



Animal Oppression & Human Violence: Domestication, Capitalism, and Global Conflict

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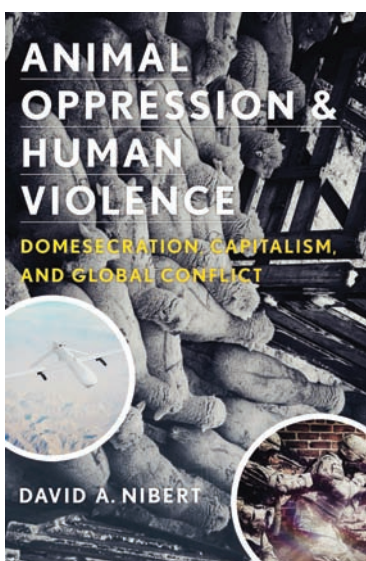


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Animal Oppression & Human Violence: Domeseccration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict

David A. Nibert. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. 352 pp., notes, index. \$29.50 paper (ISBN 9780231151894); \$89.50 cloth (ISBN 9780231151887).

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Animal Oppression & Human Violence, by David A. Nibert, is a provocative counterhistory of the domestication of nonhuman animals, the rise of capitalism, and the violent oppression of humans and other animals. The work challenges dominant narratives that characterize domestication as a feature of historical and contemporary human–animal relations celebrated for its role in the presumed success of human evolution and technological innovation. Nibert offers a different reading of this process, renaming it “domeseccration” to highlight the violent role of domestication in colonizing not only the bodies and lives of other animals, but also indigenous peoples around the globe. Contemporary global injustice and inequality, he says, stem from this history of domeseccration.

Animal agriculture, like domestication and capitalism, is a hegemonic institution. So thoroughly is the use of other animals implicated in human societies that the violence inherent in these institutions goes largely unchallenged. This long-standing normalization of violence against animals only increased with the rise of capitalism. Indeed, Nibert’s central argument is that domeseccration of other animals facilitated the rise of capitalism and the conquest of humans, land, and other animals across the globe. Nibert describes in detail the ways in which the history of

animal oppression was closely intertwined with human oppression; for instance, human slavery developed alongside the domestication of other species as those in power required human labor to maintain the subjugation of other animals in farming.

Nibert employs a historical-materialist approach to understand the systemic impacts of pastoralism, ranching, and contemporary industrial factory farming. The book is organized chronologically and spans the globe in its exploration of domeseccration. Nibert begins with the transition from forager societies to pastoralist and early ranching systems (Chapter 1). This is followed by a historical account of the role of animals in the colonization of the Americas by the Spanish and Portuguese (Chapter 2). The “settling” of the North American West was also a period of violent appropriation of indigenous peoples and land, along with other species native to the region, and farmed animals were integral instruments and subjects of war and violence in Western ranching (Chapter 3) and in the annexation of Texas and the U.S. expropriation of Mexico’s northern half (Chapter 4). The domeseccration of other animals, Nibert argues, was a key feature in European colonization of other parts of the world, including parts of Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and Ireland—all places he uses as examples of violence enacted by elites on other humans and nonhuman animals (Chapter 5).

Moving onto contemporary times, Nibert describes the rise of what he terms “hamburger culture” in the United States (Chapter 6)—a history that should not be unfamiliar for those who have read Schlosser’s (2010) *Fast Food Nation*. Here he explains how the effects of this hamburger culture have global ramifications with an analysis of ranching and feed-crop farming in Latin

America and the violent conflict arising around this export production. The book concludes with a reckoning of contemporary global conflict related to land dispossession, environmental degradation, climate change, widespread inequality, increased consumption of other species, corporate power and greed, and public health and disease—all urgent problems driven in large part, Nibert argues, by domeseccration (Chapter 8). Thus, he advocates a radical restructuring of contemporary social relations: a widespread dismantling of capitalism, and veganism as a global imperative (Chapter 9).

The book offers a major intervention into the social sciences and humanities. Its value, in part, lies in its counterhegemonic reading of the history of domestication: one that centers the oppression of animals at the origin of social inequality. What sets this book apart from other books that tend to focus either on violence against humans or violence against nonhuman animals is that Nibert carefully shows the entanglements of violence against many species (including humans) in his analysis. Thus, he creates a complex and rich history that demonstrates how hegemonic structures of domeseccration and capitalism operate to oppress and subjugate human and nonhuman animals alike. This kind of analysis is a welcomed corrective in geography and the social sciences (as well as the academy at large) where critiques of social inequality and oppression are often siloed, focusing on one group or another, prioritizing and reinforcing hierarchical conceptions of whose lives and deaths matter most. For scholars interested in resisting structures of violence and appropriation, much can be learned from this form of analysis, which resists the hierarchization of lives and bodies and attends to global structures of power and inequality. Beyond the issue of domeseccration, Nibert's argument and approach can be applied to a range of topics in fields such as geography, sociology, history, environmental studies, critical animal studies, and agricultural studies. Those interested in critiques of capitalism, historical and

contemporary agriculture and food systems, human–environment relations, and global inequality and struggles for justice will find much of use in this book.

For those unaccustomed to thinking about the ongoing plight of other-than-human animals, Nibert's call for veganism as a global imperative might sound extreme, or even universalizing. The argument articulated throughout the book is carefully constructed, however, in such a way to illustrate the ways in which animal use, in many forms, is at the root of global injustice and, as such, veganism (the abstention from supporting systems of animal use) is a necessary step to dismantling these global structures of power and oppression. He is careful to acknowledge and respond to concerns about universalizing ethical imperatives—a conversation that admittedly could have been expanded on in the conclusion—and links his argument about veganism with the need to critique and resist capitalism as a hegemonic political-economic system.

Animal Oppression & Human Violence is a profoundly important book and should be widely read and discussed. It is a book that easily transcends disciplinary boundaries and international borders and has relevance for a diverse set of scholars of social justice and inequality. Nibert urges us to confront the way oppression of, and violence against, humans and other species are intertwined as a critical step in working toward a more just and peaceful world. Thus, understanding and taking seriously multispecies violence should inform not only our intellectual projects of knowledge making, but also our political and ethical commitments in how we ought to live our lives in a multispecies world.

Reference

Schlosser, E. 2010. *Fast food nation: The dark side of the all-American meal*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.