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**Contribution to the special session on “Degrowth and Animal Liberation”**

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**Presentation title:**

**The environmental crisis and the animal industry—an ecofeminist perspective**

**Long abstract, max. 1200 words**

Saturday morning, farmers’ market: a heteronormative white couple is buying organic vegetables and some parts of a dead non-human animal for the evening’s barbecue. Who will be the barbecue master? Why must *slow food* include corpses in the first place? And what consequences does the consumption of animal products have on people and the environment?

This presentation introduces, firstly, ecofeminist theory on the interconnected exploitation of women, nature, and other animals.

Secondly, it examines the so-called “livestock” industry as an example of this interconnected exploitation. It especially focuses on the environmental impact of the animal industry, the so-called “ecological hoofprint.”

Thirdly, it aims to explain why the *degrowth* movement and theory must care about animals and adopt animal liberation.

According to ecofeminists like Plumwood (1993), Merchant (1980), and Adams (2000), the oppression of women, other animals and nature in general has common roots: these roots are constituted by the construction of hierarchical dualisms such as culture and nature, human / animal, male / female, white / of color, subject / object, rational / irrational, etc. The result is a hegemonic human subject who is a purely cultural, independent being, and, furthermore, white, male, heterosexual, and propertied. The devalued other side—including nature, nonhuman animals, women, LGBTQIA, people of color, people with disabilities, etc.—is literally “othered” which serves as a justification for their exploitation. Ecofeminist intersectional theory consequently argues that speciesism, sexism, and racism (and other intertwined categories of oppression) are mutually reinforcing elements of the same system.

This intertwining can be illustrated in the animal-industrial complex which claims 66 billion land animals and more than a trillion aquatic animals every year. The animal-industrial complex is indeed not only a tragedy of tremendous extent for the animals themselves, but

also has wider and long-lasting consequences. The sometimes devastating consequences of climate change, partly caused by the animal industry which emits more greenhouse gases than the global transport sector (studies range between 14.5%-51% of global emissions, calculated in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents), affect the Global South first and foremost. Next to the emission of greenhouse gases, the animal industry amounts to the waste of natural resources and environmental degradation. This includes waste of land, energy, and water, the clearing of rain forests for grazing land and, consequently, loss of biodiversity, the pollution of water and air, overfertilization and fecal contamination of the soil through liquid manure and so on. Moreover, almost one billion human beings concur in the demand for food with the animal industry's use of grain for fodder, which today makes up 35% of the global grain harvest (FAO 2013) – facts that have led to the concept of “environmental racism.” Additionally, employees (most often low-income, immigrant workers) in factory farms suffer from a disproportionately high number of occupational injuries and emotional trauma (Noske 2008; Twine 2012), in the same time, illnesses caused by animal fat or protein are increasingly observed on the consumer side.

In general, the consumption of dead animals is a sign for virility and heteronormative masculinity. Advertisements by the “meat” industry oftentimes invoke sexist images of women or pornographic images of animals as “meat,” while women function as “absent referents.” (Adams) In this context, sexism and speciesism are inseparable, but not only there: there are also numerous other societal examples illustrating common grounds in the oppression of women and animals. In the spirit of the hierarchical dualism, women and animals are both identified with their bodies and bodily functions, with wilderness, unpredictability, and danger, and have thus to be controlled by men. Common curse words compare women with animals and vice versa (“bitch”, “bunny”, “chick”, etc.). Animals are socially and legally considered as property; likewise, women are often treated as objects. By the same token, women and animals are victims of direct, sexual, symbolic (normalized), and structural violence. The control and exploitation of the reproductive labor of women and animals is the basis of whole industries and the state.

Although there are countless cases underpinning the argument of interconnected oppression, some feminists are still reluctant to acknowledge species as a constitutive category of discrimination, and to show their solidarity with the exploited. Several reasons can be outlined. The most obvious one is crude anthropocentrism and speciesism. Nonetheless, there are also more delicate issues at play: the implicit fear of losing the hard-won status of a political subject, and thus the admittance to the realm of justice; the anxious fixation to equally identify and being identified as uniquely human after many centuries of being treated like and compared to other animals; an assimilation to emotional coldness and individualism, performing a categorical rejection of everything deemed “sentimental” or “motherly-feminine;” in sum, the abuse of (male) privilege – and, by excluding the category of species, a reductionist analysis of domination (Deckha 2006), especially domination of our inner and outer human nature (Adorno/Horkheimer 2002).

The same sobering conclusion can be drawn for degrowth. Degrowth theory and practices seem to lack a thorough analysis and understanding of human-nature relationships in general and of the human-animal relationship in particular. Publications on the issue can be counted on the fingers of one hand (Ferrari 2014; Fragano 2012; Scroccaro 2012). If animal exploitation is discussed, then only in the anthropocentric reasoning that consuming animal products is threatening our human future. A concept like biodiversity enjoys greater attention than the fate of individual animals; many degrowth activists would rather hug a tree than embrace animals belonging to so-called “invasive species,” and would justify the culling of such animal selves with ecosystem preservation. Veganism is outdone by “locavorism” and old-fashioned *slow food* barbecues with “sustainable meat” (i.e., locally raised, killed, and dismembered animals). But not only day-to-day practices, also the sophistication of degrowth’s foundational theories of ecological economics appears to clash with an unquestioned and rather dull anthropocentrism, for example when sentient beings like fish or other aquatic individuals are regarded as “renewable resources.”

Degrowth has broken with the Western myth of infinite growth, it is courageous enough to question the productivist, self-subjecting, individualizing neoliberal mindset, and to finally take ecological limits and our dependency on the biosphere seriously. The time is overdue to thoroughly inquire our instrumental relationship to nature. Arguing that this relationship and gender as well are socially constructed and determined by power relations, non-essentialist ecofeminism provides fruitful tools of analysis to deconstruct the abovementioned hierarchical dualisms and overcome the concomitant intertwined oppression.

After all, degrowth integrates classic feminist demands such as valuing reproductive labor, care, and difference. It is time for degrowth—and some speciesist feminist streams—to expand our care to those most dependent on us, and to expand our solidarity to those most exploited. People are not the only victims of patriarchy, capitalist reification and its growth imperative.

Animals, especially those abused in food production, are the embodied experience of objectification, productivism, blind mastery of nature, and, hence, unnecessary suffering.

In the creation of a different economy beyond misery (Gorz), of a different food system, and of different interpersonal relationships, degrowth activists and theorists must integrate ecofeminist calls for human *and* animal liberation, including veganism and active engagement against all forms of animal exploitation—towards a true solidarity of life (Horkheimer). And a vegan-feminist barbecue on the ruins of a slaughterhouse.