Animal Studies

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Abstract

This overview of animal studies scholarship from 2020 covers a diverse range of sites – from escaped primates in IKEA carparks to boar hunting in colonial India – and disciplinary contexts, drawing together research from philosophy, literary theory, the environmental humanities, animal geographies, imperial history, and ecofeminism. What unites these texts is their engagement with one of the most significant themes in animal studies: the politics of anthropocentrism. The first sections of the essay engage with work that has sought to critique anthropocentric logics and practices. Through focusing on research related to the exotic pet trade, avian extinction, and colonial science, I illustrate how anthropocentric hierarchies are being enacted – but also complicated – but particular socio-economic relationships and knowledge-frameworks. In the second sections of the essay, I engage more explicitly with scholarship that has foregrounded the complex relationships between anthropocentrism, colonialism, gendered inequalities, and racialization. Although this research is wide-ranging, what it shares is an insistence on the need to better situate narratives about the intersection of human and animal oppression, in light of the way these relations are shaped by specific national and cultural contexts. The essay culminates by discussing contemporary critiques of animal studies due to the primacy it has given to anthropocentrism over other oppressive social relations, particularly race. At the same time as arguing that the field needs to meaningfully engage with these critiques moving forward, I conclude by suggesting that there is something important about anthropocentrism that means it retains value as a critical concept for animal studies.

Introduction

The politics of anthropocentrism are far from straight-forward. Over the past year, the emphasis of some of the most established scholars in animal studies has been to renew longstanding commitments to interrogating – as Matthew Calarco puts it in *Beyond the Anthropological Difference* – 'institutions, systems, and practices that protect the existence and interests of a select group of beings deemed to be fully human' (p. 4). Within this definition of anthropocentrism, it is the phrase 'select group' that offers the most significant gesture toward the term's complexity. Here, anthropocentric hierarchies are not treated as being entirely synonymous with notions of 'human exceptionalism', wherein the needs of humans are universally prioritized over nonhuman beings. Instead, Calarco is pointing to the unevenness of anthropocentric privilege; how it is complicated, and sometimes even undercut, by racialized, gendered, and classed inequalities. What Calarco's definition of anthropocentrism underlines, therefore, is a longstanding tenet of animal studies of different stripes: that the label 'animal' is not just at the root of animal oppression, but entangled with social formations that legitimize the marginalization and exclusion of particular groups of humans. The precise relationship between these oppressions, however, is both complicated and contested, lying at the heart of some of the most significant debates in animal studies not only from the last 12 months but the previous decade.

The act of tracing intersections between anthropocentrism and human oppression has long been an important current within animal studies, which has united sometimes disparate branches of the field. For instance, points of tension have historically existed between so-called 'mainstream' animal studies and work with more critical ethical commitments. These tensions have stemmed from a range of factors, not least animal studies increasingly being defined by a focus on animals as subject matter, as opposed to

earlier scholarship that was characterized by an ethical agenda seeking to critique or transform commonplace relationships with nonhuman beings. Accompanying the field's distancing itself from normative ethical commitments, have been a number of conceptual shifts wherein animal studies has steadily embraced posthumanist and poststructuralist thought; indeed, these developments are sometimes argued to be correlated with one another (Fraiman, 2012; Probyn-Rapsey, O'Sullivan and Watt, 2019). Frictions within animal studies have often proved so profound that they have given birth to other fields and sub-fields; most notably critical animal studies (CAS), which remains firmly allied to animal activist agendas, and vegan studies, with its grounding in vegetarian-ecofeminism (see Wright, 2015).

Yet, despite the tensions between different strands of animal studies and amidst the branching off of new fields, what has united strands of research with otherwise different orientations, are attempts to unpick how variegated forms of human oppression are entangled with the modern emergence of 'the animal' as an ethical, epistemological, and ontological category. An emphasis on recognizing the relationships between structural inequalities, for instance, has been central to CAS's commitment to total liberation, as well as work in feminist science studies, posthumanism, and more-than-human geographies, which has emphasized the differential entanglements between humans and other beings. Attempts by scholarship from 2020 to flesh out how anthropocentrism operates, as well as its relationship with other oppressive structures, thus have far reaching implications: not only in the context of animal studies itself, but for wider bodies of theory.

Below I engage with texts that have furthered, complicated, and at times overhauled dominant understandings of the dynamics of anthropocentrism. Some of the research I discuss unpicks the anthropocentric logics through which animals themselves are rendered commodities or forced to near extinction due to human activities, as with Rosemary-Claire Collard's focus on the global wildlife trade in *Animal Traffic* or Thom van Dooren's careful attention to the fragile lives of corvids in *The Wake of Crows*. In doing so, these monographs pose valuable questions about how to dislodge anthropocentrism within knowledge production itself, joining books – such as Wahida Khandker's *Process Metaphysics and Mutative Life* – that offer an explicit attempt to explore how insights from animal studies could inform more established disciplinary fields (in Khandker's case, the philosophy of science). Other texts, including Antoinette Burton and Renisa Mawani's edited bestiary *Animalia* or Kathryn Gillespie and Yamini Narayanan's special collection 'Animal Nationalisms', probe the intersections between anthropocentric violences directed towards racialized humans and the oppression of non-human animals. Carol J. Adams's updated edition of *The Pornography of Meat*, likewise, foregrounds the relationship between oppressions, in line with the ecofeminist arguments pioneered by Adams's earlier work, wherein sexually explicit meat marketing is argued to exploit: 'the asymmetrical relationship of gender to normalize animal oppression, simultaneously naturalizing the gender binary and a consumer vision in which farmed animals are imputed to desire their own death and consumption' (p.17).

I close by reflecting on some of the ways the relationship between anthropocentrism and human inequalities have been grappled with, in the wake of a growing sense that attempts to contest human and animal oppression do not always line up neatly (e.g. Kim, 2015; Ahuja, 2016; Boisseron, 2018). In many ways, a defining feature of research published in 2020 is that it has marked a point in which these sympathetic internal critiques of animal studies have taken centre stage: as perhaps best embodied by Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's *Becoming Human: Matter and meaning in an antiblack world*. What distinguishes *Becoming Human* is not just that the text questions simplistic notions of human exceptionalism by pointing to the unevenness of this phenomenon, or that Jackson offers theoretical coordinates beyond the standard animal studies canon (although she does do both of these things). What sets Jackson's book apart is her emphasis on the way that antiblackness has imbricated modern

conceptions of 'the animal', from its historical origins amidst Enlightenment projects of colonial expansion. *Becoming Human*, therefore, signals an important theoretical direction in animal studies wherein, at the same time that critiques of anthropocentrism are intensifying, the notion of anthropocentrism itself is being complicated – or at least – the way this concept has often been understood and utilized.

The work I engage with in this essay is relatively wide-ranging, but I have still, unfortunately, had to draw some boundaries in order to make writing a review essay about an especially significant year of research manageable. It is, in part, therefore, for pragmatic – as well as intellectual – reasons that I have focused on critical engagements with anthropocentrism. This focus, however, means that I have not engaged with sociological and historical work that engages with other themes in animal studies, such as Corey Lee Wrenn's analysis of thirty years of animal activism in *Piecemeal Protest*, Angela Cassidy's exploration of controversies surrounding badger culling as a response to bovine tuberculosis in *Victims, Vermin and Disease*, or Paula Arcari's interview-based interrogation of animal consumption in *Making Sense of 'Food' Animals*. These texts, nonetheless, offer rich and valuable routes into grasping how animal ethics is negotiated, enacted, and contested in practice, which complement many of the works discussed below.

Renewing anthropocentric critique

Calarco's *Beyond the Anthropological Difference* offers an especially useful entry-point into debates about anthropocentrism, due to its function. The text is a concise 52-page volume, published as part of Cambridge University Press's 'Elements in Environmental Humanities' series, which aspires to be of value to those 'who hope to gain a fuller sense of what is at stake in recent work in critical animal studies; advocates for social justice who wish to know more about how animal issues might figure in their work for the reconstitution of a society that eschews rhetorics and practices of dehumanization; and readers concerned with environmental justice and politics' (p.1). As such, Calarco offers a lucid overview – as well as intervention – into the problem of anthropocentrism.

Beyond the Anthropological Difference begins with three sections that critically map existing debates. It starts with a critique of philosophical attempts to assert anthropological difference (exemplified by the work of Hans-Johann Glock), before situating these exceptionalist philosophies as the product of anthropocentrism (as opposed to speciesism), and culminating with an examination of the relationship between intersectional theory and animal studies. For Calarco, speciesism is 'a form of ethical discrimination against animals based on the supposed superiority of the species Homo sapiens' (p.4). In contrast, as outlined in the quote that opened this essay, anthropocentrism is defined in terms of 'institutions, systems, and practices that protect that existence and interests of a select group of people deemed to be fully human' (p.4). In *Beyond the Anthropological Difference*, then, animal oppression is not just depicted as something anchored in systemic prejudice, but enacted through institutions and infrastructures that organize the world for the benefit of a highly selective group of people. Before delving into Calarco's own arguments about anthropocentrism, however, it is worth elucidating what his definition might mean in practice by drawing on other texts from the past year, which concretize precisely the 'institutions, practices, and systems' that are referred to in *Beyond the Anthropological Difference*.

Collard's *Animal Traffic* and van Dooren's *Wake of Crows*, for instance, engage with themes that shed light on systems that reproduce anthropocentric social configurations: the exotic pet trade and the wider phenomenon of extinction, respectively. These themes are not unrelated. Just as homes are increasingly filled with exotic pets, the spaces that formed these animals' original habitats are emptied. Indeed, Collard's book begins with a series of shocking facts that testify to relationship between animal

traffic and extinction; in her words: 'Animals have been exported so rapidly out of Southeast Asia to be pets in countries like the United Kingdom, the United States, and Japan that experts have coined the term "empty forest syndrome" to refer to the concomitant loss in biodiversity' (p.15). This emptying out of forests and rivers is not solely due to increased consumer demand, but the high mortality rates of captive animals. For instance, 'for every ten birds and reptiles who are captured, as few as three make it to the pet shop. For fish the mortality rate between capture and purchase is even higher, as much as 80 percent. The chance of a new exotic pet living through its first year after purchase is just over 20 percent' (p.15). *Animal Traffic* is, however, not simply a book full of shocking statistics. Instead, Collard offers a thick sense of the processes, practices and institutional arrangements that form the supply chains through which animals are transformed into 'lively commodities'.

Each chapter examines different moments in these commodity chains, beginning with animals' initial capture, before moving to auction halls in which they are traded, and closing with an examination of wildlife rehabilitation centres. This commodity circuit thus begins with animals being severed from their original ecological and familial networks (in order to be made encounterable as domestic pets), and ends with attempts to undo this act via a further severing: this time from human lifeworlds. While the initial act of capture 'strips the animal of "a life of its own" by severing the animal from the ability to provide for itself and its community' (p.37), the 'misanthropic practices' employed in rehabilitation (spraying spider monkeys with water, refusing to speak to parrots, and even using firecrackers to make animals scared of humans) aim to 'undo an animal's status as lively capital – dismantle the individual, encounterable, controllable life … produced through capture, bodily enclosure, and commodification' (p.93). The effects of the initial act capture and animals' subsequent commodification, however, can sometimes never be undone, with ex-pets unable to survive in their original ecologies even after being exposed to the discomfort of rehabilitation attempts.

In addition to offering a rich account of supply chain circuits themselves, Collard traces the complex emotional relationships with nonhuman animals that inform these socio-economic relations. The book begins, for instance, with the case of Darwin, or the 'IKEA monkey' who was found wandering around the carpark of a popular furniture supplier in Toronto '[w]earing a diaper and a miniature shearling coat' (p.1). After being caught by animal protection, Darwin was eventually rehomed at the nearby Stony Brook Farm Primate Sanctuary – much to the distress of his owner, whose car he had escaped from, and who, in the ensuing court case over Darwin's fate, described him as being like a son to her. The presiding judge, however, thought otherwise and stated that: 'callous as it may seem' as soon as he had escaped his 'owner' Darwin was not only no longer her son, but no longer her property, due to distinctions made in state law between the property status of 'domestic' versus 'Nonnative wild animals' (p.2). For Collard, the judge's description of the ruling as 'callous' is key to understanding what is at stake in Darwin's case: and in the case of animal traffic more broadly. On the one hand, Darwin (temporarily) became property after being (to draw on the theme of Collard's first chapter) 'severed' from his relationships with other non-human primates and his ability to survive independently in his forest home, and instead rendered 'thing-like' in order to be made exchangeable. On the other hand, Collard argues, this process of violent disentanglement is driven by love.

Darwin's value as a commodity, perhaps paradoxically, hinges on his capacity to resist being wholly categorized as an inert 'thing', indeed, his non-thing-like qualities are precisely what make the wildlife trade so lucrative. As Collard points out: 'Darwin makes his own designation as "property" tremble; his anthropomorphic, "son"-like qualities strain his object status … This legal case exemplifies how a pet is a sentient, dynamic, emotional being who is made thing*like* when it is made a commodity, made property, through markets, the law, the state, and other institutions and mechanisms' (p.5).

Collard's descriptions here could be read in light of precisely the sort of anthropocentric systems flagged up by Calarco, wherein human needs drive anthropogenic extinction. A neat reading of these supply chains as materializations of anthropocentrism is complicated, however, by the way these dynamics are not solely driven by the prioritization of human commerce over animal life, but also by intense love for the nonhuman animals at the heart of these processes. This love might, in part, itself be anthropocentric – in both its consequences for biodiversity and its anthropomorphism – but it simultaneously troubles the very anthropocentric order that sustains it: as with Darwin's uneasy position as neither person nor property.

The impossibility of separating love and violence in particular multispecies entanglements has also long been a theme of van Dooren's work, notably his startling account of whooping crane conservation in *Flight Ways* (2014). *The Wake of Crows* continues van Dooren's concern with violent-care, with stories about five species of corvids inhabiting different contexts (spanning Australia, Hawaii, the Netherlands, the US and the Mariana Islands). In many of these corvid stories, van Dooren foregrounds how human activities have decisively taken precedence over the lives of other beings. His third chapter, 'Unwelcome Crows', for example, describes a small colony of house crows who originally found a niche in the Netherlands in the 90s. This particular species of crow ordinarily inhabits regions of the Indian subcontinent, but by 2014 around 40 of the birds had established themselves in Hoek van Holland after arriving 'likely as stowaways' (p.104), on one of the cargo ships entering the – '105 square kilometer' (!) (p.113) – port. The flourishing of this tiny crow community, however, was soon put to a halt by a state-led eradication programme that was motivated not by any damage the birds were doing to local ecologies, but speculation over potential future harms to crops and 'native' species. As with Collard's account of the classificatory systems shaping Darwin's fate, therefore, human categorizations of certain species as belonging and others as 'non-native' – and thus unwelcome – have world-making consequences.

Accordingly, van Dooren's story of house crows draws together some complex, heterogeneous conceptual threads in order to situate making-unwelcome as a central component of extinction. To further his argument that acts of (un)welcoming other species have played a significant role in creating the conditions for the Anthropocene, van Dooren uses Derridean notions of hospitality to unpick these Anthropocenic (and anthropocentric) logics. While recognizing well-documented problems with the label Anthropocene, turning to sites such as ports, van Dooren suggests, can instead foreground how specific locales play a key role in inscribing 'particular forms of human life in the landscape … with an ever increasing intensity' (p.118).

The Port of Rotterdam is an especially evocative Anthropocenic site, because it marks a place where logics of anthropocentrism are materialized. Here, van Dooren argues, '[r]hetoric is made strangely material' with the port not only acting as a motor for global commerce but enacting an 'assumed entitlement to the world that is … increasingly "authorized" by the ongoing transformation and destruction of environments' (p.105). The plight of the house crows offers a microcosm for these dynamics. Despite the crows' arrival being caused by carbon-intensive global transport networks, these (far more damaging) human activities are naturalized while environmental anxieties are projected onto the birds. As van Dooren puts it: 'Here, at the epicenter of "our" remaking of the world to suit "our" designs and whims, the lives of forty crows could not be tolerated. In this massively transformed and transforming landscape we worry that they may one day harm local biodiversity, that they may one day become an inconvenience to us. This is the (il)logic of mastery at work' (p.120). This story thus illustrates how (particular) humans have positioned themselves as planetary hosts who have the authority to lay their

marks on the Earth, in ways that demarcate the boundaries of who else is subsequently welcome to inhabit a place and who is excluded.

The situations outlined by van Dooren and Collard speak to the complexities of anthropocentrism. On one level these cases could be read as straight-forward instances of human needs being given precedence over those of nonhuman beings, which elucidate the 'institutions, practices, and systems' (Calarco, 2020: p.4) that materialize these anthropocentric hierarchies. What emerges is a picture wherein the global trade networks that contribute to planetary collapse are allowed to continue unabated, while autonomous animal mobilities entwined with these networks are eradicated. At the same time, mobilities regulated by humans – such commodified animal traffic associated with domestication and animal agriculture – is facilitated. Yet this is not the entire picture, as events in both books also speak to another integral aspect of Calarco's account of anthropocentrism: that it is 'select groups' of humans on the upper echelons of these hierarchies and, by extension, nonhuman animals do not always assume the bottom rungs. Collard, for instance, offers a clear account of the ways conservation rhetoric is used to legitimize the militarization of the border between Mexico and Guatemala, and describes how: 'ecotourism is serving as a major impetus to militarized conservation as tourist sites are created and maintained through the expulsion of peasants and their vilification as predatory on local fauna, as well as the army's increased presence through the creation of military outposts and their enrollment in enforcing conservation laws' (p.41-2). *The Wake of Crows'* final chapter, similarly, turns to neo-colonial conservation initiatives wherein the presence of endangered birds gave rise to conservation policy that devastated local communities on the Marinara islands: often leaving Indigenous residents in limbo for a decade due to depriving them of land rights. Collard and van Dooren's work, however, does not just offer a sense of the different aspects of Calarco's arguments could come together to speak to concrete political settings, but also offer a response to a different dimension of his work: a call to rethink knowledge production itself.

Unsettling anthropocentric knowledge production

The second half of *Beyond the Anthropological Difference* shifts 'from a critical to an affirmative mode' (p.27), setting out Calarco's own contribution to the project of refusing anthropocentrism: an ontology – which gives rise to an ethics – of 'indistinction' that 'acknowledge[s] that we are indiscernible from animals and animality, with no exceptions or qualifications, and without any nostalgia for securing an anthropological difference' (p.31). What this philosophical approach might look like in practice is set out in the second half of the book, where Calarco combines a re-working of Guattari's *Three Ecologies* (2005) with a call for further interdisciplinary engagements with fields such as ethology: in a framework he terms the 'three ethologies' (p.35). Through reading philosophy and ethology against one another in this way, Calarco seeks to muddy the boundaries between human and nonhuman by, firstly, emphasizing the constitutive role of animals in human worlds and, secondly, recognizing nonhuman animals as having their own distinctive social, environmental and mental ecologies. The moves made in the second half of the book thus speak to one of Calarco's central assertions, that what is at stake in going 'beyond the anthropological difference' is not just that this journey demands a rethinking of animal ethics but that it precipitates a 'struggle over the future of thought' itself (p.13). In other words, once the boundary between human and nonhuman beings has been rendered indistinct, new forms of ethics and ways of knowing are necessitated.

Further sense of what a non-anthropocentric mode of knowledge production might look like in practice can again be found by revisiting research from 2020. Collard uses her focus on the global wildlife trade, for instance, to rethink a cluster of Marxist terms – including lively capital and animal fetishism – so they better reflect the more-than-human dynamics of contemporary commerce. Similarly, van Dooren juxtaposes short tales from the lab (which give insight into corvid behaviour) with longer

ethnographically-focused chapters, diffracting ethology and ethnography through one another in a manner that offers a reworking of established theoretical categories (such as heritage and hope) so they better capture the affordances of extinction. Perhaps the most holistic sense of how knowledge production can be informed by the principles of animal studies (and critical animal studies in particular), however, can be found in Khandker's *Process Metaphysics and Mutative Life*. Each chapter of Khandker's book brings process philosophy into dialogue with the life sciences, in order to think through a series of 'living processes' (incipience, transmutation, symbiosis, metamorphosis, reminiscence, plasticity, and extinction) whose conceptualization have high ecological stakes. While not an explicitly animal studies text in quite the same manner as Khandker's previous monograph, *Philosophy, Animality and the Life Sciences* (2014), what makes *Process Metaphysics* informative is precisely through emphasizing the constitutive role of animals in knowledge production, in contexts where their role might otherwise have been submerged in favour of broader narratives about ecological processes.

Chapter 2, 'Transmutation', for instance, begins with the story of the Noisy Miner, a species of bird 'currently protected under Australian law' but whose aggressive policing of territory has resulted in discussion of whether some '"control" (culling) of the species' is necessary 'to provide some of the declining smaller bird species a chance to flourish' (p. 27). From this specific bird, Khandker then conceptualizes the wider processes through which species are reclassified, here from success to threat. This situated discussion of reclassification, in turn, opens into an examination of the emergence of species hierarchies from Darwin onwards, which culminates in a wide-ranging discussion of how processes of transmutation have been understood by, and inform, philosophy, the life sciences, and contemporary conservation science.

An insistence on holding specific animals in view when discussing large-scale processes is also reflected in the book's overarching structure. *Process Metaphysics* begins with a description of *Melonys rubicola,* a rare variety of rat, who rose to prominence after being labelled the first species whose extinction has been attributed to climate change. These themes are revisited in the closing pages of the book, in its culminating chapter that focuses on the process of extinction. Here, Khandker marshals historical and philosophical sources about the decline of the thylacine to trace how extinction has shifted from being treated as an inevitable, and natural, process to contemporary environmentalism that perceives mass extinction as 'a harm to be avoided' that is directly attributable to human activities (p.169). By structuring the text so that it begins and ends with extinction, and through individual chapters foregrounding the role of animals in contexts where they are often relegated to tools or thought-experiments, Khandker evokes the pluralistic roles of animals in knowledge production in a manner that speaks to the demands of Calarco's call for philosophy to resist anthropocentrism. Her closing reflections on extinction, moreover, also speak to another persistent concern expressed in *Beyond the Anthropological Difference*: the relationship between oppressions.

In Calarco's closing pages, he suggests that: 'How the human is conceived and how numerous modes of "othering," dehumanization, and subhumanization are carried out are brought into greater relief when examined specifically in relation to animals and animality' (p.40). Khandker's closing chapter, relatedly, offers a reminder that it is not humans 'in general' but specific colonial violences that have been entangled with many of the philosophical frameworks through which animals are rendered abject: From Darwin's 'derogatory statements about Australian marsupials in *The Origin of Species*' to historical framings of the thylacine which rendered it a 'bad analogue of a tiger' (p.171) or less sophisticated than introduced species (such as cats and dogs) 'who can wag or articulate their tails more expressively' (p.173). As with other Australian fauna, the decline of species in the wake of colonization was thus framed instead as a form of natural selection due to these species being 'less evolved than their European

counterparts' (p.169). What emerges in this chapter, therefore, is a concrete sense of the relationships between anthropocentrism, Othering, and colonization.

While these themes come to the fore in the culmination of Khandker's text, and are one thread amongst others in Collard and van Dooren's books, other work from 2020 takes the relationship between philosophical and scientific understandings of evolutionary process, material processes of colonization, and violence toward non-human animals, as their primary focus. It is the varying ways that this body of work engages with racialized, gendered and anthropocentric violence, which are the concerns of the remaining sections of this essay.

Anthropocentrism and human inequalities

A notable development in 2020 was the emergence of a number of texts, which offered situated analyses of the ways that intersections between colonial violence and anthropocentrism manifest themselves in particular cultural and geographic contexts. Much of these discussions centred on contemporary settler-colonialism. The valuable articles brought together in Kathryn Gillespie and Yamini Narayanan's special edition of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 'Animal Nationalisms', for instance, offer an overview of the intersection of contemporary right-wing populism and violence toward animals. Settler-colonialism, Gillespie and Narayanan argue, relies on 'mechanisms of othering' (p.3) and while important work has been undertaken in interrogating the role of 'processes of racialisation, criminalisation, ethnocentrism, and religious persecution' in legitimizing and enacting this othering (p.3), less attention has been paid to the role of anthropocentrism.

The special edition's five articles offer a series of case studies that – together – build up a persuasive picture of why and how anthropocentrism matters in understanding the contours of settler-colonialism. Some of these pieces do offer insight into some of the longer histories of anthropocentric-colonialism, as with Christopher Mayes's article on the role of fences in Australian sheep farming. Others provide a more contemporary focus, including Chloe Diamond-Lenew's research on the weaponization of dogs in the US military-industrial complex, Stephanie Rutherford's analysis of uses of wolf imagery in white nationalist discourse, and Esther Alloun's account of 'vegan-washing' by Israeli state actors – as well as Palestinian and Israeli animal activists' attempts to negotiate such narratives. Maneesha Deckha, moreover, offers a future-oriented vision for how legislative frameworks in Canada could unsettle entwined colonial and anthropocentric foundations by engaging with conceptions of 'legal personhood ascribed to animals in numerous Indigenous legal orders in Canada' in order to 'stimulate a new legal conversation in Canadian law about who/what animals are and the legal subjectivity and regard they merit' (p.78). Mindful of longer histories of problematic comparison-making between animals and racialized peoples in animal advocacy, Deckha underlines that 'growing public support in favour of Indigenous rights should not be opportunistically instrumentalized for the benefit of animals while eclipsing human Indigenous claims' while still insisting that 'decolonization and critiques of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism are conjoined and entwined projects, not antithetical or contradictory ones' (p.79).

To some extent, 'Animal Nationalisms' offers a series of concrete examples that support conceptual claims – such as Calarco's – regarding the intersection of oppressions. As well as making an empirical contribution to understanding the role of anthropocentrism within colonialism, by offering 'a multispecies analysis of nationalist agendas of the making of particular nations' Gillespie and Narayanan also seek to 'advance a theorisation of animal nationalisms that draws attention to the need for a de-anthropocentric understanding of the violent effects of nation-making projects globally' (p.5). This aim is borne out, for instance, in Mayes's article on Australian sheep-herding, which reworks Foucauldian

conceptions of pastoral care to take into account biopolitical violence, noting that 'the care and protection of a flock require exclusion of those not part of the flock (e.g. goats) or violence to those who threaten it (e.g. wolves or thieves)' (p.44-5). These dynamics, Mayes outlines in visceral detail, have historically resulted in the normalization of extreme acts of violence, from shooting existing inhabitants to deter them from desired pasturelands, to the wide-scale poisoning of dingoes and, in some instances, Aboriginal people who were labelled 'threats' to the flock (p.50). Alloun, likewise, extends and complicates theories of 'homonationalism' – or cynical appeals to LGBT rights as a way of legitimating US imperialism over racialized Muslim Others (see Puar, 2007) – to examine how veganism is mobilized and contested by activists in the context of Israeli settler-colonialism.

A complementary analysis of intersections between anthropocentrism and colonialism can be found in Burton and Mawani's *Animalia*, wherein, echoing the introduction of 'Animal Nationalisms', empire is framed as a 'biopolitical project' that is enacted via 'species supremacy' (p.1). As stated in the bestiary's opening pages: 'if empire was a project dedicated to organizing hierarchies of lives worth living, the human/animal distinction served as a recurrent reference point for who was expendable and who would flourish' in modern projects of imperial expansion (p.1). Rather than focusing on contemporary nation states, though, Animalia attends to the enrollment of animals in colonial violence in the context of the British Empire. The complex relationships between British colonialism and anthropocentrism are illuminated by the bestiary's 26 short, lively, pieces, each authored by scholars who have established track records engaging with the animals in question. 'E is for Elephant' (p. 55-70), for instance, builds upon Jonathan Saha's previous research about the role of elephants in British Burma, while Harriet Ritvo's 'Q is for Quagga' draws on her prior analysis of the figure of the 19th century colonial hunter.

Aside from the bestiary conceit, three recurring themes tie *Animalia*'s entries together. Firstly, and perhaps primarily, the book is concerned with the biopolitics of empire: with a focus both on practices of population management (such as situated acts of violence, animal trade networks, and domestication), and the classificatory frameworks that created racialized species hierarchies. For instance, the role of apes in racial anthropology (Amy E. Martin, 'A is for Ape', p.24), enrollment of giraffes as zoo animals in 'imperial rivalry with France' (Angela Thompsell, 'G is for Giraffe', p.74), or framing of deadly scorpions as a problem easily resolved by acts of eradication on the part of colonizers (Antoinette Burton, 'S is for Scorpion', p.166), all offer insights into knowledge-frameworks and institutions where species was mobilized in support of colonial projects.

Rubbing up against narratives of colonial mastery is *Animalia*'s second key theme: animal resistance. And here, again, there are complex intersections with human politics: as with Annalise Claydon's account of Boar hunting in 'B is for Boar', where boars were both hunted by British colonizing forces in India but also routinely (and often fatally) gored their would-be hunters, to the point that: 'Comic depictions of hapless and trembling British officials being unseated, intimidated, and gored by wild boars decorated private murals in the Rajput palace of Nahar Odi, a spectacle of Schadenfreude for the amusement of the maharaja and his nobles in the late nineteenth century' (p.34). Neel Ahuja's 'M is for Mosquito', likewise, foregrounds relationships between animal agency and human resistance, as illustrated by mosquitos' role in 'the series of military victories against Napoleon's disease-stricken armies during the Haitian revolution' (M is for Mosquito', p.118). Both the book as a whole and individual entires are, however, careful not to overstate this agency. As Ahuja points out, in settings such as Egypt new agricultural practices and trade routes facilitated the spread of mosquitos to devastating effect on colonial subjects themselves (p.119). These complicated, context-specific relationships between empire-building, anthropocentrism, and resistance, speak to the book's final theme, the necessity of

situatedness. Again paralleling 'Animal Nationalisms', a key intervention made by *Animalia* is its situated engagement with theoretical assertions about the intersection of oppressions, which that can sometimes be overly broad brush. In doing so, the book illuminates the complexity of how oppressions intersect in practice.

In a sense, both 'Animal Nationalisms' and *Animalia* build upon longstanding traditions within animal studies, which have sought to probe the relationship between the oppression of humans and nonhuman animals, especially research informed by ecofeminism. As argued by Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, a central aim of ecofeminist praxis has been to grasp 'the various ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ablism are informed by and support speciesism and how analyzing the way these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practices' (2014: 1). It is notable, therefore, that 2020 also saw the reissue of one of the most well-known ecofeminist texts: Carol J. Adams's *The Pornography of Meat* (perhaps second in prominence only to Adams's earlier *Sexual Politics of Meat*, 1990).

Originally published in 2003, the 2020 edition of *The Pornography of Meat* contains more up-to-date case studies that, Adams states, are intended to register 'developments in politics, representations, and the evolution of my own understanding of the theory I developed in the sexual politics of meat' (p.364). The new edition also contains a further 130 images (making the book's total an astounding 300), many of which are crowd-sourced from readers of Adams's previous work: indeed, the acknowledgements contain almost three pages dedicated to those who submitted imagery. These updates to *The Pornography of Meat* are worth noting, in part, because the weight of Adams's arguments rest upon the sheer volume of visual evidence provided in the book, which is used to illustrate a discourse that persistently connects masculinity to meat consumption and treats women and non-human animals as 'the object of consumption' (p.7). Accompanying these images are a series of quotes and examples, which add further layers to the discursive formations traced by the book. Though broadly focused on the US and Western Europe, the materials assembled by Adams are nonetheless eclectic: ranging from British restaurant critic A. A. Gill to US chef/television persona Anthony Bourdian, from blogs to Burger King campaigns, 1970s editions of Hustler to homophobic kebab shop marketing, and Derrida's concept of carnophallogocentrism to Gillespie's (2018) contemporary ethnography of the dairy industry. These materials are organized into short thematic chapters, such as 'Body Chopping' (which connects the decontextualized focus on women's body parts in advertising with the literal dismemberment of animals), 'Man Up' (concerned with misogynist and homophobic rhetorics associated with meat consumption), and 'Anthropornography' (the 'feminizing and sexualizing of animals' (p.127) in meat marketing). Some of Adams's previous concepts, notably the 'absent referent' (p.51) and 'feminized protein' (p.258) are flagged up as frameworks to make sense of the images and textual excerpts Adams includes, but, in all honesty, the most significant argumentation is accomplished by the pages upon pages of images and examples themselves. Indeed, on Adams's website the book is explicitly pitched as 'a visual companion' as well as sequel to *The Sexual Politics of Meat*.

As touched on above, one of the reasons why Adams's work has proven so important in animal studies, as well as in the emergence of new fields such as vegan studies (see Wright, 2015), is in being one of the earliest texts in the field to insist that oppressions do not exist in isolation. As such, her work has been cited as an important touchstone for other valuable scholarship spanning activism and academia, or academic fields such as animal studies and critical race studies (e.g. Harper, 2010; Ko, 2019), which has sought to articulate the relationship between oppressions without relying on crude comparison-making between human and animal suffering. Despite Adams's influence, ecofeminism has had a complex position and history within animal studies, often sidelined or dismissed for alleged gender

essentialism. In academia more broadly, reductionist framings of ecofeminism have been debunked (see Foster, 2021), while historic criticisms have been acknowledged within ecofeminism itself (see again Adams and Gruen, 2014). Indeed, in *The Pornography of Meat*'s first chapter, Adams takes care to avoid claims of essentialism, by instead situating her work as a critique of the way that anthropocentrism and biological essentialism intersect in ways that reify exclusionary binary gender norms (p.17).

These important acknowledgments of prior academic critique, however, are perhaps where those who are not already on board with Adams's arguments might be less persuaded of her thesis. *The Pornography of Meat* does not always work through theoretical claims in depth, but, rather, enacts its arguments through layering evidence. While some might find this approach unsatisfactory, it is important to recognize that one of the key reasons why Adams is such a key figure in animal studies is due to making debates about interlocking gender and animal oppression intelligible, accessible, and engaging beyond academia: as well as opening up important space within it. It is thus important to recognize the invaluable work that this text, along with Adams's other work, has accomplished.

What is also important, however, is for other scholarship in animal studies to resist using the evidence presented in texts such as *The Pornography of Meat* to support more universalizing arguments about the way oppressive social structures intersect with one another. The layer upon layer of evidence offered by the Adams illustrates a clear discourse – and set of practices – wherein animal product consumption is linked to masculinity, abjection, and exclusion; a discourse that permeates food marketing, writing, and even politics, especially in contexts such as the US. Care needs to be taken, however, to resist assuming that these relationships manifest themselves in the same way across different cultural and national contexts, or that there are a geographically and temporally stable set of coordinates between anthropocentrism, patriarchy and other oppressions. Indeed, as many of the case studies in *Animalia* and 'Animal Nationalisms' illustrate, while human needs and priorities are given precedence in many contexts, this prioritization is manifested in very different ways in different social and cultural settings. The need to carefully situate arguments about the way oppressions intersect is underlined by the final text I turn to in this essay.

Complicating 'anthropocentrism'

In 2016's *Bioinsecurities* Ahuja argues that: 'The idea of the human's domination of life on Earth – featured in narratives of progressive medical modernization as well as in some liberal versions of animal rights and environmentalist politics' can, at times, be 'an ideological obfuscation' (p.11). Foregrounding the arguments in *Animalia*'s 'M is for Mosquito' Ahuja makes this critique of anthropocentrism in the context of failed state interventions in disease control, where, far from being dominated by humans, certain lifeforms have been destructive to human life (with the effects of this destruction inevitably distributed along racialized lines). This line of argument is also touched on in one of the most influential books from 2020, Jackson's *Becoming Human*, which, likewise underlines that 'viruses, bacteria, parasites, and insects all commonly exercise dominance over human populations' (p.15). This observation, however, is just a small part of Jackson's wider project of complicating critiques of 'the human', not just in the context of animal rights or environmentalism but animal studies itself.

As touched on in the introduction to this essay, despite sometimes being portrayed as making broad-brush claims about the primacy of 'the human' over 'the animal', important traditions within animal studies (as well as wider theoretical work allied to the field) have resisted this line of argument. These heterogenous strands of research have recognized that anthropocentrism is complicated by racialized, gendered, and classed social formations. It is these traditions that Calarco's *Beyond the Anthropological Boundary* points towards in stating that: 'anthropocentrism – as a logic, and as a set of

rhythms and habits that structure everyday life, and as a set of institutions and practices aimed at securing the privileged status of those deemed to be fully human – operates on and among bodies and lives of all sorts and does not respect species boundaries' (p.21). These arguments thus align non-anthropocentric thought with feminist and anti-racist projects, echoing some of the founding gestures of literary animal studies as it began to formalize itself as an academic field, as with Cary Wolfe's claim in *Animal Rites* that: as long as 'the humanist discourse of species' exists it 'will always be available for use against other humans as well' (2003, p.8).

As Calarco and Wolfe's arguments illustrate, recognizing the intersections between oppressions has been an important in enabling scholarship concerned with animal ethics to move beyond single-issue commitments. Jackson suggests, however, that the way these intersections tend to be figured in animal studies can run the risk of undercutting the aims of intersectional ethics, due to treating 'species' as the wellspring of other oppressions. In *Becoming Human*'s opening chapter, for instance, Jackson states that:

> Current scholarship in posthumanism, animal studies, new materialism, and theories of biopolitics has begun a broad enquiry into the repercussions of defining 'the human' in opposition to 'the animal.' Much of the recent scholarship suggests that race is a by-product of prior negation of nonhuman animals. These fields, particularly animal studies, are slowly advancing the thesis that human-animal binarism is the original and foundational paradigm upon which discourses of human difference, including, or even especially, racialization was erected. (p.12)

It is precisely the rendering of the human/animal distinction as the primary mode of exclusion, upon which other oppressions are anchored, which Jackson seeks to dislodge throughout the remainder of the book. While Jackson shares a concern with the intersection of species and racialization, she upends this relationship to contest: 'the economies of value presumed in posthumanism and animal studies … namely, that all humans are privileged over all animals by virtue of being *included* in humanity, or that racism is a matter of suggesting that black people are like animals based on a prior and therefore precedential form of violence rooted in speciesism' (p.17). Her critique, as set out in *Becoming Human*'s introduction, initially unfolds via interrogating conceptions of a 'universal humanity' that emerged within Enlightenment philosophical, political, and scientific texts (with a particular focus on Hume, Hegel, and Kant, as well the writings of Jefferson). These writings, Jackson argues, illustrate that conceptions of 'the human' or 'the animal' were racialized from the start; the product not simply of universal man's mastery over nature but 'an effect of slavery, conquest, and colonialism' (p.25) wherein '[d]iscourses on nonhuman animals and animalized humans [were] forged through each other' (p.23).

In making such arguments, Jackson replaces 'the notion of "denied humanity" and "exclusion" with bestialized humanization' (p.23). For Jackson, structural oppression does not operate by stripping groups of people of the rights and privileges ordinarily attributed to 'the human'; there is no neat bifurcation between human/animal where the latter term is used to exclude racialized people from a universal humanity. Conversely, it is the inclusion of racialized people within Eurocentric notions of a 'universal humanity' that has historically wrought the most violence. Rather than freeing people of the burden of animalization, she argues, inclusion has just served to instantiate hierarchies within the category of human. Thus: 'Instead of denying humanity, black people are humanized, but this humanity is burdened with the specter of abject animality' (p.27), allowing it to serve as '*the nadir of the human*' (p.22, italics in original).

Though critical of the primacy given to the human/animal distinction, Jackson's engagement with posthumanist animal studies remains sympathetic and is framed as productively complicating the work of

thinkers such as Wolfe and Derrida. The same sympathy is not extended to her critique of earlier philosophical conceptions of the human. In relation to Heidegger's 'metaphysical ordering of human, animal, and stone as world relation' (in which animals are rendered poor in world, acting only on instinct), for instance, Jackson states in no uncertain terms: 'this is not an order to reify. This is an order to destroy' (p.86). What is significant about *Becoming Human*, however, is that the mode of destruction it offers is decisively productive. Assumptions about the foundational role of species in sustaining other oppressions, Jackson suggests, mean that 'many scholars have essentially ignored alternative conceptions of being and the nonhuman that have been produced by blackened people' (p.3). In *Becoming Human*, these alternative conceptions of being are brought to the foreground, with Jackson engaging in close readings of 'key African American, African, and Caribbean literary and visual texts that critique and depose prevailing conceptions of "the human" found in Western science and philosophy' (p.1). In other words, Jackson does not just critique existing philosophical ideas but shatters the assumptions of humanist metaphysics through putting forward cultural productions that offer alternative trajectories, including Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Octavia Butler's "Bloodchild" and collages by Wangechi Mutu (images of which are included in the book).

While Jackson's theoretical project deepens and extends critiques of animalization, then, her work also troubles understandings of the mechanisms through which anthropocentrism intersects with other oppressions. These arguments are especially significant for theoretical work within animal studies, but also have wider political implications. For instance, if the modern categories of 'human' and 'animal' are understood as being racialized from their origins then what does this mean for animal studies' positioning of anthropocentric critique as a route into contesting other oppressions? If animalization is no longer seen as a sharp dividing line, or exclusionary mechanism, then how might the dynamics of anthropocentrism be rethought? A corollary to these points is that unsettling the boundary between 'human' and 'animal' cannot succeed unless these terms' racialized epistemological foundations are understood and unpicked in tandem. Moving forward, then, Jackson's work offers important provocations for the conception of anthropocentrism itself, as well as this concept's utility within animal studies, while at the same time making an important intervention into the abjection of nonhuman animals through disrupting animalization's 'authority in the management of life' (p.53).

Conclusion

Through engaging with contexts ranging from 'pet' monkeys in contemporary Canada, to historical hunting practices in colonial India, the research discussed in this essay illustrates how recent animal studies research has elaborated upon what has long been an important theme in the field: the violence created by anthropocentric ideologies and practices. At the same time, what unites the texts I discuss is a focus on the relationship between oppressions, through illustrating – albeit in different ways – that anthropocentrism does not act alone. As discussed in 'Animal Nationalisms' and *Animalia* in particular, anthropocentrism plays a driving role in producing and intensifying other inequalities. In some of the other scholarship I have focused on, such as Collard's discussion of exotic pets and van Dooren's focus on avian extinction, anthropocentrism is the consequence of particular socio-economic relationships or colonial social formations. Yet, however they are configured, the relationships between anthropocentric hierarchies and social inequalities often proves devastating to both animals and humans who fall outside of the 'select few' that Calaro points to in his definition of anthropocentrism.

While many of the books I have discussed are united in their critique of anthropocentrism, they are also united by underlining the need to situate these critiques carefully and to resist universalizing assumptions about the intersection of oppressions. At times, the dynamics of anthropocentrism means that particular animals – those deemed especially valuable, classified as 'native' or 'endangered', and who are

the focus of human love – are privileged about the lives of certain groups of people, as well as prioritized over less lovable species. Though anthropocentrism is still entangled with many of these classificatory systems, these cases trouble overly neat narratives about human exceptionalism. To echo Jackson, it is vital to avoid imparting – however inadvertently – a sense that humans are intrinsically valued above animals and all that is necessary to contest racism or misogyny is to create more expansive understandings of 'the human'. At the same time, it is not sufficient to simply disrupt the category of 'animal': especially if it is no longer treated as the foundation of other oppressions but co-constituted with them.

A question that is perhaps posed by the engagements with, and reevaluations of, anthropocentric hierarchies discussed throughout this essay is whether – in light of its unevenness – anthropocentrism is still a helpful term to use at all. It seems important, though, to resist being overly hasty rejecting the concept. The layers upon layers of empirical and theoretical evidence provided by the historical, ethnographic, geographical, philosophical, and feminist-activist work discussed above illustrates that anthropocentrism is a potent discursive and material force. It is, therefore, important to recognize anthropocentrism's limitations as a concept, resist linking the term to simplistic diagnoses of human exceptionalism, and offer more situated accounts of how oppressions intersect. At the same time, it is vital to maintain a sense of the political and ethical purchase that critical, but situated, engagements with anthropocentrism can accomplish.

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