherent accounts. Five qualitative interviews were conducted with the primary sanctuary caregivers on the specific history of the sanctuary, their personal histories when they entered the sanctuary and the everyday tasks of caring. One interview was conducted on site, one in a private setting, and the remaining three interviews were performed online. The interviews were conducted in Danish and generally lasted between 80 minutes and two hours with one short interview of around 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Selected quotes have been translated into English.

even if we are never able to fully compensate for the methodological and ethical implications of research being embedded within human experience and discourse.

Although I had prepared myself for such challenges—in particular thinking that additional time spent in the field might help me to attune myself to ‘other ways of knowing’—I ended up having to limit my actual field observations due to the COVID-19 pandemic which, in many ways, complicated the ethics of field research even more.⁹ While I have tried to be mindful of these limitations by continuously considering the human and nonhuman co-constructedness of life at the sanctuaries, the main focus of the subsequent analysis remains on the human caregivers’ experiences and accounts of multispecies life at the sanctuary.

3 Sanctuary Place-Making and Caregiving

From the main road, I get off the bus and walk the remaining two kilometres following a small road across the fields. It is my first visit to the Cornflower Refuge. Together with a group of visitors, I am introduced to the place and shortly afterwards we are standing by the enclosure of two sows—Rita and Gertrude—both of whom escaped from an industrial farm. They are large creatures, pink with white hairs, making slow movements as they dig and eat from the grass. One of the caregivers, Ebba—a woman in her 50s—talks about their rescue, noting the chain of events that led to the rescue of these two particular animals: “It’s quite a coincidence that it was these two who made it,” she reflects. People nod and ask questions about the individual stories and past lives of the two pigs.

At first sight, farmed animal sanctuaries might recall to memory the idea of traditional small-scale farms. However, sanctuaries are places that offer a kind of flourishing beyond life at a farm (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2015). Ultimately designed to accommodate individual nonhuman residents, the

9 During my fieldwork, I was faced with the ethics of conducting face-to-face interviews and observations at a time that was marked by the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews and observations were conducted between September and November 2020 at a time when the virus was considered to be largely under control in those specific regions of Denmark where I conducted my research. During this period, the social distancing restrictions imposed by the Danish health authorities in the early spring of 2020 had been lifted. However, the virus continued to pose certain limitations on my fieldwork. While I was able to perform my observations outdoors, it was necessary for me to adjust my original plan with regards to the interviews. In the end, three of the six interviews were conducted online.

human caregivers at the sanctuaries try to interfere as little as possible in their daily activities. As Ebba tells the group of visitors gathered around her as she continues her guided tour around the sanctuary: “I like the idea of how the pigs can walk into the forest and pretend that humans don’t exist”—the underlying message being that humans have exposed pigs to so much abuse that the best thing to do would be for them to be left entirely by themselves. However, as Ebba’s point suggests, life at the sanctuary is not a form of existence in ultimate freedom, and while the pigs can wander off and not be disturbed by humans for extensive periods, they still depend on their human caregivers in terms of receiving a sufficient amount of food, water, and basic care.

Previous studies have described the compromises and sacrifices that sanctuary caregivers face when trying to create an environment in which formerly farmed animals can thrive (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2015; Blattner, Donaldson, and Wilcox 2020; Abrell 2021). Most significantly, due to the limited resources and space available, sanctuaries can only help a tiny fraction of the actual animals that need care. It is therefore necessary to make difficult decisions. Additionally, caring for others—and the ethical responsibility that comes with it—is essentially precarious and marked by uncertainty when responding to the complex need of the other (Gruen and Weil 2012). This last point resonates with Ebba’s reflection on the difficult job of running a sanctuary. As she explains: “We don’t save animals at any cost. We only take animals in when we believe it will improve the situation for that particular animal.” This often means that only animals who have no other possibility of rescue and thus otherwise would be killed are considered.

Although sanctuary caregivers aspire to create the conditions for a life beyond the constraints imposed by conventional farming practices, the location of sanctuaries in rural and agricultural settings is often a practical solution. The property is often less expensive and includes some hectares of land, appropriate facilities for sheltering animals, as well as a main building to house the human caregivers and companion animals such as cats and dogs.

The location of sanctuaries in rural areas is also supported by the legal infrastructure (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2015). In Denmark, animal husbandry is governed by multiple legal regulations, including the Danish Animal Welfare Act.¹⁰ Additionally, like in many countries, zoning laws provide the overall legal framework that specifies the number of animals that can be kept for non-commercial purposes in urban and rural zones, including restricting certain species, breeds and even sexes.¹¹ In urban areas, certain species, such as cows,

10 The Animal Welfare Act no. 133 of 25/02/2020.

11 For example, municipalities might only permit one rooster per household.

pigs, horses, goats, and sheep are not permitted. The less restrictive zoning in rural areas makes it more attractive to locate sanctuaries in such areas. However, even in the latter case the permitted number of animals is limited.¹²

Multiple aspects of care constitute part of the daily procedures at the sanctuaries: feeding, regular health checks, cleaning and trimming of hooves and cloves, predator proofing, repairs, etc. Furthermore, caring for farmed animals requires expert veterinary care. Although once they have arrived at the sanctuary, the animals might effectively be protected from any immediate source of harm or death, their life at the sanctuary could still be significantly impaired by how they have been specifically engineered to grow as large and quickly as possible. This particularly applies to animals that have been used in the commercial industry. Domestication and ongoing processes of selection resulting in the specialised production of “fast-growing broilers”, “breeding sows” or “high-producing dairy cows” all expose the animals to significant health risks, some of which can be fatal. For example, century-long processes of domestication and subsequent selection of wild boars (*sus scrofa*)—a species from which most of today’s pigs are descended—have resulted in phenotypic changes, causing present-day sows to grow an extra rib. Additionally, such selection practices have caused changes in behaviour, reproduction, and “coat” colour (Rubin et al. 2012).

Danish farmers achieve record numbers in “pig production” with the average sow giving birth to 33.3 piglets per year (in comparison, the figure for the UK is 25.8 piglets for an average sow per year) (van der Zee and Kosc 2021). In 2018, a new record was set when an industrial farmer managed to breed sows “producing” a disturbing average of 41 piglets (Hansen 2019). The sows and piglets pay a high price. The high mortality rate in farrow stables is a known problem. On average, 29,514 piglets die every day on Danish pig farms (that is one out of four), amounting to more than ten million piglet deaths a year (Arp 2022). Due to the enormous pig industry in Denmark, the sanctuary caregivers regard

12 The specific piece of legislation defining “non-commercial animal husbandry” is entitled “Executive Order on the Environmental Regulation of Certain Activities” no. 844 of 23/06/2017. According to Section 7, the maximum number of animals is limited to (1) 30 hens, (2) four adult dogs and additional puppies under 18 weeks, (3) a group of animals including either: (a) two dairy cows, (b) four cattle, (c) four horses (d) two sows with piglets (up to 40 kg), (e) 15 porkers, (f) 10 ewes (mother sheep) with lambs, (g) 10 mother goats with kids, (h) animal species other than those referred to in points a–f or g, if the total area for keeping these animals does not exceed 25 m²; or (i) different types of animals composed in accordance with points a–g or h, if the proportion of each type of animal in accordance with points a–g or h does not in total exceed 100% (author’s own translation, the content has been slightly moderated for simplification).

education about pigs to be an essential part of their outreach via social media platforms and when people come to visit them. One of the sanctuary caregivers, Karen, speaks of the strong reactions they receive: “People are surprised when they come and see these pigs. Are they really that big? They ask.”

Even with the intention of providing lifelong care, farmed animals such as rescued sows do not grow to be very old. Having been fed a high-protein diet prior to their arrival they are often experiencing obesity-related health issues. Thus, one of the ways in which the caregivers attend to the well-being and health of sows is by placing them on a diet as soon as they arrive at the sanctuary. The precarious situation for farmed animals reveals the extent of the commodification of animal life in the context of industrial animal farming. For animals in this production regime, their only relief from pain and suffering is death. In fact, very few of the sanctuary residents are from large-scale industrial agricultural facilities, because at such facilities it is standard practice to “put down” sick or injured animals if they are no longer “fit” for production. Thus, more often than not, the sanctuary residents come from hobby farms, small-scale farms or private individuals who might not be able to care for them properly or simply no longer wish to take on such a task. Also, in some cases in which individuals have been charged and convicted of mistreatment in accordance with the Danish Animal Welfare Act, the animal surviving the abuse might be brought to one of the sanctuaries. However, as no infrastructure and formal partnership with the enforcement authorities currently exist, such examples are rare. Consequently, a disturbingly low number of animals in need of care make it to a sanctuary—even in situations in which they are formally recognised as victims of abuse. More often than not, these animals are simply killed.

4 Flourishing across Species Boundaries

When Ann arrives from work one dark and cold winter's day, there is no sign of the horses. This would not be the first time they had left the enclosure. Ann had previously taught me that horses are quick to learn—they know exactly the right moment when the current is low on the electric fence. However, after searching the few hectares of land, Ann finds all of them—a group of seven horses—closely grouped together in the corner furthest away from the new pig enclosure.

Ann tells me this story when I visit the Little Green Cottage a few days after a new group of pigs had been relocated to the sanctuary. I had come to learn about their arrival but as I quickly discovered, the pigs were not the only ones

affected by this sudden change—for a day or two the horses wouldn't even dare to come near the water trough close to the pig enclosure. For Ann it was less surprising that the horses would act nervously towards the pigs but as the episode suggests, multispecies life at the sanctuary can be hard to predict. The sanctuary is essentially shaped by the presence of its nonhuman residents, and it is not always possible for the human caregivers to foresee the preferences and behaviour of individual animals, who are all unique and have their own distinctive personalities.

The aspiration of a life beyond the traditional farm is very much connected with the idea of creating places in which individual residents can engage with other members of their species or across different species. Some residents might be rescued with their offspring or siblings, but individual animals are frequently brought together at the sanctuary. This means that the sanctuary caregivers have to carefully assess the possibility of inter- and intra-species life and cohabitation, taking into account a number of unknown factors such as an individual animal's past experiences, their history of trauma, and individual preferences, all of which depend on their circumstances before arriving at the sanctuary. Thus, the decision to accept new animals is based on a case-by-case assessment of whether the sanctuary can provide a sufficiently stable and suitable environment for the particular animal depending on the space available and whether the new resident would potentially fit in and be accepted by the other sanctuary residents.

Whenever new animals are introduced, careful monitoring and supervision are required. This also includes planning for unsuccessful attempts to bring the residents together. Sometimes this process can take months during which time the newcomer is slowly introduced to the other residents. For example, the sanctuary caregivers have often had to deal with the particular dilemma of welcoming new pigs. As pigs are social beings who, in their natural surroundings, would remain with their offspring and siblings in sounders of 12 to 20 individuals, they are very alert and potentially hostile towards other pigs. Ebba recalls the discussions when they were first contacted regarding a five-year-old rescued sow now living at the sanctuary: "Taking in a five-year-old pig, which is relatively old, seemed quite unmanageable." She adds that it might not be optimal for the sow, either. However, as no other solution could be found, the sanctuary eventually agreed to take her and after some months of slowly introducing her to the other residents, she was finally accepted as a member of the herd.

However, co-existence is not a given. For example, combining rescue dogs with other animals is another challenge that could create potentially dangerous situations such as the aforementioned incident with the dogs chasing a

rabbit. As animals of prey, rabbits are extremely vulnerable to such situations. One particularly sad experience that the caregivers at Little Green Cottage recall to this day is how an old hen once picked on a young rabbit kit. The incident took place just a few weeks after two new rabbits had been introduced to the sanctuary. From the beginning, the rabbits had demonstrated a preference for staying in the warm and cosy henhouse without the sanctuary caregivers knowing that one of them was pregnant. This resulted in one of the rabbit kits not surviving as the kit was seriously injured after the attack by the hen.

Because an essential task of caregiving at the sanctuary is considered to be accommodating the social needs of each of its residents, the human caregivers do their best to ensure that all residents can form bonds with other members of their species. This is one of the important aspects of sanctuary life that makes it fundamentally different from life at a traditional farm or animal shelter.¹³ Many of the animals who come to the sanctuary are in urgent need of care. Karen recalls an incident in which a pig was found in the woods and picked up by a group of working men who happened to live in the neighbourhood. Instead of returning the pig to the adjacent pig farm—assuming he had escaped from there—they searched online and by chance found the sanctuary. After some time, the pig—now called Tom—established a close friendship with another older pig sanctuary resident, Albert, and they now follow each other around all day and sleep close together each night in the barn.

Importantly, life at the sanctuary reflects how care is not only provided by human caregivers. For example, horses and donkeys are known to form close bonds and this was also something that Karen witnessed between Benny, a donkey, who had formed strong ties with Tira, one of the horses. They had lived together for several years when Tira fell seriously ill. As she had an untreatable illness, the caregivers had been forced to put her to sleep. Benny had laid down beside her and tried to get her to stand up by lifting her head. “There was no question that Benny experienced great grief,” Karen later told me.¹⁴ Thus, the experiences of multispecies care at the sanctuary remind us that the relationship between human caregivers and nonhuman residents in the sanctuary context—as in all interspecies relationships—cannot be boiled down to

13 While animal shelters might also consider the social needs of rescued animals, the animals are often kept in separate enclosures and, upon adoption, close bonds (such as between a mother and her offspring or siblings) might be broken.

14 As this example illustrates, the sanctuary is also a place in which the grief of nonhuman animals can be recognised. In *Flight Ways*, Thom van Dooren (2014) discusses how considering nonhuman grief might be a powerful way to challenge human exceptionalism as it draws attention to *the deep evolutionary continuity* and persistent *entanglements* between humans and other animals.

humans giving and animals receiving care. However, as labour studies scholar Kendra Coulter (2016, 200) observes, “animals’ own forms of caregiving are rarely recognized as a kind of care work.”

5 Post-Domestic Care

The entanglement of care and place has recently been articulated in the field of geographies of care (Lawson 2007). Evidently, the particular spatial context plays an enormous role when contrasting sanctuary caregiving with the limited care provided at agricultural facilities. However, as this analysis brings to attention, care performed at FASes remains embedded in normative structures of industrial farming. For example, one disconcerting aspect of sanctuary caregiving relates to the practice of reproductive control. *The Open Sanctuary Project*, a digital guide for FASes, stresses the critical need to adopt a “no-breeding” philosophy, noting that “[b]reeding residents does not help [sanctuary residents]; it merely perpetuates the idea that animals exist primarily for human entertainment and enjoyment” (Griffler 2020; see also Chapter 1 by Szczygielska and Kowalewska in this volume concerning the politics of sex and reproduction in pig farming). As noted in the guide, caring for farmed animals is already a task that exceeds the capacity of sanctuaries¹⁵ and to intentionally breed “reduces a sanctuary’s ability to take in an already existing animal that may have nowhere else to go” (ibid.). Preventing animals from reproducing naturally might be problematic when considering the goal of animals regaining their place in broader “socio-ecological reproductive networks”¹⁶ (Collard 2020). Furthermore, castration or neutering is a painful and stressful procedure.¹⁷

15 With a global industry that is estimated to “produce” 31 billion farmed animals at any given time (Anthis and Anthis 2019), it is unrealistic to believe that all animals can be rescued and saved.

16 In *Animal Traffic* (2020), Rosemary-Claire Collard observes the harmful and sometimes “misanthropic” procedures of reinstalling natural behaviour and fear of humans in “exotic pets” to potentially enable these captive animals in returning to wildlife. By analogy, the process of “de-commodification” in FASes might involve techniques such as reproductive control, which can be problematised from the perspective of the individual animal. For a more elaborate discussion of the ethically compromised practice of preventing sanctuary residents from reproducing, see Donaldson and Kymlicka (2015).

17 Nevertheless, in Denmark—as in most countries—it is routine practice to surgically castrate pigs without using anaesthetics, causing immediate pain that becomes chronic and can last for up to several days and weeks (Rault, Lay, and Marchant-Forde 2011).

Caregiving for animals requires being able to react quickly, be competent, and also recognise the limits of your own abilities, for example, by consulting veterinarians when appropriate. It is not only practices such as castration or spaying that require the assistance of professional veterinarians. For example, veterinary assistance is also needed as part of more routine check-ups, whenever new animals are introduced, or in cases of illness and end-of-life care. However, receiving the appropriate level of consultancy and treatment is more difficult than you might expect in a country with more farmed animals than humans. Karen, who has many years of experience with animal caregiving from before she started working at the sanctuary, reflects on the many times she had problems finding a suitable veterinarian. This has particularly been a problem regarding the pigs. As she has experienced many times, veterinarians specialised in farmed animals do not usually treat animals with other than antibiotics.

In a country that “produces” 28 million pigs annually, it is revealing to note that sanctuary caregivers experience difficulty finding veterinarians who are actually willing to treat pigs in the event of illness. Euthanasia is commonly suggested to sanctuary caregivers, even when a medical condition is treatable. It is also extremely difficult for the sanctuaries to find veterinarians who know how to anaesthetise pigs as anaesthesia is most often only used in the veterinary care provided to smaller companion animals such as cats and dogs.

The problem of finding proper veterinary skills is not only a matter of the specialised training that a vet receives, but also about how care practices are heavily influenced by social and cultural perceptions of animals of different species. Karen explains how on several occasions she had tried to instruct veterinarians to examine pigs according to the standards of other animals such as dogs. Similarly, Beatrice, a caregiver at the Cornflower Refuge, recalls an episode in which she persuaded a private vet for smaller companion animals to place a new-born piglet with breathing difficulties in an oxygen chamber designed for dogs. Reflecting back on this episode, she regards this as being a minor victory in itself even if the piglet did not recover from its condition.

Sanctuary caregivers are not only confronted with the limited remit of care with regard to mainstream veterinary practices, they might also be confronted with a certain regime of care governed and sanctioned by the Danish Animal Welfare Act. According to this legalisation, animals “must be treated properly and protected in the best possible way from pain, suffering, distress, lasting injury and substantial nuisance.”¹⁸ A paradoxical consequence

18 Section 2 of The Animal Welfare Act no. 133 of 25/02/2020 (author’s own translation).

of the attention afforded to suffering animals appears to be that the enforcement authorities might consider the aim of providing life-long care, e.g., keeping old and weak animals alive, as being contrary to the intentions of the act. For example, the sanctuary caregivers have witnessed how state-authorised animal welfare inspectors—such as in the case with private veterinarians—recommend killing injured or sick animals who might otherwise recover or still be able to experience some quality of life. In this context, I am reminded of Thom van Dooren's (2014) notion of “regimes of violent-care” in which practices of care become inseparable from the techniques of control, harm and death (see also, Collard 2020).¹⁹

While animal welfare legislation is often associated with a lax interpretation in terms of protecting the welfare of animals within the farming industry, it appears that the opposite might also be true in a sanctuary context. Here, the regulatory framework appears to have rather far-reaching implications meaning that sanctuary caregivers risk being reported for violating specific animal welfare regulations. In other words, challenging the authorities by insisting that animals should be allowed to grow old could potentially have serious consequences for a sanctuary, as it might face a temporary or permanent ban on keeping animals.²⁰ Of course, the highest price might be paid by the individual animal if a decision were made to put an end to their life, even if we can never know a particular animal's preferences.

6 The Ethics and Politics of Sanctuary-Making

This chapter has documented the care labour performed in the context of two farmed animal sanctuaries (FASes) in rural Denmark. In drawing on Puig de la Bellacasa's situated ethics, the analysis has offered a perspective of care which simultaneously includes its affective, ethical and practical dimensions, i.e., the

19 In his careful consideration of bird conservation such as captive crane rearing in *Flight Ways*, Van Dooren (2014) draws attention to the complex entanglement of care and harm when it comes to practices such as cross-species imprinting and costume rearing.

20 According to Section 60 of the Danish Animal Welfare Act no. 133 of 25/02/2020: “Anyone convicted of ill-treatment or grossly negligent treatment of animals may be banned from owning, using, taking care of or slaughtering animals, or in general dealing personally with animals on a permanent basis or for a specified period of time. The same applies to a person who, after having previously been found guilty of the improper treatment of animals, is found guilty of such an offence again. The ban may be limited to certain species of animals. Violation of the ban is punishable by a fine or imprisonment for up to six months” (author's own translation).

everyday activities of and embodied obligations to a (multispecies) collective. In doing so, the analysis has highlighted some of the important aspects of FASes, thereby documenting how sanctuary caregiving differs fundamentally from other “ethical doings” such as permaculture, as discussed in the introduction.

Importantly, the analysis has drawn attention to the challenging task of caring for formerly farmed animals against the backdrop of the broader normative structures that impact sanctuary life (e.g. restrictive zoning laws, the lack of suitable veterinary assistance and the potential frictions in view of the legal framework—in addition, consider the significant role of introduced biosecurity measures on human-porcine relations as described in Chapter 1 by Szczygielska and Kowalewska in this volume). One important reflection in this regard is how sanctuary caregivers are forced to navigate their way through multiple constraints given how conventional forms of care are embedded in a regulatory framework intended on industrial production. Thus, the analysis depicts how sanctuary caregivers risk coming into conflict with the very institutions that are supposed to protect the well-being of animals (i.e., animal welfare law) when undertaking what in this context I have proposed to describe as practices of *post-domestic care*.

When engaging with the everyday practices of sanctuary caregiving, it is difficult to ignore how this work is being done at a time that is significantly marked by the devastating consequences of ecological overshoot on a global scale. As much critical thinking and scholarship is directed towards how humanity can come to terms with its destructive patterns, which pose a fundamental threat to all life on earth, sanctuary caregivers focus on those animals whose existence is intimately shaped by the presence of humans: the animals who are reduced to consumable objects and completely separated from the discourse of ‘nature.’

In insisting on caring for previously farmed animals, the sanctuaries challenge the deep-rooted assumptions of Enlightenment thinking about nature and culture as distinct spheres and the consequential image of nature and non-human beings as resources completely disconnected from society’s activities. Thus, as a specific example of the collapse of the nature-culture dichotomy, the sanctuary becomes a disruptive site for contemplating ethics and politics beyond these binary categories. Alongside other concrete manifestations of *natureculture* cosmologies, FASes are part of shaping an alternative idea about multispecies life beyond the contemporary political-economic context of animal capital, thereby opening up largely neglected sites for more-than-human flourishing, namely, that of domestic places.

FASes are emerging in a time of increasing concern about the impact of industrial animal agriculture. In Denmark, a growing alliance of environmental organisations and local residents in neighbouring communities has increasingly launched campaigns²¹ targeting the continuous expansion of pig producing farms, thereby raising awareness of the multiple environmental harms and potential human health issues associated with industrial farming.²² Such campaigns are important for conveying the idea that what has been perceived for decades as farmland is actually an important place of everyday (multispecies) life and activity. Moreover, this growing movement is attempting to combat decades of land ownership and agricultural reforms, which in conjunction with the EU Common Agricultural Policy, have favoured large-scale and intensified farming at the expense of the flourishing of local communities and the environment.

In this broader context of political contestation, farmed animal sanctuaries go largely unnoticed: small in scale and with few resources, they have limited ways of standing up to the industry. However, as Elan Abrell (2019, 109) suggests, animal sanctuaries are potential sites of *rural political action* given their role in “reconfiguring the power dynamics of the dominant mode of rural human-animal care-based relations in which animals are reared as agricultural resources.” From this perspective, the primary role of sanctuaries might be to offer an alternative idea about what multispecies life could be. However, more than an ideal place, sanctuary life is a practical manifestation of a community already engaging in transforming the world—an observation which compelled

21 *Landsforeningen mod Svinefabrikker* [The National Association Against Pig Factories] (www.landmodsvin.dk) and *Miljøforeningen Tuse Næs* [The Environmental association Tuse Ness] are two examples of such campaigns involving local environmental groups in alliance with national environmental organisations such as *Noah* (part of the international alliance of Friends of the Earth) and the Danish branch of *International Greenpeace*.

22 The negative environmental effects of intensive farming has been well documented, including increasing loss of natural habitats, soil degradation such as erosion, depletion, and pollution of natural water resources and climatic upheaval (see, for example, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2018). However, the effects on human health are less studied in Denmark. During the past decades, neighbours of large farming facilities have complained about health and odour annoyance associated with the emission of particles and gasses from industrial farming. A recent literature review conducted by researchers at the *Danish Centre for Environment and Energy* concluded “a scarcity of studies concerning health and neighbourhood exposure to farming operations.” In contrast, the increased frequency of respiratory diseases among farmers and farm workers has been described in previous studies. In conclusion, the Danish researchers found “strong evidence” concerning odour annoyance. However, they emphasised that more research was required to examine the potential health risks (Sigsgaard et al. 2020, 46ff).

Timothy Pachirat (2018, 315) to emphasise the “urgency to unimagine sanctuaries as sacred utopias—places that are no place—and instead (re)think them as sites of potential rupture and resistance.”

The primary purpose of this chapter has been to offer a perspective about what we might learn from the activities of sanctuaries for farmed animals. First and foremost, FASes serve as an important reminder of the precarious situation for most animals inhabiting this earth. In other words, the mere existence of such sanctuaries underlines how the responsibility of providing aid and care for previously farmed and abused animals has come to rest on a handful of individuals who have taken on the difficult task of creating a better life for these particular beings. In a society in which the commodification and exploitation of animals are deeply engrained in our social and cultural norms, the care provided by the sanctuaries reveals how current restricted and instrumentalised forms of care are essential aspects of the broader crisis in human-animal relations. In this sense, sanctuaries might be promising sites “where care is radically reimagined” (Gillespie 2018, 127).

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Negotiating Disability in Celebrity Cat Lil BUB's Eating Videos

Milla-Maria Joki

1 Introduction

Lil BUB¹ (2011–2019), a disabled domestic cat rescued from a tool shed in Indiana, U.S., became an internet phenomenon in the early 2010s after Mike Bridavsky, her guardian, posted pictures of her online. People were captivated by BUB's unique appearance: kitten-like features, tongue sticking out of her toothless mouth, short limbs, and extra toes. BUB's distinctive looks were the result of genetic anomalies and feline dwarfism, which not only added to BUB's "cute" and "inspirational" allure (for an analysis of Lil BUB and cute-fying disability, see Laforteza 2014; for an analysis of "inspirational" disabled animals,² see e.g., Taylor 2017, 24) but also aroused speculation of her assumed suffering and quality of life. Alongside Tardar Sauce, another disabled cat better known as Grumpy Cat due to the seemingly pout-like expression on her face, BUB became one of the first "pet influencers,"³ generating millions of social media followers and thousands of dollars. Bridavsky, commonly referred to as "Lil BUB's Dude," also received a fair share of attention, and his willingness to care for a disabled cat has been vigorously discussed on social media.

Lil BUB is not the only cat Bridavsky has lived with. In 2019, he stated that, by that time, he had been the guardian of seven cats and had "known hundreds" of cats (Bridavsky 2019). Before he gave a home to BUB, Bridavsky—an audio engineer and musician by profession—already had four rescue cats living at his

1 Lil BUB's full name is Lillian Bubbles. In this chapter, BUB's name is shortened and capitalised in a similar manner as on her official website and most of her social media platforms, with the exception of direct quotes that are kept intact despite differing diction.

2 In this chapter, I mostly use the concepts "humans," "animals," and "other animals" to distinguish between human animals and other animals. For clarity, the word "animal" refers only to other animals than humans unless otherwise specified.

3 The concept of pet influencer (or "petfluencer") remains largely unexplored in scientific literature. For discussions on animals and social media, see e.g., Maddox 2021; Riddle & MacKay 2020; Mkono & Holder 2019; and Linné 2016. For discussions on social media influencers, see e.g., Abidin 2018; Khamis et al. 2017; and Freberg et al. 2011.

recording studio Russian Recording in Bloomington, IN (Dodero 2014). BUB, however, is the only cat who became an international celebrity.⁴ According to Bridavsky, BUB's fame occurred by happenstance after a photo he had posted on the microblogging website Tumblr went viral (Bridavsky 2019), and her social media following continued to proliferate when he set up accounts for her on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Bridavsky has consistently noted that, unlike all the other cats in his life who do not even like to be photographed, BUB was destined for fame due to the massive interest she aroused in everyone around her as well as her own easiness around activities most felines would find abhorrent:

I was [...] a little surprised when people started following her [on social media]. It was just friends telling other friends about her. [...] [I]t wasn't about the medium or the social media platform or anything. People needed Bub, and they were going to find out about her one way or the other. [...] A brand formed out of the fame. [...] People wanted T-shirts and things and we made them, essentially out of necessity. [...] I think trying to make your pet famous is forcing them to do something that they were not designed to genetically or biologically. But with Bub, I could always get the exact photo I need. She knew what she was doing. She was always this way. She loved to travel. She knew when the camera was on. (Bridavsky 2019)

You're not supposed to make your cat famous. [...] I've never met another cat that could, would, or should be famous and be able to deal with it like the way Bub does. I never tried, so I don't recommend anyone try to make their cat famous. (Time Out Group, 2016)

Despite the seemingly "organic" nature of BUB's prominence and the claim that T-shirts were made by popular demand, Bridavsky has admitted that BUB's commercial success helped him to recover from a looming bankruptcy (Dodero 2014). In the years to come, Lil BUB's fame not only enabled Bridavsky to salvage himself from financial ruin, but he was also able to hire a group of people for full-time and part-time jobs.⁵ While Bridavsky may have semantically attempted to efface his responsibility as the acting agent behind BUB's

4 After the writing of this chapter, Bridavsky has established a popular Instagram account for another disabled cat, Mister Marbles.

5 Lil BUB's official website does not include a list of personnel, so it is unclear how many people have worked for the brand.

brand,⁶ it is crucial to articulate that BUB's fame was a volitional construction enabled by the neoliberal and capitalist social media influencer environment and the consequential "anyone can make it" ethos. In this context, it is quite possibly true that the market niche BUB provided came initially as a surprise—not everyone can actually make it—but eventually the fame turned into profitable work that required maintenance. As the internet culture scholar Crystal Abidin notes, "the wide uptake and global prominence of internet celebrity have cultivated an elite economic group that has been able to turn their digital fame into a self-brand and eventually a business" (2018, 71). Indeed, even though Lil BUB was the cynosure of the brand,⁷ she was also the vehicle for Bridavsky's business, art, and his self-branding as a responsible caretaker.⁸

During and even after the eight years of BUB's life, commodities and content abound. Pictures and illustrations of BUB's face have been stamped on numerous coffee mugs, T-shirts, sweaters, tote bags, calendars, socks, hats, plush toys, face masks, and so forth. In October 2021, almost two years after BUB's passing, official merchandise is still being sold on BUB's website. In addition to commercial merchandise, Bridavsky and people working with him have generated an immense amount of BUB-related material, such as: copious photos and videos, interviews, campaign collaborations, the full feature documentary film *Lil BUB & Friendz* (2013), appearances in the comedy films *Nine Lives* (2016) and *I'll Be Next Door for Christmas* (2018), the books *Lil BUB's Lil Book: The Extraordinary Life of the Most Amazing Cat on the Planet* (2013) and *Lil BUB: The Earth Years* (2021), and the music album *Science & Magic: A Soundtrack to the Universe* (2015) that includes instrumental music and BUB's vocalisations.

It has not been disclosed how much money Bridavsky has earned with Lil BUB, but some sources have speculated that Lil BUB's net worth is something between \$100 thousand and \$250 thousand (Net Worth Spot 2021). However, it is possible that Bridavsky could have made a lot more money had he not

6 This seems to be congruent with some "amateur" managers of animal companion Instagram accounts who have referred to their content as a joyful and "pure" corner of the internet (Maddox 2021, 3333). However, as Jessica Maddox points out about the mediated nature of such accounts: "Pet Instagram accounts reveal more about individual selves and how people construct their pets and pet experiences online" (Ibid., 3345).

7 I use the word "brand" when I refer to the entirety of Lil BUB's curated image: social media presence, official merchandise, charitable causes, and public appearances in events, films, interviews, etc. My intention behind the use of this word is to highlight the commercial aspect of BUB's public image as well as the mediated nature of what is known about BUB as an individual.

8 It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss Lil BUB's role as a labourer. For further analysis of animals and work, see e.g., Hamilton & Taylor 2013 and Blattner et al. 2019.

insisted on keeping the business independent and making sure that a steady flow of proceeds goes straight to charity (Dodero 2014). In fact, the website for Lil BUB's Big FUND (reportedly the first national fund for disabled animal companions in the U.S.) claims to have raised over \$700 thousand⁹ for animal companions in need (Lil BUB's Big FUND). In comparison, Grumpy Cat's guardian, Tabatha Bundesen, struck a deal with the meme manager Ben Lashes whose business proposals Bridavsky has claimed to have previously turned down (Stall 2015). Bundesen has also remained secretive about exact numbers, but Grumpy Cat's net worth has been speculated to land somewhere between \$1 million and \$100 million (Andrews 2018). Bridavsky has made critical remarks about the memetic and corporate nature of Grumpy Cat's brand and her treatment as a "cash cow" (Stall 2015), explaining that he wanted to maintain control of how BUB is portrayed to make sure her image is not reduced to a joke: "I didn't want people to make fun of her. [...] Memes were obviously made, but I never shared them. I always made it about her" (Bridavsky 2019).

In line with a long history of feminist and cultural studies (see e.g., Giraud 2019, 142–70; Gossett et al. 2017; Trier-Bieniek 2015; Paasonen 2011; McRobbie 2004), my interest in BUB and Bridavsky stems from taking seriously the influence of popular culture¹⁰ and its ability to participate in cultural negotiations about values and discourses; in this chapter, especially regarding matters of (animal) disability. As Imre Szeman and Susie O'Brien describe it, popular culture is "familiar and obvious at first glance, but very complicated as soon as you start to think about it in any detail" (Szeman & O'Brien 2017, 18). Therefore, it would be a serious oversight and simplification to consider popular cat videos nothing but a gauzy amusement. Indeed, feminist and cultural studies have long worked to disrupt the high culture/low culture binary, with a focus on "why and how such inclusions and exclusions occur in the first place" (Ibid., 20)

9 This number varies depending on the source. For example, the landing page of Lil BUB's personal website (www.lilbub.com) claims that the fund has raised over \$500 thousand, whereas the website's "about" section (www.lilbub.com/about) claims the number to be \$300 thousand or \$200 thousand (numbers checked in October 2021). I assume these texts have not been updated in a while and the information on the website of Lil BUB's Big FUND (www.goodjobbub.org) is the most accurate.

10 Culture has been described as "one of the [...] most complicated words in the English language" that has no single correct meaning attached to it (Williams 1988, 87). According to Tim O'Sullivan, culture entails "the social production and reproduction of sense, meaning and consciousness. The sphere of meaning, which unifies the spheres of production (economics) and social relations (politics)" (O'Sullivan 1994, 68). Popular, in turn, refers to something that draws in a lot of people, but it also entails a classed dimension: "the words 'popular' and 'the people' don't refer to absolutely everyone, but to a particular group to whom a certain quality or value is attached" (Szeman & O'Brien 2017, 20).

and the sheer multitude of popular culture. As Mikita Brottman notes about the potential theoretical shortcomings of cultural studies if the prominence of popular culture were ignored: “any discipline that fails to take into account 90 percent or more of what constitutes its domain will [...] run serious risks of distorted vision in understanding the small zone it *does* focus on” (Brottman 2005, 12).

In this chapter, I discuss how disability is negotiated in social media videos and other publications that revolve around BUB's eating and feeding practices.¹¹ In these videos, posted via platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, BUB slurps her wet food and makes a mess, requiring Bridavsky to clean BUB's face and her surroundings. In some videos, BUB, who was born with a rare bone condition called osteopetrosis, walks to her food bowl with noticeable effort. Other videos are more heavily edited, such as advertisements for a cat food brand and BUB's “birthday cake” videos that consist of stacking wet cat food on a cake plate and sharing the food with homeless shelter cats. Bridavsky is present in most videos, holding BUB in his tattooed arms and communicating with her. BUB's eating videos make her anomalies visible, spurring discussion about her disabilities and her brisk appetite as a signal of her vitality as well as of Bridavsky as a caring, amiable man whom, as one social media commentator put it, “any sane woman would marry [...] in a nanosecond.” In order to contextualise the topic of this chapter, I also analyse some material that does not focus on food and feeding practices. The methodology informing this chapter and the material analysed is specified in the next section. A crucial aspect in BUB's brand that I cannot elaborate on in this chapter is the relevance of Bridavsky's gender performance and the caring masculinity he demonstrates. In contrast to the queer figure of the irrational “crazy cat lady” who struggles to establish a heteronormative domesticity (McKeithen 2017), BUB's disabilities and Bridavsky's cisheteronormative image¹² as a bearded, tattooed man seem to co-constitute each other, affording Bridavsky to come across as a “tough big man” who is not afraid to be a “softie”¹³ and rendering BUB's needs as a serious

11 Interestingly, Grumpy Cat's YouTube channel does not include similar videos that would exhibit her everyday life and caring practices. Only one video (“Grumpy Cat getting treats after being on the TODAY show!”) displays her eating. The description of the video states: “Quite a few people have emailed asking for a clip of Grumpy Cat eating ... so here it is!”

12 To be clear, I am referring only to his public image, not making assumptions about his gender or his sexuality.

13 YouTube video comment.

matter. Likely, Bridavsky's Whiteness also contributes to his perceived eligibility and credibility as a cat guardian.¹⁴

A disability studies analysis of BUB's care guides my reading of her eating videos, helping to consider the possible benefits of the brand created by Bridavsky while also offering critical notions on how disability is fetishised at the expense of an animal who does not have the ability to refuse her social media appearance. I deconstruct some of the ableist-anthropomorphic strategies Bridavsky engages in when he represents BUB as an inspirational example of determination and perseverance while acknowledging his insistence on challenging the cultural understanding of disability as mere suffering. Finally, I turn my focus to interdependence and the importance of assessing vulnerability not as a pitiable state of being, but rather a fundamental condition that can apply to any animal, human or other, disabled or abled.

2 Methodology and Research Material

I approach the contradictions present in Lil BUB's brand with the help of Eva Giraud's notion of ambivalent popularity and her suggestion to engage with exclusions, as articulated in her monograph *What Comes after Entanglement? Activism, Anthropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion* (2019). The guiding idea behind Giraud's work on activism is that cultural theories aiming to move beyond an anthropocentric worldview risk undermining possibilities for political action that, in practice, tends to be a messy and complex business ripe with contradictions. Despite the importance of critical work assessing entanglements and relationality, Giraud argues that "in order to explore how things could be otherwise [...], it is sometimes necessary to push for these alternatives at the expense of relations that currently undermine them" (Giraud 2019, 45).¹⁵

14 To my knowledge, the intersection between Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour (BIPOC) and the figure of the crazy cat lady/person remains utterly unexplored in academic literature. Google's picture search with the keyword "crazy cat lady" yields pictures of White people, whereas the keyword "black crazy cat lady" summons pictures of black cats. The keyword "white crazy cat lady" mostly summons pictures of products, such as white T-shirts and mugs. Biased algorithms may play a part in these results, but this still begs the question: Why is the figure of the crazy cat lady predominantly White, and what is at stake for BIPOC to be considered crazy cat people? See, however, Boisseron 2015 for discussion on Blackness and dogs in the context of the U.S.

15 As Giraud explains: "By foregrounding the ways that human existence is bound together with the lives of other entities, contemporary cultural theorists have sought to move beyond a worldview where the human is seen as exceptional. Narratives of entanglement have, in such contexts, proven important in implicating human activities in ecologically

In the context of this chapter, the concept of ambivalence assists in articulating the frictions inherent in the research material whereas a focus on exclusions makes visible the political imperative of having to choose one mode of operation at the expense of some other actions. In Lil BUB's case, for example, Bridavsky is actively "pushing for alternatives" when it comes to the wellbeing of homeless, ill, disabled, and mistreated domestic cats, and he has collaborated in paid partnership with a cat food brand that, in addition to being accepted by BUB, he deemed the most sustainably sourced and ethical. The more comprehensive animal industrial complex (see e.g., Noske 1989; Twine 2012), however, remains eschewed—possibly in no small part due to the practical challenges related to feeding obligate carnivores such as felines in a truly sustainable and ethical way.¹⁶ Additionally, not only is it possible that BUB's health affected what kind of food she was able to eat, it is also likely that Bridavsky's performance as a caretaker would not have been taken seriously had he opted for a more experimental plant-based cat food diet.¹⁷

Liana Chua has noted that, despite their pervasiveness,¹⁸ mass spectatorship of animal presences on the internet has attracted relatively scarce scholarly interest—"a reflection, perhaps, of common assumptions about their trivial,

damaging situations and calling for more responsible relations to be forged with other species, environments, and communities. Actually meeting these responsibilities, however, is not a straightforward task. [...] Though it might be important to recognize the nuances of a given situation, this can also make it difficult to determine where culpability for particular situations really lie, let alone offer a sense of how to meet any ethical responsibilities emerging from these situations. Irreducible complexity, in other words, can prove paralyzing and disperse responsibilities in ways that undermine scope for political action" (2019, 1–2). As a practical example, animal rights and other social justice activists may be forced to settle for unsatisfactory political advancements in situations in which more vigorous structural changes remain unattainable. Refusing to settle, on the other hand, could lead to the thwarting of any sort of advancements.

16 For a discussion on sustainability and the "pet" food industry, see e.g., Acuff et al. 2021. It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss the cat food industry at length, but Kuura Irni's chapter on cat advocacy in this book provides an enlightening discussion on the matter of vegan politics and cat food (306–342).

17 Knight & Leitsberger (2016) suggest that it can be possible for a domestic cat to lead a healthy life on a plant-based diet when certain precautions are taken into consideration. However, they also note that the lack of a wider body of long-term research renders such a diet experimental and risky.

18 In addition to numerous animal celebrities, such as the dogs Marnie, Tuna, and Doug, the cats Nala, Maru, and Henri le Chat Noir, the fox Juniper, the monkeys Diddy Kong and Yeti Kong, and the gorilla Harambe who became famous after being killed, the internet is riddled with memes, videos, and photos representing animals.

entertaining status” (Chua 2017, 328).¹⁹ Here, the focus of the chapter is turned to how dismissing popular forms of representation as mawkish sentimentality or idle recreation “not only fails to attend to their ambivalence but can make it difficult to gain meaningful critical purchase on how they *work*, which is dangerous in light of their visibility and influence” (Giraud 2019, 143). Some of Lil BUB’s visibility and influence can be deduced from the follower counts she still has on social media: 2,8 million followers on Facebook, 2,3 million followers on Instagram, 835 thousand followers on Twitter, and 344 thousand subscribers on YouTube.²⁰ While Lil BUB’s cuteness may be the most prominent topic her followers focus on in their social media interactions, the hundreds of comments Lil BUB’s publications receive also include serious negotiations about disability, suffering, care, and the right to live. Indeed, on my part I can affirm that it is social media accounts dedicated to disabled animal companions that sparked my interest in the topic of animal disability in the first place—possibly because I had not really seen many disabled animals before, hinting towards their precarious condition and slim chances of being left alive.²¹ While I would gladly encourage everyone to read Sunaura Taylor’s *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (2017), it is much more likely that it is mediums such as Lil BUB’s social media where people outside the fields of disability studies and critical animal studies assess their normative perceptions regarding animal disability. Therefore, it is of no small consequence what kind of negotiations take place on these popular sites.

Lil BUB’s brand may not seem like an obvious case of activism, however, it is crucial to note how Bridavsky’s consistent focus on charitable causes and animal welfare differs from many other famous “pet influencer” brands enabled by capitalist social media consumerism. Furthermore, in practice, making the decision to appreciate BUB’s privacy and to refuse monetising on her unique persona would have probably led to BUB’s early death due to the lack of access

19 To be more precise, animals as *individuals* seem to have been of little interest, whereas spectatorship in itself has garnered some interest as “digital pet therapy and/or stress relief” (Myrick 2015, 174) and aesthetic pleasure (O’Meara 2014).

20 Numbers checked in October 2021.

21 On the other hand, as critical disability scholars such as Sunaura Taylor have illuminated, the animal industrial complex is based on bringing to life industrially farmed animals who are effectively disabled through various means. Such means include but are not limited to: breeding domestic animals to painful physical extremes in order to increase production volumes, keeping domestic animals in filthy and cramped enclosures that restrict mobility and expose to diseases, debeaking of domestic birds, and exposure to mental health issues, such as the stress-induced porcine stress syndrome that makes domestic pigs susceptible to heart attacks (Taylor 2017, 30–43).

to specialised veterinary care²² as well as a diminished popular focus on the right to live and to be cared for as a disabled animal companion. Additionally, as I argue in more detail later in this chapter, some of the ableist and anthropomorphic strategies Bridavsky utilises in Lil BUB's brand are effective in challenging the more alarming ableism that assumes the existence of disabled animal companions (and disability in general) to be nothing but a nonviable tribulation. Yet, despite some of the transformative prospects of Bridavsky's ambivalent work with BUB, it is also momentous to pay critical attention to what kind of exclusions he engages in when he takes, as Thom van Dooren puts it, "a stand for some possible worlds but not others" (van Dooren 2014, 60).

Due to its immense quantity, I have not familiarised myself with all the official content produced by Lil BUB's brand. I have also not read every single comment BUB's publications have received across different social media platforms—even after all the possible comment deletions and moderation, there are still tens of thousands of them. Instead, I have especially focused on material found in BUB's YouTube channel due to the relative ease of navigating its contents. From the 263 videos uploaded on BUB's YouTube by October 2021, I initially collected a list of titles that somehow insinuate that food, eating, and feeding practices are present in the video, such as: "Lil BUB Will Travel for FOOD" and "The first time I fed BABY BUB". I listed some videos that I deemed relevant based on the still photos visible of the uploaded videos: one example is "Lil BUB's Super Bowl" that could have referred to American football but turned out to be a pun about a massive food bowl. In total, I listed 37 YouTube videos, the length of which vary from some seconds to some minutes. I watched all these videos and browsed through a portion of their comment sections (some videos have received a couple of hundred comments, others over a thousand comments). My aim was to read enough comments to get a general idea what kind of recurrent discourses they entail, and I copied some representative samples on my list of videos.

In addition to YouTube videos, I also watched some videos on Lil BUB's Facebook page. I deemed Facebook's interface arduous to navigate and decided against focusing on it thoroughly, but I added three videos to my list: "Will travel for food" (also published on YouTube with a slightly different title),

22 Bridavsky has stated that BUB's initial life expectancy was 6 months. BUB's official website states that BUB is "the only cat in recorded history" to have been born with osteopetrosis, making her bones grow progressively denser. Combined with the multitude of other genetic anomalies, she required highly specialised care. The website credits BUB's popularity for discovering the Assisi Loop, a pulsed electromagnetic field therapy device that helped her gain and maintain mobility.

“Lil BUB Thinks You Should Adopt, AND Do a Damn Fine Job,” a paid partnership video with the animal companion food brand Halo, and “BUB Demands Food.” I also disregarded the accounts Lil BUB has on Instagram and Twitter for the same reason—however, I am somewhat familiar with her Instagram as I have followed BUB’s account for some years and remember witnessing similar negotiations as on the YouTube videos I examined.²³ Along with BUB’s social media videos, I watched the documentary film *Lil BUB & Friendz*, produced by Vice Media and currently viewable on Lil BUB’s YouTube, and the video “RIP Lil Bub: This Is What Happens When Famous Pets Die,” published on the Vice News channel on YouTube. Both of them provide further information about Bridavsky and BUB as well as of the internet cat phenomenon and other “pet influencer” brands. I also read Lil BUB’s official websites (Lil BUB: www.lilbub.com and Lil BUB’s Big Fund: www.goodjobbub.org) and Bridavsky’s online writing and interviews for background information and more explicated descriptions of his thoughts about BUB and her brand (Bridavsky 2019; Dodero 2014; Eordogh 2014; Stall 2015; Time Out Group 2016). Finally, I listened to the album *Science & Magic* as background music during the writing of this chapter. Not all of the material I familiarised myself with is explicitly analysed, but the information I gathered affects how I approach the examples I raise in the text.

To be clear, my aim in this chapter is not to judge how much of a “good job”²⁴ Bridavsky has done as a caretaker and as an individual, and it is not my purpose to criticise individual people commenting on Lil BUB’s publications.²⁵ Instead, drawing from the method of discourse analysis (see e.g., Jokinen et al. 2016; Barker and Galasiński 2001), I approach my research material as a cultural artefact/text²⁶ that is shaped by the capitalist social media platforms it was born out of and the discourses of the surrounding Anglo-Western society. It is also

23 It should nevertheless be pointed out that different social media platforms may have differing cultures of communication, which can have an effect on what kind of comments publications receive.

24 This pun refers to a common motive in Lil BUB’s brand, repeated in numerous publications: “GOOD JOB BUB.”

25 In order to protect the privacy of the people who have commented on BUB’s social media publications, I have decided to use short direct quotes only when I do not specify on which video or platform I have found the comment. If I specify the source, I paraphrase the comments and make general descriptions of repeated discourses.

26 The structuralist genealogy in the humanities “assert[s] the specificity of culture, and its irreducibility to any other phenomenon, taking culture to be analogous to, or structured like, a language. [...] While everyday usage of the word ‘text’ refers to writing, it has become an axiom of cultural studies that a text is any phenomenon that generates meaning through signifying practices. Hence, dress, television programmes, advertising images, sporting events, pop stars, etc. can all be read as texts.” (Barker and Galasiński

worth specifying that, despite my shared interest with Bridavsky in underlining that BUB was a living, breathing being rather than a meme to be consumed, everything that is publicly known about BUB derives from the curated and mediated cultural artefact that consists of the entirety of her brand.

3 Lil BUB and the Unstable Space between the Stigma and the Inspiration of Disability

Disability studies provides a multidisciplinary framework for combatting the stigmatising and oppressive practices surrounding disability as well as “challeng[ing] the idea that disability is a deficit or defect that should be cured or remedied, disrupt[ing] the idea that an individual with disabilities can be defined solely through her disabilities, and critiqu[ing] representations of disability as pitiable, inviting charity, to be compensated for, made invisible, or overcome” (Dolmage, 2014, 20). Furthermore, while disability studies exhibit various conceptions regarding disability, much effort has been put into articulating that disability is not only a medical construction, but also, importantly, a cultural, social, and societal one (Garland-Thomson 2019, 12).

Yet, what does it mean to say that Lil BUB, a feral-born domestic cat, was disabled? At the surface level, this question can be approached from a strictly pathological perspective by listing her various anomalies and ailments in a similar manner as on her official website that also includes radiographs of her twisted limbs. At a more theoretical level, however, there have been many differing views regarding the complex intersection between disability and animality in itself, some of which flatten disabled and animal lives as “simple” modes of existence (e.g., Taylor 1984, 159) whereas others have found that the comparison excludes disabled humans from full human worth (Kittay 2005). This chapter, however, draws from Sunaura Taylor’s ground-breaking work and her suggestion to “crip animal ethics, incorporating a disability politics into the way we think about animals” (Taylor 2017, 57). In addition to having an intersectional perspective in analysing how animalisation has been employed as a method of devaluing disabled, racialised, and otherwise marginalised human lives, Taylor argues that “ableism is intimately entangled with speciesism, and is deeply relevant to thinking through the ways nonhuman animals are judged, categorized, and exploited” (Ibid.).

2001, 11–12). In line with this tradition, I approach all the elements in my research material as a cultural artefact that can be regarded as structured like a text.

In other words, ableism informs how some humans²⁷ regard our species as superior to nonhuman animals based on different human abilities, such as tool making with opposable thumbs, walking upright, cognitive capacities deemed as “complex,” and levels of self-awareness deemed as “high.” The standard abilities of abled humans are taken as the baseline against which all other abilities are reflected as less-than or otherwise irrelevant when it comes to the speciesist hierarchy that enables humans to exploit other animals as resources and entertainment. In addition to being grounded in ableist rationalisations, the problem and, indeed, the irony with such complacent hierarchy is that humans harbour an alarmingly miniscule and anthropocentric understanding of the colossal diversity of nonhuman abilities, leading to misinformed and underestimated assumptions regarding, for example, the ability to feel pain. As Taylor reports the fitting words of the humanities scholar Michael Bérubé: “There hasn’t been a discovery at any point in the last five hundred years after which we said to ourselves, ‘My goodness, animals are stupider than we thought.’ Every single discovery has gone in the opposite direction” (Ibid., 78). However, it is not only animals who bear the brunt of ableist categorisations, as many humans also fall short of meeting the standards of the abled human. While it is challenging to infer the impact of disability in the social contexts of animals themselves due to our limited knowledge about how various species comprehend physical and cognitive difference (Ibid., 24), we can at least establish that speciesist and ableist standards have tangible effects on the lives of numerous humans and animals alike: exploitation, institutionalisation, societal and social exclusion, putative “mercy” killings, violent abuse, and so forth.²⁸

4 If BUB Can Do It, So Can You

Even though we project human ableism onto animals to the degree that “they are subjected to some of our most familiar ableist narratives [such as]

27 Globally and historically, there are numerous different philosophies and cosmologies informing how humans make sense of their relation to other animals, such as animistic worldviews. The particular relation I invoke here is informed by the settler-colonial Western context that has not only been the driving force behind the escalating climate crisis and the proliferation of the animal industrial complex (see e.g., Lightfoot et al. 2013; Chu 2019, 189; Hultman and Pulé 2018, 22), but has also actively worked to render BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ people, and disabled people animalised as a category of “subhumans” in numerous ways (see e.g., Chen 2012; Puar 2017; Taylor 2017, 83–94; Ibid., 101–116).

28 For further reading on disability studies, see e.g., Vehmas 2005; Campbell 2009; Hall 2011; Kafer 2013; and Ray & Sibara 2017. For further reading on disability and animality, see e.g., Jenkins et al. 2020 and Lundblad 2020.

the 'better off dead' narrative, [...] a common thread in discussions of pet euthanasia" (Taylor 2017, 23–24), the rise of social media has afforded the burgeoning of the celebrated "inspirational" disabled animal in an unprecedented scale. Lil BUB is an especially prominent example of this figure—indeed, Mike Bridavsky has even stated that being a positive inspiration was her (or rather, his) principal objective: "I see a lot of people get discouraged so easily—but what Bub was able to do is show people [that] no matter what's happening in your life, no matter what emotional or physical challenges you are working to overcome, you can do it. If Bub can do it, so can you." (Bridavsky 2019). The phenomenon of disability as "inspiration porn"²⁹ (Young 2012) also concerns certain "successful" disabled humans, commonly represented as "supercrips" who surpass great odds with great attitude (Alaniz 2014, 31–33). As disability activist Stella Young explains, "inspiration porn [...] [is] there so that non-disabled people can put their worries into perspective. [...] It's there so that non-disabled people can look at us and think 'well, it could be worse ... I could be that person'" (Young 2012).

Despite Bridavsky's insistence that "if Bub can do it, so can you," this description of inspiration porn does not perfectly translate to animal contexts. Gazing at disabled people may remind non-disabled humans of the reality that their abledness is only a temporary state of being that, at any given time, could be interrupted by sudden illness, accidents, old age, and so forth, but none of us could become nonhumans³⁰—disabled or otherwise. While BUB videos may work to some as "digital pet therapy and/or stress relief" (Myrick 2015, 174) that helps people to, as Stella Young expresses it, "put their worries into perspective," I consider it doubtful that BUB's capacity to inspire finds meaningful resonance from the hypothetical thought: "It could be worse... I could be that cat." Albeit many of BUB's social media commentators associate BUB's disabilities with human disabilities (for example, by replying to an offensive comment by asking whether it would be acceptable to say the same to the parent of a disabled child), her species membership adds another layer to the process of inspiration that requires further analysis of what affords famous disabled animals their particular attraction.

The cultural studies scholar Elaine Laforteza credits BUB's cuteness as one of the main features of her inspirational popularity, arguing that, unlike disabled humans who may respond to other people's compulsion to gawk at their disabilities as a sort of spectacle (see Garland-Thomson 2002) by looking back,

29 For further analysis of inspiration porn and "cripspiration," see e.g., McRuer 2018 and Ellis 2015, 149–168.

30 "An animal" has, however, been a concept historically tied to racialisation, and Anti-Black discourse continues to animalise Black people (see Jackson 2020).

disabled animals are rendered cute by their assumed ignorance³¹ of being stared at:

The online presence of cute animals, who are “cute” because of their disabilities, invites the human gaze to rest on their disabilities and encourages them to linger, to keep looking without feeling the need to look away. This desire to linger on the cute animal informs the commodification of Lil Bub. For example, the range of products produced to celebrate Lil Bub’s cuteness highlight how viewers are invited to visually absorb everything to do with Lil Bub. Cute-ifying disability, in terms of packaging “cute disabilities” as commodities, re-signifies how humans can perceive and view disability through rearranging the “awkward partnership” between disability and ability. Disability, in this case, can be marketed as “cute” and bought and sold because of its cuteness. (Laforteza 2014)

While Laforteza’s analysis of “cute-ified” animal disabilities as an enjoyable spectacle is apt, she also acknowledges that Lil BUB’s brand has the ambivalent potential to promote disabled animal companions’ right to live and to represent disability in general in a manner that “can resignify normative ideas about disability as something that is other to the complexity of human existence” (Ibid.). Laforteza’s analysis, however, does not provide a thorough focus on the negotiations that take place on BUB’s social media channels. Furthermore, BUB was only about two or three years old at the time of her article’s publication—a crucial observation when one considers the changes in BUB’s physical demeanour as she grew older.

Indeed, cuteness is not the only attribute attached to BUB’s disabilities, as indicated by the many social media commentators asking what is “wrong” with her—even during the early years of her fame when some others, in contrast, failed to notice her disabilities and assumed she was a munchkin cat.³² During

31 The same assumption of ignorance applies to animals in general—in this case, however, the focus is particularly on staring at disabilities. However, see e.g., Derrida 2008 for a discussion on his realisation that a cat is an actual being who has the capacity to look back at a human.

32 The munchkin cat is a domestic “dwarf cat” breed with notably short legs, purposely caused by genetic mutation. One of the important aspects of BUB’s brand that I cannot thoroughly focus on within the length of this chapter is the matter of selective breeding of animal companions and its relation to enhancing disabling features. As indicated by the assumption that BUB was a munchkin cat, many of BUB’s casual followers apparently did not consider BUB particularly different from any other animals who have been selectively bred to exhibit desired genetic traits. The desirable idea of pedigreed

her later years, she had a bone infection that added mass to her jaw, resulting in a visible bump on the other side of her head. Combined with her unsteady physique, she looked even more atypical than before, causing many to conclude that BUB's unique appearance is rather something sinister and sad than "cute."

5 Appetite as Vitality and Determination

In order to combat negative feedback and advocate for BUB's right to live, Bridavsky utilised ableist and anthropomorphic strategies in BUB's brand that helped him to shift the focus to BUB's vitality and inspiring determination. Crucially, BUB's brisk appetite is one of the repeated proofs of her enduring spirit. As Bridavsky explains in the film *Lil BUB & Friendz*: "Anytime you put food in front of her, she just goes to town, and you know when a cat's [...] uncomfortable or in pain or unhealthy, they stop eating, they stop drinking, and they [...] hide."

Bridavsky has posted numerous videos of BUB that consist of displaying BUB's willingness to climb stairs and walk relatively long distances in order to reach the much-desired target: a bowl of food. One such example is the video entitled "Will travel for food" and "Lil BUB Will Travel for FOOD" (published on Lil BUB's Facebook and YouTube pages respectively) that shows BUB's slow pacing as she walks to her food bowl, followed by instantaneous munching sounds.³³ The video was published in late August 2019, just a few months before BUB's passing in early December. In comparison to many other BUB's eating

"purebreds"—in contrast to the "mongrels" and "mutts" of mixed breeds—possibly hides and erases the stigmatised concept of disability. As selective breeding of animal companions has become so normalised and monetised in Western societies, it seems that disability needs to be articulated or otherwise accentuated in order to dispute the widely accepted "cuteness" of overemphasised physical features, such as huge, babylike eyes and short muzzles. People seem to have made an intuitive connection between BUB's appearance and aesthetic breeding practices, which suggests that, at least during her early years of fame, BUB's disabilities remained obscure in public understanding. In fact, some have even inquired whether it would be possible to breed more cats in the likeness of BUB, which Bridavsky has immediately rejected (Eordogh 2014).

33 Based on BUB's eating videos, she made loud sniffing and slurping sounds when eating, presumably due to her jaw structure and her tongue sticking out. However, it should be noted that Bridavsky is an audio engineer by profession, and it would be easy for him to manipulate the audio track of the videos. Nevertheless, I do not think that Bridavsky has faked BUB's noisy eating sounds (even though he might have enhanced them in some cases). BUB's quality of life as well as right to live was constantly under scrutiny, compelling Bridavsky to assure people that he took proper care of her, so it would seem odd of him to draw willful attention to BUB's atypical features.

videos, this particular video aroused more worry in social media commentators and accumulated sad, crying emoji. One of the thousands of comments states that it feels bad to see how BUB leans on the wall in order to steady her gait but concludes that at least she still has her appetite. Others remark that the bone growth on her face and her walking style indicate that BUB has no meaningful quality of life, arguing that the decision to keep her alive is telling of human selfishness. Others, nevertheless, still consider BUB inspiring, stating that the video proves that nothing stops a determined cat from getting to her food. Many also counter suggestions that it would be more merciful to euthanise BUB by noting that Bridavsky is a good caretaker who knows what is best for her and pointing out that her appetite testifies that she still has fight in her.

The latter reaction seems to be what Bridavsky was aiming for with BUB's eating videos. Indeed, he actively enforced BUB's image as a determined cat equipped with a voracious appetite. On Facebook, the foreword for the aforementioned video is "Go BUB go," but on BUB's YouTube channel, the same video is introduced with the following text: "Despite her bone condition, BUB still gets around like a champ. She's not as graceful as most cats, but she's a hell of a lot more determined." Many of BUB's other eating videos relay the same message, like the Facebook video entitled "BUB Demands Food" that states: "BUB's appetite is a metaphor for her resilience and determination. At just under 4 pounds, she eats enough food for a 16 pound cat, every day."

Indeed, Bridavsky is not wrong in highlighting the importance of monitoring feline appetite. Cats have developed an innate ability to hide underlying illnesses and pain, which can be a useful trait in the wild: cats are more likely to end up prey for bigger predators if they demonstrate frailty (Haikka 2018, 232). Within the domestic context, however, cat guardians should always pay careful attention to changes in appetite, as this may signal hidden health issues and a need to consult a veterinarian. Furthermore, it is dangerous for cats to go without food for more than a couple of days: the exhaustion of protein supplies forces the feline body to use fat reserves for energy, which overwhelms the liver and may lead to a life-threatening condition called feline hepatic lipidosis. (Ibid., 145) Nevertheless, Bridavsky admits that BUB's eating behaviour did not completely translate to how she was actually feeling, crediting her spirit for subsisting even during sickness: "Bub never ever would give up, even at the very end when she was really sick. Every day, she'd run to her food dish, acting like nothing was wrong. Her spirit was so strong" (Bridavsky 2019). Even though appetite and eating behaviour may provide symptomatic information of feline health, Bridavsky's description of BUB's eating and her illness demonstrates the difficulty of making unequivocal assumptions of vitality.

6 Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Interdependence

From the perspective of disability studies, the repeated focus on BUB's unyielding determination alludes to an anxious conceptualisation of disability and to the idea of "compulsory able-bodiedness,"³⁴ a concept introduced by Robert McRuer (2006). Compulsory able-bodiedness refers to a cultural understanding of disability as a lack or an imperfection that should be either overcome or hidden out of the way of neoliberal productivity (or, in the context of disabled humans living in especially precarious conditions and disabled animal companions, erased in the form of "mercy" killings). Overcoming a disability often refers to a life of *despites*³⁵—living according to ableist norms to an extent despite the disability, the impairment, the illness, the disorder, or the madness. Considering the claim of BUB's resilience and the videos that celebrate her appetite and her mobility, it would seem like the story told of her of disability is one of overcoming. Certainly, Bridavsky did not hide BUB's disabilities, but rather put them on display as an example of perseverance and positivity. In fact, Bridavsky even assisted scientists who wanted to sequence BUB's genome in order to study her unique mutations (Bridavsky et al. 2019), further accentuating BUB as a spectacle who, to add to Elaine Laforteza's analysis (2014), can be stared at so intimately that even her genetic data is no private matter.

Nevertheless, it is also crucial to note that Bridavsky exhibited transparency—albeit curated—in the practice of caring for a disabled animal companion and he actively challenged the cultural understanding of disability as something so abysmal that even death would be a more desirable option.³⁶ Sequencing BUB's

34 The concept of "compulsory able-bodiedness" draws from "compulsory heterosexuality," a term introduced by Adrienne Rich (1980).

35 As Ian Parsons has noted about the problematic rhetorics of "despite": "Women talk about being proud of who they are—proud because they are women; [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples] talk about being proud because they are [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples]; gay men and lesbians about being proud because of their sexuality. But throughout the disability movement we are much more likely to hear people with disabilities talking about pride in themselves despite their disability" (Parsons 1999, 14).

36 Able-bodied animals are also sometimes included in the "better off dead" narrative if they are otherwise considered vulnerable and dependent, like in the case of domesticated animals who have lost their perceived "wildness" and the ability to survive without the help of humans. One such example is the animal liberation scholar Gary L. Francione who has taken a critical stance towards the institution of "pet ownership" because animal companions "exist forever in a netherworld of vulnerability, dependent on us for everything and at risk of harm from an environment that they do not really understand." Therefore, if there were only two dogs left in the world, they should not be "allowed to breed so that we could

genome, on the other hand, provided Bridavsky with more information about her mutations and what kind of matters may need to be taken into account in her care practices. Most importantly, however, the treatments BUB received were essential in maintaining her life and alleviating possible pain. Indeed, even though the act of caring is fraught with ambivalence and power imbalances (see e.g., Puig de la Bellacasa 2012, 2017, and Haraway 2007), dependence on others is a condition that concerns not only disabled animal companions, but also all the other domestic animals. Furthermore, a disability perspective on interdependence reminds us that we are all “vulnerable beings who will go in and out of dependency and who will give and receive care (more often than not doing both at once) over the course of our lives” (Taylor 2017, 171). As Sunaura Taylor, while acknowledging her own troubled relation to being cared for as a disabled person, explains:

Domesticated animals are dependent on us, which means we cannot simply leave them to their own devices. But the truth is we cannot really do this for *any* animal (human or non) [...]. With domesticated animals and with many disabled humans, there has to be involvement and interaction; there can be no illusion of independence. This vulnerability can create frightening opportunities for coercion, but it also holds the potential for new ways of being, supporting, and communicating – new ways of creating meaning across differences in ability and species (Ibid., 217).

Even though Lil BUB’s brand draws from ableist-anthropomorphic “inspiration porn” narratives and the idea of compulsory able-bodiedness as a method of responding to the stigma of disability, I would argue that it also has the potential to contribute to “new ways of being, supporting, and communicating” when it comes to the treatment of animal companions. In addition to enabling the establishment of Lil BUB’s Big FUND that focuses to support animals “who are the most difficult to adopt, the most expensive to care for, and who are at a high risk of euthanasia” (Lil BUB’s Big FUND), BUB’s social media presence as a disabled cat living her life may also change perspectives about dependence and the right to be cared for. As one social media commentator—responding to a comment that ponders how many “special needs” BUB has and how few would go to the lengths Bridavsky has—notes: “Disability is hard. No lie. But

continue to live with dogs.” (Francione 2012) Sunaura Taylor has critiqued Francione’s reasoning, stating that “[t]he ableist assumption that it is inherently bad, even unnatural, to be a dependent human being is here played out across the species divide, showing once again just how much ableism informs our ideas of animal life” (Taylor 2017, 214).

don't treat that sweet kitty as less than. She doesn't have special needs. She has needs."

7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analysed how disability is negotiated in the context of the celebrity cat Lil BUB's social media publications that demonstrate her eating and feeding practices. My aim in this text was not only to take popular culture seriously and, following Sunaura Taylor's suggestion, to crip animal ethics, but also to bring attention to the consequences that internet consumption of animals can have for the living beings behind the memes and the videos. Despite the inherently problematic construction of the neoliberal and capitalist social media consumerism that encourages fetishisation of disability and use of non-consenting animals as a means for profit, Lil BUB's case also demonstrates the ambivalent potential of such exposure to anthropomorphic internet stardom. For BUB, her fame helped to add many years to her life, whereas efforts such as Lil BUB's Big FUND may have provided a possibility for life for many other animal companions in precarious conditions. On a more abstract and discursive level, BUB's brand may have also worked to challenge cultural ideas about disability.

As I discovered during the time I delved into the world Mike Bridavsky had built around and dedicated to BUB, it is rich material full of potential for numerous analytical perspectives that would further deepen articulations of its ambivalence and the power imbalances inherent in relations that involve parties giving and receiving care across species and ability. Throughout the chapter, I have pointed to some of these potential perspectives (such as Mike Bridavsky's gender performance and Whiteness, the link between the animal breeding industry and disability, and Lil BUB's role as a labourer) in order to address the multifaceted nature of the material. I hope this chapter inspires further critical discussion on cultural representations of animal disabilities and works to deconstruct the lackadaisical assumption of internet cat videos as mere entertainment.

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PART 3

Revisoning the Potential of Education



Pedagogy of the Consumed: an Integral Feminist Lens on Veganism in Higher Education

Alka Arora

Outrage isn't the right word for the change I have undergone since [the class began]. The readings and discussions over the past couple of months have provoked within me a need to acknowledge my own complicity in the consumerism and capitalism that leads to the slaughter of millions of animals each year. I have been forced to reckon with my personal philosophy built on the foundations of Western thinking for centuries and fed to me in my education, secular and religious. And finally, I have come to question how my own choices impact animals and humans I will never meet, and if I am doing enough.

Excerpt from a student reflection paper



Liberatory educators must create spaces where students can reflect both critically and compassionately on their relationship to nonhuman animals.¹ Yet, as Kahn (2014) notes, the academy is mired in “epistemologies of ignorance” (Tuana 2004) when it comes to animal consumption; this remains true even in otherwise radical educational spaces. How do we break through such ignorance and foster instead epistemologies of interconnection, care, and agency?

The field of critical pedagogy, inspired by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([1970] 2017), has foregrounded questions of power and domination in higher education for decades. Feminist pedagogy has added a focus on gender, identity, and interrogation of the personal realm (Shrewsbury 1987; hooks 1994; Fisher 2001; Crabtree 2009; Light, Nicholas, and Bondy 2015). However,

1 The term “nonhuman animals” helps to highlight how humans are also animals. However, for the sake of concision, I will use the term “animals” throughout the rest of this chapter to refer to animals other than humans.

to date, both critical and feminist pedagogies have remained rooted in a fundamentally anthropocentric worldview. Fortunately, nascent scholarship in the fields of ecofeminist pedagogy (Houde and Bullis 1999; Pilgrim and Davis 2015; Chattopadhyay 2019), ecopedagogy (Kahn 2010), and critical animal pedagogies (Andrzejewski, Pedersen, and Wicklund 2009; Dinker and Pedersen 2016; Nocella 2019) has begun to challenge speciesist education. These newer frameworks are examining the relationships between humans and nonhuman animals, who are not only oppressed but are literally consumed by the billions.

My chapter contributes to this growing discourse by offering insights rooted in an *integral* feminist pedagogy, a framework that integrates the intellectual, political, affective, and spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning (Arora 2017). The integral tradition (Esbjörn-Hargens, Reams, and Gunnlaugson 2010; Dea 2010) highlights the importance of addressing students' inner worlds—their emotions, intuitions, and spiritual perspectives—while the feminist tradition emphasises how our personal experiences are rooted in socio-political realities. I contend that bringing these two traditions together when teaching vegan concepts can help educators better support students as they navigate the personal and political ramifications of such content. The integral feminist *vegan* framework that I offer in this chapter builds upon the political insights of critical animal pedagogy and ecofeminist pedagogy while bringing a deeper focus on the embodied, affective, and spiritual² concerns that arise in the classroom when animal exploitation is examined.

An integral feminist vegan pedagogy (IFVP) begins by destabilising taken-for-granted assumptions about our relationship to animals and food. I refer to this questioning as “waking up to speciesism,” inviting students into reflective inquiry about their daily relationship to the animals they interact with or consume. Second, this pedagogy draws upon a post-essentialist feminist care ethic (Tronto 1993) to affirm students' emotional bonds with animals. An integral, care-based approach also requires that educators attend to the emotional impact on students of learning about the enormity of animal oppression.

Third, IFVP offers specific strategies that educators can use to advance critical animal studies' “holistic understanding of the commonality of oppressions” (Best et al. 2007, 5), which is the hallmark of critical animal studies. Such strategies include surfacing and deconstructing associations of veganism with

2 By “spiritual”, I refer to a sense of a deeper meaning and mystery beyond what we can perceive through material means. Spiritual ideas have been codified and transmitted through the development of institutionalised religions, so any in-depth discussion of spirituality must address religion. However, in contemporary times, the “spiritual” is generally understood as more personal and less formalised than religion (Zinnbauer et al. 1997).

whiteness and privilege and offering more complex perspectives centred in the work of scholars and activists of colour. Fourth, an integral feminist perspective on veganism invites students to reflect upon their own religious or spiritual presuppositions about human-animal relationships while learning about decolonial and Indigenous spiritual paradigms in which animals are not seen as objects but as sacred subjects with innate worth.

Finally, an integral feminist vegan perspective recognises that the politics of whose bodies we eat is intimately tied to the politics of how we experience and perceive our own bodies. Given the pervasiveness of body image anxiety and eating struggles among students, discussions of veganism can become fraught. Therefore, educators must find ways to sensitively frame discussions in ways that resist fatphobia and that centre ethical agency over bodily discipline.

In the sections that follow, I explore each of the above five themes in greater detail and offer specific pedagogical strategies that vegan educators can use or adapt to their own educational contexts. Many of these strategies are based on what I have found useful when introducing vegan perspectives to students. Other strategies were inspired by reflections on what I could have done more effectively in the past; I have turned to the literature in these latter cases to develop new ideas and teaching tools.

1 Standpoint and Context

I have been a feminist educator at the university level for over twenty years, but it is only in the past few years that I have more fully incorporated a vegan and animal liberation lens into my teaching and research. I had been an ethical vegetarian since childhood, influenced both by my Hindu upbringing and by an awareness of the terrible plight of factory-farmed animals.³

However, for many years, I kept my concern for animals separate from my other social justice commitments, rarely if ever raising the issue in the feminist communities of which I was a part. It was not until coming across ecofeminist and critical animal studies scholarship that I began to see how deeply imbricated speciesism is with every other social and ecological justice issue.⁴ This

3 In my youth, I first gained awareness of animal suffering in industrial farming via pamphlets published by the vegetarian religious organisation ISKCON (www.iskcon.org) as well as by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) advertising (www.peta.org). More recent sources such as Nibert (2002), Singer (2009 [1975]), and Imhoff (2010) offer more scholarly rigour and analysis of the conditions of animal farming in modern times.

4 The first ecofeminist scholarship that inspired my thinking was Carol Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990); Lisa Kemmerer's *Sister Species* (2011) was another early influence. Among

growing awareness led me to transition from vegetarian to vegan and shift the direction of my teaching and research.

My own veganism is motivated by a deep sense of the sacred interconnection of all life and has been influenced by my study of the ethical principles of myriad spiritual and religious traditions.⁵ I teach at the California Institute of Integral Studies, an institution which is unique in its integration of secular and non-hegemonic spiritual worldviews.⁶ My graduate program integrates the fields of women's and gender studies, ethnic studies, philosophy, and religion.⁷ Most of our students identify as women and have an interest in progressive spiritualities that affirm gender and racial justice. This context has shaped my development of an integral feminist vegan pedagogy, particularly its focus on examining the teachings of religious and spiritual traditions vis a vis animals.

However, I believe that the inclusion of a spiritual dimension may nonetheless be of value to educators who teach in more traditional, secular institutions. A study conducted in 2004 of students in U.S. universities revealed that eighty percent expressed interest in spirituality, which was defined to include ideas such as transcendence as well as compassion, connection, service, and broad-mindedness (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2011). A global study from 2013 found that only 16% of adults in the U.S. were found to have no spiritual or religious affiliation, and that percentage is expected to trend downward in the coming decades (Pew Research Center 2015). Given the pervasive influence of spiritual and religious beliefs in most people's lives, particularly in nations with strong religious cultures, it becomes necessary to interrogate assumptions that animal domination is divinely sanctioned (Luke 2007, Farians 2011).

2 Waking up to Speciesism

One of the central tasks of a liberatory educator is to call into question the oppressive social relations that are generally taken for granted as the natural order of things; we must help students 'unlearn' as much as they learn (Freire

the critical animal studies scholarship, David Nibert's *Animal Rights/Human Rights* (2002) and A. Breeze Harper's *Sistah Vegan* (2010) were significant influences.

5 Much of this study has been in my personal rather than academic life. As noted earlier, I was raised Hindu and raised to believe that animals and humans alike possess souls and must be treated nonviolently. Scholarly influences that have further shaped my thinking on religion, spirituality, and animals (across multiple traditions) include Ricard (2016), Waldau and Patton (2006), Kemmerer (2012), Pereira (2018), Tuttle (2005), and Robinson (2014).

6 <https://www.ciis.edu/about-ciis>

7 <https://www.ciis.edu/academics/graduate-programs/womens-spirituality/about-the-ma>

[1970] 2017; Giroux 2020). I contend that human consumption of animals is one of the oppressive—and ubiquitous—relationships within contemporary life that largely goes unnoticed. Further, as Kahn (2014) notes, primary and secondary education comprise some of the major sites through which this oppressive relationship is naturalised. As with other forms of oppression, human domination of animals is made to seem either God-given (Luke 2007; Farians 2011) or natural (Warren 1990; Plumwood 1993), and hence unchangeable. Those of us in higher education, then, are charged with challenging many of the messages that students receive earlier in their lives.

The integral feminist vegan framework I use begins by inviting students' awareness of the ways in which they relate to—and consume—animals in their daily lives. When beginning a class or public presentation on animal ethics, I often begin by leading the audience in a reflective exercise where they bring to mind a typical morning. I ask them to picture themselves waking up in the morning, getting dressed, eating breakfast, and going through their normal routines. Next, I ask "What role do nonhuman animals play in your morning?" I typically get two types of responses: the first type mentions a beloved companion animal, usually a cat or dog, whom they feed or play with in the morning. The second most common response is "I don't have any pets, so animals don't play a role in my mornings." Even when the title of my presentation is clearly on animal ethics, it is rare for participants to mention their feather down comforter, the bacon they had for breakfast, or the cream they put in their coffee as a relationship they had with an animal.

When I follow-up by asking students to consider the animal *products* they may have used in the morning, they are then more likely to recall the animals they may have eaten or worn. The discrepancy in their responses to these two questions underscores Carol Adams' argument that animals become absent referents via our consumption: "the reminder that the animal was a full being, living a life, disappears" (2015; also see Adams 1990). In debriefing these questions with students, I discuss Adams's concept of 'absent referent' and add the concept of 'absent relationship,' pointing out that consumption *is* a form of relationship, albeit a dysfunctional one (Gruen 2015) that is "asymmetrically imbued with power" (Dinker and Pedersen 2016, 415). This activity helps highlight how, in modern industrial societies, we literally wake up daily to a speciesist culture, or more particularly, a *carnist* culture. Melanie Joy (2011) coined the term "carnism" to describe the subset of speciesism that "dichotomizes nonhuman animals into 'edible' and 'inedible' categorizations" (21). It is the ideology that allows people to view dogs as part of their family and pigs as part of dinner. Through the "waking up" exercise, students come to a greater realisation that "the perpetual, intimate, and deeply symbolic act of eating animals in

large part defines the human-nonhuman relationship” (Joy 2011, 21). It is only by recognising that they are already in relationship with animals that people can begin to question and transform such relationships.

When I have an opportunity to work with students for an entire semester, such as in my Animal Ethics course, I bookend the course with opportunities for students to reflect on their connections to animals. The course begins and ends with students responding to the following prompts:

- Where do nonhuman animals fit into your philosophy or worldview? What messages have you received about animals as a child, through your religion, schooling, etc.?
- If you have animals in your life (e.g., companion animals, visitors to your garden, etc), how would you describe your relationship to them?
- How would you describe your relationship to the animals that you use or consume? (e.g., for food, clothing, entertainment, medical testing, etc.).
- If you have never considered such questions before, why do you think that might be the case?

By and large, students note that their upbringing led them to believe that eating animals was “normal, natural, and necessary” (Joy 2011, 96). The simple act of reflecting on the messages they received via their families, schools, and religious institutions enables students to call into question the animal domination which otherwise goes unnoticed. This sets the foundation for a deeper dive into the complex ideological, political, and social forces that sustain animal oppression.

3 Centring Care

3.1 *Caring for Animals*

The feminist care tradition in animal ethics asserts that emotion must be integrated with reason in our approach to animals. Against the dominant Western animal rights tradition which emphasises rationality and autonomy (exemplified by the work of Peter Singer ([1975] 2009) and Tom Regan (1983, care ethicists note that *care* is the foundation of any effort to change our relationship with animals. Josephine Donovan and Carol Adams (2007) note that feminist care theorists question the “rationalist roots” of animal rights theory, which “requires an assumption of similarity between humans and animals, eliding the differences” (5). Moreover, traditional rights theory denies the reality of interdependence among animals (human and nonhuman), is “abstract and formalistic” and “devalues, suppresses, or denies the emotions” (Donovan and Adams 2007, 6). A care approach, by contrast, affirms the role of emotions in human-animal relations, allows for a contextual response to animal

suffering, and offers a framework for understanding our responsibilities to animals who have become dependent upon humans (Donovan and Adams 2007; Kheel 2007; Gruen 2015).

An integral feminist vegan pedagogy adapts feminist animal care ethics for the higher education classroom. The animal ethicists cited above who espouse a feminist care approach have focused on human-animal relationships, not teacher-student relationships. Conversely, the literature on the pedagogy of care ethics focuses either solely on the human realm (Mortari 2016; Monchinski 2010; Owens and Ennis 2005; Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2002; Noddings 1988), or, in some cases, an undifferentiated “environment” (Goralnik et al 2012; Li 2013 [2007]), eliding ethical consideration of animals. The integral perspective offered in this chapter addresses this gap. First, it affirms and normalises students’ care for animals while challenging gendered assumptions about such care. Second, it brings a mindful and trauma-informed lens to care *for students* as they grapple with the mental and emotional impact of learning about the immensity of animal suffering.

Within the humanities and social sciences, courses on animal ethics are usually electives, and thus students who choose such courses usually enter the classroom with some interest in and care about animal issues. However, their care is sometimes unreflective and extends primarily to companion animals, endangered species, or animals that are rendered “cute” in the media. Many students also come in with a certain self-consciousness about their care, having internalised the dominant culture’s view that rational adults should not care too deeply about animals. As Luke (2007) notes, most people are naturally inclined to care about animals, but the animal exploitation industries have indoctrinated us to “overcome” this care by convincing us that humans cannot survive or thrive without exploitation. As part of this indoctrination, I would argue, we are taught that it is “childlike” to care deeply about animals; coming into adulthood means accepting the inevitability of domination.⁸

Caring about animals is feminised as well as infantilised; indeed, feminists have long critiqued the ways in which ‘feminine’ traits have been considered more childlike than ‘masculine’ ones (Laing 2021). Marti Kheel (2007), citing a history of the American Humane Society (Coleman 1924), notes how the dismissal of feminine traits affected the U.S. animal liberation movements of the early 20th century; the mostly female members of these movements “were often labeled ‘animal lovers’ or ‘sentimentalists’ in an attempt to belittle their concerns” (Kheel 2007, 45). Such attitudes persisted for decades, and thus

8 See Solot and Arluke (1997) for an example of how mainstream science education socialises adolescent students in the U.S. into accepting human dissection of animals, despite their initial hesitancy.

the next wave of animal liberation activism sought to take a more dispassionate approach, buttressed by the rationalist philosophy of Peter Singer (Kheel 2007). Given that rationality is considered both antithetical and superior to emotion within modern androcentric cultures, many students of all genders have learned to downplay their emotional responses to animal suffering.

In order to help students affirm the dignity of caring about animals, I highlight the work of feminist care ethicists such as Lori Gruen (2015), whose concept of *entangled empathy* captures the way that affective and intellectual processes support each other. I have them read personal narratives, such as Ayesha Akhtar's *Our Symphony with Animals* (2019), which chronicles both Akhtar's personal experiences of bonding with companion animals and her research into the connection between human and animal healing, abuse, and advocacy. Students also read accounts of animal emotion and culture (as interpreted by ethologists and animal advocates) such as Carl Safina's *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel* (2016) and Marc Bekoff's *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (2008). Such readings deepen students' capacity for the entangled empathy that Gruen describes.

I have also found that it is critically important to give students classroom time to talk openly about their emotional experiences with animals, both positive and painful, and reflect on how such experiences have shaped their ethics. The following are examples of discussion prompts that can encourage students to integrate affective and intellectual reflection:

- Reflect on a time that an encounter with a nonhuman animal brought you particular joy, comfort, or other positive emotional experience.
- Has an encounter with an animal ever elicited fear, anger, and/or a desire to inflict harm?
- Reflect on a time when you've felt grief, sadness, or other negative emotion in response to animal suffering.
- How have each of these experiences affected your understanding of the appropriate ethical and moral responsibility that you have toward non human animals?

Further, I invite students to reflect on how their attitudes toward animals and animal-based foods may be gendered. Questions such as the following help initiate group dialogue:

- If you identify as male or masculine, what societal messages have you received about the relationship between men and animals?
- If you identify as female or feminine, what societal messages have you received about the relationship between women and animals?
- If you identify as non-binary, are there any ways in which you've been influenced by gendered ideas about human-animal relationships?

As the class discusses such questions, I affirm students' care about animals while working with them to challenge gender essentialist notions about care. As Joan Tronto (1993, 2–3) has argued, “the values of caring—attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion, meeting others' needs” have been “traditionally associated with women” but are in fact equally accessible to all. An inclusive reframing allows people of all genders to reclaim their embodied sense of care. Carol Adams (2007, 216) writes:

Several animal advocacy men have told me that they spent years insisting they did not care for animals, because they did not feel caring was an appropriate response. They needed to appear rational, ‘in control,’ distanced from animals. With the appearance of ecofeminist writings on animals, they felt such relief because they now had a language that legitimated the idea that one might care for animals and that this was an appropriate motivation for activism.

Here, Adams highlights the necessity of destigmatising care in order to respect the true reasons that animal activists engage in the work they do. Her words here also hint at the complex emotional terrain that animal advocates must navigate, terrain that is similar to what students may encounter when learning about animal oppression. Thus, I turn my attention now to how an integral feminist vegan pedagogy tends to student needs.

3.2 *Caring for Students*

We must care for students as we support them in caring about animals. When people wake up to the extent of the suffering that animals experience at human hands, they often experience a range of emotional impacts, such denial, grief, rage (Corman and Vandrovcová 2014), and even existential despair (Mann 2018). Texts that are used to educate people about animal oppression are often distressing, depicting images of animals whose experiences include the following:

Deprivation of basic comforts, rearing animals in crowded confinement stalls and pens; veal crates, gestation crates, and battery cages; tail docking and beak clipping; hormones and antibiotics; broken limbs and dysfunctional organs; transporting animals and meat over states and continents; and a disassembly line that never stops mutilating and killing—these are the standard practices of industrial meat production (Rowe 2011, 12–13)⁹

9 Some of the texts that I use in my classrooms that include descriptions of intense animal suffering include *Eternal Treblinka* (Patterson 2002), which describes the parallels between the

Rowe (2011) argues that a “pedagogy of visual disturbance” is necessary to motivate change in human attitudes toward animals. While I agree that some discomfort is necessary for learning, a surfeit of distressing images can actually impede learning by triggering defensive responses and trauma (Corman and Vandrovцова 2014). To date, critical animal pedagogy has focused primarily on conveying a nuanced political analysis of animal and human oppression; it has paid insufficient attention to the mental and emotional impact on students of learning about violence toward animals.

Julie Andrzejewski’s reflection on her teaching practice (2003) and Lauren Corman and Tereza Vandrovцова’s (2014) “holistic critical animal pedagogy” (2014) begin to address this gap. While noting that graphic images of animal suffering may help students grasp such violence viscerally and not just abstractly, Corman and Vandrovцова warn that such imagery may also negatively affect students’ mental well-being. Providing students with too much information or intense images can backfire, leading to desensitisation and avoidance. Educators must therefore titrate the use of graphic material and “provide emotional and intellectual guidance as students struggle with the information” (145). In their classrooms, Corman and Vandrovцова do this by emphasising agency, noting the gains that have been made for animals via activism, and inspiring hope for future shifts in human-animal relations.

Andrzejewski (2003, 23), meanwhile, cares for student responses to course material by regularly tracking the emotional pulse of her classroom. She asks students to reflect on their process via weekly responses to questions such as these:

- What are the key things you learned this week?
- What things, if any, did you find difficult or challenging this week? (Were you confused at any point? Did you have emotional reactions to any of the materials? How can you deal with these constructively?)
- What everyday actions can you take this week to decrease or eliminate animal suffering?

Such responses allow Andrzejewski to regularly assess student learning and affect; she also uses such responses to know if it is time to collectively process issues with the class.

An integral vegan feminist pedagogy builds on the strategies cited above by drawing from the growing literature on contemplative and trauma-informed

treatment of Holocaust victims and animals in factory farms; *Sister Species* (Kemmerer 2011), which includes stories of animals and humans suffering in various industries; and *Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home* (LaVeck 2012), a film that, among other things, depicts the pain of mother cows when their calves are taken from them.

pedagogy. Scholars in this field assert that mindfulness and healing practices can deepen students' capacity to integrate and derive meaning from course material (Barbezat and Bush 2014; Thompson 2017; Berila 2016; Carello and Butler 2014). In my own classrooms, I have found the practices of *collective grieving* and *mindful dialogue* to be especially useful as the class delves deeply into the realities of human-generated animal suffering.

According to James Stanescu, people who mourn the atrocities that animals experience at human hands find that their grief is "socially unintelligible" (2012, 568):

Those of us who value the lives of other animals live in a strange, parallel world to that of other people. Every day we are reminded of the fact that we care for the existence of beings whom other people manage to ignore, to unsee and unhear as if the only traces of the beings' lives are the parts of their bodies rendered into food: flesh transformed into meat. To tear up, or to have trouble functioning, to feel that moment of utter suffocation of being in a hall of death is something rendered completely socially unintelligible.

In a similar vein, Australian vegan psychologist Clare Mann argues that, as people wake up to the realities of human-caused animal suffering, everyday life becomes fraught with this new awareness; those who become vegan may experience *vystopia*, a type of existential crisis unique to vegans living in cultures where meat-eating is pervasive. This crisis is engendered by the fact that the majority of the population is unaware of and complicit in such suffering through their daily consumption patterns. The vegan thus feels isolated in their suffering and grief.

The task of an integral feminist vegan educator, therefore, must be to make such grief intelligible within the classroom community, while helping students make meaning out of their experience. This can be accomplished by consciously carving out time and space in the classroom for students to openly share the feelings and responses that are arising for them as they digest the course material. Students can also be given time to journal, write poetry, or make art centred on their evolving understanding of human-animal relationships. Rituals, such as lighting candles and honouring moments of silence, can help the classroom community grieve together.

Mindful dialogues can provide students another avenue for processing their responses to challenging material. Whereas classroom *discussions* help students learn new information and clarify their views, *dialogues*—as understood by integral educators—focus students on opening to new ideas, suspending

judgments, and listening deeply (Reams 2011). Paired or small group dialogues can be used in the classroom wherein students are invited to speak authentically about their thoughts and feelings about course materials. Listeners are advised to bring their full attention to the speaker, bracketing their own thoughts and opinions until it is their turn to speak. According to Barbezat and Bush, such deep listening “not only increases retention of material but encourages insight and the making of meaning” (2014, 138).

Earlier in the course, I have students engage in small-group dialogues about relatively comfortable topics, such as narratives about companion animals. This helps to build trust and ease among students. As the course progresses, students can be asked to speak about much more sensitive issues, such as their responses to viewing animals being harmed and their thoughts about the interconnections between human and animal oppressions. Toward the latter part of the course, small groups can give way to a fuller dialogue among the whole class about collective resources for dealing with the grief and trauma that the course material can evoke.

Educators are often given the advice to refer students to university counsellors when course materials bring up distressing feelings (Carello and Butler 2014). While this is generally sound advice, vegans and others who care deeply about animal suffering often find that non-vegan counsellors fail to understand—or, worse, pathologise—their distress (Mann 2018). Thus, vegan educators bear greater responsibility for attending to student responses to potentially traumatising material. Stanescu (2012, 567) has argued that grieving animal lives can be understood as a “political act that produces new communities”. By introducing dialogue and grief practices into the classroom, integral feminist vegan educators can help foster bonds that transform pain into action.

4 Reframing Vegan Discourse

Ecofeminist and critical animal studies scholars have extensively documented how human and animal oppressions are interrelated (Donovan and Adams 2007; Nocella et al. 2014). However, few students have been exposed to such literatures, even in programmes centred on feminism and social justice. In my own classrooms, I have noticed that my students enter the classroom with a deep sensitivity to oppression and privilege. Most of them are versed in the language of ‘intersectionality,’ even as they may not have a full grasp of its complexity. Yet, only a fraction of students have seriously considered speciesism, nor are they aware of the massive human injustices engendered by the animal industrial complex. As Steven Best (2009, 17) has noted, “nearly all histories,

even so-called ‘radical’ narratives” are constrained by “a speciesist straight-jacket”. Thus, students can spend years learning about myriad social justice issues, and earn multiple degrees, without ever engaging in a sustained critique of the human domination of animals.

In fact, some students will argue that veganism is *itself* oppressive, citing its association with whiteness, financial privilege, and thinness.¹⁰ These arguments often come from students of colour and white allies who have been engaged in anti-racist work. Breeze Harper examines these types of assumptions in *Sistah Vegan* (2010), a ground-breaking text that expresses the perspectives of diverse Black vegan women. Harper recalls how she herself held such a view prior to becoming a vegan advocate; as an undergraduate student, her perception of vegan activists was that they were “just bored overprivileged rich white kids who [did] not have real problems” (2010, 35). Other Black vegan women in Harper’s text describe being ostracised (Drew 2010) or cast as “self-righteous” (Santosa 2010, 73) by peers in their community; such experiences further illuminate why some students might resist the idea of veganism.

Despite the growing literature by vegan activists and scholars of colour (Adewale 2021; Brueck 2017; Mwangi 2019; McJetters 2014; Robinson 2014, 2018; Deckha 2012, 2017; Ornelas 2011; Cordiero-Rodrigues 2021), the figure of the vegan as white (or white-identified), privileged, and racially insensitive persists in my classrooms over a decade after Harper’s text was published. To challenge these assumptions, vegan educators are tasked with reframing the discourse around veganism and expanding students’ ideas of who and what veganism is for. I have found it helpful to begin this process by first surfacing and deconstructing students’ common associations with veganism. For example, at a recent online workshop I facilitated that was geared specifically toward BIPOC¹¹ individuals, I began by asking participants to free-associate responses to the question: “Who or what comes to mind when you think of the word ‘vegan?’” I received the following responses: “Bougie—extra money to buy avocados”, “Very, very thin”, “White, gentrifier, privileged”, “Obsessive about food”, “Difficult to communicate with – get mad easily”, “Combative, righteous”, “Difficult at restaurants”, “Weird”. Notably, several members of this small group were themselves vegans but shared these responses because they understood these to be the common discourse in their communities.

10 I will return to the theme of thinness later in this chapter.

11 BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour; in the U.S., this term is increasingly replacing the term ‘people of colour’ in order to more explicitly center Indigenous and African-American peoples, who have been the greatest targets of white supremacy in this nation (The Bipoc Project 2021), <https://www.thebipocproject.org/about-us>.

As noted earlier, critical education requires us to both question dominant discourses and construct new, more liberatory, ones. It also asks us to consider multiple possibilities and eschew the idea that there is one truth. Giving students a chance to openly discuss their prior associations with veganism helps reduce their resistance to considering alternate perspectives. Moreover, it is also useful to explore how some of their prior perceptions are *partially* true—vegan specialty foods often cost more than non-vegan foods and are consumed by those with higher incomes. The most vocal and visible vegan activists are often white. But these partial truths are balanced by other truths, such as the fact that vegan diets can be relatively inexpensive when comprised of simpler foods, that peoples of colour across the globe traditionally ate more plant-based food prior to colonisation and globalisation (Laws 2014; Calvo and Esquibel 2016; García 2013), and that veganism is a multifaceted movement comprised of diverse voices and perspectives.

To emphasise this final point, an integral feminist vegan pedagogy centres the work of scholars and activists who offer complex and interconnected analyses of how racial, gender, and other oppressions connect with animal exploitation. From Aph Ko and Syl Ko (2017), for instance, students learn how racism and speciesism have been co-constitutive. Christopher Sebastian McJetters (2016) offers a framework that connects Black liberation, queer liberation, and animal liberation. Postcolonial vegans (García 2013, Mwangi 2019) challenge the globalisation of Western meat-centric diets and the human, animal, and ecological harms engendered by such diets. Other scholars analyse the links between speciesism and sexism (Adams 1990; Kemmerer 2011), homophobia and heterosexism (Simonsen 2012) and disability oppression (Taylor 2017).

Further, I note how many prominent U.S. activists of colour are or were either vegans or ethical vegetarians, such as Cesar Chavez, Coretta Scott King, and Angela Davis.¹² Activist students are often surprised to hear this and question why these leaders' commitment to ethical eating is rarely discussed within social justice movements. We explore how the anthropocentrism and speciesism endemic within such movements has led to such silence. As they learn from the lives and scholarship of BIPOC and allied scholars, activists, and movement leaders, students are better able to reframe their understandings of veganism and resist discourses that posit human and animal liberation as competing interests.

12 Cesar Chavez (1927–1993) was a labour leader and farmworker activist; Coretta Scott King (1927–2006) was a civil rights leader and wife of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.; Angela Davis is a long-time leader in movements for racial justice. All three are fairly well-known figures in the U.S., particularly among progressives and activists.

Many of the vegans of colour we read in my courses explicitly link their veganism to a spiritual worldview.¹³ Layli Phillips (2010, 7), for example, argues that veganism is “an expression of ecowomanist practice and philosophy,” which is rooted in “a holistic perspective of creation encompassing humans and all living organisms plus the nonliving environment and the spirit world”. Drew (2010, 62) argues that she boycotted the meat and dairy industries because “[s]piritually, I couldn’t condone a system that treated any living being with such disregard.” Drawing upon their South Asian religious roots, Kaur et al. (2017, 123) discuss “vegan spirituality” as a practice that emphasises “wholeness in nourishing the body as well as the mind without deliberate harm to other sentient beings”. However, the spiritual aspect of vegan praxis has been under-examined in the critical animal studies literature, and an integral perspective can help address this gap, as I will discuss below.

5 Examining Religious and Spiritual Worldviews

In *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, Anthony Nocella et al. (2014) map the history and contours of critical animal studies (CAS), focusing on the interplay of theory, pedagogy, and activism. In their introduction, they acknowledge that religious and philosophical traditions “played a major role in establishing the fundamentals of our ethics and morality, including questions of what we as humans owe to nonhuman animals” (Nocella et al. 2014, XXI). They credit the Indic religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism as well as ancient Western philosophers (such as Pythagoras) for providing “the philosophical, moral, and ethical foundations of animal advocacy” (Nocella et al. 2014, XXI).

After crediting such traditions, however, Nocella et al. (2014, XXI) quickly move to reject them, arguing that “religious thought is dominated by anthropocentric views that legitimize domination of other animals”. Nocella et al. rightly challenge the anthropocentrism of religions, noting, for instance, that even the vegetarian-leaning Indic religions lean so for the sake of human spiritual progress. Yet, they “throw out the baby with the bathwater” by moving

13 Of course, not all vegans of colour identify as spiritual. In fact, Wrenn’s (2019) study indicated that a majority of vegans identify as atheist or agnostic; however, a smaller percentage of participants of colour identified this way compared to Whites. Moreover, her study was comprised of nearly 80% white respondents, making her conclusions somewhat less applicable to people of colour. My own, admittedly informal, survey of the literature reveals that vegans of colour are more likely to discuss the spiritual roots of their veganism than White vegans; however, this merits further inquiry.

to dismiss the importance of spiritual and religious worldviews in shaping our relationships with animals. In fact, there is no further mention of religion throughout their volume, and this is true of much of the critical animal literature.

In contrast, the integral feminist vegan pedagogy I espouse gives religious and spiritual worldviews their proper place within animal studies: one in which they are seen as offering important wisdom that can guide our ethics while also having their own limitations and hierarchical biases. Feminist scholars of religion and spirituality have demonstrated that while religions have upheld women's oppression, they have also provided women important resources for liberation¹⁴; I contend that a similar argument can be made for the relationship between spirituality and animal ethics. In her study of animal ethics across the world's major religious traditions, Lisa Kemmerer (2012, 10) argues that all of them "offer a wealth of moral teachings and spiritual ideals that *surpass animal welfare to align with animal rights and animal liberation*" [italics in original]. Across traditions, religious adherents can choose to focus on teachings that emphasise compassion and the sanctity of all beings, or they can emphasise teachings about human superiority to justify their use of animals (see e.g., Scully 2002; Labendz and Yanklowitz 2019; Ali 2015; The Vegan Muslim Initiative 2021).

As noted earlier, I teach in a program that emphasises the role of religion and spirituality in shaping our lives and politics. When students delve into their beliefs about human-animal relations, most reveal that their ideas have been formed largely by religious concepts that place humans at the apex of creation. While my students are more primed to consider religion as a factor in their attitudes than students in secular institutions, any culture that has a strong religious basis, as does the U.S., will likely generate similar responses. Vegan theologian Elizabeth Farians (2011, 103) argues:

Since over 75 percent of Americans profess Christianity, ethics classes, or even humane education classes . . . will not solve the problem of violence and cruelty to nonhuman animals. If you ask most Americans why

14 Some scholars in this field note a distinction between religious traditions that maintain sexism and individual spiritual experiences that offer women a glimpse of a reality "beyond the authority of man" (hooks 1993, 2; see also Lerner 1993). Others challenge androcentric interpretations of texts, using feminist hermeneutics to unearth more liberatory readings (Ruether 2002; Fiorenza 2002; Wadud 1999; Gross 1993). Yet others focus on Indigenous (Allen 1986; Talamantez 1991) or lesser-known traditions (Sered 1994) which are women-led. For a general overview of this literature, see Sharma (2002), McIntosh and Bagley (2016), and Arora (2018).

they think it is morally acceptable to eat meat, they will reply, “God gave humans dominion over animals and creation, and God made animals for humans to eat and use.” Most people do not know that the creation story in Genesis says that God gave all animals—including humans—the very same breath of life, *nephesh chayah*.

Farians asserts that emphasising animal-friendly interpretations of her tradition is necessary to unseat her students’ belief in human domination.

In a similar vein, I have found that introducing students to animal-friendly teachings across religious and spiritual traditions can help challenge implicit beliefs that human exploitation of animals is part of a divine order. Students are often surprised to learn that the root of the word ‘animal’ is *anima*, which means ‘breath’ or ‘spirit.’ The etymology of the word gives clues to the ways that, even in the West, animals were originally understood to be more than objects. Pre-modern peoples held a spiritual worldview in which all of nature was alive and interconnected. Carolyn Merchant (1980) has traced how the Western shift to a modern, mechanistic worldview destroyed all constraints on exploiting and extracting from Earth’s resources; the same argument can be made about human relationships with animals. To be sure, pre-modern peoples did consume and often exploit animals, but the scale and degree of animal oppression intensified greatly with the rise of capitalistic and mechanistic ideas that animals were nothing more than soulless machines (Nibert 2002).

Any discussion of religious animal ethics must of course include the Indic traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, in which human consumption or abstention from meat become defining concerns. Despite the significant differences among these traditions, they all hold that animals and humans possess the same fundamental life-force and that therefore one must practice non-violence, or *ahimsa*, towards all beings (Nelson 2006; Bryant 2006; Harris 2006; Chapple 2006; Walters and Portmess 2001; Sims 2016) Within all of these religions, vegetarianism is encouraged or mandated, to differing degrees;¹⁵ some contemporary practitioners have argued that given the scale of abuse of dairy cows in modern times, veganism is the correct response rather than vegetarianism (Vithlani 2021; Sims 2016; Narayanan 2018 Compassion Project 2019).

15 A full discussion of the differences within and between these traditions is beyond the scope of this chapter, but, generally speaking, vegetarianism is a religious *ideal* within Hinduism and Buddhism, but is not necessarily the majority practice (Phelps 2004; Donaldson 2016). Within Jainism, however, vegetarianism is strictly mandated (Sims 2016; Donaldson 2016).

Learning about these traditions helps students de-centre the Western view that animals and humans are wholly other. However, it is necessary to not romanticise these religions, either. I also encourage critique of the contradictions and inconsistencies in these traditions—for instance, citing the ways that Hindu elites and fundamentalists weaponise vegetarianism for anti-caste and anti-minority purposes (Sathyamala 2019), or the ways in which cows continue to be exploited for milk despite the rhetoric of “cow protection” (Narayanan 2018). The purpose of introducing these philosophies in the classroom is not to valorise these religions above others, nor to suggest that students adopt (or appropriate) other cultures’ traditions, but rather to highlight that there are many ways to conceive of our ethical responsibility to animals outside the modern secular Western paradigm.

Students in my courses also learn about Indigenous worldviews that perceive all of life, including plants and animals, as imbued with the Divine. Margaret Robinson, an Indigenous vegan scholar, argues: “For the Mi’kmaq it means that humans and animals both experience our lives in the first-person, overcoming fears, having adventures, falling in love, raising families, vanquishing enemies, and having a relationship with *Kisu’lk*, the Creator” (2014, 674); human use of other life forms is permitted, but only if done in non-abusive, respectful, and reciprocal ways. Indigenous scholars Linda Fisher (2011), Rita Laws (2014), Jen Bell Rivera (Rivera and Vavilakolanu 2021) agree with Robinson that veganism is an appropriate adaptation of traditional Indigenous values to contemporary contexts, particularly in urban settings.

Despite the perspectives discussed above, it is rare for Indigenous people to identify as vegan, in part because critical animal studies and the term ‘veganism’ have become associated with settler societies (Robinson 2018; Koleszar-Green and Matsuoka 2018). However, as Koleszar-Green and Matsuoka (2018, 345) note, most Indigenous peoples would agree with vegans that animals should not be harmed or killed unless “necessary for subsistence”. Thus, they argue that Indigenous and critical animal perspectives could be reconciled to the extent that non-Indigenous vegans support Indigenous worldviews, land rights, and better food access in subsistence communities. Indeed, the integral vegan pedagogy forwarded in this chapter suggests that educators engage with Indigenous perspectives on animals, discuss the interconnection between animal rights and Indigenous land rights, and explore Indigenous religions with respect.

In this section, I have argued for the inclusion of religious and spiritual perspectives in vegan education. By exploring the diversity of spiritual and religious teachings on animals and highlighting teachings and traditions that emphasise compassion and reciprocity rather than domination, educators can help challenge the idea that we have “divine permission” (Luke 2007) to ignore

the cruelties of the animal industrial complex. Students who are exposed to multiple viewpoints are better equipped to reflect on their own ethical and spiritual attitudes toward animals. Atheist or agnostic students, too, can benefit from reflecting on what undergirds their values in the absence of religious or spiritual beliefs. Moreover, as students learn about traditions that stress nonviolence toward all beings and the sacred nature of all life, they are better equipped to challenge the modern Cartesian frameworks that have rendered animals objects rather than subjects.

6 Challenging Diet Culture and Fatphobia

When I first began teaching about the relationships among animal ethics, veganism, and feminism, I did not consider the impact that such dialogues might have on students who were struggling with dieting and body image. Even though I had struggled with such issues myself, particularly in my youth, my own motivations for becoming vegan were strictly ethical, and I had firm distinction in my mind between food decisions made from aesthetic, health, or ethical concerns. However, upon realising how fraught *any* discussion about changing one's diet is for some who struggle with disordered eating, I have rethought my approach.

Indeed, it has become increasingly clear to me that an integral feminist vegan pedagogy must address issues of diet culture, body image, and fatphobia. As Megan A. Dean (2014, 128) argues, in Western culture, "eating is problematized as a way to manage the body's appearance, to bring it into conformity with feminine norms, and also as an ongoing opportunity to exercise the will over unruly bodily desires". Given the pervasiveness of disordered eating and body image issues among diverse women, gender non-conforming people (and, increasingly, men), classroom discussions of veganism can trigger concerns around food restriction, body shaming, and racialised gender norms. Therefore, I suggest that vegan educators draw upon the lessons of fat pedagogy (Cameron 2015) to sensitively frame classroom discussions about food choices. We can also engage students in critical readings of mainstream vegan discourses and images that are fatphobic. Further, we are tasked with challenging anti-vegan media narratives that imply veganism is a form of disordered eating; instead, we can help students consider that veganism may be understood as a form of resistance to patriarchy (Wright 2015) and capitalism (Giraud 2013), rendering it a "practice of freedom" (Dean 2014, 127).

In her discussion of fat pedagogy, Erin Cameron (2015) cites "framing" as one of the primary pedagogical strategies that educators use to combat fatphobia.

Such framing involves defining concepts such as sizeism and size acceptance—and explaining their interactions with gender, race, and class—at the outset of a course. The class may develop community agreements wherein students agree to avoid negative body talk or assumptions about vegans' or nonvegans' bodies. In Harper's (2010, 138) dialogue about Black women, veganism, and size politics, she cites an anonymous respondent who wrote: "If the subject comes up that I am a vegan, I notice the first thing that some people do is look me up and down. . . I see the doubt in their eyes and their tone of voices" since she is not thin. Introducing size-acceptance alongside veganism can help affirm the diversity of body sizes among students in the course while preventing students from automatically linking veganism with weight loss.

With this framing in mind, students can be engaged in critically reading mainstream discourse on veganism, which often links veganism to dieting and the quest for thinness. Popular books like *Skinny Bitch* (Friedman and Barnouin 2005) promote the idea that a vegan diet is a surefire pathway to thinness and an idealised Eurocentric concept of femininity.¹⁶ Vegan celebrities who represent these idealised images may contribute to the association, even when their personal motivations for going vegan are primarily ethical rather than aesthetic. And, as explored earlier, the whiteness of the mainstream images of vegans adds to the popular perception of vegans as white and class privileged.

A critical reading of mainstream texts can also include showing and deconstructing vegan advertising. Constance Russell and Kari Semenko (2016, 216) suggest that educators can help challenge the ways that some popular vegan discourse, such as that by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), engages in fat shaming by portraying fat bodies with taglines such as "Save the Whales. Lose the Blubber: Go Vegetarian").¹⁷ Even Physicians for Responsible Medicine (PRM), usually a more even-keeled organisation than PETA, put out ads centring on a fat man's belly and a woman's thigh that said, "Your Abs on Cheese" and "Your Thighs on Cheese," respectively (Maisto 2012). Students can be invited to notice and challenge the ways in which "animal bodies, fat bodies, and female bodies are considered abject" (Russell and Semenko 2016, 217) in everyday cultural discourse.

Given the pervasiveness of fatphobia in some popular vegan movements, it is unsurprising then that fat vegans find it difficult to discuss the ethical issues of meat within the fat acceptance movement (Russell and Semenko 2016) and

16 Wright (2015) points out that the authors of *Skinny Bitch* rely upon diet/looks as a way to pull readers in, but their message is one based in ethics.

17 See Deckha (2008), Baran (2017), and Pendergrast (2018) for additional feminist analysis of PETA's advertising strategies.

that some critics of veganism have suggested that a plant-based diet not only contributes to disordered eating, but is *itself* a form of disordered eating. In 1997, a physician named Steve Bratman developed the concept of orthorexia nervosa, a “fixation on righteous eating” (Stanescu and Stanescu 2019, 137) and linked it implicitly to vegan and vegetarian diets. Several studies seemed to confirm his findings but have been found to be based on spurious logic. As Dean (2014) has noted, the studies that have argued for a correlation between the rejection of animal foods and disordered eating lumped together vegans, vegetarians, and the rather meaningless category of “semi-vegetarians” in their samples. Further, they failed to ask whether their subjects’ motives for reducing or eliminating animal foods were ethical or diet related. Thus, rather than demonstrating that those who become vegan end up with eating disorders, their studies actually revealed that those who are motivated to limit their food intake and lose weight end up reducing their consumption of animal foods—a rather unsurprising conclusion.

While not every course that discusses veganism may have the time to engage in an in-depth analysis of these studies, it can be useful for educators to have this information on hand if students raise concerns about *orthorexia nervosa* in their classrooms. Returning to Dean’s work cited above, she found that that veganism can provide some women a pathway *out* of disordered eating. By finding a connection to larger ethical and political issues outside of themselves, the vegan women in her study “claim[ed] that their practice of veganism helped them to relinquish disordered eating habits, temper the emotional and psychological turmoil that surrounded their eating practices, and mitigate antagonism toward their own bodies” (Dean 2014, 129).

To be sure, an integral feminist vegan pedagogy would *not* suggest that ethical veganism is a remedy for disordered eating, as Dean’s study is exploratory and cannot be overgeneralised. Rather, it would question the narrative of “dietary restriction, denial and privation” (Wright 2015, 91) that pervades mainstream attitudes about veganism. Instead, it would focus students on vegans’ agency and their resistance to the animal industrial complex that leads to much animal *and* human suffering.

Dominant discourse constructs a binary between thin white vegans who promote veganism as a weight-loss aid and concerned health professionals who see veganism as a cover for disordered eating. Both viewpoints foreclose the discussion of veganism as an ethical and political commitment to anti-speciesism. An integral vegan feminist perspective engages this discussion directly in the classroom. As it endeavours to liberate animal flesh from a speciesist system, it simultaneously seeks to liberate human flesh from the dictates of a sexist, racist, and sizeist culture.

7 Conclusion

Introducing vegan perspectives in the anthropocentric landscape of higher education can be rife with challenges. Resistance to veganism comes from both the mainstream media and from within many social justice communities. As educators, we are charged with sensitively addressing student preconceptions about veganism and offering more complex and nuanced understandings of its relationship to identity, ethics, and social justice.

Overall, I have found the strategies described above to work well in countering students' perception that veganism is a movement only of the white, thin, and privileged. My students have also broadened their understanding of the complex relationship among religious and spiritual beliefs and the treatment of nonhuman animals. By and large, their final papers demonstrated that they had developed new understandings of the depth and scope of speciesism. As Kari,¹⁸ a middle-aged white woman, wrote,

I learned from my family and from the greater American culture around me that due to the hierarchy of the animal kingdom, with humans at the top, our dominance over all other animals is normal, okay, and need not be questioned. I realize now that this attitude of 'dominion over' [...] allowed me and my family to accept that controlling, killing, and using non-human animals for our benefit is right and good and should not only be supported but celebrated.

Sonia, a biracial woman, noted that "re-membering" human-animal relationships "entails unpacking the ways I approach and participate in race and racialisation, capitalism and consumerism, gender, class, dis/ability, dependency, age, colonizing narratives, and the environment." These are just a few examples of how students developed new understandings of the relationship between human and animal justice.

On the other hand, I have also experienced some missteps in my classrooms. During a course I taught in 2018, students were upset that a course on animal ethics was so heavily weighted toward veganism; they wanted to see more perspectives on "humane" farming and sustainable animal agriculture. Given this feedback, I have since decided to follow Andrzejewski's (2003) lead. She writes that she begins her classes by stating "that I will not be presenting 'both sides' because I contend, and will demonstrate, that they already

¹⁸ All student names here are pseudonyms.

know ‘the other side’ ... if they decide to stay in the class, students are much less likely to complain that I am being biased” (Andrzejewski 2003, 13). I have also included more articles that address the limitations of so-called humane farming (e.g., Stanescu 2013).

In addition, I did not previously consider the depth of students’ emotional responses to course material. Students informally shared with me years later that this course was the most distressing of their coursework, even as compared to other courses in our program that addressed gender-based violence or institutionalised racism. It is because of this feedback that I have brought mindful and trauma-sensitive strategies more to the forefront of my teaching. While I wish for students to be productively challenged in order to transform their relationships with animals, my intention is that they also find more support for their affective process, both from myself and through mindful dialogue with peers.

In sum, the integral feminist perspective offered in this chapter brings a care-based and expansive approach to critical animal studies pedagogy. It unites the affective, political, and spiritual elements of teaching and learning to address both students’ interior experiences and the external realities of the animal industrial complex. Ultimately, it aims to help students see veganism as a diverse and multi-vocal movement focused on the liberation of all sentient beings.

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Human Children, Nonhuman Animals, and a Plant-Based Vegan Future

Maneesha Deckha

1 Introduction

Conservative estimates indicate that humans eat approximately 65 billion land-based animals annually (FAO 2020a), and that wild-caught fishing and aquaculture entail the death of nearly a trillion (and quite possibly more) fish per year.¹ The enormity of this scale of animal consumption is unprecedented in human society. Yet, most people are unaware of the scale of animal farming, trawling, and slaughter or the brutalities it involves as these activities take place away from public view, typically in windowless concentrated animal feeding operations or in gigantic trawler nets in the middle of the ocean (Bisgould 2011, 162–163). Media coverage discussing the phenomena, even in affluent countries with the highest levels of animal consumption per capita, is sparse with national governments also remaining silent on farmed animal suffering (Arcari 2017, 77–82). In fact, meat, dairy, and animal-based food lobbies enjoy elevated levels of political influence (Kemmerer 2006), and legislation may also exist in certain jurisdictions to illegalise whistleblowing or undercover investigations in these spaces.² All of these forces combine to minimise public awareness of the scale of these industries and the torturous conditions in which animals are raised, slaughtered, and otherwise processed.

However, the harms of animal-based farming and trawling as well as animal-based diets are not localised to farmed animal bodies. Numerous studies have concluded that adopting a plant-based diet is the single most effective choice one can make not only to reduce farmed animal suffering, but also

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- 1 Between 0.97 and 2.7 trillion wild fish are slaughtered annually through commercial fishing, and between 37 and 120 billion fish are slaughtered annually through aquaculture (Mood 2010, 71; Mood and Brooke 2012, 1). The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated global fishing slaughter to be 179 million tonnes in 2018 (FAO 2020b, 2).
 - 2 See Kingery 2012. For recent developments on this front in Canada, a country which previously did not have any “ag-gag” legislation, see Lazare 2020. Outstanding bills include Ontario’s *Bill 156, Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act*. A constitutional challenge is in the works by Animal Justice. See Animal Justice 2020.

curtail wild animal suffering and extinction, environmental damage to soil, water, air, and global food insecurity (Tilman and Clark 2014; IPCC 2020; Bailey 2007; Safran Foer 2010; Safran Foer 2019, 76–101, 165–66, 187). Evidence further demonstrates that animal agriculture is the single most salient contributor to deforestation and a principal, if not leading, driver of climate change (Safran Foer 2019; Kemmerer 2019).³ Climate change has been classified “as the biggest global health threat of the 21st century” (Korkala, Hugg and Jaakkola 2014, 1), producing globally stratifying effects, where poor people and nonhumans bear the brunt of resource-rich Global North lifestyles, the effects of which are now becoming irreversible. In terms of public health harms, there is burgeoning literature highlighting the causal relationship between animal agriculture and the increasing incidence of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19 (Greger 2007; Jones et al. 2013; WHO 2004; UNEP and ILRI 2020). The individual health detriments of eating animal flesh are also well established, as are the adverse health effects that result from consuming cow’s milk and milk products for most of the world’s population (Grant 2017; Kim, Caulfield and Rebholz 2018; Wrenn 2017).⁴ Across these multiple categories of harm perpetuated by animal-based diets, scholars have noted how such diets exacerbate not only species disparities, but also those that fall along gender, race, class, and culture lines simultaneously. As part of this critique, scholars have attributed the ongoing rise and scale of animal-based diets to the colonial imposition and capitalist expansion of Western foodways the world over (Deckha 2020). In sum, animal-based diets are a root cause of an array of sobering global phenomena that reinforce multiple inequities and injustices.

This chapter accepts the evidence against animal-based diets and proceeds from the premise that a global shift toward plant-based diets is required to remedy these harms. It adds to the scholarly voices calling for such a transformation by advancing the argument that a critical component to bring about this shift is to reach human children in the Global North, who grow up in societies and cultures where diets are centred on animal products, and eating meat and drinking milk are the norm (hereafter “children”) (Chiles and Fitzgerald 2018), with alternative messaging about animals that educates them about the multiple harms of animal-based diets and the need for a plant-based society.⁵

3 There is debate about how to account for the GHG emissions of animal agriculture, and thus some estimate that animal agriculture is responsible for 14% of GHG emissions while others hold it responsible for 51% of the world’s GHG; the latter figure elevates it to the leading catalyst behind climate change (Safran Foer 2019, 95–96, 227–232).

4 For an argument that the best diets for humans nutritionally and ethically is raw veganism, see Alvaro 2020.

5 For examples of scholars who advocate veganism as the solution to animal death and suffering as well as climate change and food insecurity, see Kemmerer 2019.

Such messaging would qualify as a version of what is presently classified as “humane education” in animal advocacy and education circles, although I call for the integration of such messaging as part of a critically-oriented intersectional education on the harms of objectifying animals in general. This chapter, thus, draws centrally from critical animal studies and critical education scholar Helena Pedersen’s concept of “critical animal pedagogies” and its essential criterion of locating anti-speciesist and anti-anthropocentric critiques in a larger intersectional critique of power. I say more below about the type of education interventions that could be adopted by a teacher or school or other child-centred programme in this vein (Dinker and Pedersen 2016; Pedersen 2019, 1–2).⁶ Given the desire to reach individuals before dominant ideas about animals and consuming animals are entrenched, I focus on younger, elementary school aged children.

Part one of this chapter sets out why education is important for catalysing this shift toward plant-based or vegan diets (hereinafter “plant-based”) rather than relying on other pathways for change, such as legal reform. Part two establishes why such education must concentrate on children rather than adults. Part three situates the plant-based diet messaging to children as part of a broader “critical humane”, i.e., a critical animal pedagogies, education agenda. Drawing from Pedersen and other scholars, the discussion here identifies why a critical version of humane education for children about animals holds more promise to elicit transformational change toward widespread plant-based eating than traditional iterations of humane education.

The argument below does not make the claim that all human beings on the planet need to immediately adopt a plant-based diet or that plant-based agriculture avoids animal death and is otherwise benign. There are those living in conditions of poverty or geographic areas that may make a diet completely free of any animal products unrealistic in the present (Walker, Keane and Burke 2010).⁷ Furthermore, how to best generate a system of plant-based agriculture that minimises harm to animals, farmworkers and other humans, and plants

6 I focus on organised formal schools in this article in discussing curriculum reform not to privilege formal education as more desirable to alternative schooling, but as a shorthand for education for children in general. For more on the value of alternative education to children, see Lees and Noddings 2016.

7 Of course, structural change needs to occur to make fully plant-based diets easily accessible to all in terms of supply rather than continue to subsidise and normalise animal-based foodways. In conversations about accessibility of plants, it is important not to presume that vegan diets are more costly than non-vegan diets (even in the face of massive food subsidies to animal-foods corporations in North America and Europe) and to recall that most of the world cannot afford to eat animals and subsist largely on plant-based diets (Chiles and Fitzgerald 2018, 4; Lundström 2019, 127).

should also be a top priority. Yet, the fact that veganism is not presently universally attainable, and plant-based agriculture is also in need of serious reform, does not erase the ample evidence attesting to the disproportionate magnitude of animal, human, and planetary violence wrought by animal agriculture and aquaculture. From almost every ethical angle from which food systems can be assessed, a transition away from animal agriculture is required (Chiu and Lin 2009; WFPB 2019; Kemmerer 2019). This chapter argues that advocacy which prioritises humane education is imperative to help actualise this transition.

2 Why Education?

Many legal scholars have commented on the glacial pace by which social change is effected through law and the unlikelihood that it will become the catalyst for social transformation on a particular issue.⁸ Although law shapes culture and sometimes inaugurates transformative social change through instituting new legal prohibitions or lifting old ones,⁹ the legal system is fundamentally conservative, with judges following not only legal precedent and existing legislation but also prevailing cultural norms and social opinion on which such precedent or legislation is based. In cases where courts prohibit or authorise something new they know is controversial, judges have been known to reference changed social opinion to help justify departure from legal precedent.¹⁰ Moreover, legislative change occurs when political will, typically tracking public opinion, emerges. To date, although other social movements directed at combating systemic injustices and long-standing cultural norms have enjoyed success in these venues, the courts and legislatures have heretofore proven ineffective pathways for meaningful change for the overwhelming majority of animals. The common law originated as and remains a deeply anthropocentric legal order.¹¹

This state of affairs shows little sign of changing despite increased adult public awareness in recent years regarding animal agriculture's multiple

8 See, e.g., Smart 1989; Meth 1981; Ocheje 2018.

9 See the discussion of the judicial decisions against the British Slave Trade in Almiron 2019.

10 See, e.g., in the Canadian context, *Canada (Attorney General) v Bedford*, 2013 SCC 72, [2013] 3 SCR 1101 (on authorising more liberal parameters for sex work); *Carter v Canada (Attorney General)*, 2015 SCC 5, [2015] 1 SCR 331 (on authorising assisted death in certain situations).

11 See Fox 2004; Braverman 2018, 140; Deckha 2012a; Grear 2015.

harms to *humans* and some recognition of animal sentience in certain legal jurisdictions.¹² Rising coverage of animal agriculture's contributions to climate change and other adverse environmental phenomena or heightened potential to create deadly zoonotic pandemics have not elicited government or other mainstream policy attention to revamping present animal-based food systems. Instead, governmental responses to climate change have centred on greening buildings and transit with a conspicuous silence about the need to reduce animal agriculture.¹³ Most governments promote such industries through subsidies as well as agricultural ministries that routinely work with agricultural stakeholders to oppose any efforts even within their own government through the policy work of other ministries and departments that would threaten the meat, dairy, and egg industries.¹⁴ In the case of promoting public understanding of the origins of COVID-19, it is primarily alternative media sources rather than national governments that have scrutinised the role of animal agriculture in increasing the planet's risks to zoonotic pandemics—despite the fact that the United Nations prominently linked animal agriculture to zoonotic diseases in late 2020 (UNEP and ILRI 2020). The mounting evidence that meatpacking plants and slaughterhouses were hotspots for the transmission of COVID-19 between human workers did not cause the closure of these facilities. Instead, we saw industry bailouts and animal agriculture designated as “critical infrastructure” in the name of “food security”, while slaughterhouses that did close down temporarily due to rising rates of infection were ordered to stay open despite the ongoing health and mortality risks to a heavily racialised and precarious immigrant workforce.¹⁵ When food practices are impugned in most

12 See Arcari 2020, 31–41; Wilks and Phillips 2017. On recognition of animal interests in the legal system, see Fernandez 2019.

13 For a discussion on how animal agriculture is portrayed in climate change literature in Australia, see Arcari 2017. Canada's Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change has limited content on the animal agriculture industry and focuses on implementing new technology to “reduce emissions from livestock and crop production” rather than reducing meat and animal product consumption (ECCC 2016, 22–23).

14 For example, up until its most recent 2019 iteration that was based on independent research, meat and dairy industry lobbyists heavily influenced Canada's Food Guide (Crowe 2019). An Access to Information request by the *Globe and Mail* revealed that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada government officials lobbied Health Canada to advocate on behalf of the meat and dairy industry while it was developing the new food guide (Hui 2017).

15 The Canadian Federal Government announced a \$77.5 million “Emergency Processing Fund” for Canadian food processors in May 2020 (PMO 2020). The Cargill Slaughterhouse in Alberta was the site of one of the largest COVID-19 outbreaks in Canada, see Baum, Tait and Grant 2020. Animal Agriculture was deemed a critical infrastructure for the COVID-19 pandemic (Public Safety Canada 2020).

Canadian and American mainstream media and by governments in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is primarily the issue of “wet markets” presented as a foreign phenomenon that attracts their attention.¹⁶

It is challenging to see how the common law or international law, with their indelible anthropocentric and colonial imprints, can respond to present-day climate catastrophes, pandemic crises, and other global emergencies without major conceptual transformation and integration of alternative valuations. Current crises are fundamentally occasioned by colonial human exceptionalism grounded in private property logics that treat most of the world’s inhabitants (nonhuman and not) as naturalised and ongoing “resources” or “labour” to exploit.¹⁷ Indeed, if the threats of irreversible climate change or another global pandemic are not enough to spark policy action or legislative debate about the need to revamp food systems to transition away from animal-based agriculture, it is not clear that anything will. Instead of looking to law as a primary venue to bring about the needed plant-based solutions, a necessary (albeit still long-term) pathway to such transformation is educational intervention. However, for Western education to serve as a catalyst to create the public opinion that can ultimately facilitate a change in legislative will, regulatory oversight, and judicial convictions to hold animal agriculture more responsible, it needs to reject its own humanist and anthropocentric formation and focus on children.

3 Why Children?

It would be erroneous to suggest that adults cannot adopt new ways of thinking or new habits or that behavioural change in adults has not contributed to major social transformations in securing human rights or other social shifts in values and norms. However, there is an abundance of literature that demonstrates that while we can change our behaviour as adults, it is not simple to do so, and that those who set out to change long-standing habits, no matter the specific behaviour, overwhelmingly fail.¹⁸

16 See, e.g., Greenfield 2020. *The Guardian* is the only mainstream news outlet that has offered a series of articles on the problems with intensive farming as revealed by the COVID-19 crisis in its *Animals Farmed* series. See the Guardian 2020.

17 See Wadiwel 2015, 159; Belcourt 2014, 3–4; Arcari 2017, 44–45.

18 See, e.g., Kwasnicka et al. 2016, 277–78, 290; Prochaska, DiClemente and Norcross 1992; French et al. 2014; Bastian 2019.

Changing eating habits is no exception. Social psychologists and sociologists have noted multiple impediments at the cognitive and behavioural levels in motivating dietary change away from animal products.¹⁹ Gendered and heteronormative associations around eating animal flesh, in particular, are deep-seated in mainstream Western cultures, with studies reporting that women are disproportionately represented amongst vegetarians and vegans and are also more willing to consider becoming plant-based.²⁰ The impediments are so significant that studies demonstrate that even when individuals do wish to and are able to transition to plant-based diets, they are likely to revert back to previous diets within a short span of time.²¹ Of particular note in this set of factors is something called the “meat paradox”, or the situation whereby individuals profess to love animals, are aware of the conditions of intensive farming, but continue to purchase the industry’s products. In this situation, cognitive dissonance is managed through blocking-out mechanisms, denial, or justification (Aaltola 2019; Buttlar and Walther 2019; Dowsett et al. 2018; Camilleri, Gill and Jago 2020; Panagiotou and Kadianaki 2019). None of this should be surprising when most of us can recall our own childhoods and experiences thereafter to realise that food is not simply about caloric intake and something we need to eat to keep living, but about nostalgia, family, culture, community, and a sense of belonging (Twine 2017; 2018). Trying to transform adult behaviour through education, even for adults who are open to learning about where food comes from, is typically a low-yield activity for immediate or long-term social change due to “denialism” and cognitive and emotional strategies that adults deploy against the information and the wider social and political carnist context (Spanning and Grušovnik 2019, 1193).

This is why turning to *children’s* education makes sense as a top priority in public awareness campaigns whether conducted through formal educational curricular interventions or more informal pathways. Young children already identify with animals. Indeed, their world is full of animals, and there is some evidence that children do not demonstrate human exceptionalist thinking at the levels that adults do (Wilks et al. 2021). At some point, though, children start adopting the human exceptionalist values of adults and the institutions that surround them. Indeed, schools are part of a larger anthropocentric cultural apparatus where children learn to normalise human instrumentalisation

19 See, e.g., Joy 2011; Sanchez-Sabate, Badilla-Briones and Sabaté 2019; Rothgerber 2020; Malek, Umberger and Goddard 2019.

20 See Dowsett et al. 2018, 281; Rothgerber 2013, 364–65, 371. See also Gorvett 2020.

21 For example, a 2014 study found that 84% of surveyed vegetarians/vegans reverted back to eating meat (Humane Research Council 2014; Humane Research Council 2015).

of other animals and associated and ubiquitous brutalities visited upon animal bodies (Pedersen 2019). As critical animal studies and critical education studies scholar Helena Pedersen notes, Western education is decidedly humanist and is also an important space where children learn to become human by dominating animals (Pedersen 2010). She further notes that “[a]lthough educational institutions are not the only societal actors contributing to organizing and forming human-animal relationships, the education system occupies a particular space as norm-(re)producer and legitimizer of certain knowledge forms, social orders, and practices, where animals figure in asymmetrical power arrangements” (ibid., 2). Despite this searing appraisal of how education is a heightened enculturator into the performance of aspirational humanity, Pedersen and other critical animal scholars leave hope and provide ideas as to how children’s education can promote critical thinking about the normalisation of human domination over animals (Pedersen 2019).

If taught early enough, such education can be introduced *before* children’s habits and views about eating are entrenched or are easier to shift. Children can receive alternative messaging to the species scripts they typically receive from their parents, books, toys, television, advertising, schools, and other educators about who animals are and how humans should relate to them.²² Presently, as mentioned above, they are enculturated into dominant humanist norms that suggest simultaneously that it is good to love and care for nonhuman animals, but that most are disposable or dispensable resources, such that it is legitimate to eat, kill, cage, confine, or even abandon animals as a routine practice of daily living or when circumstances warrant it (Cole and Stewart 2014). Alternative messaging would relay information not only about animals’ needs and relationships, the harms experienced in captivity, and human interdependence with animals, but also why animals matter as beings in their own right, and why “compassion” for animals includes not simply being “kind” to them, but not eating, wearing, or using them either (except in exceptional situations involving imminent harm and death).²³ Children have the ability to absorb age-appropriate information, reflect on such information, and make

22 For a review of literature about the role of animals in education and the lives of children, see Bone 2013.

23 For example, Kathryn Gillespie describes how children are taught from a young age that the purpose of cows is to produce milk for humans, which normalises the practice, in her book *The Cow with Ear Tag #1389* (2018, 148–49). For a discussion on how the way humans are taught to treat animals is integral to the liberal human identity, see Boggs 2013. For a discussion of an alternative method of education that challenges anthropocentrism, see Lupinacci and Happel-Parkins 2016.

moral choices (Hussar and Harris 2009; Ruckert and Arnold 2018). While we cannot expect transformational change to occur, such early education can sow seeds for reflection, deliberation, critical thinking, and possible future action; it is thus worth doing (Linné and Pedersen 2014; Wright-Maley 2011).

This education can be delivered through existing pathways such as schools, books, apps, television and other visual media, as well as through conversations with parents. There are many existing models of humane education programmes offered by not-for-profit organisations that can be expanded to reach a wider number of households and school classrooms.²⁴ The author is presently unaware of any longitudinal study that has demonstrated the benefits of humane education programmes by following children who have been exposed to structured interventions into their adult years to gauge attitudinal and practice-based increase in compassion for animals (and possibly other vulnerable groups). However, more truncated data sets do show such results over a shorter timespan.²⁵ Additionally, general educational literature already shows that what children learn in elementary years in schools can shape the outlooks they have as adults, especially when those school-based messages are sustained in later years and reaffirmed at home.²⁶ We already know that the not-so-silent curriculum in Western schools already encodes human supremacy as natural and legitimate, likely sedimenting an outlook that children carry into their futures (Pedersen 2009, VIII; Rowe 2011).

Further confirmation about the difference that such early education can make in how children think about farmed animals comes, in particular, from observing industry investment in using educational channels to promote their products and a favourable view of animal agriculture to children. Consider, for example, the curriculum designed by Dairy Australia, which includes free nutrition lesson plans available through Dairy Farmers of Canada, free classroom resources about the beef industry through Alberta Beef, and other “educational” programming offered free to schools²⁷ or which are child-centred (Cole and Stewart 2014; Linné and Pedersen 2016). That an industry which spends heavily on marketing research and public relations management

24 Examples of available humane education curriculum and resources include BC SPCA 2017; HEART 2020; HSI 2019; Institute for Humane Education 2016; PETA Kids 2016.

25 See, e.g., Aguirre and Orihuela 2014; Bryant and Dillard 2020; Dilmac, Kulaksizoglu and Eksi 2007; Nicoll, Trifone and Samuels 2008; Samuels, Meers and Normando 2016.

26 For a discussion of research on how a child’s education, home life, and other interactions impact their development, see Melson 2001.

27 See Dairy Australia 2020; Dairy Farmers of Canada 2019; Alberta Beef 2020; Dinker and Pedersen 2016; Linné and Pedersen 2016.

considers it worth establishing curriculum-based materials for children is telling of the power ascribed to early childhood messaging in general. If the industry is targeting children, then advocacy against industry discourse must also reach children.

None of this suggests that such advocacy, especially changing school curricula and educator attitudes, will be simple or straightforward or even that educational objectives travel a linear path between instructor, materials, and learner (Pedersen 2012). Education, as Pedersen explains, is “not outside ideology”, and it is optimistic to see it is a corrective for anthropocentrism’s hold on society (Pedersen 2010, 245). Indeed, given the controlling or at least strongly influential role of parents in the lives of children, advocacy efforts will still need to be directed at adults even if the uptake is limited for reasons discussed in the previous section. It is reasonable to expect that the material impact of “humane” education that takes an animal rights perspective, particularly about the ethics of meat, eggs, and dairy, may be overwhelmed in these childhood years by parental, other social, and institutional, counter-narratives. However, children grow up and start thinking more independently of parental influences (Sorensen, Cook and Dodge 2017, 699). They will also be able to make their own meals and exercise other choices as they mature. Given existing literature addressing how messages received in childhood can influence our adult behaviour,²⁸ it seems reasonable to conclude that animal-rights oriented humane education directed at children today will yield tangible anti-anthropocentric outcomes in the future.

What of the further objection that such targeting of children is ethically unacceptable given their vulnerable status and marginalised social position in an anthropocentric order that privileges a paradigmatic type of human (one that is not a child)? This is an important concern that should not be dismissed. However, at the same time we know that children are already targeted by formal education, which can be problematic not merely for teaching children to subordinate animals and thus reinforcing the larger anthropocentric culture, but for suppressing children’s agency and exalting adult authority vis-à-vis children in general. Animal rights-oriented humane education must be mindful of this power imbalance between human adults and children and integrate a child-as-learner-centred ethos (Rowe 2011). This is why the scope of such education must be more responsive to the concept of alterity in general.

28 See, e.g., Damerell, Howe and Milner-Gulland 2013.

4 Why *Critical Humane Education*?

In this section, I set out the specific type of educational intervention into children's lives that has the potential to encourage an increase in plant-based consumption in the future and how the content of this more critically oriented approach differs from conventional understandings of "humane education". I also explain why such differentiation is necessary. Put simply, humane education as a concept has liberal and colonial roots (Feuerstein 2019; Boggs 2013, 24–25, 135–36.), that impede its anti-anthropocentric potential, as I explain below. In order to avoid the residual anthropocentric effects of these roots that marginalise animals and children, as well as other groups who cannot approximate liberal and imperial ideas of what it means to be human, this section endorses Helena Pedersen's call for "critical animal pedagogies", understood as a more critically situated iteration of humane education, as a conceptual home for plant-based messaging.

4.1 *The Liberal and Imperial Pillars of "Humane Education"*

As Anna Feuerstein discusses in *The Political Lives of Victorian Animals: Liberal Creatures in Literature and Culture*, humane education is a product of liberalism and colonialism (2019). Feuerstein documents how humane education programmes were developed by the earliest British animal protection organisations at a time when anti-cruelty statutes started to emerge in England in the nineteenth century concomitant with the rise of broader liberal political cultures. In this Victoria era, Feuerstein shows how animal protection organisations strategically pitched their education messaging to the public to conform to anthropocentric expectations of the larger liberal order (ibid., 63). Adults and children alike were instructed to be kind to animals in order to conform to expectations of (and perform their identities as) aspiring bourgeois liberal subjects (ibid., 64, 75). Such campaigns and the formal state programming that also took place married with pre-existing Lockean liberal mindsets. These mindsets demanded conformity to intersecting hierarchies all resting on an anthropocentric foundation that prized reason and cognition and decried bodily associations that were associated with animals. Kindness to animals demonstrated civilised regulation of the self (ibid., 67, 70, 75).

Such messaging occurred against a general backdrop where education was a vehicle to encourage human Others regarded as closer to bodily associations and thus animals to become more "human" through appropriate self-regulation and the expression of idealised liberal traits (ibid., 136). Children's education, in particular, championed this message as a way of inculcating liberal ideals

from the impressionable early years. Greatly influenced by the education writings of principal liberal thinker and architect John Locke in his 1693 *Some Matters Concerning Education*, a genre of children's literature and its anchoring in animal characters and fables arose in short fashion to deliver humane messaging about kindness to animals (ibid., 135–37). The instruction to (white) children to be kind to animals was part and parcel of the larger message that taught children to respect private property and class and gender hierarchies, while also teaching them to control (read suppress) their emotions, appetites, and impulses (ibid., 136–140). Children, like adults, were taught to be kind to animals not out of a desire to respect animals as beings who wished to be liberated from human domination, but to yield maximum benefit from animal capital (ibid., 139). In effect, what we could call welfarist ideology today was promoted by this early Lockean iteration of humane education.

In the subsequent Victoria era, as Feuerstein notes, humane messaging had to fit into this liberal narrative that encouraged empathy for animals only insofar as such sentiments were seen to benefit social cohesion in the laissez-faire pursuit of private property, a category in which animals were firmly placed (ibid., 139–40). In the later Victorian period, humane messaging—targeted at domestic populations, namely: 1) children, to learn anthropocentric, patriarchal, and bourgeois liberal social mores; and 2) so-called lower orders of societies to respect a deeply class-based social order—also married with rising social and political narratives regarding the need for British imperialism and empire-building abroad (ibid., 144–46). Liberalism was the justificatory backdrop for British imperialism with educational efforts in colonies directed at inculcating “European civilized rationality” in colonial subjects.²⁹ Governmental educational messaging about animals that the British promoted in the colonies fit into these efforts. The colonial educational goal of teaching kindness toward animals was aligned now with the modernist project of exploiting all animalised labour (animals, human Others, the Earth) (Feuerstein 2019, 144–46).

We can understand the adaptation of humane education to fit within colonial and imperial narratives as articulated by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and other animal advocacy organisations as a deliberate political strategy of its time, much like present-day animal welfare messages that do not ask people to confront underlying anthropocentric and imperial premises. However, the reality remains that humane education, like all liberal education, is rooted in anthropocentric and imperial history.

29 Ibid., 144. See also Samera's case study of Egypt in this regard (Esmeir 2012).

4.2 *Creating (Critical) Humane Education: Implementing Critical Animal Pedagogies*

4.2.1 A Basic Stance: Anti-Exploitation

It is possible, of course, to teach children about kindness and compassion to animals outside of these liberal and imperial parameters. If we canvass contemporary definitions and understandings of humane education in advocacy organisations today, even where organisations adopt welfarist orientations toward animals, we can observe that the definitions espouse these values without promoting patriarchal and imperial values. Contemporary humane education for children does not promote self-regulation in the service of private property or otherwise suggest that children are not fully human or civilised because they are children. Today's messaging is more directly related to protecting animals: contemporary welfarist animal organisations define "humane education" as education that is directed at instilling a kindness ethic and compassion toward animals (World Animal Net 2017). Some organisations attending to interspecies education go further to emphasise the creation of compassionate communities and an anti-violent society in general, taking specific care to include nonhuman animals in their definitions.³⁰

Scholarly literature defines humane education as "an attempt to develop altruism and a sense of compassion in a world where all other pressures are in opposition to it." (Milburn 1989, 179; quoted in Thompson and Gullone 2003, 77). Scholars note that the meaning of humane education has evolved over time, and that it "not only includes human-animal interactions but also broader humanistic, environmental, and social justice frameworks and guardianship of the earth, or sustainability" (Jalongo 2014, 5). Such scholarship does not insist on a non-welfarist position. It seems possible, then, to locate messaging about the harms of animal-based diets and the need for a plant-based society within an overall welfarist approach by emphasising, say, the need to reduce animal consumption to achieve "sustainable" diets and treating farmed animals "well" to better express "guardianship" of the earth. And given the more tempered nature of this message over one that articulates an anti-exploitation message against farming animals or consuming their by-products at all, this

30 For example, the Institute for Humane Education has the following mission statement: "THE educates people to create a world in which all humans, animals, and nature can thrive." Its model recognises the interconnected issues of "human rights, environmental preservation, and animal protection" (Institute for Humane Education 2021).

type of message has more of a chance of being integrated into mainstream educational curricula (O'Connor 2018).³¹

At the same time that advocacy can focus on making inroads into formal educational spaces for children with this more palatable message, advocates also need to find ways to advance a more critical message, i.e., one that challenges the logic of human exceptionalism and supremacy that is so central to rationales for eating animals at the levels humans do in the Global North and is also vital to the normalisation of other animal use that entails (extreme) suffering. Some present-day humane education programming has surmounted welfarist ideology to mark a more “radical” animal rights-oriented departure point than its historical antecedents in re-shaping human-animal relationships. For example, in the humane education programmes delivered by the US-based Farm Sanctuary, children are taught about the interests and needs of farmed animals independent of human purposes for them, and the value of bringing animals to a sanctuary environment where they can be cared for and lead happier lives in the company of other animal friends and family (Farm Sanctuary 2021). Similarly, all the activities on Petakids.com impart an animal rights message to children. Consider, for example, the colouring activity telling children that “orcas belong in the wild” (PETA Kids, 2017). The PETA.kids website is extensive and is part of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the largest animal protection organisation in the world. The scope for PETA.kids to reach children is promising. However, as some animal studies scholars have noted, PETA’s overall messaging about gender and race and how the stratifications they give rise to relate to the exploitation of animals could be substantially improved (Deckha 2008; Gaarder 2011; Kim 2015). As I explain in the next section, it is important to integrate into animal advocacy directed at children a more intersectional understanding of animal exploitation.

With this promotion of a radical re-evaluation of who animals are and why they deserve to lead lives free from suffering where they may actually experience kinship and joy, such alterity-affirming education aligns with and may be seen as an example of what Pedersen denotes as “critical animal pedagogies” (Pedersen 2019). Pedersen is clear that specific educational interventions that

31 It is important to consider that such integration should be more seamless than obvious. Meena Alagappan, the Director of HEART (Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers), has stated “that to expand the reach of humane education I think it is really important that it be blended into the standard subjects, aligned to mandated educational standards (so it is seen as an enhancement and not a burden or add-on for already overwhelmed teachers), and infused into mainstream educational pedagogies (like, for example, social and emotional learning which is widely embraced in the US).” (Maneesha Deckha, personal communication to Author, September 9, 2020).

wish to subvert anthropocentrism or claim to promote “critical” thinking and curriculum in revisiting human-animal relations must “engage, support, and protect and stand with the animal herself” (ibid., citing Pedersen and Stanescu 2014). By this, Pedersen refers to interventions animated by the commitment to undo human normalisation of animals as subordinates and activities that teach us how to “cease thinking about, acting on, and relating to animals as if their ontological status is *for us*” (Pedersen 2019, 8). She distinguishes “critical animal pedagogy” from posthumanist interventions that indicate a desire to challenge foundational anthropocentric norms in educational contexts but are curiously permissive of animal use and/or caution against educators “moralising” to their learners about animal agriculture and other animal-use industries (ibid., 2–6). As Pedersen exposes through critical discursive methods, such posthumanist arguments retain the animal in a subordinated position, where “the ontological status of animals as *for us* remains intact” (ibid., 7). She aptly characterises such approaches as “*more human*”, thus reinforcing the foundational order of education, rather than “*more-than-human*” as their authors claim (ibid.). Pedersen and others also distinguish critical animal pedagogies from new materialist “*more-than-human*” glorification of children encountering animals in outdoor settings or playing with animals and their representations, identifying uneven power distributions and an insufficient divestment of anthropocentric valuations in such settings as well (Dinker and Pedersen 2016).

Instead of including educational activities that bring animals into the classroom or involve visits to animal farms and zoos or forests to “relate” with animals, or authorising pedagogies that fail to take a position against animal testing and other instrumentalisation in the name of “pluralism” and not “moralising”, Pedersen insists that to qualify as anti-anthropocentric, pedagogical activities must “disentangle animals from the demands we make on them” (ibid., 9). One approach she offers is to interrogate the “human behavior, institutions, and thought regimes that have made our appropriation of animals possible” (ibid., 8). This could include pedagogical strategies that educate students about the pitfalls of humanism in age-appropriate ways (Pedersen 2019). Teaching here could also combine an anti-exploitation message with a contestation of human exceptionalist mindsets through activities inviting reflection on how animals experience confinement and killing, critical discourse analysis of industry materials, watching critical documentaries about animal confinement, and discussing differences in responses to different animals (Dinker and Pedersen 2016).

Such classroom activities would give child learners insight into not only why compassion requires a certain anti-exploitation response, but also why it is

that animals are treated the way they are. Children receive an opportunity to learn about the systemic and structural thinking that leads to animal exploitation by learning how animal industries use certain messaging to normalise their practices and obtain consumer approval, including children's, for their products and overall existence (ibid.). As Pedersen and one co-author writes, critical animal pedagogies should teach children that "humans are not the only beings with emotional experiences and emotional lives, discover that emotion toward animals can be deepened and expanded and reflect on how students can act more honestly and congruently with their own emotions and those of animals" (ibid.). The hope is to move animal-involved education "from learning about animals, to learning *with, from, and for* them" (ibid.).³²

4.2.2 Contextualising the Basic Message to Offer a Broader Critique

We can regard the above examples of critical animal pedagogies as rights-oriented "humane" programming from farmed animal sanctuaries as essential ingredients for "critical humane education". Both provide a basic animal alterity-affirming message through their anti-exploitation narratives emphasising animals' individual and relational needs and preferences that implicitly challenge the larger anthropocentric human exceptionalist culture. Such education, whether occurring implicitly in present-day rights-oriented "humane" education offered by animal rights organisations or farmed animal sanctuaries or arising explicitly through deliberate "critical animal pedagogies" to scrutinise and counter the pro-exploitation messages that children hear about animals in schools, are thus a marked improvement from conventional welfarist humane education.

Yet, a critical perspective about how animals are exploited and dominated is just the starting point for critical animal pedagogies. As Pedersen and Dinkers have argued, animal rights or other anti-exploitation messaging must also address how views about animals relate to a broader array of social problems and injustices (Dinker and Pedersen 2016). They call this "species-inclusive intersectionality education" (ibid.). It is this further content that can amplify the critical education that children receive about animals so that the key message about, say, compassion for animals in an anti-exploitation frame pitched to a junior elementary classroom, is situated in a larger context that

³² Combining such classroom activities with the veganisation of schools and other educational centres is a critical step toward unsettling the normal messages that children absorb regarding the naturalness, normalness, and necessity of eating animals and consuming other byproducts (Rowe 2011). For specific strategies to promote veganisation see Dinker and Pedersen 2016.

starts to teach children about broadly entwined systemic injustices and modes of Othering that pivot on anthropocentrism. This type of education shows the broad-based harms of anthropocentrism and the synergies tying various injustices together (Rowe 2011). It also imparts a more complete picture about “animal” issues. Such a picture may have a better chance of generating long-term impact for behavioural change in children than not only welfarist humane education, but also animal rights messaging that may not integrate this broader critique. Of course, robust empirical data is needed to demonstrate if such a hypothesis about the long-term is borne out. However, it seems prudent to at least consider what such contextualisation would be and why it might make a difference.

What would such contextualisation look like? A first point of contextualisation would be for humane education programmes to address the prominent marginalising tropes of “animal” and “animality”. Doing so can help inform children as to how such terms create a logic around animalisation that serves as a foundation for the Othering of animals as well as nonhuman others perceived as “different” (Jackson 2020; Lupinacci and Happel Parkins 2016), or too close to animals such as children themselves (Harju and Rouse 2017). The tropes of animal and animality animate social forces such as adultism, sexism, racism, and ableism, mistakenly believed to operate separately from each other with only occasional interaction or intersection (Bennett 2020; Deckha 2013). Yet, as many scholars attest, in modernist Western epistemologies, the animal is indelibly a part of the conceptual logic that shores up liberal humanism to explain which bodies are not seen as civilised or grievable or deemed not to matter (Burton and Mawani 2020; Kim 2017; Glick 2013; Lopez and Gillespie 2015). Students can learn this circumscribed nature of a purported universal human or humanity (Dinker and Pedersen 2016).

Pedersen and Dinker have suggested the following for this type of intersectional intervention: introducing students to cultural and religious variation in how humans regard animals, studying comparative histories of social movements, teaching how the use of animal names and terms have resulted in violence against humans, and conducting critical media literacy exercises (*ibid.*). For very young children, such ideas can be integrated at basic levels when prompting children to draw circles of care and discussing why respect and kindness are important and why we often exclude categories of humans and animals in relation to these concepts.³³ It is possible to teach

33 HEART has developed a social justice curriculum for very young children that incorporates such discussions, but it does not take a critical position about animal use industries. See HEART 2019.

children the perniciousness of animalisation logic so that they not only learn compassion for animals, but also start to understand how foundational the disparaging of animals and animalisation is to other social hierarchies and the range of multispecies harms it occasions.

A further benefit of this multi-layered contextualisation is that children learn how to counter colonial mindsets as part of their critical thinking about animals. The prevailing view, somewhat of a perverse colonial holdover, is that caring about animals or placing animals as subjects deserving of justice, is a Western, Eurocentric, or white practice.³⁴ It is important to dispel this notion as inaccurate, show its origins in civilisation myths that powered imperialism, and help children see the traditions of caring for animals in many cultures and even in Western traditions before the ascent of modernist epistemologies and a sharp sense of human exceptionalism (Deckha 2013, 520–22).

A related benefit of this multilayered analysis is to counter the zero-sum thinking that can infect equity-seeking social movements (Kim 2015; Ko 2019; Deckha 2020). It is often assumed that bringing forth animal issues to discuss alongside human rights issues is problematic because attention to animals undermines or displaces attention to marginalised humans, perhaps especially vis-à-vis racialised subjects who have been so thoroughly animalised by European and white ideologies (Deckha 2017; Gillespie 2018; Klein 2019). Achieving justice is assumed in this constricted conceptual logic to be a zero-sum game. Seeing animalisation as a trans-species vector of abjection is to understand synergy in structure and architecture of inequalities and thus the need for a shared path toward meaningful redress (Bennett 2020; Deckha 2012b, 538–39). Teaching children this multi-layered analysis about multiple differences can help generate thoughtful analysis about the need to see the exploitation of animals as a linked social justice issue rather than simply accept arguments about culture and tradition in relation to animals, arguments that invariably come up when issues of human-animal relations, and especially the question of eating animals, are at stake.

4.2.3 Emphasising Gendered and Heteronormative Associations with Eating Animals

In addition to introducing critical thinking about entwined alterity and differences stemming from species differentiations between humans and animals, a heightened message about gender alterity and the harms of sexism and heteronormativity, themselves interrelated (Rifkin 2011, 7–8), should be

34 See Bailey 2007; Harris 2009.

included as a third point of contextualisation. Heteronormative gender roles are also, of course, part of entwined alterity since the social forces of race, gender, and otherwise are best understood as mutually constitutive.³⁵ The social psychological literature shows the tight correlation in Western societies between dominant hetero-masculinities and meat-eating as well as patriarchal nation-building discourses and milk drinking (Eisen 2019, 115; Rothgerber 2013, 364–65; Stanescu 2018; Adams 1990). In effect, our gender identities and heteronormative nationalist identities are constituted and performed, in part, through animal domination (Bailey 2007; Rothgerber 2013). If we do not address gendered identities and heteronormativity, we cannot adequately destabilise this domination mentality and preference for animal-based foods (Deckha 2012b, 539–40; Adams 1990). Moreover, but for the sexual violation and reproductive appropriation of female animal bodies and the related heteronormative shaming of those who empathise with animals or express emotions for them, animal agriculture could not exist (Gillespie 2014). Humane education would do well to foreground or integrate discussions about respect for bodies and counter-narratives to male sexual entitlement or the normalisation of violence against other bodies. Understanding how gender norms and the feminisation of animals allow such appropriations and shaming is important to understanding the structural logic that impedes empathy for animals from developing (*ibid.*; Duxbury 2019; Esmeir 2012; Hamilton 2016).

5 Conclusion

Having established that reaching children is important to the goal of transitioning to a plant-based society, the pressing question remains of how to popularise alterity education through critical animal pedagogies so that they are integrated into school curricula. We know we need to reach children with alternative messaging, but the gateway of school curricula is guarded by the adults in charge who will, in all likelihood, oppose such information as a radical ideology. An urgent task for animal advocacy is to consider how to deliver this education outside of schools until such a time when governments, schools, and parents may be willing to integrate such perspectives. What types of popular cultural and social media interventions might work to build a plant-based movement among children?

35 For scholarship discussing this symbiosis in relation to species, see Bailey 2007; Adams 1990; Deckha 2012.

Ultimately, however, even the best social media interventions or the best educational model integrated into the curriculum, and affirmed at home, can only do so much. If children's basic needs are not met at home or by the larger society at school and generally, they will not be able to reach their full developmental potential, which is an urgent matter of equality, but also, as child development scholars have demonstrated, relevant to the related question of empathy cultivation (Machell, Disabato and Kashdan 2016, 845–46). To develop compassion for human or nonhuman others in their early years, human children need a responsive foundation with their attachment figures where they receive empathy (Thompson and Gullone 2008, 124; Hawkins and Williams 2017, 1–2). This type of foundation is unavailable for the majority of children in the Global South whose families endure high rates of poverty and precarity. Similarly, this is also elusive for many Black, Indigenous, and other children from economically and culturally marginalised communities living in the Global North with the legacy and reality of systemic historical and contemporary state and social oppression.³⁶ Without structural reform to create better public investments in children in early years throughout the world, compassionate societies will not materialise, and the impact of alterity education to popularise the uptake of plant-based diets, even if fully integrated into school curricula, will be circumscribed. Animal advocacy efforts toward plant-based societies must advocate for children on multiple levels, addressing their right to know about the multiple harms of animal-based diets and their needs for developmental flourishing in general. A wide-scale commitment to focus advocacy efforts on resourcing, reaching, and teaching children is needed.

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PART 4

Trans-Formations in Ecofeminist Theory



Revisiting Ecofeminist Genealogies: towards Intersectional and Trans-Inclusive Ecofeminism

Kuura Irni

This paper revisits the genealogies of ecofeminism from the perspective of a trans,¹ queer, science studies, and race-critical feminism. I concentrate on vegan, formerly called vegetarian, ecofeminism. Importantly, the exploitation of nonhuman animals has been questioned and plant-based foods known for centuries in various parts of the world (Deckha 2012), but the earliest definition of veganism by that name, to which Anglo-American vegan scholars and activists often return, was constructed by the UK Vegan Society, founded in 1944 (Giraud 2021, 3). The current formulation states that veganism is “a philosophy and a way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose” (The Vegan Society 2022). Veganism, specifically in the ecofeminist context, is an activist approach that strives to critique all nonhuman animal exploitation from an intersectional perspective, meaning that it simultaneously strives to account for intersecting oppressions of people (Adams and Gruen 2022a; for discussion of different aspects of veganism, see Giraud 2021).

Ecofeminism, as it is currently known, emerged mainly in the United States at the turn of the 1980s, although Australian and German work also existed in the 1980s (Gaard 2011, 28; see also Adams and Gruen 2014a; Adams and Gruen 2022b). One of the internationally best-known vegan ecofeminist thinkers is Carol Adams, whose work has been extremely influential not only within ecofeminism, but also critical animal studies and in popular discourses. Her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* had its twenty-fifth anniversary edition published in 2015, with two reprints in 2016. *The New York Times* has even called

1 “Trans” in my text is a shorthand that includes trans women, trans men, transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, agender, and other gendered and non-gendered experiences and identities that differ from cis experiences (of feeling comfortable within the gender assigned at birth). Transgender studies takes an affirmative approach to the varieties of gender and, among other things, problematises the oppression of trans people (see e.g., Bettcher and Garry 2009).

the book “a bible of the vegan community” (Jesella 2008; Adams 2016, xvii). However, Adams’ critique of other animals as “absent referents” (e.g., Adams 2016, xxiv; 2003, 22) whose suffering is bypassed, including her critique of the production of milk and eggs for food, has been more or less left out of the mainstream genealogies of feminist theory. In ecofeminist readings, the standard explanation for why ecofeminist questions have been abandoned in Euro-American mainstream feminisms is the assumed essentialism of ecofeminism (see e.g., Gaard 2011, 2017). Ecofeminist Greta Gaard identifies critiques of ecofeminism as concerning “charges of both essentialism and ethnocentrism,” including “the essentialism of the woman–nature connection, and the bifurcations between spirituality–politics and theory–activism” (Gaard 2011, 36; see also e.g., Agarwal 1992; Sturgeon 1997). Gaard (2011, 2017) and other ecofeminists such as Erika Cudworth (2005) have, however, questioned the charge of essentialism. Gaard suggests that accusing ecofeminism of essentialism because of the problematics in some ecofeminist texts is a rhetorical strategy that has enabled the dismissal both of animals and nature as crucial analytical themes in feminism, and of sexuality and gender in environmental thought (2011, 37, 43; 2017).

This chapter revisits these discussions in order to propose transformations in vegan ecofeminist theory. My concern is that, at present, the understanding of feminism in critical animal studies and vegan feminist theory is narrowed down and reproduced through a very particular genealogy of and approach to feminism (see also Hamilton 2016). My analysis is genealogical² in the sense that I attempt to open up specific theoretical trajectories of vegan feminist thought concerning gender, race, nature, violence, and structures of domination for scrutiny. I discuss theoretical assumptions that underline vegan ecofeminist work specifically from transfeminist and race-critical perspectives, and in relation to ecofeminist arguments about intersectionality.³ Even though several of the examples I discuss are derived from Adams’ texts—because of the importance of her work as vegan feminism and as work that has influenced critical animal studies more than any other feminist thought so far—this chapter is not intended as a critique of any individual ecofeminist. Instead of any particular theorist’s personal opinions or attitudes, the focus of the chapter is on a discussion of the grounding theoretical assumptions within vegan feminist theory. By evaluating and rethinking shared theoretical

2 For an analysis of feminist genealogies, see also e.g., Lykke 2018.

3 Through these genealogies, also queer studies came mostly to be articulated outside of ecofeminism (see however, Dell’Aversano 2010; Gaard 1997).

patterns of thought within vegan ecofeminism, the chapter proposes ways towards trans-inclusive and intersectional vegan ecofeminist theory.

My reading methodology draws on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reparative reading in that I am interested in what knowledge *does*, affectively and politically (Sedgwick 2003, 124). I attempt to conduct a nuanced, "fluid" reading where vegan feminist work is not rejected as a whole because of disagreements that may concern specific aspects of the work of some vegan feminist scholars.⁴ The point in this reading is to acknowledge both disagreements and resonances when developing feminist theory, in other words, to sustain theoretical movement *with* other feminist texts and keep their important contributions alive, rather than moving *against* and *away from* them. This is in contrast to unanimously suspicious⁵ readings, which may stop engagement and create gaps between theoretical traditions. Instead of neglecting the work of the ecofeminist thinkers whom I partly disagree with, I call for further engagement with vegan ecofeminism, in particular with the commitment to criticise animal exploitation. Despite my other disagreements, I argue for the continued usefulness of, for example, Adams' (2016) concept of the absent referent and her critique of "mass terms" for nonhuman animals, as well as the recognition of nonhuman animal subjectivity by ecofeminists such as Josephine Donovan (2018) and Zipporah Weisberg (2009). In this sense, my preferred enactment in this knowledge production is to build relations between ecofeminism and trans and queer sensitive intersectional feminism rather than widening the gap between them.

I start by discussing the notion of nature in ecofeminism in order to propose a conceptualisation that is trans-inclusive and that recognises the violences involved in the entanglements in nature, bodies, and technologies. I then move on to discuss accounts of violence and structures of domination concerning understandings of animality, race, and gender, and then discuss the ways in which intersectionality is understood in ecofeminism and how this pertains to

4 For theorising of "fluid" reading as an attempt to cherish the movement of feminist theory through engagement with others' work and partial inspirations rather than stopping engagement and creating gaps between feminist traditions, see Irni 2017. For related approaches, see, for example, "transversal politics" as theorised by Nira Yuval-Davis, meaning the replacement of perceived unity with "dialogues which give recognition to the specific positionings" of the participants and "unfinished knowledge" based on these positionings (Yuval-Davis 1997, 131), and Nina Lykke's application of "transversal dialogue" (2020) to attending to disagreements within feminist theory.

5 For problematisation of suspicious readings, see Felski (2015) and similar "paranoid" readings, see Sedgwick (2003).

analyses of gender and race. I end with a discussion of future possibilities for intersectional and trans-inclusive ecofeminism.

1 Radical Feminism, Gender, and Nature

The vegan ecofeminism discussed here is inspired by, for example, Mary Daly's thought, and situated within a strand of feminism which has been called "radical" or "cultural" feminism (Adams 2006; see also Hamilton 2016). Daly's work also appears in Gaard's genealogy of ecofeminism; Gaard names her *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) as one of the foundational texts that has helped ground ecofeminism (2011, 28). In her letter to Daly after the publication of *Gyn/Ecology*, Audre Lorde pays critical attention to Daly's way of bypassing "any images of my foremothers in power" and "dealing with noneuropean women, but only as victims and preyers—upon each other" (Lorde 1979). The type of feminism that Daly presented has also become known for its denial of trans women as women. Daly, for example, supported the thoughts of Janice Raymond and her 1979 book *The Transsexual Empire*, which invalidated trans people's self-determination of gender, including presenting the idea that by transforming their bodies trans women violated (cis) women's bodies.⁶ At this point it is important to note that radical feminism is not synonymous with trans-exclusive radical feminism. Trans-exclusive practices were both criticised and resisted by feminists in the 1970s, and trans women also participated in building feminism in the 1970s (Enke 2018; Heaney 2016; Stryker 2008; Williams 2016).

As Talia Bettcher and Ann Garry suggest in their introduction to a thematic issue on *Transgender Studies and Feminism*, the transfeminist critique of Raymond's and other trans hostile feminist work initiated transgender studies (2009, 2). Transfeminist responses included, in particular, Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: a Posttranssexual manifesto," the first version of which was written in 1987 and presented at the conference "Other Voices, Other Worlds: Questioning Gender and Ethnicity" in 1988 at Santa Cruz, California, and published in 1991. This text was refined several times and became one of the pioneering works for transgender studies (Bettcher and Garry 2009, 1–3; Stone 2014; Stone 1991). In their Introduction to the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* issue *Trans/Feminisms*, Susan Stryker and Talia Bettcher note that "Stone's formulation of a 'posttranssexual' politics took shape in the same milieu that

6 Within that trans hostile logic, transforming one's body amounted to a "deception" and appropriation of "women's" bodies (which were equated with cis women's bodies), which then was equated with "rape"; for a critical analysis, see Bettcher and Garry (2009).

generated Anzaldúa's 'new mestiza,' Haraway's 'cyborg,' and de Laetis's coinage of queer theory" (Stryker and Bettcher 2016, 10). As Bettcher and Garry (2009, 3) note, Stone was a doctoral student of Donna Haraway at the time. Stone writes in the paper that it "owes a large debt to the work of Donna Haraway" (Stone 2014, 4), even though her paper was published before the piece by Haraway Stone gives credit to.⁷

I suggest that this collaboration contributed to one of the crucial divisions whereby ecofeminist and vegetarian/vegan concerns became, for several decades, articulated separately from the development of more many-faceted works on gender as well as of the co-constitution of technology and nature. Haraway's work became extremely influential within Euro-American feminism, and even though Haraway herself has not so much written transgender theory, I suggest in the following that her notion of naturecultures enables formulating a trans-inclusive account of ecofeminism. However, Haraway's more recent work on nonhuman animals has been severely criticised by ecofeminists and critical animal studies scholars (e.g., Adams 2006; Donovan 2018; Gaard 2017; Giraud 2019; Pedersen 2011; Weisberg 2009) for not denouncing practices such as dog breeding, animal experimentation in science, hunting, and animal consumption for human food; from this perspective, her work has been regarded by some ecofeminists as useless for critical analysis of animal exploitation (e.g., Gaard 2017; Weisberg 2009). Even though I acknowledge that Haraway's work as such is not wholly compatible with ecofeminist critique of animal exploitation, I propose a different reading of her thought,⁸ arguing that ecofeminist interpretations of Haraway have not properly assessed the potential in her notion of naturecultures (Haraway 2003) for working towards trans-inclusive ecofeminist theory. I suggest that rethinking these disagreements and creating ecofeminist theory that draws in its understanding of naturecultures and nonhuman animals from both Harawayan thought and ecofeminism is one way of working towards trans-inclusive ecofeminism.

Haraway's best-known works, including *Primate Visions* (1992/1989), *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991), and *Modest_Witness* (1997) have made her one of the most influential scholars within both the Euro-American mainstream and feminist science studies scholarship specifically (including her influence in countless other fields). Her papers "A Cyborg Manifesto" and "Situated Knowledges," both re-published in *Simians*, have become part of

7 See footnote 15.

8 Elsewhere I have raised other aspects of her writings, such as her approach to politics, and to sexuality and relationships, which I hope can usefully inspire critical scholarship on animals (Irni 2020; Irni, Chapter 10 in this book; Irni 2023)

the canon of Euro-American women's/gender studies. Since her early publications, Haraway has been in critical dialogue with radical feminists and ecofeminists. For example, Haraway is one of the scholars who has criticised radical feminist Catharine MacKinnon about the totalising view of women owing their existence to sexual appropriation by men (Haraway 1991, 159). Haraway's dialogue with ecofeminists has dealt primarily with the conceptualisation of nature. Haraway has argued for avoiding the polarisation of nature/organic versus culture/technology; this polarisation, in turn, has been one of the challenges that have contributed to trans-exclusive views of gender, as well as to the simplification of Indigenous cultures as "closer to nature" or as preserved in some ideal state, prevalent in some ecofeminist work.⁹ Haraway is known for promoting an approach that assesses the complex ways in which the natural and the technological are co-constituted (2004/1992, 66). In terms of ecofeminism, her attempt was to "keep ecofeminism and technoscience joined in the flesh" (2004/1992, 3). In contrast to the Harawayan perspective on the co-constitution of bodies and technology, ecofeminists have criticised particular ways in which this co-constitution is conducted, for example, the genetic engineering of nonhuman animal bodies (see e.g., Donovan 2018; Weisberg 2009). A crucial issue for a trans-inclusive ecofeminism is whether the critique of the co-constitution of bodies and technologies is interpreted as a contextualised case that deserves critique because of the exploitation of nonhuman animals, or whether the ecofeminist approach is based on a theoretical assumption of the inherent separation of nature and culture. This question has implications for how the gender-confirming medical treatments needed by some trans people as well as gender self-determination can become intelligible within ecofeminist theory.

For example, in constructing her vegan theory, Adams (2016) importantly problematises not only the use of protein derived from the killing of animals but also the extensive exploitation of the reproductive capacities of other animals in egg and milk production. This critique, when targeted at intensive farming, is in itself apt, because the exploitation of nonhuman animal reproductive capacities is a core practice in, for example, animal-based food production (see also Szczygielska and Kowalewska, Chapter 1 in this book). However, if and when ecofeminist theory assumes the inherent separation of nature and technology, it ends up making an essentialised connection between femininity, females, mothering, and reproduction. For example, Adams does this by calling eggs and milk "feminized protein," produced by "females of child-bearing

9 For questioning these simplifications with the help of Haraway's work, see Sturgeon 1997, 272.

age” who “become oppressed by their femaleness” and as “*Mother* animals” (Adams 2016, 62, emphasis in original). Greta Gaard (2013) provides a very similar understanding that assumes inherent connections between “femaleness”, “mothers”, and “other mammal mothers” in her work on feminist postcolonial milk studies, which is an ecofeminist approach to milk production that, drawing from postcolonial studies, problematises the milk industry by illustrating various ways in which milk is intertwined in colonial practices.¹⁰ Importantly for the discussion of trans-inclusive theory, *gender* appears in these vegan feminist approaches as the connection of females, femininity, reproduction by giving birth, and claiming parenting in other animals as mothering. Without simultaneously acknowledging that these terms are not essentially or self-evidently connected, ecofeminists end up constructing a gender binary that invokes both bodies and nature in a very particular way that appears essentialist and trans-exclusive.

In contrast, a “naturecultures” approach that theoretically allows for more fluid connections and disconnections between bodies, cultural meanings, and technologies enables more many-faceted understandings of gender that are trans-inclusive. Such an approach is able to grasp that femininity is not necessarily connected to “femaleness” or to women¹¹ and that reproduction is not necessarily about femaleness and maleness, and that this is not only because of new reproductive technologies, but because “sex” in “nature” is a more varied phenomenon (see e.g., Alaimo 2010; Hird 2008, 2012; Roughgarden 2004). Such a naturecultures approach also grasps that giving birth is not necessarily about women, because trans men and some nonbinary persons can also become pregnant, and that there is no necessary connection between parental responsibilities and practices and any gender identity or shape of a body (see e.g., Karhu, Chapter 8 in this book; Toze 2018). In addition, a naturecultures approach can account both for subcultures and other cultural contexts where bodies are read differently from mainstream Western binary readings of bodies, and for the critical histories of sciences which suggest that the very term “female” involves specific scientific readings of bodies, organs, and molecules, which have changed significantly over the years (see e.g., Alaimo 2010; Bettcher 2014; Butler 1993; Hird 2008, 2012; Irni 2016; Miranda 2010; Oudshoorn 1994; Preciado 2013; Karhu, Chapter 8 in this book).

10 For a detailed analysis of Gaard’s work from a transfeminist perspective and development of trans sensitive ecofeminist critique of milk industry, see Karhu, Chapter 8 in this book.

11 Rather, it is problematic from a feminist perspective to assume and restrict femininity as either the property or essence of women; for a broader discussion of femininity, see Kondelin 2016.

Crucially, the problematics related to essentialism concerning “women and men” or “females and males” is not solved merely by intersectional analysis that integrates the analysis of race, gender, and class as social categories into ecofeminism. This is because the challenges, from a transfeminist perspective, also lie in the understanding of bodies and nature and the self-evidently assumed connections between women, femininity, “female” bodies, and giving birth discussed above, as well as in a particular approach to sexuality and power that I mention below in relation to anti-pornography feminism, which do not easily open up for queer and trans-inclusive analyses. In other words, in committing to this naturalising¹² perspective on bodies and gender, ecofeminist theory became situated in a strand of feminism that lacked sensitivity to and understanding of trans lives and realities, and relatedly the many-faceted co-constitutions of bodies, sexes, and technologies.

2 Ecofeminism and the Nature/Bodies/Technology Nexus

Arguments that explicitly or implicitly invoke “nature” in the understanding of gender, for example, by claiming that some women are “natural women” and some are not, risk invoking nature or “the natural” as a moral reference point in order to legitimise or de-legitimise different (a)gender identities and bodily practices.¹³ As noted above, such views are also problematic because they ignore the variety of “sex” in nature, in this sense offering a restricted and misleading conceptualisation that neglects the diversity in nature (see e.g., Alaimo 2010; Roughgarden 2004, Hird 2012). Moreover, such a theoretical perspective simplifies nature/technology relations by assuming that technology is essentially a human advancement.¹⁴ A view that theoretically and conceptually separates nature and technology by assuming that technology is a human endeavour makes it difficult to acknowledge more complex entanglements between these terms, such as that “technological development” can at times be based on modeling the technologies already in use in nature, such as designing microlenses inspired by the capacities of brittlestars (Barad 2014).

12 By naturalising approaches to gender, I mean the attachment of some aspects of feminist theory to the notion of “natural” as it has been historically connected to evoking a binary conceptualisation of gender and the intersecting unnaturalisation of “deviant” genders and sexualities, which has also been intertwined with racism and colonialism (Finley 2011; Miranda 2013; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010).

13 For a critique of this type of thinking, see e.g., Alaimo 2010; Hird 2008; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010.

14 For a critique of this view, see e.g., Barad 2014; Hird 2008.

An approach that allows viewing technology as a more-than-human endeavour is also able to problematise assumptions of human superiority concerning technological advancements.

A theoretical framework of naturecultures, inspired by Donna Haraway's thinking and transgender theory, proves more fruitful for problematising and rethinking the co-constitution of gender, nature, bodies, and technology than the binary and naturalising perspective, including theorising gender and nature in trans-inclusive ways. Countering a logic of the natural that theoretically enables trans-exclusivity and restricts the understanding of gender to a binary that is separated from technology, one of the key founders of transfeminism, Sandy Stone, envisions political action that generates difference and reclaims "the power of the refigured and reinscribed body":

The disruptions of the old patterns of desire that the multiple dissonances of the transsexual body imply produce not an irreducible alterity but a *myriad* of alterities, whose unanticipated juxtapositions hold what Donna Haraway has called the promises of monsters—physicalities of constantly shifting figure and ground that exceed the frame of any possible representation. (Stone 2014, 16, emphasis in original.)

Here Stone refers to Haraway's thinking in order to embrace the myriad differences, transformations, and possibilities of bodies,¹⁵ while she also resists the assimilation of trans bodies into prefigured gender ideals.¹⁶ Another response to claims of trans unnaturality was made in the 1990s by another key scholar in emerging transfeminism, Susan Stryker, who utilised the character of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein's monster to argue that transgender people need to reclaim words such as 'monster', 'creature', and 'unnatural' (Stryker 1994, 240), and claimed that transgender bodies are placed in an "unassimilable, antagonistic, queer relationship to a Nature" (1994, 243). In order to respond to the unintelligibility of transgender bodies in the trans-exclusive frame of thought about nature, Stryker developed the thinking of Judith Butler, another theorist who became a central figure in mainstream poststructuralist feminist theory

15 Haraway's article "The Promises of Monsters," to which Stone refers, was originally published in 1992, that is, one year later than Stone's first printed version of "The *Empire Strikes Back*" (1991), but Stone (1991) mentions in her references a forthcoming version of this article from 1990.

16 Suggesting trans people "to forgo passing" and "to begin to *write oneself* into the discourses" Stone is inspired by Anzaldúa's (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Stone 2014, 16 and note 52; emphasis in original). Stone also utilises Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* in her article.

and also a vocal critic of trans-exclusive feminism.¹⁷ Butler's poststructuralist approach also later became visible in transdisciplinary debates involving poststructuralist, new materialist, and science studies feminisms, and was criticised from the perspective of feminist scholars who wanted to engage with and draw inspiration from natural sciences rather than formulating a societal analysis of bodily and other "matter" enabled by Butler's thinking.¹⁸ Haraway's work, as she engages with biology among other things, has in turn greatly inspired new materialists and (trans)ecological feminist approaches as well as other environmental humanities and science studies research.

In the context of transecologies and popular trans cultures, Haraway's work has inspired such varied transfeminist and trans sensitive approaches as theorising "transgender" in relation to ecology through "interdependent ecological transsex" (Kier 2013); theorising "trans*life" as "the movement that produces beingness," akin to "becoming with" where "trans*" marks "the *with, through, of, in, and across*, that make life possible" (Hayward and Weinstein 2015, 196–7, emphasis in the original); and a comic strip questioning the artificial binaries of gender and organic/technological while discussing medical treatments and computer games as part of the technicity related to (some) trans experiences (Hokkanen 2021). However, the challenge in Haraway's work is that while it has been capable of inspiring transfeminisms that rethink "nature" in trans-inclusive ways, it has not convinced ecofeminists of its helpfulness in contesting animal exploitation. I raise here critiques that are particularly relevant to thinking trans-inclusivity in terms of understanding nature as naturecultures, that is, through the co-constitution of bodies and technology.

As Hil Malatino (2017, 185–6) has noted about reading Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," it is important to read her work from a perspective that recognises the colonial histories of technologies and the many-faceted forms of power involved in the co-constitution of bodies and technologies, for example, the ways in which hormone technologies have been used in racist eugenics. Importantly, therefore, "[i]f we're going to embrace the queer potentiality of cyborg ontology we must be simultaneously attentive to these necropolitical

17 Stryker developed Butler's thinking in order to assess transgender rage, which is "the subjective experience of being compelled to transgress what Judith Butler has referred to as the highly gendered regulatory schemata that determine the viability of bodies" (Stryker 1994, 249; see also Butler 1993) and which "furnishes a means for disidentification with compulsorily assigned subject positions" (Stryker 1994, 249). About Butler's recent critique of trans-exclusive feminism, see, for example, Butler's interview by Alona Ferber (2020).

18 See Barad 1998; for a critical analysis of the debates, see Irni 2013.

instances of cyborg embodiment” (Malatino 2017, 186). Ecofeminist and critical animal studies work also raises critical perspectives on technology by focusing on scientific exploitation of nonhuman animals. From this critical perspective, they interpret Haraway’s (2003, 2008) more recent work, analyses of the co-constitution of bodies and technology especially in her work on companion species, as “endorsing genetic engineering” (Donovan 2018, 260) and as “enthusiasm for transgenics and technoscience” that “ultimately leaves the framework of techno-capitalist domination”—in their case the use of nonhuman animals in painful laboratory experiments—“unscathed” (Weisberg 2009, 55–6). Within ecofeminism, Haraway’s argument about the ontological entanglement of bodies and technology is interpreted to mean that humans are “justified in rearranging nature as they wish” (Donovan 2018, 260).

While I consider it important to criticise the exploitation conducted in scientific practices, a theoretical framework that stems from the notion of naturecultures does not logically lead to accepting or endorsing *any* technological endeavours, such as racist and colonialist endeavours or genetic technologies that rearrange and remake nonhuman animal bodies for scientific or food production purposes. In this respect, it is crucial to recognise that Haraway’s (2008) framework provides a “praxeological perspective” (Lettow 2017) capable of focusing on societal power relations, which also explicitly discusses nonhuman animals as subjects that need to be responded to in an ethical way (even though Haraway and ecofeminists disagree on what is demanded of ethical conduct regarding nonhuman animals). In this sense, Haraway’s approach differs crucially from new materialist frameworks such as Jane Bennett’s (2010), which according to ecofeminist critique are based on “nullification of the ontological distinction between inert matter and living creatures.”¹⁹ In other words, from an ecofeminist perspective, a new materialist framework becomes problematic if it reduces manufactured products and nonhuman animals “to the same ontological and ethical level”, which “enables an ethical erasure of any obligation on the part of the human” concerning the treatment of nonhuman animals as subjects who have their own lives and feelings (Donovan 2018, 259). To be clear, I argue that Haraway’s *theoretical framework* of naturecultures *allows* simultaneously a critical focus on the ways in which scientific technologies are implicated in colonial, racist, and violent endeavours (see also Malatino 2017) and a more radical critique of utilising nonhuman animal

19 Donovan 2018, 257; for Haraway’s framework as a praxeological perspective and its difference from the latter type of new materialist work, see Lettow 2017.

bodies in science, as well as in food production. As Donovan herself notes, while reading Haraway's thought in relation to new materialism:

In its ascription of an activist vitality to the material world, its endorsement of a nonobjectivist view of living bodies, and in its anti-anthropocentrism, the New Materialism would seem to be a welcome theoretical partner to Critical Animal Studies, strengthening its rejection of the objectivist Cartesian view of animals as soulless mechanisms subject to human domination. (Donovan 2018, 257.)

Weisberg also grants that "Haraway does not necessarily advocate the total annihilation of the subject per se, and indeed suggests that we recognize other animals as subjects" (2009, 52). The difference between Haraway and ecofeminists concerning the accounting of nonhuman animals as *subjects* is therefore not in that the naturecultures approach would not allow recognising nonhuman animal subjectivity, but rather how Haraway utilises her own theoretical framework in her accounts of nonhuman animals, which differs from the critical politics of ecofeminists. As Weisberg (2009), Donovan (2018), Giraud (2019), Pedersen (2011), and other ecofeminist and critical animal studies scholars have noted, new materialist and science studies frameworks that analyse the co-constitution of bodies and technologies have not hitherto produced much critical analysis of animal exploitation, but rather tend to be interested in and admiring of the co-constitution of bodies and technologies *as such*.

However, as indicated above, the ability of a theoretical framework to grasp the manyfaceted ways in which nature/bodies/genders/technology can be co-constituted, can also be critical of particular co-constitutions. For example, Kim TallBear's (2017) framework proposes a co-constitution of bodies, nature, and technologies from an Indigenous perspective. TallBear criticises cryopolitical endeavours that attempt to maintain genetic material from Indigenous bodies as a colonial practice that neglects, among other things, the more-than-human relationality of bodies and land. Simultaneously, TallBear critically assesses new materialist frameworks that have not been able to account for Indigenous perspectives and do not refer to Indigenous thought despite the similarity of the thought patterns. I suggest that one way to work towards trans-inclusive ecofeminism is moving towards a naturecultures perspective, while drawing on Indigenous, decolonial, and race-critical scholarship that helps in approaching animal exploitation as intertwined with colonial and racist violence.²⁰ A framework of naturecultures combined with a critical

²⁰ For studies that simultaneously assess racism and animal exploitation, see for example, Deckha 2012; Kim 2015; Weaver 2021.

perspective on animal exploitation can simultaneously, for example, grasp different co-constitutions of genders, bodies, identities, and technologies, support self-determination of gender, criticise the use of scientific technologies in animal exploitation and racist endeavours, as well as grasp technological inspiration that draws, for example, from the capabilities of brittlestars.

3 Towards Many-Faceted Analyses of Violence

Another, partly overlapping, development in the genealogy of ecofeminism was the way in which vegan ecofeminism came to be situated in relation to the so-called “sex wars,” which is, as Hamilton (2016, 115) notes, sometimes oversimplified as a debate between “anti-porn” or sex-negative and “pro-sex” or sex-positive feminists in the United States in the 1980s.²¹ As Hamilton suggests, ecofeminist work was influenced by anti-pornography feminists, such as Susanne Kappeler and Catharine MacKinnon. This strand of feminism has influenced, for example, Carol Adams’ important and influential concept of the “absent referent.” Adams explains this concept in the following way:

Behind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes. The “absent referent” is that which separates the meat eater from the animal and the animal from the end product. The function of the absent referent is to keep our “meat” separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal, to keep the “moo” or “cluck” or “baa” away from the meat, to keep *something* from being seen as having been someone. (Adams 2016, xxiv, emphasis in original.)

I suggest that Adams’ critique of language use that effaces the “someone” who is being eaten remains relevant, especially if it is used without coupling it with a binary analysis of gender, assumption of power as one hierarchical structure, and the so-called sex-negative approach. Notably, Adams, in her *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, is inspired by Daly’s analysis of language and the linkage of language to violence (e.g., Adams 2016, 45, 51), rather than trans-exclusive radical feminist comments on trans people as such. The challenge in ecofeminist theory production from the perspective of transgender theory, however, is not first and foremost in openly expressing trans-exclusive statements, but in the binary focus on “women and men” and “female and male” in some ecofeminist texts, and the theoretical implications of this binary from both trans and queer

21 For an analysis that develops sex-positivity into sex-neutrality which is also inclusive of asexuals, see Milks 2014.

perspectives. In addition, in this section, I suggest that in order to enhance more many-faceted vegan ecofeminist analyses of violence, sexuality, and gender, the sex-negative feminist approach and an understanding of power as one hierarchical structure of domination need to be rethought. This rethinking is important not only for trans-inclusive theory production, but also in order to enhance the integration of race-critical analysis and a more complex approach to sexuality and sex work in ecofeminism, as well as enabling more many-faceted analyses of the violent treatment of nonhuman animals.

In the context of discussing the absent referent, Adams' explanation continues as follows:

Once the existence of an animal who was killed to become that “meat,” meat becomes unanchored by its original referent (the animal), becoming instead a free-floating image, used often to reflect women’s status as well as animals.’ Animals are the absent referent in the act of meat eating; they also become the absent referent in images of women butchered, fragmented, or consumable. (Adams 2016, xxiv–xxv.)

The notion of the absent referent also indicates the dehumanising use of animal metaphors, of which Adams' prominent example is “the use of meat metaphors—linguistic and visual—to describe women” (Hamilton 2016, 115). Adams argues that “the pornography of meat”, meaning the various visual images and written statements she has gathered from international, mainly Euro-American, popular culture, “exploits the asymmetrical relationship of gender to normalize animal oppression, simultaneously naturalizing the gender binary and a consumer vision in which farmed animals are imputed to desire their own death and consumption” (2020, 17). On the one hand, her work is thought-provoking and important in demonstrating the connection of naturalising the gender binary and the dehumanisation and objectivation of women’s bodies with the promotion of nonhuman animal consumption and exploitation. On the other hand, however, her critique of animal exploitation and dehumanisation stems theoretically from an anti-pornography and anti-sex work stance that approaches sexuality as a form of oppression first and foremost and assumes power to be merely repressive. My point in the following is not to devalue this ecofeminist focus on sexualised and objectifying imagery and critique of how it intertwines with and supports nonhuman animal exploitation. Rather, I wish to point out the theoretical legacy of this perspective in order to open up other possibilities for approaching ecofeminist analysis of violence, sexuality, and dynamics of power.

As Susan Stryker notes, the queer feminism that emerged from the 1980s began to consider the position of women, in contrast to the anti-pornography approach, not just as a condition of victimisation or repression from above (“patriarchy”), but simultaneously as a position “that its occupants identified themselves with, understood themselves through, and acted from” (2008, 156; de Lauretis 1987). Coupled with challenging the sexual morality of mainstream (US) society and problematising the condemnation of some sexual practices as necessarily anti-feminist (such as consensual sadomasochism, nonmonogamy, or pornography), even though it did not deny the existence of systematic exploitation based on gender, the emerging queer feminism provided a more many-faceted view of sexuality and power, while questioning a politics of “purity” of sexuality that it deemed problematic from a feminist perspective (Stryker 2008, 160–2; see also Rubin 2006/1984).

I agree with Hamilton’s point that the argument by Adams “that masculinity in Anglo-American society is constructed both in relation to an undervalued femininity and in violent opposition to animal others remains relevant” (2016, 115). However, aligning with anti-pornography feminism marks another crucial trajectory whereby ecofeminism became separated from the developments that became the mainstream of contemporary queer and transfeminist theory. As Hamilton (2016, 113) points out, assuming the interconnectedness of the oppression of women and animals, and making this connection via pornography, excludes the agency and experiences of people who do sex work. For example, in relation to her analyses of how gender, race, and animality intertwine in various advertisements and other popular cultural products that support animal consumption, Adams aptly criticises current practices within and images of animal agriculture, but in addition, her theoretical perspective renders women merely as objects for men, and men as the only subjects of the scenes of sex work and pornography. An absolute anti-sex work stance risks reproducing objectifying language and denigratory comments about sex workers, which I do not regard as helpful in addressing the varying contexts and types of sex work, including violence occurring in the scenes of sex work (see also Hamilton 2016).²² Simultaneously, the strictly gendered subject/object

22 For example, in her 2003 version of *The Pornography of Meat* Adams writes in a chapter called “Hookers” of a particular

[veal] ad [that] ‘hooks’ with slim women, reinforcing the idea that women should be lean and trim. What sort of ‘hook’ would exist if veal calves with their chronic diarrhea, their heat-stressed, bloated, ulcerated bodies, were depicted instead living the short, chained, cramped, sickly lives required of them to become the anemic, white, malnourished flesh available to others? Women’s bodies are used to sell anything, but that’s not

assumption excludes, for example, feminist, queer, and trans pornography, which is not necessarily oppressive but instead can be empowering. In contrast, the work that has criticised anti-pornography feminism has included various queer, transgender, and race-critical feminist scholarship, and as Hamilton (2016, 115) notes, this critique “recognized sexuality as a relation of power, but refused the dyadic ‘man-masculinity-violent/woman-femininity-victim’ that underpinned anti-pornography feminism.” In addition, the scholarship that criticised anti-pornography feminism has “contested the idea that the gaze was uniquely masculine, or that women’s position in visual culture could best be understood through the thesis of objectification.” (Hamilton 2016, 115).

I propose that the queer feminist development around the turn of 1990s that “reconceptualized gender as a network of ‘relations of power’ that, like language, we don’t ever get outside of but always express ourselves through and work within” (Stryker 2008, 157) enables ecofeminists more variability in the analytical toolkit than committing to the assumption of power as a hierarchical top-down structure of domination. Crucially, the assumption of a top-down structure of domination does not in all cases allow a sufficiently nuanced and contextualised analysis of various aspects and forms of violence and power. It should be noted, however, that in *The Pornography of Meat*

all: women’s bodies themselves are sold. *Hook* not only means *to take strong hold of; to captivate*, it also means *to work as a prostitute*. ...

Whore. Hooker. The key to understanding these words and their many synonyms is that they are the vocabulary by which men might speak of any woman. They may be *sluts*, who do it with or without being paid, or expensive *courtesans*—either way, they are viewed as available, whether *at a price* or not. When men go to prostitutes they often want to try out “ideas” they have gotten from pornography. ...

The advertisers, the writers for women’s magazines, and pornographers provide the same answer: sex and steak. (Adams 2003, 97, 100, 102, emphases in original.)

This to me sounds not only critical towards problematic advertising and sexist language, but also denigratory towards those who do sex work, and in this sense reproducing violence against sex workers rather than consisting of a feasible critique of violence. Importantly, the overlooking of the subjectivity of sex workers bypasses the contextual variability of opportunities for agency in sex work and the variability of sex workers’ own experiences. For an illustration of the ways in which feminist politics that try to eradicate sex work without enough attention to sex workers’ actual experiences and situations, may, for example, not realise the intersecting effects of immigration regulations, and may end up supporting “governing in the name of caring”, which is particularly detrimental for migrant sex workers, who form the majority of sex workers, see the discussion from the perspective of the Nordic Model, Vuolajärvi 2019. The new, 2020 edition of *The Pornography of Meat* is still fundamentally anti-porn and anti-sex work, but in my reading not similarly denigratory towards sex workers, even though she operates theoretically within the framework of “prostitution”.

Adams also emphasises specificity of analysis. She connects the notion of the absent referent to the *thingification* of nonhuman animals, which is enabled by the use of “mass terms” such as “meat” (2003, 22). She argues that mass terms obfuscate the *specificity* of animal lives: “When humans turn a nonhuman into “meat,” someone who has a very particular, situated life, a unique being, is converted into something that has no individuality, no uniqueness, no specificity” (2020, 48). Adams’ call for attention to the specificity of individual animals in the case of food production instead of using “mass terms”, as well as her call to scrutinise the “literal fate of animals” instead of hiding this fate with metaphors (2016, 56), remains valid. In addition, it is important to note that even though Adams is influenced by radical feminism, she also criticises the use of animal metaphors by radical feminists to describe what happens to women without acknowledging the realities of animal lives, as well as suggesting that animal advocates should be “wary of language that uses rape metaphorically to describe what happens to animals, without basing their analysis on a recognition of the social context of rape for women in our culture” (2016, 41–2). Adams’ point that “[m]etaphoric borrowing that depends on violation yet fails to protest the originating violence does not acknowledge interlocking oppressions” (2016, 42) remains relevant.

This call for specificity and critique of problematic use of metaphors could also be read as pointing towards a need for a careful, contextualised analysis. However, the challenge lies in the ecofeminist work that focuses on *one hierarchical structure* of domination, which may contradict and prevent a detailed analysis of how power relations work in specific contexts. *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, for example, includes arguments such as the “oppression of women and the other animals derives from one hierarchical structure” (Adams 2016, 158) and “meat eating is associated with male power” (Adams 2016, 168). These arguments propose *a* hierarchy, with (White) men always on top. This understanding of power as merely repressive top-down hierarchy prevails, even though in the 2020 new edition of *The Pornography of Meat* Adams’ analysis can be called intersectional in the sense that the book both integrates race-critical analysis throughout and is trans-inclusive:

These dualistic associations that ‘dehumanize’ are hierarchical and interconnected: not just male over female, human over animal, animate over inanimate, but humanized white cis male over animalized men of color and all women, ‘legal [human]’ over ‘illegal [animals]’ (undocumented immigrants). The more associations drawn from the non-dominant side, the greater is the risk of being treated like an absent referent, a mass term. I am not saying these associations are constant,

or equal, or always present. But, for instance, a woman (nondominant) who is white (dominant) will greatly benefit from her whiteness because in a white supremacist culture it is so highly prized; but her whiteness does not protect her from sexual violence. Black trans women burdened by multiple non-dominant associations are at an especially high risk of being assaulted or killed. (Adams 2020, 182, all parentheses in the original)

Calling for a more complex and contextualised analysis of power relations, Hamilton, analysing Adams' article on meat advertising (Adams 2010), suggests that "Adams does seem to confuse human trafficking and prostitution" (2016, 117) and that even though "operations of the sex industry, the migration—forced and otherwise—of people, or the traffic in animals ... all are part of the contemporary globalised economy, they operate within vastly different legal and economic frameworks" (2016, 117). Because of this complexity, it is important to consider carefully the specific contexts within which these different movements and exploitation of people and nonhuman animals take place, rather than analysing the sex industry, trafficking, animal exploitation, and violence from the perspective of shared experiences of commodification of women and animals.

Likewise, not presuming a hierarchical top-down structure of power enables more nuanced readings of how animal advocacy and violent treatment of animals get caught in the dynamics of race, class, and gender. One example consisted of the publicity related to the conviction of popular African American National Football League quarterback Michael Vick for dogfighting, where, according to Claire Jean Kim (2015), notions of the "optic of cruelty" by animal advocates and the "optic of racism" by Vick's defenders came into play. This case invoked the dehumanization and racialisation of Black masculinity as violent, which worked as a contrast against which pit bull-type dogs came to appear as innocent victims (see also Weaver 2021, 6–7). This case is one example where a carefully contextualised analysis of race, class, and gender in relation to violence—rather than a focus on women and animals or a top-down hierarchical structure of domination—is needed to grasp how danger in the United States context is located on the bodies of both Black men and pit bull-type dogs, and how rescue practices and the fate of dogs may intertwine with tacit narratives of middle-class Whiteness (Kim 2015; Weaver 2021; see also Zelinger 2018).

Moreover, specificity and nuanced analysis is needed for a trans-inclusive assessment of gendered violence. For a feasible theory of gender, it is important to criticise the assumption of binary gender and recognise various nonbinary experiences. However, as transgender scholar Talia Bettcher (2014,

384–7) notes, in addition, a theory of gender is not feasible if the critique of the binary assumption leads to a new norm and ideal concerning going “beyond the binary.” Such an approach does not account for the oppression of trans people who identify as women or men. Therefore, a feminist account is needed that both respects self-determination of gender—or outside of gender—and recognises the form of violence which Bettcher (2014) has called “reality enforcement.” As part of the violence of reality enforcement, trans women can, for example, be accused either of “deceiving” others about being women (if trans women “pass,” that is, are regarded as women) or “pretending” to be women (if trans women do not “pass”), both of which are based on a violent enforcement of an assumed “reality” of gender that cannot accommodate trans people. Importantly, reality enforcement is “an instantiation of racist violence, sexist violence, transphobic violence, and violence against sex workers, all at once” (Bettcher 2014, 395). An approach that takes the binary of gender as a starting point, as a “reality” in itself, and does not support self-determination of gender, is not able to assess the varieties of existing forms of gendered violence. In order to provide feasible analyses of violence towards people and nonhuman animals, vegan ecofeminism needs a nuanced approach to power that supports self-determination of gender and recognises reality enforcement of gender as a form of violence; that recognises sex workers as subjects and avoids aligning with notions of purity of sexuality at the expense of queer and other non-normative consensual sexual practices; and is able to assess more complex racialised and other power dynamics than merely repressive top-down hierarchies of power.

4 On Claiming Ecofeminism as an Intersectional Approach

At present, varying interpretations of whether an intersectional approach has been included in ecofeminism, in particular the intertwining of race, class and gender issues, have been put forth.²³ Erika Cudworth, for example, criticises what she sees as unfair accusations of essentialism and lack of intersectional approaches in ecofeminism, suggesting that “[t]he most significant contribution of ecofeminism is the understanding of multiple kinds of social domination, of exclusion and inclusion based on varieties of hierarchies of difference” (Cudworth 2005, 1). Greta Gaard in turn has argued that “[e]cofeminism emerged from the intersections of feminist research and the various

23 About the concept of intersectionality in feminist studies, see Collins and Bilge 2020; Crenshaw 1989; Nash 2019.

movements for social justice and environmental health, explorations that uncovered the linked oppressions of gender, ecology, race, species, and nation” (2011, 28). Gaard also points to correctives made in terms of essentialism within ecofeminist thought (2011, 35, 42).²⁴ In this sense, Gaard constructs ecofeminism as a “progress narrative,” which is one of the three common narrative types feminist scholars have told about feminist pasts (Hemmings 2011).²⁵ This progress narrative indicates, among other things, a move from essentialism to questioning of sexuality and gender as natural givens and an increasing intersectional focus on power relations (Hemmings 2011, 32, 38–45, 48).²⁶ In contrast to Gaard and Cudworth, Carrie Hamilton (2016) presents a contrary view in which vegan ecofeminism, in particular Adams’ approach, is not able to take an intersectional perspective into account. Hamilton takes issue in particular with the binary approach to gender, which is more evident in Adams’ *The Sexual Politics of Meat* than in her most recent work (Adams 2020), and with her anti-pornography perspective.²⁷

Importantly, Black and postcolonial feminists have criticised the whitening of discussions about intersectionality, a transformation from intersectionality as a Black feminist critique of oppression related to race, class, and gender towards a mere focus on any “intersections” where a critical analysis of White supremacy may be forgotten (Bilge 2013; Carbin and Tornhill 2004, De los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2003; Nash 2016). As the invoking of intersectionality is

24 In her article published in 2017 she writes, mentioning Bina Agarwal, Christine Cuomo, and Victoria Davion as “environmental justice, feminist, and ecofeminist” theorists, who “provided corrective challenges to gender essentialism in ecofeminism, and this critique served both to splinter and to strengthen ecofeminism, distinguishing essentialist from social constructionist branches, and encouraging theory that became more attentive to differences of race, nation, religion, ethnicity, and so on” (Gaard 2017, 118).

25 *Loss narratives* switch this development around; as Hemmings argues: “While feminist subjects of the political past are naïve or exclusionary in progress narratives, in loss narratives it is feminist theoretical subjects of the present who fail in their feminist radicalism” (2011, 64). This failure includes for example, depoliticisation, retreat to the academy and the realm of discourse instead of focusing on the essential questions of the economy and grass-roots activism (2011, 69, 71, 85). *Return narratives* in turn emphasise “past obsessions with representation over the current moment of materiality” (2011, 109).

26 The ecofeminist genealogical storytelling does not, however, share the mainstream Euro-American feminist progress narrative’s focus on a move towards poststructuralism alongside a move towards intersectionality; for this aspect of the progress narrative, see Hemmings 2011.

27 Hamilton argues that the way in which animals and women are connected by Adams, enabled by inspiration from anti-pornography feminism, aligns her theorisation with binary thinking about gender while generalising women as a category, which also serves to erase power relations concerning class and race (Hamilton 2016, 115–6).

a crucial way to legitimate ecofeminism as a contemporary feminist praxis, as well as intersectionality being used as an argument for including critique of animal exploitation in the sphere of feminism, it is important to pay attention to how claims to an intersectional perspective work within ecofeminism. From the perspectives of striving for trans-inclusive feminism and integrating analysis of race into ecofeminism, I wish to discuss the current ways of laying claim to intersectionality. Crucially, ecofeminists seem to draw simultaneously on intersectionality as a Black feminist critique, as well interpreting it as a study of any “intersections.”²⁸

In a collection published in 2014, *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, the editors Carol Adams and Lori Gruen call for integrating “the intersecting structures of power that reinforce the ‘othering’ of women and animals” (Adams and Gruen 2014b, 1). Their collection seems to propose intersectionality as an analysis of *intersections* that must recognise and integrate yet more intertwining hierarchies of power in the analysis, including the exploitation of nonhuman animals. This view of intersectionality lets the reader assume that integrating trans struggles also belongs to the interests of ecofeminists. A crucial question to discuss, then, is what it entails to integrate trans struggles into ecofeminist analysis and how to understand ecofeminism as an intersectional approach, including how to make sense of the current contradictory claims about whether ecofeminism is an intersectional approach or not.

Concerning the ongoing discussions about intersectionality, I suggest that the existence of research practices that attend to race but do not *integrate* it into the research framework, as well as differing expectations of what an intersectional approach entails, help explain the contradictory arguments about

28 In addition to the genealogy that defines intersectionality through Black women in the nineteenth century questioning of the Whiteness of the women’s movement (Brah & Phoenix 2004, 76–7) and theoretically links the notion of intersectionality to Black feminist theory in the United States (e.g., Crenshaw 1989; hooks 2000, XI–XIII; Nash 2019), Nina Lykke, one of the most influential feminist scholars in the Nordic countries, has pointed towards an alternative European genealogy. In this genealogy, she argued, the socialist movements at the beginning of the twentieth century were questioned for ignoring gender (2005, 9–11). She also pointed to a definition of intersectionality as a question of (any) “interacting power asymmetries” (Lykke 2003, 53; see also Lykke 2010). (All translations of citations from Swedish journal articles are mine). Lykke’s position has been criticised by postcolonial and race-critical feminists (e.g., Bilge 2013; Carbin and Tornhill 2004) and she has also more recently reformulated her approach (Lykke 2018, 2020). Ecofeminists have not, to my knowledge, been influenced by Lykke’s thinking specifically, but the understanding of intersectionality as “intersections”, or focusing on various intersecting oppressions, also emerges in ecofeminist thinking.

(non/)existing intersectionality in ecofeminist work. For example, Adams in her *The Sexual Politics of Meat* refers to bell hooks, which could be taken as an example of her intersectional work. Adams writes: “racism as it intersects with sexism has been defined by bell hooks in distinctions based on meat eating: ‘The truth is—in sexist America, where women are objectified extensions of male ego, black women have been labeled hamburger and white women prime rib’” (Adams 2016, 41; hooks 1981, 112). However, Adams does not further discuss in this context the ways in which racialisation and animalisation are intertwined. Inspired by race-critical work, metaphoric borrowing and making comparisons between women and animals could be developed by including the point that the notion of speciesism too easily erases larger social structures that ground the operations of “species” and its links to racialisation and animalisation (Chen 2012; Jackson 2013, 2020). Animalisation and dehumanisation have been utilised, among other things, to justify violence against colonised peoples, land seizure, and eugenics, and in this sense drawing boundaries around the notions of “human” and “animal” is a profoundly racialised question (Deckha 2012, 539).

More thoroughly accounting for the intertwining of animalisation and racialisation in the research framework would entail that the central issue cannot be seen in connections between metaphors or treatment related to “women” and “animals”, as Adams suggests (e.g., 2016, 204). This is an example of how, even though Adams frequently mentions race and class in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (2016), gender remains the prioritised category of analysis. In this sense it can be interpreted that even though, in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams attends to the question of racism, it is not *integrated* into the book’s theoretical framework. Later (as *The Sexual Politics of Meat* was originally published in 1990), Adams acknowledges the intertwining of racialisation and animalisation in her work published in a collection in 2007 (Adams 2007a/2006); despite that, in another text published in the same collection, she holds on to the notion of “sex-species system,” which is also repeated without reflection in the introduction of the collection (Adams 2007b/1995, 203; Donovan and Adams 2007, 3). In her new and considerably updated 2020 edition of *The Pornography of Meat*, however, a critical analysis of race is integrated into the analysis throughout the book.

Cudworth, who discussed ecofeminism’s significance in its analysis of “multiple kinds of social domination,” presents, immediately before the argument about intersectionality I cited above, her definition of ecofeminism: “Ecofeminism can most simply be defined as a range of perspectives that consider the links between the social organization of gender and the ways in which societies are organized with respect to ‘nature’” (Cudworth 2005, 1).

Here she also appears to give gender priority, after which comes the argument of the inclusion of an intersectional perspective. Maneesha Deckha has named this type of writing as a “residual problem with essentialism” and defines it as ensuing from a theory’s “reliance on gender as the primary explanatory deconstructive tool to understand the dynamics of human exploitation of animals at the same time that it acknowledges the importance of an intersectional analysis” (Deckha 2012, 532).

In addition to maintaining gender as a prioritised category of analysis, the analogical *like-race* thinking evoked in parts of animal studies has also been criticised, because it tends to silence the realities of racist injustices and often erases the violent histories and the people whose experiences are appropriated by this thinking (e.g., Kim 2015, 283–6; Weaver 2021, 116, 131). In her work published in 2014, Adams analyses the case of “Ursula Hamdress,” a photograph of a pig that turned Ursula Andress, a White “sex symbol” in the 1960s for her role in a James Bond film, who also posed for *Playboy*, into a photograph of a pig, “Ursula Hamdress”, in *Playboar*, a pig farmers’ *Playboy*. Adams first encountered this picture in the early 1980s and discussed it in 1987 on a panel on sexual violence (Adams 2014, 210–1; Adams 2016, 19–20). In her 2014 article she has taken aboard an analysis of race, drawing from “the genealogy of the reclining nude within the context of oppressive attitudes regarding sex and race” (2014, 217), while she argues that “cultural theory must include consideration about species hierarchies and attitudes when examining racial and sexual representations” (2014, 209). However, in this text she also makes the criticised analogy between slavery of humans and animals: “Who else in contemporary society is enslaved besides women, girls, and an unknown number of boys? Other animals; the largest number being farmed animals” (Adams 2014, 218).

I suggest that several practices related to intersectionality in ecofeminism have enabled the seemingly contradictory arguments that vegan ecofeminism does not adequately integrate intersectionality and that ecofeminism has been unjustly criticised for this. These consist of simultaneously mentioning race but not integrating race-critical analysis into the research framework, which can prompt both readings that race has been taken into account in the analysis (as race is mentioned) and critical readings, like Deckha’s (2012), that expect the integration of race into the research framework. In addition, analysing race more or less thoroughly in various texts that all circulate widely within the reading public may result in different arguments about ecofeminism, depending on the text discussed. Moreover, the different understandings of what an intersectional analysis entails have an effect on whether ecofeminism is understood as intersectional—it certainly is, if analysis of any “intersection” such as

gender and animality is understood as intersectional analysis.²⁹ At least some ecofeminist texts can be understood as intersectional, if intersectionality is understood as a focus on the analysis of race, class, and gender; but fewer of them, if an intersectional analysis is also expected to entail a trans-inclusive research framework.

Conducting intersectional work that integrates a critical analysis of race and culture into ecofeminist concerns is crucially important, as several scholars have already pointed out (e.g., Agarwal 1992; Deckha 2012; Kim 2015; Sturgeon 1997). As noted above, integrating race includes recognising the co-constitution of species and race, including the justification of enacting violence against colonised peoples through animalisation and dehumanisation. In addition, as Deckha explicates, an integration of critical analysis of race and culture entails, for example, recognising how colonial and racialised thinking is contained in definitions of “cruelty” as well as in definitions of “barbaric” versus “civilised” treatment of nonhuman animals. It also includes problematising the will to extend critique that stems from an analysis of dominant Western contexts to Indigenous and other communities suffering from colonialism without addressing the colonial context itself; and attending to how racialised identities are reproduced through foodways, including the history of imperialism, where diets based on vegetables and grains were regarded as “weak” or “primitive” in contrast to eating flesh, and the present ways in which these Asian or other foodways that differ from the normative meat-based Western foodways are signified as “ethnic” and serve to promote “cosmopolitan” identities for White Western consumers. (Deckha 2012, 536, 539–40; see also Bailey 2007; Stănescu 2018.)

Claiming an intersectional perspective, or an attempt at conducting intersectional work as a careful analysis of race and gender, has not, however, in itself solved the problem of trans-exclusivity in all vegan ecofeminist texts. For example, in 2014 Adams and Gruen claim an intersectional approach, mentioning the need to account for “sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism”, which “are informed by and support speciesism” (2014b, 1). Still, this focus on several intersecting oppressions does not mean that their own work in the same book is trans-inclusive. In a chapter called “Groundwork” in

29 For problematisations of the understanding of intersectionality as a question of (any) “intersections,” if this means forgetting the focus on racism and White privilege, see e.g., Bilge 2013; Carbin and Tornhill 2004; De los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2003. For discussing the concept of intersectionality inspired by Black feminism, see e.g., Collins and Bilge 2020; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Crenshaw 1989; Nash 2019.

the same collection, Adams and Gruen reflect on the history of ecofeminist theory and activism, including its relations to trans people.

Adams and Gruen reflect, in particular, on the practices of Feminists for Animal Rights, an organisation formed from a study group that viewed sex work as inherently oppressive, in contrast to feminists who “were interested in embracing the ‘pleasures and dangers’ of non-normative sexual expression” (Adams and Gruen 2014a, 16–7). As Adams and Gruen (2014a) explain, Feminists for Animal Rights was established in 1981³⁰ in California as a response to problems inherent in the animal advocacy movement in the US in the 1970s and 1980s. According to them, it had become clear by the 1980s to the women within the animal advocacy movement that the leaders of the movement were men, that the movement included sexism, and that animal advocacy needed to be included in feminism. Feminists for Animal Rights also helped, for example, women who had experienced violence in their relationships but did not want to leave their animal companions. Concerning this feminist activism, Adams and Gruen write:

While ecofeminism was under criticism for appearing essentialist, it was also being criticized for being trans-exclusive. Feminists for Animal Rights [abbreviated later in Adams’ and Gruen’s text as FAR] contributed to this perception by *having a woman-born-woman membership rule*, much like the Michigan Women’s Music Festival. This was a source of debate both within FAR and for those who wished to start FAR groups in their cities. The *need for cis-women to create safe spaces devoted to their own concerns*, particularly for those who have been sexually terrorized and abused, has been *seen by some* to be trans-exclusive. (Adams and Gruen 2014a, 23, emphases added)

The emphasised parts suggest that Adams and Gruen differentiate between cis and trans women, apparently assuming that trans women are not women who would have women’s concerns or who would encounter sexualised violence.³¹ Importantly, they continue this paragraph by stating: “[e]cofeminists

30 According to its website, this organisation was active roughly for twenty years (Feminists for Animal Rights 2012).

31 Below I will discuss the second edition of this book, published in 2022, where this paragraph and this kind of trans-exclusive argumentation does not exist. It is relevant to comment on the 2014 edition alongside the new edition, however, since this text will be available for readers even though the personal understandings of the writers may have changed since the publication of the first edition. In addition, many people may end up reading the first edition of *Ecofeminism* rather than the second, and hence come across this text.

have been exploring how to be more trans-inclusive without reinscribing painful, problematic binaries” (Adams and Gruen 2014a, 23). This statement can be read as indicating that their conscious *purpose* in the paragraph is not to write trans-exclusive theory, but rather to be open to thinking through how ecofeminism could be more *inclusive*. Again, as stressed throughout my chapter, my discussion does not concern conscious, purposeful ecofeminist trans-exclusion but the implications of theory production. The seeming contradiction, with sentences clearly distinguishable as problematic from a transfeminist perspective—trans-exclusive in the sense that they do not regard trans women as women—and the next seeming to imply an attempt towards trans-inclusive ecofeminism, becomes understandable when the underlying theoretical assumption of the sentences is examined. It is exactly the implicit theoretical assumption that conflates nature, a cultural interpretation of bodily characteristics, and gender, and contrasts them with technology (i.e., including the assumption that trans women are not “born women” but only acquire the status of female/women if they want or get gender-confirming medical treatments)³² which enables reading cis-women as (“naturally”) women in contrast to trans women. In other words, the reality-enforcement of a person’s gender based on a particular cultural reading of a body as “female” or “male” enables differentiating between the notion of “woman-born-woman” in contrast to trans women, who are not therefore assumed to be “women” since birth. This theoretical assumption enables the argumentation in the above citation, where the authors do not admit that “a woman-born-woman membership rule” was trans-exclusive, and their claims that the idea of “the need of cis-women to create safe spaces” which trans women would somehow make unsafe, has only been “seen by some” as trans-exclusive rather than actually having been trans-exclusive.³³ In other words, the radical feminist naturalising approach to sex developed in the 1970s echoes in these sentences as *underlying theoretical assumptions*, although the *stated purpose* of the paragraph, judging from the subsequent sentence, can be read as an attempt to develop trans-inclusive ecofeminism. Adams and Gruen’s (2014a) text is otherwise a valuable account of the history of ecofeminism, but unfortunately this part, because of the underlying theoretical framework to which the text is committed to, ends up producing a trans-exclusive approach.

32 See Bettcher (2014) for a helpful explanation of the problems in this type of thinking.

33 For further discussion about safer spaces in feminist contexts, see, for example, Krishnakumar and Menon 2022 and Keegan 2016.

Importantly, in the second edition of *Ecofeminism*, Adams and Gruen (2022b) have rewritten the whole chapter, now renamed “Ecofeminist Footings”, and it no longer includes this paragraph. In addition, the new edition includes an article that connects, in an affirmative way, trans struggles to an ecofeminist perspective against interdependent injustices (Kirts 2022). However, in Adams and Gruen’s new chapter, FAR is presented only from the perspective of fighting sexism in the animal rights movement and bringing consciousness of animal exploitation into feminism, regarding animal exploitation as a question that is linked to the critique of patriarchy (Adams and Gruen 2022b, 19–21). The new chapter includes neither mention of nor reflection on the trans-exclusive history of feminist animal rights activism, nor affirmation of gender self-determination, nor a corrective to the binary framework of gender inherited from radical feminism. Yet the chapter presents ecofeminist history unproblematically as “a robust philosophical practice with engaged, activist roots” that “over decades” has attended to “overlapping, interconnecting issues” that include “militarism, capitalism, racism, colonialism, environmental destruction, and patriarchy” (Adams and Gruen 2022b, 1). I am delighted that I no longer come across any explicitly trans-exclusive sentences in Adams and Gruen’s account of ecofeminism in the second edition, which also makes this chapter suitable for teaching, and that the whole volume can now be read as more inclusive of trans struggles, because of the addition of Kirts’ (2022) chapter. However, like Gaard’s progress narrative of ecofeminism, Adams and Gruen’s (2022b) account of the history of ecofeminism has been written without critical reflection on how ecofeminist activism and theory production has also participated in unjust politics, including trans-exclusive practices. Moreover, Gaard presents Mary Daly’s work—which I discussed above in the context of her support of trans-exclusive feminism and the problems in Daly’s representation of non-European women—in the following way, after the suggestion that the analysis of intersections have been part of ecofeminism from the beginning:

An early text of radical feminism, Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), exposed the historical and cross-cultural persecution of women as legitimized by the various male-dominated institutions of religion, culture, and medical science (that is, Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African genital mutilation, European witchburnings, American gynecology, Nazi medicine), linking the physical health of women and the environment with the recuperation of a woman-centered language and thought. (Gaard 2011, 28)

Gaard therefore bypasses the critique I mentioned above, concerning *how* non-European women are presented in Daly’s work (Lorde 1979), as well as

Daly's support for trans-exclusive radical feminism, and presents Daly's work unproblematically as intersectional. In contrast, I suggest that claiming ecofeminism as an intersectional approach requires critical reflection on *how* race and culture are taken into account in ecofeminist work, as well as explicitly and critically reflecting on the injustices and ignorance that have affected past ecofeminist practice and theorisation.³⁴ From a transfeminist perspective, such a critical, reflective endeavour also includes transforming the theoretical assumptions concerning the naturalising binary approach to gender and the nature/bodies/gender/technology nexus that—despite the stated intentions of some ecofeminist authors—have at times produced trans-exclusive theory.³⁵

5 Towards a Myriad of Alterities in Ecofeminism

To conclude, I agree with Adams and Gruen (2014a, 2014b, 2022b) and other ecofeminists that it is important to take animal exploitation seriously in feminist theory and practice. Recognising nonhuman animals as subjects that require an ethical response (e.g., Donovan 2018; Weisberg 2009) remains valid, as do Carol Adam's (2016, Adams 2016, xxiv; 2003, 22) notion of the absent referent and her critique of the use of "mass terms" of nonhuman animals,

34 Examples of how such critical reflection of past theorisation can be done methodologically, see for example, Lykke 2018, 2020. Concrete examples of how to integrate a critical analysis of race, culture, and decolonial analysis, see for example, Belcourt 2020; Deckha 2012; Kim 2015; Polish 2015; Weaver 2021.

35 If intersectionality is interpreted as a broad claim that includes not only accountability to the intersections of gender, race and class, but accountability also in dismantling for example, ableism, ageism, speciesism, and hetero- and cisnormativity, it has been argued that one researcher may not be able to make a robust and well-informed enough analysis of this "endless series of interacting power asymmetries" (Lykke 2003, 53), and therefore one has to choose one's focus. She received a response from a postcolonial feminist position that "[i]f we accept the idea that gender as a category is constituted in continuous processes in which among others, race, sexuality and class act together, isn't it likely that one cannot choose to not choose one or the other?" (Carbin & Tornhill 2004, 13.) For a further discussion related to this debate and its implications, see for example, Bilge 2013; Irni 2010, 104–27; Lykke 2020; Nash 2019. As an alternative to getting stuck on the question of how many different aspects of power and exploitation one researcher is able to account for, see an exploration of sensitivity to other struggles while focusing on a particular struggle in one's analysis, Irni 2010, 108–27. Ecofeminists who want to focus on violence against nonhuman animals from an intersectional perspective could, for example, exercise sensitivity towards trans struggles by avoiding theoretical assumptions that are trans-exclusive (such as the naturalised gender binary), even though the focus of their research would not be on trans struggles per se.

which problematises the silencing and normalisation of animal exploitation. In addition, in this chapter I have argued that in order to integrate the specificities of trans struggles and in order to claim ecofeminism as an intersectional approach, certain aspects of the vegan ecofeminist *framework* of sexual politics need to change, which also requires critical reflection on unjust histories of ecofeminism.

Because of the whitening of intersectionality as a theoretical approach as a result of White scholars understanding it as an analysis of various “intersections” rather than a race-critical analysis (see e.g., Bilge 2013; Nash 2016), it is crucial to ask about the specific ways in which the notion of intersectionality is invoked for the purposes of studying the exploitation of nonhuman animals. It is more feasible than writing ecofeminist genealogy into a “progress narrative”, or claiming that ecofeminism has been intersectional from the start, to keep continuously working on fully *integrating* critical analyses of racism and colonialism into vegan ecofeminism. In addition, invoking intersectionality by claiming that ecofeminism conducts an analysis of various interlinked oppressions requires critical reflection about past exclusions and explicit discussion about what contemporary frameworks have inherited from radical and anti-pornography feminism and what aspects of these thought patterns need to change, in addition to integrating race-critical analysis.

An integration of trans struggles entails changes in the ecofeminist theoretical framework inherited from the strands of radical feminism that naturalises the binary between female and male: giving up the naturalisation of the binary model of gender and simultaneously giving up “reality enforcement” (Bettcher 2014) while supporting gender self-determination. A transformation in ecofeminist theory in these respects also includes conducting more many-faceted analyses of sexuality and power that provide alternatives to the sex-negative stance and the assumption of a relatively stable top-down hierarchy of power. These theoretical transformations enable more varied analyses of gender, race, sexual politics, animal exploitation, and violence in vegan ecofeminism.

In addition, in this chapter I have argued that the notion of naturecultures enables both a trans-inclusive account of the nature/bodies/gender/technology nexus, as well as a more many-faceted analysis of the relations of nonhuman animals to that nexus. An explicit or implicit theoretical assumption of a binary between technology as necessarily “bad”, “unnatural”, or “human-made” in contrast to “natural” bodies, which has been problematised by scholars such as Donna Haraway and Sandy Stone since mid-1980s and beginning of the 1990s, is recognisable in different ways in both Weisberg’s (2009) and Donovan’s (2018) accounts of new materialism and in Adams (2016), Adams and Gruen’s (2014a), and Gaard’s (2013) work. Although it is important to account for the

colonial violence, including violence towards nonhuman animals, in technological endeavours; against the conscious intentions of ecofeminist scholars, this theoretical assumption that inherently separates nature and technology becomes trans-exclusive if and when it is connected to a naturalised reading of bodies as “female” and “male”, and a theoretical conflation of women, femininity, femaleness, and giving birth is made. In contrast, in this chapter I have proposed alternative conceptualisations which would be able to account for various violent *and* empowering entanglements of nature, bodies, identities, technologies, and self-determinations of gender. It is important that ecofeminist theory will be able to conduct critical analysis of violent entanglements of colonialism and technology *and* take into account scientific work that is inspired by technologies already at work in nature, which questions the assumption of technology as a property and achievement of the “human” of Western science (Barad 2014).³⁶

In my reading, the ecofeminist interpretation that feminist science studies scholars Karen Barad and Donna Haraway imply that humans are “justified in rearranging nature as they wish” (Donovan 2018, 260) is a misinterpretation based on the idea that if body-technology entanglements are theorised as an ontological condition of bodily existence, it implies accepting any entanglements, or even endorsing them. However, Donovan (2018), Weisberg (2009), and other ecofeminist and critical animal studies scholars are correct in their interpretation that new materialist and feminist science studies scholars have not hitherto used all the potential of these theoretical frameworks for criticising the ways in which particular entanglements unethically exploit non-human animal bodies. I see ecofeminist potential especially in simultaneously constructing trans-inclusive theoretical approaches³⁷ *and* combining the notion of naturecultures with a critical analysis of the intertwining of violence, colonialism, and technology, while remaining critical of animal exploitation in its various forms.

The above-mentioned Bettcher’s (2014) approach is just one example of the various ways in which contemporary transgender and queer feminist approaches have problematised the dyadic and binary understandings of sex and gender, as well as of sexual and gender-related, racialised violence. Hamilton’s (2016) analysis, inspired by transgender sex worker, artist, and

36 For critique of the racialised construction of the “human” in Western colonial thought and practice, see e.g., Jackson 2020; Wynter 2003.

37 For an example of how to question gender categories as essential while supporting various trans and other gender-related self-identifications, see e.g., Bettcher 2014. This support includes respecting a person’s possible lack of gender identity.

activist Mirha Soleil-Ross's work, is an example of an attempt to develop an alternative "sexual politics of veganism" that draws from trans-inclusive strands of feminist theory and is sensitive to the experiences and agency of trans people and sex workers.

At the moment of writing this paper, "a *myriad* of alterities,"³⁸ to invoke Sandy Stone's vision from the turn of the 1990s, can already be seen in the feminist accounts of gender, sexuality, race, and nature. Feminist starting points that do not take the gender binary as a given enable many-faceted analyses of, for example, how scientific accounts of sex have changed profoundly, from focusing on differences in visible body parts or internal organs to proposing that the "truth" of sex is a question related to chromosomes rather than the outlook of the body, to seeing sex as a question related to hormone levels that can be transformed, which all produce differing power relations in different contexts (e.g., Irmi 2016; Oudshoorn 1994; Preciado 2013). More precise analyses of environmental activism and the implications of hormonally active agents are enabled when a binary of gender is not taken as an ontological starting point of the analysis, preventing, for example, that a "heteronormative bias... render[s] it even more difficult to understand the effects of various toxins" (Alaimo 2010, 54; see also e.g., Ah-King and Hayward 2014; Di Chiro 2010).

Inspired by queer and race-critical scholarship, developing the notion of "interspecies" (Puar and Livingston 2011) into "interspecies intersectionality" enables the assessment of the production of gendered and sexualised categories in racialised multispecies relations (Weaver 2021). Connecting queer and Indigenous studies has enabled the development of queer approaches that are not centred on identities but on analyses of cisheteronormativity and mononormativity as colonial endeavours and forms of biopower (Finley 2011; TallBear 2020). Critical analysis of settler colonialism can also include a critique of norms related to family and gender while pointing out that settler colonialism has not acknowledged Indigenous more-than-human relations (Rifkin 2011; TallBear 2018).

Accounts that problematise Western norms related to the nuclear family and reproduction can also help envision other animals as actors in new ways (e.g., Alaimo 2010; Haraway 2008, 193; Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 38–9). For example, rethinking sex positivity into sex neutrality that is inclusive of asexuality as well (Milks 2014) can help question the centrality of compulsory sexuality and couple relationships in the Western relationship norms that define close and valuable relationships, which can open up space for regarding

38 See Stone 2014, 16; first published in 1991.

relations with animal companions as valuable and important rather than viewing their function solely from the perspective of human needs as “companion animals” or “pets” (Irni 2020).

In addition, feminist accounts that have problematised the idea that “sex” in nature is binary and static (e.g., Ah-King 2013; Hird 2008, 2012; Roughgarden 2004) have helped question the ways in which “nature” is invoked as an argument against sexual and gender minorities. Approaches that recognise the varieties of sex and reproduction may note that “the remarkable variance regarding sex, gender, reproduction, and childrearing among animals defies our modes of categorization, even explodes our sense of being able to make sense of it all” (Alaimo 2010, 67). As one excited scholar argues, “(a) universe of differing naturecultures ... can hardly serve as a foundation for biological reductionism, gender essentialism, heteronormativity, or models of human exceptionalism” but rather can “help foster queer-green ethics, politics, practices, and places” (Alaimo 2010, 64, 68).

A regendering of nature from the perspective of transgender studies is also needed—a rethinking of the relations of trans and nature that is not only about genitals (Bendorf 2014). As Oliver Bendorf (2014, 137) notes when writing about learning masculinity from birds and calling it “cross-species ‘biomimicry’”: “I want theoretical critique and art and song about species ... and biodiversity and evolution and instinct and habitat.” One example of reworking understandings of nature consists of ecological aesthetics in cinema, which, as Wibke Straube notes, when it radically reappropriates and reworks the connections between pollution, toxicity, and the unnatural in relation to trans and non-binary bodies (2021, 83–84, 93), may have “world-making potential” (see also Muñoz 2009) that materialises nature as a space “of connectedness and hope for future trans livabilities” (Straube 2021, 81).

The notion of “tranimacies” has also been proposed for conducting decolonial reworking and thinking otherwise the connections of race, animality, intimacies, and trans lives (Steinbock, Szczygielska and Wagner 2017; see also Steinbock, Szczygielska and Wagner 2021). In addition, “[f]raming transness within a politically interdependent struggle toward social justice” is an important perspective that can consist of a trans nonbinary Latinx collective providing plant-based food in the aftermath of a natural disaster, collecting rejected plant produce from a local market, and cooking for asylum seekers, some of whom are also queers, thus connecting trans and queer struggles “on the front lines of climate collapse and political oppression” (Kirts 2022, 384–5).

My point in referring to all these scholars and studies is to suggest that a broad variety of analysis of sex, sexuality, gender, race, colonialism, and nature exists—which is by no means exhausted by the above references—that could contribute to ecofeminist analyses and vegan feminisms. Along these lines, in

the future of vegan ecofeminisms, I would like to envision many-faceted animal and multispecies scholarship and activism where trans, queer, Indigenous, and race-critical analyses proliferate.

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Ecofeminist Critique of the Milk Industry: from Mammal Mothers to Biocapitalist Bovines

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1 Introduction

Breastfeeding and lactation are widely explored questions in contemporary feminist theory (e.g., Hausman 2003; Smith 2017; Woollard 2019). In these discussions, breastfeeding is understood as a bodily practice that is strongly regulated by misogynist cultural norms and attitudes. The way we conceive of breastfeeding and breastfeeders is thus informed by larger structures of oppression against women. Therefore, breastfeeding and lactation are taken as necessary objects of feminist study.¹ Although most of the feminist scholars examining human milk emphasise that breastfeeding should be conceived of as a social practice and not “natural” in any simplistic way, the category of woman is generally left untouched, however. As the category of woman remains unproblematised, the feminist accounts of breastfeeding rely implicitly on the assumption that only *women*, that is, only cis-women who have recently given birth, can breastfeed. Consequently, the varied nursing practices of gender diverse people, such as non-binary and trans² parents, for example, are left out of feminist inquiry. Another lacuna in these discussions is the omission of ecofeminist theorisations of milk, because of which the anthropocentric background premise of milk as *human* milk goes unproblematised as well. Consequently, feminist studies on nursing have paid little or no attention to

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- 1 The contemporary discussions of breastfeeding deal with such topics as the negative perception of public nursing (e.g., Woollard 2019; Whiley et al. 2019), the difficulties in balancing breastfeeding and work life (Lee 2018a; Boyer 2014), the cultural and historical discourses of breastfeeding (Hausman 2003; McCaughey, 2010; Formis 2016), the economic undervaluation of breastmilk (e.g., Smith 2017) as well as women’s different experiences of breastfeeding depending on socio-economic and cultural background (Smith & al 2012).
 - 2 I use the term “trans” as an umbrella term that covers a diverse array of experiences and identities (e.g., non-binary persons, trans women, trans men, genderqueer and two spirit persons) that are distinct from cis-gender experiences and identities (those whose gender identity correspond to the gender assigned at birth).

the oppression of the bodies of other lactating mammals, such as cows in the dairy industry.

My chapter critically extends upon the growing feminist literature on nursing by questioning these taken-for-granted presumptions that characterise current discussions of milk and breastfeeding and expose them to feminist philosophical critique. I will problematise the notion that only cis-women who have recently given birth can breastfeed but I will also question the presumption that it is primarily *human* milk that necessitates feminist theoretical attention. My aim in this chapter is not to provide merely an account of lactation that will include marginalised bodies—human or animal—into feminist theorisation of nursing, however. My broader aim is to advance the feminist philosophical background work on which to start developing theoretically and conceptually perceptive feminist accounts of milk and nursing. To do this, I will bring the ecofeminist critiques of the dairy industry into contact with the budding queer and trans discussions of nursing. Critically cross-feeding these two different approaches enables me to question the naturalised conception of nursing as something that solely “females” can do as well as theorise lactation and milk beyond the anthropocentric framework. My chapter aims thus to develop further feminist theorisations of milk by revising the central concepts deployed in these discussions.

While the normative assumption that only cis-women can breastfeed is often an implicit and unproblematised premise in feminist discussions of nursing, in recent ecofeminist theory, the connection between womanhood and breastfeeding is taken even a step further. A leading ecofeminist scholar Greta Gaard, for example, has proposed a “feminist milk studies” (Gaard 2013, 613) that is grounded in the understanding that it is exactly *female* mammals that produce milk. She introduces the concept of “mammal mothers” as the basis for feminist and postcolonial milk studies. With this conceptual framework, she analyses both the cultural undervaluation of breastfeeding as well as human and animal suffering in the global dairy industry. Similar arguments can be found from feminist animal scholar Carol J. Adams’s work (Adams 1990; 2017). While I think their ecofeminist theorisations of milk are important as they call into question the anthropocentric framework on which most feminist analyses of nursing and milk rest, I will argue that some of their main claims and concepts need to be questioned.

The association of women and breastfeeding is so strong in contemporary feminist and ecofeminist discussions of nursing that the normative assumption of gender as a binary category is almost never questioned or reflected upon, although “gender” in feminist theory is generally conceived of as an historical and not a natural category. This is so despite the fact that the social and legal

inclusion of non-normative families and parents (e.g., LGBTQ+ families and parents) in the West has already begun to shape the language used in perinatal services and policies as well as lactation organisations and activism. Thanks to new trans affirmative policy at a National Health Service trust in Brighton and Sussex, UK, for example, midwives have been advised to use gender-inclusive terms when working with trans or non-binary parents.³ These include such terms as “chestfeeding” and “human milk” instead of “breastfeeding” and “breastmilk”.

Given that queer and trans theories have problematised naturalised understandings of sexual and gender identities already from the 1990s onward and developed such concepts as “heteronormativity” and “cisnormativity” that have significantly shaped feminist theory, it is surprising that prominent feminist discussions of nursing—including ecofeminist ones—have bypassed such remarkable and paradigm changing theoretical legacies. At the same time, breastfeeding and chestfeeding as adequate research topics have long been neglected in queer and trans theorisations. It is only recently that queer and trans scholars have begun to question the naturalised assumptions of gender found in medical, popular, and mainstream feminist accounts of breastfeeding (see e.g., Lee 2017; Lee 2018b; Cohen 2017; Riggs 2013).

Drawing on the queer and trans discussions of nursing I will contend that building an ecofeminist account of lactation on the category of “mammal mothers” takes the risk of re-naturalising gender as a stable binary category. This kind of naturalisation further risks reinforcing the cultural and political exclusion and dehumanisation of those who do breast/chestfeed but who do not fit the normative notions of gender and breastfeeder. These include non-binary persons, trans people, queer folks as well as adoptive parents. The aim of my article is therefore to suggest an alternative conceptual and theoretical framework, one that both acknowledges the queer and trans notions of breastfeeding/chestfeeding and takes seriously the ecofeminist critiques of the dairy industry. I will argue that such a framework could be found from the feminist critiques of capitalism, biocapitalism in particular.

I will proceed by first examining the key arguments in Gaard and Adams’s ecofeminist critiques of the milk industry. I take these critiques as my starting point, but I will argue that some of their key assumptions need revision. In the second section, I move to explore the ways in which the concept of “mammals” introduced in 18th century functioned as a regulative and political category that targeted breastfeeding in Europe. The goal of this section is to shed light

3 <https://www.bsuh.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/09/Support-for-trans-and-non-binary-people-during-pregnancy-birth-and-the-postnatal-period.pdf> (accessed 29 August 2023).

to the problems pertaining to the ecofeminist use of the concept of “mammal mothers”. The second section also paves the way for my analysis of the gendering practices in today’s milk industry. The third section focuses on formulating a feminist critique of biocapitalism by developing further recent ecofeminist problematisations of capitalism. In the concluding section, I summarise my main arguments by briefly discussing the human/animal dualism.

2 Mammal Mothers

In her influential article “Toward a Feminist Postcolonial Milk Studies” (2013), Gaard offers an ecofeminist analysis of milk by drawing on feminist theory, postcolonial theory, critical animal studies, and food studies. By “bringing these knowledge fields together through a new intersectional field of feminist postcolonial milk studies” her aim is to examine “the multiple complex cultural assumptions and material practices articulated through milk” (Gaard 2013, 599). She focuses on such diverse issues as the global expansion of the dairy industry and its consequences on subsistence farming in developing countries; the chemicals and toxins found in breast-milk as a question of environmental racism; breastfeeding as undervalued care work; the hormonal basis of mother-infant bonding in nursing mammals; as well as the ethical problems pertaining to the instant separation of calves from cow mothers after birth, a regular practice in the dairy industry. Gaard (2013, 598–99) argues that only by analysing these complex issues together as a whole through the lens of intersectional and postcolonial ecofeminism, can we start to comprehend the common ground of human and animal oppression in relation to milk.

For Gaard, intersectional ecofeminism includes the categories of species and nature in addition to other categories of oppression, such as gender, sexuality, class, and race (Gaard 2013, 596). As the concept of “feminist postcolonial milk studies” implies, Gaard seeks to outline her ecofeminist approach to milk also in terms of postcolonial critique.⁴ Here she takes up Alfred Crosby’s (1986) seminal concept of “ecological imperialism” that emphasizes European colonialism both as a political and biological project, which has always operated and continues to operate through agribusiness.⁵ Colonialist practices thus encompass

4 For a feminist postcolonial critique of the intersectional framework, see Deckha (2012).

5 “Animal colonialism” can be understood as an aspect of ecological imperialism. Cohen (2020, 37) defines it as follows: “Animal colonialism can be defined as a dual phenomenon, consisting, on the one hand, in using animals to colonise lands, native animals, and people and, on the other hand, in imposing foreign legal norms and practices of human-animal relations

not only the violent appropriation of Indigenous land and the expropriation of natural resources, but also the introduction of European livestock and agricultural practices, dairy cattle, and dairying most notably (Cohen 2020, 39). As Mathilde Cohen (2020, 36) notes, “lactating animals became integral parts of colonial and neo-colonial projects” as vehicles of imperial agro-expansionism and thus “milk colonialism”.⁶

It is in this sense that also Gaard examines the global milk industry in her article. She focuses on the case of Operation Flood in India as it illustrates the intertwining goals of European corporate interests and business elites in developing countries. Operation Flood was a dairy development program in 1970-1996 that turned India into the world’s largest milk producer. The Indian dairy corporation Amul’s employee Verghese Kurien offered Operation Flood as the solution to a challenging market situation. The European Economic Community (EEC) hold an enormous surplus of milk powder and butter in the late 1960s, a part of which was dumped as food aid to developing countries, such as India. As Gaard (2013, 604–605) notes, food aid has never been devoid of colonial or corporate aims as it can serve the opening of future markets for commercial sales.⁷ As Amul was India’s biggest producer of milk powder, butter, and baby-food, Kurien’s—who also served as a chair of India’s National Dairy Development Board—task was to prevent the threat to the corporation’s profits.⁸ The solution was to sell the food aid products to the public—not to give them to the poor as charity.

The funds from the sales were invested into intensification and modernisation of India’s dairy production: replacing subsistence dairying for larger cooperatives and mass production; introducing western dairy technologies

upon communities and their environments”. For more on animal colonialism from the perspective of critical animal studies, see e.g., Struthers Montford and Taylor (2020).

6 Cohen (2020) also mentions “breastfeeding colonialism” by which she refers to the ways in which breastfeeding was regulated and controlled in the colonies. Hunt (1988), for example, examines the regulation of breastfeeding in Belgian Congo, where prolonged breastfeeding (a “natural” form of birth control as it prevents ovulation) was seen as a problem as it stalled population growth; enhancing the fertility of local women was understood as the solution to the growing need of labour power in the colonies. For an analysis of the cultural interconnections between milk, Whiteness, and the histories of racism and colonialism, see also, e.g., for example, Stanescu (2018).

7 See also, e.g., Lappé and Collins (1977).

8 The “success story” of Amul corporation is linked to Nestle’s notorious powdered milk and infant food marketing campaigns in India and Africa. After the World Health Organisation (WHO) issued a code against the advertisement of breastmilk substitutes in 1981, Nestle’s campaigns came to an end. As mothers had no access to clean water or sterile bottles, the use of the substitutes instead of breastmilk caused diarrhea, malnutrition, and death. In India, Amul took over Nestle’s lost baby food markets (Gaard 2013, 604).

and practices; importing northern European breeds to replace the indigenous cows and buffalos, whose milk production could not sustain intensive dairying. This enabled Amul to maximise its dairy production and ensured the corporate's profit growth as well as market expansion as milk was not only marketed and sold to the cities' middle classes but also produced for export. (Gaard 2013, 604–6).

As Gaard points out, although Operation Flood was marketed as progressive “white revolution” to the public and media, the project weakened the social and economic status of rural women as they had to give up the preparing and selling of ghee, traditionally women's task and a crucial way to earn money. “With operation Flood”, Gaard writes, “the new crossbreeds required additional feeding and milking labor from women and children, and the milk was sold for cash, leaving women no economic returns and lowering their status in the family economy” (Gaard 2013, 606). Compared to the minimal upkeep of indigenous breeds (e.g., they have accustomed to the climate and local vegetation; have stronger immunity to diseases and parasites; are calving easily), the upkeep of the new breeds was more expensive as they required regular veterinary care and special feeds. Operation Flood not only crumbled “an already precarious subsistence farming (often powered by women's work)” but further crumbled the economic status of farmers as they got a “barely remunerative price” for the milk, “throwing thousands of people into real material poverty” (Gaard 2013, 606–7). As Gaard's analysis of Operation Flood demonstrates, milk colonialism does not only operate by imposing the western practices of intensive dairying upon the farmers of developing countries, but also, and importantly, through the capitalist accumulation of profit for the business elites in western countries *and* developing countries.

Another example Gaard gives of milk colonialism is the toxic chemicals found from the breastmilk of Indigenous and poor communities of color in the USA. She (2013, 598) mentions Akwesasne midwife Katsi Cook's Mother's Milk Project that sought to draw attention to the bioaccumulation of industrial chemicals in the ecosystem, and particularly breastmilk. Cook founded the project after high levels of PCBs was discovered from Mohawk mothers' milk in the 1980s due to the Akwesasne Nation's location near the plants and waste dumps of General Motors. As an example of environmental racism, chemicals in breast milk demonstrate “additional colonial practices, linking the continued expropriation of resources and transfer of wastes to communities of color, and rural and impoverished communities around the world” (Gaard 2013, 598).⁹

9 For more on the critique of settler-colonialism in relation to critical animal studies, see, e.g., Belcourt (2020).

As these examples of milk colonialism illustrate, Gaard's article offers one of the pioneering attempts to combine ecofeminist framework with postcolonial critique to address milk as a feminist question and problematise the milk industry.¹⁰ The central value of her approach lies in outlining milk—human and animal—as a multidimensional and intersectional feminist question. Despite its merits, her approach has a few problems, however. First, as it loosely connects very different kind of issues around the main topic of milk, it lacks clear analytical focus, leaving the article rather descriptive. Therefore, the exact mechanisms of current dairy capitalism and its feminist critique remain underexplored. One of the reasons for this can be found from her theoretical framework. Since Gaard seeks to touch simultaneously multiple angles of the question of milk with her postcolonial, intersectional ecofeminism, the main arguments remain overly general and thus vague. What exactly are the connections between India's mass dairy industry, the chemicals found in Indigenous people's breastmilk and the separation of calves from cow mothers after birth, for example? Albeit these examples all illustrate the histories of racism, colonialism, and speciesism in relation to milk, the particular mechanisms of oppression and relations of power remain unclear, as do the rigorous feminist critique of them as well.

A further problem pertains to the terminology of gender vis-à-vis lactation. Given her emphasis on intersectional feminism and postcolonial framework, it comes as a surprise that in the conclusion of the article Gaard highlights gender, or *mammal motherhood*, as the point of departure for feminist milk studies.

Ideologically imprisoned in a humanist colonial framework, *few human mothers who breastfeed their infants use this embodied experience as an avenue for empathizing with other mammal mothers*; few human parents who touch and nurture their newborns have used these behaviors' affectionate oxytocin release as an opportunity to consider the experiences of other animal parents locked in systems of human captivity. *Feminist milk studies addresses the bio-psycho-social connections produced through the behavioral and material elements of this first relationship, the mother-infant bond, and their nursing milk.* (Gaard 2013, 613, emphasis added)

Through the conceptual pairing of “mothers” and “other mammal mothers” (i.e. cows), Gaard seeks to articulate an ecofeminist ethics that would take

¹⁰ After the publication of Gaard's article, “feminist postcolonial milk studies” has started to appear as a budding research topic, see e.g., Cohen (2020) and Narayanan (2019).

seriously the shared experiences of motherhood beyond the species line or geographical location. The attachment between the child and mother in the act of nursing represents for her a fundamental biological and hormonal need, which she defines as a species-specific behaviour that connects all the animals belonging to the class of mammals. She emphasises several times that the sudden breaking of this bond causes enormous suffering to both the calve and the mother: “inside each glass of milk is the story of a nursing mother separated from her offspring” (Gaard 2013, 612). As she goes on, “cows separated from their calves bellow and appear to grieve for days afterwards, sometimes ramming themselves against their stalls in attempts to reunite with their calves” (ibid.). Therefore, she argues that it is ethically problematic to disrupt this bond by separating the suckling—be it human or nonhuman—from the lactating mother. As a central aim of her feminist milk studies, then, Gaard calls for a new ecofeminist ethics that is based on empathising with all “mammal mothers”, specifically the cows and calves suffering in the confines of the milk industry. As she argues in the passage above, this kind of feminist empathy becomes available through the embodied experience of parenting and, more importantly, through the symbiotic experiences of breastfeeding and the hormonal surge of oxytocin enabled by the “mother-infant” bond.

Given that Gaard stresses the importance of an intersectional approach in her ecofeminist and postcolonial milk studies, her emphasis on “mothers” and “other mammal mothers” in the conclusion of her article may come across as inconsistent. Yet, this theoretical choice mirrors quite well Gaard’s main thesis that she posits in the introduction of her article. There, Gaard argues that “Because milk is produced by *female mammals*, a feminist perspective seems to offer a logical foundation for such inquiry” (Gaard 2013, 595, emphasis added). While Gaard’s general framework of intersectional and postcolonial feminism allows her to analyse many different political aspects of milk and lactation, she ultimately grounds her notion of breastfeeding on the notion of mammal motherhood that is interpreted in terms of biological parenting as her lengthy descriptions of the hormonal bonding between the mother and the child demonstrate.¹¹

While I agree that it is ethically problematic to break the symbiotic bonding between an infant and a mother or birthing parent be they humans or cows, grounding an ecofeminist ethics of milk on the workings of hormones is to reduce complex social and political phenomena—such as parenting and infant

11 Gaard dedicates a whole section in her article to describing the function of oxytocin in the act of nursing and the mother-child symbiosis. She calls oxytocin as “the biological foundation of the mammal mother” (Gaard 2013, 610).

feeding—to mere biology. Even though the enjoyable feelings of infant-parent bonding and breastfeeding might be linked to the oxytocin surge in the brain, it is a sweeping generalisation to draw a parallel between the experiences of “cow mothers” and “human mothers”. Motherhood and parenting are socially constituted historical categories, not primarily biological ones. Although I am sympathetic towards the idea of empathetically recognising the importance of parenthood and caring of offspring across species, equating the practices of human and animal “mothering” like Gaard does would need much more theoretical and historical analysis to be convincing.¹²

I argue that this kind of biologism informs not only Gaard’s notion of motherhood and breastfeeding but also her understanding of gender that guides her ecofeminism of milk. By drawing an analogy between lactating human and cow mothers—or “other mammal mothers” as she calls them—she naturalises nursing as an ability of bodies that only *female* mammals have. Her understanding of nursing thus rests on a notion of gender that is interpreted as a biological category, that is, “sex.” This is a peculiar theoretical move bearing in mind that prominent ecofeminist scholars, including Gaard herself (Gaard 2011), have sought to distance themselves from ontological and biological essentialism from the 1990s onward.

Essentialist assumptions regarding gender and other categories of difference became the target of heightened critique when post-structural modes of thinking started to gain more ground in feminist theory in the 1990s (see e.g., Butler 1990; 1993). This critique concerns specifically the understanding that women shared certain universal features or experiences as *women* as well as the claim that gender differences could be explained by natural characteristics. Accordingly, ecofeminism also became an object of critique as it appeared to conceive of women as a monolithic category and, more importantly, because it seemed to draw a strong analogy between women and nature.¹³ While ecofeminist theorisation has always been a diverse body of scholarship with scholars holding differing views depending on their theoretical commitments and backgrounds,

12 For a compelling historical analysis, see e.g., Cohen (2017), who compares the legal regulation of human and animal milk as well as the social regulation of lactating “mothers” and “cows” in French and the USA. Although also she relies on the categories of “female” humans and animals, she recognises that lactation is possible also for trans and nonbinary parents, for example.

13 Gaard (2011) argues that post-structuralist feminists often wrongly reduced the diverse body of literature published under the title of “ecofeminism” to the gynocentric approach, thus making the whole scholarly endeavour appear as essentialist and thus something to be avoided. According to Gaard, this kind of strawman version of ecofeminism partly explains why ecofeminism was long neglected or even scorned in the academic feminism.

this critique targeted particularly the gynocentric strand of ecofeminism that hold “women” as a unified category and group that is oppressed in a similar manner as “nature” by the patriarchy (see e.g., Daly 1990).¹⁴

In the history of feminist thought, scholars have made tremendous effort to dismantle the argument according to which women are in some way closer to nature or animals than men and therefore incapable of rational thought and political participation in the public sphere. The main problem of this kind of essentialism that constitutes “women” as a natural and biological category is that gender—and thus power relations related to gender—are seen as immutable and apolitical. Naturalised notions of gender not only legitimate women’s oppression but also repudiate the lives of gender non-conforming people, such as trans, intersex, genderqueers, and non-binary persons. Gynocentric ecofeminism seemed to reiterate age-old essentialist claims and hence reinforce rather than challenge patriarchal and heteronormative power relations. Although Gaard herself calls for the rejection of all kinds of essentialisms in one of her previous articles (Gaard 2011), her notion of “mammal mothers” as a conceptual basis for a feminist theorisation of milk suggests otherwise.

In a similar fashion as Gaard, ecofeminist and animal ethics scholar Carol J. Adams has suggested that the domination of women and the suffering of cows in the milk industry is based on the structurally similar operation of oppression, that is, on “the sexual exploitation of female bodies” (Adams 2017, 19). In conceptualising this connection, she critically analyses the advertisements of milk and other dairy products that often represent cows as feminised and sexualised figures, such as cows wearing high heels, garters, or scarves. The sexualisation of cows in her view serves the normative logic through which the “food” animals are culturally produced as objects of desire and consumption. According to this argument, the feminisation of cows is connected to the misogynist cultural norms that construct women as sexual objects available for symbolic and physical consumption (Adams 2017, 20). Adams develops this argument in her trailblazing book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (2015/1990), in which she coined the concept of “feminised protein”. In her words, the concept seeks “to call attention to the use of female animals’ reproductive cycles to produce food” and to the ways in which cows’ “labor is both reproduction and production” (Adams 2017, 22).

When it comes to the specific case of bovine milk production, Adams argues that “Feminized protein from other species that is sold to humans arises from a *destroyed relationship between mother and child* and signals our broken

14 For more on the theoretical commitments of gynocentric ecofeminist scholars regarding “gender”, see, e.g., Kuura Irni’s chapter in this book.

relationship with other animals" (2017, 22, emphasis added). Throughout her work, she has defended a feminist ethics of care as a form of resistance against the sexual oppression of women and the violent treatment of factory farmed animals.¹⁵ As a critique of the milk industry, she calls for what might be characterised as "care ethical sisterhood", that acknowledges the connection between misogyny and the industrialised oppression of female animals, such as cows (Adams 2017, 36–37). In a similar manner as Gaard with her concept of "mammal mothers", Adams operates with the biologist concept of "females", understanding "motherhood" primarily as a natural and not social category.

The ecofeminist arguments highlighting the connection between human mothers and cows might be viewed as ethically valuable, for they take the suffering of cows seriously as a feminist question. I agree that the exploitation of cows and calves in the milk industry should gain more critical analysis in feminist discussions of nursing, as should also the different forms of milk colonialism as Gaard reminds us. These ecofeminist accounts of milk are thus important as they expose and problematise the anthropocentric and colonialist assumptions and practices regarding lactation. They also offer useful insights into understanding the ways in which misogynist cultural norms affect the normative legitimation of the violent treatment of cows and calves in the milk industry as well as the commercial consumption of animal flesh and milk.

It is my contention, however, that their notion of gender is highly problematic, since they understand it narrowly in terms of biological sex and, as a result, overlook the feminist critique of biological reductionism. Ignoring this critique has consequences on how they come to formulate the key concepts of their ecofeminist approaches to milk. Both of their accounts become anchored to the conceptual pairings of "mothers" and "mammal mothers" as well as "female animals" and "women". To sum up my argument in this section, although Gaard and Adams's ecofeminist accounts of milk offer useful insights into dismantling certain anthropocentric and colonialist frameworks of lactation, their approach ultimately ends up normalising rather than questioning the binary notion of gender understood as a natural category of "sex".

3 Problematising the Lactating Body

One of the reasons behind the naturalisation of gender in ecofeminist accounts of nursing might be that lactation along with the mammary gland are generally

15 For a sustained exploration of the feminist care tradition in animal ethics, see, e.g., Donovan and Adams (2007).

taken as natural features marking the biological difference between the sexes, features that connect humans (and particularly *females*) to other mammals. Historically, it is indeed breastfeeding that has been utilised to distinguish the class of “mammals” along with the separate and binary categories of male and female. In Carolus Linnaeus’s (1758) taxonomic classification of animal species, the mammary gland is the defining feature of *mammalia*, a concept Linnaeus coined as part of his attempt to differentiate the class of animals covering humans, apes, ungulates, sloths, sea cows, elephants, bats and all other animals with hair, a four-chambered heart, and three ear bones.

Linnaeus’s classification was far from neutral, however. As an historian of science Londa Schiebinger (1993) argues, the taxonomy reflected certain political trends and questions of the time. According to Schiebinger, Linnaeus’s scientific interest in *mammae* was deeply informed by his strong opposition to wet nursing, a common practice in 18th century Europe.¹⁶ Wet nursing means that someone other than the birthing parent is nursing the baby, such as hired wet nurses. In Paris and Lyon, for example, families irrespective of their class status, sent up to 90 % of their children to wet nurses in the countryside during this era (Schiebinger 1993, 404). Whereas European families usually employed peasants for the task, in overseas colonies Indigenous women and especially women of African descent were forced to work as wet nurses to white settler and slave owner families, a violent practice that left their own infants malnourished (Schiebinger 1993, 402). Mirroring the prevalent expert and medical discourse of the time, Linnaeus—who himself was a practicing physician—believed that breastfeeding was the birthing mother’s natural task that wet nursing jeopardised (Schiebinger 1993, 405).

Another reason for the opposition to wet nursing was sentiments related to the hierarchical class system, most evidently, the fear of contamination between “lower” and “upper” classes. As Schiebinger notes, “Linnaeus, for example, cautioned that the character of the (upper-class) child could easily be corrupted by the milk of (lower-class) wet nurses” (Schiebinger 1993, 407). The political opposition to wet nursing emerged in parallel to the strengthening of middle and upper-class women’s domestic role and the weakening of their public position. While wet nursing solved the challenges of child rearing for middle and upper-class families, it was soon realised that wet nursing was

16 Wet nursing began as early as 2000 BC and continued as a common practice until the political control of it along with the invention of the feeding bottle and bovine milk formula in the 19th century (see e.g., Stevens et al. 2009).

connected to high infant mortality.¹⁷ Declining population became a major problem for the French and other European governments as capitalist, colonialist, and military expansion required more labour power. The legal and social regulation of breastfeeding proved one of the central strategies to combat infant mortality. The aim of controlling breastfeeding and the use of wet nurses manifested in several laws of the time. The French National Convention, for example, ruled in 1793 that only (healthy) mothers who breastfed their children would be eligible for state aid; similarly, a 1794 Prussian law made it mandatory for all (healthy) mothers to breastfeed their infants (Schiebinger, 1993, 408).

In addition to legal reform, the regulation of breastfeeding also took highly normative and moralistic dimensions. Governments developed education programs and training targeting not only obstetricians and midwives but also, and importantly, mothers. To reinforce maternal duties, medical authorities published health and conduct manuals for mothers, for example. These normative discourses of nursing gained powerful momentum from the philosophical and popular belief of the time that “the laws of nature” also dictated social order. Unsurprisingly, then, many experts pleaded women to listen to their “animal instinct” to get them to breastfeed their own infants. This was true to Linnaeus as well.¹⁸ He claimed that mothers who left their infants to wet nurses barbarically violated the laws of nature. Unlike the unruly mothers who relegated breastfeeding to wet nurses, Linnaeus observed that even the most fearful of the beasts, such as the lion and the tiger “mothers”, gently nursed their young (Schiebinger 1993, 404–6). In other words, the political, legal, and expert discourse of the time pressurized and even forced birthing parents to breastfeed as it was understood as a necessary means to restore the natural order of things.¹⁹ A central means to achieve “the natural order of things” was to define breastfeeding as a natural task of women.

Naturalising breastfeeding as a main task of mothers thus became a central tool of population politics and the way through which middle and upper-class women were relocated back to their natural place in society, that is, the sphere

17 Due to economic pressures, wet nurses often took on more nurslings than they were able to feed sufficiently. While the children sent for wet nursing were often treated inadequately, also the infants of wet nurses were regularly neglected, resulting in malnourishment and death (Fildes 1988, 193).

18 Likewise, one of the era’s most prominent philosophers of natural order, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, defended the view that mothers who refused to nurse violated natural laws and thus threatened the moral order of nations. See Rousseau (2010).

19 Like wet-nursing, bottle-feeding gave rise to similar moralistic debates, see e.g., Obladen (2014).

of the home. Mother's milk was construed as the foundation of a healthy relationship between mother and child and, by extension, of civil society. As Schiebinger notes, "Linnaeus thus followed well-established Western conceptions when he suggested that women belong to nature in ways that men do not" (Schiebinger 1993, 395). The political, scientific, and expert discourse of nursing thus normalised and legitimated women's exclusion from public life by defining women as closer to nature than men, as the lactating prototype of mammals. As becomes clear from Schiebinger's historical analysis of the cultural context of Linnaeus's taxonomy, the racialised gender and class politics of the time shaped his concept of mammals in general and female mammals in particular. The naturalised notion of breastfeeding as the primary task of female mammals besides reproducing offspring reinforced the decline of women's political position and rights in Europe at the turn of the 18th century.

Despite the efforts of naturalising breastfeeding as one of the definitive characters of women as female mammals, nursing is—as Schiebinger's analysis demonstrates—eminently an historical and social practice. Although lactation is a physiological ability of certain bodies, social norms and understandings of gender, race, and class, for example, condition and regulate the ways in which nursing has been socially organised. Far from a neutral and natural practice, breastfeeding has been employed as a regulative mechanism to foster the population growth of white, heterosexual, and middle- and upper-class families in the 18th century Europe. From this vantage point, it is not surprising that although the political control of nursing is more subtle today as nursing is regulated mainly through national recommendations and instructions, the socio-economic background still affects breastfeeding. Population growth and health is rarely articulated as explicit reasons in encouraging certain families to choose nursing in Western countries. Yet, work life is often arranged so (e.g., paid family leave and/or making it possible for employees to express milk at workplace) that nursing remains an available option—even if limited—mostly to white families with higher income and education (see e.g., Heck et al 2006; Dodgson 2012; Smith 2018).

Returning to the ecofeminist approach to milk, then, I argue that building a feminist account of milk on the concept of "mammal mothers" and the conceptual pairing of "mothers" and "cow mothers" risks repeating the biologist assumptions of nursing cultivated in the discourses of *mammalia* and "the natural law" during the Enlightenment era. Relying on the naturalised categories of mammals and mammal mothers not only echoes age-old conceptualisations of women as closer to animals and nature than men, but it also excludes those who do not conform to the binary categorisation of sex, such as gender-diverse parents who nurse or chestfeed, including non-binary and

trans parents. The use of gender essentialist language resurrects hetero- and cis-normative vocabulary as a conceptual basis for feminist theorisations of nursing and milk. Ecofeminists, such as Gaard and Adams, who defend the concept of “mammal mothers” resemble maternalist and gynocentric feminists, who emphasise the language of sexual difference and understand both pregnancy and nursing as the fundamental features of women’s embodied experience and thus key aspects of feminist politics (see e.g., Hausman 2004). The problem is not, to make clear, the feminist emphasis on pregnancy or nursing *per se*, but the conceptualisation of these topics exclusively in terms of womanhood, sexual difference, and the binary notion of gender. It must be stressed, though, that in certain branches of maternalist feminism or “feminist motherhood studies,” the recognition of gender diversity starts to be commonplace (see e.g., Green 2020; Joutseno 2021).

It is my contention that understanding nursing as a social practice allows us to build ecofeminist accounts of milk on the conceptual basis that both acknowledges and affirms gender diversity. Gender is a historical construct through which those who do not conform to cis- and heteronormative notions of bodies have been excluded from the ideal of what counts as a “normal” human (see e.g., Karhu 2022). Therefore, it is necessary for feminist theorisations of milk and nursing to resist the history of normalisation and pathologisation through which certain populations have been dictated as abnormal or “less-than-human,” to borrow Judith Butler’s term (see e.g., Butler 2004, 2). Whereas the political, medical, and legal recognition of gender diversity has slowly started to get ground, nursing is still seen as something that only cis-women who have recently given birth can do. The hegemonic assumption is, as Mathilde Cohen notes, that “only ‘mothers’ breastfeed, that is, only bio-mothers who use their own milk to nurse their children, leaving out [...] not only male, transgender, and non-binary breastfeeders, but also cross-nursers or those using donor human milk” (Cohen 2017, 158).²⁰ I would add also adoptive mothers, and adoptive trans or non-binary parents as well as non-birthing mothers/parents (including lesbian and trans mothers as well as nonbinary parents) as it is possible to induce milk production without having given birth.

While there are multiple medical and technological ways to support milk production for birthing or non-birthing parents, the biggest obstacles seem to be the strict cultural norms and negative attitudes towards those parents who wish to nurse but who do not fit the naturalised notion of what a nursing

20 For more on milk sharing as a feminist question, see, e.g., Carter and Reyes-Foster (2020).

parent looks like.²¹ As Cohen points out, trans or non-binary parents who wish to nurse or chestfeed need to negotiate not only with the cultural assumption that only mothers (and only *cis*-mothers) breastfeed but also with the negative cultural construction of feminised bodily fluids, such as milk and menstrual blood, that are considered shameful and dirty when leaking through clothes and becoming visible (Cohen 2017, 157; see also Whiley et al. 2020). Chest-feeding and nursing by non-binary or trans parents can be seen as subversive practices, since they disrupt the hegemonic norms regarding gender, nursing, and parenting as well as the hierarchical order of masculinity and femininity (Cohen 2017, 157; see also Lee 2017; Lee 2018b; Lee 2019). While mothers who breastfeed publicly or for an “extended” time often face harassment or shaming (see e.g., Whiley et al 2020), it is important to bear in mind that for those who do not fit the normative notion of gender the consequences might be even more devastating as negative attitudes towards public nursing gets amplified through transphobia or anti-queer prejudices, for example. It is therefore not enough to provide gender-neutral lactation spaces or inclusive vocabulary; the norms of nursing need to be questioned in a much more profound way. Similarly, calling into question the anthropocentric norms of nursing does not go far enough. This was the problem with the ecofeminist accounts of milk I discussed in the second section. Formulating a feminist understanding of nursing and critique of the milk industry requires the problematisation of *both* anthropocentrism *and* hetero- and cis-normativity. Next, I will suggest an alternative theoretical and conceptual approach to developing an ecofeminist critique of the milk industry.

4 Biocapitalist Bovines

In contrast to the ecofeminist critique of the milk industry that is based on the concept of “mammal mothers”, I suggest that the starting point and object for such a critique should be the capitalist exploitation of the reproductive capacities of cows. Gaard herself implies this when she notes that “the industrialized dairy system is also a ‘free rider,’ profiting at the expense of the cows...” as it

21 Another predominant naturalised assumption of nursing is that it happens easily, naturally, and without pain (McCaughey 2010). Yet nursing—including nursing by birthing parents—often requires different kinds of medical and technological assistance, including breastfeeding counselling and peer support, manual or electric breast bumping equipment, feeding bottles, syringes, supplemental nursing system (SNS), supplemental feeding, donor milk and medication (e.g., for inducing milk; for the pain during the first days or weeks of nursing; or for blocked milk ducts or mastitis).

“extract[s] wealth from animal nature” (Gaard 2013, 603). Adams also points to this direction with her critical analysis of “feminised protein” that is extracted from cows by exploiting their production and reproduction. It is my contention that a feminist critique of capitalism offers a more promising avenue for formulating an ecofeminist argument against bovine milk production. Instead of forging an analogy between women and cows in terms of ethical or empathetic sisterhood, I argue that shifting the focus to the commodification of the reproductive capacities of animals and humans alike can avoid the pitfalls of biological reductionism.

The “free-riding” aspect of capitalism that Gaard mentions is one of the central objects of critique in the tradition of Marxist ecofeminism originating in the 1970s and 80s. Maria Mies (1986/1998), for example, argues that the birth of capitalism relied not only on the appropriation of surplus value generated by wage-labourers but also, and importantly, on the violent expropriation of women’s reproductive labour (e.g., child bearing and care work), nature’s production as well as the work in the colonies. According to Mies, these assets were naturalised and externalised so that they were viewed as “natural resources” freely and infinitely available for capital accumulation (Mies 1998, XI). Mies’s overall argument is that the process of expropriation is not just a phase in early capitalism, but a fundamental and structural part of capitalism in general (see also Fraser 2016).

Yet, as feminist philosopher Johanna Oksala (2018, 223) states, although Marxist ecofeminism offers us tools to understand the structural connection between gender oppression, colonialism, ecological destruction, and capitalism, its shortcoming is that it remains theoretically too abstract in its aim to bring together historically and geographically very complex and variegated set of phenomena. In my view, this holds true also to Gaard’s framework of post-colonial and feminist milk studies. In sum, it offers necessary insights into the multiple ways in which the global milk industry exploits humans and animals alike in a colonialist manner, but it risks remaining too vague, as I have already argued. Rejecting the monolithic understanding of capitalism, Oksala argues that Marxist ecofeminism needs to be updated to address some of capitalism’s, or more precisely biocapitalism’s, *specific* mechanisms today that “absorb[b] both nature and women’s reproductive labor into its value circuits” (2018, 223). Biocapitalism refers to the commodification of life and to the extraction of surplus value from living beings or biological processes.²² Mushrooming

22 For more on the theorisation of biocapitalism and its links to neoliberalism, see, e.g., Peters & Venkatesan (2010).

biotechnology and life science companies is an example of the rapid expansion of biocapitalist markets today.

Oksala (2018, 223) identifies two different mechanisms of contemporary biocapitalism: “the commodification of nature as nature” and “the real subsumption of nature”. For Oksala, contemporary biocapitalism operates analogously in commodifying nature and reproductive labor done by women and gender minorities, and therefore ecofeminist critique should take these two mechanisms as its main target. While Oksala illustrates these mechanisms by examining the marketisation of carbon pollution, care work as well as the global fertility market, I contend that both mechanisms also provide important insights into problematising the expropriation of cows and their reproductive labour in the dairy industry. I argue that this extension to nonhuman animals is not only a possible but necessary extension of Oksala’s critique. Given the massive scale of the “food animal” industry globally, it is imperative that an ecofeminist critique of capitalism addresses the commodification of nonhuman animals as well. For the sake of my argument, I will summarise Oksala’s analysis of each mechanism, beginning with the “commodification of nature as nature”, and showing how they can be employed to analyse the dairy industry as well. Before delving deeper into analysing the mechanisms of capitalism, I want to emphasise that although Oksala uses the terms “woman” and “women” rather conventionally, her arguments are in my view still valid as her focus is on the capitalist exploitation of reproductive capacities and labour and not *female* bodies *per se*. When paraphrasing her work, I use therefore the expression of “women and gender minorities” to stress that in addition to women reproductive work is done also by people with nonnormative genders.

While early venture capitalism sought to discover new “virgin territories” to expropriate and “free-ride” costs, contemporary neoliberal capitalism has taken new forms as those kinds of “virgin territories” are not available in the same sense anymore. Consequently, as Oksala (2018, 224, see also Smith 2007) notes, “nature itself has become capitalised to an unprecedented extent” as a result of which “... a whole new range of ‘ecological commodities’ has been produced” such as carbon or pollution credits. In this process, nature is first produced as external and free resource to capitalist expropriation (e.g., manufacturing that causes pollution), but then internalised into capitalist value circuits by giving it exchange value (e.g., carbon credits). As Oksala (2018, 224) explains: “Hence, we can identify a twin movement: capital externalizes costs—for example, by emitting pollution—which provides opportunities for capital accumulation through mechanisms of internalization by other firms (or sometimes even the same firms) in the form of pollution trading, for example”. This raises a set of ecological and philosophical problems.

First, many functions of biocapitalism are still based on the practice of free-riding on nature as it externalises costs. Second, “the attempt to protect the environment by turning it into an internal part of capitalist markets” faces two interrelated problems as well (Oksala 2018, 224). Economically, it is difficult to turn the environment and complex ecosystems—including air quality, certain species of plants, or temperature, for example—into distinct goods and services that commodification process requires, as it is equally challenging to assign proper economic prices to them (Oksala 2018, 225; see also Foster 2002, 27–28). But as Oksala emphasises, the most serious problem in the “commodification of nature as nature” is philosophical. Nature’s internalisation into capitalist markets and the ensuing monetisation of it omits the question of ethical values.

Oksala’s example here is the government discussions of bioenergy and carbon sinks. Many EU countries seek to meet the EU’s climate and energy targets by investing in bioenergy. As it is based on extensive logging, the debate has revolved around the issue of whether the production of bioenergy boosts or diminishes forests as carbon sinks. The claim favored by many governments of those countries with strong logging industry, such as Finland and Sweden, is that replacing old-growth forests by younger, faster-growing and intensively cultivated forests will strengthen them as carbon sinks. Yet, as Oksala points out, “Irrespective of whether this claim is true or not, what the example should make clear is that in such a framework, the fact that forests are old and ecologically diverse has no value.” (Oksala 2018, 225). The elimination of old forests is thus framed as environmental protection, for carbon sinks can be commodified into carbon credits and offsets (that enable companies to keep polluting as emissions are “compensated”). Paradoxically, then, the market mechanisms that should protect the environment only worsens biodiversity loss (Oksala 2018, 225).

Oksala argues that an analogous logic of commodification can be found in the way that reproductive labour and care work done mostly by women and gender minorities are internalised into capitalist markets as part of the fast neoliberalisation of our economies (2018, 225). The issue is thus not only that women are assumed to do reproductive and care work for free in the private sphere (on which capitalism “free-rides”), but also the internalisation of care work within the capitalist system by generating new private markets for it. One of the problems in this new form of commodification is the unequal “global care chains”.²³ As Oksala (2018, 226) notes, “This has resulted in new

23 The concept was first coined by Arlie Hochschild (2000).

forms of gender oppression, as it is often poor immigrant women from ethnic minorities who now end up providing the commodified care services” that are physically and emotionally exhausting and requires the workers to leave their families and native countries. This work includes for instance forms of domestic or institutional labour and care for children, the sick, the elderly, or people with disabilities. Another problem is that care work is systematically underpaid. This has led to “the crisis of care”, referring to “the lack of sufficient numbers of qualified care-workers who actually care” (Oksala 2018, 228). Commodification of care work has not, in other words, solved the problem of gender division of labour in private or public spheres but created “feminized service economy” as a new form of gender oppression marked by classist and racist hierarchies. Or, as Oksala (2018, 228) sums up: “When reproductive work is not commodified, we have the free-riding problem; when it is turned into paid services, we face the crisis of care”.

Now, when brought to the framework of the milk industry the mechanism of commodification explained above can be employed to examine the ways in which capitalism commodifies cows and their reproductive labour. As Kathryn Gillespie (2021, 281) points out, cows are particularly apt example of commodification as “the word cattle has its root in chattel (property)”. In a similar way as in the early capitalism, the milk industry externalises costs by extracting²⁴ wealth from animal labour (and from undercompensated human labour). Cows are understood as a natural resource that can be freely used to produce use value (such as milk and flesh) for consumption and thus to the accumulation of surplus value. Animals, of course, are not workers in the sense of wage labourers as they do not get any compensation for their work besides minimum, often squalid, upkeep. Rather, in the capitalist system, “food” animals are used as means of production and treated as property (see e.g., Stache 2020). Or, as Bob Torres (2007, 40) puts it: “(t)he bodies and functions of animals have been completely appropriated by capital, and, subsequently, put to use in a single way only, subordinating the total animal being to this single productive activity”.

Indeed, animals are commodified equivalent to Oksala’s description of “the commodification of nature as nature”. Cows in the dairy industry are not only used as a natural resource but their whole bodies and parts of them are commodified through and through. As Gillespie (2021, 282) explains, “To prompt this milk production, cows must give birth regularly, and so they are artificially inseminated annually, gestate for nine months, their calves are removed

24 The industry is also “free-riding” in the sense that it does not provide any compensation for the environmental devastation it causes (see e.g., Smith 2017, 125).

immediately after birth, and they are milked for 300 days out of every year". A cow gives birth to 1 to 5 calves, after which they are considered "spent" (Gillespie 2021, 283). Once cows become too exhausted from constant pregnancies and milk suction, they are sold to meat and leather companies to be killed and commodified as flesh products for the meat industry. Those body parts that cannot be used in the meat and leather industry are sold to rendering companies that manufacture fertilisers, glue, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals, for example. While the natural lifespan of a cow is 15–20 years, bovines used for milk production are commonly killed already at the age of four to five.

The highly industrialised capitalist food system thus controls the whole *lives* of the cows from birth to their killing. During their short life, cows' reproductive labour, their milk, and calves are appropriated for profit as "free" natural resources, and after death, the killed bodies of cows and body parts are once again internalised into the capitalist circuits of valorisation. Some estimates put the size of the global commodification of "food" animals at several billions annually; the world's largest meat and dairy company (JBS) alone profited 50\$ billion US dollars in 2020.²⁵ Since the bodies of cows are thoroughly commodified, merely advancing animal welfare laws, for example, does not solve the core problem of commodification. Neither does addressing the cultural or hormonal connections between "mammal mothers". Therefore, I contend that an ecofeminist critique of the dairy industry should take capitalism as its main target by posing critical questions regarding the definition of cows and their reproductive capacities not only as property but also as material resources "freely" available for capital accumulation—indeed, as bodies that can be freely produced, reproduced, used, and then killed for profit.

The other mechanism of contemporary capitalism Oksala identifies is "the real subsumption of nature",²⁶ which refers to the manipulation and intensification of biological productivity that aims to make natural assets more profitable for commercial exploitation (2018, 227). The real subsumption of nature thus allows companies to extract "natural resources" irrespective of natural production cycles. The aim of modifying biophysical processes is to enhance biological productivity and thus accumulation of capital. Combined with the fast development of biotechnological innovations, the real subsumption of nature has afforded unprecedented opportunities to capitalist expansion (Oksala 2018, 228). Oksala gives two examples that illustrate these aspects of contemporary biocapitalism: the forestry industry and the commodification of

25 <https://www.iatp.org/companies-dominating-market-farm-display-case> (accessed December 5, 2021).

26 The concept draws on a new, ecological interpretation of Marx's notions of formal and real subsumption of labour. For more on this interpretation, see e.g., Boyd et al. (2001).

assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs). While early capitalism was defined by extensive logging of old-growth forests and the subsequent deforestation, “today firms and state agencies aim to intervene in the biological basis of forest growth” (Oksala 2018, 227). The industry thus relies on the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, manual and mechanical planting of trees, and manipulation of genetic material, for example. I have already addressed the ecological problems of today’s plantation forestry, so suffice it here to reiterate that biotechnologies are used to increase profits, not biodiversity.

A similar logic can be found in the global fertility market. As Oksala maintains, the emergence of ARTs has offered new ways to exploit “reproductive labor due to the ability of these technologies to alter radically the biological process of human reproduction” (2018, 228). Given the development of ARTs, it is now possible to implant an embryo into the womb of a surrogate. This process is organised more and more through market intermediaries who control the access to gametes and hire surrogates. The private clinics will prepare the uterine lining of the surrogates for the embryo transfer, which “involves lengthy medical procedures and complex drug regimes” (Oksala 2018, 228). I want to emphasise that the problem is not the ARTs themselves. It must be acknowledged that these technologies have significantly advanced the options for LGBTIQ+ people, for example, to reproduce beyond the heteronormative framework. Rather, the problem is the capitalist appropriation of these technologies and the bodily capacities of women and those gender minorities who possess the reproductive system required for gestation. The issue is thus not the technology itself but the commodification of it. As Oksala (2018, 229) argues, “gestational surrogacy can be viewed analogously to the real subsumption of nature by capital: capital is able to take hold of and transform biological reproduction and use it as a source of the creation of new markets and of new forms of capital accumulation”.

The feminist problem with surrogacy markets is that capitalism externalises risks of the medical processes, pregnancies, and deliveries to surrogates (and infants), who often belong to poor, oppressed, and otherwise vulnerable groups (Oksala 2018, 229–30). The markets are booming in countries, where surrogacy companies are not regulated, such as Ukraine. Before the war in Ukraine, the country held over a quarter of the global surrogacy market due to the lack of government regulation, even though there were rising concerns over human rights violations, such as the abuse of surrogates as well as the abandonment and trafficking of children (Lamberton 2020).²⁷

27 As journalists have documented, the war has made the situation even worse, see e.g., Dominus (2022).

I argue that a similar logic of “the real subsumption of nature” can be found from the dairy industry. In addition to the internalisation of cows into capitalist markets as living and finally as dead bodies and body parts, the commodification of bovines takes on another specific form in today’s biocapitalism. As many critical animal studies scholars have noted, dairy producers today employ the newest biotechnological innovations to manipulate and transform the biophysical features of bovine animals to extend the productivity and maximise profitability of their bodies when they still are alive (see e.g., Gillespie 2014; Gillespie 2018; Lonkila 2017; Twine 2010). The fact that milk products are vastly available today around the year is the result of manipulating the reproduction cycle of cows. The milk industry today utilises different biotechnological innovations to increase productivity, ranging from genetic breeding,²⁸ antibiotics, high-volume milking machines, genetically engineered bovine growth hormones (e.g., recombinant bovine somatotropin, rBST), and artificial insemination to embryo transfer technologies, the latter being the next big step in the dairy industry.

As the representative of a company providing biotechnological innovations for the milk industry explains: “Embryo transfer (ET) is one option that can increase a cow’s reproductive efficiency, allowing her to have numerous calves per year. While the average cow produces six to seven calves in her lifetime, ET can increase her reproductive efficiency to numerous calves per year—allowing breeders to multiply the success of their superior pedigrees” (Sara Kober cited in Gillespie 2018, 169–170). As these examples demonstrate, contemporary biocapitalism exploits cows not only by a complete commodification of their living and killed bodies, but also by transforming and manipulating their reproductive capacities by pushing them to extreme limits to maximise productivity. As a result, the cows—not the companies—are shouldering the risks: during their short lives, they are increasingly vulnerable to many painful health problems including recurrent mastitis, hoof infections, emotional distress, lameness, and compromised mobility.

I contend that a fundamental part of the biocapitalist workings of today’s dairy production is the gendering of the reproductive capacities of bovine animals and the commodification of them. As Gillespie states, the milk industry “frame[s] animals through a binary understanding of sex and gender, categorizing them as being female or male and as reproductively viable or not” (Gillespie 2018, 177). The gendering of bovines based on their reproductive capacities is evident in the vocabulary used to describe them: a cow

28 For more on the commodification of genetic breeding of dairy cows, see, e.g., Lonkila (2017).

refers to an animal who has given birth to at least one calf, a heifer is defined as a female who has not yet given birth, a steer refers to a castrated male, and bull to an intact adult male (Gillespie 2018, 8). Whereas calves defined as male are removed after birth to be sold to veal or beef production (even day-old calves), calves defined a female are either “raised on the same farm where they were born or moved to another farm until they reach reproductive maturity” (Gillespie 2018, 198). If cows defined as females are sterile or if their milk production or fertility declines, they are slaughtered (Gillespie 2018, 177). The gendering of these animals has thus consequences on the ways in which each animal is commodified as well as on the ways in which the industry controls and manipulates the reproductive systems of bovines.

If the concept of “mammal motherhood” is taken for granted as a conceptual tool in outlining an ecofeminist critique of the dairy industry, the risk is that—in addition to the problems I have discussed earlier in this chapter—the gendering effects on *all* the calves born within the confines of the industry gets omitted. As Gillespie notes, those calves defined as males are often deemed superfluous: their economic value for the industry is low (Gillespie 2021, 282). If they are not immediately killed as “waste” or raised 4–6 months for veal, a few are selected as breeding bulls for semen production, “where they are forcibly ejaculated by artificial vagina or electro-ejaculator” to extract profit from their bodies (Gillespie 2021, 283).²⁹ The latest development in the industry makes it even possible to produce “sex-specific” semen as a commodity, an effort to eliminate the birth of useless “male” calves and to increase the number of calves with suitable reproductive organs to be utilised for milk production (Gillespie 2021, 283).

Gendering plays thus a crucial role in the construction of bovines as commodity: not only their function as “labourers” in the industry but also the ability of their bodies to extract profit gets determined based on their reproductive capacities. In other words, bovines in the dairy industry are naturalised and commodified both as *constantly* lactating mammals and raw material to be appropriated and manipulated for capital accumulation.

5 Conclusion: Towards an Ecofeminist Critique of Biocapitalism

Recent ecofeminist discussions of milk production have importantly questioned the anthropocentric framework of most feminist accounts of milk and

29 For more on artificial insemination in terms of sexual violence and moral panic around animal “sex”, see, e.g., Marianna Szczygielska and Agata Kowalewska’s chapter in this book.

nursing, thus expanding the analysis of lactation to cover also other mammals than merely “human mothers”. Ecofeminist approaches to milk, such as Gaard’s “feminist postcolonial milk studies” and Adams’s account of non-speciesist sisterhood, have thus been able to expose and question the oppression of “other” mammal mothers in the dairy industry, for example. As I have showed in my article, turning to the vocabulary of mammals is not unproblematic, however. The analogy of cows and human mothers as “mammal mothers” has been so commonplace in ecofeminist discussions of milk that it is difficult to find any analyses of dairy production that does not employ it. I argue that the vocabulary of mammals as the basis of ecofeminist milk studies reproduces naturalised notions of women as closer to animals than men. The naturalisation of breastfeeding in this sense is problematic for three reasons.

First, it draws a simplified and abstract parallel between women and animals and, in turn, conceptualises women based on their capacity to breastfeed. Historically, the definition of women in terms of their reproductive capacities has operated as a way of excluding them (and other feminised groups) from the public sphere and barring their political participation. Second, the concept of “mammal mothers” reinforces biologist notions of gender interpreted as “sex”. Understanding breastfeeding as something that only “mammal mothers” can do not only exclude those who do not conform to the binary notion of gender but also falls prey to reducing complex social and historical practices, such as parenting and infant feeding, solely to biology. Third, building a feminist critique of the milk industry on the biologist notions of sex ignores the ways in which the milk industry itself produces commodified notions of binary gender. It is exactly the gendering aspects of commodification and biotechnological engineering on which the biocapitalist exploitation of bovine bodies rest today.

Instead of “mammal mothers”, I suggest that ecofeminist critique of the milk industry should take as its starting point a feminist critique of capitalism. By shifting the focus from “mammal motherhood” to the problematisation of biocapitalism, I critically build upon the previous ecofeminist approaches to milk. In particular, Gaard’s feminist and postcolonial approach to milk and Adams’s account of the exploitation of cow’s reproductive capacities offer budding efforts to formulate an ecofeminist notion of milk in terms of a critique of capitalism. Updating their central concepts and theoretical frameworks, I suggest that the focus should be more clearly on the different mechanisms of commodification that the milk industry involves today rather than the shared motherhood between women and cows. This makes it possible to expose the oppressive logics of contemporary biocapitalism, most importantly, the way in which the reproductive capacities of both humans and

animals are appropriated for capitalist accumulation. In this sense, also “feminist postcolonial milk studies” becomes highlighted as a critique of capitalism, an economic and normative system on which most of the colonialist practices of the industry continue to rely.

Although it now starts to be customary in feminist theory to question the human/animal divide, the dismantling of the dichotomy does not itself lead to any radical notions of humanity or animality, let alone notions of equality or justice between humans and nonhuman animals. The reason for this is that these concepts are not universal and stable but historically, politically, and culturally constituted. Therefore, the critique of the dualism must consider how “the human” and “the animal” are normatively and politically produced and regulated in specific historical contexts.³⁰ For the same reason, drawing a parallel between women and cows is therefore not enough in exposing the specific mechanisms of exploitation in today’s dairy production. It is for this reason that I suggest a feminist critique of biocapitalism as a theoretical ground on which to begin to theorise an ecofeminist critique of the milk industry and the question of milk more broadly.

Scrutinising the contemporary mechanisms of biocapitalism enables ecofeminists to start asking radical questions on the limits of commodification (Oksala 2018, 230; Gillespie 2021, 292). Questioning the taken-for-granted status of contemporary capitalism opens more space for philosophical ecofeminist imagination, one that takes seriously the violent treatment of nonhumans as a feminist question but avoids the pitfalls of biologism. Resisting the oppression and commodification of the bodies that can reproduce, breastfeed, chestfeed, or lactate might bring about alternative understandings of our interdependent relations beyond the species line, throwing solidarity and nonviolence into sharp relief as the central values of ecofeminism.

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30 I want to thank Johanna Oksala for emphasising this point in one of our discussions of animal philosophy.

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PART 5

Veganism and Possibilities for Resistance



Men's Veganism: a Pathway towards More Egalitarian Masculinities?

Kadri Aavik

1 Introduction¹

One of the defining features of the Anthropocene is the killing of nonhuman animals on a massive scale, mainly for human food: every year, over 70 billion land animals lose their lives (Faunalytics 2018). At the same time, animal agriculture is a key driver of climate change (Steinfeld et al. 2006; Goodland and Anhang 2009). While the term “Anthropocene” implies all humanity’s equal involvement in ecological destruction and exploitation of nonhuman beings, these disastrous processes have primarily been driven by the activities of privileged White men and masculine values in Western societies (Moore 2017; Alaimo 2009, 26). Given this reality, there is an urgent need for a transformation in (particularly White privileged) men’s practices, towards more ecological masculinities—an ideal that involves environmental sustainability and gender equality (and social equality more broadly), with these two aspects entangled (Hultman and Pulé 2018). To encourage this change, it is useful to study men whose ways of life may positively contribute to these goals. Vegan men, having renounced the use of animal products, constitute one such group, as their food practices cause less harm to nonhuman animals and are more ecologically sustainable, compared to conventional animal-based diets.²

In recent years, veganism has gained cultural visibility and received increasing scholarly attention, particularly in Western contexts. Some previous research on veganism has taken a gender perspective, which has included a focus on the links between masculinity and eating nonhuman animals (see, for example, Hart 2018; Potts and Parry 2010; Rothgerber 2013; Sumpter 2015; Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Mycek 2018; DeLessio-Parson 2017; Aavik 2021; Aavik 2023).³ Broadly, these studies suggest that veganism offers potential

¹ This chapter draws on Aavik 2023.

² Compared to animal-based and vegetarian diets, a plant-based diet is optimal in terms of environmental impact, as it produces the lowest greenhouse gas emissions (Chai et al. 2019).

³ Some of this research is on vegetarian men.

for men to do masculinity differently; yet this does not mean that vegan men always or fundamentally challenge gendered (and other) power relations; they may sometimes even reinforce traditional masculinity norms (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Hart 2018). Given the somewhat ambivalent relationship between the potential of men's veganism to foster alternative ways of doing gender, as indicated by previous research, there is a need to examine this issue further.

In this chapter, I examine the potential of men's veganism to foster alternative, more egalitarian ways of doing masculinity, drawing on 61 qualitative interviews with vegan men based in Finland and Estonia. More specifically, I explore vegan men's explicit and implicit gender and intersectional politics and practices and ways of doing masculinity within the following three themes: a) identity construction b) empathy and emotions c) food and cooking. The first of these themes explores vegan men's sense of self and how it has changed upon going vegan, according to the men themselves. The latter two aspects are culturally feminised and are thus interesting to study in the context of men and masculinities. Altogether, these themes shed light on the ways in which vegan men do gender and veganism and how these are interrelated (see DeLessio-Parson 2017).

In exploring these issues, this chapter engages with gender, social change, sustainable food practices, and human-animal relations in the age of the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). It responds to the need to gain new insights into "men's multiple roles in climate change" (MenEngage Alliance 2016, 2) as well as in advancing more egalitarian gender and other social power relations, linking these two aspects.

The narratives of Finnish and Estonian vegan men in this study indicate that veganism encourages the development of empathy in men towards nonhuman and human beings, even for vegan men who do not explicitly and consciously position themselves as profeminist allies or embrace commitments to intersectional justice. Yet, there is some mismatch in certain contexts between vegan men's personal practices and values and their public performances of veganism in which they at times rely on normative masculinity scripts. Overall, I argue that vegan men's practices contribute to the emergent cultural change towards more egalitarian masculinities.

2 Conceptualising Veganism

In both scholarly and activist discourses, a variety of conceptualisations of veganism have been offered, for example, focusing on veganism as an

identity, including motivations behind veganism (e.g., “health veganism”) or linking veganism with various anti-oppression causes. Not all of these ways of approaching veganism are compatible. For instance, veganism has been thought of as a practice that challenges exploitative human-animal relations or as a form of political protest (Taylor and Twine 2014). In more recent definitions, in particular, veganism has been identified as a powerful strategy to combat climate change. There are ongoing debates on what elements should be included in definitions of veganism and how much the concept should be expanded beyond engagement with food and eating (see, for example, Dutkiewicz and Dickstein 2021). Within the tradition of understanding veganism as more than a food practice or individual lifestyle choice (see, for example, Giraud 2021), I approach veganism as a political practice intertwined with other social justice causes (see Ko and Ko 2017, Bailey 2007; Harper 2012). This way of thinking about veganism foregrounds various intersectionalities and power relations, including between different human beings and groups, implicit in food production systems and individual consumption practices.

3 Men’s Veganism from Intersectional Feminist and Critical Masculinities’ Perspectives: Conceptual Insights and Previous Work

An important question in gender and feminist scholarship and activism concerns the potential for more just gender relations and social justice more broadly. In recent decades, scholars in the field of critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM) in particular, have begun to pay critical attention to men’s identities and practices in fostering more egalitarian gender and other social power relations. They “critically address men in the context of gendered power relations”, “naming them as men” (Hearn 2004, 50). One of the key questions emerging from this field is: how to move towards more egalitarian masculinities, that is, doing masculinity in ways that are more oriented towards gender equality and intersectional justice? These concerns align with Black feminist and other intersectional approaches that seek to further social justice (see, for example, Collins and Bilge 2020).⁴

At the same time, in the context of the global ecological crisis, attention has been paid to gender in an effort to move towards more sustainable ways

4 There are debates around the issue of whether intersectionality should retain its original commitment to anti-racist politics, as it was conceptualised in Black feminist approaches or if it can be used to analyse any intersections that appear relevant (see, for example, Collins and Bilge 2020).

of living. More recently, this has included explicit concern with the role of men and masculinities in sustainability efforts (see, for example, Hultman and Pulé 2018; Pulé and Hultman 2020; MacGregor and Seymour 2017; MenEngage Alliance 2016). The concept of ecological masculinities has been introduced to describe men's doing of gender in ways that aspire, on the one hand, towards gender equality (and social equality more broadly) and on the other, to ecologically sustainable ways of living, seeing these two aspects as intimately intertwined (Hultman and Pulé 2018, 51). In the era of the Anthropocene, largely brought about by the practices of privileged White men and masculine values (see Moore 2017), there is an urgent "need to reconstruct the subjectivities and practices of men" (Pease 2020, 108). This would involve "encouraging in men an ontological vulnerability, a relational and embodied sense of self, and empathy and compassion not only in relation to people but also in relation to non-human others and the planet" (Pease 2020, 108).

Globally, meat consumption is higher among men than women (Modlinska et al. 2020) and meat is associated with masculinity (Rogers 2008). Of particular groups of men whose food practices contribute to less violent (towards other species) and more ecologically sustainable ways of living, vegan men stand out as an interesting case. Previous research on veganism from the gender perspective has explored links between masculinity and meat eating, including veganism and vegetarianism in relation to men's identities and practices, primarily in Western contexts (see, for example, Hart 2018; Potts and Parry 2010; Rothgerber 2013; Sumpter 2015; Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Mycek 2018; DeLessio-Parson 2017; Aavik 2023; Aavik 2021; Modlinska et al. 2020). Some of this research suggests, from the point of view of gender and gendered power relations, that the practice of veganism enables and encourages doing masculinity differently, in ways that contest normative masculinities. Ecofeminist scholars have argued that by refraining from consuming nonhuman animals and becoming vegan, men disrupt the link between hegemonic masculinity and meat-eating (Adams 1990), recognised as a powerful element in dominant constructions of Western masculinity. By becoming vegan, men open up avenues for "the negotiation of new, nonnormative masculinities that challenge our traditional understandings of what it means to be manly" (Wright 2015, 26).

Yet, as some research has shown, men's veganism may leave gendered (and other) power relations largely unchallenged (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Hart 2018). Thus, despite or along with this transformative potential, we may also be sceptical of the idea that men's veganism necessarily aligns with or contributes to greater gender and intersectional egalitarianism. Indeed, a number of examples from recent popular culture suggest that veganism and animal

advocacy can be entirely compatible with and support more conventional ways of doing masculinity. For example, the 2018 U.S. film *Game Changers* explicitly promotes links between masculine athletic performance and virility, using these tropes to attract men to veganism.⁵ Some scholarship has documented ways of management, hierarchies, sexism and male privilege in the U.S. animal advocacy movement that align with normative masculinities (see Kemmerer 2013). On the more extreme end, animal advocacy and veganism have been associated with Neo-Nazi ideology in some men's practices (Forchtner and Tominc 2017). Thus, (men's) veganism is not necessarily incompatible with some anti-egalitarian ideologies.

I have previously argued that veganism can constitute one tangible way for men to cultivate and practise greater care towards (non)human others, the environment and the self (Aavik 2021; Aavik 2023). Even if (some) vegan men do not consciously pursue these goals, they may inadvertently contribute positively towards these through their vegan praxis. This can include aspirations towards and/or practising more egalitarian ways of doing gender (Aavik 2021; Aavik 2023). This chapter draws on and expands on these insights.

4 Research Material and Context

The research that informs this chapter draws on semi-structured, in-depth qualitative interviews which I conducted in 2018–2019 with 61 people who identified as men and as vegans, based in Estonia (31) and Finland (30). They were recruited via the two largest vegan-themed Facebook groups in the two language communities: *Eesti Veganid* (Estonian) and *Vegaani* (Finnish). The interviewed men were between 18–56 years of age, with an average age of 34. The time they had been vegan ranged from a few months for some to nearly two decades for others. The research participants constitute a privileged group: they were White, predominantly ethnic Estonian or Finnish, typically middle-class, living in urban areas, and most had completed tertiary education. The analysis is attentive to this intersectionally privileged (Aavik 2020) social position of the research participants.⁶

5 For a critical analysis of this film from a gender perspective, see Oliver 2021.

6 By intersectional privilege, I refer to “the opportunities and advantages that are systematically available to individuals or groups in particular social contexts and situations due to their privileged position on the axes of gender, age, ethnicity, race and other relevant social categories simultaneously” (Aavik 2020: 222). Conceptually similar to Whiteness, such privilege tends to remain invisible, particularly to those in privileged positions, and is therefore

Recruiting participants and establishing rapport with them prior to and during the interviews was facilitated by my own long-time veganism and engagement in vegan activism which I disclosed already in the call for research participants. In the course of the interviews, I often shared my own experiences as a vegan in response to the men's accounts. Thus, in many ways, the emerging narratives were collaboratively produced (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). I illustrate my findings with quotes from the interviews, using pseudonyms to refer to the research participants.

I analysed the interviews using a narrative approach (Gubrium and Holstein 2009; Lawler 2002), focusing on stories that the men told about becoming and living as vegans. The topics explored in the interviews included their experiences of transitioning to veganism, their relationships with non-vegan (significant) others, and their views on gender and masculinity in relation to veganism. For this chapter, I specifically examined how gender figures in the vegan identities and practices of the research participants, especially how they construct masculinity in the context of veganism. Through these narratives, the men made sense of their vegan experience as well as produced their identity (on narrative identity, see for example Ricoeur 1991; McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich 2006). Via sharing stories of their vegan transition and experience, the men signified “who they are for themselves and for others” (McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich 2006, 4). Research on vegan men and masculinities has primarily been conducted in and about Anglo-American countries, with little scholarship on men's veganism in other parts of the world, such as Northern Europe. In Finland and Estonia, vegans make up around 0.5 to 1% of the population (see TNS EMOR 2018 for Estonia; K Group 2019 for Finland). Men make up a numerical minority among vegans, at least in Western societies such as the UK and the U.S. (Oliver 2021). Despite these small numbers, veganism in both contexts has become increasingly culturally visible. Veganism has had a longer presence in Finland. Partly due to this, it is more accepted as an identity and practice in Finland in contrast to Estonia, where its reception, particularly by the medical and nutrition establishment, remains more unfavourable (Aavik 2018, 2019).⁷ Yet, veganism is gradually becoming rapidly more established in Estonia—as evidenced by increasing media coverage, the availability

difficult to study (for a discussion on methodological issues in studying intersectionally privileged groups, see Aavik 2020).

7 The reasons behind this institutional resistance to veganism include strong traditions of meat and dairy production and consumption in Estonia, the entanglement of business interests (of meat and dairy producers) and the production of scientific knowledge on nutrition, and reliance on outdated knowledge on plant-based nutrition in the training of medical doctors and nutrition specialists (for more in this, see Aavik 2018 and 2019).

of a more diverse range of plant-based products, and the presence of vegan eateries.

In terms of gender, Finnish society exhibits more egalitarian gender norms and relations than Estonia,⁸ where more traditional anti-egalitarian masculinities still prevail (Pajumets 2012), partly as a legacy of the Soviet past.⁹ As a commonality in both countries, consuming animal products remains an important element of doing masculinity for most men. Additionally, men may confront the narrative of the difficulty of veganism in cold Nordic climates and the perceived necessity to sustain oneself by consuming animal products.

5 Empirical Insights: Towards More Egalitarian Ways of Doing Gender through a Vegan Praxis

The men in my study regarded becoming vegan as a significant and positive change in their lives. It brought about or facilitated a transformation in their sense of self, other core values, and led to new practices, including some novel ways of doing masculinity, towards egalitarianism and care. In the next sections, I explore this transformation in more detail, focusing on a) vegan men's identity construction, especially in relation to non-vegan men b) experiencing and expressing empathy and emotions c) food and cooking practices. Men's avoidance of (excessive) displays of emotions and empathy as well as their lesser involvement in home cooking, and unhealthier eating patterns compared to women (Szabo 2019), are associated with dominant patterns of masculinity. These ways of doing masculinity contribute to gender inequality in society. I suggest that the practices of vegan could men help to challenge these patterns while also identifying and acknowledging the limitations of this claim.

5.1 *“The Vegan Men I Know Don't Fit in the Traditional Masculinity Box”: Vegan Men's Identity Construction, Gender and Intersectional Politics and Practices*

In this section, to understand links between veganism and masculinity, as perceived by vegan men, I examine vegan men's identity talk (on identity talk,

8 At the same time, feminist scholars have produced critical accounts of Nordic discourses on gender and gender equality practices (see for example Holli, Magnusson and Rönnblom 2005; Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008). Postcolonial Nordic feminist scholars have exposed the normative Whiteness of Nordic gender equality discourse (see, for example, Keskinen et al. 2009).

9 Estonia was part of the Soviet Union until 1991 when the country regained its independence.

see Pajumets and Hearn 2012)—a specific form of identity work (Snow and Anderson 1987) by which people construct and present their identities through discursive means, signifying to others how they perceive themselves, others and the world (Hunt and Benford 1994, 492). Identities are actively produced as people talk, “even if they do not perceive their involvement in identity construction” (Pajumets and Hearn 2012, 37).

For the men in this study, there was no significant conflict between their identity as a man and veganism, which is culturally coded as a feminine practice. This was achieved by distinguishing oneself as an exceptional man, standing above or being able to successfully resist societal masculinity norms, including engaging in feminised or otherwise denigrated social practices, as I explore below.

It was typical for the research participants to construct themselves as different from other—notably non-vegan—men. This perceived distinctness was seen as going beyond rejecting the use of animal products, but in terms of how they do masculinity more broadly:

Tapani, 35, FIN: All the vegan men I know definitely don't fit in the traditional masculinity box.

Issues of gender and masculinity were explicitly articulated and tied to veganism by some men, particularly those well-versed in gender equality and intersectionality politics (typically, Finnish men living in urban centres who had obtained degrees in social sciences, including gender studies), and more tacitly by others who were less familiar with these discourses. In addition to regarding oneself as distinct from non-vegan men, other vegan men were also seen as not corresponding to conventional ideals of masculinity, in terms of their values and practices that aspire towards gender equality:

Lukas, 25, FIN: I often feel like if I meet another man that is vegan, there's like a very high chance of getting very well along with that person [...], [their] sense of masculinity, [...] they have kind of similar tempers for instance, or kind of like a certain openness and softness about them that I feel like is often lacking with other men who I might be friends with. But I might feel that like if they don't or aren't open to this vegetarianism or veganism, then they might have these other kinds of masculine beliefs that I feel really uncomfortable with. [...] Veganism, especially with men, it very often goes hand in hand with kind of critical ideas about gender or politics as well. Like it's not the most obvious thing or like the easiest thing to do as a man in a way. [...] I don't know, it might be it like

generalising but I often feel like some friends who are not vegetarian, like male friends in my community, they were like a bit more likely shittier boyfriends, for instance, or kind of like had these other beliefs that I have found harmful as well or that they're not as trustworthy.

As the extract above demonstrates, standing out in such ways was seen as a source of pride. It was not only becoming vegan that according to the men set them apart from others. Indeed, some men claimed to have always stood out from others, even before their vegan transition, in ways that do not conform to prevalent norms of masculinity, for example by appearance (e.g., long hair), values (e.g., gender equality, pacifism, broader social justice commitments and intersectional politics) or (bodily) practices (e.g., not drinking alcohol¹⁰). Thus, going vegan only exacerbated an already existing perceived distinctness from others. Typically, the ways in which the vegan men emphasised their difference was by a critique of or non-participation in a characteristically masculine practice. An apt example of challenging dominant norms of masculinity was opting out of the military service compulsory for men in Finland and Estonia and choosing to complete civilian service instead (which typically involved some form of feminised care work). This was more typical among the distinct group of Finnish men mentioned above for whom veganism was part of a broader social justice agenda:

Jukka, 30, FIN: I'm very very much left, on the left politically [...] I didn't go to the army and I'm kind of against violence and all that [...]. It kind of takes a certain type of people to like go against the herd, like not move along with the herd, because obviously in Finland most people do go to the army and be there for the six months, nine months, 12 months, whatever. But as for someone who kind of can be like... does not follow the herd and goes their own way, it's kind of ... I think it's easier to make that choice with the diet as well.

As the quote above suggests, emphasising their other non-mainstream life choices and difference from non-vegan men in a variety of ways functioned as part of the research participants' explanation as to why they transitioned to veganism—seen as a transgressive act in the context of anthropocentric social norms and ideals of masculinity which entail the consumption of nonhuman

10 Both Estonia and Finland are among countries with high alcohol consumption (Ritchie and Roser 2018). Drinking remains central to Finnish and Estonian masculinities. On Finnish alcohol culture and gender patterns in alcohol consumption, see Karlsson 2009.

animals. Once already having challenged some social norms, it is easier to do so with others.

In explaining why many men do not give up meat or become vegan, the research participants highlighted norms of masculinity that make it difficult for men to do so. However, they characterised themselves as having surpassed the pressure to conform to mainstream ways of doing masculinity, being relatively comfortable with expressing an “alternative” masculinity or being perceived as the odd one out:

Oskar, 23, FIN: I think the pressure from the others is the main reason. You don't want to be the freak, like the only one. Like me. In my work we have like 50 people there. I'm the only one who is vegan or vegetarian. So, I think the pressure is the main reason.

Some men brought up experiences from male-dominated environments as particular settings where their veganism had been met with disdain:

Jaanus, 35: EST: Especially in the motorcycle circles where masculinity plays a big part and when there is an event like the opening or closing of the season or motorcycle orienteering, I have not encountered very friendly attitudes when I've asked for plant-based or meat-free meals. They pretty much said “We are not offering some vegan crap here! If you are looking for something like this, you can look elsewhere!”

While examples were shared of situations and environments in which standing out as a vegan man was especially challenging, some recognised that their own social context was conducive to practising an alternative kind of masculinity:

Petri, 43, FIN: Some people are afraid to become [vegan] or eating vegan or vegetarian food. So that it's a threat to their masculinity... Sort of going to the sauna and having a sausage, it's a thing. But I haven't experienced it myself nor really experienced in my circles. I believe nobody has ever told me that it would be unmanly to not eat meat. I have been in a sort of protected environment, I think.

The extract above illustrates a typical attitude expressed by my research participants—societal norms of masculinity were recognised as an obstacle preventing *other* men from becoming vegan but not themselves. They regarded themselves as having successfully challenged these pressures or claiming not to be affected by them due to their uniqueness present already prior to their

vegan transition. Standing out from others and being able to feel comfortable or even proud of this is easier for privileged individuals or groups, as they do not risk being ostracised or marginalised for defying social norms. My research participants' privileged social position is likely among the reasons why they did not perceive veganism as a threat to their own masculinity while claiming that it may threaten the masculinity of other men. Indeed, if anything, it is likely that for privileged vegan men, veganism may reinforce their social status and bolster their masculinity, as they may be perceived as pioneers or positive role models.

During the interviews, some vegan men shared experiences of situations where they have actively challenged conventional ways of doing masculinity. A good example of this is contesting some typical ways in which men bond with each other over killing or eating nonhuman animals. No longer participating in such activities can impact relationships with non-vegan men:

Lukas, 25, FIN: I used to go fishing with my father during the summers before that [becoming vegan], it was kind of like this father-son thing [laughs]. Like very like classical traditional thing. And I remember like when I went vegetarian, it was during the summer and I still wasn't like quite sure how to handle it like... When we went to our summer cottage ... if I want to go fishing with him, and I felt like that was maybe cutting that bond a bit when I told my father "I don't want to go fishing anymore."

The values discussed in this section—gender equality, intersectional justice and ideals of egalitarian masculinity—are intertwined with men's material practices, as several narratives above demonstrate. The importance of moving beyond merely the discursive realm where one declares adherence to certain values to materially practising an alternative masculinity involving care towards nonhuman others is captured in the quote below where Lauri challenges the focus on vegan men's identity as something important in itself:

Lauri, 28, FIN: It's not about me and my life. So, it has to be less sort of like egocentric thinking about me and my identity. I'm just one person among millions. It's a bit similar to like ... when sort of like this sort of men who will claim that "I'm a feminist". So that's great, but it shouldn't be about a White man's identity and that sort of "I'm a good person". [...] I think it should be at all times the sort of really examining your privileges and trying to be better and trying to be less toxic and that sort of thing, instead of like showing an identity to others. So, it should be more like political and less like psychological, or something, because ... I don't think

I'm interesting at all. I'm just a regular sort of person, I'm not important. I think animals are much more important than my identity.

In assessing whether men's veganism supports gender and other forms of equality, it is relevant to examine the question of whether and how vegan men associate veganism with other social justice issues. I have touched upon this issue in my previous research (Aavik 2021; Aavik 2023), where I outlined two seemingly distinct stances on this: a) regarding veganism and animal justice as part of a broader social justice agenda along with gender, racial, class and other forms of equality and consciously cultivating awareness of and challenging intersectional injustices and b) not explicitly linking veganism with these other causes or even being opposed to making such associations. The first position was typical among some Finnish men in particular—those with broader leftist views and awareness of gender and intersectional issues (e.g., due to their educational backgrounds):

Tapani, 35, FIN: And we [referring to his friends] also talk a lot of about intersectionality.

Kadri: So, you have like a circle of vegan friends, I understand, with whom you share similar values?

Tapani: Yeah. And it's also very clear that the other values that are shared there have a lot to do with human rights. We talk about class issues, we talk about racialisation, we talk about gender, minorities, and sexual orientation minorities issues as well, and ableism and stuff like that. So, it's kind of part of this constellation of concerns there. [...] It's kind of natural for me to look for parallels and try to understand how things might be interlinked. So that's why intersectional thinking is very natural for me, once I understood what it is.

The reasons why explicit pro-feminist stances and considering nonhuman animal justice as part of (intersectional) social equality were more typical among Finnish men has to do with Finnish society exhibiting more egalitarian gender norms and state policies, compared to Estonia. While this does not mean that all Finnish men do masculinity in more egalitarian ways, and these interviewed men may be rather exceptional in terms of their gender and intersectional politics, I suggest that in this social context, performing an alternative pro-feminist masculinity, including becoming vegan, is easier for men—particularly for privileged men.

Yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Aavik 2021; Aavik 2023), vegan men cannot neatly be separated into these two groups. The narratives of the vegan men in

my study suggest that the vegan praxis encourages men to cultivate greater care towards nonhuman life, themselves, and human others (Aavik 2021), as well as a sense of empathy which can make a positive impact towards more egalitarian masculinities. I explore this in the next section.

5.2 *“Veganism Has Made Me a More Empathetic Person”: Cultivating Emotional Literacy and Empathy through a Vegan Praxis*

Emotions are gendered (Shields 2002). They remain culturally feminised and undervalued, as they are associated with women’s lives and practices. Emotions have been devalued or even rejected by some prominent male animal rights advocates as the basis for concern for nonhuman animals (for more on this, see Donovan 1993). This thinking is still prevalent today, as many animal advocacy organisations appeal to rationality when arguing for animal rights and veganism. In contrast, ecofeminist scholars have stressed the importance of care and emotions in relating to human and nonhuman others. They have challenged the false dualisms of emotions versus rationality, nature versus culture and so on, pointing out that rational considerations and emotions are always entangled in moral action and in human experience more broadly (Aaltola 2013; Gruen 2007).

Thus far, theorising emotions, empathy, and care in relation to men and masculinities has been scarce, let alone in the context of veganism, despite important links between masculinities and emotions. The privileged position of White Western middle-class men in the social power hierarchy is in part maintained and reinforced through their performances of “rational” masculinity (de Boise and Hearn 2017, 3). This involves avoiding being perceived as “emotional”, associated with femininities and thus regarded as inferior. An orientation towards care as well as emotional literacy is not part of dominant masculinity scripts (Hultman and Pulé 2018). Yet, as several critical masculinities scholars and activists note, developing and practising these capacities in men could help to move towards more egalitarian and ecological masculinities (Hultman and Pulé 2018; Pease 2021).

Ethical veganism can be conceptualised as a “responsive, affective ethics of nonviolence”, built on feminist ethics (Jenkins 2012, 505). It involves rethinking hierarchical and exploitative human animal-relations, broadening our moral circle of compassion and care, and encouraging a compassionate response to the suffering of nonhuman animals. As such, I argue that for men in particular, veganism offers possibilities for engaging in and/or strengthening their sense and relationships of care and developing empathy and emotional literacy and connection with others. As the narratives of my research participants attest, this is also evident for many men who did not

originally become vegan as a result of emotionally connecting with nonhuman animals and their suffering.

My research participants juxtaposed their own masculinity with that of the figure of a “typical” man they constructed, drawing on shared cultural understandings of what is expected from men. According to the participants, men’s sense of empathy is typically underdeveloped, and they are not sufficiently in touch with their emotions. The origins of these deficiencies were traced to gendered socialisation and cultural scripts of masculinity, which fail to develop these capacities in men:

Toomas, 39, EST: It’s this attitude that most cultures cultivate in men from a young age. You are not well in touch with your emotions. The result of this is that as a man, you have to learn to cry at the age of twenty-nine. [...] The gender roles that are promoted in the society are a problem.

This emotional detachment and empathy deficiency that according to the vegan men in my study characterises most men, prevents many men from going vegan as veganism is often associated with concern for nonhuman animal suffering. To display such compassion could challenge men’s sense of masculinity:

Raido, 28, EST: I think veganism is linked to a greater sense of empathy and other qualities that are important for everyone. But if you are a classical man, then empathy is the last thing you think about. If you did, then people would perhaps perceive you as a softie.

As already evident from the discussion in the previous section, the men in my study constructed themselves as not adhering to these masculine norms and practices that they attributed to other, non-vegan men. My research participants claimed to have always been more empathetic or having developed these qualities upon going vegan:

Timo, 38, FIN: Veganism has made me a more empathetic person: less arrogant, less ignorant.

Tanel, 31, EST: If I talk about some kind of emotions and feelings, then, after I decided to go vegan, I ... I don’t remember how long it took, but like this empathy or love or understanding ... towards animals ... that increased a lot. I became much kinder. [...] I became more caring and loving. Especially towards animals.

As the extracts above illustrate, becoming vegan facilitated the cultivation of empathy for the men in this study. Experiences of watching footage of nonhuman animal suffering, but also in some cases a powerful and transformative direct encounter with a nonhuman animal, contributed to the development of a sense of empathy and relating to nonhuman animals through emotions:

Kalev, 43, EST: I went to this Vigil last week. It was an extraordinary experience for me. A truck stopped and we were able to look at the cows through the small holes that the trucks have. I established eye contact with a cow. I will never forget how this cow looked at me ... It felt like ... Well, it was like some communication through our eyes, I felt in her eyes fear and despair that she felt. I could tell from her being that she perceived ... she had foresight of where she was going or what was soon going to happen to her. This feeling entered me and when I got home at night I couldn't sleep because I couldn't get this feeling out of me. I thought that I have been made numb in the course of my life and I'm so old that I would never be able to feel anything like that, but this was an extraordinary experience. The longer I have been vegan, the more I perceive or start to understand the ethical and spiritual side of it. That's the kind of development I've had.

While veganism brought about or strengthened a sense of empathy mainly towards nonhuman animals, several men claimed to have become generally more compassionate, also towards human others. Extending empathy towards non-vegans was not necessarily easy, at least initially. The emotions men experienced upon becoming vegan included negative ones, such as frustration and anger towards human beings, having learned about the horrors of factory farming:

Martin, 27, EST: Some time ago I was very upset about this [what human beings do to non-human animals]. I was disturbed and disappointed at the whole world, that not everyone is vegan. I was kind of angry at everyone. I very often talked to people about this very thoroughly.

Anger is an emotion typically coded as masculine (Shields 2002, 11). For the men in my study who described such initial emotions, after having been vegan for some time, these sentiments subsided, and they began to experience more understanding of and empathy towards human others. This shift was likely facilitated by frequently having to explain one's veganism to others and in the

process learning to appreciate others' points of view. The ability to forsake anger and other such negative emotions, and instead practise compassion and learn to understand the perspectives of non-vegans was seen as strategically important for successfully spreading veganism:

Toomas, 39, EST: We need to empathically relate to others, if we want to solve the problem. And this concerns the vegan movement too! If the other side doesn't feel understood, then nothing will ever happen.

Previous research has found that given the widely perceived incompatibility of masculinity and empathy, vegan men tend to downplay the role of emotions and empathy in talking about nonhuman animals and veganism. Instead, they use "rational" arguments, facts, and evidence-based reasoning, in anticipation that "emotional" considerations might be perceived negatively, particularly by other men. In doing so, men uphold the emotion/reason binary (DeLessio-Parson 2017; Mycek 2018; also see Deckha 2012 on a discussion of how Western liberal discourses discourage emotional responses to nonhuman animal suffering).

While for some men in my study, "rational" justifications for veganism were personally important, such as facts about the destructive impact of animal agriculture on ecosystems, it was also typical to relate to nonhuman animal suffering, as experiences such as Kalev's feeling of connection to a nonhuman animal at the Vigil demonstrate.

The narratives of Finnish and Estonian vegan men suggest that there is some mismatch between what they experience and feel personally (i.e., empathy towards animals) and how they represent veganism to others, especially to non-vegan men—typically relying on facts and "rationality". This latter strategy is shaped by (perceived) cultural norms of masculinity. In other words, vegan men are wary of how they may come across to non-vegan men when emphasising compassion towards nonhuman animal suffering as a (primary) reason behind their veganism:

Indrek, 34, EST: It [animal suffering] seems to men like unmanly talk. They are like "What the hell are you talking about? What do you mean that cows are raped to get milk? Seriously? Come on, let's just go get a shot of vodka now!"

From these considerations, several men chose to emphasise the environmental aspect of veganism instead of animal ethics, particularly when talking to other men:

Olavi, 33, FIN: I have also the feeling that's that the environmental angle is sort of like more rational, because when I talk about animal rights and so forth, it's ... when talking with people who don't think about these things as much as I do, it may sound a bit hippie. Animals have feelings too, so ... I don't think that it's as efficient as using actual numbers that eating a pound of beef is worth like this and this much CO₂ and so forth.

This incongruity between what vegan men personally think and feel and how they perform veganism publicly, particularly in front of non-vegan men, is shaped by societal norms of masculinity. Deeming it inappropriate or uncomfortable to stress the role of emotions and empathy when sharing their vegan experiences, vegan men may be in some contexts reproducing dominant masculinity scripts. Thus, personal transformation in one's masculinity through a vegan praxis may not always help to foster cultural change in patterns of gender towards more egalitarian masculinities.

5.3 *"I Started Cooking": Vegan Men's Food Practices in the Domestic Sphere*

The previous two sections primarily dealt with vegan men's identity work¹¹ and expression of emotions. While these are important elements in constructions of masculinity, attention should also be paid to men's material practices when studying changes in masculinities and gender relations. Men's transforming relationship to food constitutes one such material practice.

Food and eating practices are gendered and linked to men and masculinities in particular ways (for more on this, see for example Adams 1990; Bailey 2007). Meat eating, unhealthy eating, and distancing oneself from household cooking have been identified as among the key food practices or cultural patterns associated with men and masculinities (Szabo 2019). Vegan men could challenge these patterns. I argue that this may have positive implications for gender equality.

Becoming vegan changed my research participants' relationship to food and eating, in a way that went beyond just replacing animal products with plant-based ones. Typically, switching from an animal-based diet to a plant-based one brought about the need to take up (more) cooking, particularly for those who had become vegan years ago, when plant-based ready-made foods were

11 On the notion of identity work, see Snow and Anderson 1987.

not yet widely available in Finland and Estonia. Some found preparing meals difficult initially, but adjusted quickly:

Panu, 22, FIN: When I went vegan, it was tough to make the food in the beginning. It was quite odd like ... thinking of a sandwich ... not putting cheese or any kind of meat on it [...] In the beginning I just put cucumber or tomato on my sandwiches. But ... the cooking wasn't hard. If I had the ingredients, I was able to make myself a meal and I haven't really eaten those ready-made meals or anything.

While many men also enjoyed ready-made meals, including fast food and specialty vegan products, such as cheeses and ice creams, several noted that since their vegan transition, they had started to pay more attention to the ingredients and nutritional content of foods. It was typical to prefer easy, nutritious, and quick meals:

Petteri, 38, FIN: I tend to eat versatile of meals that are healthy and nowadays what I look forward to is like to feel better.

Even men for whom health reasons were not behind their transition to veganism, gradually began to pay more attention to nutrition and make healthier food choices. This suggests that veganism as a praxis may encourage the emergence of healthier ways of doing masculinity (see Aavik and Velgan 2021).

While cooking was not necessarily seen by the men in gendered terms, it is nevertheless a material gendered practice through which to challenge norms of masculinity. Activities such as learning to participate (more) in cooking for oneself, one's partner, and children, or even becoming the main person in charge of preparing the household meals, help to foster gender equality in the domestic sphere:

Tarmo, 36, EST: I was such a terrible person [...] I accepted that my wife had a certain role, certain commitments [...] Now I think that in a family, both partners should equally participate in doing domestic tasks, not in such a way that one is left alone in some things. [...] Anyway, I started cooking myself and I discovered finally that I was able to cook well using simple ingredients. Focusing on food reduced my stress and thoughts about work, it enabled me to switch off. And then I learned to cook pretty well. My wife used to cook all the time, but then that changed.

Some of these changes were not necessarily brought about solely by veganism but also had to do with the men becoming more mature with time. However, veganism helped the research participants to connect to food in a more intimate way.

These food practices that veganism brings about or encourages, such as taking up or increasing one's participation in home cooking and paying more attention to nutrition and preparing healthier meals, have the potential to redefine norms of masculinity in a favourable direction. However, the practices discussed here—home cooking, opting for healthier foods, and paying more attention to nutrition—occur in the private sphere and on the individual level. As such, they remain largely invisible to other men, and hence, their contribution to more egalitarian masculinities may be limited. Also, we should be cautious about drawing profound conclusions about the emergence of more egalitarian gender relations based on vegan men's claims about an increased interest in food and home cooking without examining this question in more detail. For instance, there is a significant difference between occasionally cooking meals from new and interesting ingredients and feeding the family (including children) on a daily basis, including planning meals and shopping—tasks that continue to be overwhelmingly performed by women and that help to maintain gender inequalities. More research is needed to establish to what extent and how vegan men's household cooking is transformative in terms of the gendered division of domestic labour.

6 Conclusions

By drawing on qualitative interviews with vegan men in Finland and Estonia, this chapter has explored the question of whether and how men's veganism can contribute towards gender equality. I have discussed how men's veganism and vegan men are positioned in relation to cultural ideals of masculinity and the implications of this for challenging dominant masculinity scripts and for the spread of veganism. As some previous research (Greenebaum and Dexter 2017; Hart 2018) has found, vegan men's contribution to gender and intersectional justice is ambiguous.

The empirical insights presented in this chapter broadly align with these findings, suggesting that some ideals and practices of Estonian and Finnish vegan men—cultivating empathy, aspiring towards more egalitarian ways of doing gender (consciously and inadvertently) and taking up (more) home

cooking—contribute to more egalitarian ways of doing gender, at least in the personal practices of men. However, contrary to private beliefs and practices, in some public contexts, particularly in the company of non-vegan men, vegan men can adopt conventional masculinity scripts in their gender performances, for instance, downplaying the role of emotions and emphasising rational argumentation in introducing veganism.

Not all of the research participants consciously engaged in more egalitarian gender performances, but their vegan praxis consisted of small transgressive acts that contest some accepted social norms. These could be conceptualised as microactivism or everyday activism (Stowards and Renegar 2006; Vivienne 2016), referring to acts of resistance in everyday settings, typically not thought of as activism by those engaged in it. Thus, I suggest that vegan men act as agents of change in everyday settings, helping to transform how we relate to other animals as well as challenging some existing gender norms in a small but significant way.

In conclusion, I suggest that the vegan men in my study do not perform a radically different kind of masculinity, but their constructions of masculinity contain important alternative elements. Their orientation towards more egalitarian values and practices does not challenge the entire gender system in a profound way. Nevertheless, the small changes I identified support the emerging ideals of masculinity that emphasise egalitarianism, care, and environmentalism. These orientations do not necessarily directly lead to more egalitarian masculinity as a cultural ideal, as men's veganism is still a culturally marginal phenomenon and as such, has limited capacity to transform the gender system. However, men's veganism can make a positive contribution towards changing ideals of masculinity in the Anthropocene.

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Staying with the Trouble in Cat Advocacy: Donna Haraway, Vegan Politics, and the Case of Cat Food

Kuura Irni

1 Introduction

Recent work across disciplines, including feminist science studies and environmental humanities, has argued that in order to responsibly assess the current conditions described by terms such as Anthropocene, Capitalocene, or Plantationocene¹ it is important to regard people as ontologically entangled in complex webs of life and non-life (Despret 2016a; Escobar 2016; Haraway 2016; Probyn 2016; TallBear 2017; van Dooren et al. 2016). The needed responses and multispecies thriving within these complex entanglements is seen in feminist science studies and environmental humanities to require an open-ended approach, often called “cosmopolitical” after Isabelle Stengers (2005). Such an approach is said to entail no definite answers or predetermined truths but a creative process of “staying with the trouble” or “tinkering” through multispecies encounters, contradictory commitments, and complex conditions (Haraway 2016; Kaljonen et al. 2019). In this body of research, veganism has at times been read as an attempt to impose one predetermined truth on others, and it has therefore appeared as an overly simple and straightforward solution to such complex conditions. This is voiced, for example, by Elspeth Probyn in her book *Eating the Ocean*: “increasingly the choice to proclaim oneself vegan often seems to act as an opting out of the structural complexities of food provisioning, production, and consumption” (2016, 3). In this paper, I contest the assumption of the simplicity of vegan politics and suggest, instead of a singular veganism, a focus on veganisms, which include frictions and several options for how to enact veganism in practice, rather than a veganism that offers only one course of action (e.g., “not consuming animal products”).² More

1 For an overview of these terms, see e.g., Haraway in Franklin 2017, 53–54; Haraway 2016, 44–51, 206n5; Moore 2016; Tsing et al. 2016.

2 Important concerns for vegan politics, which affect the conditions and opportunities for people to practice veganism or eat plant-based food, and which need to be taken into account when striving for “ethical” or “non-violent” eating and relations with nonhuman animals,

specifically, I focus on cat advocacy in Finland and, in particular, on vegan politics relating to cat food.

Drawing from ecofeminism and feminist science studies scholarship, I focus specifically on the difficulties, challenges, and contradictions involved in sharing a life and planet with domestic cats (*Felis catus*), including stray and feral cats,³ who are “obligate carnivores”⁴—while advocating both the wellbeing of cats and vegan politics. These controversies have previously been conceptualised as “the vegetarian dilemma” (Rothberger 2013), a contradictory pull on the one hand to guarantee the wellbeing of a carnivore animal companion by giving them animal flesh to eat, and on the other, to support vegan politics, which would entail refraining from supporting the animal industry by buying meat, albeit not for one’s own consumption.

In this paper, I suggest that it is not only the individual ethical vegetarian’s or vegan’s dilemma and related guilt that is at stake. In my opinion, such an approach involves a risk of individualising veganism as a personal lifestyle choice. As a useful alternative to considering veganism as a lifestyle, Eva Giraud has formulated an understanding of veganism as a political approach that aims at an intersectional critique of biocapitalism, including a critique of the structural position of nonhuman animals⁵ as ‘killable’ within biocapitalism

include structural disparities in the global economy, working conditions in the Global South, the effects of colonialism, and the ways in which the promotion of veganism has perpetuated white supremacy, sexism, and uncritical adherence to consumer capitalism (e.g., Harper 2010; Polish 2016; Rosendo, Oliveira, and Kuhnen, Chapter 11 in this book; Shotwell 2016).

- 3 “Stray cat” usually indicates an abandoned or escaped cat used to human presence, while “feral” refers to cats not used to human presence, but in practice the difference is not always clear. In order to emphasise people’s responsibility for cat-human naturecultures, including the existence of cat colonies of so-called feral cats, I use the term “stray cat” throughout the text when I discuss cats without a human responsible for their care, except when I refer to texts that use the notion of feral cats.
- 4 The term “obligate carnivore” refers in particular to the family *Felidae*, cats, who are not able to obtain all nutrients necessary for their bodily functions from plants or bacteria when living in the wild (see Britannica.com: Nutrition [diet]). This does not mean, however, that these essential nutrients could not be added to cat food; this is how plant-based cat food is composed. Nutrients are also added to meat-based food, meaning that any diet based on meat does not automatically include an adequate amount of nutrients for cats (Ward et al 2020, 167–71). The current concerns include whether different commercial cat foods include an adequate ratio and amount of different nutrients (Zafalon et al. 2020) and whether the nutrients from plant-based food are absorbed properly (Omaeläinklinikka 2020).
- 5 It would be problematic to write about “animals” as though in contrast to “humans”, but it is also problematic to write about “nonhuman animals” in contrast to “humans”; neither of these options undoes the opposition between “humans” and their “others” and the racialised history that this opposition has carried, as the meaning of the notion of “animal” has included black(ened) people and the notion of “human” has denoted a white privileged “man” rather

(2013, 112).⁶ In the course of my research, however, I began to pay attention to the different aspects of killing and injuring involved in the cat food question. These are not all caused directly by making beings killable within biocapitalist food production; rather, some of them relate to cat-human naturecultures⁷ where cats themselves are also actors. In this paper, then, I understand vegan politics related to cat food as a node in a web of concerns that stretches from the concern of beings made killable within biocapitalism to animal flourishing to climate change to the loss of biodiversity. The question of cat food entails cosmopolitical trouble, where trouble is related to becoming-with others and “living in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times”, wherein a response is needed despite the impossibility of knowing final answers or finding perfect solutions (Haraway 2016, 1; Stengers 2005, 995–96). This paper is an exploration of who is affected by and cared for in the case of vegan politics of cat food, involving not only different people and different cats, but a range of other nonhuman animals as well as ecosystems.

I argue that when combined with media and critical animal studies scholar Eva Giraud’s (2019) work, Donna Haraway’s approach to “staying with the trouble” can enrich the understanding of the specificity of vegan politics in relation to other approaches to complex conditions that, in Haraway’s words, all have to be “for some ways of living and dying and not others” (2016, 41). My approach, on the one hand, complicates the understanding of animal liberation and vegan politics presented within the body of work that stresses multispecies entanglements, including Haraway’s own work. On the other hand, I read a difference between Haraway’s *own political stance* in relation to nonhuman animals (such as eating meat and promoting hunting) and her *approach to the political*. I suggest the aptness of her approach to *the political* for assessing

than any member of the species of *Homo sapiens* (Jackson 2020; Wynter 2003). Using the notion of “nonhuman animals”, i.e. a wording that stresses that humans are also animals, which is a common practice in critical animal studies, is my attempt to avoid exercising a hierarchical human/animal difference. However, it is simultaneously a sign of my privilege —as a White person I am in a specifically privileged position to be able to claim my own animality by using notions such as “other animals” or “nonhuman animals”, rather than being animalised by others as part of processes of racialisation.

6 See also Greta Gaard’s rereading of the history of ecofeminism as a systemic, intersectionally sensitive critique (Gaard 2011).

7 The notion of naturecultures is inspired by Haraway (e.g., 2003, 1–7; 2008, 16–18; 2016, 40–41). Cat-human naturecultures entails that I view cats and cat food in this chapter as being profoundly intertwined with other forms of life, and I acknowledge the challenges in attempts to separate “nature” and “culture”. Questioning these separations becomes relevant, for example, in attempts to define “natural” food for cats or accounting for cat hunting.

the politics of veganisms, rather than her own arguments about food per se.⁸ Haraway's contribution in this case is specifically interesting because of her enormous and ongoing influence on feminist thought on nonhuman animals, natures, and technoscience since the 1980s.

In the following section, I first discuss my research material and methodology, then explain my reading of Haraway's notion of staying with the trouble and how I see it as useful for approaching the politics of veganisms. Subsequently, I illustrate three different aspects of staying with the trouble in the case of cat advocacy and cat food in the Finnish context. I begin by exploring the challenges in defining what constitutes 'proper' cat food. I suggest that a particular reading of the 'natural' in Finnish cat advocacy, linked to what is regarded as proper cat food, helps us understand the crucial debates at stake in terms of plant-based or animal-based food for cats. In the subsequent section, I discuss the competence-building of both people responsible for cats and the cats themselves, which again indicates why the question of cat food entails staying with the trouble. I then move on to discuss the issue of stray cat colonies in order to argue that choosing *not* to live with these carnivores is not a way out of trouble for a feasible vegan politics either. Each section presents why none of the possibilities of feeding cats vegan food, or flesh, or even abstaining from living with cats, enables an 'innocent' vegan cat politics. Lastly, I conclude by combining Haraway's and Eva Giraud's (2019) insights in order to assess the trouble in cat advocacy as something that encourages action rather than mere notification of the complexity of the conditions and the noninnocence of all veganisms.

2 A Note on Data and Methodology: Exploring Complexities

My methodological approach involves exploring the complexities of the politics of veganisms in the Finnish cat advocacy context. The practical and political stances pertaining to veganism I focus on include not sharing a life with a carnivore companion, adopting cats but offering them animal-based food, and adopting cats but serving them vegan food. I will *not* discuss these three options of (not) relating to cats and their food in order to argue for the best or the 'right' vegan politics. Instead, I suggest that vegan politics,

8 This is in contrast to other readings of Haraway within ecofeminism that focus on Haraway's own political stance on nonhuman animals, readings that seem to conclude that Haraway's thinking is of no use for ecofeminist or other critical animal scholarship (e.g., Donovan 2018; Weisberg 2009).

at least in the specific context of Finnish cat advocacy, involves contextual, non-innocent, everyday struggle as well as cat diplomacy, that is, negotiations about food with cats that may lead to unpredictable results. These practices stem from incompatible vegan positions that rub against each other and have very different consequences for those affected.

My research material consists of public communication messages of Finnish animal welfare and animal rights organisations and campaigns in their Facebook updates (on cat colonies 271, other topics 13) and statements and press releases (11), as well as newspaper articles and news (on cat colonies 37, vegetarian/vegan food for cats 7, other topics 12), columns and editorials (3), blogs (5), and other documents (5) that discuss cat food or—mostly—the situation of cats in Finland more broadly. By both collecting and thematising the research material, I have attempted to account for the complexity of the cat food question and the possible vegan political stances in this context. I have made internet searches with relevant keywords and collected publications cited in social media. In the case of social media updates, I systematically collected the updates of five different animal advocacy organisations over at least one year (June 2020–May 2021). These organisations are situated in both Northern and Southern Finland, one of them being a national umbrella organisation for several local organisations. In addition, I have followed several other organisations in social media and collected updates that appeared in my own feed. I have also followed the changes in cat discussions after the systematic data collection period. Additionally, I have included statements by two animal rights organisations and one campaign, and one animal welfare organisation about the ethics of having “companion animals” or “pets”.⁹ Moreover, I found five threads in public internet-based discussion forums concerning feeding plant-based food to cats: these publications ranged between 2006–2018. Some of these were quite lengthy discussions, one spanning from 2014 to 2018. These certainly illustrated the range of opinions related to plant-based cat food.¹⁰ However, in this paper, I am more interested in the politics of animal

9 A widely used term in the Finnish discussion is “lemmikki” (pet); I, however, use the notion of animal companion in order to stress the agency and intrinsic value of the life of the cats in question, instead of assessing them as beings whose value lies in the companionship or other pleasure they are supposed to offer people (as the terms “companion animal” or “pet” indicate).

10 In addition, I have gained background knowledge by following several cat-themed Finnish-speaking Facebook groups since 2016. These groups include “Cats” (“Kissat”, 38,400 members at the moment of writing) and “For the love of cats” (“Rakkaudesta kissoihin” 27,200 members) and several other smaller cat-themed groups, which concentrate on, for example, indoor cats, cats with illnesses, or cat food, or are groups for

welfare and animal rights organisations, campaigns, and social media influencers rather than in the range of individual opinions. From this perspective, the public discussions in traditional and social media form an *issue network* concerning the situation of cats in Finland: “the whole range of actors who mobilize around an issue, including those antagonistic toward one another” (Giraud 2019, 209n17). In addition, in order to illustrate the every-day diplomacy with cats that pertains to what kind of cat food politics becomes feasible in practice, I also elaborate briefly on my own negotiations about food with a cat I live with. I use these public and everyday life Finnish negotiations in this paper as, first, an exploration of the range of the issue network regarding cat food in the Finnish context, and second, as illustrative examples to argue for a situated understanding of the politics of veganism, which does not enable purity or innocence.

3 Reading the ‘Trouble’ in Haraway’s Thought

Donna Haraway defines the notion of “staying with the trouble” in the following way:

In the face of unrelenting historically specific surplus suffering in companion species knottings, I am not interested in reconciliation or restoration, but I am deeply committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together. Call that staying with the trouble. (Haraway 2016, 10)

This statement can be unfolded in many different ways. “Companion species knottings” are related to a broader posthumanist feminist science studies and multispecies studies approach to the ontological intertwining of living (and

people who have adopted a cat from a particular rescue organisation. I have joined these Facebook groups because I am interested in and share my life with rescued cats. But being a member of these groups has also given me a fairly broad understanding of the current challenges in the shared lives of people and cats as well as the debates involved in cat care in the Finnish context, of which the published blogs and articles are just a small fraction. Because these groups are closed groups and I interpret them first and foremost as support groups for people living with cats, even though they also include sharing videos and pictures about cats when all is well and support is not needed, I do not consider it ethical to cite discussions directly from these groups.

non-living) beings, or rather, becomings-with.¹¹ Companion species knottings and “getting on together” are related to the importance of focusing on the actual, complex, multispecies relations in the present. I suggest that, in the case of cat food, a focus on the complex, everyday multispecies relations works better for assessing vegan approaches than a general theory of animal rights, because the everyday situations of care in the cat food case complicate the attempts to find politically feasible general solutions. Feminist scholars have aptly paid attention to the fact that someone always does the everyday work to care. At the root of my exploration of vegan politics is the question of who cares, and for whom (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011).

In addition, getting on together is related to questioning agency as solely residing in people, and my approach thus involves respecting the creativity of cats and cooperation with them. This relates to a broader tenet in feminist technoscience studies, environmental humanities, and ecofeminism to see nonhuman animals as agential beings who deserve to be seriously communicated *with*, rather than merely cared for or spoken for (Donovan 2014a; Haraway 2008, 237–45; Meijer 2013; Metcalf 2008, 107, 110; van Dooren 2019, 140–71). Herein stems the notion of “diplomacy” with cats raised later in this paper. In this sense, my feminist perspective on cat advocacy does not consist of mere one-dimensional acts in which a human is the subject of advocacy, an advocate who speaks for nonhuman animals, who in turn are seen as passive and unable to communicate their needs and wants (e.g., Haraway 2012, 22–25). Instead, cat advocacy on the everyday level requires constant active negotiation.

Yet another crucial aspect of Haraway’s definition of staying with the trouble is “unrelenting historically specific surplus suffering”, which for her does not lead to an account of “restoration” but rather “an attempt to partial recuperation” and “getting on together” (Haraway 2016, 10). Partial recuperation and getting on together, however, do not indicate an absence of suffering. Haraway’s rather pessimistic understanding of suffering is related to her questioning of innocence, which stems from her interest in unsettling origin stories and narratives that construct purity as an inherent value, including the questioning of narratives that strive for racial purity and/or assume an idealised “nature” and the distinction between nature and culture (e.g., Haraway 2016, 118–21, 125; 209; Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 113, 121–22, 125–27, 130–32)—therefore the notion of “naturalcultural multispecies trouble” that stresses the inseparability

11 Living with other species can also consist of “being alongside” without extremely tight cooperation or sharing of space (Latimer 2013).

of nature and culture (Haraway 2016, 40; for explanation of Haraway's nature-cultures, see also Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 30–34).

Haraway's questioning of innocence also relates to her disbelief in the possibility to avoid suffering in any relationship,¹² which is why she sees it as unrealistic to imagine a world without the suffering of nonhuman animals or people. Non-innocence, combined with the ontological entanglement of life—that we cannot simply separate ourselves from the fates of other animals—entails that our actions and politics cannot achieve a state where no harm is produced to anyone (Haraway 2008, 80). Therefore, we need to “help the flourishing of some ways of getting on together and *not* others” (Haraway 2008, 288–89, emphasis in original).

I do not agree with Haraway that suffering is invariably part of every relationship, but rather take as a starting point a more hopeful ecofeminism where the aim is to put an end to suffering as much as possible, which opens up a range of possibilities to act. Such an approach “centres other animal species, makes connections among diverse forms of oppression, and seeks to put an end on animal suffering” (Gaard 2017, 116). From this perspective, I interpret Haraway's (2008, 80) statement, the challenge to “learn to live responsibly”, “in quest of the capacity to respond” in the above quote as the core of what Haraway in her later work called staying with the trouble. However, for me this notion indicates *specific conditions in which it is not possible to put an end to suffering* and where one is forced by the conditions to act for some ways of living and dying rather than others.

Haraway's own political stance in terms of food is a form of welfare ethics, meaning that she supports animal agriculture, albeit criticising its most extreme forms, namely factory farming (Haraway in Potts & Haraway 2010, 326, 330; about welfare ethics, see Twine 2015, 24, 26). Crucially, I do not follow Haraway's political stance. Her approach has been interpreted and utilised in various ways. For example, Haraway's stance has inspired some scholars to argue that killing is inevitable and that a “non-moralizing” approach should be chosen (Bruckner 2018, 26, 47, 134–37). Such an approach promotes a political perspective of free choices by avoiding “food rules” and suggesting that people develop a variety of food experiences since childhood (Bruckner 2018, 137, 170) – rather than avoiding animal exploitation or suffering as a starting point.¹³ Another interpretation from a quite contrary, critical position

12 For Haraway, “inflicting (and receiving) pain and even cruelty is part of every mortal relationship of a serious kind” (Haraway in Potts and Haraway 2010, 331).

13 For a more comprehensive critical analysis of Bruckner's “non-moralizing” approach, see Pedersen 2019.

states that Haraway's stance entails "a reiteration of the presumption that we humans have the right to remake the world in ways we preconceive" (Donovan 2014b, 88), where "the net effect remains ... humans operating on, dissecting, destroying, and rearranging an objectified natural world *in accordance with their wishes and ideas*" (88, emphasis added). In these interpretations, I quarrel with both the theoretical turning of Haraway's idea of serious, responsible engagement into a gathering of various experiences (in Bruckner) and the interpretation of the food issue or the treatment of nonhuman animals more broadly as a question of Haraway promoting free choices by individuals (in both interpretations, albeit from very different viewpoints).

Instead, this paper has been inspired by Margret Grebowicz' and Helen Merrick's (2013) reading of the political in Haraway's thought in their *Beyond the Cyborg*. Crucially, following their interpretation, Haraway's approach to the political is not liberal individualism and the promotion of free choices by individual consumers or scientists. The key to their reading is that they connect Haraway's thinking to radical democratic theory that centres on dissensus at the heart of the political, rather than on the prospect of forming consensus. From this perspective, "[c]ontestation must be in play in order for politics to become democratic" (Butler 2004, 39, Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 92). Their understanding of Haraway's political as "a contested site of continuous reinterrogation and dissent" (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 82) has inspired me to understand vegan politics not as a proposal for a predetermined stance but a site of dissent in itself. Therefore I interpret Haraway's opposition to approaches that offer a predetermined position or solace in one particular course of action¹⁴ not as a critique of animal rights activism or veganism *per se* but related to *fostering the very sphere of the political*. Haraway's thought stresses the importance of allowing disagreement and discussion to emerge, and points towards the non-desirability or impossibility of a final consensus.¹⁵ This is very different from interpreting Haraway as promoting free choices to use animal bodies or opposing the restriction of free choices of food. In other words, in my interpretation, she is not a proponent of "modernist liberal choice discourse," a discourse that she herself addresses critically (2016, 42).

Opposing a final consensus does not, however, entail endless "war" against "enemies" (Haraway 2016, 42). Rather, it indicates an affective condition of living in complex and contradictory, troubled worlds where "cosmopolitical" questions arise—in which "seriously different, felt and known, finite truths"

14 See Giraud 2019, 205, note 52; see also Haraway 2008, 285–302.

15 See my other paper for a development of this interpretation of "the political" in Haraway's thought (Imi 2023).

pull in different, contradictory directions (Haraway 2008, 299; see also Stengers 2005, 995–96). Haraway calls for engagement in *cosmopolitics*, “articulating bodies to some bodies and not others, nourishing some worlds and not others, and bearing the mortal consequences” (2008, 88).

My reading also has a slightly different emphasis from Eva Giraud’s, who does extremely important work in her book *What Comes after Entanglement?* in discussing critical animal studies approaches together with Haraway and other feminist science studies and environmental humanities scholarship. In the case of cosmopolitics, Giraud suggests that Haraway and others who wish “to create space for cosmopolitical engagement” have “seen as vital to refuse to draw on conventional political frameworks—such as rights or social justice—that have a predetermined notion of what convivial relationships between humans and nonhumans might look like” (2019, 72–73; see also Giraud 2021, 50). In Giraud’s reading, the emphasis in a cosmopolitical approach, in contrast to such a predetermined perspective, is on openness to surprising conditions (2019, 72). The need to respond to surprising conditions is included in my examples too (such as the need for diplomacy with a cat who does not agree with the food offered). However, in my reading, the point called for by Haraway’s texts in this case is not opposing these animal justice frameworks per se, but rather stressing the existence of complex conditions and the pull of different, sometimes permanently incompatible options, and the importance of responding to these conditions and taking responsibility for one’s actions and forms of care, despite the complexity of the situation.

4 Negotiating Cat Care: on the ‘Natural’ and ‘Proper’ Cat Food

The first proof of the existence of cats (*Felis catus*) in Finland dates back to the years 800–1050, and it is likely that the first cats were brought to Finland by Vikings (Keinänen & Nyman 2014, 14–5, 19). Cats made the storage and shipment of grains from Asia to Europe possible, as they would prey on rodents that would otherwise eat and damage the grains. In this paper, I concentrate on the stray cat and cat colony question,¹⁶ which as a societal issue has developed

16 My focus in the chapter stems from the point that most critical animal studies scholars and animal rights activists in the Finnish context agree that if living with a cat is at all compatible with vegan politics, then adopting a homeless cat is the best option, rather than buying a pedigree cat who has been specifically bred for the purpose of living a life as a “pet” (e.g., Animalia, n.d.; Kaski 2019; Oikeutta eläimille, n.d.).

mainly in connection with farming.¹⁷ Thus, in the present it appears in the public as a challenge that predominantly concerns the White Finnish population,¹⁸ the legacies of farming, and the contrast that has emerged between what could be called “traditional” and “modern” understandings of cat care within this predominantly White context.¹⁹

The most visible controversies in contemporary Finnish cat politics concern standards of cat care, which sometimes in social media discussions include generalising the conditions of cats (and disregarding people) living in the countryside, because this is where the stray cat and cat colony issue is mostly located. According to this generalisation, cats in the countryside live in barns, being fed or surviving mostly on their own while they reduce the numbers of rodents (and other animals, such as birds) in the surroundings. This “traditional” understanding of how to live with cats is contrasted with “modern” cat care, where cats visit the outdoors in harnesses and live as house cats, ideally within conditions inspired by scientific knowledge about cats as a species, including their species-specific and health needs in order to live meaningful lives. The genealogy of this controversy likely includes the gentry, who at the turn of the 20th century regarded themselves as having more noble relations with domestic animals than the less well-off (Syrjämaa 2019, 161). However, the genealogy is complex. The gentry also paved the way for social acceptability of close relations with nonhuman animals when industrialisation and urbanisation changed human-animal relations (Syrjämaa 2019, 168). Concerning the genealogy of the current controversies, it is important to remain critical of the histories and presents of making differences in proper cat care as well as the development of the commercial (so-called) “pet”²⁰ industry. However,

17 Because they hunted rodents, the cats were essential for storing grain.

18 The Indigenous Sámi people, whose land, called Sápmi, is now divided by the Northern parts of Sweden, Finland, Norway and Russia, historically hunted, fished, and developed reindeer herding (Haataja 2018), and the Roma’s livelihood mostly consisted of handicraft, horse trading, and various work tasks in the countryside (Pulma 2006, 169; Tervonen 2005, 291).

19 The public discussion in Finland that concerns cats is not similarly racially polarised as, for example, the rescue dog discussions in the United States (see e.g., Kim 2015; Weaver 2021; Zelinger 2018). In Finland racism in the public sphere in the case of animal advocacy is most evident in controversies related to the conservation of wolves and wolverines, which concerns reindeer herding and the Indigenous Sámi people and their possibilities for cultural survival within a colonial context. To my knowledge there is as yet no research in Finland about racism in cat advocacy in grassroots-level shelter work (for research in the United States concerning dogs, see Weaver 2021), in other words, in situations that are not visible in the public research materials I use in this study.

20 See note 9.

simultaneously, it is crucial to recognise the value of caring for cat health and wellbeing and new scientific knowledge about cats as a species, including their species-specific needs.

Importantly, cat advocates have come to vocally promote cats' species-specific needs and abilities based on a scientific understanding of cats as a species, as well as the intrinsic value of their lives.²¹ In this process, combined with commercialisation, cat care has become more expensive, as the standards for what is expected of health care, in particular, have grown. The "pet" industry has started to provide various commercial products for cat care: health insurance, microchip pet feeders, puzzle feeders, climbing trees, harnesses, toothbrushes, and a wide variety of commercial food alternatives. Many of these commodities can be useful but not necessary for cat wellbeing, as toys for activation, hiding places, climbing opportunities, and quality food can also be provided with less cost. Good health care, however, is often very expensive.²²

In Finland, cat advocacy is mostly conducted by animal advocacy organisations where the political focus is on welfare rather than on animal rights, while the largest animal rights organisations focus mostly on the critique of factory farming and other animal issues.²³ In addition, The Regional State Administrative Agency, the public body coordinating and advising the work of local authorities as well as enforcing, for example, safety and environmental standards, in their recent guidelines recommends killing cats in cat colonies if they are not sufficiently healthy and readily domesticated. They argue that cats are "of low monetary value" and hence "an extensive treatment of cat's illnesses is typically not appropriate" (LSSAVI/5288/2021, 17). Animal advocacy organisations who have extensive experience of managing cat colonies as well as medical treatment and domestication of so-called feral²⁴ cats, however,

21 Importantly, historian Taina Syrjämaa points out that cats have been seen as valuable companions at the turn of the 20th century as well, both in the gentry and less well-off families, and that having cats as rodent killers did not exclude the possibility of them being regarded as family members, who could live inside the house and, for example, sleep on the belly of the farmer (Syrjämaa 2020, 141, 151–52).

22 Since the 1980s, the amount of money spent on animal companions (all species, not just cats) has increased from less than 200 euros to more than 1000 euros per year; the most significant rise has occurred in veterinary services and medication costs, but food costs have risen as well (Statistics Finland 2020, 2).

23 In the autumn 2021, however, the organisation *Kissojen oikeudet ry* ("Rights for Cats") was founded.

24 These Finnish organisations argue against the notion of "feral" cat ("villikissa"; in Finnish language the word "villi" translates as both wild and feral), pointing out that cat colonies are a result of human neglect. Some of the cats living in colonies may be tame, abandoned cats, and the cats that are not used to people can often be domesticated. They also point

disagree strongly with this view (e.g., Dewi 2021; Rekku Rescue 2021; SEY and HESY 2021). Animal advocacy organisations' voluntary workers and their networks, including some veterinary and cat behaviour professionals, take the main responsibility for trying to raise the intrinsic value of cat lives and resist seeing cats as mere commodities, a killable invasive species, or vermin.

Interestingly, despite the overall changes in the standards and conditions of cat care, the cohabitation of people, cats, and rodents in the farming context forms what is presently understood as “natural” food for cats within the Finnish cat advocacy scene. A crucial difference in the domestication process of cats in comparison to dogs—or those nonhumans who became food production animals in the West—is that cats have acted independently and had a mutually beneficial relationship with people. Cats did not have to be specifically bred or have their bodies modified in order for them to be able to take on the task of protecting grain stores from rodents that would otherwise eat harvested grain (Ellis et al. 2013, 220). Cats were in fact the ones to enable the storing of grains (Keinänen and Nyman 2014, 11). The “natural”, which equals “proper”, food for a cat is tied into this cat-human collaboration. While cats specialise in preying on small mammals, they are dietary generalists, who have been reported to feed “on a total of at least 248 different species ranging from large birds and medium-sized mammals to small insects,” depending on the prey available (Bradshaw et al. 2012, 137–8). However, the “contents”—as the cat advocates put it—of the mouse, the minimum amount of carbohydrates, in addition to a fair amount of animal protein, has become in the Finnish cat advocacy discussion a standard for proper and “natural” cat food, to which the contents of commercial cat food is compared.²⁵

The most visible and societally powerful animal rights organisations in Finland, Oikeutta eläimille (“Rights for Animals,” hereafter OE), and Animalia, raise several problems regarding animal companions or “pets”, such as health

out that many otherwise tame, domesticated cats are also stressed by medical treatment and that such short-term stress is not a reason to deny treatment and kill cats. (e.g., Dewi 2021; Rekku Rescue 2021; SEY and HESY 2021.)

- 25 This is the case for both proponents of so-called “alternative”, “natural” diets/health care and animal advocacy organisations. For example, a blog about cat food notes that “in nature” cats eat (among other things) moles, birds, frogs and insects, and then concludes without further explanation that the analysis of a mouse works well as the starting point for what is “natural” or organic food for cats: 70 percent of water, 14 percent of protein, 10 percent of fat, and in addition, 1–2 percent of carbohydrates based on the stomach contents of the mouse, and under 1 percent of fibre and minerals from the bones. (Numminen, n.d.) The animal welfare organisation Suomen Eläinsuojelu (SEY) also takes the mouse as the determinant of what an ideal meal for a cat includes (SEY 2021). For explanations of cat nutritional needs based on science, see Beitz et al. 2006; Bradshaw 2013, 79.

problems related to breeding and ignorance of animal wellbeing in factory-like “pet” production. Both organisations are critical towards having animal companions, but state that the most ethical option for having them is to adopt a homeless animal. Animalia “accepts keeping an animal as a pet provided that the animal does not suffer as a result, and the animal has the opportunity to live and behave in a manner typical of its species and breed” (Animalia, n.d.). Animalia does not explicitly discuss what species-specific living might entail for cats, but in their case, as the cat is a carnivore, it implies giving them animal-based food. By not mentioning the food question at all, Animalia’s statement avoids the possibly challenging discussion and ethical contradictions involved. Similarly, Vegaanihaaste (“Vegan Challenge”), a campaign linked to OE that concentrates on food and provides recipes, support groups, and assistance for trying vegan food for one month, bypasses difficult discussions about a possible contradiction by strategically talking about veganism as an individual human’s diet. The campaign states in their Vegan diet FAQ that the diet of one’s “pet” does not matter in terms of whether one defines oneself as vegan, unless one eats the nonvegan food of one’s “pet” (Vegaanihaaste, n.d.).

On their general website, OE has been more explicit, having stated that “feeding a cat may require supporting animal agriculture”, which they raised as one of the several ethical compromises related to “keeping pets”. Their formulation (“may require”) however, implied an openness to the possibility of plant-based feeding of cats, even though they did not state it explicitly. During the course of my research, the text regarding animal companions on OE’s webpage was changed, and as of spring 2021, no longer states anything about cat food. In the Finnish-language public sphere it is difficult to find any positive statements related to plant-based cat food; only in October 2021 did one Facebook page appear, called “Kissojen ja koirien eettinen ruokinta” (“The Ethical Feeding of Cats and Dogs”), which promotes plant-based food for both cats and dogs.²⁶

In social media, any news items about giving cats plant-based food usually creates a furious storm, although updates in the above-mentioned new Facebook page on “ethical feeding” have received supportive comments as well. As expected, the tone in mainstream newspapers and blogs is less fierce, but still critical. For example, in a tabloid, a veterinarian was quoted as saying that “dogs and cats are not vegetarians, isn’t it clear just by common sense?” (Manninen 2016), invoking the connection between what is “natural” (cat as

26 In November 2021 a Facebook group was also created around the theme of plant-based food for cats and dogs. The group has 80 members in November 2022. A blog on the same theme has also been established (<https://eettinenruokinta.wordpress.com/>).

carnivore) and what is common sense. In contrast to the dominant representations, a blog by a woman who describes herself as “interested in the nutrition and mental activation of cats” relates to vegetarian feeding of cats somewhat more positively by suggesting that “it is possible for a cat to stay alive with (almost) vegan food”, provided that the food includes several important additional nutrients, such as taurine. The blog also explains, in a more detailed way than is possible to cite here, most of the arguments circulated within cat advocacy discussions in Finland, including that “physiologically, cats are true carnivores, which makes them poor utilisers of plant-based substances” (Piivi 2014), and that a cat’s natural diet includes only a couple per cent of carbohydrates, reiterating the “natural” of the cat food as accounted for above.

Critical animal studies scholars Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka walk on the tightrope of, on the one hand, recognising that “[c]ats are the only true carnivores amongst domesticated animals, and thus pose a unique challenge in human-animal society” (2014, 152) but on the other, also stating that in their theory of citizenship, the “liberty of citizens is always constrained by respect for the liberties of others” (2014, 150). Because of this, “[d]og and cat members of mixed human-animal society do not have a right to food that involves the killing of other animals” (2014, 150).²⁷ They note that dogs are omnivores, which means that feeding them vegan food is not as problematic as it potentially is with cats (2014, 149). They recognise that one objection would be that vegan food is not natural for cats (or dogs) but note that “[t]here is no natural diet for animal companions”; the reason for this being that “dogs and cats have been part of our world for centuries, adapting to a diversity of cultural diets (and there is nothing natural about commercial pet foods)” (2014, 149). They suggest that an adequate diet for cats is one that fulfills their nutritional needs and is pleasing for them. However, in practice, the option of meat being tastier for cats does not count, because of the need to respect the liberties of other nonhuman animals (2014, 150). The only option they allow for compromising this principle is if it turns out that a cat is not able to thrive on plant-based food; as in the case of all domestic animals, cats included, “we are responsible for ensuring that they have adequate nutrition” (2014, 149).

27 In practice, Donaldson and Kymlicka have different rules for cat companions who are considered *co-citizens* versus feral or stray cats, whom they categorise as *denizens*, or liminal animals, who live among humans but not as part of human-animal societies; as they suggest that predator-prey relationships are a necessity outside of human-animal societies (2014, 150). See also Belcourt 2020 for a critique of Donaldson and Kymlicka for basing their analysis of animal rights on theorising citizenship and therefore taking for granted the settler-colonial structures prevalent in the North American, Canadian context, where all three scholars are based.

Some research exists concerning the adequacy and palatability of vegetarian diets for companion animals, including cats (e.g., Semp 2014; Knight and Leitsberger 2016; Knight and Satchell 2021). Andrew Knight and Madelaine Leitsberger, who have reviewed a range of studies on vegetarian feeding of cats and dogs, do not start from what is “natural” but rather from nutritional adequacy; they conclude that “(t)hose interested in vegetarian companion animal diets should be aware of concerns about the nutritional adequacy of some such diets demonstrated by a number of studies over a significant number of years” but note that “(h)owever, to ensure a balanced view, they should also be aware that similar concerns exist about commercial meat-based diets” (2016, 16). They point out that even though a growing body of work suggests that “cats and dogs maintained on vegetarian diets may be healthy”, the body of work on plant-based diets for companion animals is “rarely conducted in accordance with the highest standards of evidence-based medicine” (2016, 16).²⁸ In addition, they note that health problems are prevalent in both domesticated animals fed on vegetarian and meat-based diets, and that, regardless of their diet, regular health monitoring of the companion animal is necessary.

On the basis of these studies, at least three points can be noted regarding the politics of feeding cats plant-based food. First, the question of proper cat food is intertwined with different accounts of what is considered “natural” for cats. This “nature,” however, is tied to cat-human collaboration within farming, therefore already a product of cat-human naturecultures. Second, offering cats plant-based food is a politics for nonhuman animals in general, and in particular *for* the animals often exploited in food production, while the question of the health and species-specific needs of cats is much more controversial. Even though research exists that supports the possibility of cats living as healthy lives as with some other commercial meat-based diets, this type of vegan politics will have to rely on a few studies that do not attain the best standards

28 For example, some studies of “owner-reported health” suggest that cats on plant-based food can seem healthy (Dodd et al. 2021). However, it is important to note that the signs of not being well, and even being in chronic pain, in cats are very subtle (in comparison to dogs, for example, which is a result of their different evolutionary history) and they often remain unnoticed (Rochlitz 2017, 134, 151). Because of this, “owner-reported health” is a rather vague proof that a cat actually is healthy, and that, for example, the cat does not suffer from nutritional deficiencies, the clinical signs of which can take many years to develop. This is important also because Dodd et al. 2021 themselves reference several studies that have criticised plant-based cat (and dog) foods for their nutritional deficiencies. In addition, one-third of the cats fed plant-based food in Dodd et al. 2021 had unlimited access to the outdoors, which means that their diet in practice most likely also consisted of animal prey.

of evidence-based medicine (Knight and Leitsberger 2016, 16). Third; importantly, however, the question of adequate cat diet is far more complex than a choice between plant-based and animal-based food.

5 Competence-Building in the Cat Food Land

Another option for a vegan political course of action, choosing the wellbeing of cats over other nonhuman animals by feeding cats animal-based food, likely intensifies what is called the “vegetarian dilemma”, a “tragic tradeoff” where a person is “forced to choose between two sacred values” (Rothberger 2013; see also Tetlock 2003). However, this is not in any simple way a better option, even for cats. As Knight and Leitsberger point out, not all commercial meat-based diets are adequate in terms of cat nutrition. They point out problems such as hazards related to pathogenic microorganisms, chemical contaminants, or “significant quantities of abattoir products condemned as unfit for human consumption, such as ‘4-D’ meat (from animals that are disabled, diseased, dying or dead on arrival at the slaughterhouse), labelled using terms such as ‘meat derivatives’ or ‘by-products’” (2016, 12). Knight and Leitsberger also mention differences between nutritional contents as claimed on the labelling and the actual contents in commercial “pet food” (see also Hill et al. 2009).

In the cat advocacy scene in Finland, a relatively stable consensus exists that food that consists of by-products is not the best for cat wellbeing; the Facebook cat groups very frequently include discussions where “quality food” (i.e. meat-based food; following the “mouse contents” norm) is promoted, instead of food consisting of these by-products. In the discussions within the more vegan-oriented animal advocacy scene, however, the knowledge that companion animal foods contain these very by-products is a reason to suggest that one is not supporting extra killing of nonhuman animals even when providing cats or dogs animal-based food.

The challenge of determining proper food for cats, in particular high enough intake of protein and low amount of carbohydrates, is demonstrated by cat nutrition being a regular topic of debate in cat-themed Facebook groups. If one is politically committed to cat welfare by establishing that *Felis catus*, categorised as an obligate carnivore, is entitled to food consisting of animal protein, the challenge remains to differentiate marketing claims and product information writing strategies from the information that people responsible for cats need to know. For example, the contents of a kibble package may include several carbohydrates mentioned separately or an amount of fresh meat in order to get the reader to overestimate the amount of meat in the food (Sari 2016a, 2016b).

Knight and Leitsberger also suggest: “Regardless of dietary choice, consumers should be encouraged to check labelling claims of nutritional adequacy, and to ask manufacturers what steps they take, and what evidence they can provide, to ensure nutritional soundness of their diets” (2016, 16). This suggestion, as demonstrated by the challenges involved even in interpreting kibble package information, makes it clear that the demand to provide adequate nutrition to cats is an endeavour that requires competencies, and the energy and time resources for the detective work and self-educational efforts required to build them. Even though feeding is only one part of cat care—in addition to medical care, activation, securing a proper environment with places for safe sleeping, hiding, scratching, and climbing, etc.—it is no straightforward matter.

Some of those disappointed in commercial cat food have turned to raw feeding, which is indeed one of the most popular contemporary Finnish arguments around proper cat feeding. The required competencies in this case include, for example, learning what nutritional additives cats need and learning to compose the diet with the correct daily amount of these additives in relation to the weight of the cat. Another task is to find ways to get raw animal parts and fit a large enough freezer to store cat food in one’s apartment, as ordering larger amounts of animal parts is cheaper than buying them from one’s local market. Raw meat-based diets appear to their proponents as more “natural” and healthier than “processed” food, but various health claims have also been questioned and the prevalence of potentially serious pathogens shown to be higher than in heated meat (Davies, Lawes and Wales 2019).

Yet another perspective concerns the greenhouse gas emissions and overall environmental impacts of animal-based food. For example, in research concerning the United States it is suggested that cat and dog food put together is responsible for 25 to 30 percent of the environmental impacts—in terms of land, water, fossil fuels, phosphates, and biocides—of animal-based food production (Okin 2017).²⁹ Greenhouse gas emissions specifically depend on several issues, such as what animal is eaten: beef production tends to produce the most greenhouse gases (Martens et al. 2019, 468, 471; Poore and Nemecek 2018, 987–88). However, the gains in climate sustainability if a diet is changed to another animal’s meat rather than to a plant-based diet may come with more severe aggravation of welfare issues, exemplified by the fast-growing broiler chickens (Shields and Orme-Evans 2015). Another effective difference related to climate sustainability concerns whether cats or other animal companions are offered animal-based food that people could also eat—which increases overall animal food production and consumption—or byproducts or organs

29 For an analysis of the “ecological paw print” of dogs and cats in Japan, China, and the Netherlands, see Martens et al. 2019.

that are not popular as human food, or meat that would otherwise go to waste. In addition, maintaining ideal body weight and avoiding overfeeding decreases the environmental impact of cat (and dog) food. (Martens et al. 2019.)

The contribution of animal companions to the question of climate sustainability has not yet become a visible topic in the Finnish cat advocacy scene as of 2022. Interestingly, a crucial difference that matters in the case of “proper” cat food in the Finnish context seems to be the ability of a cat’s responsible person to develop *competencies* rather than their wealth (cf. Zelinger 2018). Finnish-speaking Facebook cat groups abound with suggestions for “quality” food brands for prices that are no higher than those of what are termed low-quality foods. For cats’ people, wealth becomes an issue first and foremost in the case of cat health problems, which require special diets and increase the frequency and costs of veterinary visits.

However, building competencies does not only concern people. Whatever the cat’s diet, food costs as well as food waste (and thus the environmental impacts) may rise with individual cats who do not agree to the food offered. Critical animal studies scholars Donaldson and Kymlicka are among the very few scholars to raise the cat food question in their work. However, they do so in a slightly problematic way, as they do not allow much agency to cats themselves—or to other nonhuman animals, as Eva Meijer (2013, 45) has pointed out. Another critical animal studies scholar, Josh Milburn, comes closest to acknowledging agency when he discusses whether freedom of choice for the animal companions can be guaranteed by providing them plant-based food. He first asks the reader to remember that “the majority of companions in the West are not given much freedom concerning their choice of diet, and are simply fed the canned food that their guardians have chosen” (2017, 195). In this context, according to him, plant-based food does not entail any less choice, as there are multiple food brands and recipes available, therefore, “it is perfectly consistent to imagine a companion having considerable choice while remaining vegan” (2017, 195). Knight and Satchell’s (2021) study, based on cat and dog guardians’ observations, suggests that plant-based food is generally as palatable for cats and dogs as conventional meat-based or raw meat diets. However, at least in Finland, queries are constantly posted to cat-themed social media groups concerning how to get a cat to agree to the healthier food that the cat’s responsible person would prefer to offer. Because of these ongoing grass-roots negotiations with cats, I would like to place greater emphasis on the need for diplomatic negotiations with cats, who also develop their competencies during the food negotiations.³⁰

30 See also a critique of the trope of “voiceless” animals: Taylor 2014, 123–24.

The notion of diplomacy with nonhuman animals draws on the one hand, from ecofeminists, such as Val Plumwood's (1993), emphasis on the importance of recognising nonhuman animals as subjects who should be listened to (see also Donovan 2006; Despret 2016a), and on the other, development of the notion of diplomacy by Vinciane Despret (2016b), Isabelle Stengers (2005), and Thom van Dooren (2019, 140–71), as well as Eva Meijer's (2013, 2019) argument for (political) negotiations with nonhuman animals. In these approaches, nonhuman animals are recognised as subjects who have their own preferences and who can—and should be—negotiated with. Everyday care involving special diets because of health issues, or accounting for different cat personalities, preferences, and levels of determinacy and creativity, may require a considerable amount of food experimenting and development of negotiation skills by the human in order to reach a multispecies agreement about both tasty and healthy food.³¹

When cat agency is acknowledged, the anthropocentric notion of “feeding” changes into every-day diplomacy. Negotiations start from what can be considered “food” (a cat may not regard a new substance that smells different as “food”) and therefore, healthy, or edible, and from whose point of view. To exemplify, my negotiations with the cat Saga, who has kidney issues and for health reasons should eat food with a low phosphorus content, and who lives with other cats who apparently receive tastier food, has so far included, among other things, the following: buying microchip-activated pet feeders for all cats that only open the lid of the food bowl when the feeder recognises a cat's unique microchip; so far unsuccessful attempts to prevent Saga from using others' microchip feeders as new kinds of “puzzle feeders” that activate her to imagine new ways of hunting (or as an anthropocentric interpretation might put it, developing new competencies to steal food from others' food bowls despite the microchip function); trying to find food other than kidney food that has low phosphorus content and offering it to the other cats too, in order to diminish the incentive to reach for their food and enable the cats to use other puzzle feeders which are actually meant for this purpose; negotiating which low-phosphorus food might be tasty enough for the other cats, etc.³²

In our household, the negotiations continue. So far, there is no final agreement about food, but new creative ways of hunting from others' food bowls have been invented. In other words, both human and cat competencies related to food can develop in the process. If cat agency and the existence of different cat personalities are taken seriously in the everyday care of cats, and if

31 Fasting is dangerous for the health of the cat, even for overweight cats (Ylikorpi 2018, 277, 381), which is why tasty food is not a minor concern.

32 For a more detailed account of cat diplomacy in practice, see Irni 2021.

the concrete care of actual cats is acknowledged in theory-building, it must be noted that multispecies diplomatic negotiations about food may take directions and lead to results that are not simple to determine beforehand, nor is the cat food question solvable by any general theory.

6 Cat Colonies, Biodiversity, and Non-Innocent Care

The issue of cat colonies is the main reason why the third option for a vegan cat politics, not living with carnivore companions, is not a way out of the trouble, despite it being what the animal rights organisation OE and Donaldson and Kymlicka imply. On their homepage, OE states that “keeping pets” may involve “problems, the solving of which may require ethical compromises” (Oikeutta eläimille, n.d.), implying that one is not involved in ethical compromises concerning, for example, cats, as long as one does not live with them. Donaldson and Kymlicka write specifically about cats in a very similar way, also mentioning the question of food: “There may be no way for humans to have cat companions without dealing with a certain level of moral complexity regarding their diet and other restrictions necessary for them to be part of human-animal society.” (2014, 152) Both statements aptly bring up the ethical problems and compromises related to living with animal companions, but not the ethical problems related to ignoring the stray cat question. Both imply that the best answer to ethical problems related to animal companions is not to live with them, as if such a choice guarantees that one then avoids the ethical problems related to cat-human naturecultures.

If this option to not live with a cat is chosen, however, it is an active choice for one’s vegan life choices, against keeping animals “imprisoned” and for the animals often used in food production, but this course of action may exclude any actual consideration and care for the wellbeing of cats in cat colonies. Importantly, stray cats are not “wild” animals in the sense that they would survive well without human support. Routine neutering and confinement have been presented as key ethical issues in cat care in animal rights scholarship (e.g., Palmer 2013; Meijer 2020).³³ While roaming freely can certainly

33 The discussion about reproductive rights, discussed by e.g., Palmer 2013, remains beyond the scope of this paper’s focus on food and demands its own discussion. I want to point out, however, that any discussion of “reproductive rights” should take into account the female cats whose health deteriorates significantly from giving birth repeatedly, as well as avoid imposing a heteronormative reading on cat lives where sex and reproduction are assumed as self-evidently for the best for the female cats.

be valuable for cats, I would like to question the argument that ‘wildness’ and ‘freedom’ is self-evidently the best option for cat advocacy.

The Finnish case may be peculiar in an international context because of the specific cat advocacy politics that is firmly against free-ranging house cats, at least if they are not neutered.³⁴ The main reason for this is the problem of fast-breeding cat colonies (Ahjopalo 2018; Mäkilä 2020).³⁵ In Finland, adopting a cat from an animal advocacy organisation most likely involves both neutering and promising not to let the cat roam free; however, letting the cat explore the outdoors safely on a leash or in an enclosure, or at least on a balcony, is highly recommended.

Cat colonies are mostly framed as a problem related to cat wellbeing and health: a widely shared view within Finnish cat advocacy is that the life of a cat living in a colony is not “nice, wild and free”, but instead cats “suffer among others, a variety of diseases, inbreeding and the health problems it causes,” these include “giant roundworms, tapeworms, [and] ectoparasites”, and starvation is common, as well as violent killing of cats by stoning and drowning (Mäkilä 2020, 7–8). My point is that to look the other way and let cats inbreed, freeze, starve, and suffer from diseases and parasites by themselves contributes to the production of increased cat suffering year after year. This is hardly a more feasible option for vegan, serious animal advocacy politics than risking cat health by feeding cats plant-based food, or compromising one’s ethics by buying animal-based food that contributes to the suffering and killing of other animals in food production. In the midst of these incompatible, imperfect courses of action, I feel the resonance of Haraway’s (2016) notion of “staying with the trouble.” This also includes the Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) programmes, which have sometimes been proposed as an alternative to having cats as companions (e.g., Meijer 2020).

TNR programmes have been one means to reduce the number of cat colonies, for example, in the United States, since the 1980s (Slater and Shain 2005). Donaldson and Kymlicka (2014, 225–26, 229) mention this type of interaction as an alternative to cats living as co-citizens; in their scheme of thought, cats can also live as liminal animals or “denizens,” leading relatively independent

34 Only in the autumn of 2021, when the organisation for the rights for cats (Kissojen oikeudet ry) was founded, did Finnish cat advocacy publicity become somewhat more diverse, as this organisation supports the free-ranging of neutered cats.

35 Another reason is safety—in social media, horror stories about various types of violence enacted towards cats are shared regularly, and sometimes these are also published in the national press (e.g., Siirilä 2020). In addition, pictures of dead cats hit by cars where the person responsible is searched for invite regular condemnation of letting cats roam free.

lives among human societies, without having their movements or food choices restricted. They mention, for example, the city of Hull in the UK, where city residents provided the cats with food, shelter, and water, and the city of Rome, where a cat sanctuary was established that offered the cats food, shelter, and medical care (2014, 225–26). In both cases, however, the cat populations were managed by TNR programmes (2014, 225–26), so in practice cats in these contexts are not fully able to “retain their own self-regulating mechanisms of social organization, reproduction, and raising of their young” (2014, 229), which Donaldson and Kymlicka elsewhere state as a feature of their denizen-ship model.

Donaldson and Kymlicka assert, regarding the city of Hull in particular, that “(m)any of the cats seemed to live quite healthy and independent lives, counter to the stereotype that all feral pets must be suffering and in need of rescue by humans” (2014, 225–26). Elsewhere, however, they acknowledge that in less temperate zones feral animals may not survive on their own (2014, 224). The geographical conditions and climate issues in specific sites crucially condition the boundaries of feasible cat advocacy. During the Finnish winter, the temperature typically drops below minus six and even minus twenty degrees Celsius in southern Finland, and by the Arctic circle it can typically drop below minus 30 (Finnish Meteorological Institute, n.d.). What acquiring food can mean in these conditions for a stray cat is illustrated by the following fragments of Facebook updates of rescued cats by animal advocacy organisations:

It was a freezing December day and the thermometer indicated minus 25 degrees [Celsius]. A woman was taking out her rubbish when she noticed a starved grey-white cat rummaging through biowaste looking for something to survive on. The cat was clearly in distress and likely hadn't eaten for many days. [...] The cat had parasites, was malnourished, and cold. (FB-update, December 2020)

Judging by the output in the litter box, the little dude's menu had included, among other things, duct tape, parchment paper, and plastic. Luckily, the stuff came out and is coming out ... Not very good for a 100 % carnivore. (FB-update, February 2021)

Because of the Finnish climate, removing cats from colonies, giving them health care, domesticating them, and finding them homes seems more reasonable than concentrating on TNR programmes (Ala-Hulkko 2021). The widely shared cat advocate view is that “The domestic cat does not belong to the Finnish nature, and it cannot survive the cold winter. Part of the colony cats freeze

to death during winters, part of them suffer different degrees of frostbite, when for example, the tips of ears may break away” (Mäkilä 2020, 8).

Concern about biodiversity, of birds in particular, is an additional reason for not supporting free-ranging cats within the cat advocacy scene.³⁶ In terms of cats, Finland is a country with 5.5 million people and 590 000 companion cats, and 371 000 households living with at least one cat (Statistics Finland 2020, 1). It is estimated that, excluding the winter months, free-ranging house cats bring home 800 000 prey animals per month and kill and injure even more. According to a study focusing on a town in South-Western Finland, 72 per cent of the prey were mammals, especially rodents, and 18 per cent birds.³⁷

The late Finnish ecologist Ilkka Hanski suggests that people have contributed to creating an extraordinary predator by taking cats everywhere with them, even to the most vulnerable communities in the world, and by letting cats roam free because it is “their nature” (2016, 128). His point is that there is nothing “natural” in this cat-human combination. If people do not interfere, the populations of wild predators are dependent on the populations of their prey, especially if they specialise in particular prey animals (Hanski 2016, 128). However, as Hanski notes, this is not the case for cats: the number of cats is not regulated by their prey (2016, 128). Cats are not wild predators, but they are also cared for and fed by humans, and are either intentionally bred or allowed to reproduce by themselves and form the above-mentioned suffering cat colonies. It is also worth noting that cats do not only predate for food, which entails that they kill or injure more animals than they actually eat (about cat predatory behaviour, see Bradshaw et al. 2012, 128–41).

Importantly, cat-human naturecultures are not solely to blame for the declining numbers of birds. In addition to “invasive alien species”—a category which also includes cats—climate change, habitat destruction, chemicals and toxins, hunting, and other exploitation crucially affect the living conditions

36 It is usually bird and wildlife advocates and ecologists who wish to reduce the free ranging of cats. They do this in Finland too (Birdlife Finland 2021); for examples elsewhere, see Barcott 2013 (United States), Legge et al. 2021 (Australia), and Predator Free NZ, n.d. (New Zealand; see also Morris 2020 for a critical analysis of the overall Predator Free New Zealand agenda and an alternative approach promoting ‘compassionate conservation’).

37 According to the study’s estimate, during summer and autumn, in the area they studied, cats bring home two percent of the local bird population as prey each month and 150 000 birds per month across the entire country. If an estimate of stray cat prey is added, cats may kill more than a million animals per month (excluding winter) in Finland. (Kauhala et al. 2015, 51). It is also worth noting that free-ranging house cats do not bring all their prey home (Kauhala et al. 2015, 50; Loyd et al. 2013). In the United States cats are estimated to kill 1.3–4.0 billion birds and 6.3–22.3 billion mammals each year (Loss et al. 2013).

of birds and other wild animals (Halley 2015, 152; IPBES 2019; Hanski 2016, 95–8; van Dooren 2014). Still, the question of cat food has broader implications depending on whether to offer cats plant-based food or body parts of farmed or hunted animals, or let them catch their food themselves. In practice, no “natural” life or diet exists for cats, and arguing for their “freedom”, for example, to hunt their own food, ignores both the ecological naturecultures where cats are situated as products of cat-human histories, as well as the less glorious aspects of living in cat colonies. If people offer the food and provide non-lethal opportunities for fulfilling predating needs, it is likely that fewer other animals get killed or injured even if the offered food consists of animal parts. Again, however, no way exists to escape people’s responsibility and the politics of choosing some lives over others.

In this sense, vegan politics in the cat case might want to embrace, or at least accept, the incompatible arguments and positions stemming from *whom one cares for*. None of the options for assessing the case of cats (including turning away and letting cat colonies grow and other people take responsibility for them) enables a neat outsider position from which to claim innocence or pure or perfect vegan cat politics. However, embracing pluralism per se is not an option for a feasible politics of veganism either, as the way in which I understand veganism in this chapter also aims to challenge unjust systems of power. I end the chapter by exploring this point further.

7 Conclusions: Staying with the Trouble with Vegan Cat Politics

To conclude, in the sense described in this chapter, all the options in which veganism and animal advocacy are taken as a serious concern in the context of Finnish cat politics are troubled: none of the options lets vegan politics off the hook of *acting for some lives and not others*. To be clear, this is not a problem inherent in vegan politics specifically, or a suggestion to oppose vegan politics. On the one hand, the cat food case demonstrates that vegan politics does not necessarily consist of simplified or single truths, contrary to how veganism is sometimes presented in feminist science studies or environmental humanities. On the other hand, the cat food case demonstrates that a notion of the political in the case of veganism is needed that recognises *both the exclusions in and the commitments to* animal advocacy. Therefore, I suggest connecting Eva Giraud’s insights about the ethics of exclusion with what I read as Haraway’s notion of the political. I find that what is important for critical feminist animal studies is not Haraway’s own political stance as such in terms of food (e.g. supporting eating of hunted animals) or her interpretation of veganism,

but rather her point about *the political* as a sphere of questions that may not be resolvable. Acting in such conditions entails “staying with the trouble.” From this perspective, I suggest that the case of *Felis catus* and their food entails cosmopolitical *trouble within* the scene of vegan politics.

In my opinion, Haraway voices her politics most clearly in relation to veganism in an interview by Sarah Franklin (2017). Even though Haraway is not vegan, she talks about her changed position towards veganism: “I think vegan feminists called me to account, and I had to pay attention that I was really not getting it!” [...] “So I think we’re always in process on this. I now have a profound respect for veganism as a kind of witness, as a kind of No, a kind of loud *No!* as well as an affirmative politics.” (Haraway in Franklin 2017, 56) As the cat example suggests, seeing veganism as a politics of a “loud *No!*” is still somewhat misleading:³⁸ saying a “loud *No!*” to the killing of nonhuman animals and their suffering is rather an ideal, not the actual, contextually conditioned vegan practice. In the Finnish cat politics sense at least, vegan practice is a question of acting for some lives and not others, which makes its own exclusions on the way.

Some of the options for vegan politics exclude cat wellbeing from their sphere of concern, in particular those that turn away from the cat colonies because of opposing living with carnivore companions, and to an extent also the politics of feeding cats plant-based food. These options are more clearly *for* the animals exploited in food production and against the treatment of nonhuman animals within biocapitalist food production, but willing to take the risk of compromising cat health and/or ignoring questions related to cat colonies. The third option, trying to find quality food with animal protein, is first and foremost *for* cats, but it is prone to excluding other animals, the ones exploited for food production, from the sphere of concern.

However, it is important to note that any cat food that includes meat or meat derivatives is not of a good quality for cats (Knight and Leitsberger 2016). Therefore, the third option, taking cat health seriously in terms of food, does not simply involve offering the cat a meat meal. Making a difference to cat health in terms of food requires building specific competencies concerning cat behaviour and cat food, as well as necessitating conducting diplomacy with cats, who also develop their competencies in negotiating about the food offered. Even when choosing animal parts, offering healthy cat food requires

38 Note also the social model of veganism, contextual veganism, and other approaches to veganism that acknowledge the structural, social and political, power-laden conditions where such a definitive “No” was never an option (e.g., Emmerman 2014, Curtin 1991, Gruen 2014, 133; Taylor 2017, chapter Conflict of Needs).

the resources and time to do detective work on, for example, how to interpret commercial food labels, or to build knowledge about vitamins and other nutritional additives needed when giving the cat hunted, dumpster dived, or otherwise acquired animal body parts. Another question is whether the meat that is found will be acceptable to an individual cat.

Even though an innocent option for vegan cat politics does not exist, my argument is not simply that vegan politics is not innocent. My point, in other words, differs from what Giraud describes as “critical responses to vegetarian ecofeminism [that] often *conclude with* assertions that no position is truly innocent and without violence” (2019, 163, emphasis added). As Giraud aptly notes, the mere assertion of non-innocence is not enough—this is also pointed out by Shotwell in her *Against Purity*, a point which, according to Giraud, is often missed when Shotwell’s analysis is used only for making the point about the non-innocence of all relations (226n76; Shotwell 2016). Giraud’s main criticism of the type of thinking that stresses the noninnocence of all action, including Haraway’s, is that “constitutive exclusions are often simply *acknowledged* and seen as an instance of the noninnocence of any form of relation,” instead of actively *engaging with* these exclusions (117). Her point is that not engaging with exclusions “can ultimately reproduce existing sociocultural relations in ways that leave hierarchies intact.” (2019, 164) Some examples of leaving hierarchies intact, in my interpretation, could include failing to question the structures where cats are rendered killable within the official cat politics that does not recognise the value of their lives; rendering other animals within biocapitalist food production killable; or the practices of commercial breeding and selling of cats and other nonhuman animals as commodities.

All the vegan cat political options I have discussed start by questioning the existing sociocultural relations that render nonhuman animals killable and their bodies modifiable merely for people’s interests. The challenge is that, despite this starting point, none of them manages to fully achieve this, in the sense of escaping the politics of acting for some lives and not others. Eva Giraud’s note on the exclusions can be applied to the vegan cat politics case, and this concerns all the options I discussed:

the exclusion of particular relations or ways of doing things is not a problem that can be avoided, as even nonintervention and pluralism support a particular materialization of reality at the expense of alternatives. The focus, therefore, needs to be less on avoiding approaches and practices that exclude ways of being, and instead on finding ways to make these exclusions visible in order to foster accountability and create space for these relations to be contested in the future. (Giraud 2019, 74–5)

For example, staying with the trouble while choosing to offer cats animal-based food—in other words, acknowledging that this politics excludes food production animals—might lead to a change to other options when such options become available. In addition to acquiring wasted animal parts mentioned above, for example, cellular agriculture, in particular cultured meat, could emerge as a possibility that requires considerably less suffering and killing of animals compared to contemporary animal production (Ward et al 2020, 169, 172).³⁹ In addition, critical animal studies scholar Josh Milburn (2022, 46–47, 180) has suggested that invertebrate-based foods could be one alternative for feeding carnivorous animals, as long as their being sentient is not proven yet; although he also proposes more studies in order to determine whether there actually are animals that are non-sentient. In this sense, none of the vegan political options are “just choices” that are “invariably violent”: staying with the trouble is a *process* that entails a constant vigilance for what and who is excluded from the sphere of consideration, and what options may become available for transforming the current practices.

What I want to add to Giraud’s insight of engaging with the exclusions is the point that a certain kind of “pluralism” also concerns vegan politics, in the sense of different, irreconcilable perspectives based on *who* is cared for first and foremost. This becomes crucial when the focus is not only, for example, on cat-human relations, but on the multispecies naturecultures that include ecological considerations. In this sense, I find Haraway’s point about *the political* as a sphere of questions that are not resolvable important for critical feminist animal and multispecies studies. I read Haraway as demonstrating how food politics can consist of the pull of incompatible animal advocacy perspectives, all of which one considers valid: “That I feel them both in my gut is not relativism, I insist, but the kind of pain that simultaneously true and unharmonizable things cause” [...] “Bekoff and Lease do not embody contradictions. Rather, they embody finite, demanding, affective, and cognitive claims on me and the world, both sets of which require action and respect without resolution.” (2008, 300.)

While for Haraway these irreconcilable differences are between vegan and other animal politics, as she sees veganism as providing only one answer

39 However, it is yet unclear how widely cultured meat could become available to other than wealthy, middle class consumers. At this point it is also unclear whether it would actually reduce people’s meat consumption and whether the energy use needed in it would enable alleviating the climate sustainability problems in animal agriculture; the positive prospects include enhancing both animal welfare and human health and significantly reducing agricultural land requirements (Stanescu 2021; Mattick et al. 2015; Mattick 2018).

(“No!”), I argue for the acknowledgement of the unresolvable frictions *within* vegan politics. Importantly, from a critical feminist multispecies studies position, acknowledging the frictions does not entail non-action—the mere acknowledgement of non-innocence of all practices which leaves all current hierarchies intact. Rather, vegan politics consists of staying with the trouble: it is an active, ongoing *process*, a constant re-evaluation of the political options and their exclusions.

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Fractured Locus: Resistances in the Global South and a Decolonial Ecofeminist Anti-Speciesist Praxis

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1 Introduction

The Argentine philosopher, María Lugones, in the article entitled “Towards a Decolonial Feminism” (2010), continues her analysis initiated in “Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System” (2007), about the wrappings that make up colonial capitalist modernity. Lugones (2010) proposes that we think of race, class, sexuality, and gender not only as homogeneous, atomic, and separable categories but rather as an intersection that fuses social, cosmological, economic, spiritual, and ecological organisation.

Although Lugones has not developed it much, in this chapter we aim to highlight the notion of ecological organisation (2010, 745), that is, the way colonisers conceive nature as a homogeneous sphere available for human domination and exploitation, which includes native populations and their cultures. We propose to discuss to what extent this notion helps us to understand the process of territorial expansion and the ethnocultural subjugation of Indigenous peoples, including their food practices, ecological devastation, and the establishment of the meat industry in Latin America as inseparable sources of speciesism originating from the colonial regime in the region.

Therefore, we aim to discuss the relationship between decoloniality and anti-speciesism in order to defend decolonial veganism from the “fractured locus” as a decolonial ecofeminist praxis. By fractured locus, Lugones means the relationship between oppression and resistance. Understanding veganism as a practice to fight speciesism, while being aware of other forms of oppression against humans and nonhumans, reveals other dimensions of growing food, cooking, and feeding that relate to the oppression of dominated individuals, and groups, as well as their resistance. As an example of this praxis of resistance in the Global South, we present the work of Regina Tchelly, a Brazilian chef, social entrepreneur, and community leader in the Favela Orgânica Project.

In this chapter, we aim to incorporate speciesism as a component of Lugones’ critical analysis of the effects of coloniality within the social organisation based

on the ontological hierarchical dichotomy between humans and nonhumans. This separation has made prevalent a type of violence still in force against vulnerable populations and political minorities in the Global South, especially in so-called Third World¹ countries.

Although we understand veganism to be a necessary condition for confronting the globalising market of agriculture and food production, as well as for the overthrow of the colonial and epistemicidal regime, it is arguably not a sufficient condition, as our choices regarding consumption are part of a broader socioeconomic and environmental exploitation system, grounded in various forms of oppression.

The connection between Lugones and animal ecofeminism² led us to a better understanding of the ecological organisation and its dynamics that make up a society marked not only by social inequalities but by the naturalisation of violent practices of colonial origin. Among them, we may highlight the invasion of land, environmental devastation, appropriation and privatisation of natural resources, and exploitation of human and nonhuman animals. These different forms of domination advance a monoculture based on colonisation of the culture and food production chain, and consequently on the colonisation of taste. Through these examples, we demonstrate how food production and consumption are permeated by intersecting violence against humans, animals, and nature.

In order to develop the relationship between decoloniality and anti-speciesism, we have structured the chapter in four parts. The first one addresses the rise of scholarly work on coloniality in 1990s Latin America, which led different authors to examine the power relations of colonialism and its long-standing effects. Then, we incorporate María Lugones' critique and development of this concept, identifying gendered power relations intrinsic to coloniality.³ More specifically, we invoke her notion of the fractured locus

1 Here, the use of the term "Third World" is intended to provoke an epistemological tension. Although it has been used as an insult, to belittle the contributions of the Global South, it seemed important to us to resituate the term at this time as a historical mark of contempt for the knowledge of the Global South, especially of impoverished countries marked by colonialism.

2 By animal ecofeminism we mean ecofeminism that takes the protection of individual animals' lives as central to anti-speciesism, addressing questions related to veganism as an ethical and political matter. It recognises the effects of animal oppression on the lives of individual animals without ignoring the intersection with other systems of oppression that affect different subalternised groups.

3 The M/C Working Group is part of a critical movement that distinguishes colonialism and coloniality. Both concepts are part of the colonial project, and coloniality continues to exist after colonialism.

to later analyse what kind of vegan practice would make sense in a decolonial framework.

In the second part, we analyse the effects of coloniality beyond human beings. We state that speciesism is not only analogous to other isms of oppression, but it is also symbolically and materially organised to consolidate itself in line with other injustices, such as sexism and racism, and the transnational food industry, which exploits both humans and nonhumans as a characteristic of colonialism that we may call coloniality of species. In this sense, we adopt the definition of speciesism not only as a discrimination based on species, but as a structural oppression (Oliveira 2021). In other words, we understand structural speciesism as the recognition that the oppression against nonhuman animals is intertwined in a necessary and interdependent way with other isms of domination, among which we highlight colonialism, racism, and capitalism. Both colonialism and capitalism established a type of socio-racial organisation dependent on speciesism (Oliveira 2021). Regarding food industrialisation, we consider how taste is colonised and how it is related to a broader sense of monoculture (not only of the soil but also of the mind).

In the third part, we bring together decolonial theoretical approaches and anti-speciesism to help build an ecofeminist project for an ethical and just society. The fourth part demonstrates how Favela Orgânica's project, from Regina Tchelly, is an example of resistance in the Global South through a decolonial ecofeminist anti-speciesist praxis, born in the fractured locus—meaning it is counter-hegemonic and not subordinated to systems of oppression, although surrounded by them.

Before moving on to the first part, we consider it important to briefly explain how we came to write this chapter. In July 2020, the 76-year-old Argentinian philosopher, María Lugones, passed away. In her honour, the Brazilian feminist philosopher, María Clara Dias, along with Letícia Gonçalves, Paula Gonzaga, and Suane Soares, compiled a book called *Feminismos Decoloniais: Homenagem a María Lugones*, published by Ape'ku, in Rio de Janeiro. Being invited to contribute to this book, we aimed to initiate a dialogue with Lugones' legacy in order to investigate how her theories and contributions could improve the anti-speciesist ecofeminism we had already been developing.⁴

That is why we would like to stress the choices we have made in developing our arguments. Since we are committed to epistemological concerns regarding power relations, we consciously chose authors from the Global South to

4 Based on this investigation, we presented a shorter version of our arguments online in the Animal Futures conference that took place in Estonia in May 2021. After that, we were kindly invited by one of the organisers, Kadri Aavik, to contribute to this book.

support our argument. This is not to say that no other authors elsewhere in the world are talking about these issues. Rather, we seek to bring to the fore voices that have historically been neglected, while being aware of certain differences in language and reasoning. Indeed, readers from the Global North who are not well-versed in other languages⁵ or knowledge systems may perceive these differences. Although academia has strong traces of colonialism (which means, for instance, that we usually learn how to think through foreign authors), we are permeated by processes of translation both ways—when we read/learn and when we write. This is a challenge we all face when expanding our circles of consideration, and analyses using decolonial approaches.

2 The Concept of Coloniality and María Lugones' Notion of Fractured Locus

During the 1970s and 1980s, great efforts were made by intellectuals and artists in Latin America to offer critical analytical tools for the period marked by the military coups that implanted dictatorships in the region.⁶ There was an attempt to understand the political influences and external economic interests in this anti-democratic process in the Latin American context. In addition, intellectual and artistic production has attempted to reread and assume new approaches to the historical process of the (de)formation of nation states, consolidation of socioeconomic dichotomies and hierarchies, questioning the attempt to naturalise poverty and hunger, and a radical critique of the fragility of the autonomy of Indigenous peoples and ethnic groups from colonisation to global and neoliberal capitalism.

This movement of contestation, resistance, and criticism can be found in various publications, mainly in the social sciences, but also in the arts, from the effort to recover memories and histories neglected by the ruling power through the production and creation of aesthetic-political ruptures.⁷ In this

5 Like Brazilian Portuguese, our mother tongue.

6 Military coups in Latin America took place in 1964 in Brazil, in 1966 in Argentina, in 1973 in Chile, and in 1976 in Uruguay.

7 We highlight the following works: (1) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), by the Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire; (2) *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* [Open Veins of Latin America] (1971), by the Uruguayan thinker Eduardo Galeano—banned in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay during the military dictatorships in these countries; (3) *Identity and Utopia in Latin America* (1989), by the Peruvian thinker Anibal Quijano. Among the artists, we highlight the Brazilian singers and composers Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Ferreira Gullar, and Nara Leão. The filmmaker Glauber Rocha and the playwright Augusto Boal are artists

context, the following decades have deeply marked Latin American works, with a particularly important milestone for decolonial thought in the 1990s: the birth of the Modernity/Coloniality Working Group (M/C Working Group).

The M/C Working Group consists of Latin American intellectuals located in several universities around Latin America, and it is part of a critical movement that, from the beginning, aimed to question the foundations of the colonial project that made the distinction between colonialism and coloniality fundamental. Both concepts are presented as integral parts of the so-called colonial project. To make this distinction, the Puerto Rican philosopher, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), states that colonialism precedes coloniality and that the latter survives colonialism since its tentacles are beyond the outcome of traditional colonialism.

This distinction helps in understanding the deepening of authoritarianism in Latin America, commanded by military dictatorships. Moreover, it enables us to analyse the hegemonic historical process in the region and creates fissures for a counter-hegemonic reading, which in this context we call “decolonial”.⁸ We identify in the birth of the M/C Working Group the first records that lead to a conjugated analysis of the subjective structures, imaginaries, and epistemological colonisation that still pervade how Latin American societies were forcibly organised in the light of colonial thought.

Given this understanding, the thinker Aníbal Quijano (2005) proposes the concept of coloniality of power. This conceptual device helps us understand the structure of domination that has subjected Latin America, Africa, and Asia, based on the discourse and action of conquest. The term alludes to the invasion of the Other’s imaginary, that is, its Westernisation. More specifically, it refers to a discourse that inserts itself in the colonised world and reproduces itself in the locus of the coloniser. In this sense, the coloniser would destroy the Other’s imaginary, making it invisible and subordinating them while

who produced the “art of resistance to the dictatorship” and therefore spent years in exile as a consequence of political persecution.

8 Decolonial is understood as a fundamental epistemological movement for the critical and utopian renewal of the applied human and social sciences in Latin America in the 21st century: the contextualisation and radicalisation of the postcolonial argument in the continent through the notion of “decolonial turn” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; 2017). As the result of myriad theoretical influences, the M/C Working Group updates the critical tradition of Latin American thought, offers historical reinterpretations, and problematises old and new issues for the continent. It defends the decolonial option—epistemic, theoretical, and political—to understand and act in the world, marked by the permanence of global coloniality at different levels of personal and collective life. We believe this perspective helps us better understand both animal and food production in Latin America.

reaffirming their own imaginary. Thus, the ideas of the European coloniser are naturalised as superior to those of the native peoples, making their way of life, their knowledge, and the native culture of the land seen as inferior (Oliveira 2020). Quijano (2005) also deals with the coloniality of knowledge, which is understood as the repression of non-European forms of knowledge production. It denies the intellectual and historical legacy of Indigenous and African peoples, reducing them to the category of primitive and irrational, and seeing them as belonging to the “other race”.

María Lugones moves on from the understanding of gender in Quijano’s work. Considering Quijano’s proposal of the coloniality of power, Lugones (2007; 2008) analyses how his notions of gender and sexuality help us think about some fundamental intersectional aspects of the formulation of a decolonial perspective. To this end, Lugones proposes to think of a modern/colonial gender system to bridge a gap she identifies in thinking about “Third World” feminist women and feminists of colour.

In a critical dialogue with Quijano’s contributions, Lugones (2008) proposes the notion of gender coloniality. Through this concept, she explains how the dichotomous and hierarchical colonial logic cannot be thought of separately from the essentialising aspect of the gender binary (male/female) amidst Indigenous peoples and cultures. She thinks of coloniality in terms of the processes of subjectivation of colonised subjects reconfigured from dichotomous and hierarchical forms, not only the gender binary, but also the compulsory heterosexuality present in the colonial project. Along with racialisation and capitalist exploitation, she highlights that a process of dehumanisation has made the colonised subject inferior to “human beings”—or the colonial subject,⁹ under the rubric of the heterosexual white man. Lugones highlights the need to theorise these intersections, at the risk of ignoring inseparable aspects for many subjects oppressed by the colonial regime, whose project of power and knowledge compulsorily brought along the markers of race, class, gender, and sexuality as features of exclusion.

Lugones (2008) thus points out that Quijano’s theorisation of the modern/colonial project of gender is limited: he presupposes a patriarchal and heterosexual conceptualisation of the disputes around gender, which he does not question and, consequently, naturalises. In this way, Lugones proposes that gender should be problematised, starting from questioning its essentialisation because, just like race, gender is a fictitious category. Unlike Quijano, who states that an idea of is gender expressed in the naturalisation of binary sexual

9 In this sense, we understand that the colonial subject is not restricted to the coloniser but refers to everyone who reflects this ideology until today.

relations (Fabbri 2014), Lugones (2008) points to the existence of a patriarchal conception of gender to be challenged by decoloniality. It is worth noting that Lugones not only criticises Quijano, but points to the need for decoloniality to assume gender as a colonial category, given that Quijano represents a fundamental author for this perspective.

Based on this critique, Lugones also highlights how (compulsory) heterosexuality strengthens the limited understanding of gender because heterosexuality, as we know it today, is a colonial construction allied with the myth of gender. Furthermore, heterosexuality is a forceful strategy that naturalises bodies based on biology, thus limiting the possible relationships between them. Lugones (2008, 93) states that “this heterosexuality has been consistently and harshly perverse, violent, degrading and has turned non-White people into animals and White women into reproducers of (White) Race and (bourgeois) Class”.

In “Towards a Decolonial Feminism”, Lugones (2010, 747) states that the oppression of subalternised women occurs through the “combined processes of racialisation, colonisation, capitalist exploration, and heterosexualism”. Considering this intersection that places coloniality in every aspect of life aids understanding of how subjectivity/intersubjectivity is formed and how these women act to resist in communities to build ways of being, valuing, and believing that are anti-capitalist and deviate from the colonial imaginary.

Lugones (2010) develops the notion of a fractured locus that manifests itself in the relationship between oppression and resistance. It is about the possibility of the processes of subjectivation escaping subjectification.¹⁰ From this, it is possible to think of other relations that, during adaptation and simultaneous opposition to the colonial regime, can lead to liberation. In the fractured locus, any minimal possibility of agency of the subaltern¹¹ promotes other logics than that of oppression, giving rise to the multiplicity of realities that can escape colonial dichotomies and dualisms. When it is recognised that

10 As Lugones (2010, 747) notes, “[t]he coloniality of gender enables me to understand the oppressive imposition as a complex interaction of economic, racializing and gendering systems in which every person in the colonial encounter can be found as a live, historical, fully described being. It is as such that I want to understand the resister as being oppressed by the colonizing construction of the fractured locus. But the coloniality of gender hides the resister as fully informed as a native of communities under cataclysmic attack. So, the coloniality of gender is only one active ingredient in the resisters’ history. In focusing on the resister at the colonial difference I mean to unveil what is obscured.”

11 For Lugones, the notion of the subaltern designates a way of understanding oppression through the combined processes of racialisation, colonisation, capitalist exploitation, and heterosexuality.

the place of existence imposed on the subaltern can be fractured, it is possible to promote the difference from the colonisers, to try to read the world beyond the dichotomies, and to seek other ways of being through creativity and recreation. According to Lugones (2010, 749), “the locus is fractured by the resistant presence, the active subjectivity of the colonised against the colonial invasion of self in community from the inhabitation of that self”.

For Lugones, the experiences in the community of daily interactions of women woven into social life resist the colonial difference. In this sense, subalternised women¹² in the Global South¹³—bearing possible tensions in how they inhabit the colonial difference—can be fluent agents of their cultures. They can find ways to give visibility to the complex subjects simplified and reduced by the colonial vision. In this chapter, we seek experiences that demonstrate this fractured locus in a decolonial ecofeminist praxis. To this end, we develop the ecological aspects of coloniality, especially in relation to nonhuman animals.

3 Effects of Coloniality beyond Human Beings: Speciesism and the Food Industry

Lugones’ critical analysis reveals that coloniality expands beyond human minorities, to subject nonhuman lives to same systems of exploitation intensified by the demands of global developmental capitalism. Coloniality promotes food standardisation via multinational industries, which impacts both humans and nonhumans. At the same time in coloniality we also find forces of resistance that create, through an epistemological turn, colonial difference, fracturing its locus by asserting life over profit.

Maria Clara Dias, Suane Soares, and Letícia Gonçalves (2019) address the relationship between ecofeminism and decoloniality. They suggest that “beyond

12 Lugones (2010) draws attention to the fact that care must be taken even when employing the terms “man” and “woman”, as using colonial language results in an erasure of the anti-colonial reality.

13 We follow this understanding: “The idea of the Global South is political and not geographical, although it is connected with the spatial question, and is related to the historical trajectory of each country, continent and region. Thus, the terms Global South, Southern countries, and other variants refer to the peoples and regions that have suffered from the colonising processes imposed by white Eurocentric peoples, mainly from what is called maritime expansion. The idea of the South is also related to climatic, racial, religious, patriarchal, cultural, and technological issues, among others.” (Dias, Soares and Gonçalves 2019, 197, authors’ translation).

the identification of colonialism in a strategic geopolitical domination, that is, situated in a context of geographical exploitation, dated between the 16th and 18th centuries” (Dias, Soares, and Gonçalves 2019, 192, authors’ translation), coloniality not only usurped territories but also decimated entire cultures, including their ways of understanding, relating to nature, and interacting with nonhuman animals (Oliveira 2019). That is why the speciesist feature can/should integrate the understanding of coloniality. The perspective of Dias, Soares, and Gonçalves is innovative because it considers speciesism in colonialist, imperialist, racist, and patriarchal projects. It promotes a dialogue between decolonial feminism and ecofeminism, which is fundamental from an epistemological point of view. They highlight aspects of decolonial feminism that integrate the dialogue between ecofeminism and justice:

a) the criticism of the supposed universal subject, markedly situated in a patriarchal, cisheterocentric, racist, elitist, urban, and, we add, speciesist logic; b) the location, therefore, of complex systems of oppression, domination, and exploitation, which intersect, limiting the implementation of an expanded concept of justice; c) the impossibility of hegemonic and homogeneous propositions of justice, without the singularised incorporation of the various moral concerned. (Dias, Soares, and Gonçalves 2019, 195, authors’ translation)

Because of this, ecofeminism originating from the Global South tackles contextual issues of colonialism and needs to understand the centrality of epistemicide in the colonialist project. That is, colonisation is the fruit of a “coalition of forces of entities that represented European power to conquer and destroy epistemologies” (Dias, Soares, and Gonçalves 2019, 197, author’s translation). The ecological characteristics peculiar to the peoples and cultures that now form the Global South became the target of colonisation and imperialism. This region’s nature and tropical climate made possible the production of what mercantilism, capitalism, and, today, neoliberalism understand as inputs: non-human animals, plants, and seeds. Within this perspective, Dias, Soares, and Gonçalves highlight the links between ecofeminism and decoloniality:

ecofeminism and decolonial feminism are—although originating from different points of the globe—associable through a perception that colonisation does not work without the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of nature does not work without the colonisation of the people that inhabit certain regions. Which regions are these? Precisely the tropical regions. The so-called countries of the South make up the

massive, exploited population in the tropical and subtropical regions. (2019, 198, authors' translation)

In this same sense, Vandana Shiva (1993) develops the concept of monocultures of the mind through “intellectual colonisation”, as local traditions of the colonisers are globalised and acquire a supposed universality, which consequently generates the erasure of local knowledge of the colonised. As she notes, “monocultures first inhabit the mind, and are then transferred to the ground. Monocultures of the mind generate models of production which destroy diversity and legitimise that destruction as progress, growth and improvement” (Shiva 1993, 7).

Monoculture of the mind is the metaphor through which diversity is eradicated like a weed. Just as dictatorial regimes exterminate dissident voices—which become the “disappeared”—intellectual colonialism eliminates subalternised pieces of knowledge to make them “disappear”, too. Born of a dominating and colonising culture, modern knowledge systems are colonising in themselves (Shiva 1993). By understanding the complex process of coloniality and its relationship with speciesism, we can highlight the attempts to escape colonial subjectivation, for example, through recognising and creatively promoting the decolonisation of taste.

3.1 *The Colonisation of Taste and the Coloniality of Species*

The colonial regime continues to produce new effects. Associated with globalist and developmental capitalism, translated into the idea of “progress”, it materialises in the globalised food industry’s attempt to appropriate an anti-speciesist agenda. As food consumption is important for the animal rights movement, the production of industrialised and nonanimal foods becomes of interest to this capitalism. When allegedly vegan and plant-based practices ally themselves with multinational food corporations, in turn, linked to the production of transgenic seeds and animals in agribusiness, vegan options become part of the standardised food offered on the shelves of hypermarket chains.

This is the promotion of a depoliticised vegan food standardisation, i.e., uncommitted to intra- and inter-species justice. The food imaginary is, in this way, colonised and appropriated globally. This can affect people’s interest in planting region and community specific plant varieties that are the main ingredients in many plant-based, diverse, creative, nutritious, and inexpensive recipes. Colonisation can boost food dependency when it leads to the abandonment of local plant-based foods, made of affordable and sustainable ingredients, originating in Indigenous cultures and local territories. It also impacts other ways of growing food—agroecology, organic family farming,

and extractivism—as well as the very variety of food planted, cared for, and harvested according to nature’s cycles in different subalternised groups inhabiting the colonial difference in Brazil.

Fabio A. G. Oliveira, in *La dieta sexista: contribuciones desde el ecofeminismo crítico para una decolonización del paladar*¹⁴ (2019), argues that the expansion of capitalism makes coloniality a regime that not only governs the exploitation, enslavement, commercialisation, and domination of life processes, but also emphasises the standardisation of different ways of living, reducing them to the economic interests of that same ideology. The place of nonhuman animals in this process suggests a specific type of capital, termed “animal capital” by Nicole Shukin (2009). This animal capital results from the biopolitical effort based on dualistic thinking, which, by recognising the differences of the Other, belittles them and authorises their objectification. The colonial regime, in this sense, takes advantage of the coloniality of power to deepen its forms of absolute domination over those who are called Other. Dehumanised humans and objectified nonhumans are vulnerable to this colonial onslaught. In the case of nonhuman animals, the result is the creation of animal capital, both symbolic and material. It represents the authorisation to use violence and a socio-cultural and industrial organisation of life, reinforcing what Barbara Noske (1989) has called the “animal-industrial complex”.

Therefore, in the colonial context, as stated by the Indigenous thinker Billy Ray Belcourt (2015), it is not possible to dissociate speciesism from other tactics and strategies of domination. For him, the biopolitical control of animal bodies in colonisation is an expression of speciesism, although White people did not use the term at the time of colonisation.

Belcourt (2015) suggests that we understand speciesism based on the concept of White supremacy, a political machinery based on territorial expansion and usurpation, in line with the exploitation and extermination of Indigenous and animal bodies. For this reason, decolonial thought makes a constitutive proposal for anti-speciesism: the anti-speciesist struggle “cannot exist within these fleshy and architectural spaces of whiteness through which Indigenous politico-economic structures are anachronized, and the totality of decolonisation is rendered unimaginable” (Belcourt 2015, 3).

According to Belcourt (2015), under the pillars of White supremacy food cultures are imposed by colonisation and resized by colonial capitalism as an exclusive way to homogenise the relationship of colonised peoples and territories with food. This process can be understood through both the appropriation

14 “The sexist diet: contributions from critical ecofeminism to a decolonialisation of taste” (authors’ translation).

of land and the imposition of a monoculture cultivation model that no longer guarantees the way of life of the original peoples but rather the satisfaction of the colonisers' desires. This is a way of imposing a single standard of taste and annihilating different worldviews. In other words, coloniality is not perpetuated in isolation. Instead, the project of expansion, territorial usurpation, and cultural domination uses its political machinery for a type of food production. This is exemplified by the large-scale slaughter of nonhuman animals for human food within the animal industrial complex.

In this process, the appropriation of animal bodies and seeds is a form of domination and control of production. Genetic techniques applied to the reproduction and growth of animals and the patenting of seeds gradually violate rural and riverbank populations' the right to cultivate crops. Such people still resist the model of social organisation imposed by neoliberal capitalism, which is eminently urban, global, and White.

Thus, an imaginary of progress is decisive for promoting the monoculture of the mind, which establishes a hierarchy between cultures and organises production and consumption chains. It annihilates the knowledge and cultural practices of Indigenous peoples and nations of the Global South. This model reinvents forms of domination of historically vulnerable groups, above all, due to hunger and misery. Oliveira (2020) calls this an epistemicidal regime: a social organisation based on violence combined with the domination of territories and the annihilation of peoples, nations, and their cultures. This regime is understood as practices that structure the marginality of knowledge that escapes from Eurocentric and Global North production and becomes imbricated in the production of stereotypes that place certain bodies and subjects at the margins of knowledge and power. The epistemicidal regime is consolidated through coloniality in its multiple forms and expressions (Oliveira 2020).

The epistemicidal regime is the consolidation of the monoculture of the mind. Vandana Shiva (2003) perceives this as a capitalist strategy of the technology of precariousness, which disseminates new practices for incorporation into the social dynamics of global power relations still based on the racialisation of particular peoples and ethnicities. The technology of precariousness, far from revolutionising the world and implementing the good life, legitimises the relations of domination imposed by colonial violence. We need to break with this perception to be able to imagine and realise other possible worlds and absolutely creative resistances (Oliveira 2020).

Thus, at least two fields of dispute flirt with what we call the coloniality of the species. On the one hand, the openly speciesist perspective rejects veganism and any manifestation of anti-speciesist struggle; on the other, a

depoliticised veganism aims to translate veganism into a niche market, or lifestyle (Oliveira 2018).

When veganism is allied to this imaginary of progress of food multinationals, it may break some barriers of access to vegan food. Still, it does not untie the knots of the colonial system. It may even contribute to intensifying the oppression of women from the Global South, swallowed up by the precarious reproductive and productive forms of work of the globalising developmentalist model. This helps to deepen the system of colonial domination: the bodies of women made vulnerable by the intersections of the system of oppression, in urban spaces abandoned by state policies, may become instruments for the propagation of the monoculture of the mind and of an industry which profits from the deepening of precarious conditions of life, of humans, and nonhumans. Colonial domination includes the exploitation of female nonhuman animal bodies as reproductive machines in factory farms.

Faced with this scenario of colonial domination of taste and the transformation of diverse local food cultures by the food industry, associated with the precarisation of labour relations—tactics located within the epistemicidal regime—it is important to seek, in the decolonial proposal and in the ecofeminist anti-speciesist struggle, food strategies of resistance which shake up the relations of domination and exploitation in the Global South. It is essential to ensure the protection of human and nonhuman lives through a decolonial critique that is deeper than what Lugones has named ecological organisation.

4 Towards a Decolonial Ecofeminist Anti-Speciesism

Suppose we understand that women and other political minorities in the Global South, through their modes of transformation and organisation of society, stand up to the global capitalist system sustained by the tactics of expansive colonial oppression. We can reflect from them and with them, in a creative and recreative way, on another kind of anti-speciesism that arises in association with animal ecofeminism, in the contravention of an epistemicidal regime.

As the philosopher Marti Kheel (2019, 40) points out, the “main form of contact that most people have with animals is on their plates”, so anti-speciesism also involves decolonising food. The market and processed foods play a fundamental role in people’s diet today, and colonialism reaches this sphere by strongly influencing what should be produced and consumed. Many typical “Brazilian” dishes reveal the colonial mark in our culture, such as those centred

around milk, pasta, and some types of meat. Decolonising food includes the recovery of Indigenous cuisines and presupposes a critical ethical and political reflection on what is “conventionally” produced and consumed. It also implies a reflection on what food is thrown away because it lacks financial and economic value.

Motivated by resistance to the colonisation of taste, we can affirm that Non-Conventional Food Plants (PANCs in the Brazilian Portuguese acronym),¹⁵ or as many popular and community initiatives in Latin America have suggested, the “bush to eat”,¹⁶ are an example of historical resistance. Besides guaranteeing nutrients that plants from the conventional commercial circuit cannot supply, the bushes that can be eaten “have medicinal properties, and their bioactive compounds contribute to the promotion of health. In addition to being plants with the potential to generate income, they are a great path to adequate, healthy and responsible food” (Callegari and Matos Filho 2017, authors’ translation).

Edible bushes are not part of the everyday diet of many groups or communities, especially in urban areas. This means that although they can be eaten, they are not produced and marketed on a large scale. This concept includes the nonconventional edible parts of plants that are part of this production, commercialisation, and consumption circuit, such as banana blossoms, banana peels, and carrot and cauliflower leaves.

Bushes that can be eaten value the biodiversity and knowledge of regional and/or local cultures besides contributing to strengthening food sovereignty, food and nutrition security, and, ultimately, to guaranteeing the right to adequate food (Callegari and Matos Filho 2017). Thus, these plants help popularise veganism and have a low financial cost.¹⁷

Veganism gains prominence in this concept, but to remain politicised, it must go beyond the absence of animal products, such as meat, eggs, milk,

15 PANCs are an academic classification that fails to recognise that some plants have always been part of the culture of some peoples, ethnic groups, and communities. Thus, by using the term “non-conventional” they reinforce a paradigm of neglect of longstanding popular knowledge, strengthening a hegemonic academic type of knowledge dissociated from knowledge production outside the university walls.

16 The term has been used by some educational institutions’ initiatives in teaching, research, and extension, e.g., the No Cruelty Workshops, offered by the Laboratory of Environmental and Animal Ethics (LEA/UFF). See: <http://lea.eco.br/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Teaser-matosdecomer.jpg>

17 Ora-pro-nóbis, for example, is an easy plant to grow and a rich source of protein. Other PANCs include the Brazilian plants azedinha, aroeira, capuchinha, moringa, taioba, and almeirão-roxo.

and derivatives. In these terms, veganism is a necessary condition for animal ecofeminism. By considering that animal consumption is not a gender-neutral issue, dietary choice in a sexist culture is a way to politicise the ethics of care and resist the pressure of sexist standards, states Deane Curtin (1996). The production of eggs and milk means pain and suffering for the exploited chickens and cows, that is, the exploitation of their reproductive capacities. Reproductive rights are central to the feminist agenda. It is necessary to break the species barrier and abolish the production of feminised protein from eggs and milk, which turns animals into absent referents, as argued by Carol J. Adams (2011), by the same logic that turns women into objects. This exemplifies how speciesism and sexism go hand in hand.¹⁸ For the Brazilian philosopher Sônia T. Felipe (2014), as long as the sexist diet—marked by domination—is maintained, there will be no liberation of women.

The diet centred around meat, dairy products, eggs, and derivatives is the most destructive to the planet, additionally impacting the lives of Indigenous peoples (United Nations Environment Programme 2021). Greenhouse gas emissions from the production that maintains this diet is a central factor in the 1.5° C increase in the Earth's temperature.¹⁹ Other factors related to the diet centred around meat, eggs, and dairy products are namely the burning of fossil fuels—on which the transport of animals and the cultivation of grains and cereals that feeds them depends—and the destruction of tropical forests. Data from the National Institute for Space Research (INPE 2019) indicate a consolidated annual rate of 7,536 km² of deforestation in the Amazon in 2018, an increase of 8.5% compared to 2017. Brazil is the country that uses the largest quantity of agricultural poisons in the world (Felipe 2018). To aggravate this scenario, from January to September 2019, the Brazilian federal government approved the use of 325 new pesticides (Damasio 2019).

Although we understand veganism to be a necessary condition for confronting the globalising market of agriculture and food production, as well as for the overthrow of the colonial and epistemicidal regime, it is not a sufficient condition, as our choices regarding consumption are part of a broader socioeconomic and environmental exploitation system, grounded in various forms of oppression. As Esther Alloun (2015) states, veganism is one step in

18 For more on the interconnection between critical gender and animal studies, see Kuura Irni (Chapter 7) and Sanna Karhu (Chapter 8) in this volume.

19 "Cattle and buffalo herds occupy the first place in methane gas emissions on the planet, with 1.3 billion heads around the world, each individual emitting at least 140 g of methane, an estimated total of 182,000 tons a day, or 66 million tons a year. These emissions do not include the gases released by one billion pigs and 25 million poultry, only the methane gas emitted by cattle and buffaloes." (Felipe 2018, 129, authors' translation).

the long journey towards building ethical relationships between humans and other-than-humans (animals and nature). It is crucial to understand veganism within an animal ecofeminist political framework that questions hegemonic power relations between humans or other-than-humans. As Alloun (2015, 164) notes,

[v]eganism is about reducing suffering and exploitation, and taking a stand against unjust socioeconomic arrangements. At first glance, therefore, it should not be difficult to expand our ability to care for and act on behalf of trees, forests, mountains, ecosystems, and other terrestrial life.

From this political perspective, individual practices, in which food choices are included, have meaning. While veganism—as an individual choice—puts into practice the model of the world free of oppression, it does not change oppressive structures. Withdrawing from these systems of oppression is essential but insufficient, so veganism needs to be more than a lifestyle and consumption. In other words, collective political actions are needed to hold political, economic, and cultural systems accountable for oppression (Alloun 2015).

As ecofeminists, such as Trish Glazebrook (2016), point out, the climate crisis disproportionately affects countries of the Global South, women, and other political minorities. Despite expressing critical ethical and political stances, individual choices alone do not adequately address the structural problems inherent in the colonised imaginary still in force in Latin America. There is an urgent need for policies oriented by care practices of community inspiration, which contest hegemonic colonial and oppressive structures.

5 Resistances in the Global South: a Praxis for a Decolonial Ecofeminist Anti-Speciesism

In the Global South, resistance to the processes of colonisation and commodification of human and nonhuman life through counter-hegemonic narratives of non-subordination originate in the fractured locus (Lugones 2010). Such narratives allow us to rethink the interrelations between life forms in a nondualistic and nonhierarchical way, which we understand as a decolonial ecofeminist anti-speciesist praxis.

Narratives based on the experiences of subalternised individuals and groups, in general, are fundamental in thinking about another praxis and conceiving other realities in the face of the hegemony of coloniality that constantly renews its apparatus of self-maintenance. When such narratives are structured

in a counter-hegemonic way, according to Sally Haslanger (2012), they translate into acts of resistance to predetermined social scripts and are components that challenge dualistic and hierarchical conceptual structures situated behind our way of thinking and imagining. Thus, we consider it important to listen to narratives about food from marginalised groups in the Global South. It is equally necessary to write about counter-hegemonic perspectives on coloniality associated with developmental capitalism to show that the globalising food industry is not the way out for the Global South.

Moreover, narratives help to think of what Linda Alcoff (2016) calls a “new language of liberation”, that is, a decolonial language that takes into account the demand for diversity that social movements have presented to academia. For research to be liberating, traditional academic methods, closed in on themselves and historically committed to silencing and distorting investigations into the multiplicities of human groups’ experiences, are insufficient.

Based on this importance of narratives to thinking of creative languages, we introduce the resistance praxis of the Favela Orgânica Project, initiated by Regina Tchelly in 2011. Regina Tchelly moved from the Estate of Paraíba to Rio de Janeiro when she was 20 years old. As a Northeasterner woman,²⁰ she dreamed of better living conditions. For the first eleven years, she was a domestic worker. Noticing food waste in open markets, she started to think about a project against food waste. Combining work, motherhood, and life demands, she took cooking classes and without any funding put her dream into practice. Nowadays, as a recognised Brazilian chef, Regina Tchelly gives lectures and workshops in different states and other countries.

The Favela Orgânica Project has its headquarters in the communities of Babilônia and Chapéu Mangureira in Rio de Janeiro. Its objectives are to “change people’s relationship with food, avoid waste, care for the environment, and show that it is possible to end hunger” (Favela Orgânica 2020, [n.p.], authors’ translation). As for its mission, the project promotes awareness about the stages of the food cycle to create “environmentally responsible and healthy eating habits and practices for families and communities” (Favela Orgânica

20 Migration from the Northeast to the Southeast and South of Brazil is the reality of many families, including young women, who migrate in search of a better life in big cities like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. This is a historical movement of migration in Brazil spanning many decades in the 20th century, especially during the dictatorship. This movement was significantly reduced in the last decades, with the social policies of the most recent left-wing governments led by the Workers’ Party (2002–2015). As a group, Northeasterners still suffer prejudice in the Southeast, where people consider themselves more developed and civilised, even though such migrations were fundamental for the growth and enrichment of Southeastern cities.

2020, [n.p.], authors' translation). In an attempt to contribute to the decolonisation of taste, the project's actions show that peels, stalks, and seeds are ingredients and sources of nutrients rather than parts of the food to be discarded. Furthermore, the project seeks to enrich food culture to promote more significant heterogeneity by introducing new dishes and foods into people's daily lives.

Regina Tchelly carries several social markers that link her to oppressed social groups—woman, Northeasterner, poor, non-White, from the periphery. When such a woman puts into practice a community feeding project focusing on the complete use of edible vegetables at a low cost, an action against the logic of capital and coloniality emerges in this fractured place. But Regina Tchelly did not become active in isolation; her anti-colonial way of being, valuing, and believing is born in community interrelationships and needs them to move forward. In the words of Lugones (2010, 754):

One does not only resist gender coloniality. One resists from within a way of understanding the world and living in it that is shared and that can understand one's actions, thus providing recognition. Communities, rather than individuals, make it possible to do; it is done with someone else, not in individualistic isolation. The passing from mouth to mouth, hand to hand of lived practices, values, beliefs, ontologies, space-time, and cosmologies constitutes a single one. The production of the everyday within which one exists produces the self, as it provides particular and meaningful clothing, food, economies and ecologies, gestures, rhythms, habitats, and senses of space and time. But it is important that these ways are not just different. They include the affirmation of life over profit, communalism over individualism, "being" over enterprise, beings in relation rather than dichotomously divided into hierarchically and violently ordered fragments. These ways of being, valuing, and believing have persisted in the resistant response to coloniality.

Favela Orgânica encourages creativity, recreation of recipes, and the diversity of dishes based on popular and accessible ingredients, preferably organic. It is food that goes against the *nutricide*²¹ that is the hallmark of the standardised

21 Nutricide, or food genocide, is a term coined by the thinker Llaila Afrika in *Nutricide: The Nutritional Destruction of the Black Race* (2013). Afrika highlights concerns not only about the conditions of access to food, but the contours that make food security and autonomy effective. In this context, we cite the Vigitel 2018—Black Population survey, published by

and globalised multinational food industry. Regina Tchelly's creative activity exemplifies the emerging potential present in the "tension between the dehumanization and paralysis of the colonality of being, and the creative activity of being" (Lugones 2010, 754). Favela Orgânica can be understood, then, as resistance to colonial forces acting directly via food standardisation and industrialisation, as well as through commodity production by agribusiness that eliminates seeds with life. In it, women from the community take the lead in preparing food for those who make up their circle of community relations. In doing so, such women disrupt the colonial dualist hierarchical relations of subalternisation and domination that aim to hinder if not prevent creative popular and community expressions.²² It might be said that these practices can reinforce traditional gender roles. But as seen with Lugones, gender is also a category imposed by colonialism. Additionally, in these communities, family boundaries are expanded by care networks in which women support themselves in daily life. Due to the prevalence of paternal abandonment, women are frequently the only ones responsible for raising their children. Therefore, alliances between women, involving food preparation, are essential for the survival and care of everyone.

Although the community work of Favela Orgânica prioritises plant-based food and food without animal ingredients, it does not always use words that we import from the Global North, such as "vegetarian" and "vegan" food. Through this linguistic strategy, the project moves away from the discursive dualisms built around what is vegan and nonvegan food. The central concern is the preparation of healthy and nutritious food with the full use of vegetables without pesticides and chemical additives, because transnational food companies make cheap but ultra-processed and unhealthy foods available to poor people in the Global South. The nonuse of words crystallised in the discourse to divide people into groups and build hierarchies (omnivores versus vegetarians; vegetarians versus vegans) can provide us with tools to contextually rethink the body's relationship with food, encouraging us to reconfigure practices and

the Ministry of Health (Brazil, 2019), which brought to light the food vulnerability of the Black population in Brazil, with regard to the consumption of vegetables, legumes, and seeds, but also their greater exposure to pesticides.

22 The Favela Orgânica Project is one among many models of cooperation led and coordinated by women in the favelas (slums) of the city of Rio de Janeiro. By understanding this as a collective and collaborative form of resistance, we do not intend to affirm that other trajectories cannot be understood in this way. In a world marked by incisive oppression, the very existence of bodies deviating from the norms and powers in force is in itself a way of resisting.

knowledge related to the production, preparation, and consumption of food. The result is that we become more active subjects in the food system and aware of the ways in which food reaches our bodies. We can thus denaturalise our artificial relationship with the food offered within the paradigm of coloniality, which presents us with packaged and ultra-processed food on supermarket shelves or displayed in restaurant buffets.

In the colonial logic, plant foods are divided in a hierarchical, dualistic manner: the parts that can be prepared and those that are discarded (peels, seeds, stalks, etc.). Industrialised foods have countless wrappers to be discarded one by one until the edible part is reached. The packaging preserves such foods, often transported from one continent to another, and ensures they are safe for consumption for long periods. Favela Orgânica confronts this approach as it prepares fresh food distributed to the community, generally grown on the outskirts of the city, and assumes that all parts of vegetables can compose the meal. Through multiple preparations, vegetables can be used in diverse dishes and recipes.

In this nonanimal and decolonial food praxis, there is no room for waste: everything can be used in some way to nourish the human being; nutrition is not restricted to the stage of food intake but involves the whole collective process of food preparation, which nourishes relations in the community, especially among women, being an expression of caring relations. To avoid wasting food, creativity becomes central to the Favela Orgânica Project, giving place to the imagination and inspiring new combinations of ingredients. This creative cooking enriches the food diversity with new forms, textures, appearances, smells, and tastes.

The production of everyday life, with creative ways of being, valuing, cooking, and eating, promoted by Favela Orgânica and Regina Tchelly's knowledge shared with other women, subvert the imposition of colonised imaginaries. Considering the praxis of marginalised subjects, we can identify narratives, affectivities, and strategies presenting emancipation paths that escape the colonial and capitalist system imposed on a portion of humanity and non-human beings and nature in general. The unjust economic logic of profit is replaced by practices linked to the logic of care. As Donna Haraway (1995), Ariel Salleh (1994), and others have pointed out, we must pay attention to the agency present in nonhegemonic localised knowledge (historically hidden by academically situated knowledge), to the knowledge born out of devalued experiences of oppression. Through this we can move away from the conditions of precariousness and the epistemicidal regime structured and reiterated by oppressive modern/colonial hegemony.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented the intersectional decolonial perspective of María Lugones and emphasised that speciesism is an essential category of analysis to understand colonial processes still in force in Latin America. To demonstrate this, we drew on the writings of animal ecofeminist authors who informed us of the need to critically examine speciesism's theoretical and practical implications (praxis). The connection between Lugones and animal ecofeminism led us to better understand ecological organisation and its dynamics. Latin American societies are marked not only by social inequalities but also by the naturalisation of violent practices of colonial origin. These practices include the invasion of land and environmental devastation, appropriation and privatisation of natural resources, and the exploitation of human and nonhuman animals. Considered together, these practices have advanced a monoculture based on the colonisation of cultural aspects, the food production chain, and consequently in the colonisation of taste. We see the need to elaborate a decolonial anti-speciesist ecofeminism inspired by forms of resistance from the Global South. Such a perspective directs us to a necessarily anti-speciesist veganism, forged in the struggle for social justice of the Latin American ecofeminist and decolonial matrix.

Through the discussions presented here, we hope to contribute to imagining other futures for humans and other-than-humans in which lives are not constantly kept in precarious conditions and considered ungrievable (Butler 2015). Many lives indeed move in the counterflow of colonial strategies and global capitalist developmentalism through community resistance, attentive to the intersecting systems of oppression and the destructive effects of a world organisation based on hierarchical value dualisms. Against the food conglomerates that promote the consumption of ultra-processed foods, against the multinational companies that manufacture so-called vegan foods, may we be inspired by the work of Regina Tchelly and Favela Orgânica, to contribute to developing a future planetary cohabitation in which all lives are equally liveable.

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PART 6

Intersectional Animal Activisms



Toward Trans-Sensitive and Vegan-Intersectional Feminisms

An Interview with Panda Eriksson

Panda Eriksson, Kuura Irni, Kadri Aavik and Milla-Maria Joki

1. First, could you please tell us a bit about yourself: what kind of activist work do you currently do?

My name is Panda Eriksson, I'm a non-binary trans 31-year-old intersectional feminist, nurse, and sexologist. I am also a Finn-Swede, meaning that I belong to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. I have a varied educational background that involves both a BSc in cell biology and a soon-to-be-completed MA in gender studies, as well as a BAA in cultural management. I think I was around 20 when I became a vegan. I'd been lacto-ovo-vegetarian before that, but everything changed overnight when a friend of mine recommended I watch the documentary *Earthlings*. I remember it was freely available on YouTube, and I watched it and my heart sank. I left my biology studies after finishing my bachelor's degree because I couldn't deal with working on test animals. Professionally, I've always been interested in the same things I am interested in now: human rights, health, equality, science, minority rights and wellbeing, but I never quite found the way to combine them in a way that served my community until I decided to leave academia and pursue a career in nursing with a focus on sexology. I carry with me my love for science wherever I go.

I'm a people person and an animal person. I love all animals, and I'm the most extroverted extrovert I know in the sense that I get terribly blue if I don't have human contact nearly daily. At the same time, my moral compass is far too developed for my own good, and I have no trouble closing doors if I feel like my boundaries aren't being respected. I don't enjoy conflict at all, but I feel morally obligated to stand my ground when it comes to human and animal rights.

Currently, I'm mostly involved in human rights and I tend to focus on LGBTIQ+ issues, especially trans issues as well as equality within the health care system. I am a board member the student association of Tehy, which is a Finnish labour union for workers in the health care business. A friend of mine once told me he thinks it's impossible for me to do something without

incorporating it into my activism, and I think this describes me well—I can't be quiet if I feel something is wrong.

2. Would you like to tell us about your growth or transformation as an activist? What have been the most important insights you have had through your activism?

I was never an activist child, and as a teen, I was interested but not very engaged in NGO or advocacy work. My parents were not politically active, nor was anyone in my extended family as far as I know. I think I did learn a general sense of justice very early on in my life, but I didn't know how to apply it. I think my first activism was some general form of leftist idea that we should all have equal opportunities to live and thrive, but I didn't start cultivating these ideas before I moved out at 15 years old. Becoming a vegan meant opening my eyes to compassion, and I started reading activist literature online.

I think education was key for me—the values were there, but without the material, information, science, and experience to back it up, there was nothing for me to do. My veganism started in animal compassion and anti-speciesism, but very quickly evolved as I started reading about deforestation, climate issues, ecology, and the human rights issues that were involved in factory farming and the exploitation of the Global South. This, together with my coming out as trans, was probably one of the main reasons I got into feminist theory as well. For me, it was imperative to see the connections between human and animal suffering.

I realised what I'd seen as human rights issues here in Scandinavia¹ was very naive. I don't consider White feminism to be feminism at all anymore—what good is feminism if it's not intersectional? At the same time, I did run into questions of, for instance, indigenous food politics, or food privilege. One of the most important insights I've had through my activism here is probably that my perspective will never be applicable on a global scale. I don't have to hunt for food. I don't come from a tradition where animal sacrifice is a ritual, and my refusing animal products does not come with much of a cultural burden or risk of malnutrition. I still don't think animal suffering is ever justified, but I've learned to keep my mouth shut when the discussion goes places where I have nothing to say, no knowledge, or no experience. I still struggle with this all the time, because wouldn't it be great if things were black and white, right and wrong? White veganism as a phenomenon is probably one of the most current issues us White vegans have to start taking into consideration. Preaching

1 Finn-Swedes in particular include Finland as part of Scandinavia.

about spirulina smoothies is never going to carry us through to a more just, kind world, when there are millions of people who are still starving. In the meantime, we have to figure out what we can do and accept that we won't be able to change this overnight as easily as watching *Earthlings* changed me.

Since waking up to veganism, I've grown immensely in other contexts. Trans activism has become part of my daily life, of who I am. It has taught me so much in terms of professional skills, from delivering speeches in front of the UN or some minister or the other to leadership to conflict management to intersectionality. Just as I don't want to do animal rights activism in a way that throws questions of class or racism under the bus, I don't want my trans activism to be racist or abusive of animals. Learning how to be "one of the good ones" in more than one way is probably a life-long adventure, and it is natural to keep screwing up. I try to take into consideration as many intersections as I possibly can in all of my activism.

3. What does intersectionality mean to you in the context of your activism?

Intersectionality means that there are multiple axes of difference in any given issue. We aren't just trans people, or cis people, or straight or bi or pan or gay or asexual, omnivores or vegans, academics or undereducated, poor or rich or able-bodied or "crippled"² or White or Brown or Black. Human identity is a huge mix of factors that together form a rich meshwork of identity—not to mention that there is a conscious part of it as well, where we can choose whether or not to identify as something or other. I call myself a vegan, although my chronic illness demands that I take medication daily that contains trace amounts of lactose, i.e., milk sugar. I usually say I'm a vegan, not a martyr. Intersectionality is the practice where we try to be aware of these intersections, such as in my case the intertwining of food politics/eating and ability. I also mentioned that my perspective as a White person, who lives in a warm house with a very minimal risk of being evicted, is different from people whose "factors" intersect in other places. My sincere belief is that we should be aware of our own privileges and positions in our activism, since it tells us where we should demand that our voices be heard, and where we should make room for others and their experiences.

2 This term follows crip theory and normalises what would rather problematically be called "vammainen" in Finnish. The term "vammainen" might be considered problematic but Finnish activists are moving to use it so as to remove the negative charge from it, much in the same way that Crip theorists are trying to reclaim "Crip/pled".

4. When and how did you start considering the intersections between animal advocacy or veganism and other social justice makers?

I kind of replied to this in the second question. I read about animal-inclusive feminism long before my own train of thought made it to that station. I don't actually buy into the idea that there is a general "female-specific solidarity" that is connected to female animals being raped for milk production, maybe because I, as a trans person and modern-day intersectional feminist, don't see feminism as a women's issue anymore. I don't really see the human concept of gender as applicable to nonhuman animals either. I have two rescue cats and people are always asking whether they're boys or girls—I tend to ask how I'm supposed to know. They haven't told me, at least not in a way that I would understand. They're cats, I'm pretty sure they don't care about gender identity. As far as genitals go—why on Earth would you care about my cats' genitals?

For me, the intersection is somewhere else, maybe in solidarity, in justice, in minimising suffering, in not using and abusing living, sentient creatures. I don't really care if pigs have the intelligence of a human three-year-old, or if pigeons can learn how to use tools—I mean, it's cool and all, if that's what they like to do, but I don't think intelligence (the way humans might define it) should be a criterion for deserving to live life to the fullest. It also annoys me when people analyse homosexuality as "natural" because you can observe "homosexual behaviour" in penguins. Homosexuality is a human construct. I don't think penguins have any interest in flying the rainbow flag. Not that I can be sure, of course. "Humanness", proximity to human behaviour and so forth shouldn't be a core value if you ask me.

5. You organised Turku Pride, a human rights event for LGBTQ+ communities and their allies, in the South-Western Finnish city of Turku in 2016 and 2017. After this, you initiated and organised TransTurku, an alternative event designed to centre human rights work for trans people, as it did not seem to fit well enough under the "general rainbow"³ issues. You have also taken into account nonhuman animals in these organising efforts, for example by making sure that most of the food available was vegan. Could you please tell us more about these efforts? I [Kuura Irni] remember that during the Turku Pride some of the gay men commented on both the food and trans visibility. How would you analyse these events now?

3 *Sateenkaari*, the Finnish word for "rainbow", is used to mean "everybody who is not straight" but in practice can exclude trans and other queer people.

Paying attention to animal rights issues by choosing vegetarian food vendors for the events was such a simple decision for me that I have no idea how people could possibly make it into such a big drama. Science tells us that plant-based food is kinder to the climate in terms of CO₂ and energy consumption required per produced calorie. We are smack in the middle of a climate crisis. Even without thinking of the animals, it should be every responsible human being's job to make efforts to help stop the climate change that threatens all of us. In addition, vegan food is kinder to animals. It isn't a human right to eat dead animals to me, it is a human right to eat. You can easily get all of the nutrients you need in a vegan diet—there is plenty of research on this as well. If you can choose to eat in a way that offers you the same or even better nutrients, while minimising suffering at the same time, why not do so? Especially in a situation like an event, where you don't even have to bother making the food yourself. Yet another issue that was brought up was how many Finns are lactose intolerant—vegan food is, often, more suitable for a larger group of people, allergy-wise. Also, omnivores can eat plants, but vegans can't eat meat or dairy. This way we maximise food suitability for everyone.

The decision was to contact food vendors for the events, and we decided to contact vegetarian vendors. We also asked that they all carry vegan alternatives. There was, obviously, no mandatory buying of food—you could easily bring your own picnic and all the salami in the world if you wanted to, or bring your own meat and then buy some veggie food if you wanted a hot dish in addition. We even set up a meeting point for food delivery, so that people could order their meat dishes via a delivery service.

However, the response some apparently aggravated omnivores provided online was really silly. I was called a grumpy old lesbian hippie, which felt funny to me, considering I wasn't a woman, nor a lesbian, nor a hippie, nor very old. I didn't feel like I was restricting anyone's freedom of choice by making animal-friendly alternatives accessible, but clearly I hit a sore spot especially with middle-aged gay cis men. I can't say for sure that this is an issue of gender, but it occurred to me that this mirrors the example I'll talk about in the next paragraph. When these cis gay men received equal rights before the law, did they think the job was done and that no one else deserved any more rights?

Another issue that was brought up was that we decided to fly the Trans flag next to the rainbow flag, which led the local gay bar, Suxes, one of its owners and its DJ (all cis people, to the best of my knowledge, and I did to that point think I knew them fairly well) to publicly boycott Turku Pride. The argument was that we were creating separatist spaces and thus dividing the "rainbow"

community; the issue of vegan food was of course connected to the “trans side” of things. I tend to agree, if it comes to separating rainbow capitalism⁴ or homonationalism⁵ from queer trans feminist practice. If by trying to be as intersectional as possible we accidentally rule out the people who don’t think everyone should be included, then I don’t see a problem in that. I feel sad over the whole issue, because Turku still has only one official gay bar and I know so many people who decided to boycott Suxes in turn, myself included. Later we would also hear stories of racism within the Suxes community, which I decided not to pursue further. Turku does need a queer bar though, and even if Kirjakahvila is more of a vegan queer-friendly café than a queer bar, I’m happy that there is a place for queer people to gather where both trans rights and veganism are not only welcome but taken for granted. I do remember being able to get oat milk with your coffee from Suxes once upon a time, so maybe the gents there have room in their hearts for a little bit of animal rights, even if it might stem more from a customer demand situation.

6. Have you continued the attempts to combine animal advocacy efforts with other kinds of activism since then and, if so, how?

My attempt is to keep them both simultaneously going in all activism that I get involved in. I don’t really tend to preach veganism on a personal level; I’d rather make executive decisions where possible. I don’t think it’s helpful to blabber on to people who aren’t interested—unfortunately some people will keep closing their eyes and let their mouths be sated rather than their senses of justice. The way I see it, I can provide a good example, talk about it whenever asked or urged to, and keep making smart decisions in my work. I would not organise events with omnivore catering—if I organise, I want food that I can eat myself, with a good conscience. People are free to leave it be if they don’t want it. I also try to think about climate issues and animal rights (as well as human labour rights) when making purchases for an organisation, and I also try to organise events in venues that are vegan or vegan-friendly, as well as to support places that make efforts at accessibility (physical, social, and financial). It doesn’t have to be visible or dramatic, and it doesn’t have to come with a statement. I learned the hard way that sometimes it’s easier

4 Editorial note: For an explanation of rainbow capitalism and its problems, see e.g., Singh 2019.

5 Editorial note: For an explanation of the notion of homonationalism, see Puar 2013.

to just do the work without reaping the “good guy points” from it—people don’t necessarily need to know that your organisation is trying its utmost to be animal-friendly, because it might just provoke the trolls. It’s enough for me to know that I’m doing what I can, and I can go to sleep each night knowing I did my best. This is, of course, my opinion. I sound very dogmatic here, but I honestly try not to even look at what other people are eating or doing. I’m not here to judge.

7. In your opinion, what are the most urgent feminist and animal advocacy matters at the moment, in Finland or elsewhere? How should they be addressed?

I think one of the main issues is how nonhuman animals in general are considered utilities, commodities, pieces in this game that is capitalism and overconsumption. I’m not sure how to even address that, it’s such a huge question of how we value and respect life in general that I doubt I’d have the key to unlock this question even if I tried. Some of the ways this is visible in Finland is fur farming—I can’t believe fur farming is still a thing, even if new European countries keep coming up with bans all the time. I believe fur farming should be banned immediately, smack the lid on the whole thing, *finito*, the end—yes, even when it means there are people in the industry who need to get re-educated or find other jobs. I don’t understand how vanity could ever justify an industry of horror and pain. I’m writing this with a ball of fluff in my lap, and looking at Grandma Luna (my cat) I can also conclude that anti-speciesism is kind of hypocritical—I mean, I do feed her meat every day. Appreciation for cats as a species is terribly low in Finland—I’ve been affiliated with the NGO Dewi that works with stray cat populations, and the population problems we see in Finland are awful and ridiculous. People still get “summer cats”, cute pets for the duration of the summer, maybe during their time at a cottage, which is something many Finns do during summer, and then dump them, and I can’t even begin to fathom how one could do such a thing. To abandon a living person—because they are in essence to me individual, nonhuman persons—that you commit to take care of and then leave?

Diet is another big thing—humans eat way too much red meat for their own health, not to mention how twisted factory farming is, or how vastly bad for the climate it is. Finnish politicians keep making an identity-politics issue out of the right to eat meat, and some politicians choose to make this one of their key issues, as could be seen in the municipal elections in 2021. Eating meat is combined with masculinity and the idea of being a good, proper Finnish

grown man, a real man, which is then opposed, for instance, to left-leaning politicians. Media attention is vast if a municipality dares suggest that the kids in their schools eat vegetarian food once a week. Climate issues and animal (and human) rights are in such close connection to each other that I figure we'll soon all be forced to become vegans. When we do, us vegan veterans will gladly share our best recipes. After all, seitan is great!

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The Future is Queer and Vegan!

An Interview with Özge Özgüner

Özge Özgüner, Kuura Irni, Kadri Aavik and Milla-Maria Joki

1. First, could you tell us a bit about yourself? What kind of activism are you involved in?

I am a 40-year-old queer vegan feminist. I have been calling myself a feminist since I was 28 years old, and I became a vegan six years ago when I realised that speciesism is a form of discrimination. I work in the field of visual communication, and I am interested in the visual arts. I am one of the founders of the Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence, a queer feminist association focusing on sexual violence in Turkey. I am sometimes invited to run workshops (“Vegan Feminism” and “Sexual Violence against Animals”) by rights-based organisations and student groups working in various fields. I also give lessons on speciesism and discrimination at VegAcademia, a nationwide educational platform for nonvegans, which we founded with our activist and academic vegan friends. These seminars have been met with great interest.

In 2021, a group of vegan activists—including myself—opened an animal rights study centre in Beyoğlu, called BurHak in Istanbul in the memory of my sibling Burak Özgüner,¹ an animal rights and LGBTI+ activist and a conscientious objector, whom we lost on 9 November 2019. In my opinion, one of the most significant shortcomings in Turkey at the moment is that none of the existing literature (books, articles, etc.) provides an exhaustive discussion on animal rights, which also means that it cannot be utilised in the struggle for intersectional rights. Because of this, our priority was to organise Animal Rights Discussions once a month throughout 2021. In these online discussions, which I facilitate, our aim has been to illuminate and elaborate on the historical, political, and social transformation of the animal rights movement in Turkey as well as explore the link between different power relations, patriarchy, racism, exploitation of nature, and speciesism. The discussions bring together activists and experts working in the fields of ecology, human rights,

1 For Burak Özgüner's and BurHak's website, see www.burakozguner.com.

women/LGBTI+ rights, expert lawyers, academics, professionals, nongovernmental organisations, and animal rights advocates. I think that the discussions will pave the way for a common goal in the struggle for holistic advocacy of freedom and rights and develop what Burak, who carried out activism in many fields, left us. We plan to publish *BurHak Animal Rights Discussions* as a comprehensive book in 2023.

There has been an Animal Protection Law in Turkey since 2004, but it fails to protect animal rights and it does not criminalise violence against animals. In the last 10 years, however, with the increase in vegan activists, animal rights and animal freedom advocates, changing this law has been on the agenda. Our group of animal rights advocates launched a campaign called *Law for Life*² with the goal of raising awareness and ending violence against animals, while developing inclusive, protective, and transformative arrangements to prevent impunity. Our campaign consisted of twenty basic demands for a holistic law, appealing to governmental officials, sending letters to them, and organising social media and street protests.

2. You have a background in visual communication. How does this show in your activism?

Yes, I have been working as a graphic designer since 2002. It has been almost ten years since I stopped working for advertising agencies. As my awareness of discrimination increased, I could no longer bear to work in agencies that support the continuity of the capitalist system. Creating visual things for animal rights and feminism is something that I cannot stop myself from doing. Especially in recent years, social media has come to function as a news outlet and information tool, and its function only increased with the COVID-19 pandemic. Fewer people spend time reading long articles now; instead, easily understandable short videos, catchy slogans, and brief headlines stand out. I take this into account while doing digital activism. I use my skills for activism, without producing pornography of violence. I try to draw attention to equality and interconnectedness of different types of discrimination, and to produce empowering visuals.

² For the campaign's website, see www.yasamicinyasa.org.

3. Please, tell us about your relationship with nonhuman animals throughout your life. How has your understanding of these relationships and your relating towards nonhuman animals changed, and why?

When I was in high school, I moved to a small town with my parents and my sibling, Burak, who was seven years younger than I was. At that time, the municipal teams were killing dogs with poison. Burak founded the Bahçeköy Animal Lover Children's Club with the aim of instilling love for animals in children. I was unaware of what we were exposing them to by ignoring the nonhuman animals with whom we share this world. I guess I was only seeing my brother as someone who was extremely sensitive.

Long before, I left home and the city for university. After I came back home from university, we moved from that town, and my sibling became a member of animal lovers' associations. They were 18 years old when they became the president of one association and made me a member as well. Since I had an anthropocentric view of the world, I was seeing neither the animals nor the animal lovers as people waging a political struggle. I was fishing, eating animal meat, drinking animal milk, and I saw no problem in living this way. When my sibling came back from college, I was meeting with anti-authoritarian, anti-militarist activists, going back and forth to anarchist and feminist organisations, and trying to fight the fight for a nonviolent world where no one is discriminated against. When the IMF and the World Bank came to Istanbul in 2009, Burak and I participated in several protests with Rhythms of Resistance,³ an anti-authoritarian and anti-militarist group which operates via an international network. The group supports protests in many countries through music and creativity. For five years, we actively supported different areas of struggle such as for human rights, animal rights, workers' rights, ecological rights, women's and LGBTI+ rights, and immigrant rights.

In 2010, together with anarchist and anti-authoritarian friends, we founded the Association for Freedom for the Earth, which had been a joint dream for Burak and myself. Before that, there was no association in Turkey that covered all the struggles I mentioned above without creating a hierarchy among them, and there was no association that prioritised speciesism and animal freedom. With the understanding that nature and society should be considered as a whole, the association carried out activities until 2016 to contribute to the

3 For the protest group's website, see www.rhythms-of-resistance.org.

construction of an egalitarian mentality among living beings. In addition, the association advocated for a sustainable and ecological lifestyle that prioritises solidarity and sought to ensure that the rights of all living beings would be guaranteed.

Soon after we found the association, after I watched a video of a slaughterhouse, secretly recorded by another association member, I became a vegetarian. Then, in 2014, I decided to go vegan while drawing the Vegan Nutrition Chart for the association. Burak and their fighting spirit taught me that it is necessary to produce discourse without excluding anyone, and earlier they helped me learn that animals are individuals who have rights. Since then, I have seen animals who are sick, disabled, and subjected to human violence, and I have been trying to heal them, opening my house to them. I have been living with a dog for four and a half years, and I work to ensure that all animals—including human beings—lead a nonviolent life, regardless of species.

4. What does vegan feminism mean to you?

Vegan feminism is necessary to establish the link between the exploitation of nonhuman animals, those humans who are not white, adult, heterosexual, and cisgender male, and those who do not fit within social norms. Furthermore, it is necessary for the feminist struggle to move towards non-anthropocentric modes of action. As humans are also an animal species even though this fact tends to be rejected in practice and, most importantly, as all forms of discrimination—including sexism—relegate one to less of a human, I believe that the feminist movement should incorporate nonhuman animals into their agenda. As we cannot be free while keeping someone captive, it is not enough to demand freedom only for the human species.

In other words, intersectional feminism exposes the system—the big picture—we need to combat. It destroys our ingrained perception of victims and perpetrators and leads us to question the discriminations we simultaneously perpetrate and face within the intersectional power structures. The first step in combatting speciesism is to recognise the rights of animals that we have encroached upon and start living without exploiting them. In this context, being a vegan is the bare minimum. The feminist movement transforms through the efforts of those who see themselves as feminist agents. The combination of the words “vegan” and “feminism” has also been the result of long struggles. We need a vegan feminism wrapped in queer imagination for a world in which we are not slaves to anyone, we do not enslave anyone for ourselves, and we do not exploit anyone. We need queer vegan feminism to challenge all dichotomies inherent in power.

5. How can animal liberation efforts and its connection to other social justice matters be seen in your activism?

Various binary dichotomies (human–animal, woman–man, cis–trans, heterosexual–homosexual, sane–mad, child–adult, disabled–able-bodied, White–Black, etc.) have become normative and are reinforced by systemic power structures. However, this does not mean that women, LGBTI+ people, children, all disadvantaged groups, and animals are exploited in the same way within the patriarchal system. Nonetheless, discrimination and hate culture occur through the same norm of superiority, as indicated by the several processes of dehumanisation. For example, children are not perceived as fully human, so their rights are easily violated and the abuses they are subjected to are recklessly ignored. This is also the case for mentally “disabled” individuals, another group of people often silenced. A trans woman is regarded as not woman enough and not human enough. Jewish people were subjected to “inhuman” treatment and massacred in concentration camps on the grounds that they were an inferior race. When bosses are assumed to be smarter than workers, they are seen as more deserving people. In other words, the justification is always the same, and thus hate crimes and injustices end up swept under the rug.

As the bodies of nonhuman animals are “captured” for consumption using much more force than collecting plants would require, they are presented primarily to normative men.⁴ In other words, men show off or “prove” their manly strength by capturing animals using force instead of collecting plants to eat, which in practice would be an easier task. In a similar vein, all “nonmale” bodies are seen as bodies to be conquered and dominated. The innate rights of nonhuman animals are rendered invisible by anthropocentric ways of thinking and the use of discriminatory language. I, through my activism, highlight these points. I emphasise that humans positioned themselves to a superior status that enabled them to dominate nature and animals for thousands of years. For these reasons, we should read human history from the perspective of nonhuman animals if we want to understand the struggle for animal liberation. I work with activists who embrace intersectional struggle for this purpose, and I am in a constant state of change from the moment I decide to initiate change within myself. I believe that any one of us can change as long as we are open to hearing about the lives of others and do not assume ourselves to be saviours.

4 “When the meat supply is limited, men will receive it. Assuming meat to be food for men and consequently vegetables to be food for women carries significant political consequences. In essence, because meat eating is a measure of a virile culture and individual, our society equates vegetarianism with emasculation or femininity.” (Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* 2016, xxxvi)

None of us can rid ourselves of this system of exploitation; we socially transform by influencing each other. I have never thought that “I should convert this audience or that audience”.

In the workshops I have held, I noticed that people who were exposed to some forms of discrimination found it easier to establish connections between different power structures. University students are very open to change. I remember once when we took a break at a full-day workshop with psychologists on combatting sexual violence against animals, I saw three people hugging each other, one of them teary-eyed. When I asked, “Are you okay?”, they smiled and said: “You made us all vegan”. I do not think anyone will abandon their habits and comfort zones unless they want to do so. Therefore, I believe that people cannot be turned into vegans as if by magic, but you can broaden their horizons during their transformation process. At the end of the day, we embraced each other with our words, and they told me: “Your existence is very valuable. Please do not neglect your selfcare.” I felt that we touched each other, which is the most valuable thing in my opinion. Perhaps their lives did not change completely that very day, but I know that they set out not wanting to be a part of the system that narrows our lives.

6. Have you been involved in some situations or incidents that demonstrate the connection between animal liberation efforts and other social justice matters?

Back in 2013, when I was reading the Turkish translation (by G. Tezcan & M. Boyacıoğlu) of Carol J. Adams’ *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (original 1990) as a vegetarian feminist, I started to think about the connection between masculinity, meat-eating, and animal-owning. Then, in 2014, I attended the first Vegan Feminist Camp in Turkey. Throughout the three days of the event, I immersed myself in conversations with other vegan and nonvegan feminists about the institution of family, war politics, motherhood, our relationships, food culture, eating meat, militarism, homophobia, transphobia, feminist language and expression, veganism, and daily life. After the camp, I recognised the necessity of animal freedom to be a part of the social justice struggle against speciesism, and I went vegan. On 8 March 2015, when the first Feminist Night Walk was organised in Istanbul, we walked with our vegan feminist placards: “Vegan Feminists are Here!”, “Male Violence Rises from the Slaughterhouses”, “Human Freedom = Animal Freedom”. Since then, the number of vegan feminists in Turkey has risen, and there are vegan feminists in several movements against discrimination.

7. In your opinion, what are the most urgent feminist and animal liberation questions in Turkey?

When I consider Turkey from an animal freedom perspective, I do not think that it differs from other parts of the world. However, honour killings are still committed in Turkey. The Istanbul Convention, which protects the rights of women and LGBTI+ people, was denounced in Turkey on the midnight of 20 March 2021 according to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's decision. Throughout Turkey, women and LGBTI+ people protested against the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (Yalcinalp 2021). At the same time, some men in Anatolia "sacrificed" animals with shouts of joy. Claiming to the newspapers that "We don't need the immoral laws of the west to protect our women", these men killed eight sheep on 27 March in celebration of Erdoğan's decision (Sputnik News 2021).

The Animal Protection Law in Turkey that came into force in 2004. Since 2012—thanks to public pressure by activists—it has been on the government's agenda that this law should be changed. Currently, the law has no deterrence sanctions for those enacting violence on animals, defines such acts "a misdemeanour rather than a crime", and categorises animals as property that is either "owned" or "unclaimed". However, each new proposal for amendments put forth by the Turkish state officials during these years has actually included new proposals for massacre rather than improvements for animal rights. While we have been putting pressure on the state to introduce an animal rights law, pro-government people who earn income from animals have been lobbying to prevent a law that would be in favour of animals. Numerous fascist and sexist journalists who have supported the annulment of the Istanbul Convention have also taken a stand against the proposal for an animal rights law, alleging that they are defending human rights as such a law would be "harmful" to humanity. These pro-government journalists have argued that the law demanded by animal rights activists poses a threat to people, just like they argued that the Istanbul Convention poses a threat to the institution of the family. They put pressure on the state to make the law people-oriented. Despite all our objections as animal rights defenders, the amendments to the law were submitted to a vote by the ruling party, AKP.⁵ The amended law went into effect after the vote was published in the Official Gazette on 14 July 2021 (Dokuz8 Haber, 2021).

On the one hand, when we wave the rainbow flag in honour of the LGBTI+ community, we are detained. The police say, "this flag is forbidden". The state

5 The Justice and Development Party AKP is a conservative and populist party in Turkey, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the time of writing.

manages society by criminalising LGBTI+ people and claiming that the very acronym “LGBTI+” is linked to terrorist activity. Journalists and university students who express their opinion are jailed. On the other hand, the rights of nonhuman animals are placed on the lowest rung of the pyramid and thus ignored. For all these reasons, the most urgent questions must be “Who is the perpetrator? Who is forced to live with the hateful and violent consequences brought on by these perpetrators? Who end up losing their lives?” When we ask these questions in this way, we see that nonhuman animals are also the target of patriarchal and discriminatory politics. The path towards total liberation where no one gets left behind starts by realising that nonhuman animals are no different from us in terms of rights and seeing that, just like racism and sexism, speciesism is a deeply rooted form of discrimination. We need to recognise that we do not have the right to enslave animals for our own purposes. Going vegan is the first urgent step in building a holistic line of struggle for a world free of violence.

8. What is the political atmosphere around climate sustainability in Turkey? For example, what kind of public discussions are there about plant-based foods?

There is a rising movement to combat the climate crisis in Turkey. The fact that the planet and all living beings are under threat is on the agenda of left/socialist movements, too. Numerous pieces of research and news are being published on the impact of the livestock industry on the climate crisis. Activists and people with an ecological worldview are predominantly convinced that animal-based nutrition is unsustainable and unhealthy for humans. Yet, veganism is not dealt with on a political basis. Instead, many ecologists/environmentalists support a reductionist approach that advocates for combatting the climate crisis by consuming less meat as an individual. Those who see veganism as a personal preference or a diet are in the majority. As far as I can see, the vast majority of people in the environmental movement follow vegetarian diets and do not consider veganism necessary. When I discuss with these people, their main concern seems to be to imagine a habitable planet for humans, rendering animal exploitation as a secondary matter. For these reasons, some people switch to a plant-based diet and say that they are vegan.

However, plant-based diets are not the same as veganism because veganism is not just about nutrition. Instead, veganism is about removing animal exploitation from one’s whole life to the highest degree possible. Within the animal liberation movement, these debates have been taking place a lot lately. The livestock industry is one of the greatest causes of the climate crisis, so we

can continue the fight against the climate crisis by prioritising animals' right to life in an ethical and sustainable manner. Actively exploiting nonhuman animals while trying to prevent the climate crisis is neither coherent nor applicable. These contradictions are becoming more and more visible, which is a promising development in discussions regarding climate action.

Going vegan can make a big difference for all living beings and promote a sustainable climate that enables all animals—humans included—to breathe freely. I think that recognising both our own and other species' right to life brings us closer to nature from our current alienated state.

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This book develops critical feminist animal and multispecies studies across various societal and environmental contexts. The chapters discuss timely questions broadly related to food and eating, stemming from connections drawn between critical animal studies, feminist theory, and multispecies studies. The themes explored include trans-inclusive ecofeminism, decolonial perspectives to veganism, links between the critique of ableism and animal exploitation, alternatives to dominant Western masculinities invested in meat consumption, and the politics of sex and purity in factory farming. The book explores responses to interlinked forms of exploitation by focusing on sites such as sanctuaries, educational institutions, social media, and animal advocacy.

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