

White Supremacy and Patriarchy Hurt Animals

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This talk is about the stories we tell about animal oppression. We as animal rights activists have an opportunity to tell deeper stories that don't rely so much on tokenizing the struggles of people of color and women. Nor do they have to rely on tokenizing animals as romantic symbols of human identity. Instead, we can talk about animals' struggles and lives, to the best of our knowledge, and reveal how they're interconnected with different human groups' struggles by telling the stories of the forces (and the identity groups behind the forces) that bind them all.

I. Who am I?

My name is Anastasia Yarbrough. I am facilitator consultant, musician, and community educator. I have been doing animal advocacy work for over 15 years, and most recently, in the last 5 years, I have been vocally and logistically active in the animal liberation movement. I used to serve on the board of Institute for Critical Animal Studies, and I currently am on the advisory board for Food Empowerment Project.

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II. Why talk about white supremacy and patriarchy specifically?

- These pervasive, intertwined forces serve as a major backbone to the Animal Rights Movement. The AR movement is concentrated in Eurocentric countries, and within these countries, the majority of the members are white, and the bulk of the leadership comprise of white men. As a result, the ideological basis for human-animal relations tends to be very Eurocentric and it's not uncommon to see animal advocacy and vegan campaigns that promote a European ideal (i.e. campaigns against dog-eating in China). The eurocentrism makes it difficult for people who aren't white to feel like they have a place in the movement, especially when they're animal ethics don't necessarily reflect the "mainstream." And the influence of patriarchy becomes very obvious when the majority of the movement comprises of female activists but over 50% of the leadership in major, active animal advocacy nonprofits is male. When major events in the movement like the national conference don't allow these issues to truly be addressed and are treated as trivial, not central to the strengthening of the movement, we have a problem.
- Great majority of AR organizations and leaders compare the modern AR movement to and use examples from anti-racist, anti-sexist movements of US history without an understanding of how racism and sexism operate in America, but rather just assuming they know because they're activists for a similarly oppressed group (the diverse array of beings called "animals").

- At the AR National Conference 2013 in Washington DC, Norm Phelps told participants in the opening plenary that AR activists are the Frederick Douglas and Harriet Tubman of our time. Nathan Runkle, at the same plenary, also said that the AR movement is the next evolutionary progression in the advancement for social justice; animal rights is the new major social justice movement.
- This heavy reliance on lessons from anti-racist and anti-sexist human rights struggles of the past is not a problem in and of itself. They are part of our heritage, and we can't help but continue in their shadows. And the leaders from those movements are, after all, our ancestors and influential pioneers for social justice and environmental movements worldwide. But when leaders in the AR movement use lazy analyses to use them as leverage to further legitimize animal rights as a movement, it does not serve our movement and it misses the point. There's a reason why the struggles of people of color, women, and animals look similar enough for comparison. That's because they're connected by systemic forces that fuel and maintain their oppression. Another speaker could do this analysis from any angle in the matrix. Today, I'm focusing on white supremacy and patriarchy.

III. How do white supremacy and patriarchy directly impact animals?

- Same forces, different groups
- White supremacy and patriarchy (what I will from now on refer to as “white patriarchy”) have been analyzed by critical race theorists and feminist theorists respectively for several decades in the United States. People of color have had to study whiteness and women have had to study patriarchy in order to survive. Whiteness and patriarchy are collectively understood to be social identity constructs reinforced structurally over time. That means, their initial creation were intentional and the people assumed the identities by choice. In the Anarchist Federation's Women Caucus most recent anarchist analysis of privilege theory, they emphasized that identity groups like men and white people can't actually give up their privilege no matter how much individuals from those groups want to. They're born into those identities, raised in those identity groups, and are immersed in a system they cannot opt out of or choose to stop benefiting from. “You are not responsible for the system that gives you your privilege, only for how you respond to it.” Bell Hooks has often associated white patriarchy with acts of terrorism (i.e. slavery, rape, torture, and murder) against black people and black women, specifically. These acts of terrorism—slavery, rape, torture, and murder—are what we're trying to abolish in the AR movement. It's no surprise that they arise from the same system. How do we manage to live in society with all of this happening and be okay with it? Well, for one thing, white patriarchy doesn't make itself visible. Like any social identity construct that maintains a social-economic system on the basis of exploiting more vulnerable individuals and communities, marginalizing those who interfere with the “mainstream” status quo, committing systematic violence for the benefit of privileged groups, and dominating the minds and bodies and space and reproduction of other groups, white patriarchy is an institution that manages to sustain all of this invisibly. We have to make a conscientious effort to make it visible. In the AR movement, when we talk about humans oppressing animals, we have opportunities to make visible the white supremacy and patriarchy behind the exploitation, the domination, the reproductive control, the marginalization, and the systematic killing. We can name the tokenizing of animals as mascots for their own exploitation and murder. We can call out shelter animal and feral animal killings as blaming the victim. We can talk about how wild animals are marginalized by habitat loss due to agriculture and urban development and “invasive/injurious” species

become a convenient target for blame even though they're not the primary cause. We can make visible the reproductive control, forced breeding, genetic manipulation, and rape that make institutions like laboratory research on animals, animal agriculture, pet-keeping, zoos and aquaria, hunting ranches, aquaculture, and animal entertainment industries go round. Tokenizing, blaming the victim, marginalization, and reproductive control are key tenets of white patriarchy. Under white supremacy in America, the mainstream tends to identify with animals and people of color once they're dead or reduced into obscurity. This gives the illusion that we're actually respecting these groups by romanticizing them and reshaping who they are in our imaginations for our own identities, now that our ancestors and contemporaries have removed them as a threat. But a major tenet of white patriarchy is the issue of citizenship. The only legitimate voices are those who are "true citizens" of the group. And in the AR movement, that is a huge obstacle in getting animals' interests taken seriously.

- White patriarchy driving animal advocacy campaigns
 - PETA campaigns are infamous for their racist and sexist campaigns. For that reason, I won't go into too much detail with them here as another speaker in this conference will be offering an analysis of PETA. PETA, though, is an obvious example of white patriarchy driving its goals and strategies. Not just in the organization's publicity stunts but also in their policies and practices involving animals directly. PETA has a track-record of killing more rescued dogs and cats than they place into homes. Nathan Winograd has been challenging PETA for years over their animal sheltering policies and practices. PETA sympathizers have retorted that what's not mentioned in Winograd's arguments are the animals who are adopted out and the dangers of overcrowding in shelters, that it's better for animals to die a "merciful" death than to live a life in a shelter or worse, homeless. However, what this says to me is that for PETA the best kind of ethical relationship we can hope for with animals under PETA policy are with those who are dead because there isn't enough capacity to hold them all under complete institutional control and it's more efficient to kill them and congratulate ourselves on doing the right thing because we know what's best. This is white patriarchy.
 - Undercover investigations have been the primary tactic for exposing some of the worst offenses against animals. What often is not emphasized in undercover investigations of factory farm abuses or campaigns against dog-fighting or cock-fighting or exposés of illegal wildlife trafficking are the racialized components of these atrocities. The vast majority of the people who are doing the dirty work that gets plastered all over the news and bears the brunt of scorn and outrage from activists are people of color.
 - Migrant workers from countries like Mexico and Guatemala comprise 1/5th of the agricultural workforce industry. They typically don't have a high school diploma, so their options for work are slim, and they usually have very little say in the operations of these farms. They are just hands—often bloody hands—working 10-12 hour shifts. US imperialism and racism push them into jobs like this where options for livelihood are very few. They are more likely to be punished for animal cruelty than the operators of the farm who make the real profit. And animal advocacy organizations know this when they press charges; they're just trying to take whatever "victory" they can get. In the end, this doesn't help present or future animals because it allows corporations and their shareholders to avoid responsibility, it allows business owners to scapegoat impoverished and illiterate migrant workers who have very little legal protection, and it sends a misleading message to the public that the "bad guys" have been dealt with when in actuality they'll just be replaced by another immigrant of similar standing who eventually loses his mind with the violence he must perform daily for several hours.

- Dogfighting is as old as civilization itself. And cockfighting started to appear in Europe around the 1400s. Both of these blood sports were primarily the activity of wealthy landowners, merchants, and aristocrats—in other words, people with money. Nowadays, these blood sports are associated with poor people of color. So campaigns against these vicious customs tend to look like white people chastising people of color, now that middle/upper-class white people are culturally “removed” from such barbarism.
- Illegal wildlife trafficking is an issue pervasive not just in animal advocacy but in environmental conservation as well. Campaigns and reports emphasize the *illegal* portion of wildlife trafficking so that they can invoke CITES and have some legal, policy weight, but that hasn’t made a big difference so far in the number of animals, alive and dead, being trafficked out of their native lands and waters. The regions where the bulk of this activity happens are southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. News media, documentaries, and campaigns tend to focus heavily on the “poaching” side of wildlife trafficking, which is exclusively poor people of color these regions. Though the business of wildlife trafficking will be part of a big crime syndicate, the people who are splattered in imagery and news articles are those with fewer resources and less leverage in the overall syndicate—people who are easy to replace, easy to scapegoat. It’s harder to make the wealthy consumers of wildlife products visible, it’s harder to challenge the rich, privately owned hunting ranches that profit in the business of “exotic” animal trafficking, it’s harder to target American and European private investors of militias and crime syndicates in these regions—so nobody really does. Because it’s easier to target poor people of color committing the actual violence and the actual crimes, they are the poster criminals, and white supremacy and colonialism can continue to go unchecked, unnoticed in its maintenance of this system.
- Racism, classism, and colonialism drive people of color to overly depend on the exploitation of animals, and because they don’t have the protection of wealth and whiteness, these people bear the brunt of the consequences, while the heavy enablers can continue business as usual.

IV. Racism & Speciesism: Are they interchangeable?

- Race and species are arbitrary distinctions that arose around the same time in European thought. They are both driven by phenotypic differences but carry the weight and legitimacy as though they are biologically rooted, and biological is often associated with “fixed.” In biology, the biological species definition is considered the ultimate species definition. If groups are shown to have individuals producing reproductively viable offspring, then they are truly a species. More often than not, this primary definition is too difficult to test in the field or in the lab, so other definitions based on morphological and phylogenetic differences between groups are considered an acceptable substitution. But what the morphological and phylogenetic species definitions do is make the labeling of species just as arbitrary as race theory. For both, it basically comes down to: if you look a little different, do things a little differently, vary somewhat genetically, and even live in a different region from the basis of comparison, that’s good enough to label your group a distinct species (and historically, race and species have been used interchangeably) until some other “expert” comes along and says otherwise.
- In my experience, what we as AR activists often label as speciesism tends to be racism, sexism, and ableism against animals. Animal agriculture, aquaculture, laboratory research on animals, pet-keeping, and even commercial and recreational hunting rely on the oppression of specific species for the benefit of certain human groups. But the arguments used to keep them

in oppression are not so much speciesist as they are racist, sexist, and/or ableist. While dogs are targeted as a species of commercial breeding, it's the *races* of dogs (otherwise called "breeds") that are used as justification and incentive to continue selective breeding and reproductive control of dogs. And it's the races that rig a dog slated for execution in certain counties just by being born to that race. Ecofeminist animal rights activists have pointed out for years that sexism is a major force driving the oppression of animals in agricultural industries, particularly dairy and egg where they would not exist without exploiting female labor. And even animal rights activists play into the traps of ableism, emphasizing the social-cognitive abilities of animals in a desperate attempt to get people to care about animals. Abilities of animal individuals and species may perhaps be the ground for which we justify how we treat animals. Once we activists are able to recognize them when they appear, it becomes easier to see what we're really working with.

V. Conclusion

- Making white supremacy and patriarchy visible is very important to making animal oppression visible. They are often behind the atrocities against animals we're struggling against.
- White supremacy and patriarchy affect the goals of the movement and the strategies employed. We can evaluate how our goals and strategies are carried along and By practicing an intention to make these forces visible, recognize what's actually happening acknowledge our role in them all, we can take responsibility for the direction of .
- As other activists incorporate analyses of ablism, heterosexism, cissexism, and queerness, we have an opportunity for animal rights to become a genuine frontier intersectional movement. Are we up for the challenge?

More examples of white patriarchy:

- "I just installed a nose plate...so that he wouldn't be nursing on his mom. He doesn't need to anymore...He'll get used to it. We've done it to other calves. And there's little spikes on that plate, and that's to irritate the cows udder if he tries to nurse and she'll kick him away...Anyway, another fun thing to do on the farm."
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOMYfrFKHyE&feature=youtu.be>