Greedy Bat Eaters versus Cruel Pig Killers: The Lose-Lose Battle of Divisive Discourse

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Abstract: Unsurprisingly, the circumstances and challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have generated strong reactions. Among the more notable, Canadian musician and animal activist Bryan Adams made headlines when he went on a tirade on social media denouncing 'fucking bat eating, wet market animal selling, virus making greedy bastards' and advocating for veganism. This article uses this incident as a prism through which to examine the values and assumptions informing some of the central debates within the mainstream animal advocacy movement today. Certainly, there is an urgent need for a critical re-evaluation of the policies and practices that have created the conditions in which viral pathogens can spread, especially those relating to our treatment of nonhuman animals (and our relationship with nature more broadly). However, the roots of the problem are fundamentally structural, and not attributable to any one country or culture. The thoughtless use of terms that contribute to a politically charged and rancorous public debate readily descends into a lose-lose battle, which may hinder efforts to address complex and collective concerns in a mutually cooperative manner. If COVID-19 is to represent a turning point towards building a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient world for humans and nonhuman animals alike, the kind of fractioning that is currently being exacerbated by the use of divisive discourse must be eschewed in favour of a greater recognition of our fundamental interconnectedness, including through a more pluralistic understanding of law.

> Tonight was supposed to be the beginning of a tenancy of gigs at the [Royal Albert Hall], but thanks to some fucking bat eating, wet market animal selling, virus making greedy bastards, the whole world is now on hold, not to mention the thousands that have suffered or died from this virus. My message to them other than 'thanks a fucking lot' is go vegan.
>
> – Bryan Adams

Introduction

Unsurprisingly, the unprecedented circumstances and challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have generated strong reactions. Among the more notable, Canadian musician, long-time vegan, and animal activist Bryan Adams made headlines in May 2020 when he went on a tirade on social media pinning blame for the pandemic on 'some fucking bat eating, wet market animal selling, virus making greedy bastards' and directing 'them' to 'go vegan' (@bryanadams). The post closed with the hashtags #banwetmarkets and #govegan.

As evidenced by the rapid backlash that ensued (Ahearn), many dimensions of Adams' accusations are highly problematic. Over and above his confused understanding with respect to the origins of the novel coronavirus, which remain disputed within the scientific community (see for example Redfearn), Chinese-Canadians expressed disappointment and anger towards Adams for stoking racist and/or xenophobic sentiments (S. Dyer). Anti-Asian racism, including in the form of violent hate crimes, has already spiked alarmingly in the wake of COVID-19 (see Bowden; Nasser). Despite the fact that Adams does not explicitly reference China or Chinese people in his post, he did not have to: the racial subtext was abundantly clear. Indeed, subtle use of implication is exactly how dog whistling works.[1] Thus, as Shree Paradkar pointed out in an opinion piece for *The Star*, the question is not whether Bryan Adams is racist, but whether what he said is racist. Paradkar herself answers this question as 'unequivocally yes, on many counts' (para. 3).

Though the racist reading of Adams' post rankled the ire of many, other commentators on social media defended Adams on the grounds that there was truth to his statement that should not be discounted simply because it was callously expressed. Likewise, other opinion pieces in *The Star* voiced regret with respect to the way Adams' message was phrased, but averred that he raised valid and important points about animal suffering (Scott-Reid, 'What Bryan Adams Got Right') and the threats to public health posed by wet markets (Menon). Prominent (and often controversial) animal advocacy organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) co-signed Adams' sentiment, remarking that '[t]his is why it's crucial for everyone to go #vegan NOW to prevent the next pandemic' (see Britten).

Adams has since apologized 'to any and all that took offence' to his post, claiming that there was 'no excuse' and that he just wanted to 'have a rant about the horrible animal cruelty in these wet-markets being the possible source of the virus, and promote veganism'. He added that he 'has love for all people' and that his 'thoughts are with everyone dealing with this pandemic around the world' (@bryanadams). Amy Go, president of the Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice, remarked that his apology rings hollow insofar as it fails to acknowledge the potential harm to specific communities caused by his words ('Bryan Adams Apologizes'). Adams' apology also does not withdraw or modify any part of his blame mongering; instead, it doubles down on using veganism as a justification for his flawed reasoning (Cash). Being vegan and being racist are by no means mutually exclusive, and race is very much 'a salient, if often underinterrogated, site of speciation and speciesism' (Glick 643).

I am not so much concerned with Bryan Adams in particular – I am not calling for him to be 'cancelled'[2] or otherwise held to account by the vicissitudes of public opinion. However, I do think that this incident provides a timely prism through which to (re)examine some of the values and assumptions informing animal advocacy today, particularly as they relate to efforts to promote certain dietary habits in a diverse world. COVID-19 has added another layer to these issues, infusing them with a new urgency as well as a strong cultural slant that can readily be co-opted by racist and/or xenophobic agendas as further fuel for pre-existing biases. In this way, they can purport to serve the 'public good' while neglecting to admit – much less actively address – the differential harms and consequences that can be generated by taking a so-called 'race-blind' approach.

In this article, I draw on public, media, and academic commentary to explore several specific aspects of Adams' post in question. First, I discuss the demographics and strategies of the animal advocacy movement to highlight some pervasive problems that inhibit its effectiveness at creating positive social reform. I also draw some parallels with the food movement and the food justice movement, which have become more popular in recent years and invoke similar rhetoric and rationales. As Jessica Eisen has put it, '[q]uestions about what we ought to eat and how we ought to relate to animals generate distinct but overlapping contests, engaging both distributive and identity politics' (71).

Next, I interrogate some of the complex interconnections between animals, food, and culture vis-à-vis practices that have been impugned for causing or contributing to the COVID-19 pandemic. To be sure, there is a serious need for a critical re-evaluation of many of the policies and practices that have created the conditions in which viral pathogens can spread, especially those involving our treatment of nonhuman animals (and our relationship with nature more broadly). The evidence strongly suggests that change is needed if we are to make serious efforts to prevent future pandemics, if nothing else. Though this much is obvious, the question of what kind of change is necessary, and on the part of whom, is considerably more complicated.

Further, the myriad of deeply rooted legal, political, and economic factors that are implicated in the current state of affairs means that changes of the magnitude that are necessary cannot be expected to happen overnight. Consequently, our broader sights must be set on lasting change at the systemic rather than individual level, which will involve the kind of alliance-building that is ill-served by the use of divisive discourse and other strategies that cause or contribute to fractioning. In order to become both more equitable and more effective, I argue that the animal advocacy movement should consciously make efforts towards adopting a broad anti-oppression agenda that is informed by principles of humility and pluralism,[3] as well as an understanding of the inevitably complex and intersectional nature of justice struggles. I make no claims that this topic is new or original, but this article adds academic commentary to the important recent work that has already been released.[4]

1. The Animal Advocacy Movement

The ideological roots of our abysmal treatment of nonhuman animals have been written about at length (for example, Preece; Steiner), and my primary aim is not to rehash these issues. Briefly, throughout history, both religious and secular explanations have been used to subordinate nonhuman animals within the Western world. Judeo-Christian interpretations of humanity's 'dominion' over animals, as granted in the bible, alongside the emergence of rationalist philosophies, especially Cartesian notions of nonhuman animals as unthinking automata, contributed to a view of nonhuman animals as 'inferior ranks of creatures to which we owed no moral obligation' (Bisgould 23; see also V. Anderson).

The enduring legacy of these lines of thought are evident in Anglo-American legal systems. In Canada, as in many other industrialized countries, nonhuman animals are categorized as property, giving them object rather than subject status (Adams 29). This classification legitimates their inhumane treatment insofar as 'the rights to own [nonhuman animals] as property includes the rights to abuse them as you see fit' (Wise, *Rattling the Cage* 43; see also Francione; Wise, 'The Legal Thinghood of Nonhuman Animals'). Not only are nonhuman animals afforded very few legal protections, but the interests and desires of humans can be prioritized over those of nonhuman animals in virtually all circumstances.

Nowhere are the consequences of this hierarchy more troubling than in the case of institutionalized nonhuman animal exploitation, which makes up the vast majority of nonhuman animal (ab)use. Every year, billions of nonhuman animals are regularly (ab)used by humans in research, for food, and for entertainment, with full legal sanction. The extent of suffering necessitated by these industries is a grim reality that is largely normalized and obscured in our society. Though anti-cruelty laws with respect to nonhuman animals do exist, they are generally weak in substance and poorly enforced; furthermore, 'when it comes to the treatment of animals, there is no act, however violent or harmful, that is categorically illegal' (Bisgould 3).

Public concern about the plight of nonhuman animals was first aroused in England in the 1800s, but a visible animal advocacy movement did not emerge until the 1970s (Silverstein 30; see also Bisgould 15-54; Hughes and Meyer; Payne). Since then, the movement has grown markedly in size, strength, and sophistication (Silverstein 34-37; Tauber 54-68). Today, there

are many organizations advocating on behalf of animals,[5] and these organizations have won a collection of small and large victories over the years (in the Canadian context, see Animal Justice, 'Victories'). Yet, disparities along the lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, and (dis)ability are ongoing problems that have contributed to the movement's fight for legitimacy. Although many people, across all segments of society, care deeply about nonhuman animals and indicate support for animal rights (see, for example Jerolmack), organized animal advocacy and activism rarely represents this full picture.

For one, despite the fact that most of the movement's figureheads are men,[6] as existing literature on this subject has revealed, the majority of rank-and-file animal rights activists are women (for example, Gaarder, *Women and the Animal Rights Movement;* Gaarder, 'Where the Boys Aren't').[7] One of the consequences of this discrepancy is that 'struggles over gendered divisions of labor and leadership within the movement persist' (Gaarder, *Women and the Animal Rights Movement* 11). Women may very well be drawn to the animal advocacy movement because they are motivated to improve the standing of animals as part and parcel of reducing systemic sexism and gender inequality. At the same time, some of the tactics employed by advocacy organizations like PETA, such as exploiting overtly sexualized images of women (Gaarder, *Women and the Animal Rights Movement* 117-147; Gruen 195-206; Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 97-105), or invoking what has been dubbed 'the dreaded comparison' (Spiegel; see also A. Harris, 'Should People of Color Support Animal Rights?'), have been deeply problematic. These misguided strategies have demonstrated that care must be taken so as not to 'deconstruct (or reform) oppressive systems *by way of* oppressive systems' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 140), lest efforts to draw attention to the oppression of nonhuman animals actually serve to exacerbate the oppression of human beings on various grounds.

When it comes to race, Angela Harris has pointed out that '[p]eople of color are underrepresented in the animal rights movement. To be more precise, and more provocative: The animal rights movement is perceived by many African American people as "a white thing"' (A. Harris, 'Should People of Color Support Animal Rights?' 15). This perception is further substantiated by the fact that participants within the animal rights movement are predominantly represented in the media as being white, female, and thin (Wrenn, 'An Analysis of Diversity'). This does not only seem to be a problem of perception, as a majority of the current slate of staff

and board members at Animal Justice, the organization leading the legal fight for animals in Canada, fits this mold (Animal Justice, 'About Us'; see also Cronin and McArthur). I state this as a fact, and not an accusation, as my intention is not to criticize these advocates as individuals. Rather, I want to point out a structural feature of mainstream animal advocacy that has worked to narrow the demographic represented in these areas of work. The continuing whiteness of these spaces – and, in turn, the privileged worldviews that are reflected within them – creates a dynamic whereby '[n]eoliberal white morality can easily discourage people of color from joining social justice organizations' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 130).

It is not the case that people of colour do not care about nonhuman animals – quite the opposite. Today, Black people represent the fastest-growing vegan demographic in the United States (Reiley). However, there are clearly dimensions of organized animal advocacy that have either failed to resonate with the experiences of racialized groups, or have actively alienated them. In response, people of colour, like Dr. Amie 'Breeze' Harper and sisters Aph and Syl Ko, have advanced original frameworks through which to understand and undertake anti-oppression efforts from their own unique perspectives. As their work has revealed, when veganism is taken to be a one-dimensional issue that is couched within privileged, white, neoliberal understandings of justice, it elides the direct and indirect ways in which racism, classism, sexism, and ableism – and their intersections – mediate the choices available to individuals to express their ethical commitments. Veganism as a truly liberatory movement, then, must seek to go beyond a narrow focus on animal rights or health claims and endeavour to make use of discourse and tactics 'that *include* rather than *exclude*' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 126).

2. The Food Movement

At bottom, many of the problems surrounding the way we treat nonhuman animals can be attributed to capitalism and the relentless process of commoditization that it mandates, alongside ancillary developments like increasing corporate concentration and control across numerous sectors in the agribusiness industry (see Clapp, 'Mega Mergers'; IPES-Food, *Too Big to Feed*). Maneesha Deckha reminds us that 'the role of global capitalism and class relations in maintaining the abject status of animals cannot be underestimated. After all, it is capitalism and the protection that property rights are given in law that enable the complete commodification of

animals as property' ('Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory' 541). When it comes to animals farmed for food more specifically, 'the commoditization of animal farming is a direct result of the commoditization of the food system in general, where food has become a profit-driven global industry rather than a basic element of maintaining human life' (McLeod-Kilmurray 73). As such, the current orientation of our laws, economies, and values plays a significant role in creating and maintaining systems of production and consumption that have engendered extensive, invidious, and well-documented social, ethical, and environmental consequences (see, for example Clapp, *Food*; EAT-Lancet Commission; Kimbrell).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed numerous weaknesses and outright failures in the global food system (see IPES-Food, 'COVID-19 and the Crisis in Food Systems'), which affect differently situated groups in uneven ways (E. Dyer; K. Harris; Yaffe-Bellany and Corkery). For example, due to serious disruptions in regular operations, such as the extended closures of slaughterhouses, farmers have found themselves having to kill many animals farmed for food at their own hands, leading to tremendous economic and emotional costs (Corkery and Yaffe-Bellany; Labchuk; Whitley). Meanwhile, the famously poor working conditions[8] for agricultural labourers have contributed to facilities like meatpacking plants becoming major sites of disease transmission (see Dryden and Rieger; Lakhani; van der Zee;), which, in turn, has led to greater 'inefficiencies' and exploitation of vulnerabilities. These terrible circumstances have lent weight to calls for dramatically different ways of producing, consuming, and valuing food (EAT-Lancet Commission; IPES-Food, *From Uniformity to Diversity*).

Numerous parallels can be drawn between the animal advocacy movement and the relatively recent emergence of the 'food movement'. The food movement lacks an authoritative definition, but has generally been taken to capture a comprehensive range of issues relating to food. Michael Pollan described it in 2010 as 'unified as yet by little more than the recognition that industrial food production is in need of reform because its high social/environmental/public health/animal welfare/gastronomic costs are too high'. Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman similarly have used the term 'food movement' to 'indicate a broad range of proponents including those of organic, local, and slow food' (16 n2). The food movement suggests that by transforming our food practices, 'we can live healthier, more authentic lives while supporting positive social and environmental change' (Alkon and Agyeman

2). This agenda presumably includes creating better conditions for nonhuman animals, especially those who are farmed for food.

Despite the rising significance and popularity of the food movement, it has come under fire by those who have claimed that it is elitist and oblivious to deeper structural obstacles faced by certain groups. As Alkon and Agyeman put it, '[t]he food movement narrative is largely created by, and resonates most deeply, with white and middle-class individuals' (3). This generates a mutually reinforcing cycle whereby white people are disproportionately attracted to the movement to start with, and then 'whites continue to define the rhetoric, spaces, and broader projects of agrifood transformation' (Guthman, 'If Only They Knew' 277). In this process, the romanticization of ventures like urban agriculture ignores 'the explicitly racist ways in which, historically, American land has been distributed and labor has been organized' (Guthman, 'If Only They Knew' 276) as well as the existence and enduring nature of obstacles beyond those relating to physical access alone.[9]

For example, research has established that the high cost of fresh, local, and organic food often puts it out of reach for many people around the world. A recent study found that diets that place emphasis on fruits and vegetables, legumes and nuts, and whole grains 'are not affordable for much of the world's low-income population' (Hirvonen et al. E63). Over and above the pure economic cost of healthful food, preparing homemade meals is more time-consuming than relying on fast food, ready-made meals, and other processed products, and because fresh ingredients tend to have a short shelf-life, they also require more time spent shopping. As such, '[m]easures to alleviate price and income constraints will be essential to bringing healthy and sustainable diets within reach of the world's poor' (Hirvonen et al. E65). The stark associations between poverty and injustice have not gone unnoticed by scholars and activists in the food space, who have proposed different kinds of frameworks for conceptualizing and remedying the issues.

In contrast with the centrality of the consumer within the food movement, the food *justice* movement concentrates more explicitly on 'the barriers that low-income or other marginalized groups face in realizing the goals of the broader food movement, such as access to fresh, unprocessed food' (Goldberg 49). These barriers are not primarily attributable to

individual failings or irresponsible personal choices that can be rectified through education. Instead, as Andrea Freeman (1253) explains,

> [s]ocial position, which reflects the amount of privilege individuals possess along multiple axes, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, and immigration status, dictates how much disposable income and access to nutritious food people have. … More than taste, preference, willpower, or a commitment to health and fitness, structural forces shape diets.

Thus, a more holistic approach is needed in assessing the wide-ranging impacts of structural variables in determining what and how we eat. Rather than focusing on concerns like health, obesity, or food insecurity in isolation, food justice activists and organizations rely on rights-based rhetoric to argue that everyone has an equal right to access fresh, healthy, unprocessed food, regardless of income (Goldberg 49).

The food justice movement emphasizes the need to be cognizant of and tackle the kinds of systemic inequalities that lead to increased burdens on poor and otherwise marginalized groups. This requires a mindfulness of the multiple hierarchies and power structures that create privilege and disadvantage in our society, and that mediate our relationships to food and the land from which it comes (Bradley and Herrera; Kepkiewicz et al.). In what is currently known as Canada, situating food justice in the context of colonialism's pernicious legacy is particularly important (Kepkiewicz), as colonialism and its effects are an enduring cause of Indigenous food insecurity. Ideally, both justice rhetoric and activism should be consonant with these realities.

3. You Are What You Eat

Food is simultaneously a very personal and very public matter. Given the degree of in-built relativism involved, it is somewhat curious that food is one domain in which vocally passing judgment on the choices of others is considered permissible. The zeal with which conservatives will defend their right to eat factory-farmed steak and nutritionally vacuous 'junk food' – at great cost to their own health, the environment, and to nonhuman animals – is perhaps only matched by the rancour with which they will denounce the dietary customs of cultures different from their own. Regardless of political orientation, remarks that some foods are 'disgusting',

certain kinds of eating habits are 'unnatural', or calls for the universal adoption of specific kinds of diets (for example, vegetarianism or veganism) are regularly framed as objective facts, rather than subjective opinions.

Among other factors, food practices are 'traceable to the arrangement of institutional rules, the power that some individuals and groups have within institutions, the way that social processes have become materialized in the built environment, and the cultural habits that people have formed' (Young 33). Anthropological and historical accounts have shown that there are myriad reasons why what constitutes an optimal diet for one person or group may not be appropriate or ideal for another. For example, lactase persistence, otherwise known as the ability to digest cow's milk, is a trait that coevolved with the cultural practice of dairying in Europe (see Itan et al.; Simoons). In other parts of the world, where dairying was not possible and/or popular, many people are lactose intolerant, and therefore have a strong disincentive to ingesting dairy products. Despite the fact that lactase persistence actually represents an aberrance from the global norm, it has been deployed as a mark of white racial superiority, and subsequently used to rationalize a rank form of ethno-nationalism (Eisen 71). To this end, the casting of milk as a 'natural' and 'necessary' food, as aided and abetted by the law, is 'deeply interlaced with colonial, racial, and gendered deployment of these same terms (nature and necessity) as justifications for dominance and hierarchy as between human beings' (Eisen 72).

The complex relationship between food, race, and culture has been the subject of a great deal of academic attention (see E.N. Anderson; Civitello; Counihan and Van Esterik; Kittler and Harris; Montanari; Sucher and Nahikian-Nelms). A culture's socially standardized food-related activities, referred to in the literature as its 'foodways', can be defined as encompassing 'what substances are considered edible as well as the activities related to food selection, procurement, distribution, manipulation, storage, consumption, and disposal' (Axelson 346). The hegemony of Western culture centralizes a white frame of reference such that the boundaries of 'white' food activities versus 'ethnic' food activities act as shifting markers of both solidarity and separation, albeit in ways that are often taken for granted. Indeed, '[i]n societies structured to privilege whites, it is part of the point that whiteness itself, including the whiteness reflected in and reproduced through foodways, can become invisible' (Bailey, 'We Are What We Eat' 47).

A notable illustration of cultural relativism pertains to which species of nonhuman animals are considered to be edible, and conversely, which are considered to be taboo. As scholars have long pointed out, the line between the animals that are seen as comestible commodities and those that are seen as cherished companions (and thereby afforded greater protections at law) is a socially determined one, rather than representing some kind of *a priori* demarcation (see Herzog; Joy; Overcash). Nevertheless, the instinctive revulsion that many Westerners feel at the thought of eating species like dogs often translates into the harmful perpetuation of racial stereotypes about the deviance of the cultures in which dog eating is not as unthinkable as it is in Western cultures (Wu). Reliance on sensationalistic, clichéd tropes does not give adequate due to the cultural and historical contingence of gastronomical norms. For example, in Chinese culture, '[e]ating dogs appears to be a compensatory adaptation to material deprivation and the lack of reliable sources of other meats' (Wu 44). Again, this emphasizes the structural drivers of food choices, and how it is poverty, rather than avarice, that may lead some cultures to eat 'exotic' species like bats and adulated species like dogs.

One explanation for the negative reaction to dog eating is that dogs are much beloved as companion animals in the West, and that they are 'too cute to eat'. However, pigs and cows can arguably be just as lovable, and other kinds of companion animals are regularly eaten elsewhere without generating anywhere near the same degree of passionate censure. For example, guinea pigs are enjoyed as a delicacy in Peru (see for example Bland; Chambers). Rabbits are commonly consumed in France and other parts of Western Europe (see Wasser; Wilson). Horsemeat is popular in many countries (for example, Bell; Enders; Schatzker). Thus, another explanation is that Asian people and their practices are viewed as an easy mark, leading 'many Nonhuman Animal rights groups [to] target East Asia for what they see as particularly cruel Nonhuman Animal uses' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach*,128).

This pattern dovetails with the tendency for Western people to view other cultures as monoliths. Just as the nonhuman world is extraordinarily diverse, so too are cultures, traditions, and peoples. Even within Asian cultures, there is a vast degree of heterogeneity in cultural norms, including those related to food. Yet, it is all too common that Western people define non-Western people 'by a minor aspect of their multifaceted ways of life' (Wu 43). There is also a double standard at play, in the sense that the worst judgments of non-Western cultural

practices are habitually used to tar all members of that culture with the same brush, while the most egregious of Western practices are seen as non-representative exceptions to the rule.

Part of reason that the realities of Asian experiences are not highly visible in white society can be ascribed to the 'myth of the model minority', whereby 'highly stereotyped labeling creates great pressure to conform to the white-dominated culture, usually in a one-way direction' (Chou and Feagin 2). Work in critical race studies has demonstrated that, at least in the context of the US, compared to other minority groups, Asians tend to be 'less politically organized and vocal' (Chew 4). As a result, 'society believes that Asian Americans today generally do not experience discrimination' (Chew 6). Without turning it into a contest of whether Asian people experience more or less discrimination relative to other minority groups, it suffices to say that this belief is patently false. Anti-Asian racism has a long history in Canada (see Anand; McLachlin), and as the COVID-19 pandemic has painfully laid bare, remains an ongoing problem in the country, despite its purported celebration of diversity and multiculturalism.

Although not necessarily known for their activism, Asian people are demonstrating increasing political engagement and efforts at alliance building.[10] In the wake of recent events, South Korean boyband BTS donated $1 million to Black Lives Matter, and legions of K-Pop fans have been active in 'obstructing racist hashtags and police departments' (Kwon). At the same time, white animal advocates have been using the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement to reassert that 'Animal Lives Matter' (see Rose; Summerville). Repudiating this kind of tone-deaf co-optation is not to say that struggles for animal justice should be relegated to a more convenient moment, as one is unlikely to emerge without pressure from social movement mobilization (and certainly, the premise that animal lives matter is a valid one). That being said, to dilute the pressing imperative that Black Lives Matter is to partake in yet another form of subjugation and appropriation that sends the wrong kind of message. Crucial struggles for human justice are not mutually exclusive with other liberatory aspirations, and animal advocates would be better served by finding ways to stand in solidarity with aligned social movements, including contemporary anti-racist efforts.

4. This Little Bat Went to Market

In light of various theories that have been circulating with respect to the origins of the novel coronavirus, much vitriol has been directed towards wet markets and the cultures in which they are popular. Presently, there remains a lack of scientific consensus as to how exactly the virus first emerged in humans, but many signs indicate that conditions at the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in Wuhan played a noteworthy role in its spread. The impugned market is not necessarily an exceptional case, but instead, a particularly extreme example of an outbreak of disease in humans resulting from the circumstances under which nonhuman animals are traded and consumed. Nevertheless, the linkage of the COVID-19 pandemic with a wet market has prompted cries – Bryan Adams' among them – for such markets to be permanently banned.

Despite the sinister connotations that have been ascribed to them as of late, wet markets are essentially just places in which fresh produce, meat and fish (which might be slaughtered or live at the time of purchase), and other perishable goods are sold.[11] Under such a definition, even your friendly neighbourhood farmer's market constitutes a wet market, though this label is rarely used in the Western context. Further complicating matters, wet markets are often conflated with wildlife[12] markets, which specifically sell a range of animals, whether for human consumption or for other purposes. Wildlife can be found at wet markets, but not all wet markets are wildlife markets. Neither type of market is unique to China, or even to Asia, as both can be found around the world.

Numerous factors can be pointed to as an explanation for why the ubiquity of supermarkets and their corresponding dominance as the primary source of food for the majority of consumers in high-income countries is not necessarily paralleled elsewhere (Si et al.). Acquiring food is not a purely utilitarian or commercial transaction, and in many cultures, the rich tapestry of food markets acts as a central site of social exchange. Drawing on the example of Singapore, Mele, Ng and Chim have observed that '[s]ocial, political and economic contexts shape how the social functions of urban markets are experienced and interpreted' (Mele et al. 104). Hence, wet markets are 'significant and unique social spaces that increasingly matter within the context of modernisation and advanced urbanism' (Mele et al. 105).

Just as food is a requirement to sustain life, humans are social creatures who rely on social exchanges and interactions to inform many aspects of their health and well-being. Against the backdrop of 'a shifting urban landscape, a concomitant disappearance of unregulated community space, and the pervasiveness of normative consumerism' (Mele et al. 106), traditional practices and settings, like markets, provide 'a social space of stability' and can be seen as 'stand[ing] as a corrective to the excesses of modernisation' (Mele et al. 117). Wet markets therefore reveal an uneasy tension between modernization as both origin of and solution to cultural practices that are deemed to be problematic.

Modernization generally refers to the cultural and socio-economic process whereby traditional societies become urban and industrial (Inglehart and Baker). Whether implicitly or explicitly, discussions around the concept of modernization frequently carry normative judgments about the desirability of these kinds of transformations. However, processes of modernization are not straightforwardly transplanted from one place to another, especially given the aforementioned diversity within Asian cultures themselves. For example, '[i]n East Asia, Western economic and political ideas failed to displace the particularism of traditionalism with universal values. For practical reasons of cultural continuity, the entire modernization process itself … became embodied in a traditional and Confucian core' (Compton, Jr. 5-6). Consequently, the edict of modernization does not everywhere and always hold the same kind of cachet as it does in the Western world.

Goldman, Krider and Ramaswami define food retail modernization as involving 'the replacement of traditional retail formats by modern ones' (127). This tautological definition is clarified by an elaboration of some features of traditional food retail systems, including that they are typically small, family operated, employ marginal labor, and that stores are 'cluttered, dirty, and unorganized' (Goldman et al. 127). Despite this less than positive assessment, they also note that traditional retail outlets, like wet markets, can offer the advantages of lower prices, fresher products, and an environment conducive to social interaction (Goldman et al. 127).

As a practical matter, then, traditional retail outlets can be an important source of fresh, culturally appropriate, and affordable food for people in many countries. To this end, the World Health Organization has acknowledged that 'live animal markets are critical to providing food and livelihoods for millions of people globally and that authorities should focus on improving

them rather than outlawing them' ('UN: Live Animal Markets'). Vilifying wet markets discredits the qualities that explain, at least in part, their enduring popularity, and finding alternative ways to fill the gaps that would be left by doing away with them is crucial to developing equitable and effective solutions to the concerns that they raise.

Moreover, while trade in wildlife is a legitimate source of anxiety, a knee-jerk solution like a blanket ban fails to adequately account for the nuances of the issue. As a group of researchers at the University of Oxford has pointed out, the impact of bans 'cannot be assumed to be positive. They could also do more harm than good for biodiversity' (Challender et al.). As has been observed in other contexts (for example, illicit substances used for recreational purposes), prohibiting an activity does not miraculously make it go away. Instead, it pushes it further outside the bounds of formal monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Thus, rather than using COVID-19 'opportunistically to prescribe global wildlife trade policy', Challender et al. argue that '[a] more appropriate response would be to improve wildlife trade regulation with a direct focus on human health'. The takeaway here is that poor regulation of risky practices and the continuance of illegal trade in wildlife are serious concerns that should be better addressed irrespective of where they take place.

5. Bringing Culture (Back) In

The recent indictment of bat-eating and wet markets in China is merely one in a long line of controversies at the intersection of animals, food, and culture. Often, animal advocates repudiate allegations of racism or cultural imperialism by declaring that animal suffering is their central concern. Exemplifying this tactic, Jessica Scott-Reid writes, in an opinion piece about halal slaughter from 2018, that '[c]urrent debates over ritual slaughter are not about religion, race or culture, but about humanity, science and ethics; and more importantly, *about the animals*' (Scott-Reid, 'Ritual Slaughter Is Inherently Cruel'). As much as it would be nice for this to be the case, disputes about the morality of cultural practices necessarily and unavoidably invoke religion, race, and culture, and efforts to ignore or take a race-blind approach is to conveniently sidestep 'the privilege that whiteness creates' (Guthman, 'If Only They Knew' 267).

This privilege elides the fact that the white, Western perspective is not an impartial starting point – it just happens to be a dominant one. Julie Guthman explains that '[r]efusing to see (or refusing to admit) race difference for fear of being deemed racist has its origins in liberal thought, yet … the doctrine of colorblindness does its own violence by erasing the violence that the social construct of race has wrought in the form of racism' ('If Only They Knew' 267). In relying on universalist assumptions that 'values held primarily by whites are normal and widely shared', there is an attendant refusal 'to acknowledge the experience, aesthetics, and ideals of others, with the pernicious effect that those who do not conform to white ideals are justifiably marginalized' (Guthman, 'If Only They Knew' 267-268).

Additionally, religion, race, and culture are not easily disentangled from notions of humanity, science, and ethics. Despite its claim to neutrality, the discipline of science turns heavily on forms of ordering that rely on particular procedural and interpretive choices. Even to 'recogniz[e] something as a "problem" requires a pre-existing set of values as to what is 'normal", "natural", and thus "right"' (Carolan 732). Other types of value binaries that are relevant when evaluating human-animal relations include those distinguishing between 'primitive' versus 'modern' practices and 'barbaric' versus 'necessary' cruelty. There is a degree of arbitrariness involved in any process of classification that cannot be eliminated by reference to some ideal of 'pure' science untainted by cultural mores.

To be fair, animal advocates are usually quick to point out that cruel practices also take place within their own countries and cultures. In North America, the numerous horrors associated with factory farming are prime targets, but normalized cruelty also occurs on smaller scales: many do not bat an eye at boiling lobsters and crabs alive as a method of cooking, despite evidence that decapods can feel pain (see Rincon; Saner; Walsh). The denunciation of practices that are associated with other cultures should not refract attention from the everyday cruelties to which one may have become inured by virtue of their seeming banality. Accordingly, Cathryn Bailey urges us to 'work to improve our own moral consistency, being especially wary about relying on the sins of others to reassure us and distract us from our own' (Bailey, 'Africa Begins at the Pyrenees' 36).

Just as the lines separating different kinds of cruelty are thin, so too are the lines separating different expressions of racist attitudes and behaviours. Racist prejudices and

preconceptions vary by the group in question: for example, the oft-repeated tropes that Asian people are deferential (Chew 38-40), that Indigenous peoples are uncivilized (A. Harris, 'Should People of Color Support Animal Rights?' 22-24), or that Black people are violent (Glick 648-650), presumptively as compared to some white default, which is coded as the norm. Here, it is important to note that processes of racializing a subordinated group are 'mutually constitutive of one another' and occur 'relative to and through interaction with [other subordinated groups]', which means that they can 'unfold along more than one dimension or scale at a time' (Kim 106). Consequently, racist prejudices and preconceptions also vary by the context.

Human-animal and human-human relations, as expressed in the context of food, are unique sites of racialization. As a case in point, Chinese and other Asian cuisines are often considered to be 'dirty', 'exotic', and inferior to Western fare (see for example Cheung). These kinds of damaging stigmas and stereotypes not only inform attitudes and behaviours towards Asian people, but can even cause psychosomatic effects, especially when combined with the use of racialized language like 'Chinese restaurant syndrome' (Kenney; Mosby; Nierenberg). In effect, critiques of cultural *practices* can readily descend into critiques of entire *cultures*, functioning to reflect and reinforce pre-existing biases.

Discourses around veganism frequently act as another form of erasure, which is dangerous insofar as '[w]hite impositions of morality teeter toward paternalism and can even come to recreate a colonialist relationship' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 128). Although '[v]eganism, *as a political project*, is a white and Western conception[,] … this widely accepted history of veganism, for the most part, ignores the contributions of people of color who have been adhering to plant-based diets for thousands of years' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 121). As such, '[t]he vegan desire to police the world is a general reflection of the movement's historical association with the centuries-old project of Western conquest and domination' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 128). The rise of 'commodity veganism' (Fegitz and Pirani), which entrenches, rather than challenges neoliberal rationality and market- and technology-based solutionism (A. Lee, 'The Milkmaid's Tale'), further shores up perceptions that plant-based diets are constituted primarily of expensive organic produce, processed specialty products, and the latest health-boosting 'superfoods'. Such an approach is one that is by and for the already privileged, and

beyond simply being exclusionary, is actually antithetical to the professed aims of animal liberation (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 182-186).[13]

Facile commands to 'go vegan' are therefore oversimplistic in that they do not acknowledge the multifaceted barriers standing in the way of such a wholesale dietary shift for differently situated people, nor do they acknowledge the reasons why the drive for cheap meat has proliferated throughout the world. For one, it is also a mistake 'to presume that human rights, the ability to organize, and the privilege to extend attention beyond immediate matters of survival are universal advantages that extend beyond American borders. Global inequality complicates efforts to reduce suffering for nonhumans *and* humans' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 130). Further, as Wrenn points out:

> China hosts the largest percentage of vegans in the world … Nonhuman Animal suffering in Asia is not due to some innate 'evil' in non-Western populations. The skyrocketing level of Nonhuman Animal exploitation in China (and other industrializing countries) is more accurately attributable to imposed Western cultural norms, the unrelenting pressure to accommodate capitalism, and the 'humanitarian' efforts of international bodies such as the World Bank that have created food dependencies that support Western markets. (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 129)

Thus, the kind of nonhuman animal exploitation that we need to be concerned about ultimately has much closer connections with neoliberal globalization and capitalism than it does with cultural traditions or racial proclivities.

Despite the chronic devaluation of Chinese and other Asian cuisines, Asian ingredients and dishes are an important part of plant-based diets in much of the Western world. This paradox highlights the fact that 'people can eat Asian foods but still have contempt for Asians' (Wu 42). The (re)emergence of racial prejudices during times of crisis or change are an ongoing reminder of the selective and conditional acceptance of racialized people in white society. Though these prejudices may be voiced less unambiguously than they were in the past, they are potentially more dangerous when they lurk beneath the surface, because this makes insidious racism and xenophobia more difficult to call out for what it really is. When science is invoked, as is necessarily the case with a public health crisis like a global pandemic, it is especially easy to

slip into the kind of thinking that validates racist logic under the guise of neutrality, seeing as '[s]cience is often utilized as a means of legitimizing ideology and inequality' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 109). The production and reception of knowledge claims are decidedly not apolitical or acultural processes, and therefore necessitate consideration with respect to how they are mediated and disseminated.

6. Power, Privilege, and Platform

Just as food circulates around us on a daily basis, so too do law and other forms of power. As part of reform efforts, legal and regulatory institutions 'have a distinctive role because, more than other institutions do, they exist partly to facilitate the coordination of the activities of a great many actors' (Young 142). In this way, they are significant 'elements of the structural social processes that produce or prevent injustice' (Young 142). Legal reform, such as calls for stronger laws and improved enforcement, is thus a strategy rightly adopted by animal advocates in their efforts to induce change.[14]

However, law is only part of the story, and '[t]o understand how injustice is produced and reproduced, … we must also look to the rules and practices of business, communications media, and the leisure and consumption tastes of ordinary people' (Young 142). Discourse is a highly salient ground through which to examine the interplay between power and (in)justice. Discourse can be defined as 'a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning' (Fairclough 64). Through discourse, the world is made meaningful in specific ways, though the privileging of certain sense-making stories over others does not always occur through a meritorious process. Rather, the sanctioning of particular ideologies can be seen as making 'meaning in the service of power' (Thompson 5). In other words, power relations 'exert an epistemological impact. Cultural discourses and practices, through which power circulates, construct particular ways of seeing the world and those who inhabit it' (Deckha, 'Critical Animal Studies' 215).

One's relative position in society affects the degree of power one wields, whether used to 'speak truth' (i.e., set the dominant narrative) or to 'speak truth to power' (i.e., resist and/or reject dominant narratives). As is especially apparent in an era of InfoWars, social

media, and the corporatization of mass communication (Chiappinelli et al.), '[t]he power to control the exchange distorts it' (Wu 44). It is therefore significant that 'white men dominate as both media creators and media owners. White men also enjoy more representation and coverage within the media itself' (Wrenn, 'An Analysis of Diversity' 146). Through the media, existing power structures are both normalized and constantly reified. As a result, 'choices about whom to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign academic issues' (Janack 130).

Unfortunately, despite the protestations of experts, the continuing use of labels like 'China flu' or 'Wuhan virus', especially by high-profile actors like Donald Trump (Riechmann and Tang; Zimmer), further fuels the misguided belief that blame for the COVID-19 pandemic falls squarely on the shoulders of one country or group of people. Based on the uncertain and rapidly evolving science, it is inaccurate to attribute the virus to any one cause, whether that is eating bats or trading in wildlife. To be sure, there are multiple elements of the way nonhuman animals are currently being used in our food systems – including, but not limited to, public health concerns underscored by COVID-19 – that are troubling. However, no set of cultural practices related to the production and consumption of animal products has a monopoly on the risks and issues that are raised, and the use of inflammatory and racialized us-versus-them rhetoric belies this reality.

Meanwhile, the flood of celebrity responses to recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the renewed urgency of the Black Lives Matter movement has revealed the limits of performative celebrity activism (for example Cooley; see Tsaliki et al. for academic perspectives). While some celebrities have leveraged their platforms to raise awareness, mobilize their audiences, and inspire further engagement in activist initiatives, Bryan Adams has used his, in this case, to have what essentially amounts to a public temper tantrum at the expense of other people. The desire to 'have a rant' does not substitute for informed, meaningful action, and 'empty rhetoric may be just as detrimental as none at all' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 126), especially if it irresponsibly perpetuates racist stereotypes and misleading narratives. Moreover, it is certainly a lot easier to preach 'love for all people' when you are not being actively oppressed.

There are times when the best use of privilege is to opt to listen instead of speak, and the best use of a platform is to use it to amplify the voices of those who are better positioned to address issues in a culturally sensitive manner. Condemning the practices of other cultures is not necessarily out of bounds, but in so doing, animal advocates 'must be cognizant of institutionalized discrimination that is responsible for stereotypes that construct people of color as uncivil and cruel' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 136). Good intentions cannot substitute for close reflections upon the various conscious and unconscious biases that colour interpretations of what is moral and what is immoral behaviour. If animal advocates are to enhance the credibility of the movement, and more importantly, to stimulate real transformations in the circumstances of nonhuman animals, it is incumbent upon them to find ways of communicating that draw attention to nonhuman animal suffering without undermining or contributing to human suffering, especially that of subordinated groups.

7. Towards Humility and Away from Hypocrisy

In the contemporary world, many of the choices that we make on a daily basis inescapably contribute, to varying degrees, to harms spanning animal cruelty and environmental degradation to gross human rights violations. Even the most well-meaning vegan, environmentalist, or humanitarian cannot help but participate in these injustices in some way: none of us is faultless in this respect. This bleak diagnosis does not have to lead to defeatism; just as individual choices can work deleteriously in the aggregate, so too can they be a force for positive change. To identify the problems and to (re)imagine radically different alternatives is to participate in the process of building a better future for all. Hence, the role of critical theory is to 'simultaneously convince us that injustice is everywhere, and that change is possible' (A. Harris, 'Compassion and Critique' 330).

Critical theory has long worked to expose the limitations of operating within the bounds of the law's comfort zones. For example, critical legal theorists have argued that the liberal ideology's conception of rights 'leads people to think of themselves as disconnected from others in important ways' (Tushnet 27). Within the Western legal order, '[l]aw assumes that hypothetical individuals seek to maximize their independence and self-interest at all times, leading lives as individuated and egocentric units, rather than embedded in relationships with

others with a sense of duties and obligations' (Deckha, 'Critical Animal Studies' 229). Thus, any project of reform mandates that we rethink and reimagine how we conceive of relationships, because 'human beings become who they are … through the relationships in which they participate' (Nedelsky 4). This means that '[o]ur fundamentally social, relational nature – and thus our dependency – cannot be set to one side when we think of any of the core puzzles of law or politics, such as justice, mutual obligation, or the good life' (Nedelsky 28).

Alternative legal orders that are predicated on very different values and relations exist and are accessible to us in the processes of disruption and reconstruction. Many Indigenous legal orders feature the idea that there is a set of reciprocal rights and responsibilities between humans, other species, and the Earth (Deckha, 'Unsettling Anthropomorphic Legal Systems'). As such, Indigenous legal traditions 'embody rich and vibrant insights and include deep intellectual and social resources that can help us care for the natural world' (J. Borrows, 'Earth Bound' 49). Drawing on non-Western epistemologies and 'ways of relating with one another, animals, and the environment, and with past and future generations' can help us to 'question the hegemony of Western thought', thereby 'liberat[ing] us from the need to engage Western sources, institutions, and concepts in constituting ourselves politically' (Starblanket and Kiiwetinepinesiik 194).

Chinese conceptions of law are also markedly different from Western ones. The Chinese legal system has been strongly influenced by Confucian and Buddhist philosophies, which emphasize concepts like virtue, morality, and rituality (see for example L. Lee and Lai). In contrast with the fixation on individualism, which has become a cornerstone of classic Western liberal legalism (Friedman), Chinese legal systems are more egalitarian and rely on different concepts of responsibility (L. Lee and Lai 1325). Within such a system, formal, prescriptive laws are not the only means by which to regulate human behaviours, and may not carry as much normative force as other kinds of appeals to duty. Recognizing and incorporating other kinds of epistemologies, traditions, and values into our institutions, our societies, and our practices can help 'open[] up a broad and novel range of strategies for intervention toward effecting social change' (Khandekar et al. 682; see also J. Borrows 'Indigenous Legal Traditions'; Friedland; Napoleon, 'Thinking About Indigenous Legal Orders').

Animal advocacy, too, can benefit from an expansion of its boundaries. Presently, the dominant philosophical arguments for animal equality are 'grounded in liberal, rule-based sameness logic and premises that privileges reason in moral valuation and judgment' (Deckha, 'Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory' 528). Thus, both arguments for the oppression and liberation of animals generally proceeds on the same set of terms, which tends to reject 'care theory and emotions as morally salient either as markers of who count[s] as moral patients or as compasses for moral agents' (Deckha, 'Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory' 528). This has steered both the direction of animal advocacy and the strategies that are used (A. Lee, 'Telling Tails'), especially within an adversarial legal system. Approaches grounded in compassion, collaboration, and empathy have been eschewed in favour of more androcentric and antagonistic modes of operation, which are preferred for being more 'rational'. Yet, the bare fact that nonhuman suffering can be scientifically proven is not alone persuasive: '[t]he recognition that others suffer is not enough; the suffering must be registered as unjust and amenable to change' (A. Harris, 'Compassion and Critique' 348). In this way, advocacy for animals rooted in critical theory 'necessarily traffics in the emotions' (A. Harris, 'Compassion and Critique' 328), from compassion and care to anger and outrage.

Moreover, a growing body of research in behavioural economics has revealed that rationality and impartiality are elusive ideals (Ariely). We are all afflicted by cognitive biases that tend to reinforce what we already believe, and that encourage us to make sense of the information that we receive using crude heuristics and generalizations. Actively engaging in learning and unlearning our individual biases requires constant, vigilant effort. Insofar as laws and policies cement and enable harmful elements of the status quo and obstruct and inhibit progressive transformations, they require both the intellectual work of viewing change as necessary and the emotional work of viewing stagnancy as unjust.

The focus here is not on individual or small-scale voluntary action. When it comes to animal advocacy, '[a]n over-emphasis on personal conversion and vegetarian action has meant that other forms of popular political action are under developed and under theorized' (Plumwood 291). Meanwhile, shallow versions of veganism that are tied to white-centric ideals of rights and morality can propagate entitled Western perspectives while 'relieving industries, elites, and oppressive systems of their culpability' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 132). By

contrast, we should embrace a 'notion of political responsibility as a duty for individuals to take public stands about actions and events that affect broad masses of people, and to try to organize collective action to prevent mass harm or foster institutional change for the better' (Young 76). To this end, Iris Marion Young has called for what she dubbed a 'social connection model' of political responsibility that 'does not isolate perpetrators. It brings background conditions under evaluation. Its main purpose for assigning responsibility is forward-looking. Responsibility under the social connection model is essentially shared. It can therefore be discharged only through collective action' (Young 105).

To borrow a principle from international environmental law, though we may have 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities' (United Nations)[15] when it comes to our individual, national, and global approaches to our diets, this does not take away from the fact that we are all jointly accountable in relation to dismantling structural injustice. More specifically, '[w]here there are structural injustices, finding that some people are guilty of perpetrating specific wrongful actions does not absolve others whose actions contribute to the outcomes from bearing responsibility in a different way' (Young 106). This is a task for everyone, irrespective of how they are situated. Rather than stoking an 'us' versus 'them' mentality, with 'them' representing some subordinated Other, we should maintain an emphasis on the common goals that we all share: to have access to healthy, adequate, culturally appropriate food; to live, work, and play in environments that have clean water and air; to feel accepted and cared for within our local communities and societies at large. In times like these, it is incumbent upon us to make keen efforts towards greater inclusion rather than exclusion, and seek to understand rather than to blame, which can be abetted by a more charitable, contextualized, and nuanced appreciation of how cultural behaviours emerge against structural backdrops.

Of course, even the most time-honoured of cultural practices are not rendered, by virtue of their long histories alone, immune from critique or re-evaluation, and 'theories connecting animals to justice need not decay … into an apolitical praxis where ethical claims are impossible' (Deckha, 'Animal Justice' 202). However, '[t]he task demands an uncovering of the ways in which respect for cultural pluralism can co-exist with respect for animals' (Deckha, 'Animal Justice' 202). The fights for animal justice and food justice have often reflected a certain

kind of moralizing that stems from a place of unexamined privilege, which risks breeding white supremacy, double standards, and essentialist characterizations in their critiques of other cultures if not tempered with the appropriate degree of reflexivity. To quote Frank Wu, if we

> call[] on standards that are not generated within the culture we are criticizing, we must do our utmost to make such standards as neutral as possible rather than just the enlargement of our preferences. It may be impossible to produce principles in a vacuum without the influence of our own backgrounds so as to bracket and set aside everything that is culturally specific, but at least we can become conscious of the constraints of either an Eastern or a Western worldview and conduct our discussion accordingly. Lest you be a hypocrite, you should be able to live up to the standards you would set. (Wu 44)

Even though we can and should 'call one another to account', we must find ways of doing to 'without attributing malevolent intent to, or hurting, the persons we criticize' (Young 165). This requires good faith, a certain degree of cultural competency, a collaborative spirit, and a genuine willingness to learn from others as equals, as '[p]eople in solidarity for the sake of justice are determined to improve social relations, but they are also tentative and humble' (Young 120). Expanding on this theme, Lindsay Borrows writes that '[h]umility is a state of positioning oneself in a way that does not favour one's own importance over another's. Humility is a condition of being teachable. Humility allows us to recognize our dependence upon others and to consider their perspectives along with our own' (153-154). Considered thusly, humility can act as an antidote to classical liberalism, which, in encouraging an atomistic way of thinking about individuals, fails to grasp that, rather than representing something to struggle against, dependence 'is simply an inevitable part of the fabric of life' (Preston and Wickson 52).

Likewise, conflict and disagreement does not necessarily have to be framed negatively. Indeed, '[p]olitics motivated by a shared responsibility to undermine injustice involves discussion and debate about alternative courses of action, how they should be implemented, and what their likely consequences will be. Within such debates, as in most political debates, we can expect conflict and disagreement' (Young 113). Nevertheless, if conflict is to be productive as opposed

to destructive, it must avoid a language of blame that 'expresses a spirit of resentment, produces defensiveness, or focuses people more on themselves than on the social relations they should be trying to change' (Young 114).

Nurturing the development of intersectional approaches and an emphasis on collective action can help make animal advocacy become not only more equitable, but also potentially more effective. Negative stereotypes of activists abound, regardless of the domain of activism (see Bashir et al.). Cultivating more positive perceptions of activists matters in terms of being able to make a measurable impact, because 'individuals may at times resist social change, not necessarily because they have negative attitudes towards social issues or social change … but rather because they have negative stereotypes of the agents of social change' (Bashir et al. 615). In other words, the 'tendency to associate activists with negative stereotypes may ultimately reduce individuals' willingness to affiliate with activists and adopt the pro-change behaviours that activists espouse' (Bashir et al. 615).

Recent research has found that 'activists may potentially mobilize more support for their cause if they reduce the distance they feel towards those who do not take part in collective action' (Kutlaca et al. 103). One way to reduce this distance would be to recognize the complex and interconnected structural barriers that make it challenging for differently positioned groups to engage in activism. To this end, the focus of advocacy efforts should shift away from 'intervening in the lives of marginalized communities' and instead towards 'challenging the activities and structures of oppression that we are all implicated within in different ways' (Kepkiewicz 103). Activists need to ensure that what they are trying to accomplish actually resonates with the communities that are affected, as opposed to simply swapping out one set of oppressive values and practices for another (Guthman, 'Bringing Good Food to Others'; Guthman, 'If Only They Knew' 263-281). The aspiration of justice movements must remain, above all, to effect transformative change for everyone.

Conclusion

There are many linkages between human-animal relations, the way we value food, and the environmental, social, health, and ethical problems that we are currently facing. This is

simultaneously an animal justice issue, a food justice issue, and a broader social justice issue. To frame it as only one of the three is to ignore the profound interconnections between multiple grounds of oppression. As demonstrated by the Bryan Adams incident, it is readily apparent that '[r]ace and culture are deeply imbricated in animal issues and disputes' (Deckha, 'Toward a Postcolonial, Posthumanist Feminist Theory' 537). Hence, endemic racism, sexism, classism, and ableism are far from being secondary or tangential to the fight for fairer treatment among species.

Despite superficial support for equality along all axes, much of animal advocacy today continues to reflect problematic tendencies that solidify rather than destabilize oppressive power structures. Cruelty is cruelty regardless of the culture in which it originates, but '[d]emonizing people of color makes for easy advocacy in a discriminatory social environment that already views them as lesser' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach* 121). Through the process of Othering, large groups can be lumped together into homogenous entities reduced to simplistic characterizations that then serve as the basis for assuming and legitimizing their inferiority. As such, a purported commitment to animal and/or food justice certainly not does automatically render someone an ally of other social causes.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted significant failures and fragilities in our food, health, and market systems, these are not exclusive to specific countries or cultures, and seeking to assign individual blame rather than accept collective responsibility for change is unduly restrictive and counterproductive. Certainly, cultural practices are – and should be – mutable, especially in light of drastically changed conditions, such as the global ecological and public health crises in which we currently find ourselves. This does not necessarily represent a dilution of cultural authenticity, which 'is not fixed in time and space, but is adaptable to our needs, to the needs of our animal siblings, and to the needs of the land itself' (Robinson). That being said, '[i]f we critique a cultural practice, its origins and its context are relevant' (Wu 43). Furthermore, we must 'scrutinize how we criticize, [and] remember that supposedly neutral spaces of dialogue and debate have roots formed and facilitated by the privileging of western viewpoints and peoples' (Deckha, 'Animal Justice' 220). The cavalier use of terms that

contribute to a politically charged and rancorous public debate readily descends into a lose-lose battle, which hinders efforts to address complex and communal concerns in a mutually cooperative manner.

Inclusion is only the first step to some as of yet unsettled final destination. The intricacies of the process, which inevitably will include some degree of discord, remain unknown and unknowable. However, embracing an evolution of our ideas, our societies, and our laws is arguably fundamental to the effort to restructuring our relationships in a less damaging formulation, including through becoming more comfortable with pluralistic approaches grounded in a stance of humility. This applies not just to the project of animal advocacy, but also to the project of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in what is currently known as Canada (Deckha, 'Unsettling Anthropomorphic Legal Systems'), as well as broader anti-racist and anti-oppression struggles. Ultimately, if COVID-19 is to represent a turning point towards building a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient world, the kind of fractioning that is currently being exacerbated by the use of divisive discourse must be avoided. In its place, we should strive towards a heightened recognition of our fundamental interconnectedness and a greater willingness to collectively confront the pathologies of the legal, economic, and value systems that represent the true roots of injustice both among and between species.

Notes

[1] See for example Ian Haney López. López focuses specifically on politicians' use of dog whistling, which is the context it most commonly operates within. However, he defines 'using a dog whistle', in a general sense, as 'speaking in code to a target audience' (4), which, despite being ostensibly neutral, can be used to 'carefully manipulate hostility toward nonwhites' (ix). As such, the concept of dog whistling is readily applicable to other situations in which persons with public profiles, such as celebrities, use their platforms to deliver messages about social issues that invoke race in some way.

[2] For more on the history and meaning of 'cancel culture', see 'What It Means to Get "Canceled"' (Merriam-Webster);'cancel culture' (Dictionary.com); Romano.

[3] By 'pluralism' here, I mean an openness and embrace of different cultures, traditions, and epistemologies in a general sense. Though a more detailed discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this article, for a nuanced take on some of the issues surrounding legal pluralism as more formally construed, see for example Napoleon.

[4] See for example this excellent piece that was published after this article was originally drafted: Chang and Corman, 'From Wet Market to Meatpacking: Why Animal Advocacy Fails Without Anti-Racism'.

[5] Here, animal advocacy is understood broadly. Some of these organizations frame themselves as 'animal rights' focused, whereas others frame their focus as being on 'animal welfare', and still others characterize themselves differently altogether. On the multiple meanings of 'animal rights', including the distinction between abolitionist and reformist approaches, see for example Francione and Charlton, 'Animal Rights'.

[6] The most prominent voices within the movement are usually associated with people like Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Gary Francione, and Steven Wise. Unlike in the US, however, many of the most notable animal advocates in Canada are women: see Animal Justice, 'About Us'.

[7] It should be noted that this gendered binary also does not properly account for the contributions of persons differently situated on the gender spectrum, including transgendered persons, nonbinary persons, two-spirit persons, and others.

[8] One of the most well-known explorations of working conditions in the meat packing industry is Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle*.

[9] 'Food deserts' are areas in which access to fresh, healthy food is especially limited, often correlated with low-income or minority neighbourhoods: see for example Wright et al.

[10] Further, it is important to note that political engagement in and of itself is culturally mediated. As Pat Chew writes, '[s]ome Asian cultures encourage harmonious social interactions, requiring a sensitivity to the needs and interests of others. Asian Americans' attentiveness to others, what some social scientists have called "other-directedness," may well result in more self-effacing behavior and modesty. Contrary to what an American cultural perspective may suggest, this behavior is not indicative of insecurity, anxiousness, or passivity' (42-43).

[11] One explanation is that the term 'wet' is in reference to the wetness of the floor in such markets 'as a result of the frequent spraying of produce and the cleaning of meat and fish stalls' (Goldman et al. 138 n1). Another explanation is that the term 'wet' is used as a contrast to 'dry' markets that trade in non-perishable, durable goods like grains or household products (Westcott and Wang).

[12] Though I do not engage in this discussion here, the line between 'wild' and 'domestic' animals is itself a culturally determined one (see for example Deckha and Pritchard).

[13] 'Abolitionist veganism entails contentious action against a capitalist state' (Wrenn, *A Rational Approach*, 184).

[14] Though this topic is beyond the scope of this article, it should be noted that the call for stronger laws and improved enforcement (both to protect animals in a material sense, and to signal that this is an issue that society takes seriously) is not to condone a carceral animal law

system, suggest that the solution to animal cruelty lies in criminal punishment, or imply that this approach is without its limitations (see Marceau).

[15] 'the global nature of climate change calls for the widest possible cooperation by all countries and their participation in an effective and appropriate international response, in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities and their social and economic conditions.'

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