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ANIMAL COLONIALISM IN NORTH AMERICA: MILK COLONIALISM, ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM, AND INDIGENOUS VEGANISM

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Abstract
Combining insights from postcolonialism, ecofeminism, and critical animal studies, this article focuses on the colonial experience of nonhuman animals in North America whose exploitation has been integral to the colonial expansionist project. By tracing the history of displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal agriculture, animal colonialism is also linked to mass killing of free-living animals and to environmental degradation. Furthermore, the article delineates the entangled oppression of Indigenous women's and nonhuman animals' bodies that can be theorized as colonized territories, exploited for profit via the control of their reproductive cycles. To protest the violent industrial animal farming practices that involve torture, slaughter, and mass dairying and are built on racist rhetoric, some Indigenous people adopt contextual Indigenous veganism as an act of political resistance.
Keywords: animal colonialism; milk colonialism; Indigenous veganism; decolonization; environmental racism; ecofeminism
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Introduction

Postcolonial scholarship typically focuses on the impacts of European colonization on Indigenous populations and their lands. Only recently, scholars have increasingly begun to inquire about the experience and role of nonhuman animals[1] in the colonial project. Combining insights from postcolonial studies, ecofeminism, and critical animal studies, this article will make nonhuman animals the central focus of its analysis in order to highlight their commodification and exploitation in the settler-colonial states of North America, primarily in the United States and Canada. Following the Driftpile Cree Nation scholar and writer Billy-Ray Belcourt and his decolonial animal ethic, the article aims to demonstrate the importance of including nonhuman animals in postcolonial studies as "colonial subjects" alongside Indigenous peoples.[2]

By arguing that colonialism is an interspecies issue, this article does not introduce any new information *per se* (certainly not so for critical animal studies scholars). Rather, the original contribution of this work lies in using extant research to make explicit an argument that has often been implicit; that nonhuman animals should be taken seriously as colonial subjects within disciplines such as postcolonial studies. The main aim of this review article is thus to provide a contribution to critical scholarship that intervenes into the mainstream anthropocentric discourse that ignores the nonhuman experience and thus inadvertently perpetuates the current status quo. The article critiques nonhuman animal exploitation and links it to colonization of Indigenous peoples by

[1] As is the convention in animal studies, ecofeminism, and other affiliated disciplines, the terms "nonhuman animals," "other animals," and "other-than-human animals" are used interchangeably throughout the article to refer to non-human animal species. The misguiding term "animal" is mostly avoided on its own as it conventionally excludes humans from its definition, which further deepens the divide between humans and other animals. David A. Nibert also discourages the use of words that function as absent referent, i.e., that semantically create distance and mask oppression, such as "beef," "pork," or "cattle." Nibert places these terms in quotation marks "to underscore the usually overlooked ideology and values built into those terms." See David Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence: Domesecration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 6. Similarly, words that are used daily, such as "meat," "milk," or "eggs" reduce other animals and their bodies to mere commodities for human consumption and hide the subject behind the object. Like Nibert, I also strongly encourage any act of discursive resistance that highlights the oppressive nature of our language and unmasks the violence inherent in normalized practices. However, because of the frequent use of words such as "milk" in this article, I decided not to follow Nibert's example of placing all oppressive terms into quotation marks to not interrupt the flow of reading.

[2] Billy-Ray Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought," *Societies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 1–11, doi: 10.3390/soc5010001.

compiling relevant contemporary texts from the fields of critical animal studies, ecofeminism, and postcolonialism. As such, it also provides an overview and synthesis of some of the most important scholarly tendencies in the field that could be termed as postcolonial animal studies.

After offering a brief contextual background, the article first deals with the topic of displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal agriculture, especially during the expansive nineteenth century. On selected examples of extermination of full populations of nonhuman animals, the article shows how colonization has been dependent on the destruction of natural spaces and displacement of species. It then proceeds to describe the introduction of animal products as tools of racial and gender discrimination. Following on the world-renowned ecofeminist scholar and activist Vandana Shiva's statement that through modern agricultural techniques "life itself is being colonized" and the bodies of women and nonhuman animals serve as the last frontiers, the text discusses the entangled oppression of Indigenous women's and nonhuman animals' bodies that can indeed be theorized as colonized territories, exploited for profit via the control of their reproductive cycles.[3]

Furthermore, the article will show that colonialism is an interspecies issue on examples of environmental racism that is disproportionately experienced by Indigenous communities. As a result of industrial farming and other capitalist industries, land, water, and air on or near reserves have been severely polluted, leading to many health problems, including poisoning of Indigenous women's breast milk. This violence is often misrepresented for its lack of sensationalism. The Arctic and the bodies of its human and nonhuman inhabitants whose reproductive systems have been compromised represent the last frontiers that are being colonized under global neoliberalism.

The last part of the article offers various ways how to resist power inequalities stemming from colonialism and domestication of nonhuman animals and outlines several more sustainable ways how to challenge these current structures. To protest the violent industrial animal farming practices that involve torture, slaughter, and mass dairying and are built on racist rhetoric, some Indigenous scholars and organizations propose contextual Indigenous veganism as an act of political resistance that simultaneously decolonizes both Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals.

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[3] Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), chap. 2, Kindle.

Contextual Background

Postcolonial animal studies scholars speak of "animal colonialism" to refer to, first, the exploitation of domesticated animals as involuntary tools of colonization, enabling European invasion, expansion, and erasure of free-living animals and Indigenous peoples. Second, animal colonialism is also embodied in the imposition of the Western anthropocentric worldview that places humans hierarchically above other animals and legalizes their exploitation for human benefit, altering whole environments as a consequence.[4] Animal colonialism has manifested in multiple ways and has simultaneously impacted free-living and domesticated nonhuman animals as well as Indigenous peoples.

The Western hierarchical system that tends to divide people into categories was applied on nonhuman animals before it was applied on humans. "Wild animals" were placed below "domesticated animals" whose presence in the landscape was justified on the grounds of their utilitarian benefit for humans. While free-living animals were only useful for European colonizers when dead (to be exploited for their skin), domesticated animals served double purpose – as tools of colonization when alive, as well as providers of animalized protein in the form of milk or eggs, and as profitable "meat" when dead. This double usefulness hierarchically placed domesticated animals above their free-living counterparts who, in the eyes of colonizers, needed to disappear from the landscape to make space for the advancement of the Western "civilization."

Similarly, Indigenous peoples were considered a "wild" obstacle in the North American landscape and as such they were pushed out of the lands they had inhabited for centuries as "the European agricultural system [was seen] as the only legitimate future for this landscape."[5] Because they held no domesticated animals, Indigenous people were assigned animal status and considered "wild" and "savage" like their free-living animal counterparts. In their edited collection *Colonialism and Animality,* Kelly Struthers Montford and Chloë Taylor write that "to be animalized entails the simultaneous processes of being rendered non-criminally killable, and of existing solely as a resource for humans."[6] Being denied the status of "fully human" was used to justify both the physical and the

[4] Mathilde Cohen, "Animal Colonialism: The Case of Milk," *AJIL Unbound* 111 (2017): 268, doi: 10.1017/aju.2017.66.

[5] Frederick L. Brown, *The City Is More Than Human: An Animal History of Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2017), 21.

[6] Kelly Struthers Montford and Chloë Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality: Anti-Colonial Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 140.

cultural genocide[7] of Indigenous peoples on the basis of anthropocentrism and speciesism (the belief that one species is more important than others).

In the anthropocentric settler-colonial society that still legitimates the institution of speciesism, animalizing discourse continues to be used as a tool to further marginalize minoritized peoples. Being "dehumanized" is injurious to both the targeted racialized group and to nonhuman animals who are being discursively abused and denigrated as inferior to humans. In the words of Belcourt, "this not only commits a violence that re-locates racialized bodies to the margins of settler society as non-humans, but also performs an epistemic violence that denies animality its own subjectivity and re-makes it into a mode of being that can be re-made as blackness and indigeneity."[8]

Anthropocentrism and speciesism are colonial logics that contrast with most Indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies that highlight interconnectedness of all living beings and perceive animals as subjects with agency and their own life trajectories.[9] As such a worldview does not accommodate exploitation of nonhuman animals for profit, the erasure of Indigeneity has been essential for colonization and capitalism. Like free-living animals, Indigenous peoples had to be either exterminated or tamed, i.e. assimilated to the Western culture and society. After being relocated and denied access to their traditional food economies, Indigenous peoples have been forced to accept the colonial assimilationist food system that has deepened their dependency on the settler state and has caused various health problems.[10]

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[7] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada concluded in their 2015 report on the Indian residential schools that Canada's Aboriginal policy is best described as "cultural genocide." The Commission defines cultural genocide as follows: "*Cultural genocide* is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next." See The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," 2015, 1.

[8] Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects," 5.

[9] E.g. Montford and Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality*, 137.

[10] See e.g. Dennis Wiedman, "Native American Embodiment of the Chronicities of Modernity: Reservation Food, Diabetes, and the Metabolic Syndrome among the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2012): 595–612, doi: 10.1111/maq.12009; Monica Bodirsky and Jon Johnson, "Decolonizing Diet: Healing by Reclaiming Traditional Indigenous Foodways," *Cuizine* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1–10, doi: 10.7202/019373ar; and Andrea Freeman,

Meat and dairy milk, that has been described as "a conquering colonial commodity" by some postcolonial scholars, have played an essential role in the subjugation of Indigenous peoples.[11] Despite most of the world population being lactose intolerant (and predominantly people of color), milk has been universally represented as staple food and, together with meat, has been used as a colonial tool for gender and racial discrimination. While plant-based diets have been represented by the Western colonial culture as inferior and linked to emasculation, weakness, and racial inferiority, milk continues to serve as a symbol of white supremacy with its culturally constructed connection to white purity, wholesomeness and virility. Furthermore, both human and nonhuman female bodies have been exploited for their nursing milk.

Ecofeminist scholars have proposed critical ecofeminist milk studies to consider the biopsychosocial connection between a mother and her offspring which is an interspecies experience shared by human and nonhuman mammals.[12] Throughout colonial history, those who were denigrated to the status of animalized women[13] have been subjected to some of the same abuse as nonhuman female animals. The colonial powers have imitated some of the ways they employ on nonhuman female animals' bodies and applied them on minoritized women. Despite their differing experiences, some ecofeminist scholars believe that "there is value in considering the underlying connections between human wet nurses and female dairy cows."[14] The second part of this article will follow on their research and will also underscore the way the dairy industry uses minoritized children's bodies to support its colonial capitalist project.

"The Unbearable Whiteness of Milk: Food Oppression and the USDA," *UC Irvine Law Review* 3, no. 4 (2014): 1251–1279.

11 Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 269.

12 Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (Washington DC: Lexington Books, 2017), 66.

13 Cary Wolfe suggests that the Western hierarchization groups people and other animals into four categories: *humanized human* (typically white cis-gender heterosexual men), *animalized human* (minoritized people), *humanized animal* (typically those considered as "pets" such as dogs and cats), and *animalized animal* (predominantly "domesticated" animals exploited for food). See Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 101. Carol J. Adams extends Wolfe's categorization to include *animalized women* and *feminized animals* who she argues are placed even lower in this hierarchy because of their gender. Carol J. Adams, "Why Feminist-Vegan Now?" *Feminism and Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2010): 302–317, here 313, doi: 10.1177/0959353510368038.

14 Iselin Gambert, "Got Mylk? The Disruptive Possibilities of Plant Milk," *Brooklyn Law Review* 84, no. 3 (2019): 848, https://ssrn.com/abstract=3229995.

Animal Colonialism

Billy-Ray Belcourt parallels the colonization of Indigenous peoples to the exploitation of nonhuman animals. His paper argues that white supremacy, neoliberal capitalism, and colonialism are enabled through "the simultaneous exploitation and/or erasure of animal and Indigenous bodies."[15] Using a "politics of space," Belcourt explains that westward expansion and planned relocation affected both groups as farm animals and Indigenous peoples were pushed beyond the frontier and separated from the settler society and confined to spaces with a fixed boundary. To dominate the bodies of both Indigenous people and nonhuman animals, some of the same technological devices have been employed.

In his book-length study *Barbed Wire: A Political History*, Olivier Razac traces the origins of the barbed wire that was invented in the nineteenth century and has since been used as a tool of oppression of both human and nonhuman animals. Despite its apparent technological simplicity, barbed wire remains the most efficient device used "to define space and to establish territorial boundaries."[16] Razac documents the use of barbed wire during three major historical events – colonization of the American West, the World War I trenches, and the Nazi concentration camps – to unmask its primary function, i.e. to enable genocide by confining subjects to a limited space where they can be controlled.[17]

In another extensive study on barbed wire, Reviel Netz stresses its origins as a tool to contain cattle in the American West to point out the interconnectedness between the oppression of human and nonhuman animals. As he writes, "the history of violence and pain crosses species" and the shared experiences of agricultural animals and human victims of genocide should not and cannot be overlooked in order to fully understand their oppression.[18] Razac and Netz both highlight the crucial function barbed wire had during the colonization of Indigenous tribes in the American Prairies where it proved useful in controlling vast geographical spaces. Ranchers used barbed wire to enclose pastures and grazing lands and thus denying Indigenous peoples access to their traditional lands. Barbed wire ultimately facilitated the establishment of "the new order" in the American West that was marked by "a shift of species and of race: bison

[15] Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects," 1.
[16] Olivier Razac, *Barbed Wire: A Political History* (New York: The New York Press, 2000), x.
[17] Razac, *Barbed Wire,* 4.
[18] Reviel Netz, *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity* (Durham: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), xiii.

replaced by cows, Indians replaced by Euro-Americans."[19] These two shifts were interconnected and determined by one another as the Plains Indians inhabiting the Prairies were dependent on the bison and vice versa. The near-extermination of one directly led to the containment of the other.

The large-scale slaughter of buffalo is an especially brutal example of animal colonialism. Western technology facilitated westward expansion as railroads enabled quick transportation of large numbers of "sport hunters" who used rifles to massacre the bison herds, often by shooting them straight from the trains. Most of the dead buffalo bodies were left to rot on the Plains, some being skinned for their hides to be turned into leather and some being decapitated by the sport hunters for trophy heads.[20] Such displays of power and dominance highlight the Western logic that justifies both colonization of Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals. As the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear writes, Western "sport hunting" and the habit of "hanging trophies on their walls [is] disrespectful to that body" and Indigenous peoples condemn such practices.[21]

In her book *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* that maps out the human-animal relations on the Turtle Island, the Anishinaabekwe environmental activist and writer Winona LaDuke reflects on the deep connection between the Plains tribes and the buffalo who are cherished, celebrated, and worshiped as "older brothers."[22] Buffalo played a central role in the lives of the Plains peoples not only for survival in times of scarcity but also for their spiritual and cultural significance. The late Oglala Lakota Birgil Kills Straight, who dedicated his life to buffalo restoration and protection, highlights the centrality of the buffalo in the lives of the Plains Indigenous peoples: "As long as the buffalo live, we can also live."[23] Western colonists in the nineteenth century quickly detected this link between the human and nonhuman animal inhabitants of the Prairies and started the war on the buffalo as a "Government measure to subjugate the *Indians*."[24] Their tactics unfortunately worked.

Over 50 million buffalo who were roaming the Prairies in the mid-nineteenth century were almost entirely exterminated by 1880.[25] As anticipated

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[19] Netz, *Barbed Wire*, 10.
[20] Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 102.
[21] Kim TallBear, "Being in Relation," in *Messy Eating: Conversations on Animals as Food*, ed. Samantha King et al. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2019), chap. 3, Kindle.
[22] Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 139.
[23] Quoted in LaDuke, *All Our Relations,* 139.
[24] Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 103, emphasis in original.
[25] Ibid. See also LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 142.

by the Western colonists, the end of the buffalo also marked the end of active resistance from the Plains Indigenous peoples who were deprived of their main subsistence and way of life. As the bison disappeared from the Prairies together with the Plains tribes who were dispossessed of their lands and relocated to reservations, Western ranchers colonized the newly seized territories with other colonized subjects, the cows. Famished Indigenous tribes were then forced to accept "beef" rations from the US government which increased the Indigenous peoples' compliance and co-dependence on the colonial state.[26]

The environmental costs of animal colonialism in the Great Plains and beyond have been devastating. With the annihilation of the buffalo, this largest ecosystem in North America was disrupted and irretrievably changed. While the buffalo cultivated the prairie and lived in symbiosis with all of the other living organisms who were thriving in this ecosystem, the cows on the other hand deplete the lands, and overgrazing causes biodiversity loss and desertification.[27] Industrialized monocultural agriculture brought further changes to the landscape that is now "teeming with pumps, irrigation systems, combines, and chemical additives. Much of the original ecosystem has been destroyed."[28] The prairies, once full of life, are now a stark reminder of the ills of colonization.

As ranching spread across the continent, more free-living animals became endangered through the destruction of their habitats and hunting. Ranchers waged war on all free-living animals who were seen as obstructions to their enterprise, especially those who preyed on domesticated animals after being deprived of their traditional subsistence. As wolves turned into number one targets, ranchers used kerosene to burn their pups alive in their dens while offering bounties for captured wolves who were then "publicly tortured and sometimes set on fire."[29] This ruthless violence used against wolves was driven into extremes by the unfounded belief that wolves "not only deserved death but deserved to be punished for living."[30] This rhetoric also justified violence against Indigenous peoples who were considered to be "more akin to wolves than to European peoples."[31]

As they were almost driven to extinction and their habitats were destroyed, wolves recently started interbreeding with coyotes and dogs to survive in the

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[26] Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 103.
[27] LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 145–147.
[28] Ibid., 146.
[29] Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 109.
[30] Brown, *The City Is More Than Human*, 38.
[31] Montford and Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality*, 141.

colonized landscapes. Coy wolves appeared as a new hybrid species better suited for life in the colonized urbanized world. As they often search for food in urban areas, coy wolves are considered "invasive species" and are thus becoming targets of animal colonialism in the twenty-first century. But as Ortiz-Robles explains, "invasive species typically become invasive through human agency, irreversibly altering the ecosystems into which they enter and often causing the displacement or extinction of native species."[32] As such, coy wolves embody the destructive colonialism and capitalism that keeps targeting both Indigenous peoples and animals.

Just as animal colonialism was pivotal in the seizure of the vast lands of the Midwest and far West, it was used as a tool of colonization on both the East Coast and the West Coast. On the East Coast, killing free-living animals for their skins and furs to be exported to Europe was the first form of animal colonialism in North America. Colonizers killed in mass "elk, rabbits, bears, squirrels, wolves, wild cats, minks, otters, beavers, geese, and numerous species of fish."[33] Beavers and otters were almost driven to extinction as the European wealthy used their bodies to show off their power and elevated status.[34] Fur trade was not limited to the East Coast as the Haisla/Heiltsuk writer Eden Robinson reminds her readers: Fur trade "wiped out sea otter populations from Alaska to California ... *Extirpation* is the dry, scientific word for the absolute destruction of a local population. A mini-extinction, if you will."[35] Fur trade came to symbolize the colonial relationship with the lands, nonhuman animals, and the local Indigenous peoples, all of whom have been viewed as mere resources or facilitators of further conquest and financial gain.

Fur trade provided immediate and sizable provisional revenue before colonizers transported enough domesticated animals from Europe to start making profit from animal agriculture and continue in the colonization of more lands. That animal agriculture was the main colonial objective as well as the pretext for the seizure of Indigenous lands is apparent from the words of the first governor of Virginia Francis Wyatt, who stated that "our first work is expulsion of the savages to gain the free range of the country for the increase of *cattle*, *swine*, etc."[36] The destruction of Indigenous croplands by domesticated animals provoked first

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[32] Mario Ortiz-Robles. *Literature and Animal Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 8.
[33] Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 73.
[34] Ibid., 71.
[35] Eden Robinson, *Return of the Trickster* (Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada, 2021), chap. 14, emphasis in original, Kindle.
[36] Quoted in Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 72, emphasis in original.

major conflicts between the colonizers and local populations whose resistance was "weakened by epidemics of smallpox and other diseases carried by the colonizers and their domesecrated animals."[37]

After the acquisition of Indigenous lands in the Midwest and expansion of commercial ranching, invasions of ranchers into northern Florida sparked conflicts with the local Seminole peoples over grazing rights and ultimately factored into the start of another in the series of Seminole Wars.[38] Today, the Seminoles are still resisting colonial oppression against both human and nonhuman inhabitants of the Everglades that are increasingly endangered by toxic pollution from the capitalist industries and modern way of life. Raccoons, alligators, and panthers belong to the most threatened nonhuman animals of the Everglades as their bodies contain large amounts of mercury.[39] The Independent Traditional Seminoles continue living their lives based on the cultural and philosophical values of their ancestors and foster "caring relationships to land, water, animals, plants, and other human beings."[40]

The lucrative ranching business also provided "much of the capital necessary for the development of large Southern plantations."[41] Enslaved people and nonhuman animals labored on these plantations, which generated large profits for the wealthy elites. As agriculture spread all across the continent, the natural landscapes went through rapid and drastic changes, with many essential resources soon being depleted.[42] It did not take long before the lands that were expropriated for agricultural use became overgrazed and insufficient for ranchers who started to trespass onto already small reservations. Once more, cows were used as instruments to seize even more land and confine Indigenous people to small enclosures.[43]

The exploitation of nonhuman animal bodies extended beyond the vast lands of the continent. In his meticulous book-length study *The City Is More Than Human: An Animal History of Seattle* (2016), historian Frederick L. Brown shows that animal colonialism also played an essential role in the construction of American cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Using Seattle as a case study, he visibilizes the often forgotten urban-environmental animal histories,

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37 Ibid., 90.
38 Ibid., 89.
39 LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 31.
40 Ibid., 43–44.
41 Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 77.
42 Ibid., 78.
43 Ibid., 108.

highlighting how the shifting categorization of animals has played a pivotal role in the settler-colonial urbanization. In other words, Brown argues that the socially constructed distinctions between the wild and domesticated, or pet and livestock have been "crucial to constructing human identities and urban places."[44] While the elevated status of domesticated animals provided an excuse for the dispossession of lands from the "wild" nonhuman and human animals in the nineteenth century, their denigrated status similarly justified their relocation from urban centers when their visible presence was no longer necessary and became undesirable in the new middle-class neighborhoods. As cows and pigs disappeared from the streets of American cities, nonhuman animals categorized as "pets" established their presence in urban areas, constructing new human identities.[45]

The expansion of ranching gave rise to many industries that profited from the domestication of animal bodies. From slaughterhouses and meat packinghouses to animal transport and storage providers, to textile industries and retailers, more and more settlers became dependent on the animal agriculture. As the growing businesses invested into improved and mechanized modes of production, domestication – or rather "domesecration" as Nibert proposes to call it –, "facilitated the growth of capitalism, which in turn advanced the even greater expansion of domesecration."[46] From its inception, slaughterhouse has been a space of horrendous violence perpetrated against both nonhuman animals and minorized people whose "interlinking oppressions" are epitomized here.[47]

Using the colonized bodies of domesticated animals who became involuntary tools and victims of colonization, the colonial powers eventually succeeded in pushing Indigenous peoples westward and onto enclosed reservations.[48] The American Indian Wars were also waged against nonhuman animals whose colonization has been interwoven with that of Indigenous people. In the words of Belcourt, "animal domestication, speciesism, and other modern human-animal interactions are only possible because of and through the historic and ongoing

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[44] Brown, *The City Is More Than Human*, 7.

[45] E.g. ibid., 22.

[46] Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 90–91. Nibert proposes to replace the word "domestication" with the term "domesecration" that better captures the process of human treatment of other animals whose "minds and bodies are desecrated to facilitate their exploitation: it can be said that they have been *domesecrated*. *Domesecration* is the systemic practice of violence in which social animals are enslaved and biologically manipulated, resulting in their objectification, subordination, and oppression." See ibid., 12.

[47] Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 116.

[48] Ibid., 85.

erasure of Indigenous bodies and the emptying of Indigenous lands for settler-colonial expansion."[49] Once pushed onto reservations, Indigenous peoples became dependent on the settler-colonial powers who began the process of assimilation, a racial project that was once again enabled by the ongoing colonization of nonhuman animals.

Milk Colonialism

To facilitate assimilation of displaced Indigenous populations, hunger was employed as a weapon to demand compliance. Once deprived of their subsistence by being denied access to their traditional lands and resources, Indigenous people "were forced onto reservations where 'beef' rations from the government provided them enough sustenance to prevent uprisings."[50] Ironically, Indigenous people now also relied on the doubly-exploited "domesticated" animals whose bodies were used to expropriate Indigenous people of their lands. Here, Belcourt's point about the settler-state's reliance on "the simultaneous exploitation or destruction of animal and Indigenous bodies" is very evident.[51]

In their paper "A Continuing Legacy: Institutional Racism, Hunger, and Nutritional Justice on the Klamath," Kari M. Norgaard et. al. explain how "the production of hunger has been the result of a series of 'racial projects'" that include genocide, dislocation and forced assimilation.[52] The paper focuses on the Karup people living in the Klamath River area (California) to showcase how the denied access to traditional lands, foodways, and management practices continues to generate poverty and hunger among Karuk people until today, causes environmental damage, loss of biodiversity, and drives cultural loss. The authors posit this production of hunger in Indigenous communities as "a present-day example of environmental [in]justice intimately interwoven with racialized environmental history."[53] Indeed, while the respectful traditional Indigenous management practices truly *cultivated* the land, Western agricultural farming depleted Karuk food sources, making them reliant on the Western commodity food.[54]

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[49] Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects," 3.
[50] Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 103.
[51] Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects," 3.
[52] Kari M. Norgaard et al., "A Continuing Legacy: Institutional Racism, Hunger, and Nutritional Justice on the Klamath," in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, eds. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 25, doi: 10.7551/mitpress/8922.003.0005.
[53] Norgaard et. al., "A Continuing Legacy," 38.
[54] Ibid., 37, emphasis added.

As a result, 90 percent of the Karuk tribal members live below the poverty line and more than 40 percent of residents in the Klamath River area rely on food assistance.[55]

Since the nineteenth century, "feeding those whom the government had deprived of food and sustenance became a major business" and it is estimated that today up to 50 million pounds of "beef" are distributed on reservations by federal agencies every year.[56] This business relationship that generates large profits for the animal industry is dependent on the "erasure of Indigeneity" and of Indigenous non-hierarchical ontologies of interconnectedness and respectful, sustainable traditional foodways. Billy Ray-Belcourt explains how capitalism depends on this simultaneous entangled colonization of Indigenous and animal bodies:

> Settler colonialism requires the erasure of indigeneity through genocide or neoliberal processes of assimilation wherein the colonized subject symbolically abandons indigeneity for settler ways of living. Here, the corporeal and/or discursive refusal of indigeneity by the settler state legitimates settler claims to territory and political authority. On the other hand, settler colonialism wants to produce animal bodies as commodities embedded in a global economy of reiterated deathliness. Said different, animal bodies that are inserted into capitalist spaces of commodity production are always already scheduled for death to be consumed as meat, clothing, scientific data, and so forth.[57]

By forcing Indigenous people to assimilate to the Western carnist diet, colonizers continued to simultaneously invade Indigenous and nonhuman animals' bodies.

In the nineteenth century, Indigenous people started to be pejoratively called "effeminate corn and rice eaters" in order to link their socially constructed weakness, emasculation, and inferiority to their predominantly plant-based diets.[58] With traditional Indigenous foodways dismissed as inferior and inadequate, settlers had a pretext for the expropriation of Indigenous lands that were to be converted into agricultural pastures for grazing cows who could provide meat and milk –"tools of domination to control territories, humans, animals, and

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[55] Ibid., 23.
[56] LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 142.
[57] Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects," 9.
[58] Vasile Stănescu, "'White Power Milk': Milk, Dietary Racism, and the 'Alt-Right'," *Animal Studies Journal* 7, no. 2 (2018): 105, https://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol7/iss2/7.

ecosystems."[59] Today, dairy and meat industries dominate the capitalist economy and hold a considerable political power. Ryan Gunderson calls attention to the staggering "oligopoly" dominating the US agribusiness. He asserts that over 40% of all agricultural production in the Midwest is in the hands of four large firms and four transnational corporations handle 70% of milk sales.[60]

The animal and food law scholar Mathilde Cohen refers to the global spread of the practice of dairying and the adoption of animal milk as a food staple in places where milk was never part of local foodways as milk colonialism.[61] The globalization of milk consumption is far from a natural phenomenon given that humans are the only animals who regularly drink milk of other mammals and as adults. Moreover, at least 65 percent of the world's population is lactose intolerant or experiences difficulties digesting lactose that is found in unprocessed milk.[62] Lactose tolerance is a genetic trait found mostly in white people with ancestry in Northern Europe who have a long history of using animals, including their milk, as a tool for survival in cold winter months.[63] People of color are, on the other hand, more likely to be lactose intolerant. Despite the fact that for the vast majority of humans milk consumption after infancy causes various health disparities,[64] dairy milk has been presented globally as a staple food necessary for human health. The Eurocentrism behind this milk imperialism is why postcolonial scholars consider milk a tool of colonial racial projects.

Nassim Nobari pointedly writes that "[t]he sense of necessity that has been ascribed to milk both stems from and propagates Eurocentrism."[65] While a natural mammalian attribute, lactose intolerance has been redefined by Eurocentrism

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[59] Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 268.

[60] Ryan Gunderson, "The Metabolic Rifts of Livestock Agribusiness," *Organization & Environment* 24, no. 4 (2011): 407, doi: 10.1177/1086026611424764.

[61] Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 269.

[62] Gambert, "Got Mylk?," 850; Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 269.

[63] Andrea Freeman, "Milk, a symbol of neo-Nazi hate," *The Conversation*, August 31, 2017, https://theconversation.com/milk-a-symbol-of-neo-nazi-hate-83292. See also Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 269.

[64] "Studies establish a strong link between dairy consumption, particularly of saturated fats found in cheese and high-fat milk, and serious medical conditions, including increased risks of heart disease, prostate cancer, pancreatic cancer, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, diabetes, and multiple sclerosis. Research has also connected the overconsumption of saturated fats in dairy products with obesity, which may lead to various types of cancer. Additionally, milk causes health problems in infants and children and often contains dangerous contaminants." See Freeman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Milk," 1258–1260.

[65] Nassim Nobari, "Milk, Dietary Racism and the Corporate Capture of the United Nations," Seed the Commons, September 20, 2021, https://seedthecommons.org/milk-dietary-racism-and-the-corporate-capture-of-the-united-nations.

as a pathology, an issue to fix. Diets without milk are therefore perceived as deviant and bodies that cannot digest lactose as deficient. The classic capitalist strategy of "create the problem, whether material or perceived, and then sell us the solution" has been successfully employed by the dairy industry.[66] The consequences are far-reaching for both human and nonhuman animals and the environment. Moreover, universally replacing other diverse sources of calcium with milk has further affected the biodiversity of many foodways and caused the loss of traditional food sources and diets as well as cultural values.[67]

In the early twentieth century racist rhetoric continued to be the backbone of milk globalization which in turn bolstered imperialism and white supremacy. Some scientists attributed the perceived racial superiority of northern Europeans to the consumption of dairy milk. An official pamphlet from the 1920s declared that "[t]he people [...] who are progressive in science and every activity of the human intellect are the people who have used liberal amounts of milk and its products."[68] A decade later, yet another book linked milk drinking to white superiority: "Those using much milk are the strongest physically and mentally, and the most enduring of the people of the world. Of all races, the Aryans seem to have been the heaviest drinkers of milk and the greatest users of butter and cheese, a fact that may in part account for the quick and high development of this division of human beings."[69] In the twenty-first century, milk is still constructed "as a metaphorical substance which can purify and reform American society as a whole" and continues to serve as a symbol of white supremacy.[70]

In his study "'White Power Milk': Milk, Dietary Racism, and the 'Alt Right'," Vasile Stănescu scrutinizes social media posts of white supremacist members of the so-called "alt right" and reveals how they use the milk trope to perpetuate racist notions of superiority.[71] Milk serves as symbol of white purity, wholesomeness and virility, a notion that was spread during the Trump presidency over alt-right social media posts under the viral hashtag #MilkTwitter.[72] Another related viral hashtag #SoyBoy is a modern-day adjustment of the colonial "effeminate corn and rice eaters" stereotype, connecting plant-based diet with emasculation, weakness, and racial inferiority. Alt-right figures such as Richard

[66] Nobari, "Dietary Racism and the Corporate Capture."
[67] Ibid.
[68] Quoted in Gambert, "Got Mylk?" 853–854.
[69] Quoted in Gambert, "Got Mylk?" 854.
[70] Cohen, quoted in Gambert, "Got Mylk?" 853.
[71] Stănescu, "White Power Milk."
[72] Gambert, "Got Mylk?" 860.

Spencer also added milk emojis to their accounts. Extreme right-wing website featured a racist poem celebrating lactose-tolerance and explicitly attributing lactose-intolerance to people of color who are dismissed as non-belonging to North America: "Roses are red, barack [*sic*] is half black, if you can't drink milk, you have to go back."[73] Perhaps most strikingly, on the day of Donald Trump's inauguration, white supremacists held what is now known as "the milk party" outside the Museum of the Moving Image in New York City. Lifestream camera captured alt-right members with cartons of milk chanting offensive racist, sexist, and homophobic rants. Milk was labeled "an ice-cold glass of pure racism" by one of the participants, consolidating its role in the racist propaganda.[74]

Before "milk turned into a central nationalist and imperialist tool," it had already been weaponized as a means to discriminate and exploit minoritized women.[75] Patriarchy mixed with speciesism created conditions in which both human and cow's milk was commodified for the benefit of the more powerful elites. Ecofeminist research and critical ecofeminist milk studies in particular shed light on the entangled oppression of human and nonhuman lactating bodies that have been colonized for their abilities to produce milk.

Critical Ecofeminist Milk Studies Perspectives

While the exploitation and torture of (predominantly) cows' bodies for their milk has been normalized in Western society, it is less widely known that minoritized women's bodies have also been exploited for their milk. Ecofeminist research has effectively connected the exploitation of women and nature, including land, water, and other animals.[76] Both nonhuman animals and women (especially women of color) are treated as a "servant to the dominant (not subordinate) population" and their bodies and labor is devalued in order to be exploited by the settler-colonial capitalist system.[77] The work that women and nonhuman female animals do "has largely remained invisible. Like farm animal

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[73] Quoted in Freeman, "Milk, a symbol of neo-Nazi hate."

[74] Gambert, "Got Mylk?" 859.

[75] Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 270.

[76] For ecofeminist theory, see Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, eds. *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Lisa Kemmener, ed., *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011); and Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams, eds., *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

[77] Greta Gaard, "Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach," *Organization & Environment* 14, no. 2 (June 2001): 161, doi: 10.1177/1086026601142002.

labor, historically, much of women's work has been embodied, repetitive, and spatially limited-housework, childcare (including breastfeeding), caring for the old, the sick, animals, and sexual nurturing."[78] This labor has been mostly unpaid, undervalued, and taken for granted, just like the labor of female animals.

Animal colonialism has always been facilitated by the latest technological innovations, be it barbed wire, railroads, or rifles. But today, technology keeps pushing animal colonialism into dystopian dimensions. Cow's milk can only be available everywhere and all year round with technological intervention that disrupts the natural cycle. Without intervening, cows would not produce milk "for more than part of a year (March to November): cows require nine months for gestation, along with ample pasture and feed in order to produce milk."[79] Greta Gaard details the life of cows who are involuntarily kept for labor in an industrial farming complex:

> Artificially inseminated at fifteen months of age, a dairy cow suffers an endless cycle of pregnancy and lactation, milked two to three times daily by electronic milking machines, conditions that cause mastitis and other infections that must be treated with antibiotics. Fed an energy-dense food, she may spend her whole life confined in a concrete stall or standing on a slatted metal floor. Her calves are taken from her within hours after birth, with females kept to replace their mothers in the dairy, and males sent to veal farms, where they are confined in crates so tight they cannot move, and fed an iron-deficient diet until they are slaughtered at fourteen to seventeen weeks of age.[80]

The animal geographer Kathryn Gillespie notes that while ecofeminists have largely focused on the more obvious commodification of female animals' bodies and their reproductive cycles, it is critical to remember that male animals' bodies are also routinely sexually assaulted by the meat and dairy industry as the violence perpetrated on both male and female animal bodies is mutually reinforcing.[81]

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[78] Mathilde Cohen, "Regulating Milk: Women and Cows in France," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 65, no. 3 (Sep. 2017): 507–508, doi: https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcl/avx015.

[79] Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 50.

[80] Ibid., 56–57.

[81] "Male animals are routinely culled at birth (e.g., male chicks in the egg industry), raised in confinement for meat (e.g., veal), and are used for their reproductive capabilities (e.g., semen extraction)." See Kathryn Gillespie, "Sexualized violence and the gendered commodification of the animal body in Pacific Northwest US dairy production," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 21, no. 10 (2014): 1325, doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2013.832665. For the workings

Throughout the colonial history, those who were denigrated to the status of animalized women have been subjected to some of the same abuse as nonhuman female animals. The colonial powers imitated some of the ways they employed on nonhuman female animals' bodies and applied them on minoritized women. For example, enslaved African American women were routinely used as wet nurses for their white slave owners' children, often being forced to stop breastfeeding their own babies. Controlling minoritized women's breast milk turned into a business in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the so-called "milk banks" supplied predominantly hospitals that later opened their own wet nurse wards in which they confined and vigilantly monitored severely underpaid and exploited minoritized women. Women were also contracted by wealthy families to breastfeed their children. Wet nurses were "subjects to series of laws defining and regulating their behavior, including severe penalties for giving babies breastmilk contaminated by bad diet, sexual intercourse, or other failings identified by law."[82]

When cow's milk turned into a commodity and infant formula became widely available, wet nursing lost popularity among Western mothers. The global spread of dairying and the ever-more common replacement of human breast milk with cow's milk affected both human and nonhuman mothers and their infants. As Cohen explains, "by taking milk from animals and feeding it humans, particularly human babies, dairying severs the nursing relationship twice: between lactating animal mothers and their offspring and between human mothers and their offspring."[83] Through the lens of critical ecofeminist milk studies, Greta Gaard writes extensively on the biopsychosocial bonds between mother and her baby and the consequences of their breaking.[84] Removing a calf from their mother results in a deep psychological distress of both. The resistance and the resulting lasting grief following this separation has been broadly documented by animal science scholars as well as animal rights activists.[85]

Commodification of cow's milk has especially affected Indigenous populations in colonized countries. Through dairy milk campaigns and food programs, large populations of "lactose-intolerant" adults have been forced to accept the

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of the animal industrial complex see Kathryn Gillespie's book *The Cow with Ear Tag #1389* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

82 Gambert, "Got Mylk?" 848.

83 Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 270.

84 Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 66.

85 Ibid., 65.

colonial "assimilationist food system" that has caused various health problems.[86] Not only adults but especially babies and children have been targeted by the dairy milk industry. Disrupting traditional Indigenous mothering practices was part of the assimilationist agenda. Indigenous women "were accused of lacking maternal instinct and breastfeeding too long, yet producing mediocre milk."[87] As ludicrous as this accusation sounds today, it was sold under the auspices of Western medicine and science and Indigenous mothers were pressured by the colonizers into believing that infant formula would benefit their babies. This had devastating impacts in Africa and in India where mothers lacked access to baby bottle sterilizing equipment, clean water, and suitable facilities, and where Nestle in particular "made corporate profits at the expense of widespread infant suffering, causing diarrhea, malnutrition and death."[88]

In North America (and beyond), the dairy industry still uses minoritized children for their own profit. More than any other food industry, "dairy has benefited from government support and subsidies."[89] Nassim Nobari, the co-founder of the food justice organization Seed the Commons is an ardent critic of school milk programs[90] that normalize milk consumption among children which "can change a food culture in one generation."[91] Children are taught from an early age to overlook other, healthier, sources of calcium which secures future profit for the dairy industry that raises new consumers through the school milk programs. Nobari's critique echoes arguments of other food justice scholars and activists who warn against the loss of diverse foodways as a result of the imposition of Western diets in schools, not to mention the many resulting health disparities.

Nobari criticizes public school milk initiatives for their "de facto imposition in children's daily lives" and for being fundamentally racist as they disproportionately affect minoritized children.[92] For example, in San Francisco, 85% of public school attendees are children of color, most of whom experience symptoms of lactose intolerance, and many of whom come from communities

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[86] Dylan Powell, "Veganism in the Occupied Territories: Anti-Colonialism and Animal Liberation," *Resistance Ecology* 1 (2013): 20.
[87] Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 270.
[88] Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 57.
[89] Nobari, "Dietary Racism and the Corporate Capture."
[90] E.g., The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Special Milk Program. See Jared Holt, "The Troubling Link Between Milk And Racism," *HuffPost*, December 6, 2018, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/milk-white-supremacy-racism_n_5bffad35e4b0864f4f6a3e28.
[91] Nobari, "Dietary Racism and the Corporate Capture."
[92] Ibid.

suffering from obesity and diabetes. While these children should eliminate dairy from their diets, they are served milk at every meal, a practice mandated by the federal and state school meal policies that prioritize "corporate profits over the health of the nation's low-income children."[93]

The U.S. Department of Agriculture that subsidizes these programs "has also partnered with fast-food companies to create products with higher amounts of cheese."[94] Yet again, this initiative disproportionately harms the health of minoritized people who, affected by food injustice, consume more fast food products in their diets as they often lack access to healthy alternatives. In North America, impoverished communities often reside in the so-called "food deserts," areas with no or limited access to grocery stores that sell affordable healthy products. Most residents of food deserts thus rely on fast food or canned products sold in small convenience or liquor stores as they cannot access or afford fresh foods.[95] Almost all Indigenous reservations are characterized as food deserts which is a continual legacy of colonial assimilationist practices targeting traditional Indigenous foodways and land and water management practices.[96] Food insecurity is one of the many manifestations of environmental racism.

Environmental Racism

Gaard articulates an ecofeminist definition of environmental racism as "a conceptual association between people of color and nature that marks their dual subordination."[97] This association goes hand in hand with "the assumption that energy can be continuously extracted from nature – from water, from poor people, from people of color, from women – without giving back anything of sustenance."[98] Said different, minoritized people are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation. Environmental racism materializes in many ways, predominantly in land, water, and air pollution in disadvantaged communities whose health and lives are impacted by the environmentally harmful

[93] Seed the Commons/Millahcayotl Association, official website, accessed July 29, 2022, http://seedthecommons.org/.
[94] Freeman, "Milk, a symbol of neo-Nazi hate."
[95] Alison H. Alkon and Julian Agyeman, eds., *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 4.
[96] Chantelle Richmond et al., "Supporting food security for Indigenous families through the restoration of Indigenous foodways," *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien* 65, no. 1 (2021): 104, doi: 10.1111/cag.12677.
[97] Gaard, "Women, Water, Energy," 161.
[98] Ibid., 167.

practices of the industrial-complex. Agricultural complexes are often located in close proximity to Indigenous reservations and poor communities. The meat and dairy industry is "the primary emitter of greenhouse gases" and pollution from the agribusiness's confined animal feedlot operations contaminate water sources and air that minoritized communities depend on.[99]

Nonhuman animals and Indigenous women are particularly affected by the toxicity generated by capitalist industries. Before their ban in 1979, the industrial chemicals known as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were widely used and penetrated the environment through air, water, and soil. Waste containing PCBs was often dumped in landfills close to reservations. One of the most affected has been the Akwesasne reservation in the Great Lakes region where about 25 percent of all industry in North America is located.[100] The Akwesasne rely on the St. Lawrence River that was polluted with PCBs and other toxic contaminants that are now often grouped under the label "POPs" (persistent organic pollutants).[101] Both human and nonhuman inhabitants of the Mohawk territory have been affected as the toxins penetrated their bodies. Studies have shown that PCBs belong to most lethal poisons of industrialized world for both human and nonhuman animals linking them to many disorders, for example shrinking testicles in alligators, cancer and reproductive disorders in laboratory animals, and liver, brain, nerve, and skin disorders, as well as breast cancer in humans.[102]

When alarming rates of POPs were discovered in the body fat and breast milk of Mohawk mothers, the Akwesasne midwife Katsi Cook launched the Mothers' Milk Project, an ecofeminist initiative aimed at protecting women through the safeguard of the environment. Cook famously stated that "the fact is that women are the first environment," an environment that has been polluted, jeopardizing the lives of both the mothers and their unborn babies.[103] Around the same time, scientists also discovered that beluga whales of the St. Lawrence

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99 Eric Holt-Giménez, "Food Security, Food Justice, or Food Sovereignty? Crises, Food Movements, and Regime Change," in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, ed. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 318, doi: 10.7551/mitpress/8922.003.0020. Ibid.

100 LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 15.

101 "Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are chemicals that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate through the food web, and pose a risk of causing adverse effects to human health and the environment. This group of priority pollutants consists of pesticides (such as DDT), industrial chemicals (such as polychlorinated biphenyls, PCBs) and unintentional by-products of industrial processes (such as dioxins and furans)." See European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/international_conventions/index_en.htm

102 LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 15–16.

103 Quoted in Ibid., 19.

River were severely poisoned by the POPs, causing rare types of cancer and significantly lowering their reproductive rate and increasing mortality rate.[104] These findings yet again show that colonialism is an interspecies issue.

In an attempt to collect samples from a pure, toxin-free environment for comparison with the high rates of POPs in the Great Lakes region, scientists made a shocking discovery when they found an even higher level of contaminants in the human and nonhuman inhabitants of the Arctic. This breakthrough discovery was shocking because of the non-existence of polluting industries and no pesticide use in the North. Because of their chemical characteristics, the scientists soon found out, POPs flourish in colder climates and the Arctic and the bodies of its human and nonhuman inhabitants thus serve as storage rooms for POPs. Research has found "a cocktail of many chemicals" in the bodies of marine mammals and the Inuit who were exposed to more than two hundred different toxins.[105] Vandana Shiva's assertion that through modern agricultural techniques "life itself is being colonized" became painfully relevant for the Arctic inhabitants.[106]

Sheila Watt-Cloutier, the Inuk writer and activist who has dedicated her life to advocacy for the Inuit, has adopted an ecofeminist approach by emphasizing the effect environmental degradation has had on the Inuit women and their families. As a result of high rates of toxins in their bodies, Inuit adults are "at risk for diseases such as cancer, especially breast cancer, and osteoporosis."[107] The reproductive system of both the Inuit and the nonhuman Arctic animals was impacted. This is especially concerning as many animals in the Arctic, for example polar bears, are already at risk of extinction.[108] Through bio-accumulation of toxic contaminants in marine mammals who form the core of the Inuit diet, the breast milk of Inuit mothers became the most contaminated in the world, putting their infants at a higher risk of developing neurological disorders, compromising their immune system, and impairing their motor and cognitive abilities.[109] Inuit mothers were thus externally pressured to give up breastfeeding and use milk formula instead, yet again generating profit for the corporate dairy industry. Moreover, living in a food desert and therefore lacking access to fresh

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104 Ibid., 19.

105 Sheila Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman's Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic, and the Whole Planet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 133–135.

106 Shiva, *Biopiracy,* ch. 2.

107 Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold*, 136.

108 LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 16.

109 Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold*, 135, 143.

healthy foods, the Inuit started consuming more unhealthy junk food which has caused further health problems.[110]

The Arctic and the bodies of its human and nonhuman inhabitants represent the last frontiers that are being colonized under global neoliberalism. The slow but severe intoxication of the Inuit people that went largely unnoticed for decades is an example of what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence." He defines it as a "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[111] As such, most of the violence perpetrated against nonhuman and human minorized bodies in "postcolonial" era that this article has covered is an example of slow violence. Lacking the sensational aspect of immediate violence, slow violence remains underrepresented in media, and the corporate powers who profit on the relative invisibility of slow violence effectively conceal it by hiding behind campaigns such as the school milk program. Nevertheless, Nixon notes that "if the neoliberal era has intensified assaults on resources, it has also intensified resistance."[112] The numerous ecofeminist justice movements and initiatives all across the continent suggest that Nixon's observation may be more than just an optimistic wish.

Contextual Indigenous Veganism

In his horror film *Get Out* (2017) that unmasks hidden racism of a white family, Jordan Peele shows one of the white supremacist characters, Rose, as she "separates her colored cereal from her white milk, which is significant, especially since milk has become the staple beverage of the alt-right."[113] Similarly, in his war film *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), Quentin Tarantino attributes milk to the Nazi character Hans Landa who refuses wine and instead requests a glass of milk. Before he leaves, he asks for another glass, leaving no room for doubt about the milk's racist symbolism. These are just two examples of popular movies where milk is used as an emblem of white supremacy. Such cultural interventions counter the widespread notion of milk as a healthy and pure food staple divorced from politics by linking its consumption to vile characters with racist ideology.

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[110] Ibid., 144.

[111] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

[112] Ibid., 4.

[113] Aph Ko, *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out* (NYC: Lantern Books, 2019), chap. 2.

The idea of cow's milk as central to human health is also contested in a short striking video called "¿Leche? No gracias" ("Milk? No, thank you") produced by a Mexican animal rights group Liberum. The video was released in Mexico as part of a campaign that aims to inform the public about the violence generated by the dairy industry against both human and nonhuman animals as well as the environment.[114] The video features Mexican celebrities speaking about the harmful effects of dairy consumption, making the video go viral. The dairy industry's violence was reaffirmed by the repeated death threats that the members of the Liberum group received upon the video release.[115] Meanwhile, in the United States, the grassroots organization Seed the Commons started a similar food justice campaign called "get milk ... out of school meals" that aims to bring meal reform to schools by countering the popular myth about dairy milk as a necessary component of children's diet.[116] Both of these initiatives are examples of counternarratives that disrupt the widespread image of cow's milk as a universally healthy drink. Such discursive resistance is slowly translating into embodied changes.

Enough evidence exists suggesting that consumers "experience feelings of guilt, shame, and disgust when they think (as seldom as possible) about the industrial processes by which domestic animals are rendered into products and about how those products come to market."[117] With increased public awareness comes a shift in the consumers' choices as more and more people abstain from eating animal products and opt for a plant-based diet and vegan lifestyle. This directly impacts the capitalist market as has been most recently apparent in the United Kingdom where the major supermarket Sainsbury's closed all meat and fish counters in 2020 due to reduced demand that dropped significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.[118] Arguably, the pandemic has driven people's shift to a more plant-based diet not only due to its health benefits but also due to the ethical implications of meat-eating that the pandemic unmasked as outbreaks in

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[114] "¿Leche? ¡No Gracias!," YouTube video, posted by Liberum, October 14, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o6zlCETc7U.

[115] I was personally present in Monterrey, Mexico, when the Liberum members received some of these calls.

[116] Seed the Commons/Millahcayotl Association.

[117] Richard Bulliet, *Hunters, Herders and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3.

[118] Maria Chiorando, "Sainsbury's To Shut All Meat And Fish Counters Amid COVID: 2 Years After Admitting 'Decline In Meat Sales'," *Plant Based News*, November 5, 2020, https://plantbasednews.org/lifestyle/food/meat-and-fish-counters-shut-sainsburys/?.

slaughterhouses and meat processing plants have been reported all around the world.[119]

As dairy and meat industries form a considerable part of the capitalist economy, corporate resistance to plant-based diet has been comparable to resistance from tobacco industry in the twentieth century. Be it recent lawsuits against the use of the words "milk" or "burger" in vegan products[120] or actual threats that prominent animal right-s advocates receive, countless examples show that the dairy industry feels threatened by the growing numbers of consumers choosing plant-based alternatives. The meat industry magnate Tyson Foods has reacted to this shift first by investing large amounts to the vegan business Beyond Meat and recently by creating his own vegan brand. Similar steps have been taken by other large companies such as the Canadian Maple Leaf Foods, Nestle, Danone, General Mills and Elmhurst, to name just a few.[121]

But if veganism is to remain an effective means of resistance to capitalism, vegan practitioners will have to cut their support of companies that simultaneously profit from vegan consumers and meat and dairy industry. All around the world, groups of people are organizing and starting food projects that are local and operate outside or on the fringe of the capitalist food system. The practice of guerrilla gardening that uses public spaces to grow vegetables shows how a simple and peaceful act like gardening can spark an effective social revolution. By adopting this practice, people make a powerful political statement as they become self-sufficient and no longer dependent on the capitalist food system that causes and perpetuates climate change, environmental degradation and social inequality.[122] Moreover, guerrilla gardens decolonize both the public space and culture and activist art pieces accompanying these projects deconstruct the colonial cultural legacy and teach about interdependence rather than dominion.

Still, despite its apparent boom in the recent decades, "veganism remains a marginalized diet in Western countries, and is thus far from a vehicle of Western

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[119] Bibi van der Zee, Tom Levitt, and Ella McSweeney, "'Chaotic and crazy': meat plants around the world struggle with virus outbreaks," *The Guardian*, May 11, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/11/chaotic-and-crazy-meat-plants-around-the-world-struggle-with-virus-outbreaks.

[120] See "EU rejects 'veggie burger' ban but prohibits dairy-like names for vegan products," FoodIngredientsFirst, October 26, 2000, https://www.foodingredientsfirst.com/news/eu-rejects-veggie-burger-ban-but-prohibits-dairy-like-names-for-vegan-products.html.

[121] Emmanuel Petter, "How rising veganism is changing the food market," *Global Finance*, March 12, 2019, https://theboar.org/2019/03/rising-veganism-changing-food-market.

[122] Alex Pietrowski, "Propaganda Gardening – The Evolution of Revolution," Activist Post, March 13, 2013, www.activistpost.com/2013/03/propaganda-gardening-evolutionof.html.

imperialism."[123] On the contrary, as this article has shown, Indigenous plant-based foodways have been diminished and carnist diet was imposed on cultures that had previously consumed no or very little meat. Today, Indigenous vegans, Black vegans, and other vegans of color are "challenging the paradoxical stereotype of veganism as elite and white."[124] For example, in their book *Decolonize Your Diet: Mexican-American Plant-Based Recipes for Health and Healing*, Luz Calvo and Catrióna Rueda Esquibel provide an extensive collection of traditional plant-based recipes with the intention to rediscover their roots. The overarching argument of their work is that Mexicans and Indigenous people in general must rediscover and reappropriate their traditional plant-based diets in order to reclaim both their physical and spiritual health.[125]

Claudia Serrato, possibly the most well-known Latinx vegan activist and scholar, also posits that Europeans colonized not only Indigenous lands but also their bodies through the imposition of carnist diets heavy in processed food and dairy. To rediscover traditional plant-based foodways, Jocelyn Ramirez founded Todo Verde in Los Angeles, that offers traditional Mexican vegan meals as well as cooking classes, consultations, and other related activities that contribute to the spread of the green food revolution.[126] The founder of another plant-based restaurant called Liberation Cuisine that follows the same principles as Todo Verde, Gabriela Álvarez, says that one of the main goals of her food business is to educate fellow Latinx, African-Americans and Indigenous people about food decolonization, i.e. reducing or completely abandoning beef and dairy that were forced upon them by European colonizers.[127]

All Calvo, Esquibel, Ramirez, and Serrano decided to take action when either themselves or their close relatives fell ill largely as a consequence of a poor diet. Serrato calls it "nutricide" – "genocide by means of the denial of culturally appropriate nutrition."[128] Hence, in the United States, a whole movement called "decolonizing foodways" has gained ground among Latinx who want to share knowledge about healthy lifestyle and traditional diets. On top of reclaiming

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123 Montford and Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality*, 149.

124 Ibid., 7.

125 Luz Calvo and Catriona Rueda Esquibel, *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican-American Recipes for Health and Healing* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016).

126 Todo Verde. *Todo Verde*, accessed July 29, 2022, https://todoverde.org/pages/about.

127 "Liberation Cuisine," Gabriela Alvarez Martinez, accessed July 29, 2022, https://www.gabriela-alvarez-martinez.com/liberation-cuisine.

128 Claudia Serrato et al., "Decolonizing The Diet, Towards an Indigenous Veganism ... Unlearning to Relearn," *Comparative History of Ideas* 480, University of Washington, https://warzonedistro.noblogs.org/files/2017/09/Decolonizing-The-DietT-owards-an-Indigenous-Veganism.pdf.

their health, food decolonization involves re-connection with one's ancestors and ancestral ways and entails therefore spiritual and cultural awakening as well as forming of a community and general empowerment.

In order to acknowledge that not everyone can afford to follow a strictly vegan diet, ecofeminists speak of "contextual moral veganism" that centers veganism as the ethical, moral paradigm, but also recognizes the "contextual exigencies that impede one's ability to live without directly killing or using others."[129] Montford and Taylor propose a "contextual vegan food ontology" that highlights the need to foster a distinction between what humans perceive as food and what we see as edible, arguing that veganism becomes natural if we do not conceive of animals as food "but as equal subjects with their own interests who happen (like humans) to be edible."[130] In her paper "Veganism and Mi'kmaq Legends," the Mi'kmaq ecofeminist scholar Margaret Robinson recalls times when Indigenous people had to shift their perception of nonhuman animals and start viewing them as objects rather than siblings in order to participate in the colonial speciesist practices of fur trade or factory farming.[131] Even though hunting and fishing were once important elements of the Mi'kmaq society, Robinson contends that today "meat, as a symbol of patriarchy shared with colonizing forces, arguably binds us with white colonial culture to a greater degree than practices such as veganism."[132]

The Cherokee scholar and writer Daniel Heath Justice also emphasizes the changed context:

> Historically (and, for many rural and Northern communities, continuing today), meat consumption was dependent upon immediacy of relationship – hunters or farmers or ranchers lived among and slew the animals themselves, so there was an intimacy in both the living and the dying. How do these relations change when so many of us support factory farming, supermarkets, and meat that's so disassociated from the horrific conditions of the animal's short life?[133]

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[129] Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, eds., *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 358.
[130] Montford and Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality*, 130.
[131] Margaret Robinson, "Veganism and Mi'kmaq Legends," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 33, no. 1 (2013): 191.
[132] Robinson, "Veganism and Mi'kmaq Legends," 191.
[133] Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 99–100.

Justice seems to suggest that meat consumption is not justifiable in the capitalist era of distanced suffering. The Muscogee Creek-Cherokee novelist, literary scholar, and musician Craig Womack echoes Justice when he says that "the system that creates the food maximizes disrespect of animals instead of moderating it" and is therefore in direct contrast to Indigenous ontologies of interconnectedness and mutual respect.[134]

In his article "There Is No Respectful Way to Kill an Animal," Womack argues against traditional hunting and the consumption of nonhuman animals in contexts where it is no longer necessary. He redefines vegetarianism as a new form of ceremony, "a good one, a meaningful deviation from tradition, as good ceremonies so often are."[135] Womack stresses the importance of reinventing traditions to better suit contemporary circumstances and of thinking critically about their meaning. Furthermore, he refuses to perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes of Indigenous men as hunters and asks, "Is hunting the only thing that can make a person Indian?"[136] In the same light, Margaret Robinson proposes Indigenous veganism as a new tradition that is reflective of the natural fluidity and adaptability of Indigenous cultures to "changing social and environmental circumstances."[137] Veganism gives Indigenous people the chance to "recall our connection with other animals, our shared connection to the Creator, and prefigure a time when we can live in harmony with the animals."[138] As such, Indigenous veganism can serve as a form of decolonial resistance against the continual colonization of both nonhuman animals and Indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

The article focused on the colonial experience of nonhuman animals and Indigenous populations in North America. It compiled relevant and current works from the fields of postcolonialism, ecofeminism, and critical animal studies in order to articulate a criticism of the mainstream view of (not only) nonhuman animal exploitation and to provide an intervention into the current discourse that overlooks other-than-human experience. Namely, the text dealt with the topic of displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal agriculture, it

134 Craig Womack, "There Is No Respectful Way to Kill an Animal," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 17, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/536871.
135 Ibid.," 27.
136 Ibid.," 25–26.
137 Robinson, "Veganism and Mi'kmaq Legends," 194.
138 Ibid., 194.

focused on the entangled oppression of Indigenous women's and nonhuman animals' bodies, it described the introduction of animal products as tools of racial and gender discrimination and it also discussed environmental racism. The last part of the article suggested various ways of how to resist power inequalities stemming from colonialism and domestication of nonhuman animals and offered various more sustainable ways of how to challenge these current structures such as guerrilla gardening or rediscovery of traditional plant-based diets.

Animal colonialism in North America has been integral to the colonial expansionist project. Displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal agriculture also caused mass extinction of many free-living animals as well as environmental degradation. Postcolonial scholarship has only recently started to acknowledge the pivotal, albeit involuntary and tragic, role of other animals in the colonial project. To theorize and ultimately address the nonhuman colonial experience, Billy-Ray Belcourt proposes decolonial animal ethic that recognizes other animals as colonized subjects and thus includes them in decolonial thought. To disrupt anthropocentric understanding of other animals, Belcourt suggests "re-centering of animality through Indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies" that re-imagine human-animal kinships and cast other animals into sacred roles.[139] Daniel Heath Justice makes a similar point in his book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter,* highlighting the ability of art and literature to spark curiosity and evoke "the empathy required for healthy, respectful, and sustainable relationships with a whole host of beings and peoples."[140]

In the settler-colonial capitalist societies that treat other animals as colonized objects and mere commodities for human profit, cultural and embodied interventions that reshape human-animal relationships are crucial to decolonization. Return to pre-colonial foodways that did not involve large-scale human and animal exploitation and milk colonialism is also essential to addressing environmental destruction. As Indigenous peoples and people of color across Turtle Island are adopting plant-based diets, practice guerrilla gardening, and participate in food justice projects, both Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals are slowly being decolonized.

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[139] Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects," 8.
[140] Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 77.