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EDITORIAL

Employing postcolonialism as a lens for viewing and exploring the globalizing world is one of the most controversial approaches to the subject matter of the humanities and social sciences. The postcolonialist approach has both enthusiastic endorsers and sworn opponents. For more than a half-century now, their disputes have powered the dynamic development of postcolonial discourse. As an approach to interpreting the legacy of colonialism and decolonization, postcolonialism has taken on a new form, which is influenced by poststructuralism. The idea of a definitive, worldwide rejection of the colonial past has been replaced by a multiplicity of colonialisms arising at different times, in varying forms, and in different territories. In the process, postcolonial discourse has become fragmented. Its global applicability has been weakened and it has been transformed into a plethora of local narratives.

With the rise of new social movements and the end of the Cold War, a new postcolonial discourse has appeared that brings together and interconnects these polycentric narratives. Postcolonialism is now being studied with a new kind of multicultural sensitivity. This new approach to research involves a critical reinterpretation of historically and spatially fixed manifestations of inequality, oppression, and exclusion, with the goal of rectifying their consequences in the real world. The study of postcolonialism has broadened its scope to include post-communist nations, relations between East and West, and newly emerging power structures in the contemporary world, among other topics.

The field of area studies is no exception to this trend, which has led us to devote a monothematic issue of our journal to it. This special issue of *Studia Territorialia*, entitled “Postcolonial Perspectives in Area Studies,” is the result of a call for papers that we announced in 2021. Increasingly, articles touching on colonialism and its legacy have featured prominently among those submitted to us over the past several years. We have published contributions illuminating the competing memory discourses of German colonialism and the Holocaust,

anti-apartheid activism within the UN Commission on Human Rights, and the focus in French rap music on colonial crimes in North Africa. The interest in the study of postcolonialism indicates its growing relevance to area studies and possibly, its utility as a lens for viewing real-world social and political problems. There is a need for continuing critical reappraisal.

In this issue, we have gathered together three full-length articles that employ and further develop the postcolonial approach. They probe varying territorial contexts in which struggles for domination and control have occurred. The first contribution is a study of the positionality of the researcher in area studies, centered on the micro-dimensions of the contemporary production of knowledge. Kristina Garalytė and Karina Simonson deconstruct their own engagement with Dalit and South African Jewish cultures and specific subjects within those fields of study. In their self-reflective narratives, they examine the discipline of area studies as it is practiced in Lithuania. The Lithuanian experience is an especially interesting case to study. Lithuania is a part of the West, yet it does not fit the most general European colonial patterns since the country had long been under Soviet occupation and rule.

Anwar Mhajne and Crystal Whetstone, in their collaborative work, take up the theme while also investigating their positionalities and reflecting on their fieldwork experiences in the Middle East & North Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. They turn away from the established approaches to area studies in an effort to advance decolonial feminist scholarship in the field. Their autoethnographic accounts of their research for their dissertation projects point out the complexity of their status as both insider and outsider with respect to the cultures they study. Based on their experiences, they suggest specific methods for decolonizing area studies.

Finally, the third contribution is a critical review of the colonization of animals in North America. This article, by Denisa Krásná, summarizes and maps the state of the art within the fields of ecofeminism and critical animal studies. The author zooms in on the colonial experience of animals and argues that their colonization has been an inherent part of the entire Western expansionist project from the very beginning. She also devotes a good part of her study to the assimilation and oppression of indigenous people, including through the introduction of dairy farming and the consumption of animal milk.

The issue's regular book review column highlights two publications that look into subversion and information warfare waged by Russia's military against Ukraine and the West. Both books were written before Russia's reinvasion of Ukraine in 2022. Notwithstanding, they are highly relevant to the lifecycle of

colonization in Eastern Europe. Putin's wars of aggression may be the final step in the looming collapse of the Russian empire. We hope to cover Russia in more detail in one of our upcoming issues.

Wishing you a thought-stimulating read,

Jan Šír, Lucie Filipová, and Jiří Vykoukal
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ARTICLES

FROM THE MARGINS: POSITIONALITY IN AREA STUDIES

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Abstract

This article analyzes the positionality of the researcher in the field of area studies, taking as an example our engagement with African and Dalit studies and issues of race and caste. We present an autoethnographic essay on our own historically constituted agentive positionality by weaving together different angles of inquiry – Lithuanian area studies (and its institutional context), Lithuania's position in the post-Soviet and postcolonial narratives (the historical context), and our positionality in area studies and our particular fields of research (the personal context). The article shows how we as researchers construct our professional identities and relations with our interlocutors as we navigate through the Soviet past and the globalized present. We argue that the crucial question for scholars of area studies is not only the macro-political context in which knowledge production takes place (the predominant focus of area studies for decades), but also the personal micro-dimensions of knowledge production, which are inherent in the particular researcher as a historically constituted and strategically acting individual.

Keywords: area studies; positionality; Dalit studies; African studies; Lithuania; Eastern Europe

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Introduction

The positionality and reflexivity of researchers with regard to their subjects have long been overlooked within area studies. While some disciplines have taken a keen interest in reflexivity since the early 1970s, this was not always routine practice in area studies. As Anna-Katharina Hornidge and Katja Mielke argued,

Positionality – although ever present – has long been treated as invisible in the quest for neutrality and objectivity in science, as well as given the desire for the universality of knowledge and its production. Currently, positionality is increasingly viewed as critical to scholarship due to the understanding that all knowledge is specific, limited, partial and situated, that is, produced in particular circumstances that shape it (as well as the researcher and the researched) in discrete and certain ways.¹

Therefore, the crucial question for scholars of area studies is not only the macro-political context in which knowledge production takes place (a predominant focus in area studies for decades), but also the personal micro-dimensions of knowledge production, which are inherent in the particular researcher as a historically constituted and strategically acting individual.

Seeking to address this latter concern, we here present an autoethnographic essay on our own historically constituted agentic positionality. We focus our attention not so much on our research subjects, but rather upon ourselves. We subjectivize ourselves by bringing our reflexivity and positionality to the spotlight of the academic analysis and relating it to broader socio-political processes – the history of Soviet and post-Soviet Lithuania and the history of area studies on both the international and national levels. We do not do this simply to illustrate the subjectivity of research work in general, but rather to interrogate that subjectivity and expose the interplay of historical, institutional, and personal contexts that shape area studies. By explaining in a detailed manner our personal journeys through the fields of African and South Asian studies (specifically Dalit studies), we seek to deconstruct our engagement with area studies and the subjects within that field that most interest us. Close engagement with our positionality will reveal the actual mental processes of researchers who engage with different cultures and demonstrate how our fields of study are shaped by personal experiences.

¹ Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge, eds., *Area Studies at the Crossroads: Knowledge Production after the Mobility Turn* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 17.

We find Victoria Reyes's notion of "strategic positionality" particularly useful as we begin unpacking our positions in our academic and research fields.² Reyes argued that "researchers have their own ethnographic toolkit from which they draw. This toolkit consists of researchers' social capital and backgrounds, among other characteristics, and shapes field access, field dynamics, and data analysis."³ Paul Kingston noted that "we make choices when moving from outsider to insider roles (and between them), contingently adapting our positionality in the hope that it will help us better understand the political dynamics that underlie our research projects."⁴ These ideas suggest that our positionality is not a static and passive thing (shaped once and for all by our culture), but a shifting and agentive process (used in different ways to shape our research). In the vein of Reyes's and Kingston's arguments, this article contends that we as Lithuanian researchers construct our professional identities and relations with our interlocutors by navigating through the Soviet past and the globalized present. Delving into our personal experiences within our academic fields of research will illustrate how knowledge production is inseparable not only from the researcher's historical constitutedness but also from the "politics of ourselves."⁵

Most of the academic discussion of positionality focuses on "how our social positions shape access to participants, data, and field sites."⁶ The major concern is about the researcher's relationship with her or his interlocutors and field sites and how that affects the academic presentation. But how do our academic fields and the prevalent trends within them affect our relations with interlocutors and how we act in the field? Discussion of positionality should focus not only on how researchers approach the subjects of field research but also on how researchers situate themselves in their academic disciplines – and how these two types of positionality interact. Therefore, this article discusses the authors' double positionality. First is how we situate ourselves as Lithuanian researchers within the history and prevalent trends of area studies and within African and Dalit studies

² Victoria Reyes, "Ethnographic Toolkit: Strategic Positionality and Researchers' Visible and Invisible Tools in Field Research," *Ethnography* 21, no. 2 (2018): 220–240, doi: 10.1177/1466138118805121.

³ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴ Paul Kingston, "Playing with Positionality?" in *Political Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa: Methodological and Ethical Challenges*, ed. Janine A. Clark and Francesco Cavatorta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 242–253, here 242.

⁵ Amy Allen, *The Politics of Ourselves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Jean-Thomas Martelli, "The Politics of Our Selves: Left Self-fashioning and the Production of Representative Claims in Everyday Indian Campus Politics," *Modern Asian Studies* 55, no. 6 (2020): 1972–2045, doi:10.1017/S0026749X2000013X.

⁶ Reyes, "Ethnographic Toolkit," 222.

in particular. We call this “academic positionality.” Second is how we situate ourselves with regard to the people we study, our interlocutors, whom we happen to meet in our fields (we call this “fieldsite positionality”). Most researchers doing research work think and act strategically in both of these two dimensions. Reflecting on one’s fieldsite positionality has become the norm in humanities and qualitative social sciences. However, accounts of academic positionality are largely absent, even though they significantly shape the research process. We suggest that both academic and fieldsite positionality should be seen as being interrelated and influencing each other.

In this article, we try to weave together different angles of inquiry: Lithuanian area studies (and its institutional context), Lithuania’s position in the post-Soviet and postcolonial narratives (the historical context), and our positions in area studies and our particular fields of research (the personal context). In the first part, we investigate how Lithuanian area studies is situated within the larger field of area studies and its history, because that is our primary field of study and has constituted our professional identities. In the next two parts, we explore certain similarities between the postcolonial and the post-Soviet conditions as a backdrop for further analysis of our academic journey to and within African and South Asian studies. In the last part, we reveal how we situate ourselves within the race and caste debates and respond to criticism leveled at us by insiders in those two fields.

Area Studies From the Margins

In the last three decades area studies have been the target of substantial criticism, which has led to a “crisis of legitimacy” for area studies.⁷ Scholars argue that area studies are embedded in colonial, orientalist and imperial mindsets that seek to impose European and American dominance and racialized views on the rest of the world. Having survived the Cold War period, area studies continues to be deeply rooted in the framework of the nation-state and hence serves more pragmatic national interests than it produces pure knowledge. Another fault of area studies that draws criticism is its outdated focus on cultural regions. In a time of globalization, territorial, and nation-state boundaries lose their

⁷ Chua Beng Huat et al., “Area Studies and the Crisis of Legitimacy: A View from South East Asia,” *South East Asia Research* 27, no. 1 (2019): 31–48, doi: 10.1080/0967828X.2019.1587931.

significance when exposed to various “trans-” processes and formations, e.g., migration, social networks, and connectivity.⁸

These critical voices have produced an impetus for rethinking area studies. Some area studies scholars have realized that their field can only survive in the twenty-first century if it undergoes significant changes.⁹ Some of them argue that area studies should be replaced by “comparative area studies”¹⁰ or “critical area studies.”¹¹ Other scholars are reinvestigating area studies’ relationship with “classical” disciplines such as sociology, political sciences and geography.¹² While the process of globalization poses a challenge for a regionally defined world, there are still other processes at play that suggest a continuing significance and re-emergence of various types of regionalism, which in their own way call for area-specific expertise.¹³

⁸ Claus Bech Hansen, “The Crossroads Perspective,” Crossroads Asia Concept Papers 5 (Bonn, January 2017); Travis Workman, “A Minor Philosophy of World: From the Anthropological Illusion to Relation in Area Studies,” *Cultural Dynamics* 32, no. 1–2 (2020): 31–48, doi: 10.1177/0921374019900696; Mielke and Hornidge, eds., *Area Studies at the Crossroads*.

⁹ Huat et al., “Area Studies and the Crisis of Legitimacy.”

¹⁰ Ariel I. Ahram, “The Theory and Method of Comparative Area Studies,” *Qualitative Research* 11, no. 1 (2011): 69–90, doi: /10.1177/1468794110385297; Ariel I. Ahram, Patrick Köllner, and Rudra Sil, eds., *Comparative Area Studies: Methodological Rationales and Cross-regional Applications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Matthias Basedau, “Rethinking African Studies: Four Challenges and the Case for Comparative African Studies,” *Africa Spectrum* 55, no. 2 (2020): 194–206, doi: 10.1177/000203972094532; Dirk Berg-Schlosser, “Comparative Area Studies: Epistemological and Methodological Foundations and a Practical Application,” *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 20, no. 2 (2020): 288–302, doi: 10.22363/2313-0660-2020-2-288-302; Bert Hoffmann, “Latin America and Beyond: The Case for Comparative Area Studies,” *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 100 (2015): 111–120, doi: 10.18352/erlacs.10125; Rudra Sil and Ariel I. Ahram, “Comparative Area Studies and the Study of the Global South,” *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 20, no. 2 (2020): 279–287, doi: 10.22363/2313-0660-2020-2-279-287.

¹¹ Natalie Koch, “Is a ‘Critical’ Area Studies Possible?” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 5 (2016): 807–814, doi: 10.1177/0263775816656524.

¹² Ahram, Köllner, and Sil, eds., *Comparative Area Studies*; Sharad Chari, “Trans-Area Studies and the Perils of Geographical ‘World-Writing,’” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 5 (2016): 791–798, doi: 10.1177/0263775816656522; Elliott C. Child and Trevor J. Barnes, “American Imperial Expansion and Area Studies without Geography,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 66 (2019): 43–54, doi: 10.1016/j.jhg.2018.08.001; Koch, “Is a ‘Critical’ Area Studies Possible?”; David L. Szanton, ed., *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); James D. Sidaway et al., “Area Studies and Geography: Trajectories and Manifesto,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 5 (2016): 777–790; Deen Sharp, “Difference as Practice: Diffracting Geography and the Area Studies Turn,” *Progress in Human Geography* 43, no. 5 (2019): 835–852, doi: 10.1177/03091325187889.

¹³ Hansen, “The Crossroads Perspective”; Ali Mirsepassi, Amrita Basu, and Frederick Stirton Weaver, eds., *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World: Recasting the Area Studies Debate* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

Less discussed is how we should understand the proliferation of interest in area studies outside Western Europe and the United States, and what is specific about area studies when pursued beyond the reach of the former colonial and imperialist homelands. Today, there are various types of area studies established as study programs and research fields in different parts of the world. These have their own specifics, but lack visibility. This relates to certain reductionist tendencies in postcolonial theory identified by Piotr Piotrowski:

For post-colonial scholars, instead, Europe is the negative rhetorical figure. Post-colonial scholars used to homogenize culture of the old continent. Frankly speaking they can perform such a simplification, since for their purposes detailed differentiation of inner-European issues, including inner-colonization, does not have much sense. Europe for them is “simply” the Dutch, Belgian, English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonizer. They do not care so much about Moldavia, Lithuania, Slovenia or Slovakia, and the latter are very often confused to each other.¹⁴

It is important to recognize the diversity in the ways area studies is practiced in different parts of the world and not to attribute the same colonial failings to all European countries. Area studies’ emphasis on white people vs. people of color, colonizers vs. colonized, and the West vs. the Rest needs to be reconsidered while still being attentive to the colonial and imperial history of the field of area studies itself and how that shapes certain representations.

Lithuania is probably best known as an object of area studies, and as part of the post-Soviet area (sometimes it is studied as an aspect of Eastern European studies or more rarely, Baltic studies). It is not well-known as a producer of area studies itself. However, it is not widely known that since the nineteenth century, Lithuania has had developed Oriental studies tradition that was shaped at the crossroads of the global superpowers.¹⁵ Antanas Andrijauskas provides a detailed description of the rebirth of interest in Eastern cultures in Soviet Lithuania in 1977–92. He traces how Lithuanian orientalism (*orientalizmas* in Lithuanian) transformed itself and was institutionalized as Oriental studies

¹⁴ Piotr Piotrowski, “East European Art Peripheries Facing Post-Colonial Theory,” *Nonsite.org* (blog), August 12, 2014, <https://nonsite.org/east-european-art-peripheries-facing-post-colonial-theory/>.

¹⁵ For the history of area studies in Lithuania, see Valdas Jaskūnas, “India Studies in Soviet Lithuania: Approaching Asia from Outside the Establishment,” in *Framing Asian Studies: Geopolitics and Institutions*, ed. Albert Tzeng, William L. Richter, and Ekaterina Koldunova (Singapore, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018), 189–208.

(*orientalistika*).¹⁶ In independent Lithuania, Oriental studies gradually shifted its focus from largely textual studies of Asian cultures to more interdisciplinary approaches to research. The result of this process was the renaming of the Center of Oriental Studies at Vilnius University as the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies in 2018. African studies are not yet established as a formal degree program in Lithuania. However, several courses on Africa have been taught at Vilnius University and the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania.

In the Lithuanian context, area studies have been most thoroughly analyzed by Valdas Jaskūnas. As the most outspoken advocate for area studies in Lithuania, he argued that in the context of a globalizing world, the interdisciplinary nature of area studies is a major advantage over more rigid academic disciplines.¹⁷ But he also admitted to a weakness of area studies, which is its territorial boundedness and limitations. He also argued that area studies needs to more fully develop its theoretical approaches.¹⁸ Jaskūnas's other works focused on the relationship between area studies and Lithuania's national identity. He argued that Lithuanian academics lacked exposure to the world beyond their national boundaries and that as a result they had an inadequate understanding of Lithuanian national identity, especially in the context of globalization.¹⁹ Proposing a notion of "inward orientalism," he argued that:

[w]hat is specific about engagement with Asia in these stateless countries [authors' note: meaning the Central and Eastern European states] is that instead of producing knowledge in the service of the state, the local academics and in particular the cultural activists set out to appropriate orientalist knowledge for the construction of national identity aimed at resisting the colonial regime."²⁰

¹⁶ Antanas Andrijauskas, "Orientalistikos atgimimas Lietuvoje (1977–1992): orientalizmo transformacijos į orientalistiką pradžia," in *Rytų Azijos studijos Lietuvoje*, ed. Aurelijus Zykas (Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2012), 19–54.

¹⁷ Valdas Jaskūnas, "Regionistika kaip teritoriškumo ir globalumo analizė," *Logos* 54 (2008): 40–51, http://www.litlogos.eu/L54/logos54_40_51.pdf.

¹⁸ Valdas Jaskūnas, "Teritoriškumas, socialiniai mokslai ir regionistikos studijų genealogija," in *Rytų Azijos studijos Lietuvoje*, ed. Aurelijus Zykas (Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2012), 55–66.

¹⁹ Valdas Jaskūnas, „Iššūkiai nacionalinei tapatybei ir jų refleksija regionų kultūros studijose," in *Rytai-Vakarai: komparatyvistinės studijos XI. Kultūrų sąveikos*, ed. Antanas Andrijauskas (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2011), 126–138.

²⁰ Jaskūnas, "India Studies in Soviet Lithuania," 189.

Thus, in Lithuania the main impetus for Oriental studies and later, area studies, was not the pragmatic interests of the state but rather an intellectual desire to understand the world and the individual's national and/or personal identity against a backdrop of socio-political changes, i.e. changing political regimes and globalization. Currently, area studies in Lithuania stands for a certain ideological worldview. In Lithuania, area studies advocates for multiculturalism and cultural tolerance in the context of the increasing strength of various types of nationalisms and ethnocentrism around the globe. Looking at the world from the Lithuanian perspective, area studies is a relevant and necessary platform for cross-cultural understanding, which helps us to relativize our cultural constitutiveness and establish respectful relations with "cultural others."

Most accounts of area studies in Lithuania provide a macro (i.e., historical and institutional) perspective on the development of the discipline in the country. They provide an example of area studies as it is practiced away from the centers of the former colonial and imperial powers. We will attempt to elaborate on how we approach our specialties in area studies, centered on our personal positionalities within African²¹ and South Asian studies.

Our Situation Between the Post-Soviet and the Post-Colonial World

Often being called post-Soviet obliges us as Lithuanians to reflect on our Soviet past and how African and Asian histories, cultures and peoples were perceived and represented in the public culture of Soviet Lithuania. Many current Lithuanian researchers, or their parents who raised them, grew up within Soviet culture and under its influence. One of the essential ideological mottos of the Soviet Union was the "friendship of the peoples." The fundamental principle of the Soviet state was all-around fraternal cooperation and mutual assistance of the peoples and nations that have taken the socialist path of development. The meaning of "friendship of the peoples" was widely discussed by politicians and academics. Vladas Sirutavičius writes about how Soviet Lithuanian Communist party members, in their speeches during various party and non-party meetings, emphasized the special significance of the phrase.²² Soviet propaganda made

²¹ In the context of Lithuanian humanities, I (K.S.) tend to identify myself as an African studies scholar. However, when introducing myself to international researchers, I usually describe myself more specifically, as a researcher working with Southern African history and culture. This shift in my professional identity reflects the challenges of my academic positionality.

²² Vladas Sirutavičius, "Nacionalizmo manifestacijos' ir 'tarybinių tautų draugystės' ideologema, Kaunas 1944–1953 m.," *Kauno istorijos metraštis* 18 (2020): 91–106.

the “friendship of Soviet nations” a part of daily life of the people of the Soviet Union. That friendship was praised at party conferences and exalted in literature and the arts.

One of the simplest and most effective ways to inculcate the desired ideology was through stories and illustrations in children’s magazines. Soviet internationalism was illustrated in magazine photos and drawings of multinational youth embracing and smiling like “one family.” Such images undoubtedly had a significant impact on young people’s worldviews at a time when Lithuanian nationality was considered a “relic” of isolation and nationalism. It could only be expressed in innocuous Lithuanian folklore, i.e., dances, songs, and fairy tales, so long of course as they corresponded to the ideological framework of the Soviet Union. The ideal of the friendship of people appeared in the first issues of the monthly children’s magazine *Genys* after World War II. In the May 1954 issue, one can see a drawing of an African girl by Sofija Veiverytė. The April 1955 issue features an article by Antanas Venclovas about his trip to China, the life of children in that country, and his visit to a school full of tributes to the Soviet Union, such as a dove of peace cut out of paper and posters on the walls with the slogans “We love work! We love peace! The Soviet Union is China’s best friend!”

Very often, Soviet Lithuanian artists would exaggerate the facial features or physiques of African people. They almost always depicted Africans at least partially unclothed. If such images were meant to combat racism, their persistent appearance in the pages of *Genys* is puzzling, to say the least. Racial stereotyping in Soviet propaganda, produced by supposedly internationalist Soviet artists and commissioned by the supposedly internationalist state, was clearly at odds with the message. Whether the stereotypes arose from ignorance or some deeply rooted racism within Soviet culture is as yet unclear.

Another important aspect of Soviet politics was a “lesson” about the special character of the Russian nation and its role in consolidating the Soviet system and helping the “fraternal” nations of the Union to build socialism.²³ Rasa Čepaitienė states that the “friendship of peoples” publicly promoted in Soviet art covered up the inevitable Russification.²⁴ A Slavic-looking child (who in the context of Soviet culture would be unmistakably recognized and assumed to be ethnically Russian) is commonly pictured as a leading figure for children from the “ethnic” republics of the Soviet Union, such as Armenia and Kazakhstan.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Rasa Čepaitienė, “Sovietinės kultūros šaltiniai: Tarp futurizmo ir paseizmo,” *Darbai ir dienos* 52 (2009): 85–104, 99.

Although the ethnic makeup of the Soviet Union was highly diverse, in the context of the visual hierarchy, the ethnic Russian child was the leader of the Soviet Union as a whole – the big Russian brother leading the little brothers from the remaining fourteen Union Republics. The preponderance of such tableaux in *Genys* highlights the problem of “Soviet whiteness.” The Slavic figure denies and erases the ethnic complexity of the Soviet Union. Illustrations and stories signaled the importance the regime placed on the Soviet Union being seen as tolerant and friendly towards people of different races, in contrast to the racist image of the United States created in the Soviet press. On the other hand, the Soviet narrative of the friendship of peoples glossed over racial differences, inequalities, and negative stereotypes within the Soviet world, rendering them invisible, at least officially.

The imaginaries of the Orient in Soviet Lithuania were quite contradictory. Antanas Andrijauskas describes how in Soviet Lithuania for artists, scholars and writers Orientalism promised a romantic escape from the harsh and oppressive reality of Soviet life, while for the communist regime it associated with “dangerous” anti-Soviet ideology.²⁵

The influence of the Soviet ideology of “fraternity” on the representations of African and Asian people in Lithuanian culture is insufficiently researched. One of the very few publications that has broached the topic is the book *Another History of the Children’s Picture Book: From Soviet Lithuania to India* (2017), co-authored by the Lithuanian and Indian scholars Giedrė Jankevičiūtė and V. Geetha. This book is a rare challenge to Eurocentric thinking, in which Lithuania and India have jointly been deemed to be merely targets of Soviet visual propaganda. Further research is needed to explore the peculiarities of the Soviet imaginations of Africa and Asia and the legacy of Soviet Orientalism in contemporary Lithuanian culture.

Throughout the Soviet and immediate post-Soviet periods and until recently, race was rarely part of the political and public discourse on identity in Lithuania. In the almost two decades since Lithuania joined the EU, the country has become increasingly enmeshed in the process of globalization. Questions about the country’s role in the worldwide conversation about race, our relationship with racism, and the role race plays in the production of everyday life are finally starting to be raised. These developments are intensified by echoes of the protests against police brutality and systemic racism in the United States and

²⁵ Andrijauskas, “Orientalistikos atgimimas Lietuvoje.”

Europe in recent years, immigration flows from non-EU countries, and the rise of Sinophobia due to COVID-19.

Racial awareness is also beginning to inform Lithuanian academic work and public discourse through the adoption of (primarily) American and British decolonial discourses, especially those about race and skin color. As Paul Gilroy argues, race has been and remains a powerful force within the context of modernity.²⁶ The decolonial program originated in Latin-American subaltern studies and later evolved into a much more epistemologically and politically radical and global critique of Western modernity/coloniality. It has so far remained marginal in Lithuania's domestic society and academia, but it is central to the positioning of Lithuania as a legitimate member of the EU.²⁷ Because of its history as a subject of the Soviet Union, Lithuania lacks the political vocabulary of race, not to mention caste, in its everyday discourse. Race did not exist as a social and political form of identity, as opposed to nationality within official Soviet policy even though the peoples that constituted the Soviet Union were quite diverse. Contemporary Anglo-American discourses and modes of analysis of race are based upon their history of slavery and colonialism and therefore do not map neatly and easily onto the Lithuanian context and experience. Decolonial thinkers would argue that two essential elements of the colonial network of power were missing in the Soviet context – capitalism and race. Although that might have been true before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with the ensuing change of political system Lithuania acquired some of the benefits of the Western imperial experience, its economic models, and its anthropological and political discourses that eventually actualized debates on race and decolonization.²⁸

Another aspect to consider is the relationship between the postsocialist and postcolonial experiences. Some scholars have tried to compare the theories and methodologies applied to the two of them. According to Jill Owczarzak, “‘post-socialism’ has been used as a geographic label, not an analytic category, in contrast to ‘postcolonialism,’ which has a rich history as a theoretical paradigm.”²⁹ Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery claim that:

²⁶ Paul Gilroy, *“There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack”: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London: Allen Lane, 2000).

²⁷ Madina Tlostanova, “A Decolonial View of Baltic Drama. Countering Postcolonial Narratives,” *Baltic Worlds* 3 (2016): 83–86.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Jill Owczarzak, “Introduction. Postcolonial Studies and Postsocialism in Eastern Europe,” *Focaal* 53 (2009): 3–19, here 4, doi: 10.3167/fcl.2009.530101.

despite differences in timing, both ‘posts’ followed and continue to reflect on periods of heightened political change – the fall of the Berlin Wall and of Communist Party monopolies, or the formal granting of independence – and both labels signify the complex results of the abrupt changes forced on those who underwent them: that is, becoming something other than socialist or other than colonized.³⁰

In his groundbreaking article “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” David Chioni Moore pointed out that by the early twentieth century the scope of postcolonial theory included almost the entire world except for the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. He believed that the absence of the Soviet bloc countries is one of the principal issues missing in postcolonial thought.³¹ He argued that the term “postcolonial” is a useful “designation for yet another zone: the post-Soviet sphere – the Baltic states, Central and Eastern Europe (including both former Soviet republics and independent ‘East Bloc’ states), the Caucasus, and Central Asia.”³² Moore later added that the two most important features of this giant area are “first, how extraordinarily postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet regions are; and, second, how extraordinarily little attention is paid to this fact, at least in these terms.”³³ Without trying to generalize about the social conditions in the quite different societies living in the region, Moore stressed the parallels with postcolonial societies and the general conditions of Soviet colonialism that have influenced it.³⁴

Despite the parallels, there is a certain hesitance on the part of the Baltic societies to apply postcolonial discourse to themselves. They are reluctant to identify themselves with the countries of the “third world,” as the still-used rhetoric of the Cold War period refers to them, and their problems.³⁵ Violeta Kelertas in her research on Baltic postcolonialism states, “[p]referring to think of

³⁰ Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, “Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009): 6–34, here 11, doi: 10.1017/S0010417509000024.

³¹ David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 116, no. 1 (2001): 111–128, doi: 10.1632/pmla.2001.116.1.111.

³² Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?” <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/p/postcolonial-post-soviet/is-the-post-in-postcolonial-the-post-in-post-soviet-toward-a-global-postcolonial-critique-david-chioni-moore.html>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ The question of Russian colonialism and Russia’s imperial ambitions is especially relevant in the current context of the Russian war in Ukraine.

³⁵ Violeta Kelertas, *Baltic postcolonialism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

themselves as superior to other colonized peoples ... the Balts find being lumped together with the rest of colonized humanity unflattering, if not humiliating, and want to be with the ‘civilized’ part of the world.”³⁶

Ontologically, as the aforementioned scholars imply, there are certain similarities between the postcolonial and post-Soviet conditions. There are epistemological similarities as well, in that there is a noticeable tendency in postsocialist studies to write about postsocialism using the terminology and conceptual framework of postcolonial studies, applying concepts like otherness, hegemony, knowledge formation, etc. As Jill Owczarzak aptly argued, in the colonial understanding, the embodiment of the East for the Western world was the so-called Orient – the Middle East, China, India, etc. Then, in the Cold War context, the East, represented by the big new “other” – the Soviet world –, was moved epistemologically closer to the West. Owczarzak highlights that “[t]hese same dichotomies have been perpetuated in the postsocialist era, particularly through discussions about what essentially distinguishes Western democracy from the communist regimes of the Cold War era. ... On this developmental scale, Eastern Europe served as the West’s intermediary ‘Other,’ neither fully civilized nor fully savage.”³⁷

What relationships are formed when a “postsocialist” subject decides to research a “postcolonial” subject? Do their ontological and epistemological similarities play a part? Having internalized the postcolonial and decolonial discourses, we as Lithuanians quite often attribute to ourselves the blame of being white and Western, even though our country never directly instigated any colonial or imperial projects. We accept that we as individuals and researchers cannot meaningfully engage in conversations about Africa and Asia, race, and caste without leaving behind all the colonial baggage that is omnipresent in the ways Europeans perceive themselves and the world. We carry that baggage by default as members of the European culture. Moreover, our feelings of discomfort as researchers may also be nudged along by the fact that as children we were raised in the late Soviet cultural milieu, which had certain romantic orientalist imaginaries and racial prejudices against peoples of different colors and cultures. Hence, as “westernized” Eastern Europeans, we carry double guilt with regard to racial prejudices – that of both the Soviet and the Western worlds. As westernized Eastern Europeans, we are one step behind in the process of mental decolonization.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Owczarzak, “Introduction,” 5–6.

It is our experience that on the first encounter our African and South Asian interlocutors tend to focus on our supposed white privilege. We are often perceived to be typical Westerners by those with whom we engage in our research, without their recognizing our cultural and historical specificity. However, after they get to know the history and realities of Lithuania (particularly the history of its occupation and Sovietization and its brief experience with development assistance), they begin to discern new shades of cultural racism and coloniality. As one Dalit interlocutor put it to us, “Now I realize that you [Lithuanians] are not really white, but rather grey people.” It is as if Soviet history and our post-Soviet condition provides us with a specific identity that allows us to overcome the stigma of colonialism. The similar experiences of postcolonial and post-Soviet life are not self-evident, as are differences in skin color. Once explained, however, they become a bridge of sorts that helps us to establish relationships. As many others probably do, we as researchers share our history with our interlocutors not only because it is a part of our own identity, but also because it opens doors to us.

Our Situation Within African and South Asian Studies

In this part, we divide our discussion to talk about our personal professional journeys through African and South Asian studies. We seek to provide a view from inside the two disciplines and a context for the subsequent discussion of our positionality in the race and caste debates.

Karina Simonson

I am a professional historian of African art whose primary research focus is South African Jewish history and culture. The title of my doctoral dissertation was “Baltic Jewish Photographers in the Republic of South Africa (1930–1976): Leon Levson and Eli Weinberg” (2018). Several geographical, chronological, political, ideological and cultural problems came up in the course of analyzing my dissertation’s subject matter. First of all, I was keenly aware of my positionality when I was writing it. I had to acknowledge that and be cautious about becoming yet another white Western scholar who prematurely and all too eagerly declares herself as an “expert in African art.” My awareness and feelings of responsibility motivated me to try to find an approach to the oeuvre of South Africa’s Jewish photographers without imposing any Eurocentric preconceptions or imperialist attitudes on it. Second, I wanted to find a way to make my

dissertation project a bridge between geographically disparate countries and cultures. Third, my dissertation was an attempt to raise critical issues of decolonization, Eurocentrism and white privilege that are rarely addressed in Lithuanian art history studies. Finally, the project opened up to me an ambitious avenue of research dedicated to Lithuania's relationship with African art, and that of the Baltic region as a whole.

Before becoming an art historian, I was trained as a professional artist. My undergraduate degree was in photography, from the Vilnius Academy of Arts. Later, I graduated with two Master's degrees, one in photography and video from the Vilnius Academy of Arts and another in media arts from the University of Cape Town. Looking back, it was the time I spent in South Africa, and not my university studies, that led my career in an unexpected direction – African studies. After a significant amount of time away from academia and working various commercial jobs, I decided to return and study for a doctoral degree. It was the South African experience that shaped the topic of my PhD dissertation.

Researching the life and works of Jewish photographers in the socio-political context of South Africa's apartheid regime made me reconsider my position in African studies. It also made me add some new and diverse historical topics, including the historical connections between Lithuania and some African countries, questions of colonialism and decolonization, and issues of race and racism in Eastern Europe, to my research focus. What this means is that I always keep in mind the issue of the right and competence of a Lithuanian academic to talk authoritatively about African culture and history. Is there a way one can earn that right?

South Africa was *terra incognita* for most Lithuanians at the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, South Africa, along with Palestine, was one of the most popular destinations for the emigration of Lithuanian Jews, despite being thousands of kilometers away from Europe. They were seeking asylum from antisemitic Tsarist policies imposed on the territory of Lithuania. As a result, about 80 percent of today's Jewish population of South Africa is of Lithuanian origin. The contribution of the South African Jewish community to the political and cultural life of South Africa has always been huge, even though Jews make up only 0.2 per cent of the total population there. The history of South African photography features many Jewish names. They took advantage of the wider availability of photographic equipment and the rise of the photo atelier business, developed ethnographic documentary photography, and documented the anti-apartheid resistance.

To this day the scope of studies in Lithuania related to twentieth and twenty-first century Africa is very limited. Those who have a global perspective on art history notice the lack of knowledge about the representation of Africans in Lithuanian art history. Mainstream art history has focused on the connections between nation-states and “Western” art centers in the global metropolises. Lithuanian art historians pay the most attention to neighboring countries (Latvia, Poland, Belarus) and canonical art centers (Rome, Paris, Berlin, London, New York). Several non-European art studies and studies on cultural interactions have appeared in Vilnius University’s journal *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* since 2000 and the series of edited volumes *Rytai-Vakarai: komparatyvistinės studijos* (East-West: Comparative Studies; edited by Antanas Andrijauskas) since 2002. One of the very recent examples of this positive change is a 2022 issue of *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* edited by Laura Petrauskaitė, which is dedicated to cultural interactions between South America and Eastern Europe.

In my current research on cultural connections between Eastern European and African countries, the question of my positionality reappears every time I prepare and conclude an article, curate an exhibition, or give a lecture to university students. I strongly believe that in many cases, raising the issue of my positionality and starting a conversation about it is more important than having precise and detailed answers to it.

Kristina Garalytė

My academic journey began with Indology studies at the Center of Oriental Studies at Vilnius University in 2004. Back then, the Center and the program of study had a strong focus on classical textual studies of various Asian cultures. Several courses engaged in a critique of ethnocentrism and eurocentrism, a perspective that was significantly underdeveloped in the Lithuanian academic field outside of Asian studies and anthropology programs. Even though Lithuania did not experience the Western type of colonialism directly, in the course of our studies we learned to interrogate how our thinking was influenced by a colonial mindset that placed Europe and Western civilization at a central point when thinking about the world.

Throughout my undergraduate studies, and following the tradition of Indology, I was interested in the Ramayana (the classical Indian epic focused on the god Rama’s story). I ended up writing my undergraduate thesis on the Ramnami, followers of Rama who form a so-called untouchable caste in Chhattisgarh, in central India, where I did short-term fieldwork. My research interests then

shifted from the “great tradition” to the “little traditions,” and from classical Indology to anthropology. In the context of Indian studies, the “great tradition” is understood as rituals and customs rooted in various textual sources of the Brahmins (reputedly the highest and most ritually pure caste of Hindu society). Meanwhile, the “little traditions” are the various vernacular, rural traditions that are adaptations of the Brahmanical “great” tradition or independent creations of the people. Anthropology and its focus on non-textual traditions provided me with a base for a critique of the textual study of Indian culture rooted in Brahmanical tradition and Sanskrit texts, and allowed me to discover the diversity of practices and beliefs within Indian culture.

Another shift in my academic journey took place through my engagement with the Dalit (the former untouchables in the Indian caste system) during my doctoral studies at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. I researched Dalit student activism on Indian university campuses. Since the 1990s, Dalits have been mobilizing on Indian campuses to assert their communal rights and challenge the dominant upper-caste Hindu culture. They are seeking to forge national and international solidarity among various marginalized communities. My research on Dalit activism confirmed ideas that had been elaborated in many anthropological works about the cultural differences of the communities of the “little traditions” with the dominant cultural milieu. The major takeaway from my engagement with Dalit student activism and Dalit studies was a theoretical understanding of and practical experience with the politics of constructing knowledge. The question of how people and groups are represented within the academy has been an ongoing concern for this marginal yet rising group of people. The question of their representation in the academy directly relates to the theme of this article.

In the course of my academic journey from classical Indology to anthropology, and from Indian epics to Dalit student activism, I had to resolve several fundamental questions about my positionality. How does my cultural background affect the process of getting to know “cultural others”? On what sources do I base my research and how do these sources shape my understanding of the cultures I study? Most importantly, what is my position within my research field and what ethical concerns arise for me as a representative of the academy? Every stage of my academic engagement had a lesson for me to learn. Indian studies taught me about cultural relativism and how to reflect critically on the colonial legacy in Western academic thought. Anthropological research enabled me to focus on multiple forms of lived reality and understand that “Indian culture” looks very different from what classical Indology portrays when it is viewed

from the perspective of the marginal communities. Meanwhile, Dalit studies encouraged me to reflect critically on the way Dalits were presented and how academic knowledge about them was constructed. This is not to say that one perspective, that of Indology or anthropology, is more intellectually valid than the other. Rather it is to acknowledge that the different questions and concerns that are of interest to these two academic disciplines can fruitfully build upon each other.

Situating Ourselves within Race and Caste Debates

Though our research fields and professional journeys have been rather different, the problem of representation has emerged for both of us as a unifying experience. Moreover, we have encountered this problem not only in our own direct experiences but also in the theoretical insights to which we have been exposed during the various stages of our postcolonial, decolonial, African, and Dalit studies and research. African and Dalit studies insiders have fervently raised questions about the academic legitimacy and ethics of the production of knowledge in this area by outsiders, most of whom represent the Western academic tradition. Therefore, in this part, we once again individually examine how we situate ourselves in the context of race and caste debates and this criticism by insiders.

Karina Simonson

Scholars of African studies have recently come under increasing criticism for their marginalization of African voices, interests, and agendas. According to one study, the share of articles written by Africa-based authors and published in the two major UK journals *African Affairs* and *The Journal of Modern African Studies* from 1993 to 2013 has declined from around 25 per cent to 15 per cent of all contributions.³⁸ Increasingly, African scholarship is associated with the production of empirical facts and socio-economic statistics rather than theory. It has most often been published locally rather than internationally, and suffers from other disadvantages that discourage respectful exchange and engagement

³⁸ Ryan C. Briggs and Scott Weathers, "Gender and Location in African Politics Scholarship: The Other White Man's Burden?" *African Affairs* 115, no. 460 (2016): 466–489, here 460, doi: 10.1093/afraf/adw009.

with Western scholars.³⁹ On the other hand, the notion that the field of African studies is too dominated by Western epistemologies and interests⁴⁰ starts to look more and more reasonable. Given the large number of Western university programs, institutions, publications, and white scholars now active in the field, I kept wondering, is it still ethical for the white scholar to study Africa? It became important for me to explore the role that race plays in shaping knowledge production about the continent and how whiteness plays a role in my research.

As an interdisciplinary scholar also working in Jewish studies, I was very much aware of the history of othering and excluding Jews in Lithuania, as well as in other countries of the world.⁴¹ Therefore, the question of my positionality as partly a Gentile, partly a Jew myself often appears to me in my research on Lithuanian Jews. When I started to write my doctoral dissertation on South African Jewish photographers, I had to review it carefully and find novel ways to access the life stories of the photographers and to engage with their artworks. The Lithuanian Jews in the Tsarist Russian Empire had been an “othered” and oppressed minority group for ages. Arrived to apartheid South Africa they were still a minority, but the color of their skin made them a very privileged group. Therefore, I was obliged to ask questions about their positionality with regard to the mostly black subjects of their photography. That led me to question my positionality regarding the subjects of my research and its moral and academic legitimacy.

My engagement with questions of race in the context of African studies did not start out as a personal one, but it did lead to my unpacking the complex personal relationship I had with the notion of race and my place in the race conversation. The process started during my Master’s degree studies at the University of Cape Town. There, I realized for the first time in my life that I am “white.” Indeed, I was a typical white Lithuanian who did not see herself as belonging to any race at all, because in my mind back then race was for those who were different from you.

³⁹ Insa Nolte, “The Future of African Studies: What We Can Do to Keep Africa at the Heart of Our Research,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 31, no. 3 (2019): 296–313, doi: 10.1080/13696815.2019.1584552.

⁴⁰ Paulin Hountondji, “Knowledge of Africa, Knowledge by Africans: Two Perspectives on African Studies,” *RCCS Annual Review* 1, no. 1 (2009), doi: 10.4000/rccsar.174.

⁴¹ Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, eds., *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Zygmunt Bauman, “Jews and Other Europeans, Old and New,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 42, no. 1 (2009): 121–133, doi: 10.3167/ej.2009.420111; Manuela Consonni and Vivian Liska, *Sartre, Jews, and the Other: Rethinking Antisemitism, Race, and Gender* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020).

In the still highly segregated context of post-apartheid South Africa, it is nearly impossible to go shopping or take a bus ride without encountering race in one way or another. While I clearly belonged to one particular racial group, I was not equipped with the proper knowledge or the proper mental tools for engaging with what for me was a new dimension of my identity. I most often tended to take the easy road, that of “observer.” I was well aware of the racial tensions and racism present in South African society, but I saw myself as an outsider. As such, I did not have the right to interfere with, comment upon, or judge anything or anybody. My usual stance was, “I do not understand this because I am coming from a supposedly racially homogenous, non-colonizer country.” It took years and dozens of conversations with my South African friends and colleagues to realize how wrong I was to take that view. Very patiently, they brought me to realize that I participate in the race conversation just like everybody else, whether they are from Africa, Asia, or the Americas. Being Lithuanian and not from a country with an imperialist past, I had to learn both my privilege and my responsibilities as a white person.

There was another fact that I was forced to acknowledge, another type of personal engagement with my topic of study. Multiracial families, whose members can be classified under certain circumstances in different racial categories, are relatively common. I happen to belong to one. Such families have interesting dynamics, especially when they appear in public. It was on a return visit to South Africa in 2020 that I realized that I felt proud walking down the street with my multiracial son, going to museums, and visiting my alma mater. My son came with me to all my meetings with friends and colleagues. Then I began to wonder about my unmerited sense of pride. It was as though I was treating my son’s identity as some kind of achievement of my own. My son seemed to me to give me a voice or even credibility to speak about race. He was my “pass.” It took me months of Covid quarantine back home to unravel my multilayered, complex feelings about being a white scholar of African studies. At that depth of complexity, I had a nagging feeling that I was subconsciously thinking of myself as not “good enough” to connect in any meaningful way with the very subject about which I supposedly am an expert, and that I was using my son as some kind of “human shield” to deal with that. Perhaps in a *hintergedanken*, I feared that without my mixed-race son I could not be accepted, taken seriously, trusted, or even worthy of the friendship of my interlocutors. Having him gave me a “right” to do my research.

Since the emergence of critical race studies in the United States in the mid-1970s, questions of race have been mainstreamed far beyond African studies in many American and European universities. On the other hand, the question of caste is still underdeveloped outside of South Asian studies programs and departments. In Europe, and the Western world more broadly, caste is largely seen as a purely Indian or South Asian thing. However, there is a growing number of works that argue that caste has ceased to be only a South Asian phenomenon, and has migrated with the diaspora communities and been adapted to host societies in different parts of the world.⁴² There are initiatives by Dalit activists to bring the question of caste discrimination up to the level of racial discrimination and to frame Dalit rights as human rights in the context of the United Nations.⁴³ Dalit engagement with caste debates on a global scale is framed as “Dalit cosmopolitanism.”⁴⁴ Through the work of Dalit intellectuals and activists, who seek to establish solidarity with minority communities around the globe, the world is being sensitized to Dalit experiences and grievances. Their initiatives are contributing to the internationalization of caste issues and Dalit concerns.

Even Westerners whose home countries have no tradition of colonization carry the burden of whiteness. By contrast, caste does not appear to raise any direct ethical qualms in the non-South Asian researcher because she/he is by default “caste-free.” It would be easy to assume that because a non-South Asian researcher does not belong to the caste hierarchy, she/he does not harbor any of the caste biases for which upper caste South Asian researchers are often reproached by Dalit activists and intellectuals. However, I would like to challenge that assumption by showing how caste continues to matter, even if a researcher comes from a supposedly caste-free society. No longer specific to

⁴² Nicolas Jaoul, “Beyond Diaspora: Ambedkarism, Multiculturalism and Caste in the UK,” *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 27 (2021), doi: 10.4000/samaj.7489; Vivek Kumar, “Different Shades of Caste Among the Indian Diaspora in the US,” *Transcience* 12, no. 1 (2021): 1–12, https://www2.hu-berlin.de/transcience/Vol12_No1_1_12.pdf; Suraj Yengde, “Caste Among the Indian Diaspora in Africa,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 50, no. 37 (2015).

⁴³ Clifford Bob, “Dalit Rights Are Human Rights’: Caste Discrimination, International Activism, and the Construction of a New Human Rights Issue,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2007): 167–193, doi: 10.1353/hrq.2007.0001; Eva-Maria Hardtmann, *The Dalit Movement in India: Local Practices, Global Connections* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁴ Luis Cabrera, “Dalit Cosmopolitans: Institutionally Developmental Global Citizenship in Struggles Against Caste Discrimination,” *Review of International Studies* 43, no. 2 (2017): 280–301, doi: 10.1017/S0260210516000322; Luis Cabrera, *The Humble Cosmopolitan: Rights, Diversity, and Trans-State Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

South Asia, caste is becoming a social, political and moral issue for the global community.⁴⁵ Now, researchers inevitably have to take a political and moral stand with regard to caste discrimination. Even in Lithuania, espousing certain universal values, such as human rights, obliges the researcher to address the problem of caste discrimination, although it is still not part of our reality here. In the current context of global connectivity, what is seen as a foreign and alien issue or concern can easily metamorphose into a “glocal” reality. This is exactly what we have seen with Black Lives Matter protests in Vilnius in 2020, where previously distant racial discrimination issues managed to bring Lithuanian youth to the streets.

It would be difficult to impute any innate caste bias to a Lithuanian researcher, simply because the cultural context of caste relations is not part of Lithuanian social reality (the country does not even have a distinguishable South Asian diaspora community). Still, caste bias might appear when I think about what I, as a researcher, might say about Indian society, how I represent it in my work, and how my representations might be rooted in certain social and political discourses. During my field research, I have experienced this several times, when my interlocutors have asked me what authors on caste I read or when they condemned some academic literature I had bought, which according to them was written by, as they put it, casteist scholars. It made me realize that there is no neutral writing on caste and that the whole field of caste research resembles an intellectual minefield that I, as a foreigner, am attempting to enter. If I read the literature that my informants criticized, I would be in danger of reproducing that caste worldview in those books. On the other hand, if I simply follow my interlocutors’ recommendations on “ideologically correct” literature, would not I be representing the partisan views of another particular social group and lack the proper critical distance?

Because my research was done on university campuses, my field positionality and my academic positionality eventually overlapped. I interviewed and carried on conversations with scholar-interlocutors, but I had to maintain professional relationships with them in the academic field and engage with their critique of my work. After all, we are players in the same academic field. Interestingly, I was never reproached by my Dalit interlocutors for taking this topic on for research. Rather, they commended me for engaging with their concerns and grievances. However, a more critical stance regarding the representation of Dalits in academic literature has emerged among Dalit intellectuals, movement leaders and non-Dalits engaging with Dalit studies in the last decade. This is aptly

⁴⁵ Cabrera, “Dalit Cosmopolitans.”

reflected by Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai in *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*. They question the relationship of theory to actual experience and observe that recently, “groups and communities began to assert the primacy of their experience” and “began to resist attempts by ‘outsiders’ to describe and re-categorize their experience.”⁴⁶ Particularly Guru finds any non-Dalit engagement with Dalit issues problematic. Both authors agree that attempts to rethink the relationship between theory and experience have been largely Eurocentric and fail to address the specificity of the different cultural contexts.⁴⁷ This reflects an ongoing wider debate about the authenticity of representations in the literature about various minority communities worldwide (e.g. Dalit, Adivasi, Burakumin and others).

Attempting to root the debate in the local Indian experience, Guru criticizes the Indian social sciences for their inegalitarian nature, their neglect of the authentic Dalit experience, and their preference for academic theorizing.⁴⁸ He accuses the Indian social sciences, particularly sociology and anthropology, of reproducing the orientalist mindset and social-epistemic inequality of the West. He asserts that the so-called upper caste Brahmins are prioritized in theory while empirical research is prioritized for the Shudras (Dalits and other so-called lower castes). He argues that Dalits should stop “making guest appearances in somebody else’s formulations and restore to themselves the agency to reflect organically on their own experience.”⁴⁹ Though Guru’s criticism is primarily aimed at Indian scholars for their specific caste identities and privileges, its major premises problematize any non-Dalit’s engagement with the Dalit experience.

Then what arguments can one adopt, if he or she does not come from a Dalit background, in the face of such an ethically powerful critique? Guru’s approach can be commended for its social consciousness and for encouraging Dalits to engage with theory more bravely. However, his approach needs to take two counter-arguments into consideration. First, Guru speaks of the Dalit experience as a homogenous thing, as if all Dalits have one single uncontested experience of untouchability. A closer look would reveal that there are various caste groups within the Dalits that often come into conflict. It is quite often the case that the

⁴⁶ Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, eds., *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁸ This resonates with the aforementioned critique on Western epistemologies dominating the African studies field.

⁴⁹ Gopal Guru, “Egalitarianism and the Social Sciences in India,” in *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*, ed. Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9–28, here 24.

social hierarchy of the caste system is replicated among Dalits themselves. Can different Dalit castes find unity and agreement about a theory built on a single social experience? Which base of the Dalit experience would best characterize the multiplicity of Dalit experiences?

Second, Guru's position denies any need on the part of the Dalits or those researching them to understand the "cultural other." If previously marginalized groups close themselves off from others, it becomes much more difficult for the others to empathize with their marginalization. Representations of the Dalits produced by other social groups or cultural outsiders may lack the depth provided by lived experience as a Dalit, but they will only be improved by dialogue. Dialogue is a necessary, if not inevitable path for any marginalized group seeking social inclusion to take.

Conclusion

The two personal accounts presented in this article should allow the reader to understand how we, as Lithuanian researchers, are not only constituted by the post-Soviet condition and postcolonial and decolonial trends, but also navigate them as we shape our professional identities, build field research contacts, and respond to critiques and morally justify our research. When one analyzes one's positionality, it is important to reflect upon various historical, institutional, and personal factors. We sought here to demonstrate how we experience two kinds of interrelated positionalities – academic positionality and fieldsite positionality. Both positionalities reflect Lithuania's and our own transition from the Soviet cultural and intellectual legacy to the Western postcolonial and decolonial discourses. This transition obliges us to remain conscious of the Soviet past while we adapt to Western academic trends. In this autoethnographic essay we wanted to describe the dual positionalities we as Lithuanian researchers have in the field of area studies, but even more to encourage other researchers to reflect critically on the multidimensional, agentive, and strategic aspects of their positionality. We hope that positionality will not become just another buzzword, as has happened with decolonization and many other words. We want it to be a useful tool and methodological approach in area studies and beyond for critical reflection on the micro- and personal politics of research.

Mielke and Hornidge observe that area studies now functions not in a bipolar but rather a multicentric world. This change in geopolitics has also changed

the nature of area studies, making it more diverse and versatile as a discipline.⁵⁰ Escobar has encouraged us to think of the world as a “pluriverse,” recognizing multiple possibilities and realities.⁵¹ These scholars’ support for diversity and plurality of perspective encourages us to embrace the regional specificity of area studies and researchers’ positionalities, keeping in mind that three-quarters of European countries do not have a direct history as colonial powers. Respect for diverse perspectives all around legitimizes the engagement of outsiders like us with “cultural others” and allows us the chance to make meaningful contributions to better understanding of our pluriversal world.

⁵⁰ Mielke and Hornidge, eds., *Area Studies at the Crossroads*.

⁵¹ Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

NAVIGATING AREA STUDIES: INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS IN MIDDLE EASTERN AND NORTH AFRICAN, SOUTH ASIAN AND LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

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Abstract

In this collaborative article, we – Anwar Mhajne and Crystal Whetstone – investigate our positionalities in diverse area studies through a critical reflection on our experiences as political science graduate students conducting fieldwork for our dissertations. We work across different area studies – the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and South Asia and Latin America – mainly as an insider (Mhajne) or simply as an outsider (Whetstone). Taking an interpretive approach and using the method of autoethnography, we critically reflect on our different fieldwork experiences undertaken as political science graduate students, relying on postcolonialism to guide us. We ask: how can our fieldwork experiences complicate the structures of insider and outsider in relation to our situatedness in different regions of area studies? We engage with a decolonial feminist framework to help unpack these experiences and to imagine how our varied experiences disrupt the colonization processes embedded within area studies. We conclude by identifying eight ways to further decolonize area studies based on our fieldwork and other scholars' work.

Keywords: area studies; positionality; autoethnography; decolonial feminism; MENA; South Asia; Latin America

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Introduction

In this article, we – Anwar Mhajne and Crystal Whetstone – investigate our positionalities in diverse area studies through our fieldwork experiences as political science graduate students. We work across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), South Asia and Latin America through a combination of those from the region (“insiders”) (Mhajne) and those not from the region (“outsiders”) (Whetstone). Mhajne identifies as Palestinian Israeli, secular and Arab. Mhajne’s dissertation was on Egyptian women in the Muslim Sisterhood in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution in Egypt. Whetstone identifies as white Anglo-American whose dissertation was on mothers of the disappeared in Argentina and Sri Lanka.

We ask: how can reflecting on our fieldwork experiences help to decolonize area studies? We engage with a feminist framework to disrupt the colonization processes embedded within area studies. As feminist researchers, we are committed to a “methodology...[in which] we reflexively examine the ways in which our *own* engagement in the world contributes to...violences” in all forms.¹ Through autoethnography, we critically reflect on our graduate fieldwork experiences. Autoethnography – or self-narrative – includes storytelling but goes beyond simple narration to “engage in cultural analysis and interpretation.”² By interrogating our fieldwork experiences in Istanbul, Turkey, Colombo, Sri Lanka and Buenos Aires, Argentina, we suggest practices that scholars can adopt to decolonize area studies, from graduate students to seasoned scholars.

We follow an interpretive approach in this article, focusing on sense-making, to better understand our respective experiences in the field as mainly an insider (Mhajne) and outsider (Whetstone). Interpretivism provides an ideal methodology given that our research question seeks to complicate notions of insider and outsider in regards to our differently positioned situatedness and is attentive to contextual factors in the research, the research environment and all actors involved in the research.³ The next section will trace the importance of reflexivity in our research in full. Here suffice it to say that understanding our own positionality in relation to our research and to those whom we encounter

¹ Annick T.R. Wibben, Catia Cecelia Confortini, Sanam Roohi, Sarai B. Aharoni, Leena Vastapuu, and Tiina Vaittinen, “Collective Discussion: Piecing-Up Feminist,” *International Political Sociology* 13 (2019): 86–107, here 90, doi: 10.1093/ips/oly034, emphasis in original.

² Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (London: Routledge, 2008), 43.

³ Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

in our fieldwork is a critical part of our work as feminist scholars of comparative and international politics. Reflexivity is critical to both feminist and interpretive work.⁴ The method of autoethnography, which is not to be confused with autobiography, does include the use of narratives, but the purpose of this method is to interrogate the narrative for contextual understanding.⁵

This article proceeds as follows. In the first section, we trace feminist reflexivity in area studies. In the second section, we address decolonizing efforts in area studies. In the third section, each author recounts their experiences conducting fieldwork. In the discussion section, we critically reflect on what can be done to further the decolonization of area studies through a feminist framework based on our fieldwork experiences and lessons learned as early-stage professionals in academia.

Reflexivity for Feminist Researchers in Area Studies

As feminists, we are committed to reflexivity, a practice that helps us to unpack our own and others' positionalities and our work. Rabia Ali describes reflexivity as a "process of reflection and comparison" that ideally remains ongoing throughout the research process.⁶ Feminist research encourages "dialectical engagement between reflexivity and intersectionality to contextualize the research(ed)." Reflecting on the multiple layers and social markers of our identities, as well as of our research participants and areas of research helps us to "avoid replicating hierarchies and power relations...[in] knowledge production."⁷ This assists in decolonizing research and producing higher quality research.

Reflexive methodologies derive from Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway who suggest that objectivity – when understood as neutrality – is impossible given that where one stands influences one's interpretation.⁸ Harding argues that women have a more expansive perspective compared to men, given women's lower social status. This outsider standpoint provides women with an

⁴ Rabia Ali, "Rethinking Representation: Negotiating Positionality, Power and Space in the Field," *Gender, Place & Culture* 22, no. 6 (2015): 783–800, doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2014.917278; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design*.

⁵ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*.

⁶ Ali, "Rethinking Representation," 794.

⁷ Wibben et al., "Collective Discussion," 92.

⁸ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986); and Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599, here 588–589, doi: 10.2307/3178066.

understanding of the world that is both different from and superior to the vantage point of those in power.⁹ This has been complicated to recognize how positionality is constructed by interacting social signifiers.¹⁰ While the social sciences have historically taken personal experience in research as problematic, “one’s own awareness of one’s own personal position in the research process [is]...a corrective to ‘pseudo-objectivity.’”¹¹ By interrogating one’s social position and values, research is *less* biased than if a researcher’s perspectives remain under the surface, influencing research without accounting for such influence.

The qualitative researcher is encouraged to reflect on their insider/outsider status and how that might impact their research question, methodology, research location, and the interpretation of the data. An *insider* researches populations of which they share a common characteristic such as identity, language, and similar experiences with the research participants.¹² Being an insider usually enables the participants to trust the researcher. The shared identity could allow participants to share their experiences with the researcher because they assume that the researcher understands their experiences.¹³ Thus, “participants are typically more open with researchers so that there may be a greater depth to the data gathered.”¹⁴

While *outsider* researchers have to “build trust over the course of their work, for insiders, established trust is the foundation upon which they construct their research.”¹⁵ However, an insider status can derail the research process beyond the access stage because participants might fail to express and reflect on their experiences fully because they assume that the researcher is already familiar with it. Moreover, the researcher’s experience might be the dominant factor guiding the interview questions and data analysis rather than that of the participants.

⁹ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 580–585.

¹⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986): 514–532, doi: 10.2307/800672.

¹¹ J. Ann Tickner, “Feminism Meets International Relations: Some Methodological Issues,” in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. Brooke A. Ackerly, Maria Stern, and Jacqui True (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 19–41, here 28.

¹² Marilyn E. Asselin, “Insider Research: Issues to Consider When Doing Qualitative Research in Your Own Setting,” *Journal for Nurses in Professional Development* 19, no. 2 (2003): 99–103, doi: 10.1097/00124645-200303000-00008.

¹³ Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle, “The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8, no. 1 (2009): 54–63, here 58, doi: 10.1177/160940690900800105.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁵ Mariam Attia and Julian Edge, “Be(com)ing a Reflexive Researcher: A Developmental Approach to Research Methodology,” *Open Review of Educational Research* 4, no. 1 (2017) 33–45, here 38, doi: 10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068.

For instance, a researcher might focus on common factors between them and the participants and de-emphasize factors that are different, or vice versa. Insider research is viewed by some as problematic because insider researchers have a personal investment in the research setting.¹⁶

This leaves us with the question of whether you have to be an insider to truly understand, communicate, and analyze your participants' experiences. Fay addressed the question, "Do you have to be one to know one?"¹⁷ He argued that being an insider is not necessary nor sufficient to help you "know" the experience of the group under study. He explained, "Knowing an experience requires more than simply having it; knowing implies being able to identify, describe, and explain."¹⁸ Fay also argued that people are usually so caught up in their own experiences that they fail to distance themselves enough to conceptualize the experience of other members of the group adequately.

Considering these issues, we can see that there are negative and positive implications for both being an outsider or insider researcher. Recent scholarship has disrupted binary constructions of insider/outsider and "researched/powerless and researcher/powerful model," which stresses how identity and power is dynamic and fluctuates depending on the circumstances.¹⁹ Unpacking power relations remains integral to reflexive and decolonial thinking even as there is growing recognition that both researchers and research participants hold power. Research participants choose what to share and what to keep to themselves and researchers depend upon participants to generate data.²⁰ Moreover, it is important to acknowledge as researchers that the stories we tell "are incomplete, situated, and imbued with the power of our own interpretation."²¹

We agree with Fay that a dialectical approach helps address the complexity of sameness and differences between the researchers identity/ies and the group they are researching. As Fay explains, "[i]n a dialectical approach, differences are not conceived as absolute, and consequently the relation between them is not one of utter antagonism."²² As Dwyer and Buckle explain, "Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not

¹⁶ Dwyer and Buckle, "The Space Between," 58.

¹⁷ Brian Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹ Ali, "Rethinking Representation," 790, 795.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 791–792.

²¹ Katarina Kušić and Jakub Záhora, eds., *Fieldwork as Failure: Living and Knowing in the Field of International Relations* (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2020), 4.

²² Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*, 224.

being a member of a group does not denote complete difference.”²³ Viewing insider and outsider status as shifting by context and even “particular *moments*” allows for a richer reflexive process.²⁴

Who is an insider and outsider requires an intersectional approach that takes a person’s entire identity into account and analyzes which aspects of identity are relevant in a specific situation.²⁵ Sasha Roseneil’s use of insider/outsider follows participation in political movements as a basis of intersectional identity. Research on social movement organizations or other groups (such as domestic workers) is enriched when the researcher herself has been a part of the movement.²⁶ In this sense, each of us is an outsider to the women whose political lives animate our research. It is the responsibility of the researcher to be aware of their positionality and how their context influences not only their access to and interactions with the community, but also the way the data is analyzed and expressed. Nevertheless, there are connections among some of us and our research participants, including regional connections. Anti-imperial scholars – many of whom might be deemed insiders – have troubled area studies by developing new fields of inquiry to decolonize it.

Disrupting Area Studies’ Colonialist Origins: Postcolonialism and Decolonialism

The origins of MENA, South Asian and Latin American area studies point to area studies’ entanglements with US imperialism. As area studies broadened to include insiders, postcolonial and decolonial studies were developed to dismantle inaccuracies in area studies and promote greater diversity in epistemology and methodology. We map out this history to disrupt area studies’ origins in imperialistic Cold War geopolitics, which through the inclusion of insiders and insider allies led to postcolonial and decolonial studies.

Area studies is often traced back to the National Defense Education Act of 1958 (NDEA), a response to the USSR’s launch of Sputnik, which generated fear among US lawmakers that Americans were falling intellectually behind the

²³ Dwyer and Buckle, “The Space Between,” 60.

²⁴ Bahar Baser and Mari Toivanen, “Politicized and Depoliticized Ethnicities, Power Relations and Temporality: Insights to Outsider Research from Comparative and Transnational Fieldwork,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 11 (2018): 2069.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2070.

²⁶ Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), 7–8.

country's Cold War rival. NDEA was enacted to ensure a stronger education system in the United States, therein casting knowledge production in service of national security.²⁷ From 1959 to 1987, NDEA allocated \$167 million to support area studies.²⁸ While the NDEA is linked with area studies, area studies programs date back to the early twentieth century. Even then, such knowledge was used to serve military and other strategic purposes.²⁹ Private funders, such as the Ford Foundation, have also invested great sums into area studies.³⁰ When the Cold War ended in 1989/1991, there were calls to streamline area studies with the presumption that with the great power conflict over, there was less need for area studies.³¹ Additionally, with globalization's presumed homogenization, many viewed area studies as unnecessary. However, globalization meant a greater need for area studies to understand how processes of globalization are transformed at the local level. This resulted in a growth of area studies centers over the last two decades, reinvigorated through "trans perspectives" linked with an increasingly globally connected world.³² Moreover, following the 2001 9/11 attacks, area studies in service of strategic ends was once again on the rise.³³ Yet growing progressive voices – mainly insiders – in area studies over the decades since the NDEA have worked against this and helped to decolonize area studies.

Middle Eastern and Northern Africa (MENA) studies arose from biblical and Semitic studies, fields wrought from European colonization of "the Orient." "Orientalist studies" eventually moved from only studying the past to also looking at contemporary societies. Because MENA came out of the early fields

²⁷ Timothy Mitchell, "The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David Szanton (San Diego: The Berkeley Electronic Press, 2003), 1–24, here 2, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/editedvolumes/3/2>, 2003.

²⁸ Mitchell, "The Middle East," p. 25–26, footnote 12.

²⁹ Nicholas Dirks, "South Asian Studies: Futures Past," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David Szanton (San Diego: The Berkeley Electronic Press, 2003), 2, 4, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/editedvolumes/3/2>, 2003; and Paul W. Drake and Lisa Hilbink, "Latin American Studies: Theory and Practice," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David Szanton (San Diego: The Berkeley Electronic Press, 2003), 3, 5, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/editedvolumes/3/2>, 2003.

³⁰ Mitchell, "The Middle East," p. 25–26, footnote 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

³² Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge, "Introduction: Knowledge Production, Area Studies and the Mobility Turn," in *Area Studies at the Crossroads: Knowledge Production after the Mobility Turn*, ed. Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 3–26, here 7–9.

³³ Andrea Teti, "Bridging the Gap: IR, Middle East Studies and the Disciplinary Politics of the Area Studies Controversy," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2007): 117–145, 117–118, doi: 10.1177/1354066107074291.

of Semitics and biblical studies, it was the first area studies to take off in the academy and gained traction after World War II.³⁴ The short-lived American Association for Middle Eastern Studies – founded in 1955 – was discredited and brought down through donations from Zionist organizations. In 1966, the Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) was founded and included a significant number of social scientists. MESA's inaugural meeting in December 1967 followed the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Yet MESA's board prevented discussion of the conflict, suggesting that taking sides nullified claims that their scholarship was “scientific,” a long-time preoccupation of social scientists. In response to MESA's avoidance of the Arab-Israeli War and over concerns of MESA's possible CIA links, the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG) was founded in 1967 as a counter to MESA. Edward Said and others with anti-colonialist perspectives used the AAUG to contest orientalist narratives in MENA scholarship.³⁵

Said's *Orientalism* “put establishment Middle East studies on the defensive” with the rhetorical question of what is the Middle East but a construct of the Western imagination.³⁶ Said argued that “Orientalism” misrepresents the Middle East in binary and reductive terms as the opposite of the West, backward, exotic and irrational. Said's work gave rise to postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism evaluates “the material and epistemic legacies of colonialism” through experiences in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia and takes seriously ongoing imperialisms.³⁷ Postcolonialism is interested in the long-lasting effects of European colonialism, particularly in constructed binaries that privilege the so-called “West” and Western ways of thinking, while rendering local practices backward.³⁸

Like MENA, *South Asian studies* is linked with postcolonialism given that South Asian studies stems from ancient Indic civilizational and Sanskrit studies. As with MENA, South Asia was deemed part of “the Orient” and housed within Oriental Studies. After World War II, South Asia was separated from Oriental Studies.³⁹ Many of the earliest South Asianists received research funding through the CIA's precursor, the Office of Strategic Services, pointing to the national security and other strategic concerns of area studies. Early South Asianists stressed Hinduism and Sanskrit as foundational to South Asia, even

³⁴ Mitchell, “The Middle East,” 3–5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9–15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 1–9.

³⁸ Mitchell, “The Middle East,” 16.

³⁹ Dirks, “South Asian Studies,” 1–3.

going so far as to suggest (without evidence) that Muslims upset India's "cultural unity." Far-right Hindu nationalists – who engage in violence against minorities, especially Muslims – have found such arguments useful to their violent political project. Initial South Asian scholarship essentialized the region through ahistorical understandings that, for example, claimed Muslim-Hindu conflict as inevitable, and read contemporary events against understandings of "ancient India."⁴⁰ A movement in the 1970s developed "ethnoscology" to stress India's point of view. It operated in an essentialized fashion that spurned anything not "native," again emphasizing India as unchanging as well as singularly Hindu.⁴¹ Postcolonial studies includes South Asian area studies and launched subaltern studies, which moved postcolonial theorizing to highlight society's most marginalized along lines of "class, caste, gender, race, language, and culture."⁴²

Latin American area studies has not had to contend with the Orientalism of MENA and South Asian studies. Because of this, Latin Americanists both abroad and in the region have experienced higher rates of collaboration compared to those in other area studies. However, this is not to say that there are not inequities along the North-South axis, particularly in terms of funding that favors regional outsiders. Due to several philanthropic foundations focusing on the region dating back to the 1930s, Latin American studies is the US's most robust area studies.⁴³ Transnational collaboration between the US and Latin American academy – which has been much more a two-way street than other area studies – has resulted in a greater diversity of scholarship compared to other regional studies, including in methods and critical theory.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the earliest scholarship on Latin America in US academia included blatant racism that promoted notions of "backwardness" endemic to the region, not unlike tropes found in Orientalism. The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and major Latin America journal boards, however, have included regular participation by Latin Americans. Given the significant negative interventionism by the US in Latin America because of Cold War politics, LASA became a space of criticism of US security policy in stark contrast to MESA's conservatism.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4, 28, 8–9, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22–25.

⁴² Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1475–1490, 1477; and Dirks, "South Asian Studies" 33.

⁴³ Drake and Hilbink, "Latin American Studies," 1–2, 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8–9; Anne Sisson Runyan, "Decolonizing Knowledges in Feminist World Politics," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 20, no. 1 (2018): 3–8, doi: 10.1080/14616742.2018.1414403.

⁴⁵ Drake and Hilbink, "Latin American Studies," 10, 3, 5.

What postcolonial theory began, decolonial theory continued. Decolonialism is linked to Latin American studies, with an emphasis on indigenous perspectives. Scholars outside of Latin America participate in decolonial studies, especially in regions that have undergone settler colonialism.⁴⁶ Settler colonialism in the Americas meant that Europeans exploited these regions through colonial practices and settled the lands. This led to new societies based on racialized categories that placed Europeans and their descendants as elites over indigenous and Afrodescendant populations.⁴⁷ Decolonial studies highlights how European colonialism launched “modernity” through the global capitalist system and binary constructions of European social practices as scientific and superior, read against the rest of the world as irrational and backwards.⁴⁸ The entrance of insiders into area studies led to the development of postcolonialism and decolonialism, two sub-fields that point to how positionality plays a key role in interpretation.

By reflecting on our insider/outsider positionalities in our research sites, we challenge the strict dichotomy between insider and outsider underpinning much of area studies. Through ongoing interrogations of our dynamic insider/outsider positionings, we show both the challenges and benefits of relating differently or similarly. Further, following IR scholars such as Linda Åhäll who explores the significance of micropolitics of the everyday to national security and other so-called forms of high politics, which can invisibilize and normalize colonial practices in what on the surface appears to unproblematic practices,⁴⁹ we consider the embedded implications of our different positionalities within our research.

⁴⁶ Priti Ramamurthy and Ashwini Tambe, “Preface,” *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 3 (2017): 503–511, here 503–505; Kiran Asher, “Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui on the Dilemmas of Representation in Postcolonial and Decolonial Feminisms,” *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 3 (2017): 512–524, 519, doi: 10.15767/feministstudies.43.3.0512.

⁴⁷ Asher, “Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui on the Dilemmas of Representation in Postcolonial and Decolonial Feminisms,” 519; Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–232, 216–217, doi: 10.1177/0268580900015002005.

⁴⁸ Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” 221.

⁴⁹ Linda Åhäll, “Feeling Everyday IR: Embodied, Affective, Militarising Movement as Choreography of War,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 2 (2019): 428–435, here 438–439, doi: 10.1177/1043659614527321.

Two Autoethnographies in Istanbul and Colombo and Buenos Aires

In this section, we overview our diverse fieldwork in experiences using autoethnography as a method. While self-narrative is a component of autoethnography, it is the analysis and interrogation of these self-narratives that form the core of autoethnography.⁵⁰ By interpreting the subtexts of our fieldwork experiences within a feminist framework, we seek concrete actions that can be taken to decolonialize area studies, which we outline in the final section of this article.

Mhajne

My interest in researching Islamist women's activism began at a young age. I grew up in a conservative Muslim family in Umm Al Fahem, Israel, the home of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement. During the first 19 years of my life, I was surrounded by strong Muslim women who actively endorsed and promoted religious teachings and voted for the Islamic movement in every municipal election. As a teenage rebel, I always argued with these women on women's issues, political agency, and gender roles in the family. This interest became more prominent when I moved to live in Beer Sheva, a mainly Jewish city in Israel. There, I had discussions with some of my Jewish classmates on Islam and women. My colleagues viewed Muslim women as oppressed and Arab/Palestinian cultures as backwards because of their treatment of women. Later, I moved to the United States where I heard similar sentiments in US media and from private individuals. My personal experience with Islamist women showed me there is a significant misunderstanding of religious women in general and Islamist women in particular that needs to be addressed. I decided to dedicate my research to understanding Islamist women's political organizing to help me rationalize my own lived experiences and to contribute to providing an academic explanation for their activism.

In the winter of 2016–2017, I conducted fieldwork for my dissertation, “Political Opportunities and Strategic Choices of the Muslim Sisterhood in Egypt,” in Istanbul, Turkey.⁵¹ In 2013, I intended to conduct interviews in Egypt with members of the Muslim Brotherhood and their affiliated political party,

⁵⁰ Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, 43.

⁵¹ Anwar Mhajne, “Political Opportunities and Strategic Choices of the Muslim Sisterhood in Egypt” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2018).

The Freedom and Justice Party. However, I was not able to go to Egypt. My visa application to go to Egypt has been pending since 2014. I found out later on through a close colleague, who I will not reveal their name for security reasons, that my visa was rejected because even though I am Palestinian and Arab, the individuals reviewing my visa application viewed my Israeli passport and interest in women's issues with suspicion.

Another reason why I could not go to Egypt is that in July 2013, the Egyptian army ousted the first democratically elected president after the events of the January 25 revolution. The president was Mohammad Morsi from the Freedom and Justice Party. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who Morsi had appointed as minister of defense, led the takeover. Even though Morsi was democratically elected, he attempted to implement problematic policies, such as temporarily issuing a Presidential decree in 2012 to expand his powers. In addition, Sisi cracked down on Islamists and other political opponents following the coup. For instance, on August 14, 2013, security forces in Cairo slaughtered about a thousand mainly unarmed Morsi supporters. As a result, Egypt now has thousands of political prisoners. Morsi himself died in an Egyptian courtroom in 2019.

This massive crackdown made it challenging to conduct fieldwork in Egypt safely for both the researcher and the research participants. Indeed, my Egyptian colleague, Walid Salem, a University of Washington doctoral student, was imprisoned for months in Egypt on suspicion of spreading false news and belonging to a terrorist group. When he was imprisoned, Walid was in Egypt, conducting interviews for his research on Egypt's judicial system. In addition, many women I interviewed in Egypt via phone, such as Huda Abdelmonem, were eventually imprisoned.

Due to the crackdown, I found establishing contact with members of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially the women, who are now being targeted in more significant numbers than under Mubarak's regime, challenging. I luckily met a Ph.D. candidate from SOAS, University of London, at the Institute for Qualitative Multi-Methods Research whose adviser worked with the exiled Egyptian Brotherhood members in Turkey. The professor graciously agreed to introduce me to Amr Darrag, a notable Muslim Brotherhood leader who served as Egypt's Minister of Planning and International Cooperation before the military coup in 2013. Previously, he served as a member of the Executive Board of the Freedom and Justice Party and the Chairman of the party's Foreign Relations Committee. I scheduled my first interview with him during my layover in Istanbul on my way to Israel.

Knowing the suspicion my Israeli passport could bring, I identified myself as a Palestinian from Umm al Fahem. I was naively surprised when he knew my town. Umm al Fahem is an Arab town in the Northern part of Israel where Sheikh Raed Salah founded the Northern Branch of the Islamic movement. Islamists in the region know Sheikh Raed Salah for his advocacy for the preservation of the al-Aqsa mosque and his vocal resistance to Israel. Two more personal meetings and emails followed the meeting. Amr Darrag introduced women and men affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood who live in exile in Egypt. Some of the people he connected with me were open to having a conversation and wanted me to include their names in my writing. Others avoided my calls, declined to be recorded, or asked to be anonymous. I interviewed 15 men and women affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood using a snowball sample.

Even though I disagreed with them, and I am weary of the involvement of religion in politics, I was thankful for them for trusting me with their stories about the Egyptian state. Some of them shared their trauma of losing a family member in one of the pro-Morsi protests after the coup; others told me how they are stuck in Turkey and cannot finish their graduate work in Europe because the Egyptian government refused to renew their passports, rendering them stateless. Even though I was an insider in many ways – I spoke Arabic, grew up Muslim, and was born in the Middle East, I was also an outsider because I was not Egyptian, I was not an Islamist, and I held a contentious Israeli passport. However, the unique history of my town and its ties to Islamist movements in the region made me more of an insider than an outsider.

Another element that complicated my research was the political situation in Turkey in late 2016 early 2017. My Israeli passport, which had my US visa, was stolen during my first week there. I had to worry about replacing my Israeli passport and then replacing my US visa while in Istanbul. The next day, on December 10, 2016, twin bombings in Istanbul killed at least 44 people, mostly police officers, and wounded 155 others. On December 19, 2016, the Russian ambassador to Turkey was assassinated in Ankara. On New Year's Eve, a gunman shot and killed 39 people and wounded 79 others at the Reina nightclub in Istanbul. Navigating these challenges was even more difficult because I was an outsider to my research site, Turkey, and I did not speak Turkish. This made it hard for me to stay in the country long enough to interview more people. It also made reaching the participants and meeting them at their preferred locations challenging.

My fieldwork experience highlights multiple challenges and access points. My initial contact with the Muslim Brotherhood was possible through a Western professor working at a Western university. After the coup, the Muslim

Brotherhood focused on reaching out to and engaging with Western institutions as a way to challenge the common perception of them as anti-human rights and democracy. Various scholars and think-tank analysts had access to the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership living in exile in Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere outside Egypt. In this sense, even though my identity as an Arab from a Muslim family helped establish trust between my interviewees and me, my positionality as a scholar working in the West and writing in a language accessible in the West was helpful for the Muslim Brotherhood. It helped me gain initial access to members of the leadership in Turkey.

As to the data analysis, my upbringing in an environment full of strong religious women in a state context hostile to their movement (in the case of Umm al Fahem, Israel banned the Northern Branch of the Islamist Movement in 2015 and imprisoned its leader Sheikh Raed Salah on multiple occasions) has prepared me to understand and relate to the women's experiences, vulnerabilities, and intersectional positions. However, not being completely an insider, in the sense of not sharing a national identity with these women, was helpful for me to develop an analysis that is conscious of elements of ideological bias. One of the reasons I did not study Islamist women in my hometown was because it was too close to home. I was worried that by being an insider sharing too many common identities with the research participant, I would not be able to fully identify and understand their political organizing because I am submerged in their daily realities. I was also worried that I would be unable to represent and express my accurate findings comfortably due to my direct connections and family ties to these groups. Studying Islamist women's organizing in a somewhat similar context helped me understand and write about the Islamist Movement in Israel.

Whetstone

In fall 2017, I conducted fieldwork for my dissertation, "Nurturing Democracy in Armed Conflicts through Political Motherhood: A Comparative Study of Women's Political Participation in Argentina and Sri Lanka," in Colombo, Sri Lanka and in spring 2019, in Buenos Aires, Argentina.⁵² My positionality as an Anglo white US citizen makes me an outsider in both contexts. I speak no Sinhala, Tamil or Spanish, further reinforcing my outsider status. Prior to fieldwork,

⁵² Crystal Whetstone, "Nurturing Democracy in Armed Conflicts Through Political Motherhood: A Comparative Study of Women's Political Participation in Argentina and Sri Lanka" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2020).

I had envisioned conducting interviews with participants of two groups of mothers of the disappeared, the Mothers' Front and the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo. However, in Colombo, I learned that most members of the Mothers' Front had passed away. This pushed my project in a new direction, to an examination of the legacy of the mothers of the disappeared. The interviews I conducted were mainly with scholars but also civil society actors. Most of the people I interacted with were middle class and highly educated. Nevertheless, the inequities that paint the global South as "backwards" and "uncivilized" remain at the fore of both popular culture and academia.⁵³ It is imperative for outsiders to remain vigilant regarding these dynamics, which I lost sight of at times.

Some of the Sri Lankan scholars I spoke with conveyed their warranted suspicion of me. One stressed the pattern of global North scholars coming to the global South to collect data and leaving without giving back anything, a problem that has been called to attention in recent decades.⁵⁴ An archivist made it apparent that I was unwelcome at the library. It is critical for global North scholars – especially those of full outsider status – to reflect upon such messages. I also had to question myself when I sought to challenge arguments of some Sri Lankan scholars. While we shared middle class status and academic backgrounds, even as a graduate student, it was incumbent upon me (given the power dynamics) to pay attention to how I worded critiques. Too often I dismissed that I held power since I was a graduate student. Being white in the US academe – even as a graduate student – carries weight with it, whether I realized that or not. I owe my dissertation advisor and other committee members a deep debt for their help in pointing out this issue when I began the writeup portion of my fieldwork. Continuing with reflexive thinking even when fieldwork ends is critical and this lesson points to the need to collectively reflect on positionality.

My time in Buenos Aires was shorter. Perhaps for this reason I did not experience any questioning of why I was researching in Argentina. Some do not consider Argentina part of the global South. Argentina is part of the G20 and many of its middle and upper classes – who lean politically right – argue that Argentina is more akin to Western Europe than Latin America, often in starkly racialized

⁵³ Crystal Whetstone and Murat Yilmaz, "Recreating the Third World Project: Possibilities through the Fourth World," *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2020): 565–582, here 567, doi: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1702457.

⁵⁴ Aisha Giwa, "Insider/Outsider Issues for Development Researchers from the Global South," *Geography Compass* 9, no. 6 (2015): 316–326, here 316–318, doi: 10.1111/gec3.12219.

terms.⁵⁵ My status as a white American with money to travel sent signals in Argentina I was not always aware of. When heading back to the US, I left some books at my rental, including one on Marxism, for future visitors. I had thought I would stay in touch with the flat owner as we had been friendly. But once the book was discovered, our contact ceased. I suspect that I was assumed to think along the lines of most – certainly not all – middle and upper class Argentines, who are ardently anti-Marxist.

Throughout dissertating, I regularly asked: Who was I to do this project? Would not a Sri Lankan or Argentine scholar be better suited? Others would see more and differently than I. For some outsiders – at moments or over time – they become part of a community, but I do not think I can ever become an insider in South Asian or Latin American area studies. The groups that I studied in my dissertation are mothers of the disappeared and I am not a mother, much less a mother of a disappeared person. Likewise, the disappeared in both the Mothers' Front and Madres of the Plaza refer to particular moments in history. I identify with Sri Lanka and Argentina but think even if I moved to one of these countries and learned local languages, I would not be much of an insider. Where I view myself as an insider is in how I critique my government's policies in national security, global trade and other areas that harm not only Sri Lanka and Argentina but people throughout the world, including marginalized communities in the US. By studying the perspectives of communities outside the mainstream in the US and abroad, I have gained understanding of the devastation wrought by the empire. As a white middle class American, I have a responsibility to work to change US policies because these policies have benefited my family in very apparent ways.

While doing my PhD, I reflected upon my status as the granddaughter of an Okie who grew up impoverished and despised in California as an outsider, and the granddaughter of a working-class mother who put in time at factories and nursing homes. Both my grandmothers eventually became secretaries, part of the feminized pink-collar ghetto of the 1960s and 1970s. This led them to middle-class lives in their middle age, options due to their status as white women in the US, a global superpower, and before automation upended secretarial work. In unpacking my motivation for my dissertation while conducting my fieldwork, I realized that I want to bring attention to the global South, still neglected in

⁵⁵ Enrique Garguin, "‘Los Argentinos Descendemos de los Barcos’: The Racial Articulation of Middle Class Identity in Argentina (1920–1960)," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2007): 161–184, doi 10.1080/1744220701489563.

political science scholarship. I conduct research on the global South because it is missing and because it matters. While I cannot understand what I research in the same ways as those who share greater points of connection, I hope that my contributions encourage more (white) Americans to take an interest beyond the US and push Americans to demand that their government reverse harmful policies that put America first.

Decolonizing Area Studies through Academic Practice

We seek to answer: how can reflecting on our fieldwork experiences help to decolonize area studies? We dig further into our respective fieldwork narratives to find concrete measures to decolonize area studies. Additionally, we find inspiration in Catia Confortini's analysis of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), a women's organization that developed in World War I with the aim to end war. While the group initially held stances that essentialized women and ignored the issues of women of color and women living outside of the global North, WILPF evolved in through members' use of a feminist critical methodology. Over time, it helped WILPF to recognize the needs and issues of more than its original white, middle class members from the US and Europe and to critically reassess the concept of security. According to Confortini, feminist critical methodology empowers people:

To identify and remedy actual or potential forms of oppression and exclusion... in their own practice

[To welcome] input and ideas from (potentially) all

[To engage in] critical self-reflection...[on their] assumptions, language, and embeddedness in a particular historical and ideological context

[To engage in] recurrent evaluation...[of their] practices and ideas.⁵⁶

Confortini's construction of a feminist methodology provides an ideal framework to consider methods for decolonizing area studies. In this section, we unpack our fieldwork and dissertation experiences while reflecting on area studies' norms and development of postcolonialism and decolonism.

The fieldwork experience of Mhajne points to the complexities around defining insiders and how researchers' insiderness shifts based on the issue at hand,

⁵⁶ Catia Cecilia Confortini, *Intelligent Compassion: Feminist Critical Methodology in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 114.

over time and given various and intersecting identities of both researchers and research participants. Mhajne's identity as a Palestinian Arab Israeli was both disadvantageous and advantageous in her research. While it prevented her ability to enter Egypt, meeting Egyptian women members of the Muslim Sisterhood living as refugees in Turkey was facilitated by her connection to Umm al Fahem, her hometown. While not part of the Muslim Sisterhood or even religiously identifying, Mhajne's background made her an insider in a sense, for she had grown up around the Islamic faith, which helped her to understand participants.

Mhajne's experiences point to how researchers inhabit both insider and outsider spaces in ways that disrupt a binary and static insider/outsider positionality. Nevertheless, the insights that Mhajne perceives in her research projects will inevitably yield more depth than anything a total outsider such as Whetstone can glean. This makes reliance upon (partial) insiders' scholarship paramount to ensure the most accurate and rich analysis in area studies. However, full outsiders can become (partial) insiders if they spend enough time living in/with a community.⁵⁷ Regardless of a researcher's positionality, Confortini's feminist critical methodology concept that she attributes to WILPF could be deployed by any researcher to engage in reflexive thinking. Each of us is implicated in a web of harm. Understanding both our privileges and oppressions will improve the analysis of our research, regardless of whether or how much we can fully mitigate harms.

With this in mind, we identify eight major ways to decolonize area studies through scholarly practices. One of the most obvious ways to decolonize area studies is by frequently citing insiders, however defined. We by no means suggest that insiders are simply from the region. Instead, an insider is better constructed as a researcher who shares some identity markers with the participants. The insider does not fully have to belong to the community they research, but are able through some of their cultural and personal contexts to relate to some identifying elements of the communities they are investigating. The only way texts become "classics" is if they are referenced regularly. A basic political action is to cite insiders from the global South and other marginalized communities. In kind, it is a decolonial act to avoid citing any studies that rely on essentialism or reductivism, a move that also results in more accurate research. Furthermore, it is a decolonial practice to reject citing any outsider who fails to set foot in the region of which they are supposedly an expert, or who does not cite insiders. This would also strengthen the integrity of research. Relatedly, another obvious

⁵⁷ Baser and Toivanen, "Politicized and Depoliticized Ethnicities," 2072–2073.

way to decolonize area studies is to cite postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. These fields represent “insider” area studies in full fruition with an emphasis on insiders’ perspectives.

A second major method to decolonize area studies is to collaborate with and support global South scholars, whether they work in US academia or outside of it, in research projects, conference panels, round tables and other scholarly events. If the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we can find ways to “come together” even if they are geographically apart. Collaboration in the truest sense – working as partners – will result in superior scholarship and a more inclusive area studies.

A third significant way to decolonize area studies is to publish in open access sources. Countless global South scholars are unable to access the expensive databases available at even less well-off academic institutions in the US, even as this problem also impacts under-funded US institutions. By publishing in inclusive platforms (so long as they meet tenure-track requirements), we can end the dominance of global North institutions in academia. As early career scholars, we are cognizant of the limitations on academics working in the US given tenure-track demands. However, one of the most critical ways to decolonize area studies is to broaden the conversation. This minimally necessitates access to the conversation.

A fourth major way to decolonize area studies is for researchers to be frank regarding the colonial and imperial contexts influencing their research sites and participants. While discourses in both popular culture and academia paint the global South as “backward,” it is incumbent upon area studies scholars (especially outsiders) to embrace a feminist transformative approach aiming to not only document and analyze, but also to produce recommendations to help address global inequalities. Area studies scholars must broaden and present conversations on imperialism to policymakers to help them recognize how these histories influence the present, including current economic inequities within and between countries contributing to global lack of human security. They also should highlight how understanding history is vital for assessing, devising, and implementing foreign policy responses and international initiatives to promote sustainable peace based on global justice and equality.

Fifth, recognizing that education is still unequal in many regions of the world, publishing findings in collaboration with research participants (as it makes sense) and giving back to the communities we interact with helps decolonize area studies. Feminist researchers try to avoid speaking for our research participants as well as avoid viewing them through our societal and other biases,

including those gained through our academic training.⁵⁸ Our research is intended to help scholars and broader communities to understand methods to empowerment. We publish in journals for our careers but have also sought other ways to communicate our findings with the broader public, such as pieces in *The Conversation*, as well as by sharing our ideas in community-based groups. Holding local workshops, engaging in insider-based research where research participants and/or community insiders participate in some (or all) parts of the research process produces community interventions that hold greater effect and more accurate research.⁵⁹ It is also essential to make the published work accessible to the research participants by directly sharing it with them and encouraging any feedback.

Sixth, based on Whetstone's field experiences, decolonizing area studies requires a deep humility when conducting fieldwork. While there will be moments of deep discomfort even for those who might identify as partial or even full insiders, such discomfort should be used to propel researchers to become (more) attentive in how they conduct research, and conduct themselves during fieldwork, such as by being aware of the power dynamics and engaging in empathy to promote greater social justice. Recognizing that frankly, outsider researchers may not be welcomed by communities is understandable. Rather than wallowing in pain or embarrassment over slights and accusals, researchers should accept these practices as making them aware of their partial insider or outsider status and to (re)commit to reflexivity and to honoring commitments made to the community. Discomfort is not exploitation and the feelings of the researcher is not what matters. Taking the feelings of actors encountered during research into account in the research process must remain the focus to decolonize area studies.

Seventh, based on Whetstone's fieldwork experience, to further decolonize area studies, there is a need for researchers to be fully aware of the past and ongoing practices of empire and particularly if the researcher is an outsider, to be actively engaged in working to educate fellow outsiders about this history and the ongoing practices of empire and to work to change the international community's and their own government's practices. While we are still junior scholars and still learning, it is incumbent upon those in area studies – but especially

⁵⁸ Wibben, Confortini, Roohi et al., "Collective Discussion," 90–92.

⁵⁹ Lisa M. Vaughn, Crystal Whetstone, Alicia Boards, Melida D. Busch, Maria Magnusson, and Sylvia Määttä, "Partnering with Insiders: A Review of Peer Models Across Community-Engaged Research, Education and Social Care," *Health & Social Care in the Community* 26, no. 6 (2018): 779–781.

outsiders in area studies – to speak up in casual settings, the classroom, lectures, conferences, workshops and other spaces to highlight the impacts of past empire and the ramifications of continued empire on marginalized communities and states globally. Both Argentina and Sri Lanka – particularly the latter – are currently undergoing economic crises with Sri Lanka also enduring a political crisis. While some of the causes are local, understanding the global positionality of Argentina and Sri Lanka and the ongoing colonial legacies that have rendered these areas of the world on the (semi-)periphery, the internal colonialism in the global North is tightly woven to this and warrants unpacking. Area studies scholars are in an ideal position to correct the still common misperceptions that the global South is “behind” due ignorance rather than the exploitation of past and ongoing colonial practices.

Eighth, Mhajne’s fieldwork interactions show us that being an insider does not have to mean inhabiting every identifying element of the community you are studying. Commonalities such as religion, language, or geographic location could help initiate contact and establish rapport. However, it does not guarantee that the researcher will be able to gain unique insights. The researcher needs to constantly reflect on their insider/outsider status and how it influences their research process and presentation, depending not only on their personal and sociopolitical contexts but also on the contexts and interests of the research participants. These participants do not passively respond to the researcher’s identity. Some are strategic actors who grant and/or deny access to specific data and/or individuals.

To conclude, in this article, we traced the development of positionality in relation to its impact on area studies and reflected on our graduate experiences conducting fieldwork in Istanbul, Colombo and Buenos Aires. By unpacking these experiences and engaging with a feminist framework developed by Confortini, we argued for eight major methods that we suggest offer a path to decolonize area studies within the power of any academic researcher to pursue. We are committed decolonial feminists and area studies researchers who seek to make area studies accurate, accountable, diverse and inclusive, which can only happen through regular reflexivity and continual decolonization.

ANIMAL COLONIALISM IN NORTH AMERICA: MILK COLONIALISM, ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM, AND INDIGENOUS VEGANISM

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Abstract

Combining insights from postcolonialism, ecofeminism, and critical animal studies, this article focuses on the colonial experience of nonhuman animals in North America whose exploitation has been integral to the colonial expansionist project. By tracing the history of displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal agriculture, animal colonialism is also linked to mass killing of free-living animals and to environmental degradation. Furthermore, the article delineates the entangled oppression of Indigenous women's and nonhuman animals' bodies that can be theorized as colonized territories, exploited for profit via the control of their reproductive cycles. To protest the violent industrial animal farming practices that involve torture, slaughter, and mass dairying and are built on racist rhetoric, some Indigenous people adopt contextual Indigenous veganism as an act of political resistance.

Keywords: animal colonialism; milk colonialism; Indigenous veganism; decolonization; environmental racism; ecofeminism

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Introduction

Postcolonial scholarship typically focuses on the impacts of European colonization on Indigenous populations and their lands. Only recently, scholars have increasingly begun to inquire about the experience and role of nonhuman animals¹ in the colonial project. Combining insights from postcolonial studies, ecofeminism, and critical animal studies, this article will make nonhuman animals the central focus of its analysis in order to highlight their commodification and exploitation in the settler-colonial states of North America, primarily in the United States and Canada. Following the Driftpile Cree Nation scholar and writer Billy-Ray Belcourt and his decolonial animal ethic, the article aims to demonstrate the importance of including nonhuman animals in postcolonial studies as “colonial subjects” alongside Indigenous peoples.²

By arguing that colonialism is an interspecies issue, this article does not introduce any new information *per se* (certainly not so for critical animal studies scholars). Rather, the original contribution of this work lies in using extant research to make explicit an argument that has often been implicit; that nonhuman animals should be taken seriously as colonial subjects within disciplines such as postcolonial studies. The main aim of this review article is thus to provide a contribution to critical scholarship that intervenes into the mainstream anthropocentric discourse that ignores the nonhuman experience and thus inadvertently perpetuates the current status quo. The article critiques nonhuman animal exploitation and links it to colonization of Indigenous peoples by

¹ As is the convention in animal studies, ecofeminism, and other affiliated disciplines, the terms “nonhuman animals,” “other animals,” and “other-than-human animals” are used interchangeably throughout the article to refer to non-human animal species. The misleading term “animal” is mostly avoided on its own as it conventionally excludes humans from its definition, which further deepens the divide between humans and other animals. David A. Nibert also discourages the use of words that function as absent referent, i.e., that semantically create distance and mask oppression, such as “beef,” “pork,” or “cattle.” Nibert places these terms in quotation marks “to underscore the usually overlooked ideology and values built into those terms.” See David Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence: Domesecration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 6. Similarly, words that are used daily, such as “meat,” “milk,” or “eggs” reduce other animals and their bodies to mere commodities for human consumption and hide the subject behind the object. Like Nibert, I also strongly encourage any act of discursive resistance that highlights the oppressive nature of our language and unmasks the violence inherent in normalized practices. However, because of the frequent use of words such as “milk” in this article, I decided not to follow Nibert’s example of placing all oppressive terms into quotation marks to not interrupt the flow of reading.

² Billy-Ray Belcourt, “Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought,” *Societies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 1–11, doi: 10.3390/soc5010001.

compiling relevant contemporary texts from the fields of critical animal studies, ecofeminism, and postcolonialism. As such, it also provides an overview and synthesis of some of the most important scholarly tendencies in the field that could be termed as postcolonial animal studies.

After offering a brief contextual background, the article first deals with the topic of displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal agriculture, especially during the expansive nineteenth century. On selected examples of extermination of full populations of nonhuman animals, the article shows how colonization has been dependent on the destruction of natural spaces and displacement of species. It then proceeds to describe the introduction of animal products as tools of racial and gender discrimination. Following on the world-renowned ecofeminist scholar and activist Vandana Shiva's statement that through modern agricultural techniques "life itself is being colonized" and the bodies of women and nonhuman animals serve as the last frontiers, the text discusses the entangled oppression of Indigenous women's and nonhuman animals' bodies that can indeed be theorized as colonized territories, exploited for profit via the control of their reproductive cycles.³

Furthermore, the article will show that colonialism is an interspecies issue on examples of environmental racism that is disproportionately experienced by Indigenous communities. As a result of industrial farming and other capitalist industries, land, water, and air on or near reserves have been severely polluted, leading to many health problems, including poisoning of Indigenous women's breast milk. This violence is often misrepresented for its lack of sensationalism. The Arctic and the bodies of its human and nonhuman inhabitants whose reproductive systems have been compromised represent the last frontiers that are being colonized under global neoliberalism.

The last part of the article offers various ways how to resist power inequalities stemming from colonialism and domestication of nonhuman animals and outlines several more sustainable ways how to challenge these current structures. To protest the violent industrial animal farming practices that involve torture, slaughter, and mass dairying and are built on racist rhetoric, some Indigenous scholars and organizations propose contextual Indigenous veganism as an act of political resistance that simultaneously decolonizes both Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals.

³ Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), chap. 2, Kindle.

Contextual Background

Postcolonial animal studies scholars speak of “animal colonialism” to refer to, first, the exploitation of domesticated animals as involuntary tools of colonization, enabling European invasion, expansion, and erasure of free-living animals and Indigenous peoples. Second, animal colonialism is also embodied in the imposition of the Western anthropocentric worldview that places humans hierarchically above other animals and legalizes their exploitation for human benefit, altering whole environments as a consequence.⁴ Animal colonialism has manifested in multiple ways and has simultaneously impacted free-living and domesticated nonhuman animals as well as Indigenous peoples.

The Western hierarchical system that tends to divide people into categories was applied on nonhuman animals before it was applied on humans. “Wild animals” were placed below “domesticated animals” whose presence in the landscape was justified on the grounds of their utilitarian benefit for humans. While free-living animals were only useful for European colonizers when dead (to be exploited for their skin), domesticated animals served double purpose – as tools of colonization when alive, as well as providers of animalized protein in the form of milk or eggs, and as profitable “meat” when dead. This double usefulness hierarchically placed domesticated animals above their free-living counterparts who, in the eyes of colonizers, needed to disappear from the landscape to make space for the advancement of the Western “civilization.”

Similarly, Indigenous peoples were considered a “wild” obstacle in the North American landscape and as such they were pushed out of the lands they had inhabited for centuries as “the European agricultural system [was seen] as the only legitimate future for this landscape.”⁵ Because they held no domesticated animals, Indigenous people were assigned animal status and considered “wild” and “savage” like their free-living animal counterparts. In their edited collection *Colonialism and Animality*, Kelly Struthers Montford and Chloë Taylor write that “to be animalized entails the simultaneous processes of being rendered non-criminally killable, and of existing solely as a resource for humans.”⁶ Being denied the status of “fully human” was used to justify both the physical and the

⁴ Mathilde Cohen, “Animal Colonialism: The Case of Milk,” *AJIL Unbound* 111 (2017): 268, doi: 10.1017/aju.2017.66.

⁵ Frederick L. Brown, *The City Is More Than Human: An Animal History of Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2017), 21.

⁶ Kelly Struthers Montford and Chloë Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality: Anti-Colonial Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 140.

cultural genocide⁷ of Indigenous peoples on the basis of anthropocentrism and speciesism (the belief that one species is more important than others).

In the anthropocentric settler-colonial society that still legitimates the institution of speciesism, animalizing discourse continues to be used as a tool to further marginalize minoritized peoples. Being “dehumanized” is injurious to both the targeted racialized group and to nonhuman animals who are being discursively abused and denigrated as inferior to humans. In the words of Belcourt, “this not only commits a violence that re-locates racialized bodies to the margins of settler society as non-humans, but also performs an epistemic violence that denies animality its own subjectivity and re-makes it into a mode of being that can be re-made as blackness and indigeneity.”⁸

Anthropocentrism and speciesism are colonial logics that contrast with most Indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies that highlight interconnect-edness of all living beings and perceive animals as subjects with agency and their own life trajectories.⁹ As such a worldview does not accommodate exploitation of nonhuman animals for profit, the erasure of Indigeneity has been essential for colonization and capitalism. Like free-living animals, Indigenous peoples had to be either exterminated or tamed, i.e. assimilated to the Western culture and society. After being relocated and denied access to their traditional food economies, Indigenous peoples have been forced to accept the colonial assimilationist food system that has deepened their dependency on the settler state and has caused various health problems.¹⁰

⁷ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada concluded in their 2015 report on the Indian residential schools that Canada’s Aboriginal policy is best described as “cultural genocide.” The Commission defines cultural genocide as follows: “*Cultural genocide* is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.” See The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,” 2015, 1.

⁸ Belcourt, “Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects,” 5.

⁹ E.g. Montford and Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality*, 137.

¹⁰ See e.g. Dennis Wiedman, “Native American Embodiment of the Chronicities of Modernity: Reservation Food, Diabetes, and the Metabolic Syndrome among the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2012): 595–612, doi: 10.1111/maq.12009; Monica Bodirsky and Jon Johnson, “Decolonizing Diet: Healing by Reclaiming Traditional Indigenous Foodways,” *Cuizine* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1–10, doi: 10.7202/019373ar; and Andrea Freeman,

Meat and dairy milk, that has been described as “a conquering colonial commodity” by some postcolonial scholars, have played an essential role in the subjugation of Indigenous peoples.¹¹ Despite most of the world population being lactose intolerant (and predominantly people of color), milk has been universally represented as staple food and, together with meat, has been used as a colonial tool for gender and racial discrimination. While plant-based diets have been represented by the Western colonial culture as inferior and linked to emasculation, weakness, and racial inferiority, milk continues to serve as a symbol of white supremacy with its culturally constructed connection to white purity, wholesomeness and virility. Furthermore, both human and nonhuman female bodies have been exploited for their nursing milk.

Ecofeminist scholars have proposed critical ecofeminist milk studies to consider the biopsychosocial connection between a mother and her offspring which is an interspecies experience shared by human and nonhuman mammals.¹² Throughout colonial history, those who were denigrated to the status of animalized women¹³ have been subjected to some of the same abuse as nonhuman female animals. The colonial powers have imitated some of the ways they employ on nonhuman female animals’ bodies and applied them on minoritized women. Despite their differing experiences, some ecofeminist scholars believe that “there is value in considering the underlying connections between human wet nurses and female dairy cows.”¹⁴ The second part of this article will follow on their research and will also underscore the way the dairy industry uses minoritized children’s bodies to support its colonial capitalist project.

“The Unbearable Whiteness of Milk: Food Oppression and the USDA,” *UC Irvine Law Review* 3, no. 4 (2014): 1251–1279.

¹¹ Cohen, “Animal Colonialism,” 269.

¹² Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (Washington DC: Lexington Books, 2017), 66.

¹³ Cary Wolfe suggests that the Western hierarchization groups people and other animals into four categories: *humanized human* (typically white cis-gender heterosexual men), *animalized human* (minoritized people), *humanized animal* (typically those considered as “pets” such as dogs and cats), and *animalized animal* (predominantly “domesticated” animals exploited for food). See Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 101. Carol J. Adams extends Wolfe’s categorization to include *animalized women* and *feminized animals* who she argues are placed even lower in this hierarchy because of their gender. Carol J. Adams, “Why Feminist-Vegan Now?” *Feminism and Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2010): 302–317, here 313, doi: 10.1177/0959353510368038.

¹⁴ Iselin Gambert, “Got Mylk? The Disruptive Possibilities of Plant Milk,” *Brooklyn Law Review* 84, no. 3 (2019): 848, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3229995>.

Animal Colonialism

Billy-Ray Belcourt parallels the colonization of Indigenous peoples to the exploitation of nonhuman animals. His paper argues that white supremacy, neoliberal capitalism, and colonialism are enabled through “the simultaneous exploitation and/or erasure of animal and Indigenous bodies.”¹⁵ Using a “politics of space,” Belcourt explains that westward expansion and planned relocation affected both groups as farm animals and Indigenous peoples were pushed beyond the frontier and separated from the settler society and confined to spaces with a fixed boundary. To dominate the bodies of both Indigenous people and nonhuman animals, some of the same technological devices have been employed.

In his book-length study *Barbed Wire: A Political History*, Olivier Razac traces the origins of the barbed wire that was invented in the nineteenth century and has since been used as a tool of oppression of both human and nonhuman animals. Despite its apparent technological simplicity, barbed wire remains the most efficient device used “to define space and to establish territorial boundaries.”¹⁶ Razac documents the use of barbed wire during three major historical events – colonization of the American West, the World War I trenches, and the Nazi concentration camps – to unmask its primary function, i.e. to enable genocide by confining subjects to a limited space where they can be controlled.¹⁷

In another extensive study on barbed wire, Reviel Netz stresses its origins as a tool to contain cattle in the American West to point out the interconnectedness between the oppression of human and nonhuman animals. As he writes, “the history of violence and pain crosses species” and the shared experiences of agricultural animals and human victims of genocide should not and cannot be overlooked in order to fully understand their oppression.¹⁸ Razac and Netz both highlight the crucial function barbed wire had during the colonization of Indigenous tribes in the American Prairies where it proved useful in controlling vast geographical spaces. Ranchers used barbed wire to enclose pastures and grazing lands and thus denying Indigenous peoples access to their traditional lands. Barbed wire ultimately facilitated the establishment of “the new order” in the American West that was marked by “a shift of species and of race: bison

¹⁵ Belcourt, “Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects,” 1.

¹⁶ Olivier Razac, *Barbed Wire: A Political History* (New York: The New York Press, 2000), x.

¹⁷ Razac, *Barbed Wire*, 4.

¹⁸ Reviel Netz, *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity* (Durham: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), xiii.

replaced by cows, Indians replaced by Euro-Americans.”¹⁹ These two shifts were interconnected and determined by one another as the Plains Indians inhabiting the Prairies were dependent on the bison and vice versa. The near-extirmination of one directly led to the containment of the other.

The large-scale slaughter of buffalo is an especially brutal example of animal colonialism. Western technology facilitated westward expansion as railroads enabled quick transportation of large numbers of “sport hunters” who used rifles to massacre the bison herds, often by shooting them straight from the trains. Most of the dead buffalo bodies were left to rot on the Plains, some being skinned for their hides to be turned into leather and some being decapitated by the sport hunters for trophy heads.²⁰ Such displays of power and dominance highlight the Western logic that justifies both colonization of Indigenous peoples and non-human animals. As the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear writes, Western “sport hunting” and the habit of “hanging trophies on their walls [is] disrespectful to that body” and Indigenous peoples condemn such practices.²¹

In her book *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* that maps out the human-animal relations on the Turtle Island, the Anishinaabekwe environmental activist and writer Winona LaDuke reflects on the deep connection between the Plains tribes and the buffalo who are cherished, celebrated, and worshiped as “older brothers.”²² Buffalo played a central role in the lives of the Plains peoples not only for survival in times of scarcity but also for their spiritual and cultural significance. The late Oglala Lakota Birgil Kills Straight, who dedicated his life to buffalo restoration and protection, highlights the centrality of the buffalo in the lives of the Plains Indigenous peoples: “As long as the buffalo live, we can also live.”²³ Western colonists in the nineteenth century quickly detected this link between the human and nonhuman animal inhabitants of the Prairies and started the war on the buffalo as a “Government measure to subjugate the *Indians*.”²⁴ Their tactics unfortunately worked.

Over 50 million buffalo who were roaming the Prairies in the mid-nineteenth century were almost entirely exterminated by 1880.²⁵ As anticipated

¹⁹ Netz, *Barbed Wire*, 10.

²⁰ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 102.

²¹ Kim TallBear, “Being in Relation,” in *Messy Eating: Conversations on Animals as Food*, ed. Samantha King et al. (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2019), chap. 3, Kindle.

²² Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 139.

²³ Quoted in LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 139.

²⁴ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 103, emphasis in original.

²⁵ *Ibid.* See also LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 142.

by the Western colonists, the end of the buffalo also marked the end of active resistance from the Plains Indigenous peoples who were deprived of their main subsistence and way of life. As the bison disappeared from the Prairies together with the Plains tribes who were dispossessed of their lands and relocated to reservations, Western ranchers colonized the newly seized territories with other colonized subjects, the cows. Famished Indigenous tribes were then forced to accept “beef” rations from the US government which increased the Indigenous peoples’ compliance and co-dependence on the colonial state.²⁶

The environmental costs of animal colonialism in the Great Plains and beyond have been devastating. With the annihilation of the buffalo, this largest ecosystem in North America was disrupted and irretrievably changed. While the buffalo cultivated the prairie and lived in symbiosis with all of the other living organisms who were thriving in this ecosystem, the cows on the other hand deplete the lands, and overgrazing causes biodiversity loss and desertification.²⁷ Industrialized monocultural agriculture brought further changes to the landscape that is now “teeming with pumps, irrigation systems, combines, and chemical additives. Much of the original ecosystem has been destroyed.”²⁸ The prairies, once full of life, are now a stark reminder of the ills of colonization.

As ranching spread across the continent, more free-living animals became endangered through the destruction of their habitats and hunting. Ranchers waged war on all free-living animals who were seen as obstructions to their enterprise, especially those who preyed on domesticated animals after being deprived of their traditional subsistence. As wolves turned into number one targets, ranchers used kerosene to burn their pups alive in their dens while offering bounties for captured wolves who were then “publicly tortured and sometimes set on fire.”²⁹ This ruthless violence used against wolves was driven into extremes by the unfounded belief that wolves “not only deserved death but deserved to be punished for living.”³⁰ This rhetoric also justified violence against Indigenous peoples who were considered to be “more akin to wolves than to European peoples.”³¹

As they were almost driven to extinction and their habitats were destroyed, wolves recently started interbreeding with coyotes and dogs to survive in the

²⁶ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 103.

²⁷ LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 145–147.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁹ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 109.

³⁰ Brown, *The City Is More Than Human*, 38.

³¹ Montford and Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality*, 141.

colonized landscapes. Coy wolves appeared as a new hybrid species better suited for life in the colonized urbanized world. As they often search for food in urban areas, coy wolves are considered “invasive species” and are thus becoming targets of animal colonialism in the twenty-first century. But as Ortiz-Robles explains, “invasive species typically become invasive through human agency, irreversibly altering the ecosystems into which they enter and often causing the displacement or extinction of native species.”³² As such, coy wolves embody the destructive colonialism and capitalism that keeps targeting both Indigenous peoples and animals.

Just as animal colonialism was pivotal in the seizure of the vast lands of the Midwest and far West, it was used as a tool of colonization on both the East Coast and the West Coast. On the East Coast, killing free-living animals for their skins and furs to be exported to Europe was the first form of animal colonialism in North America. Colonizers killed in mass “elk, rabbits, bears, squirrels, wolves, wild cats, minks, otters, beavers, geese, and numerous species of fish.”³³ Beavers and otters were almost driven to extinction as the European wealthy used their bodies to show off their power and elevated status.³⁴ Fur trade was not limited to the East Coast as the Haisla/Heiltsuk writer Eden Robinson reminds her readers: Fur trade “wiped out sea otter populations from Alaska to California ... *Extirpation* is the dry, scientific word for the absolute destruction of a local population. A mini-extinction, if you will.”³⁵ Fur trade came to symbolize the colonial relationship with the lands, nonhuman animals, and the local Indigenous peoples, all of whom have been viewed as mere resources or facilitators of further conquest and financial gain.

Fur trade provided immediate and sizable provisional revenue before colonizers transported enough domesticated animals from Europe to start making profit from animal agriculture and continue in the colonization of more lands. That animal agriculture was the main colonial objective as well as the pretext for the seizure of Indigenous lands is apparent from the words of the first governor of Virginia Francis Wyatt, who stated that “our first work is expulsion of the savages to gain the free range of the country for the increase of *cattle, swine, etc.*”³⁶ The destruction of Indigenous croplands by domesticated animals provoked first

³² Mario Ortiz-Robles. *Literature and Animal Studies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 8.

³³ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 73.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁵ Eden Robinson, *Return of the Trickster* (Toronto, ON: Vintage Canada, 2021), chap. 14, emphasis in original, Kindle.

³⁶ Quoted in Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 72, emphasis in original.

major conflicts between the colonizers and local populations whose resistance was “weakened by epidemics of smallpox and other diseases carried by the colonizers and their domesecrated animals.”³⁷

After the acquisition of Indigenous lands in the Midwest and expansion of commercial ranching, invasions of ranchers into northern Florida sparked conflicts with the local Seminole peoples over grazing rights and ultimately factored into the start of another in the series of Seminole Wars.³⁸ Today, the Seminoles are still resisting colonial oppression against both human and nonhuman inhabitants of the Everglades that are increasingly endangered by toxic pollution from the capitalist industries and modern way of life. Raccoons, alligators, and panthers belong to the most threatened nonhuman animals of the Everglades as their bodies contain large amounts of mercury.³⁹ The Independent Traditional Seminoles continue living their lives based on the cultural and philosophical values of their ancestors and foster “caring relationships to land, water, animals, plants, and other human beings.”⁴⁰

The lucrative ranching business also provided “much of the capital necessary for the development of large Southern plantations.”⁴¹ Enslaved people and nonhuman animals labored on these plantations, which generated large profits for the wealthy elites. As agriculture spread all across the continent, the natural landscapes went through rapid and drastic changes, with many essential resources soon being depleted.⁴² It did not take long before the lands that were expropriated for agricultural use became overgrazed and insufficient for ranchers who started to trespass onto already small reservations. Once more, cows were used as instruments to seize even more land and confine Indigenous people to small enclosures.⁴³

The exploitation of nonhuman animal bodies extended beyond the vast lands of the continent. In his meticulous book-length study *The City Is More Than Human: An Animal History of Seattle* (2016), historian Frederick L. Brown shows that animal colonialism also played an essential role in the construction of American cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Using Seattle as a case study, he visibilizes the often forgotten urban-environmental animal histories,

³⁷ Ibid., 90.

³⁸ Ibid., 89.

³⁹ LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 31.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 43–44.

⁴¹ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 77.

⁴² Ibid., 78.

⁴³ Ibid., 108.

highlighting how the shifting categorization of animals has played a pivotal role in the settler-colonial urbanization. In other words, Brown argues that the socially constructed distinctions between the wild and domesticated, or pet and livestock have been “crucial to constructing human identities and urban places.”⁴⁴ While the elevated status of domesticated animals provided an excuse for the dispossession of lands from the “wild” nonhuman and human animals in the nineteenth century, their denigrated status similarly justified their relocation from urban centers when their visible presence was no longer necessary and became undesirable in the new middle-class neighborhoods. As cows and pigs disappeared from the streets of American cities, nonhuman animals categorized as “pets” established their presence in urban areas, constructing new human identities.⁴⁵

The expansion of ranching gave rise to many industries that profited from the domestication of animal bodies. From slaughterhouses and meat packing-houses to animal transport and storage providers, to textile industries and retailers, more and more settlers became dependent on the animal agriculture. As the growing businesses invested into improved and mechanized modes of production, domestication – or rather “domeseccration” as Nibert proposes to call it –, “facilitated the growth of capitalism, which in turn advanced the even greater expansion of domeseccration.”⁴⁶ From its inception, slaughterhouse has been a space of horrendous violence perpetrated against both nonhuman animals and minorized people whose “interlinking oppressions” are epitomized here.⁴⁷

Using the colonized bodies of domesticated animals who became involuntary tools and victims of colonization, the colonial powers eventually succeeded in pushing Indigenous peoples westward and onto enclosed reservations.⁴⁸ The American Indian Wars were also waged against nonhuman animals whose colonization has been interwoven with that of Indigenous people. In the words of Belcourt, “animal domestication, speciesism, and other modern human-animal interactions are only possible because of and through the historic and ongoing

⁴⁴ Brown, *The City Is More Than Human*, 7.

⁴⁵ E.g. *ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁶ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 90–91. Nibert proposes to replace the word “domestication” with the term “domeseccration” that better captures the process of human treatment of other animals whose “minds and bodies are desecrated to facilitate their exploitation: it can be said that they have been *domeseccrated*. *Domeseccration* is the systemic practice of violence in which social animals are enslaved and biologically manipulated, resulting in their objectification, subordination, and oppression.” See *ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁷ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 116.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

erasure of Indigenous bodies and the emptying of Indigenous lands for settler-colonial expansion.”⁴⁹ Once pushed onto reservations, Indigenous peoples became dependent on the settler-colonial powers who began the process of assimilation, a racial project that was once again enabled by the ongoing colonization of nonhuman animals.

Milk Colonialism

To facilitate assimilation of displaced Indigenous populations, hunger was employed as a weapon to demand compliance. Once deprived of their subsistence by being denied access to their traditional lands and resources, Indigenous people “were forced onto reservations where ‘beef’ rations from the government provided them enough sustenance to prevent uprisings.”⁵⁰ Ironically, Indigenous people now also relied on the doubly-exploited “domesticated” animals whose bodies were used to expropriate Indigenous people of their lands. Here, Belcourt’s point about the settler-state’s reliance on “the simultaneous exploitation or destruction of animal and Indigenous bodies” is very evident.⁵¹

In their paper “A Continuing Legacy: Institutional Racism, Hunger, and Nutritional Justice on the Klamath,” Kari M. Norgaard et. al. explain how “the production of hunger has been the result of a series of ‘racial projects’” that include genocide, dislocation and forced assimilation.⁵² The paper focuses on the Karuk people living in the Klamath River area (California) to showcase how the denied access to traditional lands, foodways, and management practices continues to generate poverty and hunger among Karuk people until today, causes environmental damage, loss of biodiversity, and drives cultural loss. The authors posit this production of hunger in Indigenous communities as “a present-day example of environmental [in]justice intimately interwoven with racialized environmental history.”⁵³ Indeed, while the respectful traditional Indigenous management practices truly *cultivated* the land, Western agricultural farming depleted Karuk food sources, making them reliant on the Western commodity food.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Belcourt, “Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects,” 3.

⁵⁰ Nibert, *Animal Oppression & Human Violence*, 103.

⁵¹ Belcourt, “Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects,” 3.

⁵² Kari M. Norgaard et al., “A Continuing Legacy: Institutional Racism, Hunger, and Nutritional Justice on the Klamath,” in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, eds. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 25, doi: 10.7551/mit-press/8922.003.0005.

⁵³ Norgaard et. al., “A Continuing Legacy,” 38.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37, emphasis added.

As a result, 90 percent of the Karuk tribal members live below the poverty line and more than 40 percent of residents in the Klamath River area rely on food assistance.⁵⁵

Since the nineteenth century, “feeding those whom the government had deprived of food and sustenance became a major business” and it is estimated that today up to 50 million pounds of “beef” are distributed on reservations by federal agencies every year.⁵⁶ This business relationship that generates large profits for the animal industry is dependent on the “erasure of Indigeneity” and of Indigenous non-hierarchical ontologies of interconnectedness and respectful, sustainable traditional foodways. Billy Ray-Belcourt explains how capitalism depends on this simultaneous entangled colonization of Indigenous and animal bodies:

Settler colonialism requires the erasure of indigeneity through genocide or neoliberal processes of assimilation wherein the colonized subject symbolically abandons indigeneity for settler ways of living. Here, the corporeal and/or discursive refusal of indigeneity by the settler state legitimates settler claims to territory and political authority. On the other hand, settler colonialism wants to produce animal bodies as commodities embedded in a global economy of reiterated deathliness. Said different, animal bodies that are inserted into capitalist spaces of commodity production are always already scheduled for death to be consumed as meat, clothing, scientific data, and so forth.⁵⁷

By forcing Indigenous people to assimilate to the Western carnist diet, colonizers continued to simultaneously invade Indigenous and nonhuman animals’ bodies.

In the nineteenth century, Indigenous people started to be pejoratively called “effeminate corn and rice eaters” in order to link their socially constructed weakness, emasculation, and inferiority to their predominantly plant-based diets.⁵⁸ With traditional Indigenous foodways dismissed as inferior and inadequate, settlers had a pretext for the expropriation of Indigenous lands that were to be converted into agricultural pastures for grazing cows who could provide meat and milk – “tools of domination to control territories, humans, animals, and

⁵⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁶ LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 142.

⁵⁷ Belcourt, “Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects,” 9.

⁵⁸ Vasile Stănescu, “‘White Power Milk’: Milk, Dietary Racism, and the ‘Alt-Right’,” *Animal Studies Journal* 7, no. 2 (2018): 105, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol7/iss2/7>.

ecosystems.”⁵⁹ Today, dairy and meat industries dominate the capitalist economy and hold a considerable political power. Ryan Gunderson calls attention to the staggering “oligopoly” dominating the US agribusiness. He asserts that over 40% of all agricultural production in the Midwest is in the hands of four large firms and four transnational corporations handle 70% of milk sales.⁶⁰

The animal and food law scholar Mathilde Cohen refers to the global spread of the practice of dairying and the adoption of animal milk as a food staple in places where milk was never part of local foodways as milk colonialism.⁶¹ The globalization of milk consumption is far from a natural phenomenon given that humans are the only animals who regularly drink milk of other mammals and as adults. Moreover, at least 65 percent of the world’s population is lactose intolerant or experiences difficulties digesting lactose that is found in unprocessed milk.⁶² Lactose tolerance is a genetic trait found mostly in white people with ancestry in Northern Europe who have a long history of using animals, including their milk, as a tool for survival in cold winter months.⁶³ People of color are, on the other hand, more likely to be lactose intolerant. Despite the fact that for the vast majority of humans milk consumption after infancy causes various health disparities,⁶⁴ dairy milk has been presented globally as a staple food necessary for human health. The Eurocentrism behind this milk imperialism is why post-colonial scholars consider milk a tool of colonial racial projects.

Nassim Nobari pointedly writes that “[t]he sense of necessity that has been ascribed to milk both stems from and propagates Eurocentrism.”⁶⁵ While a natural mammalian attribute, lactose intolerance has been redefined by Eurocentrism

⁵⁹ Cohen, “Animal Colonialism,” 268.

⁶⁰ Ryan Gunderson, “The Metabolic Rifts of Livestock Agribusiness,” *Organization & Environment* 24, no. 4 (2011): 407, doi: 10.1177/1086026611424764.

⁶¹ Cohen, “Animal Colonialism,” 269.

⁶² Gambert, “Got Mylk?,” 850; Cohen, “Animal Colonialism,” 269.

⁶³ Andrea Freeman, “Milk, a symbol of neo-Nazi hate,” *The Conversation*, August 31, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/milk-a-symbol-of-neo-nazi-hate-83292>. See also Cohen, “Animal Colonialism,” 269.

⁶⁴ “Studies establish a strong link between dairy consumption, particularly of saturated fats found in cheese and high-fat milk, and serious medical conditions, including increased risks of heart disease, prostate cancer, pancreatic cancer, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, diabetes, and multiple sclerosis. Research has also connected the overconsumption of saturated fats in dairy products with obesity, which may lead to various types of cancer. Additionally, milk causes health problems in infants and children and often contains dangerous contaminants.” See Freeman, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Milk,” 1258–1260.

⁶⁵ Nassim Nobari, “Milk, Dietary Racism and the Corporate Capture of the United Nations,” *Seed the Commons*, September 20, 2021, <https://seedthecommons.org/milk-dietary-racism-and-the-corporate-capture-of-the-united-nations>.

as a pathology, an issue to fix. Diets without milk are therefore perceived as deviant and bodies that cannot digest lactose as deficient. The classic capitalist strategy of “create the problem, whether material or perceived, and then sell us the solution” has been successfully employed by the dairy industry.⁶⁶ The consequences are far-reaching for both human and nonhuman animals and the environment. Moreover, universally replacing other diverse sources of calcium with milk has further affected the biodiversity of many foodways and caused the loss of traditional food sources and diets as well as cultural values.⁶⁷

In the early twentieth century racist rhetoric continued to be the backbone of milk globalization which in turn bolstered imperialism and white supremacy. Some scientists attributed the perceived racial superiority of northern Europeans to the consumption of dairy milk. An official pamphlet from the 1920s declared that “[t]he people [...] who are progressive in science and every activity of the human intellect are the people who have used liberal amounts of milk and its products.”⁶⁸ A decade later, yet another book linked milk drinking to white superiority: “Those using much milk are the strongest physically and mentally, and the most enduring of the people of the world. Of all races, the Aryans seem to have been the heaviest drinkers of milk and the greatest users of butter and cheese, a fact that may in part account for the quick and high development of this division of human beings.”⁶⁹ In the twenty-first century, milk is still constructed “as a metaphorical substance which can purify and reform American society as a whole” and continues to serve as a symbol of white supremacy.⁷⁰

In his study “White Power Milk’: Milk, Dietary Racism, and the ‘Alt Right,’” Vasile Stănescu scrutinizes social media posts of white supremacist members of the so-called “alt right” and reveals how they use the milk trope to perpetuate racist notions of superiority.⁷¹ Milk serves as symbol of white purity, wholesomeness and virility, a notion that was spread during the Trump presidency over alt-right social media posts under the viral hashtag #MilkTwitter.⁷² Another related viral hashtag #SoyBoy is a modern-day adjustment of the colonial “effeminate corn and rice eaters” stereotype, connecting plant-based diet with emasculation, weakness, and racial inferiority. Alt-right figures such as Richard

⁶⁶ Nobari, “Dietary Racism and the Corporate Capture.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Gambert, “Got Mylk?” 853–854.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Gambert, “Got Mylk?” 854.

⁷⁰ Cohen, quoted in Gambert, “Got Mylk?” 853.

⁷¹ Stănescu, “White Power Milk.”

⁷² Gambert, “Got Mylk?” 860.

Spencer also added milk emojis to their accounts. Extreme right-wing website featured a racist poem celebrating lactose-tolerance and explicitly attributing lactose-intolerance to people of color who are dismissed as non-belonging to North America: “Roses are red, barack [*sic*] is half black, if you can’t drink milk, you have to go back.”⁷³ Perhaps most strikingly, on the day of Donald Trump’s inauguration, white supremacists held what is now known as “the milk party” outside the Museum of the Moving Image in New York City. Lifestream camera captured alt-right members with cartons of milk chanting offensive racist, sexist, and homophobic rants. Milk was labeled “an ice-cold glass of pure racism” by one of the participants, consolidating its role in the racist propaganda.⁷⁴

Before “milk turned into a central nationalist and imperialist tool,” it had already been weaponized as a means to discriminate and exploit minoritized women.⁷⁵ Patriarchy mixed with speciesism created conditions in which both human and cow’s milk was commodified for the benefit of the more powerful elites. Ecofeminist research and critical ecofeminist milk studies in particular shed light on the entangled oppression of human and nonhuman lactating bodies that have been colonized for their abilities to produce milk.

Critical Ecofeminist Milk Studies Perspectives

While the exploitation and torture of (predominantly) cows’ bodies for their milk has been normalized in Western society, it is less widely known that minoritized women’s bodies have also been exploited for their milk. Ecofeminist research has effectively connected the exploitation of women and nature, including land, water, and other animals.⁷⁶ Both nonhuman animals and women (especially women of color) are treated as a “servant to the dominant (not subordinate) population” and their bodies and labor is devalued in order to be exploited by the settler-colonial capitalist system.⁷⁷ The work that women and nonhuman female animals do “has largely remained invisible. Like farm animal

⁷³ Quoted in Freeman, “Milk, a symbol of neo-Nazi hate.”

⁷⁴ Gambert, “Got Mylk?” 859.

⁷⁵ Cohen, “Animal Colonialism,” 270.

⁷⁶ For ecofeminist theory, see Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, eds. *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Lisa Kemmerer, ed., *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011); and Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams, eds., *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

⁷⁷ Greta Gaard, “Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach,” *Organization & Environment* 14, no. 2 (June 2001): 161, doi: 10.1177/1086026601142002.

labor, historically, much of women's work has been embodied, repetitive, and spatially limited-housework, childcare (including breastfeeding), caring for the old, the sick, animals, and sexual nurturing."⁷⁸ This labor has been mostly unpaid, undervalued, and taken for granted, just like the labor of female animals.

Animal colonialism has always been facilitated by the latest technological innovations, be it barbed wire, railroads, or rifles. But today, technology keeps pushing animal colonialism into dystopian dimensions. Cow's milk can only be available everywhere and all year round with technological intervention that disrupts the natural cycle. Without intervening, cows would not produce milk "for more than part of a year (March to November): cows require nine months for gestation, along with ample pasture and feed in order to produce milk."⁷⁹ Greta Gaard details the life of cows who are involuntarily kept for labor in an industrial farming complex:

Artificially inseminated at fifteen months of age, a dairy cow suffers an endless cycle of pregnancy and lactation, milked two to three times daily by electronic milking machines, conditions that cause mastitis and other infections that must be treated with antibiotics. Fed an energy-dense food, she may spend her whole life confined in a concrete stall or standing on a slatted metal floor. Her calves are taken from her within hours after birth, with females kept to replace their mothers in the dairy, and males sent to veal farms, where they are confined in crates so tight they cannot move, and fed an iron-deficient diet until they are slaughtered at fourteen to seventeen weeks of age.⁸⁰

The animal geographer Kathryn Gillespie notes that while ecofeminists have largely focused on the more obvious commodification of female animals' bodies and their reproductive cycles, it is critical to remember that male animals' bodies are also routinely sexually assaulted by the meat and dairy industry as the violence perpetrated on both male and female animal bodies is mutually reinforcing.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Mathilde Cohen, "Regulating Milk: Women and Cows in France," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 65, no. 3 (Sep. 2017): 507–508, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcl/avx015>.

⁷⁹ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 50.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

⁸¹ "Male animals are routinely culled at birth (e.g., male chicks in the egg industry), raised in confinement for meat (e.g., veal), and are used for their reproductive capabilities (e.g., semen extraction)." See Kathryn Gillespie, "Sexualized violence and the gendered commodification of the animal body in Pacific Northwest US dairy production," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 21, no. 10 (2014): 1325, doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2013.832665. For the workings

Throughout the colonial history, those who were denigrated to the status of animalized women have been subjected to some of the same abuse as nonhuman female animals. The colonial powers imitated some of the ways they employed on nonhuman female animals' bodies and applied them on minoritized women. For example, enslaved African American women were routinely used as wet nurses for their white slave owners' children, often being forced to stop breastfeeding their own babies. Controlling minoritized women's breast milk turned into a business in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when the so-called "milk banks" supplied predominantly hospitals that later opened their own wet nurse wards in which they confined and vigilantly monitored severely underpaid and exploited minoritized women. Women were also contracted by wealthy families to breastfeed their children. Wet nurses were "subjects to series of laws defining and regulating their behavior, including severe penalties for giving babies breastmilk contaminated by bad diet, sexual intercourse, or other failings identified by law."⁸²

When cow's milk turned into a commodity and infant formula became widely available, wet nursing lost popularity among Western mothers. The global spread of dairying and the ever-more common replacement of human breast milk with cow's milk affected both human and nonhuman mothers and their infants. As Cohen explains, "by taking milk from animals and feeding it humans, particularly human babies, dairying severs the nursing relationship twice: between lactating animal mothers and their offspring and between human mothers and their offspring."⁸³ Through the lens of critical ecofeminist milk studies, Greta Gaard writes extensively on the biopsychosocial bonds between mother and her baby and the consequences of their breaking.⁸⁴ Removing a calf from their mother results in a deep psychological distress of both. The resistance and the resulting lasting grief following this separation has been broadly documented by animal science scholars as well as animal rights activists.⁸⁵

Commodification of cow's milk has especially affected Indigenous populations in colonized countries. Through dairy milk campaigns and food programs, large populations of "lactose-intolerant" adults have been forced to accept the

of the animal industrial complex see Kathryn Gillespie's book *The Cow with Ear Tag #1389* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁸² Gambert, "Got Mylk?" 848.

⁸³ Cohen, "Animal Colonialism," 270.

⁸⁴ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 66.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

colonial “assimilationist food system” that has caused various health problems.⁸⁶ Not only adults but especially babies and children have been targeted by the dairy milk industry. Disrupting traditional Indigenous mothering practices was part of the assimilationist agenda. Indigenous women “were accused of lacking maternal instinct and breastfeeding too long, yet producing mediocre milk.”⁸⁷ As ludicrous as this accusation sounds today, it was sold under the auspices of Western medicine and science and Indigenous mothers were pressured by the colonizers into believing that infant formula would benefit their babies. This had devastating impacts in Africa and in India where mothers lacked access to baby bottle sterilizing equipment, clean water, and suitable facilities, and where Nestle in particular “made corporate profits at the expense of widespread infant suffering, causing diarrhea, malnutrition and death.”⁸⁸

In North America (and beyond), the dairy industry still uses minoritized children for their own profit. More than any other food industry, “dairy has benefited from government support and subsidies.”⁸⁹ Nassim Nobari, the co-founder of the food justice organization Seed the Commons is an ardent critic of school milk programs⁹⁰ that normalize milk consumption among children which “can change a food culture in one generation.”⁹¹ Children are taught from an early age to overlook other, healthier, sources of calcium which secures future profit for the dairy industry that raises new consumers through the school milk programs. Nobari’s critique echoes arguments of other food justice scholars and activists who warn against the loss of diverse foodways as a result of the imposition of Western diets in schools, not to mention the many resulting health disparities.

Nobari criticizes public school milk initiatives for their “de facto imposition in children’s daily lives” and for being fundamentally racist as they disproportionately affect minoritized children.⁹² For example, in San Francisco, 85% of public school attendees are children of color, most of whom experience symptoms of lactose intolerance, and many of whom come from communities

⁸⁶ Dylan Powell, “Veganism in the Occupied Territories: Anti-Colonialism and Animal Liberation,” *Resistance Ecology* 1 (2013): 20.

⁸⁷ Cohen, “Animal Colonialism,” 270.

⁸⁸ Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, 57.

⁸⁹ Nobari, “Dietary Racism and the Corporate Capture.”

⁹⁰ E.g., The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Special Milk Program. See Jared Holt, “The Troubling Link Between Milk And Racism,” *HuffPost*, December 6, 2018, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/milk-white-supremacy-racism_n_5bffad35e4b0864f4f6a3e28.

⁹¹ Nobari, “Dietary Racism and the Corporate Capture.”

⁹² *Ibid.*

suffering from obesity and diabetes. While these children should eliminate dairy from their diets, they are served milk at every meal, a practice mandated by the federal and state school meal policies that prioritize “corporate profits over the health of the nation’s low-income children.”⁹³

The U.S. Department of Agriculture that subsidizes these programs “has also partnered with fast-food companies to create products with higher amounts of cheese.”⁹⁴ Yet again, this initiative disproportionately harms the health of minoritized people who, affected by food injustice, consume more fast food products in their diets as they often lack access to healthy alternatives. In North America, impoverished communities often reside in the so-called “food deserts,” areas with no or limited access to grocery stores that sell affordable healthy products. Most residents of food deserts thus rely on fast food or canned products sold in small convenience or liquor stores as they cannot access or afford fresh foods.⁹⁵ Almost all Indigenous reservations are characterized as food deserts which is a continual legacy of colonial assimilationist practices targeting traditional Indigenous foodways and land and water management practices.⁹⁶ Food insecurity is one of the many manifestations of environmental racism.

Environmental Racism

Gaard articulates an ecofeminist definition of environmental racism as “a conceptual association between people of color and nature that marks their dual subordination.”⁹⁷ This association goes hand in hand with “the assumption that energy can be continuously extracted from nature – from water, from poor people, from people of color, from women – without giving back anything of sustenance.”⁹⁸ Said different, minoritized people are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation. Environmental racism materializes in many ways, predominantly in land, water, and air pollution in disadvantaged communities whose health and lives are impacted by the environmentally harmful

⁹³ Seed the Commons/Millahcayotl Association, official website, accessed July 29, 2022, <http://seedthecommons.org/>.

⁹⁴ Freeman, “Milk, a symbol of neo-Nazi hate.”

⁹⁵ Alison H. Alkon and Julian Agyeman, eds., *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 4.

⁹⁶ Chantelle Richmond et al., “Supporting food security for Indigenous families through the restoration of Indigenous foodways,” *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien* 65, no. 1 (2021): 104, doi: 10.1111/cag.12677.

⁹⁷ Gaard, “Women, Water, Energy,” 161.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

practices of the industrial-complex. Agricultural complexes are often located in close proximity to Indigenous reservations and poor communities. The meat and dairy industry is “the primary emitter of greenhouse gases” and pollution from the agribusiness’s confined animal feedlot operations contaminate water sources and air that minoritized communities depend on.⁹⁹

Nonhuman animals and Indigenous women are particularly affected by the toxicity generated by capitalist industries. Before their ban in 1979, the industrial chemicals known as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were widely used and penetrated the environment through air, water, and soil. Waste containing PCBs was often dumped in landfills close to reservations. One of the most affected has been the Akwesasne reservation in the Great Lakes region where about 25 percent of all industry in North America is located.¹⁰⁰ The Akwesasne rely on the St. Lawrence River that was polluted with PCBs and other toxic contaminants that are now often grouped under the label “POPs” (persistent organic pollutants).¹⁰¹ Both human and nonhuman inhabitants of the Mohawk territory have been affected as the toxins penetrated their bodies. Studies have shown that PCBs belong to most lethal poisons of industrialized world for both human and nonhuman animals linking them to many disorders, for example shrinking testicles in alligators, cancer and reproductive disorders in laboratory animals, and liver, brain, nerve, and skin disorders, as well as breast cancer in humans.¹⁰²

When alarming rates of POPs were discovered in the body fat and breast milk of Mohawk mothers, the Akwesasne midwife Katsi Cook launched the Mothers’ Milk Project, an ecofeminist initiative aimed at protecting women through the safeguard of the environment. Cook famously stated that “the fact is that women are the first environment,” an environment that has been polluted, jeopardizing the lives of both the mothers and their unborn babies.¹⁰³ Around the same time, scientists also discovered that beluga whales of the St. Lawrence

⁹⁹ Eric Holt-Giménez, “Food Security, Food Justice, or Food Sovereignty? Crises, Food Movements, and Regime Change,” in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, ed. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 318, doi: 10.7551/mitpress/8922.003.0020. Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 15.

¹⁰¹ “Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are chemicals that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate through the food web, and pose a risk of causing adverse effects to human health and the environment. This group of priority pollutants consists of pesticides (such as DDT), industrial chemicals (such as polychlorinated biphenyls, PCBs) and unintentional by-products of industrial processes (such as dioxins and furans).” See European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals/international_conventions/index_en.htm

¹⁰² LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 15–16.

¹⁰³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 19.

River were severely poisoned by the POPs, causing rare types of cancer and significantly lowering their reproductive rate and increasing mortality rate.¹⁰⁴ These findings yet again show that colonialism is an interspecies issue.

In an attempt to collect samples from a pure, toxin-free environment for comparison with the high rates of POPs in the Great Lakes region, scientists made a shocking discovery when they found an even higher level of contaminants in the human and nonhuman inhabitants of the Arctic. This breakthrough discovery was shocking because of the non-existence of polluting industries and no pesticide use in the North. Because of their chemical characteristics, the scientists soon found out, POPs flourish in colder climates and the Arctic and the bodies of its human and nonhuman inhabitants thus serve as storage rooms for POPs. Research has found “a cocktail of many chemicals” in the bodies of marine mammals and the Inuit who were exposed to more than two hundred different toxins.¹⁰⁵ Vandana Shiva’s assertion that through modern agricultural techniques “life itself is being colonized” became painfully relevant for the Arctic inhabitants.¹⁰⁶

Sheila Watt-Cloutier, the Inuk writer and activist who has dedicated her life to advocacy for the Inuit, has adopted an ecofeminist approach by emphasizing the effect environmental degradation has had on the Inuit women and their families. As a result of high rates of toxins in their bodies, Inuit adults are “at risk for diseases such as cancer, especially breast cancer, and osteoporosis.”¹⁰⁷ The reproductive system of both the Inuit and the nonhuman Arctic animals was impacted. This is especially concerning as many animals in the Arctic, for example polar bears, are already at risk of extinction.¹⁰⁸ Through bio-accumulation of toxic contaminants in marine mammals who form the core of the Inuit diet, the breast milk of Inuit mothers became the most contaminated in the world, putting their infants at a higher risk of developing neurological disorders, compromising their immune system, and impairing their motor and cognitive abilities.¹⁰⁹ Inuit mothers were thus externally pressured to give up breastfeeding and use milk formula instead, yet again generating profit for the corporate dairy industry. Moreover, living in a food desert and therefore lacking access to fresh

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Sheila Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman’s Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic, and the Whole Planet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 133–135.

¹⁰⁶ Shiva, *Biopiracy*, ch. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold*, 136.

¹⁰⁸ LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold*, 135, 143.

healthy foods, the Inuit started consuming more unhealthy junk food which has caused further health problems.¹¹⁰

The Arctic and the bodies of its human and nonhuman inhabitants represent the last frontiers that are being colonized under global neoliberalism. The slow but severe intoxication of the Inuit people that went largely unnoticed for decades is an example of what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence.” He defines it as a “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”¹¹¹ As such, most of the violence perpetrated against nonhuman and human minorized bodies in “postcolonial” era that this article has covered is an example of slow violence. Lacking the sensational aspect of immediate violence, slow violence remains underrepresented in media, and the corporate powers who profit on the relative invisibility of slow violence effectively conceal it by hiding behind campaigns such as the school milk program. Nevertheless, Nixon notes that “if the neoliberal era has intensified assaults on resources, it has also intensified resistance.”¹¹² The numerous ecofeminist justice movements and initiatives all across the continent suggest that Nixon’s observation may be more than just an optimistic wish.

Contextual Indigenous Veganism

In his horror film *Get Out* (2017) that unmasks hidden racism of a white family, Jordan Peele shows one of the white supremacist characters, Rose, as she “separates her colored cereal from her white milk, which is significant, especially since milk has become the staple beverage of the alt-right.”¹¹³ Similarly, in his war film *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), Quentin Tarantino attributes milk to the Nazi character Hans Landa who refuses wine and instead requests a glass of milk. Before he leaves, he asks for another glass, leaving no room for doubt about the milk’s racist symbolism. These are just two examples of popular movies where milk is used as an emblem of white supremacy. Such cultural interventions counter the widespread notion of milk as a healthy and pure food staple divorced from politics by linking its consumption to vile characters with racist ideology.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 144.

¹¹¹ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

¹¹² Ibid., 4.

¹¹³ Aph Ko, *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out* (NYC: Lantern Books, 2019), chap. 2.

The idea of cow's milk as central to human health is also contested in a short striking video called "¿Leche? No gracias" ("Milk? No, thank you") produced by a Mexican animal rights group Liberum. The video was released in Mexico as part of a campaign that aims to inform the public about the violence generated by the dairy industry against both human and nonhuman animals as well as the environment.¹¹⁴ The video features Mexican celebrities speaking about the harmful effects of dairy consumption, making the video go viral. The dairy industry's violence was reaffirmed by the repeated death threats that the members of the Liberum group received upon the video release.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, in the United States, the grassroots organization Seed the Commons started a similar food justice campaign called "get milk ... out of school meals" that aims to bring meal reform to schools by countering the popular myth about dairy milk as a necessary component of children's diet.¹¹⁶ Both of these initiatives are examples of counternarratives that disrupt the widespread image of cow's milk as a universally healthy drink. Such discursive resistance is slowly translating into embodied changes.

Enough evidence exists suggesting that consumers "experience feelings of guilt, shame, and disgust when they think (as seldom as possible) about the industrial processes by which domestic animals are rendered into products and about how those products come to market."¹¹⁷ With increased public awareness comes a shift in the consumers' choices as more and more people abstain from eating animal products and opt for a plant-based diet and vegan lifestyle. This directly impacts the capitalist market as has been most recently apparent in the United Kingdom where the major supermarket Sainsbury's closed all meat and fish counters in 2020 due to reduced demand that dropped significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹⁸ Arguably, the pandemic has driven people's shift to a more plant-based diet not only due to its health benefits but also due to the ethical implications of meat-eating that the pandemic unmasked as outbreaks in

¹¹⁴ "¿Leche? ¡No Gracias!" YouTube video, posted by Liberum, October 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o6zlCETc7U>.

¹¹⁵ I was personally present in Monterrey, Mexico, when the Liberum members received some of these calls.

¹¹⁶ Seed the Commons/Millahcayotl Association.

¹¹⁷ Richard Bulliet, *Hunters, Herders and Hamburgers: The Past and Future of Human-Animal Relationships* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3.

¹¹⁸ Maria Chiorando, "Sainsbury's To Shut All Meat And Fish Counters Amid COVID: 2 Years After Admitting 'Decline In Meat Sales,'" *Plant Based News*, November 5, 2020, <https://plantbasednews.org/lifestyle/food/meat-and-fish-counters-shut-sainsburys/>.

slaughterhouses and meat processing plants have been reported all around the world.¹¹⁹

As dairy and meat industries form a considerable part of the capitalist economy, corporate resistance to plant-based diet has been comparable to resistance from tobacco industry in the twentieth century. Be it recent lawsuits against the use of the words “milk” or “burger” in vegan products¹²⁰ or actual threats that prominent animal right-s advocates receive, countless examples show that the dairy industry feels threatened by the growing numbers of consumers choosing plant-based alternatives. The meat industry magnate Tyson Foods has reacted to this shift first by investing large amounts to the vegan business Beyond Meat and recently by creating his own vegan brand. Similar steps have been taken by other large companies such as the Canadian Maple Leaf Foods, Nestle, Danone, General Mills and Elmhurst, to name just a few.¹²¹

But if veganism is to remain an effective means of resistance to capitalism, vegan practitioners will have to cut their support of companies that simultaneously profit from vegan consumers and meat and dairy industry. All around the world, groups of people are organizing and starting food projects that are local and operate outside or on the fringe of the capitalist food system. The practice of guerrilla gardening that uses public spaces to grow vegetables shows how a simple and peaceful act like gardening can spark an effective social revolution. By adopting this practice, people make a powerful political statement as they become self-sufficient and no longer dependent on the capitalist food system that causes and perpetuates climate change, environmental degradation and social inequality.¹²² Moreover, guerrilla gardens decolonize both the public space and culture and activist art pieces accompanying these projects deconstruct the colonial cultural legacy and teach about interdependence rather than dominion.

Still, despite its apparent boom in the recent decades, “veganism remains a marginalized diet in Western countries, and is thus far from a vehicle of Western

¹¹⁹ Bibi van der Zee, Tom Levitt, and Ella McSweeney, “‘Chaotic and crazy’: meat plants around the world struggle with virus outbreaks,” *The Guardian*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/11/chaotic-and-crazy-meat-plants-around-the-world-struggle-with-virus-outbreaks>.

¹²⁰ See “EU rejects ‘veggie burger’ ban but prohibits dairy-like names for vegan products,” *FoodIngredientsFirst*, October 26, 2000, <https://www.foodingredientsfirst.com/news/eu-rejects-veggie-burger-ban-but-prohibits-dairy-like-names-for-vegan-products.html>.

¹²¹ Emmanuel Petter, “How rising veganism is changing the food market,” *Global Finance*, March 12, 2019, <https://theboar.org/2019/03/rising-veganism-changing-food-market>.

¹²² Alex Pietrowski, “Propaganda Gardening – The Evolution of Revolution,” *Activist Post*, March 13, 2013, www.activistpost.com/2013/03/propaganda-gardening-evolutionof.html.

imperialism.”¹²³ On the contrary, as this article has shown, Indigenous plant-based foodways have been diminished and carnist diet was imposed on cultures that had previously consumed no or very little meat. Today, Indigenous vegans, Black vegans, and other vegans of color are “challenging the paradoxical stereotype of veganism as elite and white.”¹²⁴ For example, in their book *Decolonize Your Diet: Mexican-American Plant-Based Recipes for Health and Healing*, Luz Calvo and Catrióna Rueda Esquibel provide an extensive collection of traditional plant-based recipes with the intention to rediscover their roots. The overarching argument of their work is that Mexicans and Indigenous people in general must rediscover and reappropriate their traditional plant-based diets in order to reclaim both their physical and spiritual health.¹²⁵

Claudia Serrato, possibly the most well-known Latinx vegan activist and scholar, also posits that Europeans colonized not only Indigenous lands but also their bodies through the imposition of carnist diets heavy in processed food and dairy. To rediscover traditional plant-based foodways, Jocelyn Ramirez founded Todo Verde in Los Angeles, that offers traditional Mexican vegan meals as well as cooking classes, consultations, and other related activities that contribute to the spread of the green food revolution.¹²⁶ The founder of another plant-based restaurant called Liberation Cuisine that follows the same principles as Todo Verde, Gabriela Álvarez, says that one of the main goals of her food business is to educate fellow Latinx, African-Americans and Indigenous people about food decolonization, i.e. reducing or completely abandoning beef and dairy that were forced upon them by European colonizers.¹²⁷

All Calvo, Esquibel, Ramirez, and Serrano decided to take action when either themselves or their close relatives fell ill largely as a consequence of a poor diet. Serrato calls it “nutricide” – “genocide by means of the denial of culturally appropriate nutrition.”¹²⁸ Hence, in the United States, a whole movement called “decolonizing foodways” has gained ground among Latinx who want to share knowledge about healthy lifestyle and traditional diets. On top of reclaiming

¹²³ Montford and Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality*, 149.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁵ Luz Calvo and Catrióna Rueda Esquibel, *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican-American Recipes for Health and Healing* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016).

¹²⁶ Todo Verde. *Todo Verde*, accessed July 29, 2022, <https://todoverde.org/pages/about>.

¹²⁷ “Liberation Cuisine,” Gabriela Alvarez Martinez, accessed July 29, 2022, <https://www.gabriela-alvarez-martinez.com/liberation-cuisine>.

¹²⁸ Claudia Serrato et al., “Decolonizing The Diet, Towards an Indigenous Veganism ... Unlearning to Relearn,” *Comparative History of Ideas* 480, University of Washington, <https://warzonedistro.noblogs.org/files/2017/09/Decolonizing-The-DietT-owards-an-Indigenous-Veganism.pdf>.

their health, food decolonization involves re-connection with one's ancestors and ancestral ways and entails therefore spiritual and cultural awakening as well as forming of a community and general empowerment.

In order to acknowledge that not everyone can afford to follow a strictly vegan diet, ecofeminists speak of “contextual moral veganism” that centers veganism as the ethical, moral paradigm, but also recognizes the “contextual exigencies that impede one’s ability to live without directly killing or using others.”¹²⁹ Montford and Taylor propose a “contextual vegan food ontology” that highlights the need to foster a distinction between what humans perceive as food and what we see as edible, arguing that veganism becomes natural if we do not conceive of animals as food “but as equal subjects with their own interests who happen (like humans) to be edible.”¹³⁰ In her paper “Veganism and Mi’kmaq Legends,” the Mi’kmaq ecofeminist scholar Margaret Robinson recalls times when Indigenous people had to shift their perception of nonhuman animals and start viewing them as objects rather than siblings in order to participate in the colonial speciesist practices of fur trade or factory farming.¹³¹ Even though hunting and fishing were once important elements of the Mi’kmaq society, Robinson contends that today “meat, as a symbol of patriarchy shared with colonizing forces, arguably binds us with white colonial culture to a greater degree than practices such as veganism.”¹³²

The Cherokee scholar and writer Daniel Heath Justice also emphasizes the changed context:

Historically (and, for many rural and Northern communities, continuing today), meat consumption was dependent upon immediacy of relationship – hunters or farmers or ranchers lived among and slew the animals themselves, so there was an intimacy in both the living and the dying. How do these relations change when so many of us support factory farming, supermarkets, and meat that’s so disassociated from the horrific conditions of the animal’s short life?¹³³

¹²⁹ Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, eds., *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 358.

¹³⁰ Montford and Taylor, *Colonialism and Animality*, 130.

¹³¹ Margaret Robinson, “Veganism and Mi’kmaq Legends,” *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 33, no. 1 (2013): 191.

¹³² Robinson, “Veganism and Mi’kmaq Legends,” 191.

¹³³ Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), 99–100.

Justice seems to suggest that meat consumption is not justifiable in the capitalist era of distanced suffering. The Muscogee Creek-Cherokee novelist, literary scholar, and musician Craig Womack echoes Justice when he says that “the system that creates the food maximizes disrespect of animals instead of moderating it” and is therefore in direct contrast to Indigenous ontologies of interconnect-edness and mutual respect.¹³⁴

In his article “There Is No Respectful Way to Kill an Animal,” Womack argues against traditional hunting and the consumption of nonhuman animals in contexts where it is no longer necessary. He redefines vegetarianism as a new form of ceremony, “a good one, a meaningful deviation from tradition, as good ceremonies so often are.”¹³⁵ Womack stresses the importance of reinventing traditions to better suit contemporary circumstances and of thinking critically about their meaning. Furthermore, he refuses to perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes of Indigenous men as hunters and asks, “Is hunting the only thing that can make a person Indian?”¹³⁶ In the same light, Margaret Robinson proposes Indigenous veganism as a new tradition that is reflective of the natural fluidity and adaptability of Indigenous cultures to “changing social and environmental circumstances.”¹³⁷ Veganism gives Indigenous people the chance to “recall our connection with other animals, our shared connection to the Creator, and pre-figure a time when we can live in harmony with the animals.”¹³⁸ As such, Indigenous veganism can serve as a form of decolonial resistance against the continual colonization of both nonhuman animals and Indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

The article focused on the colonial experience of nonhuman animals and Indigenous populations in North America. It compiled relevant and current works from the fields of postcolonialism, ecofeminism, and critical animal studies in order to articulate a criticism of the mainstream view of (not only) non-human animal exploitation and to provide an intervention into the current discourse that overlooks other-than-human experience. Namely, the text dealt with the topic of displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal agriculture, it

¹³⁴ Craig Womack, “There Is No Respectful Way to Kill an Animal,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 17, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/536871>.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

¹³⁷ Robinson, “Veganism and Mi’kmaq Legends,” 194.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

focused on the entangled oppression of Indigenous women's and nonhuman animals' bodies, it described the introduction of animal products as tools of racial and gender discrimination and it also discussed environmental racism. The last part of the article suggested various ways of how to resist power inequalities stemming from colonialism and domestication of nonhuman animals and offered various more sustainable ways of how to challenge these current structures such as guerrilla gardening or rediscovery of traditional plant-based diets.

Animal colonialism in North America has been integral to the colonial expansionist project. Displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal agriculture also caused mass extinction of many free-living animals as well as environmental degradation. Postcolonial scholarship has only recently started to acknowledge the pivotal, albeit involuntary and tragic, role of other animals in the colonial project. To theorize and ultimately address the nonhuman colonial experience, Billy-Ray Belcourt proposes decolonial animal ethic that recognizes other animals as colonized subjects and thus includes them in decolonial thought. To disrupt anthropocentric understanding of other animals, Belcourt suggests "re-centering of animality through Indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies" that re-imagine human-animal kinships and cast other animals into sacred roles.¹³⁹ Daniel Heath Justice makes a similar point in his book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, highlighting the ability of art and literature to spark curiosity and evoke "the empathy required for healthy, respectful, and sustainable relationships with a whole host of beings and peoples."¹⁴⁰

In the settler-colonial capitalist societies that treat other animals as colonized objects and mere commodities for human profit, cultural and embodied interventions that reshape human-animal relationships are crucial to decolonization. Return to pre-colonial foodways that did not involve large-scale human and animal exploitation and milk colonialism is also essential to addressing environmental destruction. As Indigenous peoples and people of color across Turtle Island are adopting plant-based diets, practice guerrilla gardening, and participate in food justice projects, both Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals are slowly being decolonized.

¹³⁹ Belcourt, "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects," 8.

¹⁴⁰ Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 77.

REVIEWS

Jessikka Aro, **Putin's Trolls: On the Frontlines of Russia's Information War Against the World**. New York: Ig Publishing, 2022. 375 pages. ISBN 978-1632461292

Russian information warfare is being critically examined more and more in both journalistic and academic circles after Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014. Now the focal point is moving to the very heart of the issue. Western intelligence services regularly report that Russia is actively seeking to manipulate the public opinion abroad using a variety of state resources, including Kremlin-financed media outlets like *RT* and *Sputnik*. The Kremlin directly hires social media professionals to produce hoaxes and spread disinformation that favors the Russian government. Therefore, many investigative journalists are attempting to reveal and describe the structures of Russia's disinformation machine, which are capable of affecting major political events and people's lives within hours. The latest publication covering this topic is *Putin's Trolls*, a book written by Finnish investigative journalist Jessikka Aro.

The nerve center of Russia's disinformation machine is the Internet Research Agency, a company located in St. Petersburg. The Agency hires professional internet trolls to fight online for Russia's interests. In 2013, two journalists from the independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* and the St. Petersburg local paper *Moi Raion* succeeded in uncovering the practices of this "troll factory" and describing how it functions. Since then, many journalists have attempted to penetrate the Agency to reveal one of the Kremlin's strongest tools in its subversion against the West.

In 2014, Jessikka Aro, an investigative journalist working for Yleisradio, Finland's public service broadcaster, followed this path. She was determined to investigate the Russian disinformation that was increasingly being disseminated in Finland. Aro was one of the first investigative journalists to systematically describe the "troll factories" that produce pro-Kremlin media content abroad. She began to work on an article that focused on the Kremlin's propaganda tools in Finland. Its publication led to a major reversal in Aro's life. She has become the number one target of the pro-Kremlin troll army in Finland. Aro says that the massive smear campaign conducted against her is perceived as "extraordinary" by many security experts. The campaign aimed to force Aro to the point of mental exhaustion in order to make sure that she would never investigate the topic again. Aro eventually left Finland in 2017. Despite the pressure she was under from the pro-Kremlin internet trolls and their conspirators, her depiction of St. Petersburg troll factory has received acclaim. In 2016, Aro won the Bonnier Grand Journalist Prize. Subsequently, in 2019, she was nominated for the U.S. State Department's prestigious Women of Courage Award, which she did not receive, allegedly because of her criticism of former U.S. President Trump.

Aro's book *Putin's Trolls*, however, is not limited only to describing the networks of pro-Kremlin internet trolls and the phenomenon of the troll factory as such. In her book, Aro examines the functioning of the Kremlin disinformation machine in depth, touching upon its impact on her life. She does so based on her experience in the years following the publication of her article in 2014. She has constantly been exposed to psychological

pressure, violation of her private space, messages wishing her injury or rape, and death threats. Aro completes the picture of how lives can be affected by the coordinated action of internet trolls by presenting the cases of other individuals who became victims of such behavior.

The book is divided into seventeen chapters that give various examples that demonstrate the complexity of Kremlin's information warfare. *Putin's Trolls* is not an academic text, although it balances on the edge of being one. Aro does not pose a clear question for research, nor does she include a traditional introduction and conclusion as do most academic papers. Instead, she blends her introduction and conclusion into her story, using a personal tone. In any event, her goal remains clear to the reader: to precisely depict the complexity of the Kremlin's coordinated disinformation campaigns. She presents multiple examples of such campaigns and their sources, so that the reliability of the information she presents cannot be questioned.

The connecting feature of all the chapters of the book is Aro's desire to present the full variety of spheres in which the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns interfere. Here Aro focuses particularly on business, the work of journalists and researchers, and people's personal lives. She investigates the global impact of the Kremlin's malign influence and does not limit her book to Finland only.

As an example interference in business, Aro recounts the case of investor Bill Browder, who contacted Aro after being introduced to her work. The chapter on Browder elaborates how he, the founder of a successful company, Hermitage Capital Management, became the target of Russia's disinformation campaign. Browder's company operating in Russia was involved in uncovering the frauds and embezzlement practices in Russia of the early 2000s. Despite getting on well with Putin's regime at first, Browder was detained in 2005 while crossing the border into Russia. He was declared a threat to Russia's national security and his company in Russia was subjected to police raids. Browder hired a lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, to start an investigation of the harassment. Magnitsky was eventually arrested, imprisoned, and tortured to death. In various interviews with Browder, Aro provides valuable insight into the Magnitsky case. Browder says his biggest goal is now to bring those responsible for Magnitsky's death to justice. The chapter also shows how the more Browder uncovers of the Kremlin's unlawful practices, the more he becomes the target of systematic information attacks.

Another theme of Aro's book is the story of the various journalists and researchers who became Kremlin targets because of their work. She presents the experience of her Norwegian colleague Thomas Nilsen, former editor-in-chief of the highly regarded *Independent Barents Observer*. This news website concentrates on the coastline of the Arctic Ocean, an area strategically important to Russia. Many of its readers are based in Russia. According to Aro and Nilsen this is the reason why the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) took measures against the website and its editors. Starting with an FSB agent spying on the editors while they were interviewing their Russian sources, the Russian government attempted to end the activities of the website by accusing Norway itself of producing anti-Russian rhetoric. Another example is Swedish researcher Martin Kragh, who

became the target of pro-Kremlin media in Sweden for publishing an academic article analyzing the tools the Russian secret services use in Sweden. Since publishing the article, Kragh has been subjected to an organized campaign of defamation begun by a leading Swedish website, *Aftonbladet*, which is often accused of spreading disinformation. He has been the target of several cyberattacks. The massive campaign against Kragh became a political tool of the Swedish far right. Conspiracy theories about him were spread across the internet by pro-Kremlin websites. As a third example, Aro presents the experience of Serbian analyst Jelena Milić, the head of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies think tank in Beograd and a proponent of Serbia joining NATO. Like the others mentioned, Milić became a target of the pro-Kremlin media in Serbia and pro-Kremlin trolls inside and outside the country, whose campaign of slander almost destroyed her reputation. The disinformation campaign against her grew personal. Milić, as a woman, was cyberbullied for her style of clothing, accused of having breast surgery, and received messages wishing for her to be raped. Her sexual life was brought into the discussion as well.

The theme that connects all the chapters of the book is the destructive impact these information attacks have on people's lives. This is well shown by the example of a former Lithuanian diplomat, Renatas Juška, whose telephone calls were illegally wiretapped, edited, removed from their original context, and then published on YouTube by an unknown culprit. This affected not only Juška's professional career, but also his personal relationships with people who knew him. The threat posed by the Kremlin's disinformation machine to its targets' personal lives is also made clear in a chapter focusing on a Ukrainian citizen, Roman Burko, who has devoted his career to uncovering the tools and strategies of Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine. To protect his family and those close to him, he must use an alias and never reveals his true identity.

Coming from a background of professional journalism, Aro provides the reader not only with her own story but those of others. Every chapter proves her point. By presenting her personal story very genuinely, she is not asking for sympathy. In the relatively large number of chapters in the book the author creates a mosaic of detailed examples of actions by the pro-Kremlin troll army and their consequences, which penetrate every aspect of their victims' public and personal life. Moreover, the non-technical language used in the book allows a wide range of readers to understand the information she presents. The systematic ordering of the book's chapters is intentional as well. The introduction in which the author presents herself sets the pattern for the whole book: after the author's personal experience, the testimony of other individuals who have experienced similar attacks by pro-Kremlin internet trolls follows.

Aro's presentation of her own story illustrates the destructive potential of a coordinated disinformation campaign. She has been continuously subjected to psychological pressure on social media platforms, receiving insults, abuse, stalking, and threats. The author also claims that at one point the Kremlin's campaign targeted some of her family members. Aro speaks frankly throughout the whole book, without being afraid to expose highly intimate topics. She is not afraid to share with the reader her desire to become a mother or her urge to cry in tense situations. In so doing, she proves just how cynical

and unscrupulous the actions of Russian state-sponsored internet trolls are. The conflict between the cynical trolls and Aro's personal life that is constantly under their attack provides the book with tangible drama.

As she presents the testimony of people who share her pain, Aro remains strictly factual, but still conveys the emotionality of the story. A good example is the chapter dedicated to former Lithuanian diplomat Juška. Such testimony is the key to the book's value. Each chapter not only examines a particular case, but also reveals the depth to which the Kremlin's malign activities abroad have sunk. In Browder's case, Aro reveals the close ties between the corrupt Russian elite and the systematic disinformation campaigns that culminated in Sergei Magnitsky's death. In the case of Serbian analyst Milić, Aro demonstrates the pattern followed by disinformation narratives. For exposing that pattern, both Milić and Aro have been denounced as "NATO agents" by pro-Kremlin trolls. Aro precisely depicts the tactics of the Kremlin's disinformation machine and its skillful use of legal loopholes to avoid criminal prosecution. The trolls' strategy is to balance their behavior on the brink of what would trigger prosecution (which even so is usually difficult to initiate). As the author proves, prosecutors are powerless to stop the trolls' slanderous campaigns. Aro also exposes the powerlessness, or perhaps the unwillingness, of big internet companies such as Facebook and Google, which run social media platforms and transmit online content, to effectively combat state-sponsored disinformation in cyberspace. The author claims that it is the tech giants that allow the internet trolls to operate by prioritizing profit and failing to regulate their social media platforms.

In her book, Aro has succeeded in providing a detailed examination not only of the Kremlin's disinformation machine but also a precise description of its impact on the lives of its targets. Furthermore, the book contains significant evidence that reveals the flaws in the national and international legal orders that should protect people. The data Aro presents will be valuable for further research. *Putin's Trolls* is highly relevant today and deserves the praise it has received from both the academic community and the community of security experts.

Natálie Vaidišová

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Denis Kazanskyi and Maryna Vorotyntseva, **Yak Ukraina vtrachala Donbas**. Kyiv: Knyzhkove vydavnytstvo Chorna hora, 2020. 336 pages. ISBN 978-617-95046-0-0

Seven years of a devastating armed conflict, an international blockade, and criminal warfare have left Ukraine's Donbas region in a state of disarray. Denis Kazanskyi and Maryna Vorotyntseva, as well as several other Ukrainian journalists call the region a "ghetto." Half of the population of the Donbas has left it for Russia, Ukraine-controlled territory, or destinations further west. The rest have lost any hope for the future, whether Donbas stays in the Ukrainian state or is incorporated into Russia. International news channels long ago shifted their focus to different topics. However, Donbas is still a key issue in Ukrainian politics and society. The authors' aim is to return to the basics and give the Ukrainian public insight into the causes of the war. As the book's title, *How Ukraine Lost Donbas*, suggests, the authors are looking for answers to the questions of when, why, and how the Kyiv central government lost the sympathy and trust of the Ukrainian citizens of Donbas and ultimately, its control over the territory.

Kazanskyi and Vorotyntseva have much to say about the topic. Both are originally from Donbas and long worked as journalists and political commentators in the region. In spring 2014 they both covered events in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in person, but eventually left for Kyiv. Kazanskyi was also politically active: in the local elections of 2012, he aspired to become the mayor of Yenakiieve, a city in the Donetsk region. Currently, he is contributing to the Ukrainian weekly magazine *Ukrainskyi Tyzhden* as a political commentator and blogger. In 2020 he was appointed as a Ukrainian representative to the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk, the international negotiating format that seeks a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in Donbas. For her part, Maryna Vorotyntseva is now working as a PR consultant for politicians and is an expert on election campaigns. Their backgrounds strongly influence the style of the book, which is more of a journalistic piece than an academic work. The personal accounts, stories, and experiences of the authors and their acquaintances are the key features of the book and its main strength. In addition, the authors rely in large part on excerpts from central and local government documents, national and local media reports, and transcripts of speeches. To include separatists' views on the war events, they also cite passages from a 2016 pamphlet, *Fakel Novorossii*, written by former separatist leader Pavel Gubarev.

Kazanskyi and Vorotyntseva's book attempts to cover the political, social and economic events in Donbas since Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991, with a focus on the relations between Donbas and Kyiv and, to a lesser extent, between Donbas and Russia. The main objective of the book is to help readers understand why the events of 2014 happened and what triggered them. The book is organized chronologically, and each chapter is devoted to one event or issue that informed relations between Donbas and Kyiv (or Moscow). At first the authors explain how Ukraine's government, under the presidency of Leonid Kuchma in the late 1990s, helped to create a narrow ruling elite that seized control of the politics and economy of Donbas. These oligarchic structures were given the opportunity to rule Donbas on their own with little or no supervision from Kyiv. The

authors show that until 2004 the level of pro-Russian sentiment in Donbas was very low. There were only a few insignificant underground groups and political parties with only a few dozen members that held strongly pro-Russian views. They were not considered to be a real political force.

However, the flawed presidential elections of 2004 and the subsequent Orange Revolution unsettled the Donbas oligarchs, who feared that Kyiv would engage more forcefully in “their” territory. They sponsored a media campaign that stoked hatred for western Ukraine and the new government’s pro-Western orientation in general in Ukrainian society. The oligarchs’ media outlets portrayed western Ukrainians as “fascists” who considered the people of Donbas as “second class citizens.” In the opinion of the authors, this was the moment when the mental barrier between the mostly Russian-speaking south-eastern regions of Ukraine and the rest of the country arose.

The rule of President Viktor Yushchenko proved to be less dramatic for the Donbas oligarchs than they had feared. The 2010 presidential elections and the victory of Viktor Yanukovich put any separatist tendencies to rest, only to be revived by the Euromaidan revolution of 2013/2014. Politicians, especially those from Yanukovich’s Party of Regions and the Communists, warned that Ukraine was being taken over by western Ukrainian “fascists” under whom Donbas’s Russian-speaking population would be subjected to “cultural genocide.” The authors show how in late 2013 and early 2014 local politicians and oligarchs in Donbas allowed marginal separatist groups to gain strength. They financially supported anti-Maidan demonstrations and provided their organizers and supporters space in the mass media they controlled. Those groups, the authors argue, were used by the Donbas oligarchy as a tool for discouraging Kyiv from taking any measures against their economic interests inside Donbas and in Russia. This proved to be a very risky game, and the Donbas oligarchs ultimately overestimated the strength of their hand. President Yanukovich’s escape to Russia and Russia’s annexation of Crimea allowed local separatists to gain momentum. Whereas until 2014 the separatists were generally considered to be low-class, picturesque hooligans, the developments gave them the ability to raise their voices in the media and arms in the streets. They managed to persuade the majority of the local population in Donbas that the only way to prevent suffering at the hands of Kyiv was to be annexed by Russia.

The book puts major blame for the war on the shoulders of the Donbas oligarchs. They created the divide between East and West in the mind of the local population and failed to foresee what their effort to hold onto their power would lead to. The most prominent tycoon from Donetsk, Rinat Akhmetov, miscalculated badly and he is rightly to blame for not intervening on the side of Kyiv in the spring of 2014. The book gives a short report on his role (pp. 270–279). However, offering deeper insight into the people surrounding Akhmetov would be useful to fully explain his role in the entire affair.

It would be easy to put all the blame for events only on the Donbas oligarchs. However, the authors argue that Kyiv also played a role by failing to take action throughout February and March 2014 in order to keep the region under its control. The leaders of the separatist groups should have been prosecuted and jailed. Local police forces, the secret

service, and the army should have been reinforced with members completely loyal to the state. The separatists should never have been allowed to besiege municipal councils and local police stations. Since the book focuses solely on Donbas, it lacks any statements by the heads of the Ukrainian secret service and police about why they let their branches in Donetsk and Luhansk stay neutral and did not act with more urgency against the pro-Russian uprising. When separatists successfully stormed administration buildings in Donbas in late March and the beginning of April in 2014, the situation was dire, and it took only a small group of Russian intelligence and military operatives to trigger a full-scale war.

A group of masked militants led by Igor Girkin, a former officer of Russian FSB, seized the city of Sloviansk in mid-April 2014. Prior to that, Russia's influence in Donbas was mostly indirect. However, the ideas of "Novorossiia," "the Eurasian world," and "Russian-Ukrainian brotherhood" had circulated in Donbas since the 1990s. They were also held by several Russian politicians and the leaders of the Don Cossacks and other paramilitary units, who periodically visited Ukraine and spread anti-Ukrainian ideas. Additionally, the authors claim that Russia had many politicians of the Party of Regions and the Communists on its payroll to protect Russian interests, which might explain those politicians' behavior in the spring of 2014. Perhaps the biggest indirect influence on Donbas, however, was the annexation of Crimea, because it created an atmosphere of pro-Russian euphoria among the local separatists. They immediately began to think that if Donbas would only show its willingness to join Russia, then the anonymous "little green men" would appear in Donetsk and Luhansk. To answer the main question of the book – who is to blame – all mentioned are to blame for the ongoing war. It is only a matter for every reader's imagination which one is the biggest villain.

In general, the book is fast-paced and its arguments follow each other nicely, creating a bigger picture. Given the authors' journalistic background, the book is easy for the general public to read. One of the authors' biggest advantages is their first-hand knowledge of the region and the differences between Luhansk and Donetsk. This makes the whole book very insightful and gives the narration an additional layer of credibility. For example, Kazanskyi and Vorotyntseva stress that the oligarchs differ in their origins and skills. The Donetsk elite is made up of underground and grey zone personalities, while the Luhansk oligarchs are former Soviet Communist party *apparatchiki*. This has led to the Donetsk elite being more powerful on the Ukrainian national level than the Luhansk elite (pp. 29–32). To the huge credit of the authors, their book devotes a good number of pages to the situation inside of the Party of Regions, the role of President Kuchma, and the meteoric rise of Viktor Yanukovich and his Donetsk clan in the 1990s and 2000s.

One can only appreciate the direct quotes from the people the authors interviewed for the book. Well-chosen passages from public speeches, documents, and other materials nicely complement the arguments of authors. Since this is a journalistic account, not an academic work, the book lacks a formal citation style. It also lacks a bibliography of publications, news articles, and documents used in its preparation, which would help the reader to expand their understanding of the authors' arguments. Sadly, the book does not make that much use of the press releases and comments of Party of Regions politicians,

or of comments and opinions of the separatists, which would help the reader understand the reasoning behind their actions. This is especially true for the chapters “The Crisis of Severodonetsk” (pp. 95–102) and “The Mystery of the Luhansk SBU” (pp. 255–270).

One more thing that I perceived rather negatively was that the authors did not consult “ordinary people” of Donbas for their views. The book repeats the fact that Donbas is a land of miners and blue-collar workers. However, it never gives them the opportunity to have their opinion heard like it does the “elites.” The authors could have talked to thousands of emigres who have their own ideas about the triggers of the war and what they experienced during the “Russian Spring” of 2014. In fact, the book sometimes disparages entire groups of people just because of their class or profession, calling them “lower-class people lacking their own will” (p. 170).

To conclude, I would recommend Kazanskyi and Vorotyntseva’s book not only to people engaged in researching or studying Eastern Europe but also to anyone interested in how things can go desperately wrong in a place that has no history of internal war or ethnic conflict but is the subject of fierce propaganda, oligarchic rule, and the clashing geopolitical interests of foreign powers. It should be a warning to any leader who hopes to stay in power by creating barriers between citizens based solely on the region in which they live. Hopefully, the book will soon have an English translation.

Vít Volný

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Citations should always include a DOI (Digital Object Identifier), if the cited material has one.

Electronic sources should be cited including the date of last access, if appropriate.

6. Reference Examples

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