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Chapter 10

Confessions of a Vegan Anthropologist:

Exploring the Trans-Biopolitics of Eating in the Field

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Introduction

Food and commensality are important aspects of most ethnographic fieldwork, and of creating and solidifying social relationships not just between our ethnographic subjects, but also between anthropologists and informants. However, food can also be a marker of difference. This chapter explores the difficulties that may arise when anthropologists have very different ideas about food and eating to those of their informants, through a focus on my own experiences of being vegan whilst conducting fieldwork in a rural farming community where meat constitutes a way of life.

It has been suggested that many anthropologists experience some form of 'culture shock' in relation to eating in the field. Indeed, food was mentioned as a potential cause of anxiety leading to 'culture shock' by Oberg when he coined the term (Oberg 1960). With the benefit of hindsight I can recognize that being vegan created certain obstacles during fieldwork that I had (perhaps naively) assumed would be easy to negotiate; the reality proved to be otherwise. However, what my informants saw as my dietary peculiarities provided me with insights into particular issues that I might otherwise have overlooked, and these will be explored here via the post-Foucauldian concept of 'trans-biopolitics' as proposed by Blue and Rock (2011). Following Franklin (2006) and Haraway (1997, 2004, 2008) amongst others, Blue and Rock define trans-biopolitics as 'the classification and evaluation of life as it unfolds in complex, technologically-mediated networks with global reach'

(2011: 2). While their paper was primarily concerned with zoonotic disease, it will be argued in this chapter that the concept is as useful, if not more so, when applied to relationships between the human and nonhuman animals involved in contemporary industrialized food networks. Probyn's summation of the Deleuzian conception of desire makes such connections explicit; she states: 'a body, moved by desire, propels itself into networks and milieux of bodies and things. In turn, the milieu must be conceived of as a dynamic arena of social action' (1996: 49). Trans-biopolitics brings other animals into this 'dynamic arena of social action' based on the human desire for meat, and facilitates the exploration of inter-species power relations and entanglements that are integral to processes of food production and consumption.

It goes without saying that dietary preference can be a hugely important marker of identity. While people choose to become vegan for a whole host of reasons, including health, veganism is, rightly or wrongly, associated in popular consciousness with extreme ideological views in relation to animal rights and environmentalism more generally. There are a few published ethnographic accounts of veganism, from Clark's (2008) consideration of veganism as a means of social differentiation within punk sub-culture, to Potts and Parry's (2010) recent work exploring the links between ethical food consumption and sexuality. Some of Potts and Parry's vegan informants claimed that they could only form close intimate bonds with fellow vegans, viewing the consumption of animal products as so polluting as to render off-limits carnivores, omnivores and even vegetarians who ate dairy products (see also Probyn 2000). Such separatist attitudes, while certainly not widespread amongst vegans, have been seized upon by the global media and feed popular perceptions of veganism as a radical lifestyle choice and marker of 'otherness' (Clark 2008: 416; see also Cole and Morgan 2011a).

As an anthropologist who seeks embodied understanding I participated as fully as I could in the lives of my informants during fieldwork. However, as a vegan I did not and could not share their desire to consume flesh. As a result I was one step removed from the network of relations that culminated in consumption. My lack of carnivorous desire, not to mention my gender, nationality and academic motivation placed me in a vulnerable position vis-a-vis my informants. By not eating meat I was thought of as 'abnormal' and this uncomfortable situation brought the hierarchies that exist

between the different bodies involved in agricultural production within this particular ethnographic context sharply into focus.

Situating the Ethnographer and the Field

Given my own veganism, the decision to conduct ethnographic fieldwork studying foxhunting and farming might seem surprising. In many respects however, my interest in animal welfare was what decided me on that particular path: I wanted to understand how and why people could participate in activities that involved the suffering and deaths of other living beings. I chose a farmers' hunt in rural Wales in a bid to see whether there might be a genuine argument for hunting as a form of pest control. The particular farmers' hunt whose members were the focus of this research is a functional institution and the hunt events (referred to as 'meets') lack much of the pomp and ceremony associated with mounted foxhunting in other parts of the United Kingdom. The majority of hunt staff and subscribers are either farmers themselves or are involved in the agricultural industry in some way (for example as vets, livestock auctioneers and transporters). I have argued elsewhere that the mounted foxhunting enacted in this particular context shares many similarities with the subsistence hunting found in other parts of the world and which is widely documented in the ethnographic record (see Hurn 2009, 2012 and forthcoming a and b). This is largely because the focus is almost exclusively on fox dispersal and control as opposed to on the riding which takes on more significance for foxhunts elsewhere (see Fukuda 1997; Marvin 2003, 2005). The community within which my ethnography is situated is very rural. Farming (mostly sheep and some cattle and mixed agriculture) is a primary source of income and there is a strong nationalist movement that prioritizes Welsh language and traditions as well as creating, at times, a hostile reception for outsiders who move to the area. These outsiders often hold radically different views relating to, amongst other things, food and animal welfare. As in other rural areas in the UK, this creates tensions in the fabric of rural communities (see Woods 1998).

I have lived and worked in my 'field' for over 12 years, having moved to Wales in 2000 for what was supposed to be one year of fieldwork. Whilst I was employed by the University of Wales from 2003–2012, I continued to maintain an active and consistent presence in the field; I lived for most of that period on a working farm belonging to one of my informants, and helped out when required with manual tasks such as shearing and milking. I still habitually attend events including

sheepdog trials, livestock auctions, hunt meets and agricultural shows and regularly meet for tea or lunch and a chat with informants. This latter is to keep up with events and developments and also to maintain the reciprocal relationships that were formed during my initial fieldwork period and which have become binding. Indeed, this sort of commensality was and is integral to daily social interactions, but especially to the hunting experience, as will now be described through a series of fieldwork vignettes.

Commensality and Reciprocity on the Hunting Field

In relation to hunting, one of the ways in which ties of reciprocity were demonstrated between hunt members was through the hosted meet. The hunt staff and followers would arrive at a hosted meet well in advance of the off and, leaving their horses in the vehicles that had transported them to the venue or, in the case of those who had arrived on foot, tying horses to a suitable hitching post, they would venture inside to eat, drink and be merry, taking advantage of their host's hospitality. There were two categories of host: the member-farmer and the public house or social club. The pubs which hosted hunts were typically small, backwater establishments integral to the social and economic life of the farming community and the hunt followers liked to loiter in the bar for as long as possible before venturing out into the invariably cold and wet Welsh weather. In the hour or so before the off large quantities of alcohol were consumed, bringing in much needed revenue to these isolated establishments as well as instilling Dutch courage in the staff and followers.

The meets hosted by farmers and hunt members were very different, although these too were based on hospitality and reciprocity. As noted above, the primary function of mounted foxhunting in the area was fox dispersal and control. Sheep farming was the dominant agricultural industry, and consequently fox predation was a genuine 'problem'. Without exception, the private hosts of the mounted foxhunts were dependent on sheep farming for their livelihood. On entering the host venue, followers would be treated to the 'stirrup cup'; they would be given a drink of their choice (hot alcoholic punch was always available, but also tea, coffee, soft drinks and usually whisky or some other spirit), and let loose on the buffet provided. The spread invariably consisted of sandwiches (ham, cheese and egg being the staples); sausages or sausage rolls; cold meats and cheese; roast potatoes (occasionally); bread and butter; sponge cake; *bara brith* (a traditional Welsh fruit cake made

with tea); Welsh cakes (like flat scones) and biscuits. Followers would eat their fill, setting themselves up for a long day in the saddle. The few followers who, for whatever reason, could not leave their horses unattended, would not be forgotten, and food and drink would be taken out to them by a member of the host's family.

These sporadic bouts of conspicuous hospitality were integral to understanding my informants' mounted foxhunting rituals. Indeed, many (over half) of these meets were held at cross roads, bridges, or other liminal landmarks and the 'stirrup cup' was therefore forsaken on these occasions (although from time to time individuals would take it upon themselves to bring refreshments which they distributed to other followers). This clearly demonstrated to me the functionality of the hunt in addition to its social aspects; the hunt is there to do a job of work. Although they are infrequent, hosted meets allow the farmers who benefit from the service provided by the hunt to make some form of repayment to the collective of followers. They not only allow them to ride over their land but, more importantly, provide them with sustenance. Indeed, in addition to the stirrup cup at the start of a meet, hosted meets would always conclude with additional food and drink. Partaking in a communal meal at the end of a day's hunting further served to reaffirm hunt followers' shared values and interests, in this case in sheep, the animals on which most are dependent for survival and in whose honour the whole ritual process is conducted.

Edible Bodies: Symbolic and Physical Consumption

On returning at the end of the hunting day, followers would put their horses away in the lorries or trailers that had brought them to the meet and then the human participants would sit down together to share a communal meal. This meal was always a steaming bowl of lamb *cawl* (a traditional Welsh stew of meat and seasonal vegetables) accompanied by bread, butter and chunks of cheese and as it was served, consumed, and washed down with a glass of something alcoholic, everyone would discuss the day's proceedings and share their experiences as a group. The significance of *cawl* cannot be over-emphasized. The use of lamb in *cawl* is a comparatively recent development, a result of the shift from dairy to sheep-based agriculture in the 1940s. This development also ties in historically with the formation of the hunt itself, which was established in the 1950s after the dissolution of the gentry estates. In the early to mid-twentieth century many tenant farmers became their own bosses

and therefore were directly inconvenienced by the foxes who had been imported into the area for the recreational pursuits of their former landlords. As they became responsible for their own livestock, the attitudes of former tenants towards foxes became increasingly acrimonious (see also Hurn 2009, forthcoming b), leading to the establishment of the hunting ritual as a form of sacrifice. In this case, the sacrifice was not conducted with sheep as the physical victims of the sacrifice but rather to propitiate those sheep whose bodies had been unceremoniously consumed by uninvited and predatory transgressors (see also Marvin 2000). In relation to sacrifice more widely, Bloch has commented that 'the emphasis upon the communal meal by Detienne leads to a neglect of issues to do with the self-identification of the sacrificer with the victim' (1992: 30). In this specific ethnographic context, while it is the fox who is killed during the mounted foxhunt, the communal meal is *lamb* and not fox. However my informants identify very strongly with their sheep who might more reasonably be thought of as the sacrificial victim(s) than the fox who is actually killed in the ritual process. Bloch has also asserted that while Turner (1982) and van Gennep (1960) recognize the violence inherent in the act of separation that occurs during the first of the three phases which constitute a rite of passage, 'they completely miss the significance of the much more dramatic violence of the return to the mundane' (1991: 6). Instead, Bloch argues for the recognition of two underlying acts of violence: Firstly, the initial conquest of an inherent weakness within the individual or society (the act of separation, in this case the act of fox predation) and, secondly, a 'rebounding violence', which involves the incorporation of 'vitality obtained from *outside* beings, usually animals' (ibid.: 5, emphasis in original) and typically manifests in blood sacrifice whose victims replenish the initiands during the communal meal. Both of these acts of violence are integral to an understanding of the specific mounted foxhunting ritual under discussion, and the importance of a meat-based diet.

In the context of this working class farmers' hunt, the first violent act, that of fox predation and the death of livestock, is given as the rationale for the sacrificial ritual in the first place. The initiands are separated from the mundane by the donning of hunting dress and through their participation in the hunt itself. On the sound of the huntsman's horn followers are plunged into a period of liminality which continues as they ride over the countryside in pursuit of their quarry, the fox. It is only when they arrive back at the hosting venue after the fox has been killed that they are released from this area

of ambiguity and reincorporated back into profane society. It is here that the second act, this time of ‘rebounding violence’, and the subsequent incorporation of vitality come to fruition. The whole basis of the ritual in this context is to both justify and perpetuate meat as a way of life (Hurn forthcoming a and b). The fox is killed to enable lambs to grow free from predation, to replenish the flock whose members sustain their human caretakers via their deaths at the abattoir. This is an inherently secular sacrifice which lacks any of the reverence or ritual of the foxhunt. Yet by participating in the mounted foxhunting ritual the hunt followers can, in some way, propitiate the sheep on whose lives and deaths they depend. Indeed, as already noted, Detienne and Vernant (1989) were concerned with ‘the communal meal which follows the sacrifice and the distribution of the portions of the animal ... as a means of *objectifying the social relations of the community*’ (Miller 1998: 80, my emphasis). If all of the hunt’s followers partake of the *cawl* provided at the end of a hosted meet, engaging in a ‘rebounding violence’ whereby the vitality of the sacrificial animal is consumed, they are demonstrating their solidarity as a social group and sharing the responsibility for the kills of both fox *and* sheep. This further explains why ‘hunters’ in this particular context especially are expected to be meat eaters. Because so many local people either make their living or supplement it from buying and selling animals classified as livestock, eating meat, and lamb in particular, has enormous cultural significance.

You Are What You Eat: Vegetarianism and Veganism as Deviance

Outside of ritual occasions, amongst hunt followers there was a tendency towards eating ‘meat and two veg’ meals. This culinary preference was especially noticeable at hunt functions which were, without exception, ‘roasts’, typically beef, lamb or poultry preceded by *cawl* and followed by a ‘sweet’ such as gateaux, trifle or occasionally pavlova. As I prepared myself for entry into the field, I had contemplated how my veganism might be interpreted and dealt with by hunt supporters (see Cassidy 2002 and Sutton 1997 whose vegetarianism featured in their respective fields). I had naively thought I would be able to manage things so that I never had to eat in front of others but in practice it was not that simple. Communal eating and drinking was, as I have already noted, integral to the ‘hunting’ experience, especially during formal functions such as the Huntsman’s Dinner, and the Hunt Ball. It was also impossible to refuse milky drinks and home-made cakes offered when I went to

informants' homes to conduct interviews. Because I had been a vegetarian for over 20 years, and a vegan for three prior to my entry into the field, I felt unable to eat meat but resigned myself to the fact that I could not refuse all animal products without causing offence. As a result I accepted meat-free items, which I would eat if there was no other option or, when I could do so without being noticed, I disposed of the offending items at the earliest available opportunity. At hunt meets my horses developed quite a taste for cake and the hounds always flocked round me in the hope of being passed a surreptitious sausage roll or ham sandwich – sacrilegious behaviour as hounds' diets were strictly controlled, especially on hunting days when their hunger was a driving force behind the chase (see Mullin 2007).

Some informants with whom I developed closer bonds realized my dietary peculiarities but accepted them grudgingly because I was 'different from normal veggies'. I felt flattered, believing that I had been accepted. My years of perseverance had paid off, or so I thought. Speaking Welsh, staying out in the torrential rain when other hunt followers had headed for home, working as a farm labourer or unpaid baby-sitter when needed, training unruly horses whom no one else would ride: Maybe I had challenged some of the pre-existing prejudices that many hunt followers held about vegetarians? Unfortunately I was deluding myself, although I only discovered this uncomfortable truth during a conversation with one informant, Lisa.¹ We were discussing my return to health following a serious riding accident sustained whilst conducting participant observation on the hunting field. I exclaimed how relieved I was to get back to a more active life and commented that I had put on two stone in weight since leaving hospital. Lisa agreed that it was good I had put on weight and revealed that she was fed up of fielding questions from other hunt members who were worried that I had an eating disorder. I was horrified and at the next available opportunity 'confronted' some of them about this revelation. It turned out that they had assumed I was obsessively worried about my figure. As one of the less tactful of them explained, 'we thought you were trying to stay slim to attract a husband'. While this last remark was made partly in jest, the fact remained that my eating habits were always noted and commented upon. When I explained that I was actually vegan, my own confession was met with shocked silence. Then, in the knowledge that I was lactose intolerant, Eileen

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

exclaimed ‘oh so are you allergic to meat too? Oh you poor thing, how awful for you’. I was not given a chance to explain myself as she and the other followers present started discussing how tragic it must be to ‘have to be vegetarian’. From then on, everyone knew about ‘poor Sam *bach*’ (a term of endearment meaning ‘small’) and her unnatural inability to digest meat. My attempts at explanation consistently fell on deaf ears.

At one of the pre-season dinners I left the table to make a phone call just as the waitress arrived to take our table’s order and, on my return, I was informed by Dan that his wife Bella had asked the waitress if I could have melon instead of the *cawl* that everyone else seemed to be having as a starter. ‘Don’t know why she bothered *bach*, there ain’t no fuckin’ meat in this *cawl* in any case!’ he concluded. Another member of the hunt staff, Merf, who was sitting to my left interjected, ‘so what do you live on then eh? Fuckin’ air? Ain’t nothin’ of yer. You need to get some fuckin’ meat in yer, init, a young girl like you’. This innuendo was met with raucous laughter from the other men sitting within ear shot (see for example Adams 1990 and Fiddes 1991 for discussions on the association between meat, sex and male virility). When the main course arrived, I pushed the meat to the edge of my plate and tried to scrape off the gravy as inconspicuously as possible to salvage the vegetables. Bella’s husband noticed and without a word relieved me of the slabs of roast lamb, heaping them onto his already-overflowing plate. When Bella and Eileen realized that I had been given a plate with meat on, they called the waitress over and asked if I could have an empty plate so I could stock up on vegetables from the communal platters in the centre of the table. This became standard practice at hunt social functions and, at the same event the following year, they even ventured to ask the waitress if there was a vegetarian lasagne in the freezer they could heat up for me. I was consistently mortified that my informants drew such attention to what was seen to be my plight, but was hushed and told I needed ‘feeding up’ as they piled my plate high with vegetables, not allowing any of the men to have seconds until I had finished eating. They also found my embarrassment, and indeed the whole situation, somewhat amusing; ‘What must they think? A vegetarian at a hunt dinner! Whatever next?’ and it became a long-running joke that followers would compete to sit next to me so as to get my ‘portion’ of meat (again, the innuendos would be churned out each time. See S. Jones 2003).

Thus, in spite of their support, and my protestations to the contrary, my ‘fussy’ eating habits continued to be interpreted as either an eating disorder or some other medical condition. For example, the first meet I attended following my riding accident went from Eileen’s farm and I was informed on arrival that she’d made me a vegetable *cawl*: ‘There’s no meat in it at all. And you’re not to leave the house until you’ve had some!’ At the next meet, this time an unhosted event which saw followers congregate at a crossroads in the middle of nowhere, Bella ordered me to dismount and I was taken to the boot of her car and forced to eat a peanut butter sandwich and drink a plastic tumbler full of lemonade from the spread she had laid out on her parcel shelf! At subsequent meets Bella took it upon herself to pack jam or banana sandwiches for me to eat (‘just in case’), which she would produce from her saddle bags at opportune moments. ‘We don’t want you passing out and falling off again!’ she explained, ‘it’s taken you long enough to get back in the saddle after the last time!’ Even my accident was explained in terms of what was perceived to be my inadequate diet. It was easier for my informants to believe that I was ‘ill’ than that I chose not to eat animal products of my own free will. And so the belief persisted that vegetarianism and healthy country people do not mix. The desire for meat was normalized and anyone who chose to eschew that norm was considered deviant, with all that that entails. As Eileen confided during an interview, ‘I’ve always been brought up to think that you have to eat meat to be healthy. If I didn’t feed my kids meat I’d feel like I was *neglecting* them’.

Numerous scholars have noted that consuming meat is widely thought to be essential to human health (for example, Peace 2008). Meat-eating also symbolizes human ‘culture’ through the domination and control of animals and the environment (see Hurn 2012). As Joy (2011) argues, ‘carnism’ is a dominant belief system within which it is considered appropriate and ethically unproblematic to eat meat. She adds the suffix ‘-ism’ to denote that, for an omnivorous species such as humans, this emphasis on meat is a choice not a biological necessity. However, because the majority of my hunting informants are involved in some way or another in livestock production, meat-eating is regarded as an absolute necessity – one which ensures not just physical but also socio-economic health. The act of eating meat, especially meat which they themselves have raised, places my human farming informants at the top of their food chain.

While I have argued that sheep constitute totems of sorts, their relationship with their human caretakers is primarily functional and persists because of a desire for meat at a local and global level. Notwithstanding the few individuals who are occasionally spared as pets, the bodies of sheep are protected and allowed to live only for as long as they are productive. For the majority of males, that can be from six to 18 months while for most females and those individual males whose bodies are required for sexual reproduction, that may extend to four, five or even six years (way below the ‘natural’ lifespan of domestic sheep who can live into their late teens and early 20s). It should be noted that foxes are not the only nonhumans to take ovine lives (see, for example, Hurn 2009). Yet they are the only species to be dealt with ritualistically. Their role as scapegoat and not totem is further evidenced in the manner of their death and especially the distribution of their flesh. As noted above, it is lamb that forms the basis of the obligatory *cawl* consumed at the communal meal. Fox meat is, as Wilde famously noted ‘uneatable’ (2007: 11). It is the hounds, the liminal servants of the hunt staff, who act as sacrificial knife and then devour the body of their quarry. The fox becomes the sacrificial substitute who pays a heavy price for ‘his’ own desire for forbidden flesh. Indeed, the ‘meat is natural’ discourse certainly rings true for foxes, whose evolutionary history and contemporary physiology leave little room for doubting their carnivorous nature. Their treatment at the hands of the omnivorous primates who also desire meat needs to be considered alongside the development of large-scale livestock production; a system which simply does not allow for the propitiation of the individual lives who are killed to satiate that desire.

From Biopolitics to Trans-Biopolitics

It is here, after recognizing the link between desire, sacrifice and consumption that we can begin to explore the trans-biopolitics of eating in this particular ‘dynamic arena of social action’ (Probyn 1996: 49). Foucault’s concept of ‘biopolitics’ is a means of conceptualizing power relations as they manifest in and on the physical bodies of social actors through the state control of bio-power – the biological functions of individuals, such as sexuality, reproduction and so on. In his lecture series, *Society must be defended* (2003), Foucault observed a paradigm shift in sovereign power in the nineteenth century which saw ‘the biological come under State control ... [accompanied by] a certain tendency that leads to what might be termed State control of the biological’ (ibid.: 240). Foucault clarified the position as

follows: 'I wouldn't say exactly that sovereignty's old right – to take life or let live – was replaced, but it came to be complemented by a new right which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it, permeate it. This is the right, or rather precisely the opposite right. It is the power to "make" live and "let" die' (ibid.: 241). However this power to 'make' live and 'let' die leads to a paradox: how to maximize life and yet also take it? For Foucault, racism provided the answer when considered as a 'means of introducing ... a fundamental division between those who must live and those who must die' (Foucault cited in Stoler 1995). For Foucault, racism facilitated the creation of hierarchy between self and other, us and them (see also Sartre 1995), which has enabled acts of violence such as slavery and genocide to be committed in other historical and ethnographic contexts.

In a similar vein, Ryder defined 'speciesism' as 'the widespread discrimination that is practised by man [sic] against other species' (1975: 16) and Singer, who popularized the term, defined it as 'the idea that it is justifiable to give preference to beings simply on the grounds that they are members of the species *Homo sapiens*' (2006: 3, see also 2009). Many contemporary scholars in the field of human-animal studies argue that the perpetuation of exploitative and discriminatory practices such as the farming of livestock indicates the 'ongoing normalization of speciesism' (Cole and Morgan 2011b: 145). However, one might take some small comfort from Pleasants's assertion that the industrialization of slavery in the eighteenth century [an industry grounded in racism] and the intensification of 'agribusiness' [an industry grounded in speciesism] in the twentieth century have facilitated the realization that these practices are immoral and unjust (2008: 208–9), realizations which are necessary preconditions for discriminatory, normative practices to be challenged. Racism, as Foucault conceived of it, 'fragments the biological field, it establishes a break ... inside the biological continuum of human beings by defining a hierarchy of races, a set of subdivisions in which races are classified as "good", fit and superior. More importantly, it establishes a *positive* relation between the right to kill and the assurance of life' (Stoler 1995: 84), which suggests that 'the more you kill [and] ... let die, the more you will live' (Foucault in ibid.: 84). Such a sentiment lies at the heart of 'carnism' and the desire for meat.

The global agricultural industry is immensely powerful (Peace 2008), and this power is based on the normative assumption of 'carnism' – that meat eating is both natural and justifiable because of

perceived differences between humans and other animals (Hurn 2012; Joy 2011). That is not to say that all meat eaters consciously harbour speciesist principles or that individual farmers carry significant political and economic clout. On the contrary, my ethnographic experience with farmers at the coal face (to mix some Welsh metaphors) suggests that many have complex and contradictory ideas about the animals in their care (see also Baker, this volume). They are also marginalized and not in control, driven by global forces and almost entirely dependent on government subsidies. Yet in this, as in other agricultural contexts, countless nonhuman lives are brought to an abrupt end so as to sustain and preserve the lives of others and it is the termination of the lives of the animals whose actions are seen to undermine human agency and control which is the focus of the sacrificial ritual because these animals serve as useful scapegoats for the propitiation of guilt or rather the shame which accompanies excessive desire (see Probyn 2005).

Foucault has been widely criticized by post-humanist scholars for his anthropocentric focus (see Haraway 2008; Blue and Rock 2011). Yet there is plenty of scope for the application of Foucault's work to the field of human-animal studies or anthrozoology. In relation to racism for example, it might be ventured that this hierarchical biological continuum extends beyond the human species. Humans share biological continuity with other animals, which makes the exclusion of nonhuman species, especially 'companion species' (Haraway 2003), from discussions of biopower surprising. Indeed, in what Bulliet (2005) refers to as post-domesticity, a state of affairs characterized by the alienation of the majority of consumers from processes of production, some nonhuman animals such as pets are embraced as honorary humans, kin even, while others, especially those enrolled in intensive agricultural production systems are regarded as inferior species. As a result, a strictly Foucauldian biopolitics appears ill-equipped when it comes to accounting for many contemporary power relations, especially inter-species relationships which are inherently paradoxical.

Blue and Rock advanced the concept of trans-biopolitics 'to account for the manifold interconnections among animal bodies as they emerge and unfold in complex industrial and technological systems with global reach' (2011: 355). Drawing on other areas of anthropological investigation (such as trans-nationalism) which allow for a multitude of voices to be heard and which link and analyze 'transformations in the nation-state in light of cross-border flows of humans, enabled

and facilitated by global technological and economic processes' (ibid.: 3), trans-biopolitics facilitates a consideration of multi-species relations. Indeed, 'the prefix *trans* signals the transgression of boundaries, borders, and barriers, enabled and augmented by modern scientific and technological systems. Thus, trans-biopolitics implies more mobility in the creation and exercise of power than that designated by biopolitics' (Blue and Rock 2011: 2). This breaking down of borders and the inclusion of nonhuman voices and bodies in previously anthropocentric theoretical discussion are of fundamental import in a world where, through their lives and particularly their deaths, nonhuman others are inextricably implicated in every aspect of human existence (see Hurn 2012).

Animals classified as livestock exist to feed and clothe a human population whose members, as noted above, *desire* to eat meat. As a vegan I have, in the past, taken the moral high ground, seeing my own lifestyle choice as inherently more 'ethical' than that of those who eat meat (see Probyn 2000), and especially of those who produce it. Yet the process of fieldwork enabled me to reconsider both my position and the processes of meat production engaged in by my informants. Unlike many consumers, including those who are vegetarian or vegan on moral grounds, my farming informants are, as I have noted above, deeply interconnected in manifold ways not just with humans but also with other animals. In relation to foxhunting, it is through their social relations with sheep that foxes become actively embroiled in human social relations and, as the eaters of forbidden flesh, their bodies become coterminous with human bodies, facilitating their substitution as human scapegoats in the sacrificial act (Hurn 2009, forthcoming a and b; see also Marvin 2000).

Embodied Knowledge and Power

Farming, or large scale animal management, is a truly embodied livelihood which dictates the lifestyles not just of the individuals concerned, but also of their families and other members of the community. But, more importantly, as a result of co-existing so closely with large animals, each individual farmer carries the scars of their inter-dependency on their own bodies; broken bones, calloused hands, aching backs and weathered skin. Moreover, animals are not inanimate passive objects; rather, as with the fox whose actions initiate the mounted hunting ritual, they frequently exert influence on the humans with whom they interact. Elsewhere I have discussed the relationships between some of my human informants and their horses as a form of symbiosis (Hurn 2008a, 2008b,

2011). However, when it comes to animals involved in food production the balance of power shifts somewhat. Yes, the lives of farmers are still inextricably bound up with their livestock, but the nonhumans in question have less opportunity to exert influence; the end point will usually see the humans concerned regaining the upper hand through the assertion of physical control, often by force (see O. Jones 2003). The use of force in human-animal interactions provides another window into how the humans involved think about both themselves and the animals in question and this domination of animals is facilitated by the same sort of anthropocentricity and speciesism that facilitates 'carnism' (Joy 2011).

Conversely, a significant factor often influencing an individual's decision to become vegan is how they perceive other animals. Unlike some other political orientations, being vegan is often an embodied ethical or moral decision. The notion of consuming the flesh of another animal, or consuming products such as milk or honey which may have caused suffering and/or death is off-putting because of recognition of the continuity between humans and other animals. In many cases this is compounded by embodied experiences and inter-subjective interactions with individual animals through the course of individual lives (Hurn 2012, forthcoming b; Milton 2002, 2005). Despite my earlier vignettes suggesting that all farmers were rampant carnivores, the reality is actually quite different. Over half of my farming informants had at least one child who was vegetarian and one farmer was himself vegetarian (but this was not common knowledge within the community). Many would not eat their own animals, while others would only eat their own animals 'because they had a good life', as one informant put it (see also Serpell 1999). Such contradictions suggest that psychological devices are at work in the food choices of individuals for whom meat is a way of life, but one that requires a close association with the animals who become food.

One final vignette from my fieldwork illustrates the contradictions, conflicting emotions and the balance of power involved in raising animals for meat. I arrived late to one of the hunt dinners and had to take the only remaining seat. I found myself next to a hunt supporter whom I had always been rather wary of. He followed the hunt religiously and was renowned for being outspoken, with staunchly nationalistic (i.e. anti-English) political views. I was, therefore, rather apprehensive about

making small talk while pushing slices of uneaten meat around my plate. However, the frank exchange which ensued took me completely by surprise; he said:

You're a vegetarian aren't you? Don't look so embarrassed! I don't blame you, not eating meat, not really. I don't care – more for me. Do you mind? [as he took the meat from my plate]. It even bothers me, you know, taking the sheep to slaughter. I don't hang around. Just drop them off and leave. They know they're going to die, every one of them. They know and it scares the shit out of them. You can see it in their faces, and in their calls – you can hear the panic. I don't enjoy that. But that's how things are. I've got to eat. They're not stupid, sheep, they're very perceptive. People don't like to think so but they are, they know what's going on, and I have to live with that. But they're not the *same* as humans, we're different. It's a different sort of intelligence. Like foxes, now they're too clever for their own good ...

This conversation was important on many levels, and it resonates with many of the central arguments of this chapter as a whole. Firstly, it gave me a concrete indication that there was some sense of guilt or shame associated with sheep farming. Secondly, it drew my attention to perceived hierarchical *differences* between species, prioritizing the human in a manner consistent with speciesism (Ryder 1975; Singer 2006, 2009). And thirdly, it suggested that there was a link between the guilt of speciesist animal exploitation and foxhunting for those who were sufficiently affected by it. Guilt or shame, the emotional residue left behind after social or moral transgression, has to be dissipated in some way, and the mounted foxhunting ritual explored in this chapter can be seen to provide such a means of absolution. By sacrificing the fox in such a heavily ritualized manner (when many other farmers simply shoot, trap, poison or gas foxes on their land), those farmers who participated in the mounted foxhunt were acting to propitiate both the sheep and lambs who had died while they should have been under human protective custody, and the hundreds and thousands of sheep whose lives were terminated every week at the local abattoir to be shipped off in cellophane packaging to feed a national and international desire for meat.

Conclusion

To come full circle and draw the chapter to a close, I will return to veganism as a secular lifestyle choice. In the contemporary world, elective veganism and (to a lesser extent) vegetarianism are social

movements often (but not always) rooted in an ethical concern for the wellbeing of nonhuman animals and/or environmental sustainability. While most contemporary post-domestic consumers are considerably removed from processes of agricultural production, the ‘technologically-mediated networks with global reach’ referred to by Blue and Rock (2011: 354) facilitate an awareness of the plight of the animals who then become food. Indeed, while they may choose to ignore or ‘forget’ it, thanks to television and the Internet the majority of consumers are well aware of the often brutal exploitation of animals which is part and parcel of industrialized livestock production; ‘carnism’ (Joy 2011), the desire for meat and an entrenched specieism allow for such realities to be overlooked. However, as Pleasants has noted (2008), becoming vegetarian (or indeed vegan) is predicated on the existence of a socio-cultural structure that makes such a dietary preference a possibility. As my own ethnographic experiences within the farming community suggest, even those individuals involved in meat production are not immune to feelings of guilt, shame and crises of conscience when it comes to making a living from the deaths of other animals. Many find ways of asserting their moral agency – ‘neutralizing’ their actions (Matza and Sykes 1961) – by, for example, taking animals to slaughter themselves, only eating their own meat, singling out individuals for preferential treatment or, as explored in this chapter, participating in the propitiatory ritual provided by the mounted foxhunt. Nonetheless, such actions are also grounded within a speciesist ontology whereby ‘carnism’ and the desire for other animal products provide ultimate justification for exploitation. Consequently these neutralizations arguably do not improve the lives of the animals concerned, nor do they destabilize power inequalities between human producers, consumers, and nonhuman ‘products’ in any meaningful way.

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