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INTRODUCTION



‘Animal Nationalisms: Multispecies Cultural Politics, Race, and the (Un)Making of the Settler Nation-State’

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As the pendulum swings toward a sweeping global conservatism, conversations proliferate on the consequences of rampant nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiments and policies. These anxieties were heightened with the election of Donald Trump as the president of the United States in 2016; however, the US elections only epitomised the global swirl of the resurgence of ethno-nationalism and extreme right-wing movements, marked by Brexit in the United Kingdom, the abandonment of the rule of law under President Duterte in the Philippines, the widespread prevalence of Hindutva extremist violence against Muslims and ‘low-caste’ Dalits in India, the rise in Islamophobia across Europe, the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and the list goes on. Erosion of democratic process, rule of law, environmental destructions, pursuit of power, anti-immigrant policies, and forms of ethnic violence and cleansing have led to growing concern that what is manifesting is a deeply insidious growth of forms of right-wing or ultra-nationalism, religious extremism, settler-colonial violence, and even fascism around the world.

Much of the anxiety around the potential rise, return, and the implications of the diffused nature, and yet palpable growth, of right-wing nationalism is focused on the violent social and spatial ‘othering’ of *human* lives and bodies – and rightly so: the lived experiences of so many humans have been impacted by the global rise of right-wing nationalism. However, in a landscape of such heightened concern over the safety, survival, and flourishing of many different human communities enmeshed in these fraught nation-building practices, the instrumentalisation of the *nonhuman animal* in these socio-political contexts has been radically under-theorised. Nation-building more generally is consonant not only with the ‘exclusion, marginalization, and enclosure’ (Howell 2015: 6) of humans but also of *other animals*. The domination of, and socio-spatial distancing from, both nonhuman animals and animalised humans have been essential to the construction of a racially, genetically, and morally superior nation-state.

Although right-wing nationalisms in particular are a central concern for contemporary global politics, even nationalistic projects not deemed *right-wing* or *alt-right* involve – and have involved historically – violent exclusions of certain humans and animals. For instance, early forms of nationalism manifested through settler-colonial projects around the globe – projects that continue into the present and form the bedrock of certain contemporary nationalisms. Indeed, settler colonialism is, at its core, a nation-building project – one that necessitates the violent erasure of both human and animal nations already

existing in place. This ‘erasure’ involves a wholesale annihilation and re-configuration of these nations and the land on which they have flourished – through dispossession, genocide, territorial expansion, and assimilation – into a settler state (Byrd 2011; Coulthard 2014; Veracini 2012). White supremacy underwrites these settler-colonial and nationalistic projects of violent dispossession (Razack 2002; Smith 2010; Tuck and Yang 2012), but it is *anthropocentrism* that anchors white-supremacist and settler-colonial logics through rendering abject both animalised humans and animals themselves (Belcourt 2015: 4). A focus on the utilisation of animals in the making and maintenance of the settler nation-state, then, is necessary to uncover how animals manifest in contemporary nationalistic agendas – those that drive, for instance, global military imperialism and ‘alt-right’ extremism.

In historic and contemporary contexts worldwide, domesticated and free-living animals feature differentially in nation-building narratives *via* masculinist performances of settler colonialism and animal dominance. Such culturally infused practices include the rodeo in the United States, horse-racing in England and the former British colonies, bull-fighting in Spain and Colombia, buffalo-racing in India, and rooster- and dog-fighting in many parts of the world. The cultural politics of food – and animals’ use as food – are deeply entangled with discourses of race, nationalism, and colonialism (García 2013, 2014). Nationalist narratives of control and eviction of animals operate alongside religio-political and cultural discourses that celebrate and even deify them. In India, monkeys, snakes, and rats are simultaneously pests and worshipped as deities. In Australia, the native kangaroo is a pest but also on the Coat of Arms. The ritual worship and sacrifice of animals across religions is intertwined with religious, cultural, and nationalist identities (Govindrajan 2015).

In *Animal Nationalisms*, we suggest that together with analyses of racism, recalibrating a focus on anthropocentrism is crucial to achieve the fullest understandings of the emergent ideologies sustained in settler-colonial nations. Specifically, we are interested in uncovering what provocations and opportunities emerge when we focus nonhuman animal subjects themselves in the making and unmaking of nations. As such, this special issue is an attempt to broaden the politicisation of ‘animals’ in nationalist projects by engaging with a multispecies cultural politics that attends to racial/ethnic and species othering. Projects of nation-building, of course, *rely* on mechanisms of othering – that is, the creation of a ‘nation’ is, in large part, reliant on notions of belonging and exclusion (Mavroudi 2010; Skey and Antonsich 2017) based on socially, politically, and even genetically constructed hierarches. These exclusions from the nation have so far been understood as being dependent on processes of racialisation, criminalisation, ethnocentrism, and religious persecution (Rana 2011; Roediger 2007), and thus reliant on notions of value – who is a valued member of the nation, who *belongs to the nation*, and who does not. Lisa Marie Cacho (2012: 13) writes, ‘Value is made intelligible relationally. According to literary critic Lindon Barrett, value *needs* negativity. As Barrett theorises, the ‘object’ of value needs an ‘other’ of value because ‘for value “negativity is a resource”, an essential resource. The negative, the expended, the excessive invariably form the ground of possibilities for value’ (Barrett 1999: 19, 21; emphasis original). Members of the nation, then, are largely determined, relationally, in terms of what they are *not*. And although animals are mobilised in solidifying these inclusions and

exclusions, they are, along with animalised humans, only rarely (if ever) provided the protections of a true member of the nation.

We argue, then, that it is the abjectness of *the animal* and *animality* that produces and sustains geopolitical spatial projects of racism, ethnonationalism, settler colonialism, and anthropocentrism (see also Belcourt 2015; Kim 2015; Ko and Ko 2017). Thus, a focus on the material and discursive realities of how these categories are created can help to uncover the underlying logics that justify and maintain racist and anthropocentric violence against both human and nonhuman lives that *together* constitute contemporary (and indeed, historical) nationalistic projects. And yet, despite the central role that animals and animality play in nation-making projects of inclusion/exclusion, this subject remains substantially under-studied and under-theorised in contemporary socio-cultural and political scholarship.

In settler-colonial states, in fact, animals have *long* been entangled with global cultural politics of nation-building and nationalism. In North America, both cattle and horses, as domesticated labouring animals, have been foundationally deployed as tools of the settler-colonial project (Anderson 2006). Cultural narratives rescript ideas of the North American ‘West’ through animals’ use in dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their land and native animal species from their habitats (Anderson 2006; Fischer 2017), and through the contemporary dairy and beef industries (where cows and the consumption of their bodies and reproductive outputs are drawn into narratives of US patriotism and what it means to be *American*) (Gillespie 2018a, 2018b; Orzechowski 2012; Sharpes 2006). In Australia, Aboriginal communities were explicitly classified as part of flora and fauna to render irrelevant their claims on land (Palmer 2003), thereby implicitly reinforcing that ‘nonhuman animals also have no claims or rights to land’ (Narayanan 2017: 479).

This special issue has two mandates. One, we ask why and how animals continue to be foundational to cultures of nationalism and racial demarcation in settler colonies. Post-colonial critical animal studies scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which racialisation (as a process frequently foundational to projects of nation-building) is intimately entangled with what Maneesha Deckha calls a kind of ‘species thinking’ wherein categories of *human*, *subhuman*, and *nonhuman* operate to create a violatable Other (Deckha 2010; see also Kim 2015; Ko and Ko 2017). We are interested in how animals themselves are used to reproduce and sustain animality and its role in nationalistic practices of exclusion, violence, and supremacy. The making of nations is persistently an anthropocentric endeavour, both in its exclusion of nonhuman animals as serious subjects *belonging to the nation*, and in the ways that they are instrumentalised for nationalistic ends. Indeed, modern discourses on the ‘humane’ treatment of animals that originated in Britain, for instance, reflect the nation as the epitome of racialised human civilisation, wherein Britain could justify ‘its assumed superiority over other nations, “races”, and cultures’ (Howell 2015: 1). This anthropocentrism is embedded in nearly every aspect of nation-making – from the fundamental anthropocentrism of state legal institutions (Deckha 2013) and global capitalist economies (Nibert 2013) to majority cultural practices involving animals (Kymlicka 2018) and the neo-colonial ways that animality and indigeneity are strategically appropriated for the crafting of a particular kind of nation (García 2014).

Two, we aim to re-imagine how animals may feature in more ‘inclusive nationalisms’ or ‘just nationalisms’ that attend to difference within and across species. Variations of environmentalism and eco-citizenship are interwoven with nation-building narratives, and are

beginning to variously unsettle and reframe the nation-state (Yeh 2009; Goldman 2005). In 2015, for instance, New Zealand recognised animals as 'sentient' beings. However, such mandates are yet to manifest meaningfully worldwide in ways that protect animals from human exploitation, and there remains a question of whether legal reforms can even substantially represent the interests of nonhuman animals when law itself is an anthropocentric institution (Deckha 2013).

A critical constitutive element of nationalism, an ideology characterised not by 'ethnicity, but by a single public culture and a set of shared political goals' is its use of evocative symbols (Cerulo 2001: 10328). Barker and Galasinski (2001: 124) define national identity itself as 'a form of imaginative identification with the symbols and discourses of the nation-state'. In nation-making, symbols may be instruments of legitimising specific nationalisms, or perform divisive, even polarising actions (Šarić and Luccarelli 2017). Such symbols are typically tangible or intangible forms of culture or heritage such as flags, monuments, or even language or arts (Šarić and Luccarelli 2017) – or indeed, sentient nonhuman animals. Certain species of animals are evoked as signals of inclusion or exclusion of certain races, making animal bodies critical vectors of nation-making, and even violent nationalisms. Animal bodies may be eulogised as the national motherland itself, as in India, where the Mother Cow is indistinguishable from a racially pure, 'upper' caste *Hindu* Mother India (Narayanan 2019). This racialised celebration of the cow, seen another way, is also a weaponisation of the cow with reference to the subjects of racial othering, in this case, Muslims and 'low' caste Hindus. Being attentive to the subjectified lifeworld experience of these animals and the dismantling of their racialised symbolism, throws open a number of key questions on the real interconnections between racism, speciesism, anthropocentrism, and the implications therein for racialised humans and nonhumans.

To these ends, we ask: How can a consideration of animals' lived experiences and discursive mobilisation illuminate a more robust understanding of nationalism, racism, and anthropocentrism? How are settler nation-states implicated in instrumentalising and exploiting animals for nationalistic ends – and indeed, thus implicated in the rise of global military imperialism, right-wing nationalism, and lasting impacts of settler colonialism? How might a decolonial and de-anthropocentric approach lead to a radical unmaking of nations built and sustained through racial, settler-colonial, and anthropocentric violence?

The articles included in this special issue interrogate these questions through a variety of lenses and geographic contexts. Chloe Diamond-Lenow (2020) illuminates how US military working dogs are weaponised and understood in multiple ways in the 'war on terror' – as technologies of intimidation, as equipment to be maintained, as heroes to be celebrated, and as pets or companions. These dogs, and the affective registers they inhabit, reveal the varied dimensions of how nationalism drives and supports projects of war.

In a different geographic context, Esther Alloun (2019) brings us to the increasingly polarising militarised context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Here, she theorises how veganism and animal rights are weaponised to reify the Israeli nation-state and enact further violence on Palestinians, who are framed in Israel's nationalist discourses as apathetic to the plight of animals – a foil against which the Israeli state frames itself as an empathetic protector of animals. Alloun's ethnographic research reveals a very

different reality that lays bare the ‘veganwashing’ at the centre of these multispecies cultural politics.

Christopher Mayes (2020) analyses the dual mobilisation of sheep and fencing in the eradication of Indigenous peoples from what became the settler nation-state of Australia, and in the selective inclusions and exclusions of immigrants to Australia. Sheep were used as tools of settler colonialism, and fencing – justified by a perceived need to contain these sheep – became a technology of land enclosure and dispossession, helping to solidify an Australian nation. Sheep, and wool production in particular, remain central to Australian agricultural economies, reproducing settler violence and human domination over animals.

Highlighting another settler nation-state and its entanglements with white supremacist violence, Stephanie Rutherford (2020) centres the symbolism of the wolf in understanding right-wing nationalism located in Canada and the United States. Originally, the wolf was seen as a threat to be eradicated by settlers, systematically hunted until their numbers dwindled. More recently, however, factions of right-wing nationalists and members of the ‘alt-right’ have deployed iconography of the wolf to solidify their white supremacist orientation. Rutherford excavates this phenomenon in the context of right-wing nationalism.

As a way of looking forward, Maneesha Deckha (2020) offers a speculative path for undoing nationalist legal systems. She tracks the anthropocentrism of settler-colonial legal organisation, and imagines possibilities for Indigenous legal orders to reconfigure and transform how animals are conceptualised and protected, and how Indigenous cosmologies and politics can be centred – a kind of unmaking of the settler nation-state.

The authors herein highlight how, as salient examples of settler nation-states that drive global militarism and right-wing nationalism, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Israel have instrumentalised and continue to utilise animals for nationalistic ends. This weaponisation of animals manifests in the use of dogs to wage the US ‘war on terror’ (Diamond-Lenow), in vegan and animal rights politics in the Israeli occupation of Palestine (Alloun), through agricultural practices rooted in land dispossession in Australia (Mayes), and through the appropriation of wolves as symbols and as eradicated species in North America (Rutherford). These empirical contexts, theorised through a multispecies analysis of nationalist agendas of the *making of particular nations*, advance a theorisation of *animal nationalisms* that draws attention to the need for a de-anthropocentric understanding of the violent effects of nation-making projects globally. To this end, Deckha’s speculative call for de-anthropocentric and decolonial systems of law provides one possibility for imagining what this future could look like, and how conceptions of *the nation* can be radically reimagined – a step toward a necessary and overdue conceptualisation of the *unmaking of violent nations*.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Kathryn Gillespie is a feminist geographer and critical animal studies scholar. Broadly, her research explores the violence of anthropocentrism under capitalism, with a focus on the entanglements of

race, species, and gender in sites of animal agriculture, food production, and other everyday geographies.

Yamini Narayanan is Senior Lecturer in International and Community Development. Her work is focussed on two major themes: the nexus between animals and urban planning in India; and the intersections of speciesism, casteism and racism in the ways in which animals are enrolled in nation-building projects.

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