

Relations

BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

11.1

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*The Importance of Language in the Relationships
between Humans and Non-Humans*

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Veganism's Anti-Anthropocentric Capacity

A Critical Analysis of the Advocacy Discourse of Three Prominent Vegan Organisations

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ABSTRACT

Anthropocentrism has been identified as a root cause of nonhuman animal and intra-human oppressions and the environmental crisis. Veganism has been celebrated as a philosophy and practice capable of undermining anthropocentrism, yet the anti-anthropocentric capacity of vegan advocacy is understudied. The current research provides a critical analysis of the online advocacy discourse of three prominent vegan organisations – The Vegan Society, PETA, and Viva! – elucidating areas of anthropocentric reinforcement and subversion in correspondence to the conceptual characteristics of anthropocentrism: human-centred narcissism and exceptionalism, the perceived human/animal dichotomy, and a corresponding moral hierarchy that exalts particular understandings of the “human” to the detriment of all considered other-than (Calarco 2014). Given the interconnectedness of nonhuman and human oppressions and importance of decentring the anthropocentric conception of the “human”, the intersectional strengths and shortcomings of the organisations’ vegan advocacy is additionally considered, with many areas of needed improvement being highlighted. The article contributes to research on vegan/nonhuman animal rights advocacy and social movement communication, and facilitates the future production of anti-anthropocentric, intersectional, vegan advocacy campaigns.

Keywords: advocacy; animal rights; anthropocentrism; discourse analysis; intersectionality; nonhuman animals; online; oppression; social movements; veganism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Anthropocentrism has been identified as a root cause of nonhuman animal and intra-human oppressions and the environmental crisis (Crist and Kopnina 2014); whilst veganism’s capacity to subvert anthropocen-

trism has been underscored (e.g., Calarco 2014; MacCormack 2020) and debated (Giraud 2021), yet not explicitly measured. The current research responds to this gap by exploring the anti-anthropocentric potency of three prominent vegan organisations through a critical analysis of their recent online advocacy discourses. The article begins with a brief exploration of existing literature on the centrality of anthropocentrism to nonhuman animal, intra-human and environmental oppressions, and the anti-anthropocentric potential of veganism. The methodology of the article is then addressed with reference to the ideological nature of discourse and the resultant importance of its study. Subsequently, the article proceeds to combined findings and discussion sections, providing a critique of vegan advocacy discourse in relation to its capacity to undermine anthropocentrism in its various conceptual manifestations and exercise intersectional awareness. By doing so, this research contributes to studies of vegan/nonhuman animal rights advocacy and social movement communication, as well as providing guidance for the future production of anti-anthropocentric and intersectional vegan advocacy for the benefit of all oppressed under hegemonic anthropocentrism.

1.1. *Anthropocentrism as the root of oppression*

Anthropocentrism is “a belief system by, and through, which humans are understood as separate and superior to all other living and non-living things” (Lupinacci and Happel-Parkins 2016, 13). Calarco (2014) elucidates the “conceptual characteristics” of anthropocentrism as follows: “human exceptionalism and human narcissism”, namely, a perpetual centring of humans, our interests, and our supposed “exceptional status” within the natural world; “a human-binary ontology”, that is, understanding humans to be distinct from other animals who are purportedly “impoverished in comparison”; and a corresponding “strong moral hierarchy”, aggrandising the human and subordinating all considered other-than (416-417).

Anthropocentrism undergirds not only nonhuman animal exploitation and environmental degradation, but intra-human discrimination also, excluding many humans from the category of “humanity proper” (Calarco 2014, 417-419). Said exclusion reveals interconnectedness between oppressions: “racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strengths from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal” (Plumwood 1993, 4). Nonhumans and marginalised humans – those not considered white, heterosexual, neurotypical, able-bodied, etcetera – are “animalized” by anthropocentrism, which

“determines [...] who matters” (Adams 2015, 204). Challenging anthropocentrism is addressing the foundation of nonhuman, human and environmental injustice, as opposed to attending to mere “symptoms” (Crist and Kopnina 2014, 387-388).

1.2. *Veganism's anti-anthropocentric potential*

According to The Vegan Society (2022a), “Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose”. Motivations driving veganism are typically categorised into “three pillars”: ethics, environmentalism, and health (Twine 2017, 210). Ethical considerations are the “original” motivator (Rowley 2016, 68), yet ethical veganisms vary. Jones (2016) distinguishes between identity- and lifestyle-based practices and what he labels “revisionary political veganism”: a radical opposition to the exploitation of “all sentient beings” with an awareness of the impossibility of complete harmlessness within contemporary society. Jones’ “aspirational” veganism is also “intersectional”, constituting a stand against the interconnected issues of intra-human oppression and the destruction of ecosystems (24-32).

Intersectional veganism (Trigg 2021) is deemed an indispensable component of decolonisation (Harper 2010; Navarro 2021) and justice for all (Brueck 2017). At best, veganism is “inseparable from other political movements striving for [...] total liberation” (Kirts 2020, 217), playing a “fundamental role” in our plight against “white supremacist capitalism and its intersecting systems of oppression” (Dickstein *et al.* 2022, 62-63). Central to this is veganism’s capacity to subvert the anthropocentrism undergirding said oppressions. In examining the discourse of three prominent vegan organisations, the current research contributes to the empirical measuring of this capacity in the hope of facilitating the future production of anti-anthropocentric vegan advocacy materials.

2. METHODOLOGY

The selected organisations are The Vegan Society, the founding vegan organisation (The Vegan Society 2022b); PETA, “the largest” global vegan organisation (PETA 2023); and Viva!, “the UK’s leading vegan” organisation (Viva! 2023). Following Freeman (2014), I recognise this

sample is not representative of the broad vegan movement but deem said organisations to be “agenda-setters” and therefore valuable “targets” of study (104). Professionalised organisations “wield incredible power in shaping the ‘common sense’ of advocacy paths” (Wrenn 2016, 43), with “discourse” being pivotal in this connection.

From a Foucauldian perspective, human subjectivity is *confined* by discourse, which demarcates “legitimate” thought and behaviour (Aydın-Düzgüt and Rumelili 2019, 286). Discourse is thus *ideological*, consolidating social conventions and power inequalities (Fairclough 2001). As a “mechanism of power”, however, discourse is “reversible”; resistance is always possible (Heller 1996, 101-102). Academics and social movements alike now recognise discourse as vital to struggles against hegemonic “power relations, oppression, and exploitation” (Nguyen 2019, xi); as Fairclough (2000) contends: “Changing culture is centrally a matter of changing language” (122). Cognisant of this – and the “profoundly anthropocentric nature of the established order” (Calarco 2014, 419) – the current research utilises a “critical discourse analysis” to examine how anthropocentrism is “enacted, expressed, legitimated, or challenged” (Van Dijk 1993, 96) in vegan discourse.

Data was collected from the main locations of the organisations’ websites – home and *About Us* pages, information and campaign pages, and online shops – between August and November 2022. Due to their vast quantity, only “featured” campaigns were viewed. All text and imagery which defined, represented, promoted, explained, and/or discussed veganism or related issues were of interest, with text/imagery deemed representative being recorded. Once collected, an “thematic analysis” was applied, consisting of the following steps: “familiarisation” – multiple readings of the dataset, noting early analytical ideas; “generating initial themes” – formulating broad themes through active, critical engagement with the data; “reviewing”, “refining” and “defining” themes – critically evaluating the utility and boundaries of each theme through an iterative process; colour coding – assigning each theme a colour and coding the dataset accordingly; and “writing up” into an analytical argument (Braun and Clarke 2022).

My personal commitment to nonhuman animal rights-orientated veganism inevitably influences the research, which proceeds from a relativist position with continuous critical self-reflexivity. My existing values undergird the “critical dimension” of the study (Aydın-Düzgüt and Rumelili 2019, 301), whilst “objectivity” is considered an impossibility (Westmarland 2001). The research is further limited by its Western focus and small sample.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Here, findings are presented in accordance to their function – that is, whether they reinforce or subvert each characteristics of anthropocentrism outlined by Calarco (2014). The organisations' intersectional potential and shortcomings are also addressed, given the importance of decentring the anthropocentric conception of the human and the interconnectedness of nonhuman, human and environmental oppressions. Each subsection includes a critical discussion.

3.1. *Subverting human narcissism and human exceptionalism*

Primarily, anthropocentrism manifests as an “incessant attention to and rotation around exclusively human existence” (Calarco 2014, 416). This “human narcissism” was subverted most clearly by the organisations' nonhuman animal-focused conceptions of veganism. Paraphrasing their definition of the term, The Vegan Society state that they “promote a lifestyle that excludes, as far as possible and practical, all forms of exploitation of – and cruelty to – animals”. Similarly, Viva! explain that vegans “exclude, as far as is practicable, all forms of animal exploitation and cruelty”. Surprisingly, there is no explicit mention of veganism in PETA's mission statement, but a t-shirt in their online store defines the term as: “The radical idea that animals' body parts are their own”. By presenting veganism as a practice/philosophy centred around nonhumans, the organisations undercut human-centredness and remain true to veganism's origins – “a movement specifically created to oppose the injustices forced on nonhuman animals *by humans*” (Brueck 2017, 19); an other-than-human-oriented movement (Freeman 2014, 165).

Human interests were decentred, and nonhuman interests foregrounded, across the sites of all three organisations. For instance, on pages concerning *Animals Exploited for Fashion*, Viva! define wool as “an animal fibre that forms the protective covering (fleece) of sheep and other hairy mammals” and affirm that “there is no such thing as humane fur – unless it remains on a healthy, living animal”. By discussing wool and fur from the perspective of the individuals from which they are cut, Viva! refuse the reduction of nonhuman animals to “factories”, exploitable for “products” of human interest (Torres 2007, 9). On their *The Honey Industry* page, The Vegan Society do similar, repudiating the narcissistic notion that “honey bees make their honey especially for us”, instead underscoring that honey is “fundamental” to the “wellbeing” of

beehive inhabitants. More broadly, PETA's tagline, "Animals are not ours to experiment on, eat, wear, use for entertainment, or abuse in any other way", rejects the anthropocentric view that nonhuman animals are mere "objects" as opposed to "sentient beings" (Turner 2019, 67) with ownership of themselves; "Their bodies belong to them, not us", PETA assert.

Recurrently, the organisations centre nonhuman interests bluntly: "No farmed animal wants to die", contend Viva!; "Like all animals, chickens [...] value their own lives", PETA declare. PETA go on to explain that "Animals used for food will never raise their families, root around in the soil, build nests, or do anything else that's natural and important to them". One such natural and important aspect withdrawn from life mentioned was "strong maternal bonds", not least for dairy cows who "are repeatedly artificially impregnated [...] and then traumatically separated from their newborn calves", PETA write. In an image produced by Viva!, dairy cows are pictured being mechanically milked with the following statement: "They are *mothers* not *Machines*". This use of the relational noun "mothers" foregrounds a (potential yet prevented) role outside of being producers of "raw materials" for human consumption (Nguyen 2019, 34-35). That said, in the quotation above, the term "farmed animal" – although an improvement on the conventional "farm animal" – reduces individuals to their "designated function" within "the system that enslaves them" (*ibid.*, 30-31).

This reductive understanding of nonhuman animals was countered by The Vegan Society's plea for a world "in which they are no longer used, but recognised as individuals with their own personalities, preferences and desires". On their *Future Normal* campaign site, The Vegan Society attempt to engender this world by showcasing footage of goats and cows in sanctuaries enjoying intraspecies relationships, each individual being referred to by a unique name. PETA also individualise the nonhuman animals they discuss through naming. For example, in their campaign to "release [...] dolphins at the Miami Seaquarium to a seaside sanctuary", PETA focus on Lolita, an orca who "was violently torn away from her family over half a century ago". By highlighting their individual experience, relationships outside of human interests, and individual – albeit imposed – names, the organisations "subjectify" nonhuman animals, "inverting their objectification" and in turn undermining their "massification [...]" as infinitely replaceable units of production" (Cole and Stewart 2021, 325).

All efforts explored thus far contribute to bringing into sight the "absent referent" – the nonhuman victim previously obscured by euphe-

misms and inconspicuous ideology (Adams 2015). Key to this endeavour is detailing the process by which animal products come to be (31-32), as discussed below. Relevant here however, is the explicit foregrounding of the beings that *form* many nonvegan products. Most frankly, a Viva! sticker states: “WARNING THIS PRODUCT CONTAINS DEAD ANIMALS”; PETA request that, “When shopping for clothes, always choose something vegan – not *someone*”; and a vegan convert speaking on The Vegan Society’s *Future Normal* campaign site describes how, when seeing friends “eating their sausage rolls or their hamburgers, I didn’t see it as food [...], I knew that it was a pig or a cow on the plate, and so of course, I had no desire to consume those things”. The last quotation exemplifies how, without “the power of metaphor”, the consumption appeal of animal flesh is disrupted (Adams 2015, 32); interest in the products of nonhuman animal instrumentalisation is stripped bare and presented against the now subjectified nonhuman victim’s existence.

Perhaps the most radical challenge to human exceptionalism/narcissism offered by the organisations was PETA’s promotion of “simply leaving them alone” as the human action needed, in most cases, to “uphold the rights of individual animals”. When highlighting the environmental costs of “overfishing” and fish farms to “ocean ecosystems” and “marine life”, Viva! advance the same solution: “We need to leave the fish alone”. “Leaving alone” – an “active passivity” that avoids “impos[ing] anthropocentrism on the non-consenting other of nature” – is conceptualised as “an activism of care” by MacCormack (2020, 23), who indicates how such a dismissal of human participation “seems unthinkable” to the “human exceptionalism” of Western culture (*ibid.*, 48).

3.2. Reinforcing human narcissism and human exceptionalism

The findings pertaining to the reinforcement of human exceptionalism/narcissism concern the centring of human interests, which was done in correspondence to all three vegan motivations. Regarding health, The Vegan Society’s *Thriving Stories* campaign was plentiful. One article declares that, “The best thing about a vegan diet is it gives us everything we need to thrive”, whilst others boast of athletic “performance” and “stamina” improvements and disease reduction: “I had osteoarthritis in my fingers [...]. When I went vegan that all disappeared”. PETA sell t-shirts with the following messages: “ANIMAL MARKETS BREED DISEASE GO VEGAN”, “TOFU NEVER CAUSED A PANDEMIC”. Relatedly, Viva!’s *Slash the Risk* campaign claims that, “A vegan diet can help you

lose weight, reverse diabetes, lower your blood pressure and cholesterol, reducing your risk of severe Covid-19”, with a commonly used phrase on Viva!’s website being, “end factory farming before it ends us”. Arguments for veganism centred around health – including “ailment” and “disease” mitigation – have been criticised as “bereft of altruism” (Christopher, Bartkowski, and Haverda 2021, 2). Whether pure “self-absorption” (Adams 2015, 140) or “anthropocentric altruism” (Freeman 2014, 167), said arguments overlook the nonhuman by centring human concerns.

Environmental issues effect both human and nonhuman life, thus separating “environmental veganism” from “veganism for the animals” has been labelled a false dichotomy (Twine 2017, 194). However, Freeman (2014) demonstrates how environmental arguments can be “altruistic and self-interested”, with an emphasis on “human health risks” constituting the clearest example of the latter (172). Viva! dedicate significant space to arguments of this nature, with their *Eating the Earth* campaign identifying “The world’s wildlife” as one of “the foundations of humanity’s survival”. A “focus on the wellbeing of nonhuman species, such as wild animals”, is deemed to be “more altruistic” (*ibid.*). Viva!’s aforementioned campaign achieves this through statements such as, “BUY A BURGER, KILL A TOUCAN, AND BURN A JAGUAR’S HOME”, and the campaign’s main image: a burger filled with exotic animals. Similarly, a PETA t-shirt states: “SAVE THE WHALES DON’T EAT FISH”. Although less anthropocentric than fears concerning humanity’s survival, such messages exhibit “an anthropocentric logic” in their redirecting of altruism away from the immediate victims of animal products toward more “charismatic forms of suffering” (Giraud 2019, 133) – suffering that is more captivating from the *human* perspective.

The organisations’ reinforcement of human narcissism through ethics-based arguments is divided into three themes. The first covers the centring of human fondness toward nonhuman animals and is typified by the following quotations from The Vegan Society’s *Future Normal* campaign site: “I’ve loved animals as long as I can remember”, “I was heartbroken because that [cow being consumed] was my friend”, “cows are still my favourite animals [...]. I squeal every time I see a herd”. The campaign is directed toward “ANIMAL LOVERS” and emphasises how veganism fosters “peace of mind”. Not only is such framing contingent on love for nonhuman animals (which not every human possesses), but by presenting veganism as a path to psychological wellbeing – presumably via “personal salvation” from guilt – this framing centres veganism around “personal gain” (Wrenn 2016, 152) and in turn contributes to anthropocentric hierarchy and “self-centeredness” (*ibid.*, 178).

The next theme regards a “toxic human savior complex that permeates animal liberation/rescue circles” (Trenkova 2020, 315). When detailing “the issues” faced by the nonhumans exploited within human societies, PETA write: “Animals are counting on compassionate people like you to give them a voice and be their heroes”. In like manner, a Viva! t-shirt features the slogan, “I’D RATHER BE SAVING ANIMALS”, whilst The Vegan Society claim that their “Veganalyser” software can determine “how many animals you would save in your lifetime if you went vegan today”. By framing nonhuman animals as “voiceless” beings in need of “saving” by “compassionate heroes”, the organisations bolster a human supremacist paternalism (Nguyen 2019, 71; Freeman 2020, 70) that decentres nonhumans (Wrenn 2016, 23-24) whilst presenting them as “infantilized tokens, to whom we generously offer our protection, leav[ing] our sense of human exceptionalism intact” (Quinn 2021, 266).

The final theme concerns the parading of (certain) nonhuman capabilities. Epitomising this was Viva!’s page on pigs, which proclaims: “Pigs are one of the most intelligent species on earth [...], sometimes smarter than, [*sic*] dogs, primates, dolphins and even human toddlers”. Said page features an image of a piglet contrasted with a puppy alongside the caption: “THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS YOUR PERCEPTION”. Psychology research suggests that humans react most strongly to the maltreatment of “humanlike animals” (Loughnan, Bastian, and Haslam 2014, 106), providing some justification for the commonplace prioritisation of “relatable” species by vegan organisations (Freeman 2014, 217-219). Nonetheless, comparing the intelligence of pigs with humans and the cuteness of piglets with puppies locates the moral worth of pigs in their similarities with humans and other animals regarded worthy from a Western human perspective (*ibid.*, 240). This not only fails to question the exploitative nature of domesticated “companion animals” (Nguyen 2019, 56-59), but also overlooks “no less important” other-than-human capacities and perpetuates discriminatory “benchmarks” to moral consideration that harm humans and nonhumans alike (Trigg 2021, 85-86).

3.3. *The binary human-animal ontology*

This section considers the subversion and reinforcement of anthropocentrism’s “reductive binary distinctions separating humans from animals” (Calarco 2014, 416). A central component of this “binary human-animal ontology” is the notion that nonhumans are *deficient* when compared to humans. However, as introduced above and explored further below,

emphasising nonhuman capabilities – especially in relation to those of humans – can be counterproductive. Of interest here are the ways the organisations “rhetorically problematize the fragile borders of humanity and species through the deconstruction of speciesist language” (Freeman 2020, 76). For instance, when PETA highlight the consequences of human behaviour on “our wild neighbors”, and a The Vegan Society video insists that “veganism is about living in harmony with everybody”, the organisations broaden human-centric understandings of community and accountability. Furthermore, Viva! and PETA frequently applied the typically human-centric relational noun “mother” to nonhumans – e.g., Viva!’s *Cruel Britannia* video details how “kids are taken from their mothers” on goat farms, whilst PETA describe rodents as “good mothers” in their *Who Cares About Mice and Rats?* video (which concludes, “They care”).

PETA take explicit aim at the human/animal distinction through their name: P standing for “People”, represented by a photograph of a gorilla underneath which is written, “I am you, only different”; and A standing for “Animals”, represented by a photograph of a cow with the caption, “We are all animals”. PETA additionally sell clothing with “I AM AN ANIMAL #EndSpeciesism” printed alongside the outline of a human hand and range of nonhuman claw/paw prints. As addressed below, the conflating or comparing of human and nonhuman suffering can be detrimental to both parties. Nonetheless, the use of a “we’re all animals” message strengthens identification with “fellow animals” and in turn bolsters non-anthropocentric concern (Freeman 2020, 28). Moreover, Nguyen (2019) has argued that the reclamation of the term “animal” from the “human supremacist ideology” which hampers our sense of kinship with other animals “simultaneously neutralize[s]” the “animalizing” discourse underpinning racism and other intra-human discriminations (121).

PETA’s rhetorical challenge to the human/animal dichotomy is, however, inconsistent, as exemplified by their plea that we must “learn to share the planet with animals”. Adding “other” before “animals” here would have avoided this anthropocentric slip. That said, Viva! constitute a more obvious perpetuator of the human-animal ontology, claiming to be campaigning for a “more sustainable world for humans and animals alike”. On their *ZOONOTIC DISEASES – 3 IN 4* page, Viva! underscore that “Three in four of the world’s new or emerging diseases come from animals”, which are “Responsible for nearly three million deaths a year”. By not identifying said deaths as *human* deaths, Viva! overlook the impact of said diseases on *nonhuman* animals and, by implication, con-

struct a rhetorically split between the “animals” from which the diseases emerge and the humans who resultantly die. In this connection, Freeman (2020) wrestles with the “struggle for nonspeciesist terminology”, deeming the normative term “animal” problematic for the reasons outlined above. Nonetheless, “nonhuman animal” and “other-than-human animal” unavoidable otherise those considered “non”, centralising those the “non” are not. What is important, Freeman argues, is foregrounding our “mutual status as animals” which can be achieved chiefly, though imperfectly, through the use of “human animals” to describe ourselves (61-62). Said term was not found in this study.

3.4. *Anthropocentric moral hierarchy*

The “strong moral hierarchy” of anthropocentrism – i.e., granting “relative and even absolute value” to humans *over* nonhumans in correspondence with the human-animal ontology (Calarco 2014, 417) – was opposed directly by The Vegan Society in their contention that, “we shouldn’t base our compassion for others based [*sic*] on how clever they are”. The ostensible absence of “some purportedly human trait” (*ibid.*) – in this case, “cleverness” – is not grounds for reduced moral concern, The Vegan Society argue. The counterproductive nature of considering the intelligence of nonhumans in the first instance is tackled below. Here, it is important to note that “compassion” does not amount to recognition of *intrinsic value* – “value [...] not bestowed from outside but [as] an integral part of the being itself” (Cavaliere 2001, 36) – and arguably operates through the lens of human exceptionalism (see section 3.2). Resultantly, despite their egalitarian tone, The Vegan Society’s efforts fall short of undermining anthropocentrism comprehensively.

Although not directly disrupting any connection between a supposed “lack” in nonhumans and their subordination, the moral hierarchy of anthropocentrism was further contested by contrasts made between the impact and benefit of nonvegan products for nonhumans and humans respectively. For example, Viva!’s *Why Aren’t You Vegan? The Big 3 – Animal Free* video features nonvegan actors who, when asked why they still consume animal products, respond: “We like the taste!”. The actors are then asked, “But, do you like the cruelty?”, before details of “dairy” and “chicken” production are outlined; PETA’s video, *Testing 1... 2... 3*, asks its viewers, “Do we really need ANOTHER hairspray?”, whilst showcasing footage from nonhuman animal testing laboratories; and lastly, The Vegan Society assert that, whilst “humans can thrive without

honey in their diets”, “Honey is the energy source of bees; without it they would starve”. By presenting the human interest in animal products alongside the experiences of the animals soon to *be* said “products”, the organisations centre the latter and trivialise the former.

Furthermore, by foregrounding victimised nonhumans and their experiences, the organisations “make the absent referent present” and in turn expose an unappetising yet often-unseen aspect of nonvegan consumer choices (Adams 2015, 31-32). The use of “concealment” to hinder public scrutiny is a hallmark of oppressive systems, particularly those in which the public are complicit, such as nonhuman animal exploitation (Spiegel 1988, 71-76). Joy (2011) identifies “invisibility” as the “primary defense” of this exploitation, contending that revealing the “process of raising and killing animals for our food” and other products constitutes the “first step in deconstructing” the hidden ideology of nonveganism (21). Unveiling the absent referent orientates veganism around nonhuman animals and facilitates an honest appraisal of “their systemic exploitation” and the “human supremacism” on which it is founded (Cole and Stewart 2021, 320).

Notwithstanding, anthropocentric moral hierarchy was upheld by the organisations in two main ways: through a single-issue focus and an emphasis on nonhuman capabilities. Viva! and PETA dedicated significant portions of their websites to problematising factory farming which, given their predominance, is understandable. However, the “singling out” of particular species or system inevitably engenders a “hierarchy of concern” among issues (Wrenn and Johnson 2013). Viva!, for instance, write of how “Over the past century animal farming has mutated from family run small holdings, to a ruthless profit-driven machine”; whilst PETA explain that, on factory farms, “Animals endure mutilations [...] without painkillers”. By spotlighting the *specific* cruelty of factory farming, the organisations imply that exploitation on “family fun small holdings” with the use of “painkillers” would be “morally more acceptable” (Francione 2020, 140), thus inhibiting their promotion of a comprehensive opposition to nonhuman animal use (Wrenn and Johnson 2013). A human-directed hierarchy – and consequently, anthropocentrism – remains.

The shortcomings of grounding arguments for moral consideration on observed capabilities has been discussed in relation to human exceptionalism/narcissism. Yet, said arguments additionally reinforce anthropocentric moral hierarchy by implying it is *because of* said capabilities that the nonhumans in question hold ethical import. Take Viva!’s page on “broiler chickens”, which endeavours to convince its audience

that “Chickens are sophisticated talkers” who “feel empathy” and “are as clever as monkeys!”. Here, Viva! explicitly counter the conventional view that nonhumans – in this case, chickens – lack the intelligence, morality, and communication skills requisite to moral consideration. In doing so however, Viva! gives credit to the “anthropocentric criteria” that undergird the oppression of nonhumans in the first place (Calarco 2008, 128-130). As discussed, said criteria also subordinate various human groups (*ibid.*, 131-132) and therefore cannot form part of an *intersectional* challenge to anthropocentric hierarchy; “ability-based ethics” operate through the assumed supremacy of those with the power to oppress based on “fallible” judgements (Bolton 2014).

3.5. *Intersectional potential*

The organisations encouraged intersectional consideration in many ways, the most obvious being the conceptualising of nonhuman animal advocacy as *part* of a broader fight against injustice. In a The Vegan Society video, author Benjamin Zephaniah states: “Just as we have tried to end racism, sexism, and ageism, we can also try to end speciesism”; whilst PETA’s homepage contends: “Bigotry begins when categories such as race, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or species are used to justify discrimination”. Elsewhere, PETA clarify that “Our world is plagued with many serious problems [...]. Cruelty to animals is one of them”. Of course, several of these “serious problems” pertain to health and environmental issues, a significant portion of which are associated with animal agriculture (Nibert 2012, 152-155; Winters 2022, 97-216). When presented alongside arguments that centre the immediate nonhuman victim, the highlighting of these issues forms part of a thoroughgoing case for veganism – e.g., The Vegan Society when they promote nonhuman animals’ “right to life and freedom” whilst noting that their “exploitation also negatively affects human justice [...] is not sustainable and is severely damaging to the environment”; or Viva! in their linking of the exploitative consumption of chickens to “Growing levels of obesity, dwindling feed stocks, food poisoning and the ever-looming threat of a global pandemic”.

The organisations underscored interconnections between a range of issues affecting nonhumans and humans: Viva! explain how Western demand for prawn and shrimp “has ravaged swathes of vital ecosystems and indigenous communities”; The Vegan Society endorse veganism as “the simplest way to take a stand against inefficient food systems”; and PETA, on their *More Reasons to Go Vegan* page, list, “Because It’s the

Only Way to End World Hunger”. PETA and Viva! additionally draw attention to the exploitation of human workers: “The money-hungry farmed-animal industry exploits poor people and immigrants [...] [who] work for low wages, and union organizing is notoriously difficult”, PETA write, spotlighting “meatpacking” as particularly “filthy and extremely dangerous”; Viva! discuss research evidencing “long-lasting psychological impacts, such as PTSD”, and “an increase in crime rates, domestic abuse, and drug and alcohol use” amongst “slaughterhouse and animal agriculture workers”, as well investigations in which “UK supermarkets were exposed for selling prawns and shrimp originating from farms built on modern-day slavery”.

Finally, The Vegan Society emphasise their efforts to “make veganism an easily-adopted and widely-recognised approach to reducing animal suffering and environmental damage”, not least through their *Vegan Vote* campaign which pushes for the inclusion of “nutritionally balanced, sustainable, plant-based option[s] on all public sector menus”, and their “Advocating on behalf of vegans in vulnerable situations”. By acknowledging – or, at best, attempting to address – the interconnected issues of intra-human oppression, workers’ rights, environmental degradation, accessibility and the like, the organisations display *some* intersectional “self-awareness” (Freeman 2020, 56).

3.6. *Intersectional inaptitude*

However, cases in which the organisations fell short of an intersectional potential were plentiful, pertaining to numerous identified themes. The first concerns the presenting of veganism as “easy”. For instance, on their *How to go vegan* page, The Vegan Society describe “going vegan” as “actually a piece of cake”, claiming elsewhere that “nowadays there are affordable and easily-sourced alternatives to just about everything”. Similarly, PETA label “healthy” vegan alternatives as “readily available”, whilst Viva! maintain that “It really couldn’t be simpler to go vegan”. Recent research indicating the affordability of plant-based diets (Springmann *et al.* 2021) notwithstanding, championing veganism as “easy” and “cheap” erases the struggles of those living in “food deserts” with minimal access to affordable vegan ingredients and in turn centres the privileged, often white, experience (Wrenn 2016, 126; Brueck 2017, 9-10).

In this connection, all three organisations emphasise consumeristic aspects of veganism, but Viva! – who feature images of specialist vegan dishes, proudly highlight their distribution of “vegan hotdogs, cappuc-

minos, milkshakes and ice-cream” during public outreach, and identify “voting with your wallet” as an effective response to the concerns associated with palm oil – serve as the clearest example. Said emphasis contributes to the “commodification” of veganism, resultantly blunting the movement’s capacity to oppose the injustices of capitalism and foreground the plight of nonhuman animals (Wrenn 2016, 212-213), whilst upholding an elitist “whiteness” (Navarro 2021, 287) that excludes those unable – or unwilling – to partake in frivolous consumerism (e.g., Carrera 2017). As worded by Torres (2007), “this brand of veganism will never be able to make real connections with other movements or forms of oppression” (137).

“Heganism” is used to describe the perpetuation of “hegemonic masculinity” through particular manifestations and portrayals of health-orientated veganism (Greenebaum and Dexter 2021). Said portrayals sustain notions of elite fitness, conspicuous muscles, and economic success constituting “real” manhood (Weik 2021, 313), with vegan advocates utilising masculinised “gender performances” to resist the association of veganism with femininity, “weakness and frailty” (Christopher, Bartowski, and Haverda 2021, 13-14). Doing just that, the Vegan Society’s *Thriving Stories* campaign showcases “world record breaking athletes” and “business owners” reaching their peaks “on a vegan diet”, whilst Viva! assert that “a plant-based diet can [...] shift your sports endeavours to the next level”. The image used by Viva! is of semi-naked, muscular people performing jumps inside a fitness studio. As a part of their “work-out collection”, Viva! sell skin-tight gym clothing with the messages, “FIT BULL” and “BOLD. BRAVE. ACTIVE. VEGAN.”, printed above the pectoral muscles of their athletic models. A PETA tank top sports a similar message: “VEGAN STRONG POWERED BY PLANTS”. A desire to counter mainstream “vegaphobia” (Cole and Morgan 2011) is tenable – and vegan athleticism contradicts “the image of the weak and emasculated vegan” (Greenebaum and Dexter 2021, 644) – yet stressing competitiveness and “power” plays into patriarchal gender ideals and consequently offers no significant challenge to them (*ibid.*, 645).

Intersectional incompetency was also identified in discriminatory single-issue focuses and insensitive comparisons between human and non-human suffering. Regarding the former, Viva! dedicate several sections of their *Slaughter: How Animals Are Killed* page to “religious slaughter”, highlighting “animal welfare concerns” around an “exemption” in UK law “for religious slaughter such as halal and shechita which demands that the animals be alive, and in some cases, conscious when they are killed”. PETA discuss “countries where animal welfare laws are virtu-

ally non-existent”, and state: “More than half the fur in the U.S. comes from China, where millions of dogs and cats are bludgeoned, hanged, bled to death, and often skinned alive”. Relatedly, in their *The Origins of Coronavirus Explained in 1 Minute* video, Viva!’s founder talks of “useless Chinese medicines” made from pangolins. As identified by Wrenn (2016), specific focuses such as these convey a “white savior” narrative in which foreign practices appear *particularly* “barbaric”, thus reinforcing colonialist notions of “uncivilized” and animalistic non-Westerners (133-136) and an anthropocentric “hierarchy of concern” (see section 3.4).

PETA’s problematic use of human-nonhuman comparison is well documented (e.g., Polish 2016), yet they continue to defend this tactic: “We aren’t afraid to make the difficult comparisons, say the unpopular thing, or point out the uncomfortable truth, if it means that animals will benefit”. In their *Testing 1...2...3* video, PETA include “Because it was wrong when we did it to orphans, blacks, G.I.s and gypsies” as an argument against testing on nonhuman animals; whilst their *Silent Scream* video presents the consumption of fish alongside scenes of domestic abuse and violent muggings with the caption: “SOME SCREAMS CAN’T BE HEARD”. Despite their potential to undermine the anthropocentric human/animal dichotomy (Freeman 2020, 49), said comparisons overlook *ongoing* human oppressions and the role human-nonhuman comparisons play in sustaining them (Constantine 2020), in turn severing the movement’s prospects of resonating beyond “privileged white” communities (Brueck 2017, 20-21). If ever, comparisons between oppressions should be utilised only by those affected (*ibid.*), in a way that is “historically informed, factually accurate, and culturally sensitive” (Freeman 2020, 49).

4. CONCLUSION

Anthropocentrism lies at the root of human to nonhuman, intra-human, and environmental injustices, manifesting as a centring of particular human interests, an othering of those deemed outside of said interests, and a corresponding hierarchy of moral consideration (Calarco 2014). As a philosophy and practice, veganism has been advanced as anti-anthropocentric (e.g., MacCormack 2020), yet the anti-anthropocentric potency of the movement’s advocacy has hitherto been measured. Through a critical discourse analysis of the websites of three prominent vegan organisations, the current research begins this measuring, illustrating numerous areas in

which vegan advocacy undermines and reinforces anthropocentric thinking. Intersectional awareness is vital to comprehensive anti-oppression efforts (Brueck 2017), thus the organisations' online advocacy was additionally critiqued in this connection to reveal some areas of strength and several areas of needed improvement. The findings of this article contribute to existing research on vegan/nonhuman animal rights advocacy and social movement communication, as well as facilitating future anti-anthropocentric vegan discourse.

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