

ISSN: 1948-352X

Volume VIII Issue 3 2010

**ICAS**  
INSTITUTE FOR  
CRITICAL ANIMAL  
STUDIES

Journal for Critical  
Animal Studies

# **Journal for Critical Animal Studies**

## **Women of Color in Critical Animal Studies**

**Guest Editors: Anastasia Yarbrough and  
Susan Thomas**

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

**Anastasia Yarborough**  
[ayarbrou@gmail.com](mailto:ayarbrou@gmail.com)

**Guest Editors**

**Dr. Susan Thomas**  
[herapellet@aol.com](mailto:herapellet@aol.com)

**Dr. Richard J White**  
[Richard.White@shu.ac.uk](mailto:Richard.White@shu.ac.uk)

**Chief Editor**

**Dr. Nicole Pallotta**  
[nrpallotta@gmail.com](mailto:nrpallotta@gmail.com)

**Associate Editor**

**Lindgren Johnson**  
[veda4animals@gmail.com](mailto:veda4animals@gmail.com)

**Associate Editor**

**Laura Shields**  
[lauraashields@hotmail.com](mailto:lauraashields@hotmail.com)

**Associate Editor**

**Dr. Susan Thomas**  
[herapellet@aol.com](mailto:herapellet@aol.com)

**Associate Editor**

**Veda Stram**  
[veda4animals@gmail.com](mailto:veda4animals@gmail.com)

**Assistant Editor**

**Bianka Atlas**  
[biankaatlas@yahoo.com](mailto:biankaatlas@yahoo.com)

**Assistant Editor**

**Dr. Richard Twine**  
[r.twine@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:r.twine@lancaster.ac.uk)

**Book Review Editor**

**Vasile Stanescu**  
[mts@stanford.edu](mailto:mts@stanford.edu)

**Book Review Editor**

**Nick Cooney**  
[usababylon@hotmail.com](mailto:usababylon@hotmail.com)

**Book Review Editor**

**Laura Shields**  
[lauraashields@hotmail.com](mailto:lauraashields@hotmail.com)

**Film Review Editor**

**Sarat Colling**  
[bright\\_new\\_morning@yahoo.ca](mailto:bright_new_morning@yahoo.ca)

**Film Review Editor**

**EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD**

For a complete list of the members of the Editorial Advisory Board please see the JCAS link on the Institute for Critical Animal Studies website: [http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org/?page\\_id=393](http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org/?page_id=393)

**JCAS Volume VIII, Issue 3, 2010**

**EDITORIAL BOARD ..... 1**

**GUEST EDITORIAL**

**Women of Color in Critical Animal Studies.....3**

**ESSAYS**

**Race as a “Feeble Matter” in Veganism: Interrogating whiteness, geopolitical privilege, and consumption philosophy of “cruelty-free” products  
*Amie Breeze Harper* .....5**

**The Subhuman as a Cultural Agent of Violence  
*Maneesha Deckha* .....28**

**COMMENTARY**

**Ecological Indigenous Foodways and the Healing of All Our Relations  
*Claudia Serrato* .....52**

**INTERVIEW**

**An Interview with Anarcha-Transnational Feminist Sarat Colling  
*By Laura Shields*.....61**

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**Sistah Vegan  
*By Anastasia Yarbrough*.....66**

**JCAS: AUTHOR GUIDELINES..... 70**

## GUEST EDITORIAL

### Women of Color in Critical Animal Studies

It began with a call for papers. The title rang: “The future of women of color in critical animal studies,” reverberating across scholarly email listings and social justice blogs. We sought essays from women of color scholars and activists across a variety of disciplines and social justice initiatives to develop understandings on the issues of race, gender, and animality in critical animal studies. We felt it was necessary to devote an entire issue to women of color because the voices and perspectives of women of color were eerily absent from critical animal studies and vegan studies in general. After six months of soliciting and reading papers, we finally consolidated an issue: five voices, five women of color. It is well-timed, given the recent book *Sistah Vegan* by Breeze Harper, who is a contributor to this issue.

The issue offers two essays one commentary, and a book review. Breeze Harper’s **essay** “*Race as a ‘Feeble Matter’ in Veganism: Interrogating Whiteness, Geopolitical Privilege, and Consumption Philosophy of ‘Cruelty-Free’ Products*” explores the behavior of whiteness and white privilege in vegan rhetoric and across vegan communities. Employing critical race theory and feminist theory, Harper provides an analysis that demonstrates the importance of acknowledging racialization in veganism and animal rights activism.

We continue with Maneesha Deckha’s **essay** “*The Subhuman as a Cultural Agent of Violence*,” where she deconstructs the subhuman/human binary present in social justice activism and anti-oppression work. Deckha argues that both the “subhuman” and “corrected” full human constructs perpetuate violence against all nonhuman and human animals and proposes for alternative approaches to counteracting dehumanization.

We move on to Claudia Serrato’s **commentary** piece “*Ecological Indigenous Foodways and the Healing of All Our Relations*” as a statement for ethical eating, food justice, decolonization, and total liberation within an ecological and cultural

context. We found this statement to be incredibly powerful because of its rootedness in sense of place, culture, and ecological living.

Afterwards, we offer an **interview** of Sarat Colling, a transnational feminist and activist of animal rights, anarchism, and anti-capitalism. This profile shares the main intellectual influences and philosophical foundations behind her work.

And, like all JCAS issues, we conclude with a review, this time a **book review** of *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society* by Anastasia Yarbrough.

I hope you find meaning and insight from this issue.

Sincerely,

**Anastasia Yarbrough and Susan Thomas**

*Guest Editors*

### **About the Guest Editors**

**Anastasia Yarbrough** is a writer, naturalist, and activist. She has been an animal rights activist for over ten years and continues to work as an animal ally. She holds a degree in Natural Resources and has worked as a field ecologist, animal behavior researcher, and animal caretaker. She has written pieces for numerous blogs and magazines. She also consults in foraging and wildcrafting and tutors in writing. She runs a blog called Animal Visions (<http://animalvisions.wordpress.com>).

**Susan Thomas**, Ph.D., University of California, is Director of Gender and Women's Studies, Associate Professor of Political Science, and Gender and Women's Studies, at Hollins University. She is active in the local animal liberation community, and is a direct action vegan who identifies as animal queer. She lives in Virginia with her partner Lori, their daughter Cais, and their nine rescued dog and cat family members.

## ESSAYS

### **Race as a “Feeble Matter” in Veganism: Interrogating whiteness, geopolitical privilege, and consumption philosophy of “cruelty-free” products**

**Amie Breeze Harper<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Abstract**

Within the context of feminist geography, *racial politics*, and *consumption* studies, I have observed that mainstream vegan outreach models and top selling vegan-oriented books rarely, if ever, acknowledge the differing socio-historically *racialized* epistemologies among non-white racial groups. There is an underlying assumption among the white middle class mainstream vegan media that racialization and the production of vegan spaces are disconnected. However, *space*, vegan or not, is *raced* and simultaneously *sexualized* and *gendered* directly affecting individuals and place identities. *Racialized* places and spaces are at the foundation of how we develop our *socio-spatial epistemologies*; hence, these epistemologies are *racialized*. This paper will explore examples of how epistemologies of whiteness manifest within vegan rhetoric in the USA, and explain why a "post-racial" approach to vegan activism must be replaced by an *anti-racist* and *color-conscious* praxis.

### **Race as a “Feeble Matter” in Veganism: Interrogating Whiteness, Geopolitical Privilege, and Consumption Philosophy of “Cruelty-Free” Products**

Practitioners of veganism abstain from animal consumption (dietary and non-dietary). However, the culture of veganism itself is not a monolith and is composed of many different subcultures and philosophies throughout the world, ranging from punk strict vegans for animal rights, to people who are dietary vegans for personal health reasons, to people who practice veganism for religious and spiritual reasons (Cherry, 2006; Iacobbo, 2006). Veganism is not just about the abstinence of animal *consumption*; it

---

<sup>1</sup> Amie Breeze Harper is a PhD Candidate at University of California- Davis in the field of Critical Food Geographies. She researches how race, class, gender, and region in the USA affect one's relationship to, and perception of, plant-centered food ways. She was born and raised in Connecticut and lives in Berkeley, CA with her husband and baby boy. Amie can be contacted at: breezeharper@gmail.com

is about the ongoing struggle to produce *socio-spatial epistemologies* of consumption that lead to *cultural* and *spatial* change; it is about contesting the dominance of animal-product consumption narrative that is central to, and dominant in, the socio-historical as well as present nation-building rhetoric of the United States. Within the context of my interests in feminist geography, *racial politics*, and *consumption* studies, I have observed that mainstream vegan outreach models and top selling vegan-oriented books rarely, if ever, acknowledge such differing socio-historically *racialized* epistemologies amongst the white middle class status quo and the collectivity of other racial groups, such as African Americans, Chinese-Americans, or Native Americans. There is an underlying assumption amongst mainstream vegan media that racialization and the production of vegan spaces are disconnected. However, *space*, vegan or not, is *raced* (Dwyer and Jones, 2000; McKittrick, 2006; McKittrick and Woods, 2007; Price, 2009) and simultaneously *sexualized* and *gendered* (Massey, 1994; Moss, 2008) directly affecting individuals and place identities. How human beings develop their knowledge base is directly connected to the embodied experiences of the places and spaces we navigate through. Scholars engaged in critical geographies of race claim that the world is entirely *racialized*. David Delaney, a geographer employing critical race theory asks, "What does it mean for geographers to take this claim of a wholly racialized world seriously?" (Price, 2009). As a black feminist geographer and critical race theorist, I take seriously that *racialized* places and spaces are at the foundation of how we develop our *socio-spatial epistemologies*; hence, these epistemologies are *racialized*.

The collective white middle class USAmerican way of knowing and relating to *space*, and all the objects and life-forms that occupy it, are connected to this demographics' physical and social placement within a racialized hierarchy in which

they are *naturalized* as normal, un-raced, universal, and the status quo; *whiteness as the norm* is at center stage of USA's production of knowledge, space, and power.

Furthermore,

to people of color, who are the victims of racism/white supremacy, race is a filter through which they see the world. Whites do not look at the world through this filter of racial awareness, even though they also comprise a race. This privilege to ignore their race gives whites a societal advantage distinct from any received from the existence of discriminatory racism. [Grillo and Wildman] use the term racism/white supremacy to emphasize the link between the privilege held by whites to ignore their own race and discriminatory racism. (Grillo and Wildman 1995, 565)

In this essay, I prefer to use the terms *whiteness* and *white privilege* as synonyms for Grillo and Wildman's above explication of 'racism/white supremacy.' For critical race geographers, how do we understand how whiteness functions as an epistemology within the power and production of space? In what ways do racialized geographies of exclusion/inclusion influence nuanced and covert acts of whiteness and white privilege amongst the racial status quo? How do these acts of covert whiteness and white privilege manifest albeit- innocently and subconsciously- within spaces of veganism? Having lived in a racialized nation in which this demographic's epistemologies and ontologies are primarily in center stage, white USAmericans are collectively unaware of how this center stage does not reflect the reality of those who do not exist in such white privileged spaces of inclusion.

Racialized spaces create racialized psychic spaces. Arnold Farr refers to this as *racialized consciousness*, and it is a term that is much more useful to use within the context of those people who do not fully understand that they are engaging in covert acts of whiteness/white privilege racism, *all while they simultaneously engage in AR/VEG based social activism*. Defined by African American philosopher Dr. Arnold Farr, racialized consciousness

replace[s] racism as the traditional operative term in discourses on race. The concept of racialized consciousness will help us examine the ways in which consciousness is shaped in terms of racist social structures... 'Racialized consciousness' is a term that will help us understand why even the well-intentioned white liberal who has participated in the struggle against racism may perpetuate a form of racism unintentionally (Farr, 2004).

Popular vegan-oriented literature in the USA such as *Vegan: The New Ethics of Eating* (Marcus, 2001), *Being Vegan in a Non-Vegan World* (Torres and Torres, 2005), *The Vegan Sourcebook* (Stepaniak and Messina, 2000), and *Becoming Vegan* (Davis and Vesanto, 2000), which are considered vegan bibles for the vegan status quo, do not deeply engage in critical analysis of how race (racialization, whiteness, racism, anti-racisms) influence how and why one writes about, teaches, and engages in vegan praxis and ultimately produces vegan spaces to affect cultural change. But what does it mean to be conscious of race when embarking on writing projects such as vegan-oriented research? This is part of a larger conversation on how racialization, race, and whiteness functions/manifest within vegan spaces in white dominated nations.

[L]ike the peace and environmental movements, the AR movement is predominantly white and middle class. Andrew Rowan, a VP at the Humane Society of the U.S., said surveys indicate the AR movement is "less than three percent" people of color. In April, 316 people from over 20 states attended the first Grassroots AR Conference in NYC, but the people of color caucus numbered only eight. If no one is racist, why is the movement largely segregated? (Hamanaka, 2005)

Similarly to second wave USA feminism that falsely universalized the white middle class heterosexual female experience as how *all* females experience social space, power, and struggle, mainstream vegan rhetoric assumes the same. While veganism itself does create oppositional spaces of consumption that challenge the standard spaces of American carniceentric diet, this essay will explore how mainstream vegan

praxis simultaneously creates socio-spatial epistemologies of whiteness that remain invisible to most white identified people.

Interestingly, it can be argued that the white racial demographic in the USA are collectively unaware of racism and white domination as an ongoing covert, institutional, and systemic process (Tuana and Sullivan, 2007; Yancy, 2004). Furthermore, this ignorance commonly manifests as a "post-racial" or "raceless" approach to dealing with the world. It can manifest into believing that an event about animal rights, with 308 white people and 8 people of color, *has nothing to do with USA's history (and current state) of institutionalized and environmental racism, as well as whiteness as the norm.*

In a "post-racial" or "raceless" society, it is believed that racism no longer exists because skin tone no longer determines equality. Throughout this text, "raceless," and "post-racial" will be written in quotations to reflect that such terms are coded language for "expected whiteness" (Kang, 2000) and "raceless" equaling "default whiteness" (Nakamura, 2002). The consequences of an individual's "post-racial" approach, in AR/VEG<sup>2</sup>, ignore the socio-historical context of skin color and the accouterments of white privilege that affect access to, and production of, local and global resources; this includes the resources for vegan products purchased by AR/VEG people in the USA. Even within the most *radical activism*, such as anti-Globalization, animal rights, food activism through farmer's markets, veganism, and anti-Prison Industrial Complex movements, this collective unawareness to white socio-spatial epistemologies proliferates and is replicated as a form of ignorance (Appel, 2003; Clark, 2004; Nagra, 2003; Poldervaart, 2001; Slocum, 2006; Yancy,

---

<sup>2</sup> AR/VEG will be the abbreviation I use when referring to Animal Rights, Vegetarian and Vegan activism and philosophy

2004).

The epistemology of ignorance is an examination of the complex phenomena of ignorance, which has as its aim identifying different forms of ignorance, examining how they are produced and sustained, and what role they play in knowledge practices....At times [epistemologies of ignorance] takes the form of those in the center refusing to allow the marginalized to know: witness the 19th century prohibition against black slaves' literacy. Other times it can take the form of the center's own ignorance of injustice, cruelty, and suffering, such as contemporary white people's obliviousness to racism and white domination (Sullivan and Tuana, 2007).

However, it is important to note that not all people of color in the USA acknowledge the consequences or even the existence of racialized or ethnocentric epistemologies of ignorance. However, Dr. Charles Mills, author of *The Racial Contract*, theorizes that most black identified people in the USA, are fully aware that their consciousness is "raced" and that the epistemological norm in the USA is derived from whiteness (Mills, 2007). This is what intrigues me about *white ignorance*: due to embodied experiences of white racialization and socialization, which strategically orients this demographic towards collective ignorance about race, a majority of white identified people in the USA deny that their epistemologies and sense of ethics are "raced" (Sullivan and Tuana, 2007). Dr. Mills has described this epistemological norm as a type of *white ignorance*

a form of ignorance, what could be called white ignorance, linked to white supremacy. The idea of group-based cognitive handicap is not an alien one to the radical traditional, if not normally couched in terms of "ignorance." Indeed, it is, on the contrary, a straightforward corollary of standpoint theory: if one group is privileged, after all, it must be by comparison with another group that is handicapped. In addition, the term has for me the virtue of signaling my theoretical sympathies with what I know will seem to many a deplorably old-fashioned, "conservative," realist, intellectual framework, one in which *truth, falsity, facts, reality*, and so forth are not enclosed with ironic scare quotes. The phrase "white ignorance" implies the possibility of a contrasting "knowledge" (Mills, 2007).

How does such ignorance manifest into vegan praxis? I will explore this in the next section.

**Race and Ethnicity in Vegan and Animal Rights Analysis...is it really a "feeble" matter?**

*From: Clara =====*

*Date: November 8, 2007 7:58:54 AM PST*

*To: [sistahvegan98@mac.com](mailto:sistahvegan98@mac.com)*

*Subject: from one vegan to another...*

*hello, my name is Clara. i am a freshman in high school and while researching animal cruelty, i came across your website about your book.*

*i am very excited about the fact that you wish to reach out to the african american female vegan femi[ni]sts, but i was taken aback when i realized how MUCH you related race and ethnicity to everything. I would just like to say that i honestly don't believe that the race of a vegan should have anything to do with the cause of saving animals and making others aware of animal cruelty. You put out a lot of topics that make me feel as if at one point in your life, you were not proud to be an african american female AND a vegan because of the depictions of most vegans and that is rather disappointing because race, to me, is such a feeble matter and there are more things important in life than just recognizing race and constantly putting out that racial matters are more important than what you believe in seems ignorant to me.*

*well, thank you for your time:*

*clara :)*

The above message was delivered to my email inbox in early November 2007. As a cultural geographer, scholar, and activist involved in analyzing how race, class, racism, whiteness and geopolitical location shape one's philosophy of AR/VEG, this email fascinated me. This young woman was writing about my website, [www.breezeharper.com](http://www.breezeharper.com) and my anthology of black female vegans, *Sistah Vegan*. One does not have to search too far in the past year or two, within the U.S.A., to see that race is no "feeble matter": The Jena 6, Don Imus' "nappy-headed hos" comment about the Rutgers University Women's Basketball team, and Megan Williams's torturers who had called her a "nigger" every time they would stab her (Tone, 2007), are several examples of racially based verbal and/or physical violence.

Though race is a social construction, there have been obvious consequences of this construction, most notably *white privilege*, *white ignorance*, and *white racism* that negatively affect all facets of life in the USA and globally (Bell, 1992; Bell, 2005; Sullivan and Tuana, 2007; Wing, 2003). Not exempt from these consequences is the *geopolitically racialized* consumption and production of vegan products (this includes food as well as *knowledge* as a product) for the vegan and animal rights consumer in the USA. Clara's email suggests that she is unaware of how a geopolitically racialized labor force and consumption system makes it possible for AR/VEG people in the USA to have access to vegan products.

The phrase *geopolitically racialized* is a phrase I created for this paper. It is a fusion of *critical geopolitical theory* and the word *racialized* or *raced*. Critical geopolitical theory takes a "critical perspective on the force of fusions of geographical knowledge and systems of power" (Dalby and Tuathail, 1996). To this fusion, I also add *systems of production* and *systems of consumption* of not only knowledge, but *material resources*, such as food, clothing, and spices. *Racialized/raced* added to

'geopolitical' or 'geopolitically,' simply means that human producers and consumers within this system of power, exist in "raced" bodies that are socially and geographically located in a globalized capitalist economic system. Such "raced" placement contributes to their relationships to, and understanding of, knowledge and materials production, power, and *ignorance*. Dr. Radhika Mohanram, scholar in women's studies, English, and geopolitics of racial identity, notes that

"[it] is a commonplace to point out that the concept of race has always been articulated according to the geographical distributions of people. Racial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relationships between various spaces and place are rearticulated as the inequitable power relations between races" (Mohanram, 1999).

For example, an indentured black Haitian sugar cane worker in the Dominican Republic will have a different relationship and perception of sugar, than a "free" white USAmerican vegan that is consuming a vegan product with sugar harvested by the enslaved Dominican. Furthermore, one's sense of "ethical consumption" is contingent upon geopolitical social and physical position (Barnett et al., 2005).

Vegan chocolate, sugar, and cotton (a vegan alternative to wool and silk) products are examples of how globalized racism sustains geopolitically racialized hierarchies of food and animal-free textile production (Harper, 2010). I will explicate the above further, to those who may not fully understand why they should be concerned with the impact unacknowledged *geopolitically racialized* consciousness has on their animal rights epistemologies and *engagement of those epistemologies* through vegan consumerism and consumption.

There are people outside of the USA that harvest chocolate under the worse conditions, simply for the production of chocolate treats, including chocolate ingredients found in certain vegan foods and beverages. There are thousands of people on cocoa farms who work as slaves to harvest *USA's* chocolate. The Ivory

Coast exports fifty percent of the cocoa beans that are used in global chocolate production (Hawksley, 2001).

There is a surprising association between chocolate and child labor in the Cote d'Ivoire...from which chocolate is made, under inhumane conditions and extreme abuse. This West African country is the leading exporter of cocoa beans to the world market. Thus, the existence of slave labor is relevant to the entire international economic community. Through trade relations, many actors are inevitably implicated in this problem, whether it is the Ivorian government, the farmers, the *American or European chocolate manufacturers, or consumers who unknowingly buy chocolate* [emphasis added] (Chanthavong, 2002).

Furthermore, as of 2001, thousands of children from the country of Mali have been declared "missing". Authorities believe that "at least 15,000 children are thought to be over in the neighbouring Ivory Coast, producing cocoa...Many are imprisoned on farms and beaten if they try to escape. Some are under 11 years old" (Hawksley, 2001).

Although many vegans in the USA believe they are practicing "cruelty free" consumption by saving the life of a non-human animal by eating vegan chocolate products, those who purchase non-fair trade cocoa products may be causing *cruelty* to thousands of *human beings*. If a product is not marked in a way that indicates it was harvested through fair and sweatshop-free practices, then how can one know that it is human-cruelty free? Who are the non-white racialized populations who are harvesting chocolate, under conditions of cruelty that *help* certain<sup>3</sup> USA vegans practice *modern ethics* through vegan chocolate food consumption? Here's a hint: they are *not* white socio-economic class privileged people living in the suburbs of the USA.

Since the beginning of European colonialism and the European (and now USAmerican) pursuit of "civilizing" and "modernizing" the globe, those who have

---

<sup>3</sup> I write "certain" because there are fair trade vegan products available that can also be purchased by vegans, such as *Equal Exchange* organic fair trade teas, sugar, and coffee, *Liz Lovely Organic* cookies, and *Steaz Energy*. However, I focus on *Silk* and *Soy Delicious* because they dominate the vegan soy based beverage and non-dairy frozen dessert market in the USA.

harvested chocolate, coffee, cane sugar and tea, have been overwhelmingly non-white racialized groups of people (Mintz, 1986; Harper, 2010). This pattern continues into 2010 (Gautier, 2007; Hunt, 2007). In my book, *Sistah Vegan*, I wrote about the harm produced by USA's addictions to foodstuffs that are sourced from the global South:

In addition, our unmindful consumption of [un]foodstuffs are not only harming and killing our own health in the United States of America; we are supporting the pain, suffering and cultural genocide of those whose land and people we have enslaved and/or exploited for...sucrose, coffee, black tea, and chocolate too. Unless your addictive substances read "Fair Trade" and "Certified Organic" on it, it is most likely supporting a company that pays people less than they can live off of while they work on plantations that use toxic pesticides and or prohibit the right to organize for their own human rights...Is your addiction causing suffering and exploitation thousands of miles a way on a sugar cane plantation, near a town that suffers from high rates of poverty and undernourishment, simply because that land grows our "dope" instead of local grains and produce for them? We have confused our addictive consumption habits with being "civilized" (Jensen, 2006). The British who sipped their sugary teas considered themselves "civilized", despite the torture and slavery it took to get that white sugar into their tea cups (Harper, 2010).

I would also like to suggest that one cannot overlook the critical concept of *modernity* (a.k.a. being "civilized") when analyzing how white racialized consciousness and white epistemologies of ignorance remain invisible to "post-racial" vegans and animal rights proponents in the USA. Philosophically<sup>4</sup>, people in AR/VEG activism can be best described as being engaged in a form of "ethical consumption." However, within "ethical consumption,"

there are unspoken political assumptions associated with the practice. As Tamás Dombos described, in Hungary, where ethical consumption is only beginning to appear, it is not simply about consuming ethically: it is also about becoming *modern* [emphasis added]. Early campaigners for... [ethical consumption] come from Western Europe and the United States, or are closely associated with such people, and a recurring theme in talk about ethical consumption is its association with an Occidentalized,

---

<sup>4</sup> By this I mean Eurocentric and Greek foundations of philosophies, ethics, and morality. I am aware of the fact that this is just one type of philosophy.

imagined West that Eastern Europeans ought to be emulating. It seems, then, that some ethical consumption cannot be understood without seeing it as an embrace of a certain kind of modernity associated particularly with the EU (Carrier, 2007).

Though Carrier is referring to the EU, I cannot help but see the same philosophies underlying ethical consumption practices of many USA AR/VEG organizations, such as Vegan Outreach, who talk of ending non-human animal cruelty by purchasing Silk chocolate milk or Soy Delicious chocolate ice cream instead of cow dairy products (Vegan Outreach, 2007). I believe that Vegan Outreach has done amazing work in educating human beings about the suffering humans cause to non-human animals. However, my two critiques are that a) animal rights activists pictured on *Vegan Outreach's Guide to Cruelty-Free Eating* appear to be all white and b) Vegan Outreach is advocating Silk and Soy Delicious chocolate products for beginner vegans in their guide (Vegan Outreach, 2007); both products' cocoa sources are not certified human cruelty free. On the Vegetarian Baby & Child website, Turtle Mountain's Soy Delicious frozen vegan desserts are described as the following:

While they're not a company big enough to purchase fair trade chocolate, Turtle Mountain doesn't use bone char-refined sugar, and they are certified organic. The company is also a supporter of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project, an organization helping [to] prevent sea turtles' extinction. What better reason do I need to buy soy ice cream but to help sea turtles? (Veggies123.com)

One has to wonder why the Turtle Mountain Company simply does not stop purchasing chocolate all together, if they cannot afford to buy fairly traded chocolate. Furthermore, there is mention that the sugar is vegan, but one also does not know if it was or was not produced through human cruelty practices. It can be assumed that profit is the motivator to continue purchasing cocoa from a non fair trade resource. It can also be assumed that saving sea turtles and using sugar, free from bone char

refinement, is what makes this vegan treat "ethical" and "cruelty-free," appealing to many *modern* day AR/VEG people in the USA. It cannot be overlooked that the "ethics" of geopolitically *racialized* production of non fair trade cocoa and sugar for Turtle Mountain (and its consumers), is not as equally important as ensuring that the sugar is "bone free" and sea turtles are given the right to self-determination and survival. If it were, I surmise that Turtle Mountain would have received enough complaints from consumers (or boycotts) to start buying fair trade ingredients.

In regard to the pamphlet's images of solely white people *engaged* in animal rights activism, one also has to wonder why Vegan Outreach did not provide images of racially diverse people distributing flyers or being engaged in animal rights activism. Page two has a white woman with a white baby, sharing food with a turkey (Vegan Outreach, 2007). On page twenty-two, there is a white child holding up an apple who is described as being a "young vegan" (Vegan Outreach, 2007). Page twenty-six has a young white man reading about advocating for animals (Vegan Outreach, 2007). Page twenty-seven has a picture of a white man handing a *Vegan Outreach* pamphlet to a black man (Vegan Outreach, 2007). On page twenty-eight, there is a young white girl handing out Vegan Outreach brochures (Vegan Outreach, 2007).

The combination of images of *white* people being the animal rights activists coupled with images that advocate vegan products with sugar and chocolate that are unfairly harvested by the labor of *non-white racialized people* embodies, for me, a contradictory ethos of *who* practices veganism and *how*. What is odd to me is that this is the praxis behind "cruelty-free eating" (hence, the name of the Vegan Outreach starter guide). Throughout the entire starter guide, there is not one mention of the avoidance of vegan products not designated as fair trade, sweatshop-free, or free of

current day human slavery practices. Therefore, what type of geopolitically racialized "ethics" are being produced and disseminated? In a 2005 interview with *Satya Magazine*, Sheila Hamanaka and Tracy Basile write:

It's one thing for a white person to pass out vegan flyers. But attempts by white AR activists to set the agenda for other cultures bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the historical pattern of suppression by dominant nations. Instead of exporting "democracy," AR activists are exporting their cultural concepts of the proper relationship between human and nonhuman animals (Hamanaka 2005).

In the case of the Vegan Outreach guide, is a white racialized, middle-classed neoliberal USA concept of *proper* vegan products being exported? Is this a consequence of white epistemologies of ignorance, "post-racialness," and *modernity*? Of practicing AR/VEG activism without fully realizing how all oppressions are interlocking (Harper, 2010; Smith, 2007), and that it may be just as "cruel" to eat animals as it is to eat food and textiles produced by enslaved humans on a cocoa, sugar, or cotton plantations?

Once again, I am not criticizing AR/VEG people in the USA who consume products such as Silk or Soy Delicious. My critique is that there are those (white and non-white) who believe "race is a feeble matter" in animal rights activism. Such people are producing and practicing their own "post-racial" epistemologies and praxis of AR/VEG "cruelty free ethics." Simultaneously, such "post-racial" approaches ignore dependence on the exploited labor of non-white racialized minorities living outside of the USA, who are producing materials for vegan products, such as those harvesting sugar in the Dominican Republic. The USA has a major dependence on cane sugar from the Dominican Republic. A dependence that ends up in vegan food products, many of these tasty vegan treats are not labeled as being free of human cruelty practices.

In Dominican Republic, Uncle Tom's Cabin never did disappear. Close to private luxury resort beaches, hidden by an impenetrable curtain of sugar cane, there are wooden insalubrious barracks grouped in Bateys. These improvised villages, with no water, no electricity, shelter [black] Haitian families. After you enter the Bateys, you cannot escape its misery: men work until exhaustion in the sugar cane plantation, women try to ensure their families' survival, children born from Haitian parents are condemned to be slaves themselves.

Each year, approximately 20,000 Haitians cross the border into the Dominican Republic to work on sugar cane plantations, whereupon they are subject to forced labor, restrictions of freedom, inadequate living environments and dangerous working conditions. The U.S. is the largest consumer of Dominican Republic sugar (Gautier, 2007).

Once again, I am not criticizing the choice to consume products made from exploitative labor by *non-white racialized people in the global South*. My concern is the impact of certain AR/VEG people's *denial* and/or *ignorance* of the fact that "race matters", all while wearing an unfair trade cotton tee shirt with pro-animal rights or pro veganism imagery on it.

Much of the global supply of cotton, a vegan alternative to animal based fibers, is harvested through the forced labor of the Uzbekistani people (Grabka, 2007). Children are not exempt from this abominable practice of slavery-like labor. "In October 2004, a minister admitted that at least 44,000 pupils and students were harvesting the cotton [in Uzbekistan]" (Grabka, 2007). Unless the "animal cruelty free" cotton sweater has a label that indicates it is sourced through a fair trade entity and is sweatshop free, there is no guarantee that the garment is free of human suffering and/or slavery. Once again, the people involved in unfair cotton labor are *not* white racialized and/or class privileged people living in the USA (Grabka, 2007). This is no "feeble matter."

When Clara wrote, "*I would just like to say that i honestly don't believe that the race of a vegan should have anything to do with the cause of saving animals and*

*making others aware of animal cruelty,"* is she speaking from the privileged side of modernity/coloniality and the privileged side of the *geopolitically racialized production* of consumer goods? Ramón Grosfoguel, a scholar of decolonial theory, employs the term 'coloniality' to address

'colonial situations' in the present period in which colonial administrations have almost been eradicated from the capitalist world-system. By 'colonial situations' I mean the cultural, political, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate ***racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racialized/ethnic groups*** [emphasis added] with or without the existence of colonial administrations. Five hundred years of European colonial expansion and domination formed an international division of labor between Europeans and non-Europeans that is reproduced in the present so-called 'post-colonial' phase of the capitalist world-system (Wallerstein 1979, 1995 in Grosfoguel 2007). Today the core zones of the capitalist world-economy overlap with predominantly White/European/Euro-American societies such as Western Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States, while peripheral zones overlap with previously colonized non-European people. Japan is the only exception that confirms the rule. Japan was never colonized nor dominated by Europeans and, similar to the West, played an active role in building its own colonial empire...***The mythology about the 'decolonization of the world' obscures the continuities between the colonial past and current global colonial/racial hierarchies and contributes to the invisibility of 'coloniality' today*** [emphasis added] (Grosfoguel, 2007).

*"The mythology about the 'decolonization of the world...' "* can easily be replaced with, *The mythology about the 'post-racial' status of the USA obscures the continuities between the colonial past and current global colonial/racial hierarchies and contributes to the invisibility of 'white racialized class-privileged consciousness' in the USA today.*<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> In terms of Clara, the effects this dominant consciousness has on the K-12 educational philosophy taught to most children in the USA, regardless of the child's race, cannot be overlooked. Most are being taught that eurocentric philosophical foundations of "justice" and "ethics" are not "raced"; that they are in fact "post-racial" and applicable for all, regardless of the reality that core philosophical ideas were largely created for and by the interests of white male Europeans and USAmericans. Hence, a black low-income twelve year old female, living in rural Alabama, is expected to learn and accept philosophies of 'liberty', 'ethics' and 'enlightenment' (created by 'goodwill' white European and USAmerican men) as being unraced; as never having been produced by white philosophers who sought to subjugate little black girls such as herself. This is suspicious, as a majority of these "great men" either perceived nonwhites as inferior and/or ignored their white male privilege in the creation of their universal

As we look at the "*colonial past and current global colonial/racial hierarchies*," does Clara become the white Christian priest of antebellum USA, who tells white plantation slave masters that God values the "ethics" of the institution of marriage and the sanctity of family (modernity), all while black families in bondage are torn apart every time a wife or child or father is sold to labor in a cotton field or tobacco farm (coloniality)? Does Clara become the "civilized" and "modern" USAmerican aristocrat from the eighteenth century, writing prose that will contribute to philosophies of "ethics" and "enlightenment" for humanity (modernity), all while sipping tea with sugar (modernity) produced by non-white humans in bondage (coloniality)? Does Clara become the early nineteenth century USA white school teacher, "enlightening" white children about the "ethics" of being a free [white] human (modernity), a reward that was *won* during the American Revolution, all while wearing a *modern* cotton garment produced from the suffering of black people in bondage who can never experience this freedom (coloniality)? Is Clara the white twentieth century USA government official of international humanitarianism who suggests that we as a nation must be "ethical" and send over cow dairy-based milk and cheese processed foods (modernity) to African nations experiencing famine in the

---

philosophies. This includes Thomas Jefferson, Hegel, Kant, Hume, and Locke (Farr, 2004; Jones, 2004; Moore, 2005; Yancy, 2004). These are men who clearly thought blacks were inferior yet simultaneously produced universal ideas and literature about 'liberty', 'ethics', and 'enlightenment', have been largely integrated into the fabric of modern USA society, including K-12 education and university departments of philosophy. The whiteness and geopolitically raced aspects of these philosophies are masked as universalist (Yancy, 2005) and falsely constructed as accessible to the very people that these "great men" believed to be inferior. In terms of the philosophies USA was founded upon, Dr. T. Owen Moore writes:

Since the establishment of this White-dominated and White controlled society, mental conflict has been in existence from the inception. Mental conflict was generated on the side of the oppressor (e.g., the Founding Fathers) because of the hypocrisy of their agenda. There is no possible way to develop a democratic and equal society when the White people who were writing and implementing the laws considered non-White people to be less than human. The hypocrisy of the Founding Fathers has passed on a social disease (Forbes, 1992) that will never be eradicated in this society because the democratic principles were formed under a false premise (Moore, 2005).

1980s (coloniality), all assuming that everyone can and *should* tolerate milk like his white European descended peers (coloniality)?

Clara's mindset represents a plethora of people in the USA, historically to the present, who have engaged in and *deployed* a sense of "ethics," "freedom," "enlightenment," and "morality" through a veil of universalism, ignorance, and Eurocentric logic (Yancy, 2004). Consequently, such singular one-dimensional approach to the "ethical" issue often, and conveniently, ignores the systems of interlocking oppressions that influences, *and* is influenced by, racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, nationalism, etc. Ramón Grosfoguel argues that

the hegemonic Eurocentric paradigms that have informed western philosophy and sciences in the 'modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system' for the last 500 hundred years assume a universalistic, neutral, objective point of view...Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of the 'modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system' (Grosfoguel, 2007).

In addition, vegans with Clara's perception about race, may not see the significance or the implications of racial identity within AR/VEG philosophy and educational outreach, because in the global West, such as the United States, many people are educated *not* to understand power relations outside of "class analysis and economic structural transformations" (Grosfoguel, 2007). Though my research website indicates that I research the implications of race *and* class on perceptions of food, health, "ethical consumption," and animal rights, Clara was only "taken aback" by the racial component of my research<sup>6</sup>.

I am hoping that this essay will help move "post-racial" white vegan activists closer to breaking down barriers, and engage in a critical reflexivity around racially

---

<sup>6</sup> If you go to [www.breezeharper.com](http://www.breezeharper.com) you will see that my latest call for papers looks at "Race and Class Consciousness" in the ethical consumption movement.

privileged oriented ways of being and knowing the world AR/VEG movements within not only white dominated or white-settler nations, but throughout the globe. White allies such as anti-racist and animal rights activists Noah Lewis, Say Burgin, and Daniel Hammer, as well as patrice jones have chosen to proactively reflect on their own *white racialized consciousness*. They are teaching white identified and AR/VEG people about the need to integrate both critical whiteness studies and anti-racism into their AR/VEG and non-AR/VEG related philosophies and educational models. For Burgin, Hammer, and Lewis' 2008 workshop, *Whites Challenging Racism, a Study Group*, the description of the group reads:

The first session of this group ran from July-Sept 2007 and was facilitated by Say Burgin, Daniel Hammer and Noah Lewis. This group is derived from the White Privilege and Anti-Racist Organizing experimental college class at Oberlin College, which Noah had the opportunity to participate in while living in Oberlin, OH.

The facilitators are not "experts," nor do we even pretend to be! We are just white folks concerned about the ways in which we perpetuate white supremacy, male supremacy, classism, and other forms of oppression both personally and through our activism. We want to push ourselves to educate ourselves about these issues and to change our behavior accordingly. We want to share this learning process with anyone else who is interested in exploring these questions (Burgin et al., 2007).

What makes their activism unique is that the three facilitators are heavily involved in vegan and animal rights activism as well. They also offer workshops about veganism and animal rights, through their group Animal Freedom. For white people who don't see the links to animal rights and critical whiteness studies, the facilitators have typed this up on their webpage:

### **Why is an animal rights group organizing this?**

Why not? Animal Freedom challenges speciesism and human supremacy in the context of working to end other interconnected systems of oppression based on sex, gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ability,

religion, nationality, and ethnicity. Eventually we hope to offer a session that is specifically geared toward issues of racism within the animal rights movement, but currently, it is a general group for everyone (Burgin et al., 2007).

People involved in vegan food activism encounter *fear, denial, and defensiveness* from people benefiting from institutionalized speciesism "as the norm," all the time. In the same manner that such people cannot *easily* see why they should be concerned with speciesism, certain white AR/VEG activists cannot see how they benefit from institutionalized whiteness "as the norm" or how this impacts their engagement with veganism. I hope this essay will engage those with a "post-racial" or "race is a feeble matter" attitude to critically re-think their perception of race and how they may contribute to social injustice within vegan and animal rights activism.

## References

- Appel, L. (2007), "White Supremacy in the Movement against the Prison-Industrial Complex," *Social Justice* 30, pp 81-88.
- Bailey, C. (2007), "We Are What We Eat: Feminist Vegetarianism and the Reproduction of Racial Identity," *Hypatia* 22.2, pp 39-59.
- Barnett, C., Cloke, P., Clarke, N., and Malpass, A. (2005), "Consuming Ethics: Articulating the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption," *Antipode* 37, pp 23-45.
- Bediako, S.M., Kwate, N.O., and Rucker, R.A. (2004), "Dietary Behavior among African Americans: Assessing Cultural Identity and Health Consciousness," *Ethnicity and Disease* 14, pp 572-32.
- Bell, D. A. (1992), *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, BasicBooks: New York.
- Bennett, M. and Dickerson, V.D. (2001), *Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women*, Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick.

- Booth, S. and Chilton, M. (2007), "Hunger of the Body and Hunger of the Mind: African American Women's Perceptions of Food Insecurity, Health and Violence," *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 39, pp 116-25.
- Burgin, S., Hammer, D., and Lewis, N. "Whites Challenging Racism, a Study Group." <http://www.animalfreedom.info/wcr/wcr.html>
- Carrier, J. G. (2007), "Ethical Consumption," *Anthropology Today* 23, pp 1-2.
- Chanthavong, S. (2002), "Chocolate and Slavery: Child Labor in Cote D'ivoire," *TED Case Studies* 664, <http://www.american.edu/ted/chocolate-slave.htm>.
- Cherry, E. (2006), "Veganism as a Cultural Movement: A Relational Approach," *Social Movement Studies* 5, pp 155-70.
- Clark, D. (2004), "The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine," *Ethnology* 43, pp 19-31.
- Dalby, S., and Tuathail, G.O. (1995), "The Critical Geopolitics Constellation: Problematizing Fusions of Geographical Knowledge and Power," *Political Geography* 15, pp 451-56.
- Dwyer, O. J., and Jones III, J. P. (2000), "White Socio-Spatial Epistemology," *Social & Cultural Geography* 1, pp 209-22.
- Farr, A. (2004), "Whiteness Visible: Enlightenment Racism and the Structure of Racialized Consciousness," In Yancy, G. (Ed.) *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, New York, Routledge,
- Foster, G., Harris, M.A., Melby, C.L., Schmidt, W.D., Toohey, M.L., and Williams, D. (1998), "Cardiovascular Disease Risk Factors Are Lower in African-American Vegans Compared to Lacto-Ovo-Vegetarians," *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* 17, pp 425-34.
- Gautier, C. A. (2007), "Slaves in Paradise," *Satya Magazine*, pp.38-39.
- Grabka, T. (2007), "The Cost of Uzbek White Gold," *Satya Magazine*, pp 12-13.
- Grillo, T. and Wildman, S.M. (1995), "Obscuring the Importance of Race: The Implication of Making Comparisons between Racism and Sexism (or Other -isms)," In Delgado, R. (Ed.) *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, Temple University, Philadelphia, pp. 564-572.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2007), "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms," *Cultural Studies* 21, pp 211-23.
- Hamanaka, S. and Basile, T. (2005), "Racism and the Animal Rights Movement," *Satya Magazine*, <http://www.satyamag.com/jun05/hamanaka.html> Access Date: July 21, 2010.

- Harper, A. B. (2010), *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, Lantern Books: New York.
- Hawksley, H. (2001), "Mali's Children in Chocolate Slavery," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1272522.stm> Access Date: November 27, 2007.
- Hill Collins, P. (2004), *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Routledge: New York.
- Hunt, J (2007), "Just for the Taste of It," *Satya Magazine*, March 2007, pp 34-37.
- Iacobbo, K. and Iacobbo, M. (2006), *Vegetarians and Vegans in America Today*, Praeger Publishers: Westport, CT.
- James, J. (2002), *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics*, St. Martin's Press: New York.
- James, D. C. S. (2004), "Factors Influencing Food Choices, Dietary Intake, and Nutrition-Related Attitudes among African Americans: Application of a Culturally Sensitive Model," *Ethnicity & Health* 9, pp 49-367.
- Jensen, D (2006), *Endgame*, Seven Stories Press: New York.
- Kang, J. (2000), "Cyber-Race," *Harvard Law Review* 113, pp 1131-209.
- Mangels, R. (1994), "A Vegetarian Diet Helps to Protect Older African Americans from Hypertension," *Vegetarian Journal* 13, pp 347-56.
- Massey, D. B. (1994), *Space, Place, and Gender*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- McKittrick, K. (2006), *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- McKittrick, K. and Woods, C.A. (2007), *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, South End Press: Cambridge, MA.
- Mills, C. (2007), "White Ignorance," In Sullivan, S. and Tuana, N. (Eds) *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, State University of New York Press, Albany, pp 13-38.
- Mintz, S. W. (1986), *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Penguin Books: New York.
- Mohanram, R. (1999), *Black Body: Women, Colonialism, and Space*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.

- Montgomery, J. R. (2005), "Preliminary Model for Understanding and Healing the Impact of Slavery on American Women of African Descent," Dissertation, Wright Institute Graduate School of Psychology.
- Moore, T. O. (2005), "A Fanonian Perspective on Double Consciousness," *Journal of Black Studies* 35, pp 751-62.
- Moss, P. and Al-Hindi, K.F. (2008), *Feminisms in Geography: Rethinking Space, Place, and Knowledges*, Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham.
- Nagra, N. (2003), "Whiteness in Seattle: Anti-Globalization Activists Examine Racism within the Movement," *Alternatives Journal*, pp 27-28.
- Nakamura, L. (2002), *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*, Routledge: New York.
- Poldervaart, S. (2001), "Utopian Aspects of Social Movements," In "Postmodern Times: Some Examples of Diy Politics in the Netherlands," *Utopian Studies* 12, pp 143-64.
- Price, P. L. (2009), "At the Crossroads: Critical Race Theory and Critical Geographies of Race," *Progress in Human Geography*, pp 1-28.
- Slocum, R. (2006), "Anti-Racist Practice and the Work of Community Food Organizations," *Antipode* 38, pp 327-49.
- Smith, A. (2007), "Social-Justice Activism in the Academic Industrial Complex," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, pp 140-45.
- Sullivan, S. and Tuana, N. (2007), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, SUNY Series, Philosophy and Race, State University of New York Press: Albany.
- Tone, D. (2007), "Megan Williams Kidnapping, Rape and Torture Case: Advocates and Family Call for Federal Hate Crime Charges." *Send2Press Newswire*, <http://www.send2press.com/newswire/2007-10-1003-002.shtml>.
- Twine, F. W. and Warren, J. (2000), *Racing Research, Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies*, New York University Press: New York.
- "Guide to Cruelty Free Eating," Vegan Outreach, <http://www.veganoutreach.org/guide/gce.pdf>. Accessed November 27, 2007.
- Williams-Forsen, P. (2006), *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, & Power*, University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill.
- Yancy, G. (2004), *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, Routledge: New York.

## **The Subhuman as a Cultural Agent of Violence**

**Maneesha Deckha<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

This paper considers the important role the idea of the “subhuman” plays in current instantiations of global gendered, racialized, and economic violence and how a “corrected” humanism (i.e., one that *really* applies to all human beings instead) perpetuates this violence-producing category. That the human/subhuman binary continues to inhabit so much of western experience raises the question of the continuing relevance of anthropocentric concepts (such as “human rights” and “human dignity”) for effective theories of justice, policy and social movements. The paper aims to demonstrate the need to find an alternative discourse to theorize and mobilize around vulnerabilities for “subhuman” humans. This move in addressing violence and vulnerabilities should be productive not only for humans made vulnerable by their dehumanization, but for nonhumans as well.

### **Introduction**

One of the organizing narratives of western thought and the institutions it has shaped is humanism and the idea that human beings are at the core of the social and cultural order (Wolfe, 2003; Asad, 2003). The cultural critique humanism has endured, by way of academic theory and social movements, has focused on the failure of its promise of universal equal treatment and dignity for all human beings. To address this failing, a rehabilitative approach to humanism is usually adopted with advocates seeking to undo humanism’s exclusions by expanding its ambit and transporting

---

<sup>1</sup> Maneesha Deckha is Associate Professor at the University of Victoria Faculty of Law in Victoria, Canada. Professor Deckha’s research interests include critical animal studies, intersectionality, feminist analysis of law, law and culture, animal law, and bioethics. She is currently working on a book project analyzing the legal status of animals in Canada from a postcolonial feminist lens. Among her multiple awards related to her critical animal studies work, in 2008 she held the Fulbright Visiting Chair in Law and Society at New York University and in 2006 her seminar on Animals, Culture and the Law received the U.S. Humane Society’s Animal and Society New Course Award. She received her BA from McGill University, her LL.B. from the University of Toronto and her LL.M. from Columbia University. This paper has benefitted from the responses received from participants in the Feminist Legal Theory Workshop on Violence and Vulnerability at the Feminist Legal Theory Project at Emory Law School as well as research support from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Maneesha can be contacted at [mdeckha@uvic.ca](mailto:mdeckha@uvic.ca).

vulnerable human groups from “subhuman” to “human” status. Law has responded by including more and more humans under the coveted category of “personhood” (Naffine, 2009). Yet, the logic of the human/subhuman binary typically survives this critique with the dependence of the coveted human status on the subhuman (and the vulnerabilities it enables) going unnoticed (Asad, 2003).

This gap in analysis is evident in how most of us think about violence and its related concept of vulnerability. Some would even say that what sets us apart from nonhumans is a capacity for vulnerability (Oliver, 2009). Others who address human-nonhuman relationships more closely might say that what sets human apart from nonhuman animals, if anything, is our capacity for violence (Kheel, 2008). More particular still, feminists would highlight the masculinist orientation of this violence against nonhumans, animals and otherwise, noting that primary sites of institutionalized violence against nonhumans occurs in male-dominated industries. (Luke, 2008). Yet, the discourse around (hu)man violence against animals is muted in mainstream debates about violence, vulnerability and exploitation in general. More common is a concern with violence against humans and how to eliminate it and make humans less vulnerable. This theorizing largely proceeds through affirmations of the inviolability or sanctity of human life and human dignity, establishing what it means to be human through articulation of what it means to be animal. The humanist paradigm of anti-violence discourse thus does not typically examine the human/nonhuman boundary, but often fortifies it.

The failure to address this boundary and its creation and maintenance of the figure of the subhuman undermines anti-violence agendas. Specifically, a full analysis of the dynamics of violence against humans is precluded when attention is not given to the function of dehumanization and the subhuman figure in facilitating violence

against humans. This paper considers the important role the idea of the “subhuman” plays in current instantiations of global racialized, gendered, and economic violence and how a corrected humanism (i.e., one that really applies to all human beings) perpetuates this violence-producing category. Specifically, the paper examines the work that the subhuman figure and practices of dehumanization have played in enabling the violence meted out against human bodies in 1) the militarized and police camps associated with the “war on terror”; 2) the various forms of coerced and/or forced labor that many argue are akin or equivalent to slavery; and 3) the laws of war.

In analyzing the role of the subhuman figure in current instantiations of violence, the argument does not seek to claim a primacy for its causal stature or to impugn the work that other markers of difference (gender, race, culture, etc.) accomplish. Rather, the paper hopes to place the subhuman figure into conversation with these other axes of difference and assist in highlighting its impact in contributing to justifications for violence. Given the overwhelming humanist orientation of western cultures, even western critical theories, including feminist theories, have not labored to unpack species difference, distinctions and demarcations in our cultural order (Deckha, 2008).<sup>2</sup> This has an obvious impact on those beings who are not human (animals, plants, etc.), but, as this paper argues, affects issues of human exploitation and violence as well.

---

<sup>2</sup> For exceptions to this please see the works of Carol Adams, Josephine Donovan, Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe. See Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1994); *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990); Carol Adams & Josephine Donovan, eds., *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1995); Josephine Donovan, "Feminism and the Treatment of Animals: From Care to Dialogue" (2006) 31:2 *Signs* 305; Carol J. Adams & Josephine Donovan, eds., *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1996); Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet: Posthumanities* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007); Cary Wolfe, *Philosophy and Animal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); and Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

## **Part I - The Humanism of Violence**

One of the most violent places imaginable is the modern day slaughterhouse. The rate of killing inside is swift and of unprecedented proportions. In the United States alone, around 9.5 billion animals are killed per year. To put that in perspective, that amounts to 250 cows per *hour* and 266 chickens per *second* (Isaacs-Blundin, 2007). This figure does not account for all slaughter of animals for food in the United States, merely the extent of killing of land farm animals (Finelli, 2006). The overwhelming number are born, raised, and killed for consumption making the violence against farm animals the most pervasive form of institutionalized violence against animals (Isaacs-Blundin, 2007). These statistics also fail to capture the suffering animals endure *while* in the slaughterhouse, where they are raised for slaughter (Finelli, 2006; Marcus, 2005; Pollan, 2002; Scholsser, 2001). All of this infliction on animal bodies is perceived as legitimate violence because of the nonhuman status of the species involved. The law buttresses this cultural acceptance. Animals are the property of corporate and human owners; theirs is a near universal status in western legal systems, which facilitates their instrumental use and exploitation for human ends.

Due to the humanist parameters of our typical framings of violence, when we do think of violence against animals, it is only certain forms of violence that enter the realm of legal sanction. The protection that animals receive in western common law systems extends to protection from “cruelty”. Yet, “cruelty” only covers a fraction of the violent activities against animals and even then is designed to protect owners’ property interests, rather than recognize any inherent interests of animals themselves (Francione, 2006). In his discussion of the development of human-animal relationships in western cultures, Richard Bulliet helps to understand this situation

(Bulliet, 2008). Bulliet identifies three primary stages in human-animal relationships in western cultures: predomestic, domestic and postdomestic (Bulliet, 2008 pp. 34-35). According to Bulliet, part of what characterizes postdomestic society in the United States is the invisibility of violence against animals (Bulliet, 2008). Contrary to the seemingly insatiable appetite for animal blood sports several centuries ago, postdomestic sensibilities against this type of bloodletting have become hegemonic due to an aversion to viewing animal slaughter despite the acceptance of slaughterhouses and the knowledge of the hidden and routinized violence against animals that occurs there (Griffin, 2007; Bulliet, 2008; Shevelov, 2009). Postdomestic societies brutalize animals, but hide the brutality.

Thus, anti-cruelty laws cover these blood sports today, but not much else beyond basic sustenance and shelter (Francione, 1995; Letourneau, 2003). “Cruelty” typically only extends to protection from “unnecessary” suffering and excludes all forms of current or “postdomestic” institutionalized violence against animals. It is not that postdomestic societies are any less violent than predomestic ones. Rather, only the “excessive” violence against animals, i.e., that which is not related to any culturally mainstream profitable or recreational practice, is outlawed while a multiplicity of institutional violence venues are kept hidden or filtered from full view.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> When violence against animals is looked at seriously it is primarily for its predictive value regarding violence against humans. This is especially so in the case of domestic violence where it has been shown that men who abuse their female partners threaten or assault their partners’ companion animals as a tool of terror against the human females. Caroline Forell, “Using a Jury of Her Peers to Teach About the Connection Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse” (2008) 15:1 *Animal Law* 53 at 55; Frank Ascione et al., “Battered Pets and Domestic Violence: Animal Abuse Reported by Women Experiencing Intimate Violence and by Nonabused Women” in (2007) 13:4 *Violence Against Women* 354; Volant et al., “The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse” (2008) 23:9 *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 1277. These studies form part of the “progression thesis” in criminology generally where it is contended that individuals who abuse individual animals are more likely to be violent. For more on this thesis see Piers Beirne, “Is There a Progression from Animal Abuse to Interhuman Violence” in *Confronting Animal Abuse: Law, Criminology, and Human-Animal Relationships* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) 165. The issue of domestic violence is critically important, especially since violence against women is also a category of violence that has not been taken seriously. Yet, for those law

This approach to animal “protection” is compatible within a legal regime that classifies all nonhumans, except corporations and ships, as property rather than persons and is premised on a species divide that is foundational for western cultures in general (Kheel, 2008; Wolfe, 2003). Statutes outlawing cruelty co-exist with the slaughterhouse. It is a mistake though to assume that the slaughterhouse is an “animal rights” issue of no consequence to humans beyond the working conditions for the slaughterhouse workers (LeDuff, 2003). Rather, according to Giorgio Agamben, it closely relates to the dynamics that sustain violence against humans who are cast into the subhuman category by virtue of their gender, race, class, culture or other socially constructed difference. (Oliver, 2009). Agamben has developed the concept of the “anthropological machine” to characterize the seemingly indelible extent to which western knowledges define the “human” and “animal” in connection with each other. In particular, as Kelly Oliver notes in discussing Agamben’s influential work, the “anthropological machine” currently operates to “animalize” humans and thus subhumanize them. The impact of this (hu)man/animal dichotomy and its effect of animalization and subhumanization are high. As Oliver explains:

Who is included in human society, and who is not is a consequence of the politics of “humanity,” which creates the polis itself. In this regard, politics itself is the product of the anthropological machine, which is inherently lethal to some forms of (human) life...It is the space of the animal or not-quite-human in the concept of humanity that for Agamben presents the greatest danger (Oliver, 2009).

Oliver captures the essence of Agamben’s insight that the human is defined through the nonhuman and, in particular, the animal, and that this binary has the contemporary

---

enforcers that do look at the issue seriously, the violence against animals in the home is mainly of interest for what it reveals to us about violence against humans. On its own, independent of human harm, violence against animals is treated as “cruelty” and treated leniently. See Francione (1995).

effect of dehumanizing vulnerable human groups and thus exposing them to violence from which humans are meant to be shielded. It is important to emphasize as Oliver does that Agamben states this thesis not to consider violence against animals, but to consider the role of our ideas on the “animal” and subhuman” in generating violence against humans (Oliver, 2009). Animal advocates and posthumanist scholars would wish to acknowledge this type of violence to ameliorate the abject status of nonhumans. While I am sympathetic to this project and count myself within this group, this is not my focus here. Rather, applying Agamben’s thesis, I wish to connect the exclusion of violence directed at nonhumans in our normal framing of anti-violence discourse, to the role of the subhuman in violence directed at humans.

## **Part II - The Role of the Subhuman in Current Instantiations of Violence**

This Part illustrates the productive role of the subhuman figure in three contemporary instantiations of violence: 1) detention of individuals in anti-terrorist militarized and police camps; 2) contemporary slavery and/or slavery-like practices; and 3) the laws of war.

### **a) Violence in the Camps**

In her latest book exploring the intersections of race, gender, culture and violence, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law & Politics*, postcolonial feminist scholar Sherene Razack discusses the lawlessness that attends the rise of the “war on terror” (Razack, 2007). In doing so, Razack highlights the phenomenon of the “camp” – spaces where states pass laws or take other measures to create a *lawless* zone untouched by rule of law principles (Razack, 2007). Camps are not a new phenomenon and may be established for a variety of purposes relating to

state control.<sup>4</sup> But a notable feature of many camps dispersed throughout the globe today is who primarily lives there - racialized individuals identified as terrorist or migrant threats and thus in need of containment and discipline. Razack dedicates her attention to these camps which involve military “anti-terrorist” efforts such as those now famously associated with Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib (Razack, 2007).

The absence of the rule of law, for Razack, converts these spaces into a “state of exception,” in the Agamben sense of the term, to mark the boundaries of political citizenship, community and belonging (Razack, 2007). The justification for creating states of exception is crafted through the rule of law itself. Similar to other postcolonial critics, Razack identifies the rule of law as an exclusive category within liberal legalism whose selective application to different conflicts should not be read as surprising (Razack, 2007). The rule of law, as an organizing concept in western legal systems, suffers from the same flaw as other foundational western legal principles. It purports to be universal, but instead is exclusive, having been formulated in and through a legal regime that catered to Empire-building and indigenous dispossession (Kapur, 2005). That it can be so easily manipulated to selectively work its rhetorical influence and apply to protect some groups rather than others should thus not be perceived as peculiar.

While Razack is quick to note that the camps and their logic of justified lawlessness pre-date contemporary wars on terror and the like (Razack, 2007), she asserts that the effect of the war on terror has been to discursively normalize these spaces and the violence they inflict. We as a population know about these camps and

---

<sup>4</sup> As Razack notes, “It is useful to recall that before it became an interrogation centre for terror suspects in the 1990s, Guantanamo Bay held Haitian refugees who were declared to pose an HIV threat.” *Ibid.* at 11-12.

the suspension of law and protective civil liberties they entail, facilitating the conditions for torture (Razack, 2007). We also know the overwhelming racialized nature of these spaces in terms of who is detained in these camps. Yet they endure. For Razack, the reason for this resides in the camps' reliance on a type of "race thinking" – "a structure of thought that divides up the world between the deserving and undeserving"- that sustains the legitimacy of indefinite detention, war and violence (Razack, 2007).

Although race thinking varies, for Muslims and Arabs, it is underpinned by the idea that modern enlightened, secular peoples must protect themselves from pre-modern, religious peoples whose loyalty to tribe and community reigns over their commitment to the rule of law. The marking of belonging to the realm of culture and religion, as opposed to the realm of law and reason, has devastating consequences....(T)he West has often defined the benefits of modernity to those it considers to be outside of it. Evicted from the universal, and thus from civilization and progress, the non-West occupiers a zone outside the law. Violence may be directed at it with impunity (Razack, 2007).

Razack connects this concept of "race thinking" with respect to the camps dispersed throughout the world to Foucault's argument requiring the presence of racism to justify the state's sense of legitimate killing and biopower. The war on terror is another instance of the state seeking to purge from its boundaries those racialized Others whose values are cased as in conflict with "our" own (Razack, 2007). It is because groups are seen as civilizationally different on one sort of cultural register or another, that we accept "the culture of exception that underpins the eviction of increasing numbers of people from political community" into lawless zones where they may be treated violently (Razack, 2007).

Gender frequently figures into this process of racialization, helping western nations accentuate the purported values on which the west and non-west differ by pointing to the systemic gender violence and oppression as part of the Others' culture,

and never their own (Razack, 2007). The classic colonial argument of the non-west requiring and benefitting from western imperial invasion to save non-western women from their misogynistic culture and “dangerous” men has clearly been operative in the war on terror. Women and the threats their Muslim culture/religion pose have been prominently featured, for example, in justifications for the war in Afghanistan and preventing *sharia* law from entering western legal landscapes (Howe, 1995; Razack, 1998; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Bakht, 2005).

While the intersection of race and gender is often acknowledged in understanding the etiology of justificatory narratives for war, the presence of species distinctions and the importance of the subhuman are less appreciated. Yet, the race (and gender) thinking that animates Razack’s argument in normalizing violence for detainees (and others) is also centrally sustained by the subhuman figure. As Charles Patterson notes with respect to multiple forms of exploitation:

Throughout the history of our ascent to dominance as the master species, our victimization of animals has served as the model and foundation for our victimization of each other. The study of human history reveals the pattern: first, humans exploit and slaughter animals; then, they treat other people like animals and do the same to them. (Patterson, 2002).

Patterson emphasizes how the human/animal hierarchy and our ideas about animals and animality are foundational for intra-human hierarchies and the violence they promote. The routinized violence against beings designated subhuman serves as both a justification and blueprint for violence against humans. For example, in discussing the specific dynamics of the Nazi camps, Patterson further notes how techniques to make the killing of detainees resemble the slaughter of animals were deliberately implemented in order to make the killing seem more palatable and benign. That the detainees were made naked and kept crowded in the gas chambers facilitated their

animalization and, in turn, their death at the hands of other humans who were already culturally familiar and comfortable with killing animals in this way (Patterson, 2002).

Returning to Razack's exposition of race thinking in contemporary camps, one can see how subhuman thinking is foundational to race thinking. One of her primary arguments for the book is that race thinking, which she defines as "the denial of a common bond of humanity between people of European descent and those who are not", is "a defining feature of the world order" today as in the past (Razack, 2007). In other words, it is the "*species* thinking" that helps to create the racial demarcation. As Razack notes with respect to the specific logic infusing the camps, they "are not simply contemporary excesses born of the west's current quest for security, but instead represent a more ominous, permanent arrangement of who is and is not a part of the *human* community" (Razack, 2007).<sup>5</sup> Once placed outside the "human" zone by race thinking, the detainees may be handled lawlessly and thus with violence that is legitimated at all times. Racialization is not enough and does not complete their Othering experience. Rather, they must be dehumanized for the larger public to accept the violence against them and the increasing "culture of exception" which sustains these human bodily exclusions.

Although nonhumans are not the focus of Razack's work, the centrality of the subhuman to the logic of the camps and racial and sexual violence contained therein is also clearly illustrated in her specific examples. It is the subhuman figure that justifies the absence of the rule of law from the racialized geopolitical space of Abu Ghraib. In discussing the now famous pictures of torture in Abu Ghraib, Razack notes that "(t)he photos from Abu Ghraib depict acts of intimacy, acts requiring a psychic closeness

---

<sup>5</sup> Emphasis added.

that endangers the barrier between the human and the subhuman even as it creates and affirms it.” (Razack, 2007). For the American soldiers, the Iraqis must be contained as the racial Other, as they are constructed through the war on terror discourse surrounding cultural differences. It is the “sexualized violence (that) accomplishes the eviction from humanity, and it does so as an eviction from masculinity” (Razack, 2007). In the course of her analysis, to determine the import of race thinking in enabling violence, Razack quotes a newspaper story that describes the background mentality of Private Lynndie England, the white female soldier made notorious by images of her holding onto imprisoned and naked Iraqi men with a leash around their necks (Razack, 2007). The story itself quotes a resident from England’s hometown who says the following about the sensibilities of individuals from their town:

To the country boys here, if you’re a different nationality, a different race, you’re sub-human. That’s the way that girls like Lynndie England are raised. Tormenting Iraqis, in her mind, would be no different from shooting a turkey. Every season here you’re hunting something. Over there they’re hunting Iraqis. (Razack, 2007).

Razack extracts this quote to illustrate how “race overdetermined what went on”, but it may also be observed that species “overdetermined what went on” (Razack, 2007). Race has a formative function, to be sure, but it works in conjunction with species difference to enable the violence at Abu Ghraib and other camps. Dehumanization promotes racialization, which further entrenches both identities. It is an intertwined logic of race, sex, culture *and* species that lays the foundation for the violence.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> For more detailed explanation of the race-sex-culture-and species system in general, please see Deckha (2008: 251-259).

## **b) Present-Day Slavery and/or Slavery-Like Practices**

Slavery is often talked about as a racialized vestige from the past. Recent years have seen several treatises arguing that slavery exists today in the form of human trafficking, debt bondage, and/or other forms of forced labor (Scrapa, 2003; Scarpa, 2008; Bales and Cornell, 2008; Bowe, 2008; Derby, 2009). While humans may not legally be property of other humans in any country, many human rights scholars and activists largely argue that non-legal slavery and its trappings still exist in a wide variety of industries where children and adults are kept imprisoned to perform labor of some sort against their will and for little or no remuneration. Kevin Bales is at the foreground of this area of activism and scholarship. He is President of the American-based *Free the Slaves* organization, a sister organization of the *Anti-Slavery International* based in the United Kingdom.

In his book, *Ending Slavery: How We Free Today's Slaves*, Bales describes the extent of contemporary slavery in a variety of global industries from debt-bondage labor, domestic migrant labor, agricultural migrant labor, sex work, child labor in textiles and cocoa production, and other forms of human trafficking for exploited labor (Bales, 2007). In his introduction to the text, Bales is careful to distinguish this form of generally non-consensual/forced labor from the much more widespread problem of poorly remunerated labor under capitalism in general (Bales, 2007). The distinguishing feature, Bales emphasizes, is the violence involved to control individuals and command their labor for profit (Bales, 2007). He identifies three core components of slavery today: "control through violence, economic exploitation, and the loss of free will" (Bales, 2007). Based on this definition, Bales estimates that

today there are 27 million slaves worldwide for whom violently coerced labor forms the norm of their working conditions (Bales, 2007).<sup>7</sup>

Again, it is the denial of humanity that is identified as the dynamic that exposes individuals to being perceived and treated violently as slaves. This is not to deny, of course, that the causes of slavery are multiple; poverty, extreme capitalism, international debt policies, greed, state corruption and apathy, and armed conflict are just some of the causes Bales identifies. Yet, the subhuman figure highlights the conceptual vehicle, a denial of equal humanity, which facilitates violence against humans to compel their labor (Bales, 2007).

This is not a controversial claim given the importance of the subhuman and dehumanization to more historical forms of slavery (Fuss, 1996; Patterson, 2002; Dua, 2007). The widespread sensibility that slaves were not fully human matches the jurisprudential conceptualization of the subhumanity of slaves.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, a recent book published on Darwin's private motivations to pursue and publicize his then radical theory of evolution highlights his abhorrence of slavery. In it, the authors argue that Darwin's concern about slavery greatly influenced his desire to develop and share his views regarding common origins among humans, and among humans, animals, and plants (Sapp, 2008). Darwin's response was to do away with a rigid sense of species divide on which to establish a social order based on whose lives matter and whose do not in a slave-based economy and society. It is not surprising that current

---

<sup>7</sup> Bales further notes that this figure only represents .0043% of the global population and impacts only a fraction of the global economy at \$32 billion. This makes the cessation of all human trafficking a goal without wide-reaching economic implications and thus, Bales argues, something that is achievable in the not-so-distant future. (Bales, 2007: 3-4).

<sup>8</sup> See, for e.g., *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. (19 How.) 393 (1856) at 1-7, 26-38.

understandings of whose lives matter and whose does not also pivot on the subhuman figure, especially since a stark sense of a species divide between humans and all other beings still remains culturally and legally entrenched.

### **c) Laws of War**

The resonance of the subhuman figure may also be found in western jurisprudence relating to the conduct of war. As the title of his recent article, “Species War: Law, Violence and Animals”, intimates, Tarik Kochi argues that a species war is at the root of war and violence generally. He notes that the “laws of war” that describe how nations may engage each other in combat differentiate between two categories of violence: legitimate and non-legitimate violence. He insists that the human-nonhuman distinction is the primary political distinction organizing the laws on war and not, as many would believe, the dyad of friend-enemy as Carl Schmidt espoused (Kochi, 2009). Building upon the Foucauldian insight that, despite international comity, war continues unabated in the domestic sphere through the prism of racial relations, he locates the war of humans against nonhumans as lying at the crux of race war and western political and legal theory (Kochi, 2009).

In making this claim, Kochi’s argument joins posthumanist, postcolonial and feminist theory by locating species difference as intricately connected to the axes of gender, race, and cultural difference (Wolch and Emel, 1998; Bailey, 2007). He moves beyond Razack’s “race thinking”, which incorporates gender and religious/cultural difference, but misses advertent to species difference. Kochi’s analysis directs our attention to the essential role species differentiation plays in our understanding of the distinction between forms of violence in the laws of war and the nature of violence itself, in terms of valuing different forms of life (Kochi, 2009).

From our treatment of nonhumans we learn that only certain deaths are valued in our cultural and legal order as “genocide” or “murder” rather than being diminished through representations as “slaughter”, “culling” or “harvest” (Kochi, 2009). Kochi writes:

While it may be difficult to empirically verify the claim that species war lies at the foundation of the Law of war, the claim does contain a certain degree of genealogical truth. Both species war and the life-value distinction between human and nonhuman animals resides within Western legal and political categories and represent a violence that is too often overlooked. If we are to better understand the relationship between law and war it is time to stop overlooking species war – time to re-think some of our dominant legal and political categories with reference to the lives and death of animals (Kochi, 2009).

Kochi’s emphasis on legitimate violence and life value explains this approach to the human/animal distinction, a binary which goes on to inform what humans may do to other humans in executing war. We can also note in this regard that in the practices of war, the associations of the “enemy” with animals is often heightened through epithets and images to subhumanize and reinforce the legitimacy of the killing (Patterson, 2002). Whether it is the laws of war on what counts as legitimate violence, the logic of the camps as to which bodies may be subject to violence without legal rights and protection, or the flourishing of contemporary slavery and/or slavery-like practices, the subhuman figure is critical to producing violence against humans.

### **Part III – Doing Away With the Subhuman**

The first part of this paper has established the importance of the subhuman figure in several contemporary manifestations of violence: militarized and police camps, slavery and slavery-like practices, and the laws of war. If this role played by

subhumanization is accurate, a pressing question presents itself: should we continue to rely on anti-violence discourses (i.e., human rights or other “human” justice campaigns) that entrench the subhuman category? In other words, human rights discourses do not instruct us to purge the subhuman category or the human/nonhuman divide from our critical repertoire. Instead, they seek to convince us that we should see all human beings as definitely human and not subhumanize them. This approach does not effectively achieve its aims of protecting vulnerable human groups from violence because it leaves the subhuman category intact, a category that humanized humans can always assert should convictions sway about the relative moral worth of a particular human group. The subhuman category is then poised to “animalize” or dehumanize the targeted group and generate corresponding justifications as to why the human group does not deserve better than subhuman treatment. A better strategy would be to eliminate the subhuman category from the onset by impugning the human/nonhuman boundary itself and thus the claim to human superiority.

Not everyone agrees with this assessment as a route to secure anti-violence agendas aimed at protecting vulnerable human groups. Many critics wish to hold onto the elevated cultural status (if not legal) of humans over any other species (Naffine, 2009). Elsewhere I have discussed the potential sources of resistance to such a move in critical theory and political campaigns.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, it can be very unsettling for vulnerable human groups to destabilize this boundary and the corollary belief in human specialness that is said to be at the root of western knowledge systems (Fox, 2004). This is especially so for vulnerable human groups whose humanity has been historically denied. Yet this might be precisely what is required (if insufficient) to

---

<sup>9</sup> (identifying information removed). What this removed on purpose?

alter the dynamics of violence that amplify vulnerabilities. Still, others may disagree and maintain that these instantiations of subhuman violence only demonstrate the incompleteness of humanism and the corresponding need to promote human rights discourse more robustly so that no human beings are thought of as subhuman. This viewpoint assumes that the impediment to humanism is its incomplete application rather than some defect in the category itself.

Postcolonial scholars have pointed to the fallacy of holding this view. Citing western imperial origins and structure, they insist upon the always already exclusive logic that human rights entail (Kapur, 2006). They have argued that the rational and autonomous liberal actor always requires an Other through which to establish himself. In contemporary times, liberalism's Other are subjects whose perceived lifestyles and values are cast as threats to a liberal order. Ratna Kapur identifies liberalism's contemporary Others as the "Islamic", the "homosexual", the "sex worker" and the "migrant subject" and highlights the "spectacular array" of laws, primarily relating to anti-terrorism and anti-migration, that produce these legal Others. Kapur goes on to note how this Othering actually creates a class of the "non-human", delineating some as "lesser" and some more as "super" human (Kapur, 2006). I would push this analysis further to investigate the depths of our reliance on the category of the subhuman. It is not simply the case that liberalism creates Others who then get plugged into a discourse of subhumanity and superhumanity. Rather, the humanist foundations of liberalism ensure that the liberal paradigmatic actor must always differentiate itself from the non-human, for the "good" life articulated within liberal theories is a vision of human life that depends on the non-human for its claims to unique value. The sub-human is crucial to the foundations of humanist and liberal theories making their recuperation an implausible task.

It is for the same reason that merely extending rights or other legal interests to nonhumans is an insufficient response to their frequently abject legal and cultural condition. While creating a non-property status or affording other rights to nonhumans might better protect them from human exploitation, this approach will not disrupt the subhuman/human boundary zones that enable violence in the first place. As feminists know very well, a mere extension of rights with nothing more does not interrogate the logic of exclusion contained within traditional moral/ethical categories (Nedelsky, 1993; Adams and Donovan, 1996; Oliver, 2009). Oliver explains the inability of merely extending rights without undoing humanism when she writes:

...focusing on rights or equality and extending them to animals does not address more essential issues of conceptions of the animal, man, or human. It does not challenge the presumptions of humanism that makes man the measure of all things, including other animals and the earth. Insofar as it leaves intact traditional concepts of man and animal and the traditional values associated with them, it cannot transform our ways of thinking about either. The consequences of Western conceptions of man, human, and animal are deadly for both animals and various groups of people who have been figured as being like them. Without interrogating the man/animal opposition on the symbolic and imaginary levels, we can only scratch the surface in understanding exploitation and genocide of people and animals (Oliver, 2009).

Oliver proceeds from this insight to note its connection to Agamben's concern, discussed above, around understanding western concepts of "animal" and "animality" in order to, in turn, understand oppression of those humans we cast as subhuman or even nonhuman (Oliver, 2009). Whether motivated by a focus on human vulnerability, nonhuman vulnerability, or both, pursuing anti-violence projects with the current anthropocentric status quo seriously undercuts those very same projects.

## **Conclusion – A New Discourse**

That the human/subhuman binary continues to inhabit so much of western experience raises the question of the continuing relevance of anthropocentric concepts (such as “human rights” and “human dignity”) for effective theories of justice, policy and social movements. Instead of fighting dehumanization with humanization, a better strategy may be to minimize the human/nonhuman boundary altogether. Discourses of anti-violence and dignity must shift from anthropocentric and hierarchical concepts to non-exclusive conceptual anchors. This will ensure a more stable foundation for anti-violence and justice-seeking projects. The human specialness claim is a hierarchical one and relies on the figure of an Other - the subhuman and nonhuman - to be intelligible. The latter groups are beings, by definition, who do not qualify as “human” and thus are denied the benefits that being “human” is meant to compel.

More to the point, however, a dignity claim staked on species difference, and reliant on dehumanizing Others to establish the moral worth of human beings, will always be vulnerable to the subhuman figure it creates. This figure is easily deployed in inter-human violent conflict implicating race, gender and cultural identities as we have seen in the context of military and police camps, contemporary slavery and slavery-like practices, and the laws of war - used in these situations to promote violence against marginalized human groups. A new discourse of cultural and legal protections is required to address violence against vulnerable humans in a manner that does not privilege humanity or humans, nor permit a subhuman figure to circulate as the mark of inferior beings on whom the perpetration of violence is legitimate. This paper has sought to demonstrate the need to find an alternative discourse to theorize and mobilize around vulnerabilities for “subhuman” humans. This move, in

addressing violence and vulnerabilities, should be productive not only for humans made vulnerable by their dehumanization, but nonhumans as well.

## References

- Abu-Lughod, L. (2002), "Do Muslim women really need saving: Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and Its Others?" *American Anthropologist* 104, pp. 783-790.
- Adams, C.J. and Donovan, J. (1996), *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals*, University of Indiana Press: Indianapolis.
- Allain, J. (2009), "Book Review of Silvia Scarpa, Trafficking in Human Beings: Modern Slavery," *European Journal of International Law* 20, pp. 453-457.
- Asad, T. (2003), *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford University Press: Stanford.
- Bailey, C. (2007), "We Are What We Eat: Feminist Vegetarianism and the Reproduction of Racial Identity," *Hypatia* 22, pp. 39-59.
- Bakht, N. (2005), "Were Muslim Barbarians Really Knocking On the Gates of Ontario: The Religious Arbitration Controversy – Another Perspective," *Ottawa Law Review*, pp. 67-82.
- Bales, K. (2007), *Ending Slavery: How We Free Today's Slaves*, University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Bales, K. and Cornell, R. (2008), *Slavery Today*, Groundwork Books: New York.
- Bowe, J. (2008), *Modern American Slave Labor and the Dark Side of the New Global Economy*, Random House: New York.
- Bulliet, R.W. (2008), *Hunters, Herders, and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships*, Columbia University Press: New York.
- Deckha, M. (2008), "Intersectionality and Posthumanist Vision of Equality", *Wisconsin Journal of Law, Gender & Society* 23, pp. 249-267.
- Derby, C. N. (2009), *Contemporary Slavery: Researching Child Domestic Servitude*, University Press of America: New York.
- Dua, E. (2007), "Exploring Articulations of 'Race' and Gender: Going Beyond Singular Categories," In Hier, S.P. and Bolaria, B.S. (Eds) *Race & Racism in*

*21<sup>st</sup> Century Canada: Continuity, Complexity, and Change*, Broadview Press, Ontario, pp. 175-196.

Elder, G., Wolch, J., and Emel, J. (1998), "Le Pratique Sauvage: Race, Place, and the Human-Animal Divide", In Wolch, J. and Emel, J. (Eds) *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands*, Verso, London, pp. 72-91.

Finelli, M. and Mason, J. (2006), "Brave New Farm?" In Singer, P. (Ed.) *In Defense of Animals: The Second Wave*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 104-122.

Fox, M. (2004), "Rethinking Kinship: Law's Construction of the Animal Body," *Current Legal Problems* 57, pp. 464-486.

Francione, G. (1995), *Animals, Property and the Law*, Temple University Press: Philadelphia.

Francione, G. (2006), "Taking Sentience Seriously", *Journal of Animal Law and Ethics* 1, pp. 1-18.

Fuss, D. (1996), "Introduction: Human, All Too Human," In Fuss, D. (Ed.) *Human, All Too Human*, Routledge, New York, pp. 1-8.

Griffin, E. (2007), *Blood Sport: Hunting in Britain Since 1066*, Yale University Press: New Haven.

Howe, A. (1995), "White Western Feminism Meets International Law: Challenges/Complicity, Erasures/Encounters," *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 4, pp. 63-91.

Isaacs-Blundin, C. (2007), "Why Manure May be The Farm Animal Advocate's Best Friend: Using Environmental Statutes to Access Factory Farms," *Journal of Animal Law and Ethics* 2, pp. 173-188.

Kapur, R. (2005), *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism*, Glasshouse Press: London.

Kapur, R. (2006), "Human Rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Take a Walk on the Dark Side," *Sydney Law Review* 28, pp. 665-688.

Kheel, M. (2008), *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*, Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, MD.

Kochi, T. (2009), "Species War: Law, Violence and Animals," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 5, pp. 353-369.

LeDuff, C. (2003), "At a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die," In Wolfe, C. (Ed.) *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 183-198.

- Letourneau, L. (2003), "Toward Animal Liberation? The New Anti-Cruelty Provisions in Canada and Their Impact on the Status of Animals," *Alberta Law Review* 40, pp. 1041-1055.
- Luke, B. (2007), *Brutal: Manhood and the Exploitation of Animals*, University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago.
- Marcus, E. (2005), *Meat Market Animals, Ethics & Money*, Brio Press: Boston.
- Naffine, N. (2009), *Law's Meaning of Life: Philosophy, Religion, Darwin and the Legal Person*, Hart Publishing: Portland.
- Nedelsky, J. (1993), "Property in Potential Life? A Relational Approach to Choosing Legal Categories," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 6, pp. 343-365.
- Oliver, K. (2009), *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human*, Columbia University Press: New York.
- Patterson, C. (2002), *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, Lantern Books: New York.
- Pollan, M. (2002), "An Animal's Place," *New York Times Magazine*, 10 November 2002, pp. 58.
- Razack, S. (1998), *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto.
- Razack, S. (2007), *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law & Politics*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto.
- Sapp, G. (2008), "Book Review of Adrian Desmond and James Moore, Darwin's Sacred Cause: How a Hatred of Slavery Shaped Darwin's Views on Evolution," *Library Journal* 133, p. 156.
- Scarpa, M.D. (2003), *Incarceration or Contemporary Slavery*, Tennessee State University: Nashville.
- Scarpa, S. (2008), *Trafficking in Human Beings: Modern Slavery*, Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Scholsser, E. (2001), *Fast Food Nation*, Harper Perennial: New York.
- Shevelov, K. (2009), *For the Love of Animals: The Rise of the Animal Protection Movement*, Henry Holt & Company: New York.
- Wolch, J. and Emel, J. (1998), *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands*, Verso: London.

Wolfe, C. (2003), *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Wolfe, C. (2003), *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.

## COMMENTARY

### **Ecological Indigenous Foodways and the Healing of All Our Relations**

**Claudia Serrato<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Abstract**

In response to the globalization of food, taste and dis-ease the following essay brings forth an earth up lens, which is an embodiment of ecological indigenous principles rooted from a her-storical foodways multilingual perspective. This journey begins 500 years ago up to the present moment applying a decolonial method or an indigenized way of storytelling. Reclaiming and re-memembering indigenous foodways brings into view the importance of animal, earth and human relations. This evolutionary food-journey redefines Latino health today without disregarding the harmful effects of culinary imperialism. Earth-centered communities suffer less from colonial dis-eases by rejecting a colonized or Western foodway. Eating for the next seven generations is an important matrix to explore within critical animal studies.

#### **Ecological Indigenous Foodways and the Healing of All Our Relations**

In discussing critical animal liberties, food and health an ecological indigenous justice framework or lens is crucial, for it provides a practical community determined pathway, liberating living species and earth-centered eco-cosmologies particularly the human body from food related diseases. As an academic I have been trained to report research findings using a linear non-relational method which is viewed as the proper way of presenting research which is “inextricably linked to

---

<sup>1</sup> Claudia Serrato is a reputable traditional and cultural foodways health educator and co-founder of the grassroots food and community health project, Decolonial Food for Thought ([www.decolonialfoodforthought.com](http://www.decolonialfoodforthought.com)) . Residing in Los Angeles, CA, she dedicates herself in creating safe spaces for reflection, dialogue and healing with community members, students and professionals. Currently, she is assessing the outcomes of community food choices and health from participants whom engage in a critical culinary and cultural nutrition curriculum taught with an emphasis on cultural and ethnic food history in the Americas, food politics and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Other areas of interest involve food sovereignty movements throughout the Global South, indigenous ecological foodways, community health, and the resurgence of traditional foods. Claudia can be contacted at [wombyn@gmail.com](mailto:wombyn@gmail.com)

European imperialism and colonial[ity]” (Smith, 1999). Therefore, as a Xicana Indígena accountable to all my relations (land, water, animals, seeds & human bodies) this paper is written through an indigenous research paradigm, which places *indígena* beliefs and principles or epistemology in the frontline by implementing a decolonial methodology of storytelling (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2009).

Did you know that prior to the arrival of those on floating boats in the lands today we call Mexico geographic foodways or *gastronomías* were fruitfully diverse and abundant with hundreds of colorful fruits, vegetables, legumes, flora and slithering, winged and small two and four legged creatures? Human bodies were physically fit and ate sustainably, for *calpullis* or working communities’ gathered, cultivated, harvested, grinded and preserved foods such as maize, beans, *calavasitas*, *jitomates*, *aguacates*, chiles, semolina, pumpkin, *amaranto* y chia seeds. Land, sky and water animals including insect flesh were eaten sparingly, seasonally and ceremonially like wild turkeys, ducks, birds, rabbit, armadillos, turtles, snakes, lake fish, frogs, bees and *larvae de maguey* (Coe, 1994, Super, 1988). Nonetheless, the daily *comidas* were predominantly plant and maize-based. Some popular meals we enjoy today such as tamales, *pozole*, *caldo*, *tacos* and *atole* did not have heavy flesh in them. Tamales were stuffed with tomates, tadpoles, fruits, toasted grasshoppers, cactus and algae. Pozole was made with fresh chiles, mushrooms and hominy. Soups were floating gardens tasteful, delicious and highly nutritious. *Caldos* were of papa, chayote, roots, corn, frijoles and *chilmolli*. Tacos were not only made by hand but where stuffed with *huitlacoche*, *nopales* and *ahuatli*. Heavy flesh foods were not a large or major part of the daily peoples’ diets. It was foods grown from the land.

Then one day, a man appeared wearing a white button up coat with a funny long white mushroom top hat. He gathered the *cocineras*, healers of the plant and

maize based ecological eating communities and told them that their foods were tasteless, inferior and at the bottom of the patriarchal food hierarchy (Adams, 1999). Apparently, this man was a culinary imperialist chef from the European nation bound to the survival of the white skinned self-proclaimed nobility who were scheduled to attend *la comida* ceremony of the day (Pilcher, 1998). He infiltrated the cultural foods by adding his peoples' desired daily meats or corpse such as beef, pig, lamb, chicken, milk, cheese and eggs along with sugar, high salts and processed grains to accommodate the uninvited guests appetites, egos, macho and feminizing pleasures, white superior complexities and non-accountable mentalities to earth-centered cosmologies (Flandrin and Montanari, 1999; Ochoa, 2000; Pilcher, 1998). This invasion was a catastrophe. Fields of Tonanztin's seasonal, organic, wild, natural, non-pesticidal, floating gardens and *milpas*, along with the *comidas*, indigena bodies y *cocinas* were infiltrated and occupied by colonial foods, taste and disease.

Luckily, the ancestors of this time, women and their families, revolted and protested by not eating the invasive mass-produced foods by re-membering their kitchen tools such as the *molcajete*, *el metate*, *el comal* y *ollas de barro* and of course their plant and maize-based eco-foodways. Connected to the land many people took a stance despite the *encomienda*, hacienda y feudal plans that forcefully enslaved the indigena: physically, mentally, spiritually and gastronomically, meaning, that the *panaderias*, *carnicerias*, *lecherias*, and sugar & wheat mills had no competition against *comidas in rebeldia*.

Masculinist food paradigms and industries responsible for neoliberal policies such as CONASUPO, The Green Revolution, Monocultures of modernity, NAFTA and Corporate entities continue disrupting nutritious Indigenous intercropping farming and accessibility in living harmoniously with Tonanztin, a feminine food

principle of cooperation and nurturing relations (Barndt, 2008; Ochoa, 2000; Shiva, 1989). This attempted feminization of the land, the idea that she is for the taking, has flourished to some degree but the people and their comidas throughout pueblos and rural geographies in Mexico, Central, South and North America continue to consume an indigenized way of eating which is one that does not include heavy meats, milk, cheese, eggs, sugar, salt and market shelf foods as a daily ritual, in other words, rejecting colonial nutritional rules (Aldrich and Variyam, 2000).

These foods have been idealized as food for the rich yet masculinized to feminize the other, *la otra* comida consisting of beans, rice and tortillas de maize. These simple yet nutritious comidas are not foods for the oppressed but of the free bodily gastronomies, for “comida[s] cannot be removed, displaced or replaced” (Esteva and Suri Prakash, 1998). As a result, these bodies, as countless medical studies release do not become prone or occupied with colonial *dis*-ease: cardiovascular, obesity, cancer and diabetes. Ecological food justice occurs by remembering Tonanztin and staying away from globalized, mass-producing, food servicing industries that market a heavily based diet full of grease creating a gluttonous, eco-terrorist society, which annihilates traditional plant and maize based gastronomies.

Concurrently, pulled out of the ecosystem, a self-organized complexity of interconnected living and breathing species, animals are brutally slaughtered in the millions each week, are infested with hormones and full of *dis*-ease (Torres, 2007). Domesticated and oppressed by confinement, they are grown and raised unnaturally by not following the seasons nor the ecology of the land. As a result, wild species that roam freely like the mountain lion and coyote are violated as their lives are ended for trespassing unto private industry property (Torres, 2007). Thousands of gallons of

fresh water resources are being depleted to grow Monsanto genetically modified corn and wheat seeds which is then force fed to turkeys, cows, pigs and geese (Shiva, 2007). Supersized and artificially colored butchered packaged meats sold with subsidies makes purchasing these foods easy to eat, creating a cultural ignorance or carnism of the violent domination, exploitation and environmental degradation of the real costs involved in assembly line, industrialized commodified food chains (Nestle, 2007; Torres, 2007). Aqua-creatures no longer grow to maturity, for they are abundantly over fished and instead are harvested in polluted bacteria ridden, man-made rounded puddles of streams, for ground, fresh and salt waters are not only mercury ridden but are chemically unsanitary or completely depleted (Torres, 2007).

And guess who is working in these animal slaughter factories and fish farms? Over-exploited people of indigena ancestry who were pushed off their homelands, forced to join the market economy all due to the increase of the privatization of lands by corporate entities, global tourism, restaurants and hospitality (Gonzalez, 2004). Now these foods are bought and sold to global fast food chains, like Mickey Dees and international markets which are provided all year long including foodstuff like dairy. Since when do female cows, wetnurses, or any females at that provide milk so consistently? They are connected to machines all day long and forced to give and not receive not even a day with their younglings. Industrialized, animalized and feminized proteins' mass production followed by mass consumption is not an indigenous way of eating in solidarity with the ecological communities (Adams, 1999).

Eating to survive means eating for the next seven generations to live and in order for this to manifest food habits need to be addressed through an ecological indigenous food justice lens which is accountable to all of our relations and not through ecological imperialist beliefs which do not “respect and protect the

sovereignty, integrity and ecological spaces of other species...[for] capitalist patriarchy thus defines creation and nature as raw material, and acts of domination, destruction and exploitation” (Shiva, 2005). Luckily, people from below and to the left, those who migrate from one end of one world to another have maintained the balance of eating, for the “body itself and its everyday habits, such as eating beans and chiles...become the mobile country and the embodied memory bank that is, in traditional cultures, accessed through the natural landscape” (Perez, 2006). At food distribution centers, fresh produce and fruits are sold abundantly to immigrant communities (Alvarez, 2005). Eating staple foods sustain peace and ecological order, strengthens cultural identity and shortens health gap disparities. Transnational migrant communities are living longer, are healthier and suffer less of *dis*-ease all due to remembering a traditional way of eating (Hayes-Bautista, 2004).

At the kitchen table, a nepantla battle-ground, I observed wombyn wholistic ways of cooking and through *charlas culinarias compartimos* recipes and enjoyed plant based cultural comidas like *mole de papas*, *enchiladas de espinacas*, *caldo de habas y tacos de flor de calabaza* (Abarca, 2006). Borderless boundry zones I came to see exist in their places turned into spaces of liberation, power and bodily sensory ways of knowing (Abarca, 2006). Feminized senses or subjective measuring has been determined to mean not a thing cause objective perspectives, the eyes and hearing is a masculinized concept rejecting truthful bodies, *la mujer cocinera*, a living theory in the flesh. Preparing comidas by cutting: touch, smelling: scent and tasting: knowing. Relational accountability, a dance with the elements: land, water, fire, and air prepared with foods from Tonanztin’s *jardin*. *Herbas buenas y sazon*: metamorphosis of the raw edible foods into gastronomic culinary *artes*. Sustainable foodways

reindigenize our Aztlan, a temple, land and a dis-membered *coyolxauqui* brown moon body-a sovereign entity.

Acculturation and assimilation is inclusive of a marketed Westernize food strategy, which is no different than a blanket full of small pox *dis*-ease. Let me reiterate: cardiovascular, obesity, cancer, and diabetes are not natural and neither is eating three full size meals daily. *Gastronomias* during the pre-colonial days consisted of *la comida* and sustenance drinks, like *xocolate*, *atole* and maize.

Ecological and healing foodways exist and not only in domestic spaces but in urban regional locations. Mexican Plant-Based Restaurants, *Proyectos Jardines* and even blogs such as Decolonial Food for Thought are spreading seeds of knowledge by advocating and putting into action the practice of the “full autonomy in the organic chain of life” by eating to survive, cultivating the land with indigenous wholistic perspectives, maintaining earth’s skin, soil fertility, protecting bio-crop diversity, participating in community supported agriculture, preserving seeds, cooking and dispensing critical cultural food *her*-stories and not just for today but for the next seven generations of our families (Esteva and Suri Prakash,1998).

As a *caracol* that swirls metaphysically into higher vibrations, dimensions and oppositional consciousness, it is time to complete a full circle in sharing this story not of green capitalism or of lifestyle classism but of decolonization, restoration, detoxification, culinary healing pedagogy and community relational accountability. It is possible to eat and live with out *dis*-ease and speciesism by re-membering ancestral ecological, cosmological earth-centered gastronomies which are natural ways of healing.

To all of our relations.

## References

- Abarca, M. (2006), *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Press, Working-Class Mexican and Mexican American Women*, Texas A&M University Press Consortium: College Station, TX.
- Adams, C. (1999), *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Continuum International Publishing: New York.
- Aldrich, L. and Variyam, J. (2000), "Acculturation Erodes the Diet Quality of U.S. Hispanics", *Food Review* 23, pp.51-55.
- Alvarez, R. (2005), *Mangos, Chiles and Truckers: The Business of Transnationalism*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Barndt, D. (2008), *Tangled Routes: Women, Work and Globalization on the Tomato Trail*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers: New York.
- Coe, S. (1994), *America's First Cuisines*, University of Texas Press: Austin, TX.
- Esteva, G. and Suri Prakash, M. (1998), *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*, Zed Books: New York.
- Flandrin, J. and Montanari, M. (1999), *Food: A Culinary History*. Penguin Group: New York.
- Gonzalez, G. (2004), *Culture of Empire*, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX.
- Hayes-Bautista, D (2004), *La Nueva California: Latinos in the Golden State*, University of California Press: Los Angeles.
- Nestle, M. (2007), *Food Politics: How The Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, University of California Press: Los Angeles.
- Ochoa, E. (2000), *Feeding Mexico: The Political Uses of Food since 1910*, Scholarly Resources: Wilmington, DE.
- Pilcher, J. (1998), *Que Vivan Los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*, University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, NM.
- Pulido, L. (2006), *Black Brown Yellow & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*, University of California Press: Los Angeles.
- Shiva, V. (2007), *Manifestos on the Future of Food and Seed*, South End Press: Cambridge, MA.
- Shiva, V. (2005), *Earth Democracy*, South End Press: Cambridge, MA.

- Shiva, V. (1989), *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, Zed Books: New Jersey.
- Smith, L. (1999), *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Studies*, Zed Books: New York.
- Super, J. (1988), *Food, Conquest, and Colonization in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America*, University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, NM.
- Torres, B. (2007), *Making a Killing: The Political Economy of Animal Rights*, AK Press: Oakland, CA.
- Wilson, S. (2008), *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Fernwood Publishing: Canada.

## **INTERVIEW**

### **An Interview with Anarcha-Transnational Feminist Sarat Colling**

**By Laura Shields**

*Sarat Colling is currently completing a bachelor's degree in English and Writing, Rhetoric and Discourse at Brock University in Ontario, where she volunteers with the Brock Animal Rights Club and the Ontario Public Interest Research Group. Sarat serves on the Board of Directors for the Institute for Critical Animal Studies and is the newsletter editor for the Vancouver Island Vegetarian Association. She is also the founder of Political Media Review, a reviewing clearinghouse for social justice media.*

**Please tell our readers about your background. What sparked your interest in social justice activism?**

Animal liberation philosophy was my gateway into social justice activism. I was receptive to the philosophy because of the close connection to nonhuman animals and nature I had growing up on a small gulf island on the west coast of British Columbia, Canada, called Hornby Island. I spent many hours in the forest with deer, birds, salamanders, frogs and other critters. But it wasn't until my first semester away at college, during a political ideologies class, that I made the connection between animal products and animal suffering. While the class brought me to veganism, it was watching footage of a fur farm on a local news station that turned me into an activist. I remember ordering Tom Regan's *Empty Cages* which turned out to be an excellent entry into animal rights. Then, in 2007, I attended the National Animal Rights Conference in Los Angeles and purchased another life changing book, *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth*, edited by Steve Best and Anthony Nocella, which inspired my interest in anarchism and grassroots politics.

**Did growing up on Hornby Island shape your outlook on North America and global capitalism?**

Being in a close-knit community that strove for environmental and self-sustainability helped me appreciate the importance of the environmental/anti-capitalist movement. With its self governing structure, Hornby attracts people interested in an alternative way of living. Most of the year there is no police presence on the island. It is known for being an early pioneer in the recycling movement, and for its vibrant artist community. My stepfather makes sculptures, baskets, and environmental art out of willow and recycled materials. As a kid I would hang out at the co-op store market while my dad sold paintings, batiks, and tie-dye t-shirts; or even at the local nudist beach, where all bodies are naturally beautiful - not something to be ashamed of or fix as patriarchal capitalist advertising would suggest.

My awareness of borders was restricted to the surrounding water and “divisions” in my own self as a person of mixed South Asian and European descent. But because I always knew everyone, as there were only about 1000 residents, I never really felt like an outsider, despite being one of the few people of color on the island. It was not until later in life that I began to understand the particular ways that I as a woman of color could be figured as “strange” or “different” by some in a system of Western hegemony.

**One of your areas of interest is transnational feminism. Could you briefly explain how you understand transnational feminism and the ways in which it relates to you as a feminist of color?**

Transnational feminism is a theory and commitment to practice that recognizes differences and borders while building solidarity and transcending those borders. Sharing roots with postcolonial studies it critiques neoliberal feminism’s universalizing representations of “Third World” women as an ahistorical monolithic subject, and calls for a de-centering of Western hegemonic discourse, a project which anti-globalization and anti-capitalism are central to. With a father who immigrated from India with five children before I was born, and mother who grew up on a small

farm in Canada, and myself as a woman of color raised in a predominantly white community, I am interested in how the transcending of borders is also the breaking down of labels - such as constructed binaries of male and female, human and animal, white and black, self and other, and how migrant and nonhuman animal bodies are distanced from communities.

**Currently, you are collaborating with Anthony Nocella on a pedagogical story about the Animal Liberation Front. What roles do anarchism and transnational feminism play in your writing?**

The ALF's non-hierarchical principles are found in anarchist and transnational feminist anti-capitalist and anti-globalization frameworks. With their lack of egoism and individualist identity, working anonymously behind the scenes, the ALF can be argued as having feminist practices. Our goal in writing *Love and Liberation*, a fictionalized pedagogical story about the ALF, is to contribute to the conversation about animal liberation politics including gender, race and class, in the context of post-September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 government repression. Because they threaten a capitalist system in which property is valued over life, the ALF and many animal rights activists are criminalized and identified as terrorists, such as under the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act.

Activism and discourse must empower the speaking of those who are oppressed by making space for their voices, rather than silencing them through what Chandra Talpade Mohanty refers to as "discursive colonialization." Speaking, as understood in the nexus of listening, responding and interpreting, can only occur when one is heard. The ALF makes space for the voices of oppressed nonhuman animals to be heard by obtaining footage of their suffering in vivisection laboratories, factory farms, and other places of cruelty, and making it widely available to the public, such as through the internet.

### **Who are the most influential people in your life?**

My interest in writing and rhetoric arose from my family's encouragement to be creative, write and read many different kinds of books. My father was the only one of his eight siblings to attend school and believed very much in education. He often told me to learn from studying the syntax in newspapers and magazines. When I was five my mother took me to Yasodhara Ashram, a yoga community in the mountains of southeastern BC, which led to my ongoing practice of yoga and reflective writing. The yoga centre which integrates social justice and sustainability was set up fifty years ago by a German woman Sylvia Helman who later became Swami Radha.

As well, I have mentioned Tom Regan's book which introduced me to a subject-of-life philosophy and Steve Best and Anthony Nocella's manifesto for revolutionary environmentalism. I have also learned much from social justice scholars and activists such as Breeze Harper, patrice jones, Alka Chandna, Angela Davis, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, Jacques Derrida, Ivan Illich, Emma Goldman, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Sara Ahmed, and Brock University professor Gale Coskan-Johnson who introduced me to transnational feminism.

### **Does the practice of yoga connect with your politics?**

My politics of nonviolence are tied to yoga through the practice of *ahisma*, as it is discussed in the *Yoga Sutras of Pantajali*. The raw-food vegan *Radha Yoga and Eatery* with its concern for environmentalism and making a positive impact in the East Vancouver community is an example of true yoga in action. One of my concerns is how capitalism is misrepresenting yoga through corporatizing it. Western capitalist driven society's journey of self-discovery is defined against the other – like the book and film *Eat, Pray, Love* in which others are consumed through the eating of nonhuman animal bodies and appropriation of 'exotic' cultures. It is a yuppie lifestyle which fails to recognize that the practice of yoga is tied historically and ethically to a plant-based diet of *ahisma*, today understood as veganism.

**What projects are you currently working on?**

I am completing my fourth year at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. I am dedicated to the growth of Critical Animal Studies, of which veganism and anti-capitalism are foundational, while resisting its capitalization and institutionalism. I have also been working on a resource website for transnational feminism and helping to promote *Wagadu: A Journal for Gender & Transnational Women's Studies*. Eventually I would like to take the Yoga Development Course at Yasodhara Ashram. My next step is to apply for graduate school this winter.

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### **Sistah Vegan**

**By Anastasia Yarbrough**

“Sistah Vegan is not about preaching veganism or vegan fundamentalism. It is about looking at how a specific group of Black-identified female vegans perceive nutrition, food, ecological sustainability, health and healing, animal rights, parenting, social justice, spirituality, hair care, race, sexuality, womanism, freedom, and identity that goes against the (refined and bleached) grain. Not all contributors necessarily agree with each other, and that is the beauty of this edited volume: even though we do identify as Black and female, we are not a monolithic group.” (2010: xix)

A monolithic group, *Sistah Vegan* certainly is not. For with every chapter, the reader enters a different voice, a different worldview, and a different conceptualization of the meaning and practice of veganism. For this reason, *Sistah Vegan* is a refreshing read. This book cannot be classified into one particular view of veganism, for it reveals that veganism’s definition and practice changes from person to person, even persons narrowly linked through the black female experience. The essays range from personal health to the struggle for animal rights to a concern for the general wellness of black people to the desire to live holistically and non-violently to a spiritual transformation based on nurturing connectedness to life—all sharing the common thread of veganism. All these women have different stories and motivations for bringing them to where they stand today in veganism. Because they came to veganism from different angles, their definitions of vegan and continued desire to maintain their vegan lifestyle vary. For some women, veganism exists primarily in the form of diet. In “Thinking and Eating at the Same Time,” the author makes her motivation for switching to a vegan diet clear:

“Not liking what I saw, I made a conscious decision to change my eating habits so that they would more closely represent my thinking on issues of social justice, the equitable use and distribution of global resources, and the health-diet-survival connection for African Americans.” (2010: 2-3)

In her case, her motivation for veganism did not directly include consideration for

animals, and certainly not animal rights. However, animals become indirectly involved in her practice of veganism:

“While humankind may have been granted dominion over animals, I don’t believe we were also given the right to be cruel, brutal, and heartless in our treatment of them. Animals are a part of creation, just as humans. Treating them so callously is symptomatic of a general disregard for anything our culture defines as inferior and expendable.” (2010: 4)

This sympathy and consideration for animals was not universal throughout the book, though it was certainly a dominant force behind many of the women’s veganisms, and it varied in degree of concern. The author of “Black-a-tarian” believed that violence against animals didn’t exist as a legitimate force so much as an extension of violence against and exploitation of humans, assuming humans (as a species) were violent to each other first and only later extended this violence to the rest of the world. In her concern for personal health and the health of the black community, she states:

“I don’t even understand animal rights. As much energy as these organizations put into animal rights, if they put the same into human rights, these animals wouldn’t be mistreated in the first place...Animal cruelty is just the byproduct of human cruelty and is not the equivalent. One just perpetuates the other.” (2010: 69)

Her motivation for veganism may be limited in scope and concern, but she is not the only one. The author of “On Being Black and Vegan” argues that veganism without consideration of animal rights or abstinence from animal products entirely is not true veganism. For the author, the first and foremost reason to practice veganism is to resist animal exploitation. Any other reason should be secondary, lest it run the risk of being a perversion of veganism:

“The problem with many Black women who label themselves as vegan, in my experience, is that they aren’t. They claim to be vegan but they are merely concerned about avoiding certain animal products for superficial health or so-called spiritual reasons, paying little to no attention whatsoever to the detrimental impacts of their consumption decisions on nonhuman animals and on environment. For example, many of these so-called vegans eat honey, saying it’s good for them and listing ways in which it benefits their health. Never do they mention, or express any concern over, the fact that honey is derived from an animal (the bee) and from the raping and exploitation of bees and their hives.

Many Black so-called vegan women will also wear wool and leather. But you're not a vegan if you embrace wearing wool and leather, no matter how many tofu dinners and steamed vegetables you eat." (2010: 43-44)

Just the fact that these two essays share the same book is amazing. If this were a purely academic book meant primarily for an academic audience, it would run the risk of being segmented and readers could never hear these rich and assertive voices in the same context of black female veganism. Although I agree with the second author regarding the roots of veganism, this doesn't change that her position on veganism is no less narrow than the first author.

For other women throughout the book, veganism becomes more holistic and multi-issued, based on a non-violent, spiritual practice that goes beyond what they put into their bodies and what they put on their bodies, but also how they behave and relate in the world. In this vegan framework, the importance of black women treating their bodies as "divine temples" or bodies worthy of love and respect is evident (2010: 68, 94, 167). Non-violence starts with loving-compassion toward oneself. In "The Food and Sex Link," the author creatively explores the sensuality of food and how the art of conscious eating in the context of veganism heightens spirituality as well:

"We can enhance sacred moments by creating purpose in the preparation of food and at the table. I always fill my food with light and positive words to raise its vibrations—blessing its source and the many people that played a role in its journey from the earth to my mouth." (2010: 103)

But holistic, non-violent veganism explored by multiple authors in this book gravitate beyond just food. It becomes a lifestyle of compassion and relationships:

"If we are ever to truly act with compassion, we must be willing to see people, animals, and especially ourselves for what we truly are: ever-changing and capable of growth, decay, transcendence, destruction; witnesses to our own inalienable experiences; ultimately, living testaments of the choices we have made, the acts of compassion or cruelty we have witnessed, and the lives we have known. Each life lived is foremost and always an honest testament to its own truth, never to a truth someone else supposes to have been or once tried to impose." (2010: 166)

Ecological sustainability is lightly touched upon in the book, though never in any consistency or depth. The most it is used is as an undefined catch-all term for simple living, a push for organic and fair-trade consumption, or an aspiration toward intentional community:

“Veganism...has filtered into and supported my appreciation for ‘living simply’ more generally, compelling me to reduce my material possessions significantly, downsize to a more compact living space, and take on other intentional practices that prepare me for living in a more balanced and sustainable way...” (2010: 19)

“We must extend our antiracist and antipoverty beliefs to all people, nonhuman animals, and Mother Gaia. Yes, unless the cane sugar you are consuming is labeled ‘organic’ (as well as ‘fair trade’), our collective overconsumption of and addition to cane sugar also helps destroy...Mother Gaia’s ecosystem.” (2010: 29-30)

“My dream is to build a self-sustaining, eco-friendly African community, with a large farm and greenhouse, fresh spring or well water, solar-powered homes, and our own businesses and schools.” (2010: 100)

In this case, ecological sustainability is more so an empty phrase than a meaningful concept to the veganisms addressed in this book.

These clips from the book are but a taste for what it has to offer. There is so much more that this short review can’t fully explore. The essays and poetry contradict, reinforce, complement, and mutually exclude one another. Like a whole and healthy ecosystem, this makes for a whole and healthy contribution to the culture of veganism. There is no singular interpretation of veganism throughout this book. Rich representation from health, animal rights, social justice, and spirituality perspectives pervade this book in a form that is highly accessible to the non-academic reader. And if you imagine veganism on a spectrum from narrow to holistic, this book contains samples across the spectrum. This book is an excellent first for providing a platform for the multitude of worldviews, philosophies, and values of black female vegans across the United States.

## JCAS: AUTHOR GUIDELINES

### Editorial Objectives

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established for the purpose of fostering academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies are increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker take a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy.

JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. This journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists to address the important topic of animal liberation. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal for the purpose of facilitating communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal rights movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

### Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed on any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Because a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytic thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminist, activism and academia, Continental philosophy or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention. The following are a few topic suggestions:

### The reviewing process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication. All submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

### Manuscript requirements

The manuscript should be in MS WORD format, in 1.5 line spacing and 12 point Times New Roman. Good electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should be run through an American English spell check prior to submission.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words, and have limited endnotes. In exceptional circumstances JCAS will consider publishing extended essays (up to 15,000 words). Authors should supply a brief **abstract** of the paper (of no more than 250 words).

A brief **autobiographical** note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation, e-mail address, and full contact details.

**References** to other publications must be in Harvard style and carefully checked for completeness, accuracy and consistency.

You should cite publications in the text: (Best, 2006) using the first named author's name or (Best and Nocella, 2006) citing both names of two, or (Best et al., 2006), when there are three or more authors. At the end of the paper a reference list in alphabetical order should be supplied:

*For books:* Surname, Initials (year), Title of Book, Publisher, Place of publication. e.g. Gray, J. (2002), *Straw Dogs*, Granta Books: London

*For book chapters:* Surname, Initials (year), "Chapter title", Editor's Surname, Initials (Ed.), Title of Book, Publisher, Place of publication, pages. E.g. Greenbrier, T. (2006) "Against Civilization, For Reconnection to Life!", in Best, S. and Nocella, A.J. (Eds) *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth*, AK Press, Oakland, pp. 198-203.

*For journals:* Surname, Initials (year), "Title of article", Journal Name, volume, number, pages. e.g. Cudworth, E. (2008), "'Most Farmers Prefer Blondes': The dynamics of anthroparchy in Animas' becoming meat", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, pp. 32-45.

*For published conference proceedings:* Surname, Initials (year of publication), "Title of paper", in Surname, Initials (Ed.), Title of published proceeding which may include place and date(s) held, Publisher, Place of publication, Page numbers.

*For unpublished conference proceedings:* Surname, Initials (year), "Title of paper", paper presented at Name of Conference, date of conference, place of conference, available at: URL if freely available on the internet (accessed date).

*For working papers:* Surname, Initials (year), "Title of article", working paper [number if available], Institution or organization, Place of organization, date.

*For encyclopedia entries* (with no author or editor): Title of Encyclopedia (year) "Title of entry", volume, edition, Title of Encyclopedia, Publisher, Place of publication, pages.

*For newspaper articles* (authored): Surname, Initials (year), "Article title", Newspaper, date, pages.

*For newspaper articles* (non-authored): Newspaper (year), "Article title", date, pages.

*For electronic sources:* if available online the full URL should be supplied at the end of the reference, as well as a date that the resource was accessed.

### Copyright

Articles submitted to JCAS should be original contributions, and should not be under consideration for any other publication at the same time. For ease of dissemination and to ensure proper policing use, papers and contributions become the legal copyright of the publisher unless otherwise agreed.