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Before They Were Food:
Wasting and Weaponizing Animals in Yoga Gastropolitics

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INTRODUCTION

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Without having repeatedly passed and reflected on this scene from last year's Denver conference, I may not be presenting here today. The gigantic blue bear peering into the Colorado Convention Center[1] aptly captures the dialogical and political predicament—the absence by means of exclusion—of animal-as-persons in academia, yoga and yoga studies, and numerous other areas.

Responding to this state of affairs, my paper centers neither on consumables nor human consumers, but animal victims *before* they were food, before they've been eliminated—*wasted*,

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as the slang goes. My three main points are: 1. Animals command strong ethical consideration for their own sake, under both Patañjalian ethics[2] and any reasonable 'secular' moral theory;[3] 2. Animals should be recognized as victims deserving of attention and care within Left-oriented, abuse-focused movements in contemporary yoga;[4] 3. Animals should be recognized as subaltern populations.

These three points—and my paper as a whole—are *critical*, critical in the manner Subaltern Studies scholar Gyanendra Pandey (2005) insists on an *actual* "dialogue between the 'academic' and the 'political,'" and how Critical Animal Studies scholar Claire Jean Kim (2018)

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[1] Sculpture titled "I See What You Mean," by Lawrence Argent 2005.
[2] Framarin 2014; Dickstein 2017.
[3] Singer 1975; Regan 1983; Adams 1990; Francione 1996; Dunayer 2001; Palmer 2010; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013; Gruen 2011; Korsgaard 2018.
[4] Rain 2018; Remski 2019; Yoga Alliance 2019.

stresses that "*critical* animal studies scholars *aim to end animal exploitation* and suffering and have little patience for work that *just happens to be about animals*."

ANIMALS AND PATAÑJALI

Unfortunately (as is possibly happening this very moment), voiced concerns for *living* animals are frequently met with the latter's immediate psychological execution and commodification. Gastrosemantics[5] habitually slides into *dead* substance-talk, debating products rather than pre-meatified, milkified, or skinified persons; as such animals vanish into what Carol Adams has aptly labeled "absent referents" (1990). Nonhuman biographies are denied. Ahistorical corpses and secretions become mere commodities, swappable with corn or cotton.

In a 2017 article I argued that the consumption[6] of animal-derived substances is *logically* prohibited by Patañjalian proscriptions against harming (*ahiṃsā*[7]) and also theft (*asteya*). I presented a dogmatic argument, assuming strict obedience to Patañjali, the dominant and profitably marketed ethical compass for Western contemporary yoga.[8] I omitted any explanation of the philosophical basis of *ahiṃsā*, as dogma hardly requires justification. But I had hoped, and

[5] Holdrege 2018.
[6] Consumption in the sense of "*consumer* behaviors, i.e. behaviors that engage markets" (McMullen and Halteman 2018).
[7] On the etymology of the word itself: "Some scholars have misinterpreted *ahiṃsā* as 'the wish not to kill' or 'the absence of the wish to kill', i.e. they take it as the negation of a desiderative derived from the root *han* 'to kill'. This is obviously untenable since the real desiderative of that root is *jighāṁsati* and a corresponding adjective **hiṁsu* (or **ahiṁsu*) is missing. The verb originally was *hinasti* rather than *hiṁsati*. Moreover ahiṁsā in pre-Upaniṣadic texts means 'security, safeness', which cannot be connected with the desiderative. For the formation *(a)-hiṁs-ā* see Wackernagel-Debrunner II, 2 1954: 246; 248." (Bodewitz 1999: 17-18)
[8] For example, Singleton 2008; White 2014.

still do, that practitioners would not heed dogma, and instead reflect on the basis of the ethic and their own commitment to it.[9]

Filling this explanatory void, Christopher Framarin (2014) has provided the most cogent, and sorely overlooked, analysis of the ethical basis of non-harming in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*. Framarin persuasively concludes that animals have direct moral standing, which means that humans must consider animals *for their own sake* when deciding what to do. Direct moral standing derives from sentience, lifespan, and other morally relevant attributes. Framarin rebuts all-too-common instrumentalist interpretations of non-harming that attempt to ground the proscription *exclusively* in the effects—specifically the purificatory and hence salvific effects—for the yogin.[10] Most significantly, Framarin demands that these interpretations provide some explanation for *why* the abstention from harming is meritorious or purificatory (and harming demeritorious or polluting), other than circularly claiming that it is so because it leads to *mokṣa*.[11] Ultimately the most—if not sole—plausible interpretation is also the most simple: harming, here referring to the causing of physical or mental pain (*duḥkha*),[12] is demeritorious *because pain itself has intrinsic disvalue*. In other words, pain is at least *partially* bad due to its own nature.[13] The text also admits the indisputable capacity of nonhuman animals to experience pain, as well as their possession of other relevant attributes.

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[9] One could supplement this reflection with additional consideration of the legal and medical literature that generally proscribe the consumption of flesh outside of sacrificial and emergency situations.
[10] For a list of authors who assert this interpretation, see Framarin 2014: 22.
[11] It is circular since the answer to "Why does it lead to *mokṣa*?" is "Because it is meritorious."
[12] See Framarin 2019 (and also 2014) for detailed discussions of pain.
[13] The *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* admits the intrinsic disvalue of pain in one instance by causally connecting merit with pleasure and demerit with pain. Mind that the text does not argue—and need not argue—that pleasure or pain in themselves are reliable means to *mokṣa* in order to establish their intrinsic value and disvalue, respectively; *hetuḥ dharmāt sukham adharmād duḥkham* | "Pleasure (*sukham*) [arises] due to having right action (*dharmāt*) as its cause. Pain (*dukham*) [arises] due to having wrong action (*adharmād*) [as its cause]" (YBh 4.11, in Framarin 2014: 134).

With an emphasis on traits rather than taxons, the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* is remarkably *non-speciesist*, evaluating entities based on morally relevant attributes rather than species categorization alone.[14] Any entity that can feel pain, no matter their species categorization (by humans, let us not forget), commands a *prima facie* obligation of non-harming from those entities who are subject to moral obligations. These entities are those who can understand and perform *dharma*, which 'traditionally' implies most, if not all, human beings.[15] As a result,

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quoting Framarin: "Human *agents* have direct, *prima facie* moral obligations to avoid acting in ways that cause animals [or plants] *pain*, death, or a decrease in other relevant attributes and abilities. To act in accord with *ahimsā* is to act in accord with these moral obligations. Hence to act in accord with *ahimsā* is to act meritoriously, and hence accrue merit, which in turn is *a means* to *mokṣa*" (84).

But a *prima facie* reason is not an *ultima facie*, or all things considered, reason not to cause harm. Perhaps one's contribution to the mass infliction of pain and death upon trillions of nonhuman animals—as is the case with any animal-consuming yoga gastropolitics—is justified by means of an *ultima facie* reason trumping the *prima facie* obligation *not* to harm these animals. But given the scale,[16] brutality, non-necessity, and avoidability of most "food animal" harming, particularly in industrialized, Modern Postural Yoga-practicing countries, it is near impossible to conceive of what this *ultima facie* reason could be.[17]

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[14] For present purposes, Oscar Horta's definition for *speciesism* will suffice: "speciesism is the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to one or more particular species" (5). Also see Rorty 1970; Singer 1975.

[15] "The food, sleep, fear, and sex of human beings is the same as with animals. Dharma alone is the superior attribute (*adhiko' viśeṣo*) [of human beings]. Without dharma, [the human being] is the same as animals." (*Hitopadeśa* 25, in Framarin 2014: 160). This also calls to mind the assertion that humans are unique in being the only sacrificable animals (*paśus*) who can also perform sacrifices.

[16] For example, 99% of all 'food animals' in the United States live and die on factory farms (Reese 2017).

[17] Many defenses assume a categorical prioritization of humans' interests, whereby *any* human's interest trumps *any* nonhuman's interest owing solely to the former's species categorization as human. But as

THE INDIVIDUAL IN CONTEMPORARY YOGA

I now highlight two diet- and animal-relevant phenomena within contemporary yoga that I believe sustain the illusion of an *ultima facie* reason: First is the secular sacralization of the human body and its imagined optimization—through self-defined self-care—as the highest value. Second, and more importantly, is the labelling of all behavioral impositions, even those with solid ethical bases, as vestiges or reproductions of a domineering yoga pedagogy.

Taken alone, the first phenomenon could hastily be reduced to mere egoism.[18] But when tied to the second, this new unapologetic emphasis on the "self-improvement and empowerment of the individual" (Heyman 2019) reveals as both result and signifier of a wave of community critique against patriarchal, ableist, racist, and classist dynamics in premodern and modern yoga systems. The wave is Leftist in orientation, which, in the words of Steven Lukes, refers to "a tradition and a project…which puts in question sacred principles of social order, contests unjustifiable but remediable inequalities of status, rights, powers and conditions, and seeks to eliminate them through political action" (2003: 611). The anti-dogma movement within contemporary yoga traditions likewise "puts in question sacred principles," from metaphysics to ethics to guru-centrism.

The new yoga practitioner perceives external imperatives, including prohibitions on animal substances, as oppressively 'traditional,' whether Brahmanical or ascetic or both; they represent patriarchal, ableist controls over the practitioner's body, infringing upon assumedly

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already intimated, the PYŚ does not uphold such an absolutist anthropocentrism (see Rawls 1971 for *lexical prioritism*), and nor does any reasonable 'secular' moral theory.

[18] "As Bernard announced in the lone issue of his journal, 'The trained imagination no longer worships before the shrines of churches, pagodas and mosques or there would be blaspheming the greatest, grandest and most sublime temple in the universe, the miracle of miracles, the human body.'" (Albanese 2007: 363). Also see Alter 2004; DeMichelis 2005; Singleton 2008; Jain 2015.

critique-immune regimens of self-care.[19] Yoga's alleged progressive gastropolitics therefore resists, if not also attacks, virtually all restrictions on diet and consumption as relics of an archaic pedagogy that fails to respect sovereignty, autonomy, and inclusivity.

But if the general thrust of the critique against "orthodox" yoga pedagogy is valid (which I believe it is), then why have anti-abuse, and race and ability inclusivity campaigns,[20] in contemporary yoga ignored if not rejected the *multi-species* implications of their calls for justice? Ignored are the trillions of nonhuman animals who, *annually*, are themselves the victims of the same colossal systems and ideologies of oppression. Tragically (and I use that in the most literal sense of the term), animals are also regularly *expected* and forced to bear the costs of reparations paid to oppressed human populations.[21] Such is the case in a fully hands-off, 'progressive' yoga gastropolitics that authorizes animal slaughter on the "altar" (Kim) of anthropocentric restorative justice. But what happens once we recognize that animals *too* are deserving of sovereignty, autonomy, and inclusion in a liberationist politics? As Kim rightly insists: "Unjust disadvantage in one sphere does not earn unjust advantage in another. Having endured racism and colonialism, subjects deserve justice and reparations from their oppressors, but they do not therefore deserve to dominate women, animals, and nature" (196). True

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[19] The assumed invulnerability of self-care regimens to social oversight can also be critiqued as an internalization of capitalist consumer identity formation. See Dickstein et al. (forthcoming) and Wadiwel 2018.

[20] Here I think of #metoo, "Decolonizing Yoga," and Accessible Yoga, among others.

[21] As but one example, in *Dangerous Crossings* (2015), Claire Jean Kim condemns the ongoing biological and cultural genocide inflicted upon the indigenous human populations of the Americas.[21] Yet on the topic of indigenous peoples resuming *non-subsistence* whaling practices, she pointedly asks: "What about the perspective(s) of the grays themselves?," for "[w]hy should whales be sacrificed on the altar of Makah sovereignty and anticolonialism?" (244).

progressivism in contemporary yoga *must* look beyond the mythical species barrier and confess the serious implications of a total liberationist stance for its own consumption patterns.[22]

A QUICK NOTE ON SUBALTERNITY

Once we accept the direct moral standing and *institutionalized* oppression of animals based simply on their not being human, their recognition as *subalterns* is hardly controversial. Nathanial Roberts (2016) notes that "the poor" in the slums of Chennai understand "being human" to "also to be, oneself, worthy of being cared for by others." So why should this "worthiness of care" (which is nothing but direct moral standing) not also apply to sentient and vulnerable nonhumans? Gayatri Spivak (1985) asserts that "the subaltern is that which has been denied a voice or a 'subject-position' in history since it does not have a consciousness comprehensible within traditional patriarchy." How does this not also apply to a numbered, incarcerated, muzzled, and shackled animal? Ranajit Guha (1982) describes *subaltern* as "the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite.'" Are not animals in India (and elsewhere)—so many roaming and dying in the streets, if not intentionally slaughtered—anything but "the elite?" Is it not time for what Yamini Narayanan calls a "subaltern animism," that, akin to work concerning subaltern humans, is not simply *about* them but also works for their actual liberation?[23]

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[22] But we must not be fooled into thinking that this necessarily isolates and demonizes "meat" production or consumption as the sole culprit. One reminder is Indian beef ban case—with its not infrequent international liberal support—which illustrates this fallacy well. There is no Indian "beef industry" proper, for bovine flesh is the but the by-product of a valorized and increasingly commercialized dairy industry. In this case a recognition of both subaltern bovine and subaltern human sovereignty would target and denounce the dairy industry in India, the true culprit, and not weaponize its mere by-products as means to further discriminate and brutalize vulnerable human populations.

[23] "'Subaltern animism' refers to the formulation of new multispecies-inclusive geographies or planning theories that recognise the agency and personhood of nonhumans, as well as the ways in which they claim and occupy space." (Narayanan 2017: 488); "'Subaltern animism' thus seeks to redraw relational

SUMMARY

For years, feminist,[24] indigenous,[25] postcolonial,[26] black,[27] and disability[28] scholars have condemned the erasure of animal victimhood and the gastropoliticial weaponization of their enslaved and slain bodies. As 'food machines,' animals are biologically, psychologically, and terminologically *processed* into social objects and political weapons. In a forthcoming article (2020), my colleagues and I argue that a consumer boycott of animal substances (i.e. veganism, as we define it), far from being a strategy of neoliberalism, constitutes a core element of a species-inclusive Left praxis. Yet in its increasingly Leftist present, the yoga world still avoids facing and defending the animals-as-food issue.

Edwin Bryant, who is hardly a vocal animal liberation activist, has even remarked: "It is my opinion (or perhaps hope), actually, that yoga students who have a serious relationship with yoga philosophy could actually be at the forefront of the animal rights movement" (2019). My own argument here has been much less ambitious. I have not made a case for *active* animal liberation work in contemporary yoga—in the academy or the shala—but simply the confession and then abstention from participation in unnecessary and avoidable violence against nonhuman sentient beings. The abstention is backed by Patañjalian ethics, secular ethics, an abuse-focused contemporary yoga culture, and subaltern solidarity. As leftist academics or yoga practitioners—and perhaps both—it never has been, nor will it ever be, an option simply not to care.

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structures of power between animals and humans to accord recognition that animals do register resistance, albeit, naturally, in modes true to their species (Wadiwel 2015)" (Narayanan 2017: 489)

[24] Adams 1990; Dunayer 2001; Gillespie 2018.

[25] Robinson 2014; Belacourt 2014.

[26] Narayanan 2017, 2018; Deckha 2018.

[27] Harper 2009; Ko and Ko 2017; McJetters 2017.

[28] Taylor 2017.

SLIDES

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1. Animals command strong ethical consideration for their own sake, under both Patañjalian ethics and any reasonable 'secular' moral theory.

2. Animals should be recognized as victims deserving of attention and care within Left-oriented, abuse-focused movements in contemporary yoga.

3. Animals should be recognized as subaltern populations.

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(Framarin 2014: 84)

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