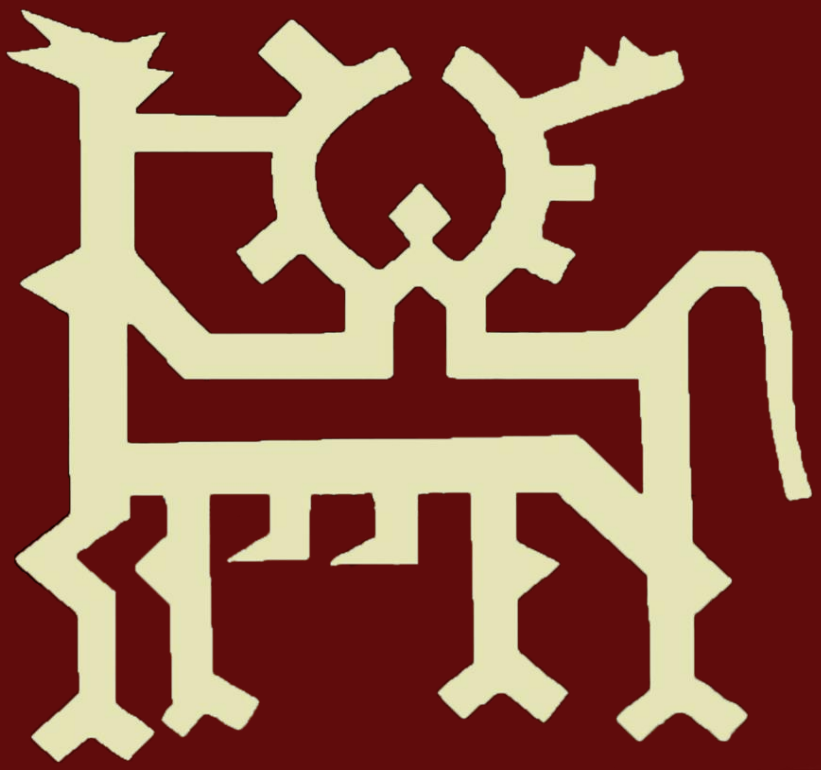
Studies on the Human-Animal Relationship



Edited by
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CONTENTS

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Multispecies Perspectives, Communities and Ethics

Borbála László

For centuries, with relatively short interruptions, dogs have been allowed to roam free on the streets of Turkish cities and contributed to forming thriving multispecies communities. The history of local stray dogs dates back to the Ottoman era, when they functioned as guards for neighbourhoods, helped eat the garbage and would alert people in case of intruders or fires (see, for example, de Busbecq 2005; Pinquet 2010; Hart 2019). However, according to Kimberly Hart, an anthropologist at SUNY Buffalo State College, "it wasn't just a functional relationship; it was seen as a good deed to feed and take care of them" (qtd. in Hattam 2021). This reciprocal care relation between people and community dogs has survived into the present, although with a two-century long interruption from the early 1800s to the 1990s, during which the authorities tried to annihilate stray dogs in their attempts to Westernise cities by imposing order and stricter hygiene rules on the streets. This led to periodic mass killings in the last century, only arrested by the 2004 animal protection law. The latter gave animals a legal right to inhabit the streets, banned killing and capturing strays, and prescribed that municipalities must take care of free roaming animals by establishing feeding stations and providing spaying-neutering operations. Thanks to the additional efforts of citizens, community dogs have been not only surviving but thriving in Turkey's urban environments. As Elizabeth Lo, director of the acclaimed 2020 documentary *Stray* recounts her experiences while filming in Istanbul, "[p]eople really see a dignity in the dogs, they see them as fellow citizens, as belonging to their streets and communities" (qtd. in Hattam 2021).[1]

At the time of writing this Introduction, the long-standing balance between the human and canine stakeholders of Turkish cities seems to be threatened with destruction once more. In the summer of 2024, president Erdoğan's government passed a law that requires municipalities to collect the country's estimated 4 million stray dogs, place them in shelters, and euthanize those that are not adopted within 30 days. The president said that this "radical solution" is a reaction to the recent rise in dog population, the growing number of attacks and the possibility of the animals spreading diseases (qtd. in Christie-Miller 2024). Yet ironically, the renewed modernisation attempt entails eliminating an integral part of Turkish culture, which is normally championed by Erdoğan's nationalistic discourse but, in this case, it has become associated with the sensibilities of liberal-minded metropolitans and, as such, something to be crushed at the roots. With losing Istanbul and Ankara in the March elections, Erdoğan is likely trying to divide people with the new anti-stray law, which is again ironic as the care for community dogs have been bringing people together rather than separating them. Furthermore, as Alexander Christie-Miller insightfully notes, "[t]here is a deeper irony

[1] The discussion of Turkey's street dog culture is a revised version of a paragraph in the author's chapter "Non-Human Precarity: Wasted Human-Canine Kinships in Two Contemporary Documentaries" in *Representations of Social Inequality in 21st Century Global Art Cinema*.

… in the notion that sterilising our urban spaces of animals – in Turkey or elsewhere – constitutes progress. The impression of cleanliness it creates is a false one, perpetuating the illusion of a 'human' world, discrete and orderly, at a time when our own waste products are killing our ecosystems and poisoning the air we breathe" (2024). Conversely, Turkey's street-animal culture fosters a recognition that we belong to larger, multispecies communities that we must respect and care for. In this sense, progress would be to ensure that these communities survive and that we learn from them.

Multispecies Perspectives

Donna Haraway imagines the way forward in similar terms, by embracing the chaotic, messy interconnections between the human and the nonhuman worlds. For her, "[s]taying with the trouble means making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all" (2016: 4). Haraway's approach draws attention to the fact that we are not alone in this world: our lives are inextricably intertwined with the lives of nonhuman beings, therefore our views and actions seriously – as Turkey's current culture wars show, often fatally – impact the existence of other animals.

The chapters in this volume share an awareness that "our lives, as humans, are intimately connected with the lives of nonhuman animals" (DeMello 2021: 4). Although each paper explores a particular aspect of particular – spatially and temporally situated – human-animal relationships, they all draw broader lessons from them, outlining the interrelatedness of human and nonhuman animals as an always already existing, universal condition. As such, although they represent different disciplines (including ethology, sociology, multispecies ethnography, cultural anthropology, philosophy and literary studies), the chapters are connected by the volume's overarching anthrozoological perspective, which contends that "[s]hared, multispecies communities of life are, plain and simple, ecological givens" and therefore it is "deeply mistaken to claim that our sole community is and can be humans alone" (Waldau 2013: 196).

Multispecies Communities

Inspired by the animal turn and the resulting development of animal studies (also known as human-animal studies or anthrozoology),[2] the novelty of the anthrozoological perspective lies in the interdisciplinary recognition that nonhuman animals are members of communities *with us* (Donaldson 2020). Thus, we constitute multispecies families, neighbourhoods, urban and rural environments as well as societies. As the relational ontology outlined by Haraway – one of the forerunners of animal studies – suggests, we cannot exist outside of relations with nonhuman animals; at every level, we constitute relationships in which "none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all" (2003: 12).[3] In other words, we are part of constantly changing, co-constitutive relations, forming "both explicit and implicit, or intentional and unintentional, partnerships with other species" (Buchanan

[2] For the definition, terminology and history of human-animal studies, see, for example, DeMello 2021.

[3] For Haraway, the best example to demonstrate the ontological concept of relationality is the companion dog, "a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings" (Haraway 2003: 11-12).

2017: 291). For scholars involved in human-animal studies, our species, communities, as well as each human individual is therefore a "species multiple": "Beyond what we might call the biological functioning of bodies, the contours of human lived experience are shaped through diverse and consequential entanglements" (Van Dooren et al. 2016: 14).

Furthermore, as Thom Van Dooren and others highlight, nonhuman animals are not merely members of multispecies communities, but – just as our views, desires and actions affect their lives – their subjectivities and agencies, as well as the ways in which we interact with them significantly shape our lives, too. To put it differently, nonhuman animals are not passively existing in the world as previous, anthropocentric thought assumed, but they also contribute to making the world through their own perceptions, desires, thoughts, and actions (Buchanan 2017). As a result, "we are not free of the animals either, although the tradition of humanism—whose ruins we inhabit—promised that we should be. Animality infests us, plagues us, goes feral on us" (Armstrong – Simmons 2007: 2). Animals shape our bodies, habits and habitats, our communities, cultures, and identities, as well as our thoughts, emotions and actions in unpredictable ways, contributing to creating networks of shared subjectivities and agencies.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) is significant to human-animal studies as it deconstructs a pillar of anthropocentric thinking: "the notion that human beings and their capacities are the given yardstick against which we must necessarily access and measure the agency of all other animals, with the most human-like species therefore afforded greater capacity for agency than less-readily anthropomorphized species" (Nimmo 2018).[4] Instead, for ANT, it becomes meaningful to speak of the agency of bees, worms, and even bacteria, in a manner that depends not on the cognitive abilities of these organisms but on their role as actors (or *actants*) within specific biosocial assemblages. Informed by the insights of Actor Network Theory, the anthrozoological perspective thus opens up new ways of thinking where humans are no longer the sole autonomous and agentic beings of humanist ontology but instead are constitutively entangled with nonhuman others in a radically heterogeneous world.

Multispecies Ethics

Human-animal studies also calls for a new ethics and politics in which we not only recognise our entanglements with other beings but also take responsibility for the many ways our views and actions affect the lives of nonhuman animals. We must reject what Van Dooren et al. call the three incommensurable demands of "social justice in a humanist vein, ethics focused on the well-being of individual entities (usually nonhuman animals but to a lesser extent plants, fungi, stones, and others), and an environmental ethics concerned primarily with the health of ecosystems and species" (2016: 15). What we need to adopt from a multispecies perspective is a "relational ethics" (Daigle 2022: 895), one that María Puig de la Bellacasa refers to as alterbiopolitics: "an ethics of collective empowerment that puts caring at the heart of the search of everyday struggles for hopeful flourishing of *all* beings, of *bios*

[4] Actor Network Theory is connected to the name of Bruno Latour, who introduced the concept in the 1980s as a response to prevailing theories and methods in studying science, technology, and society, which often relied on traditional dichotomies such as subject and object, human and nonhuman, culture and nature. Latour called attention to the complex relationships between different agents, arguing that the production of knowledge could only be understood by mapping networks of relationships between different – both biological and non-biological – entities (for example, lab animals, scientific texts, human researchers, and technologies). See Latour 2005.

understood as a more than human community" (2017: 22). This biocentric approach thus conceives of care as "a force distributed across a multiplicity of agencies and materials and supports our world as a thick mesh of relational obligation" (Bellacasa 2017: 20). Besides investigating the diverse roles of animals in our societies, the chapters in this volume also acknowledge and directly call our attention to the roles that human views and practices play in shaping the lives of nonhuman animals, either in positive or negative terms. Recognising the extent to which the fate of other creatures depends on us and calling for alternative ways of interaction that can improve the well-being of all actors in the given relationship, the studies together outline a multispecies ethics of responsibility and care.

Chapter Outlines

The volume opens with a chapter discussing the Anthropocene narratives of the human-beaver relationship. László Nemes, one of the leading figures in bioethics and posthumanist philosophies in Hungary, examines the complex bio-cultural relations between humans and beavers within the context of the Anthropocene's dilemmas surrounding environmental protection. Shedding light on the manifold importance of this unique nonhuman animal, Nemes argues that the beaver is not only an eco-engineer – due to their ability to shape freshwater habitats, which benefits many other animal and plant species – but also a "cultural keystone species" – a term coined by Ann Garibaldi and Nancy Turner (2004) – whose members are vital to maintaining the stability of human communities, cultures and identities because of the meanings connected to them. As Nemes observes, beavers have been an organic part of European collective memories, becoming indissociable from notions of intelligence, industriousness, or, in some cases, national spirit, as a consequence of which their disappearance left a gaping hole not only in the natural but also the cultural landscapes of the countries where they had been previously found in abundance. The beaver's central role in shaping human communities and cultures is also demonstrated by the attempts at reintroducing these animals in several European countries from the 1920s.

In Chapter 2, Enikő Kubinyi, leading researcher of the MTA-ELTE Lendület "Momentum" Companion Animal Research Group and the ELTE NAP Canine Brain Research Group in Hungary, examines the embeddedness of domestic dogs in human cultures from an ethological perspective, arguing that dog breeding and behaviour are not only determined by biological factors but are also affected by culture. For example, the increasing demand for cute-looking brachycephalic dogs – that have a head shape and large eyes resembling those of a small child – is reinforced by the pet industry of modern capitalist societies and negatively impacts the lives of dogs, many of whom suffer from respiratory problems. Kubinyi also reflects on how this industry, including the production of food and equipment, as well as the provision of life insurance, hospitality, breeding, walking, grooming, veterinary care, and training is growing at such a rate that today it provides "a livelihood for people who do not own dogs themselves" (21). Kubinyi thus carefully traces the various ways in which contemporary human cultures and companion dogs reciprocally shape each other, while delineating the open questions related to the growing trend of living with pet dogs.

The next chapter, written by Ivett Szalma, Lóránt Pélyi, and Orsolya Udvari in a collaboration with the Momentum Companion Animal Research Group, investigates how companion dog keeping may shape the dynamics of contemporary families around the world. For this purpose, the authors used the scoping review method, analysing existing literature on the role of pets in the family, with a particular focus on the differences that previous

literature has found between men and women in this regard. In the course of reviewing the selected journal articles, the author's findings revealed the recurrent topics of fictive kinship between humans and animals as well as the flexible roles that companion dogs may fulfil depending on the specific culture, community and the particular multispecies family that they are embedded in. Among others, the articles reviewed by the authors suggested that a pet dog can serve as a substitute child, a friend or a partner, and that many people form deeply intimate bonds with their furry companions and express a need to grieve them when they die. As such, the analysed papers outline diverse patterns of attachment between humans and companion animals.

Chapter 4, written by Saray Oxley Heaney, an Anthrozoology PhD candidate at the University of Exeter, shifts the focus to human-urban animal relations in her study of cat abandonment in Saudi Arabia. Using grounded theory techniques and utilising the framework of The Five Animal Welfare Needs, the research offers a comprehensive perspective on the impact on the affected feline subjects and concludes that the welfare needs of cats on the streets of Saudi Arabia are not met. Oxley Heaney's study thus calls attention to the fact that neglect is also a prevalent part of our relations to other animals and raises important questions of responsibility towards the nonhuman members of our multispecies communities. As such, the research not only contributes to the field of anthrozoology by bringing into focus an understudied region and foregrounding the experiences (*Umwelten*) of nonhuman animals,[5] but it also attempts to exert a positive influence on the conditions of real-life animals. Evoking the concepts of Actor Network Theory, Oxley Heaney notes that cats can possess agency as individuals and shape the worlds they are part of. However, as her research findings show, "their actions may be constrained by environmental, geographical, physical, psychological or even biopolitical situations within which their agency may be stifled" (54), therefore they need human interlocutors like the chapter's author "to speak and act in their interest" (Lynn 1998: 285 qtd. in Oxley Heaney 53).

Chapter 5, written by anthrozoology scholar Kristine Hill, founder of the Cat Academic Think Tank (eCATT) and Anthrozoology as International Practice (AIP), focuses on discourses surrounding roaming urban cats and Foucauldian biopower over feline bodies. The application of Foucault's notions of biopower and biopolitics – with special importance attributed to the role language plays in such systems – serves as a means for understanding urban cat-human relations along biopolitical lines. Discussing how the use of "power words" – a term coined by Michelle Szydlowski to identify expressions that are used to wield control over animal lives (Szydlowski 2021: 47 qtd. in Hill 86) – such as 'feral' and 'domesticated' contribute to perpetuating different notions of 'catness,' which in turn shape social expectations, pressures, and bylaws restricting the roaming of cats, Hill makes a compelling case for how Foucauldian biopower can reinforce conceptual and physical boundaries, categories, and hierarchies between human and nonhuman animals. At the same time, the author notes that individual cats can also assert their agency and influence their human benefactors, while humans can also "help change the dialogue and foster more caring multispecies communities" by using different terms (84), for example 'community cats' to refer to roaming feline subjects.

In Chapter 6, Judit Farkas, Associate Professor at the Department of Ethnography and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Pécs, Hungary, examines how the ethics of multispecies responsibility and care are practiced in contemporary Hungarian permaculture

[5] Jakob von Uexküll's concept of *Umwelt* (in plural *Umwelten*) refers to the subjective phenomenal worlds created by all organisms on earth, albeit depending on species-specific sensorial capacities.

communities, where human principles and needs may shape the lives of animals but the presence of animals also shapes daily farm life, nutrition and human social relationships. Permaculture ethics is therefore described as a "transformative ethos" which decentres the human by stressing that human agency is part of a larger, multispecies network of agencies (Bellacasa 2017: 67), and that, in order to thrive as a community, the human individual also needs to care for other people, species, and the environment as a whole – an ethical consideration also expressed by the motto 'People Care, Earth Care, Fair Share'. The author's detailed case study, focusing on a Hungarian permaculture farm consisting of four human and several nonhuman members, provides an example of how permaculture ethics can be successfully combined with the practice of "multispecies commoning," that is, of how humans can make commonly held resources available and work towards the wellbeing of all – human and nonhuman – participants.

In Chapter 7, Marius Markuckas, a philosophy scholar specialised in bioethics, transhumanism and posthumanism, begins his discussion by providing an overview of how the humanist notions of divide and hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals have been deconstructed by such (proto-)posthumanist thinkers as Jacques Derrida and Donna Haraway. As the author summarises, in humanist traditions of thinking, *logos* "becomes the ontological and ethical wedge which hierarchically separates the human from the animal, while simultaneously creating a milieu for manifestations of violence" (113). At the same time, by using the example of the 'assistance animal,' Markuckas' paper highlights that humanism and posthumanism similarly ascribe certain characteristics to animals that leave them exposed to the forces of human power or, as the author puts it, "despite the ever-increasing list of kind words used to describe them, [animals] still remain in an instrumental relation with humans" (118). The question raised by the author thus not only probes the problematic aspects of human-assistance animal relations from the perspective of multispecies ethics, but also points to the limitations of posthumanist concepts and terminology when it comes to reshaping the ways we think of and treat nonhuman animals.

In the closing chapter, Rebeka Kuszinger, whose research focuses on the representation of liminal child characters in contemporary British literature, uses the example of the 'wild child' to investigate the human-animal boundary. Drawing on post-anthropocentric discourse and Anat Pick's theory of "creaturely vulnerability" – which refers to the "condition of exposure and finitude that affects all living bodies whatever they are" (Pick 2011) –, the author discusses how the fictional 'wild child' character of Jill Paton Walsh's *Knowledge of Angels* (1994) outlines the limits of 'the human' while also showing the signs of trans-species vulnerability, thereby forcing us to "rethink our ideas of abuse and care relations" (124). As the author insightfully argues, "Walsh's narrative of the feral foundling thus reinterprets the boundary between the categories of 'the animal' and 'the human' by highlighting the need for care and the consequences of its lack, which apply to all creatures irrespective of their species identity" (133). Recognising the shared vulnerabilities and "the common capacities of creatures who in fact have coevolved in shared habitats and multispecies communities" can, as Jonathan Crane argues, lead to "a paradigm shift in moral theory and philosophical ethics" (2016: 257), one that is based on the continuities between human and nonhuman animals rather than clear-cut distinctions. As Kuszinger astutely points out through the neglected and abused 'wild child' character, we are all vulnerable creatures in need of care, safety, and a community in order to thrive. Her paper outlines an entangled, multispecies network of care, where human, nonhuman, and uncategorisable creatures all need and provide care to each

other, thereby helping us imagine an ethics that "puts caring at the heart of the search of everyday struggles for hopeful flourishing of *all* beings" (Bellacasa 2017: 20).

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CHAPTER 1

Anthropocene Narratives of the Beaver-Human Relationship

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Abstract

This paper explores the diverse relationship between beavers and humans in the light of the Anthropocene dilemmas of environmental protection. Beavers are special animals in many ways, including their extremely colourful and diverse cultural and scientific representation. Beavers are also an eco-engineer keystone species, and, as such, provide a living space for many other species through their natural activities. Yet from the perspective of the present discussion, their primary relevance lies in the fact that they disappeared from most of Europe, and became the flagship species of reintroduction generations later, which makes them a perfectly suitable subject for examining the narrative patterns and ethics of collective memory and the human-animal relationship. The beaver is therefore considered as a "cultural keystone species" that is not only central to maintaining and shaping ecosystems but is also vital to human communities, cultures, and identities, which are inseparably connected to the natural environments.

Keywords

beaver, reintroduction, Anthropocene, baseline, narrative ethics, collective memory

"Brutal crow attack in Budapest," "The Margitsziget wild boar was killed by three shots," "The first Asian hornets that settled in Hungary were killed with a tennis racket," "A golden jackal family was shot in Újszentiván," "War is starting against the cormorants: they know no god but their lead shot," "A small boar was beaten to death in Debrecen," "Hungary has been invaded by invasive slug species," "Turtles bit bathers in Croatia, otters attacked three women in Montana," "Killer whales have already sunk three ships, and their attacks are spreading," "Magpies keep the Australians in terror". War has broken out (again) between humans and (nonhuman) animals. At least, this might be the perception of those who even casually follow the daily news. Then there is the case of the famous Swiss wolf (M237), which I have already mentioned elsewhere (Nemes 2023b). "'This guy is not a hunter, but a killer' – a country mourns the Swiss wolf, public anger pours down on the man who shot the animal," reads the headline of one newspaper. Plants are no exception: "Foreign plants overwhelm Hungary". We are only a few years after the global coronavirus epidemic (Covid-19), when, with the voluntary or forced retreat of people, more and more animals found new habitats near human settlements, and many of us may have thought that the epidemic was the beginning of a new relationship with the animal world and nature. The fierce military language is also abundantly applied to beavers,

who are the subject of my study and have just began to repopulate in Hungary: "The beaver is not a toy: it attacked a dog in Budapest," "They gnaw, they drill, they fell," "Tiszaalpár sends a message of war to the local beaver colony," "The beaver is not a brother, but a feast: the hunted rodent ended up in a cauldron". So, what is the case with beavers in the Anthropocene?

1. Dilemmas of Environmental Protection in the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene refers to the period in which a specific species, namely our own, the human species (*Homo sapiens*), exerts such a decisive and lasting impact on the entire planet – the chemical composition of the atmosphere and soil, the sea level, the climate, and the ecosystem – that it seems appropriate to talk about a new geological era. The creation of the concept is credited to two scientists, the Nobel Prize-winning Dutch chemist Paul J. Crutzen, and American ecologist Eugene F. Stoermer, who proposed the term in 2000 (Crutzen – Stoermer 2000). Since then, many studies and books have been published on the interpretation of the Anthropocene epoch, both in the natural sciences, and in the social sciences and humanities (e.g., Lorimer 2015; Davies 2016). One important question concerns the beginning of the Anthropocene. Since it is not simply a matter of certain social processes to identify a period, or rather a process to be scientifically interpreted in a larger perspective, we need to point to the time when humankind started to show activities that affected not only certain places, but the entire planet. Many associate this with the spread of agriculture and animal husbandry, others with the expansion of European civilisation, such as the great geographical discoveries (from the 15th century), or the industrial revolution of the 18th century, while others place it at a later date, at the middle of the 20th century (Horváth 2021).

The other area to consider is the question of insights and lessons from the Anthropocene. What changes when we interpret ourselves, nature, and our relationship to nature as people of a new era? What theoretical and practical challenges do we face in the field of nature conservation in the Anthropocene? Environmental protection traditionally defines two tasks. One is the protection and conservation of the existing natural state, and the other is the restoration of a previous state that was not influenced by humans. In fact, both approaches are based on the premise that the world (our planet) can be divided into *two* parts: (1) nature unaffected by humans, and (2) the area affected by humans. The Anthropocene questions this *dualism*. We must now accept that there is not a single square foot of land on our planet, including uninhabited islands, deserts, the Arctic, Antarctica, seas and oceans, where the presence of humans has not left a lasting impact.

This new situation and perception poses many challenges to nature conservation. While traditional national parks, especially in the United States, were based on the assumption that nature should be preserved as *pristine* as possible in some isolated areas (Nash 2015), in the Anthropocene, this objective is considered to be unattainable, which means, on the one hand, a greater responsibility for human interventions and, on the other hand, allows more room for such interventions. It is no longer enough to simply leave nature alone, in the belief that human intervention always affects it negatively and changes its ontological status, an essential element of which is that it develops by itself, without planned or intentional interventions. In recent years, the toolbox of nature protection has expanded, along with its scope. The preservation of biodiversity and the shaping of ecosystems take many forms and include new opportunities, such as the reintroduction of species, the rewilding of certain areas, the biotechnological 'resurrection' of extinct species, or even the extermination of species and populations using similar procedures, the creation of artificial ecosystems (for

example, small pollinating drones, the creation of artificial trees), geoengineering, assisted evolution, the management of non-native (or invasive) species, the formation of new (for example, urban) ecosystems, the issues of hunting, agriculture, and animal husbandry, and more. These not only raise practical and ethical dilemmas, but also philosophical questions regarding the ontological status of nature and the human-nature relationship (Drenthen 2016).

2. The Problem of the Baseline

What do we call the ideal state or ideal path of development of nature? The root of the dilemma is the presence of human beings. Nature is often defined *in contrast* to humans, although 'human nature' or a particular person's 'nature' are also common terms. Today, the central dilemma around the various concepts, theoretical and practical forms of environmental protection and nature conservation is mainly the question: what exactly is it that we want to protect, preserve, restore, renew as 'nature'? Do we want to conserve the current state? Or do we want to return to a more *original*, 'natural' state? If so, which one? Would it be advisable to create a more lush and diverse environment than ever before? This question is called the problem of the reference point or the baseline (Keulartz 2016; Nemes 2023b).

The baseline is not only a descriptive, but also a *normative* concept: it refers to what we consider good, desirable, and achievable. As Emma Marris argues,

> Virtually every scientific study of environmental change uses or assumes a baseline. Baselines are reference states, typically a time in the past or a set of conditions, a zero point before all negative changes. In the past, a place's default baseline was often before Europeans arrived. Today, as we learn more about how indigenous inhabitants of places from Australia to the Americas changed their surroundings, it is sometimes set to before any humans arrived. For many conservationists, restoration to a prehuman or pre-European baseline is seen as healing a wounded or sick nature. For others, it is an ethical duty. We broke it; therefore we must fix it. Baselines thus typically don't just act as a scientific *before* to compare with an *after*. They become the *good*, the goal, the one correct state. (2011: 3)

The baseline is not simply a scientific concept, but also a cultural and individual mental construct. That is why it is not fixed; although it works only if it is strongly anchored and there is a certain consensus around it, it can still change continuously. In the words of Ursula Heise, "biodiversity, endangered species, and extinction are primarily cultural issues, questions of what we value and what stories we tell, and only secondarily issues of science" (2016: 5).

Dolly Jørgensen evokes the concept of the "shifting baseline syndrome" introduced by fisheries scientist Daniel Pauly back in 1995: "Essentially, this syndrome has arisen because each generation of fisheries scientists accepts as a baseline the stock size and species composition that occured at the beginning of their careers, and uses this to evaluate changes. When the next generation starts its career, the stocks have further declined, but it is the stocks at that time that serve as a new baseline" (Pauly 1995: 420 qtd. in Jørgensen 2019: 122). Such shifts of the baseline prevail not only in science and in the field of fish and game management. They are a much more general cultural phenomenon, which Jørgensen classifies among the phenomena of "mnemohistory," a term coined by Jan Assmann (122).

Both individual and collective memory are organised according to certain patterns. "When I was a child, there were a hundred times as many birds here, maybe a thousand times" (Fekete 1978: 163). This sentence comes from Uncle Matula's mouth, at a memorable point in the novel *Tüskevár* (*Thorn Castle*, 1957), when the characters of Matula and Tutajos visit the hidden hut that provides an insight into the birdlife of the marsh. Tutajos is amazed by the impressive richness of nature: "thousands of birds moving on the water, the glow of the sunrise, the motionless, yet whispering reeds, the thousand different colors of the sounds, the hissing flight of wild ducks, the appearance of a bird where there was nothing before, the soft fluttering of a meadowlark, the hoarse cry of terns, the race of starlings against time…" (161). For Matula, the baseline of memory was different than for Tutajos and again different from the experiences and imagination of later readers of *Tüskevár* (Nemes 2024).

3. Why the Beaver?

Perhaps no other animal's natural role, disappearance, and return has been written and talked about as much, none has had as many studies and books written on them, besides wolves and bears, as beavers.[1] This extensive literature suggests that beavers not only play a central role in 'natural' ecosystems but are also vital to 'human' communities, cultures, and identities. Due to their entangled significance in both of these spheres, beavers are a perfect example of how, in the Anthropocene, it is impossible to think of 'nature' and 'culture' as well as 'nature,' 'animals,' and 'humans' in separate terms.

The largest rodent in Europe and the second largest in the world (after the water pig or capybara), the beaver is special in several ways. Regarding the subject of this paper, the main aspect is that during the 19th century – and as early as the 16th century in Britain – it largely disappeared from both Europe and North America, where it used to live in large numbers. However, in some periods of the 20th century, they were gradually reintroduced, and as a result of this reintroduction and rewilding process, beavers now live in steady numbers in their natural environments. Therefore, one of the peculiarities of the beaver, especially the European or Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber*), is that it has disappeared and then returned, with a considerable amount of time having passed between these two events. In Hungary, for example, beavers were last seen in 1865, after which they largely disappeared as a result of river and water regulations, as well as their systemic extermination and hunting, and only reappeared at the end of the 20th century, partly as a result of an active reintroduction program initiated by WWF Hungary in 1996, that is, more than a hundred years later (Czabán – Juhász 2024). In Sweden, the beaver disappeared in 1866, and its reintroduction began in 1922, which was successful and served as an example for other European countries to follow (Jørgensen 2019).

Thus, people did not completely forget about the beaver. Although the time that had passed was considerable, so direct experiences remained sporadic, the beavers somehow survived in the collective memories of human cultures in both Europe and North America (Babai et al. 2019). This persistence suggests that the need for beavers to be here with us again, the feeling that somehow they belong to or among us, is part not only of the natural landscapes from which these animals disappeared and to which they returned, but also of our

[1] On the natural role of beavers, see, for example, Brazier et al. 2020; on the disappearance, return, and reintroduction of beavers in Europe, Asia, and North America see, for example, MacDonald et al. 1995; Nolet – Rosell 1998; and Goldfarb 2018. On the expansion of Eurasian beavers specifically in Hungary, see Czabán – Juhász 2024.

own identities (Nemes 2023a). In other words, the beaver is a "cultural keystone species": they are not only central to maintaining and shaping natural ecosystems – due to their ability to shape freshwater habitats, which benefits many other animal and plant species – but they also play an important role in the human communities and cultures which are inseparably connected to the natural environments. They can be considered what Sergio Cristancho and Joanne Vining, drawing on Robert T. Paine's original concept of "keystone species" (Paine 1969: 92), term "culturally defined keystone species," that is, species that are central to "the cultural stability of human communities" because of the "psychological and cultural meanings attached to [them]" (2004: 154). As Cristancho and Vining note, the disappearance of such species "may cause irretrievable and catastrophic damage to a culture" (2004: 161), while Ann Garibaldi and Nancy Turner, specifically using the term "cultural keystone species," also highlight that "a loss or change in their availability can be equally drastic to the human communities that depend on them" (2004). In particular, the loss of beavers have evoked much pain, loss, and grief, coupled with the bad feeling and moral shame that we humans caused their disappearance.

The significance of the beaver for human communities is also reflected in their cultural and scientific representation dating back to a long historical period. Beavers have featured extensively in both types of accounts, suggesting that their case is particularly interesting for human imagination and science, and explaining why they have provided the subject of several analyses published recently (e.g., 4Backhouse 2015; Poliquin 2015; Goldfarb 2018; Gow 2022; Watts 2022; Philip 2023). The cultural and scientific fascination with beavers has to do a lot with their body structure and anatomy. His intelligent-looking head and clever little 'hands' can be perceived human-like, his hind legs resemble those of a duck, while his flat, long tail makes him akin to fish. Due to the latter quality, at one point, the beaver became regarded as fasting food, as people said that they actually ate fish. All of this, of course, was long before Darwin and his modern theory of evolution.

For a long time, popular belief and scientific view both held that the beaver was an extraordinary, uniquely intelligent animal and, as such, the closest to humans (Poliquin 2015: 147). According to these beliefs, chimpanzees, orangutans, baboons, dogs, dolphins, whales and some birds were not the most intelligent animals, as we would think today, but beavers. This assumption was based on two interrelated observations: one was that beavers built dams and lodges, and the other was that they did so as an organised community. These observations led to the emergence of – by modern standards – bizarre views regarding the abilities of beavers, for example, the belief that they built their famous lodges through diligent work, with a division of labour among themselves, where some individuals performed the chewing down of trees, others made mortar or carried materials, and still others controlled the complicated work processes, and all of this was operated through a developed communication network, a specific language, and society. Contemporary accounts therefore painted an amazing picture of beaver communities: hundreds of individuals gathering to negotiate the construction of their future lodges.

A similar belief, which persisted for a long time, was the idea that if a beaver was pursued and found his situation hopeless, to save his life, he would chew off his testicles, which were (mistakenly) thought to be scent-producing glands that contained a healing balm (Poliquin 2015: 25). As Leonardo da Vinci said, "[w]e read of the beaver that when it is pursued, knowing that it is for the virtue in its medicinal testicles and not being able to escape, it stops; and to be at peace with its pursuers, it bites off its testicles with its sharp teeth, and leaves them to its enemies" (qtd. in Cooke 2019: 46-47). Such accounts also added that, if pursued

further, the beaver would stop, rise, and show that he no longer had testicles, so it was futile to pursue him further. Later, more careful research, so to speak, did not support these ideas. In fact, the body part in the centre of these folk beliefs is not even the beaver's testicles, but the scent gland found in both sexes.

In order to illustrate the diverse cultural imaginations surrounding the beaver, it is also worth recounting a strange legend. According to this, in 615, the ship of St. Felix of Burgundy got into a storm on the Babingley River near Norfolk, but was rescued from the difficult situation by a group of beavers. As a sign of his gratitude, Felix consecrated the leader of the beavers as a bishop (Gow 2020: 11). Similar curiosities of cultural history could be listed lengthily (see, for example, Cooke 2019), and suggest that the beaver has held an important place in the collective imagination of human communities for a long time. Accounts of the beaver's special abilities persisted until the end of the 19th century. From among scientific accounts, Lewis Henry Morgan's influential work *The American Beaver and His Works*, published in 1868, stands out (Feeley-Harnik 2019), as the first in-depth study that examined the behaviour of this animal in the modern sense. In North American cultural history, the assessment of the American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) is inseparable from the encounter between Europeans and indigenous people, their complicated relationship, and the social patterns of colonization (Sayre 1995; Francis 2004). The latter case is an example of how, although pre-19th century accounts and folk beliefs predominantly reflected a fascination with beavers, at different times depending on geographical location, the human relationship with these animals took a turn for the adverse.

The loss of the beaver was caused by several, geographically specific factors. In Europe, it was primarily the transformation of the natural landscape in addition to hunting and the consumption of beavers, especially the *castoreum*, the pungent-smelling glandular secretion, which was long attributed with outstanding medicinal effects only to be used later as raw material for perfumes and then a natural source of vanilla aroma (Rosell – Campbell-Palmer 2022: 36-37). In North America, beaver populations were reduced mainly because of their fine fur used in the making of fur clothes and then the men's hats popular in Europe at the time (see, for example, Rosell – Campbell-Palmer 2022: 38-43). Similar to Europe, significant efforts were made in America to reintroduce beavers and increase their populations (see, for example, Busher – Dzięciołowski 1999). In the 1930s and '40s, for example, in Idaho, beavers were dropped by parachutes in small wooden boxes into eroded areas where the beavers' activity would effectively restore wet ecosystems (Heter 1950). The latter example points to the significance of beavers in maintaining, shaping, and even saving natural environments from the brink of destruction.

Based on current criteria, the special ecological status of beavers comes from their active ecosystem engineering activity that has an impact on many other species, including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates, and plants (see, for example, Brazier et al. 2020). Since they provide other species with a living space in which they can survive and reproduce, beavers, as mentioned earlier, are an actual keystone species. The main advantage of their reintroduction therefore lies in that, by rewilding a certain area, they create the conditions for a complex ecosystem to emerge. However, the reappearance of the beaver have caused problems in practically all countries. Most of the problems were caused by the fact that they chewed up trees and swamped areas, which caused damage to farmers or other human owners and users of the given area. In some cases, the natural environment changed by the return of the beaver, which was not suitable for certain species, such as some mussels, which became exposed to the risk of extinction (Dirrigl et al. 2021). Seemingly, the

beaver is thus characterised by an ambiguous status regarding the ecological aspects of the Anthropocene.

At the same time, the beaver is a great, special animal. They are monogamous, hard-working creatures that carefully raise their offspring, live in a social community, and look kind and cute to people who like animals and nature. His hiding lifestyle makes him even more exciting. It is no coincidence that beaver safaris are spreading all over Europe (in Hungary, too), special nature activities during which we can catch a glimpse of these strange animals. Probably due to their peculiar appearance and their perceived, predominantly positive qualities, their cultural representation has also remained extensive; they often appear as symbols (for example, the national symbol of Canada), in advertisements, and as metaphors in vernacular language (for example, in the expression 'eager beaver'). These examples support the idea that as a "cultural keystone species," beavers carry psychological and cultural meanings vital to 'human' communities, cultures, and identities, thereby demonstrating the inseparability of 'nature' and 'culture,' 'humans' and 'animals.'

4. Do We Need Beavers?

It may sound strange considering what was stated above, but in relation to the resettlement process, the question arises: do humans really need beavers? By the same token, does the world, nature, the diverse ecosystems of the planet need them? How can one justify the reintroduction and protection of the beaver, and the promotion of their reproduction? Do they fulfil some function, are they useful to us, or are they simply good to be near to – because they are interesting, beautiful, and cute? The usual answer to these questions comes from biology, and is based on philosophical and ethical considerations related to the value and moral status of nature and biological species.

The nature conservation orthodoxy is based on a specific ontological commitment which is determined, on the one hand, by the increase of biodiversity, and, on the other hand, by the preference of native, indigenous species, that is, the perceived special status of native biodiversity (van Dooren 2015). However, biodiversity can also be increased by introducing alien species, so it is not necessarily limited to the preservation or restoration of a natural state. It is also important that the given species should somehow fit and belong in the given environment, a criteria not easy to define, since nature is constantly changing. In addition, species and ecosystems gain their "entangled significance" by being closely connected to each other and to the human world (van Dooren 2014: 7). As Thom van Dooren writes, "[f]ar more than 'biodiversity'—at least in the narrow sense that the term is often used—is at stake in extinction: human and more-than-human ways of life, languages, ways of mourning and being with others, even livelihoods and diverse cultural and religious worlds are often drawn into the fray as species move toward, and then beyond, the edge of extinction" (2014: 7-8).

Jørgensen (2019) examines the intertwining of natural and cultural aspects in connection with the reintroduction of the beaver in Sweden. As I mentioned earlier, the Swedish resettlement model became widespread in Europe from 1922. The Swedes perceived the reintroduction of the previously disappeared beaver as a complex process, in which the cultural representation of the beaver and the traditional relationship of the Swedish people to this animal also played a decisive role. Jørgensen quotes the thoughts of a Swedish author, Karl-Erik Forsslund, from 1914: "We are the lords of creation, so we must be good and gentle lords. Mother Earth's all other children are our subjects, let us treat them not as prisoners and slaves, but as friends and helpers. We have a lot to thank them for, we should not pay them

back by extraction and pillage, but revere and cherish them and their power and beauty" (2019: 46).

With regard to the reintroduction process, Jørgensen, among others, highlights the seminal work of three key individuals: Erik Modin (1862-1953), Alarik Behm (1871-1944), and Eric Festin (1878-1945): "For Festin, the beaver was not an animal in the countryside away from man, but rather part of the cultural traditions of the Swedish people. Festin was a cultural heritage specialist … [To him] the beaver in the wild was no different from the historic buildings in the museum he was working to preserve" (36). Considering these individuals' cultural approaches to the animal, Jørgensen summarises her thoughts on beaver reintroduction as follows:

> The reintroduction of beaver in Europe is now hailed as one of the great conservation success stories of our time… The beaver was not reintroduced into Sweden – or other countries in first half of the twentieth century – based on its ecological function or as a biodiversity protection measure as we would understand it now. Rather, some years after becoming extinct, a group of nature lovers began framing the animal as something lost. Swedish nature had a gaping hole in it – but so, it seems, did culture… The idea was that the beaver belonged to Sweden and needed to be returned there. Finding the beaver in the correct place again was redemptive, a washing away of the sins of ancestors long dead. (51-52)

In this sense, the beaver was part of the Swedish national spirit and its reintroduction was preceded by the revival of the memories that connected the Swedish people, their culture and their natural environment to the species even after its disappearance. The reintroduction of the beaver in Sweden was an emotional and ethical process, a reparation, a counterpoint to loss and grief, a cultural event.

5. Who Decides? – Narrative Ethics of Environmental Protection

Taking all of this into account, we should ask who makes decisions in matters of environmental protection, species conservation, reintroduction (in this case, beaver reintroduction), rewilding of natural habitats, and what principles, powers, and expertise are such decisions based on (Drenthen 2015). Biologists, ecologists, wildlife management and agricultural specialists, hunters, politicians, representatives of the social sciences and humanities, bioethicists, environmental ethicists and environmental philosophers, or the wider community of citizens? Do we need beavers, or other animals and plants, such as wolves, bears, golden jackals, wild boars, otters, martens, cormorants, hooded crows, pigeons, grass carp, slugs, acacia trees and yuccas, and if so, how many and under what conditions? Why is this important to us, what costs and sacrifices are we ready to take for certain species and ecosystems? How do we regulate animal populations, native and alien, in natural landscapes and urban environments?

There is an ever-increasing demand in today's democracies for scientific research and technological developments to become more transparent, for citizens to have greater insight and say in their regulation, and even to be given the opportunity to participate more actively in scientific processes, for example, in the form of the so-called citizen science. The theory and practice of environmental protection is particularly suitable to satisfy such demands. Expertise is certainly an important factor in a well-functioning democracy, but it is not

something that can function in isolation from society as a whole. Both bioethical and biopolitical aspects should be taken into account (Crowley et al. 2017), as well as the ethical principle of informed consent. The decisions to be made about our natural environment, other species, and, as in our case, the desirable population of beavers is a public matter requiring deliberations, just like the ethical and legal authorization of embryo experimentation, gene editing, or euthanasia.

However, the Anthropocene conception of nature addresses challenges of a different kind. The primary sources of these challenges, as we have seen, arise from the questioning of the traditional dualism between 'nature' and 'humans,' and the concomitant difficulty of defining the baseline. It is not an objective scientific fact that excludes the human perspective, but a kind of normativity that takes into account shifting human perceptions, of which traditional knowledge and experience are only a part of. The basis of this intertwined perspective is a multi-species narrative: not a simple scientific insight, but the creation of a common narrative that is kept alive from generation to generation by being told over and over again, even at the cost of moving away from immediate experience, the common story that pays attention to the memories and stories of the past and creates dialogue between different generations. Consequently, the ethics of intergenerational and multispecies justice comes to the fore. "In human culture is the preservation of wildness," claims Wendell Berry, in a paraphrase of a well-known idea from Thoreau: "in Wildness is the preservation of the world" (2024: 125).

The beaver, this special animal, is a lucid example of how we relate to nature, other species, and each other, how we create the patterns of collective memory, the system of narrative relationships, give meaning and value to each other and ourselves, and recognize the "entangled significance" of life (van Dooren 2014: 7). Beavers have disappeared from many countries, for several generations, but their memory remains, and so does the desire to see them among us again. They were important to us and many felt remorse and shame for letting this wonderful animal, a part of us and our natural environment, go to waste. Let us take care of them, cherish their memory, tell their story again and again.

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CHAPTER 2

Ten Open Questions in Research on the Rising Popularity of Companion Dogs

Enikő Kubinyi

Abstract

Dog ownership[1] is deeply embedded in human culture and significantly impacts society, including those who do not own dogs. Research is needed to examine precisely how dogs influence society and people's mental and physical health, as well as how owners' attitudes towards dogs' functions, training, and care affect canine behaviour and breeding. The present study's core premise is that, like all behaviours, dog ownership is influenced by both genetics and the environment. Companion dog ownership has a genetic basis, but it is also strongly influenced by culture. Throughout their 300,000-year evolutionary history, humans primarily lived in hunter-fisher-gatherer family groups, characterised by strong social cohesion and communal child-rearing. It is only since the advent of agriculture, followed by industrialisation and urbanisation, that this way of life has dramatically changed, leading to increased population size and life expectancy, decreased birth rates, and smaller family units, thus significantly reshaping community relationships. This could be one of the reasons why the role of dogs in Western[2] cultures has become more valued, as they can fill the gap left by absent community members. Dog owners highly appreciate the companionship, 'unconditional love,' and physical contact that dogs provide. This study proposes ten research directions to address the open questions related to the growing trend of companion dog keeping.

Keywords

dogs, human evolution, cultural differences, social relationships, well-being

[1] I use the terms 'dog ownership' and 'owner' throughout the paper in agreement with the editors of *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*: "Deliberate introduction of substitutes, instead of the well-established term 'owner' in the case of companion animals, leads to confusion and ambiguity, especially as both 'tutor' and 'guardian' have clear functional and legal meaning in human society. Using such terms may therefore be misleading when used in connection with dogs and cats. When it comes to the involvement of companion animals in ethological research, the term 'owner' means no less and no more than the person who is legally responsible for that animal" (Pongrácz – Camerlink 2022: 1).

[2] 'Western cultures' in this paper refers to the social norms, values, beliefs, and traditions that have historically originated from or are associated with Western Europe and other regions influenced by European colonization and cultural expansion. I acknowledge that it is a contested term (see, for example, Browning – Lehti 2009).

1. Introduction

Dogs permeate many aspects of human life, are deeply rooted in culture, and, as such, affect even those without direct ownership or care. This is true in Asian, African, and South American countries struggling with large numbers of street dogs, and even more so in Western-type societies, where, in recent decades, a larger portion of the population considers dogs as family members (e.g. Kubinyi – Varga 2023). Dogs provide companionship, emotional support, and determine many people's daily routines and lifestyles. The pet industry – the production of food and equipment, as well as the provision of life insurance, hospitality, breeding, walking, grooming, veterinary care, and training – is growing consistently, providing a livelihood for people who do not own dogs themselves. However, those who are neither financially invested in nor emotionally attached to dogs also encounter them in the news and public places, hear their barking, sometimes step in dog waste and may even suffer a bite. As dog ownership is indeed a common social issue, it is worth reviewing the open questions through which research can help us understand the current role of dogs, namely, how they affect people's mental and physical health and how the attitudes of owners – the strength and nature of the relationship – influence the breeding and behaviour of dogs.

According to our core theory, the facts that dogs are predominantly considered family members in Western societies (Kubinyi – Varga 2023), and that their numbers are increasing (Varga et al. 2023) are partly due to our species' biological need to live in a community, but the framework for this has now practically disappeared. Specifically, for 96% of its three-hundred-thousand-year history, the human species has led a fisher-hunter-gatherer lifestyle and has lived in family groups where members support each other, share common experiences, beliefs, and cultural traits, are bound together by a sense of belonging, live physically close to each other and subordinate their individual interests to those of the group (Van Vugt – Hart 2004). The children were raised together by the group (Glocker et al. 2009). A young child could be attached to several caregivers, carried and fed by many, as is the case in some of today's hunter-gatherer societies (Meehan – Hawks 2013). It is assumed that to increase their chances of survival, young children developed a socio-cognitive toolkit that allowed them to effectively attract the attention of caregivers. These skills have contributed significantly to the development of speech, and cooperative reproduction in adulthood reinforces group cohesion, a key to the success of our species (Hrdy – Burkart 2020).

The emergence of agriculture approximately twelve thousand years ago, followed by industrialisation from the eighteenth century onwards, completely transformed the way people lived in Western cultures. Mortality rates fell, life expectancy increased, populations exploded, and people moved to cities. At the beginning of the domestication of the dog, twenty-five thousand years ago, there were only five to six million people, who lived a fisher-hunter-gatherer lifestyle, compared with 300 million at the beginning of industrialisation (Biraben 2003) and more than 8,100 million today (Worldometer 2024). At the same time, birth rates have fallen globally in recent decades (Aitken 2022), which also means that a person has fewer relatives to grow up with in a generation and, thus, less unconditional social support. Mobility and changes in family structure have led to a proliferation of small households. In Hungary, for example, today only 13% of adults spend an hour a week with a young child [based on the dataset of (Kubinyi – Varga 2023)], whereas in ancient communities, almost everyone was involved in child-rearing, as the saying 'it takes a village to raise a child' illustrates (Marlowe 2005). The childcare practices of prehistoric communities – raising children as a community, with daily interactions between each adult and child – were shaped by the genetic background of human evolution (Hrdy – Burkart 2020). I argue that

these 'genetically hardwired' practices are likely missed not only by infants but also by adults, and that, if there are no young children available, the biologically determined urge to care may be diverted, for example, toward companion animals.

When an ecological niche opens up, or in this case, expands, the influx of species immediately starts. Dogs are excellent candidates to fill in the gaps in human communities (Topál et al. 2009). Studies have shown that what owners value most in their dogs is companionship (Holland et al. 2022), unconditional affection, and physical contact (Kubinyi – Varga 2023). Increasingly popular small and brachycephalic dogs have a head shape and large eyes resembling those of a small child (Bognár – Kubinyi 2023; Ujfalussy et al. 2023), are easy to cuddle and, because of their respiratory problems, are often carried on a lap or even pushed in a pram. Western culture, which includes Hungarian culture in terms of pet keeping habits, strongly supports this phenomenon, and today, not even financial constraints stop people from keeping pets, which was almost exclusively the privilege of the nobility before the Industrial Revolution (Cheang 2006).

2. Open Questions

In the present paper, I propose a number of directions for future research on companion dog keeping based on the above line of thought.

2.1. Can Dogs Replace Human Relationships?

In Western cultures, the majority of dog owners consider dogs to be family members, and in Hungary, one in ten people consider them more important than any human being (Kubinyi – Varga 2023). But to what extent can dogs effectively replace human kinship and friendship? Some authors argue that despite the anthropomorphic label 'fur baby,' dogs have a specific, unique role in the household and cannot replace human relationships (Blouin 2013; Ventriglio et al. 2021; Volsche 2021). However, direct comparisons of dog ownership and child-rearing at psychological, physiological, and behavioural levels are lacking. Further research should directly compare human-human and dog-human relationships in terms of emotional complexity, intellectual impact, shared experiences, social support, communication, and long-term life planning. A good approach is the use of the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI), which explored two components of the human-animal relationship: support and conflict (Bonas et al. 2000). The structure of the support component was similar in human-human and human-dog relationships. However, Judith Benz-Schwarzburg et al. point out that "the human-dog relationship is a dominance relationship where humans are usually in command of power" (2020: 13). Dogs, provided that the owner shows some competence in dog training, generally willingly accept human leadership (see, for example, Udell et al. 2010: 328). Humans provide resources that dogs need and exhibit behaviours that dogs perceive as a sign of dominance. According to Clive Wynne, "[t]his may be what Darwin was referring to when he endorsed the idea that a dog looks on his master as on a god" (2021: 97).

2.2. Benefits and Costs

As with any relationship, living with companion animals has positive and negative aspects (Podberscek 2006). The costs of keeping a dog are clear (e.g., purchase price, feeding, veterinary care, equipment, training, and dog walking), but the benefits are not universal. Research on large populations, with proper statistical controls, has shown that dog ownership

does not consistently have a positive effect on owners' mental or physical well-being (Herzog 2011; Rodriguez et al. 2021). So why do people keep dogs? As suggested in the Introduction, many do so to fulfil their social needs. A similar idea was expressed by Professor Vilmos Csányi, the most famous dog-expert researcher in Hungary, founder of the Department of Ethology at ELTE, in his answer to Márton Gulyás' question in the uncut version of the PartizánPOL podcast episode of 13 January, 2023:

> MG: "I believe there is a difference between a pre-existing human community, such as a family, which already functions as a social space before adopting a dog, and a single person who relies on a dog to fulfil their social needs."
>
> VCs: "But if they have no other choice… at least fulfil those needs with a dog, I beg your pardon…" (Csányi 2023, 00:37:06–00:37:26)

Given that the complex relationship between dogs and their owners can have positive, negative, or neutral effects on both parties, it is understandable that there are conflicting results about the benefits of dog ownership. Research should provide predictions about what types of dogs might be beneficial to particular groups of owners. Studies should consider not only the fact of dog ownership itself but also the socio-economic status of the owner, attitudes towards dogs, and the frequency of certain activities such as walking and playing (Barcelos et al. 2020). Longitudinal studies should investigate how the acquisition of a dog affects the lives of owners. For example, if we find no difference in well-being between dog owners and non-dog owners, it does not necessarily mean that ownership has no effect on well-being. It is possible that dog ownership improves the well-being of those who wanted a dog and were worse off without one, but now they feel as good as those who do not want a dog and do not have one. It is also possible that dog ownership reduces well-being. In this case, current dog owners may have enjoyed a higher level of well-being before acquiring a dog, which has decreased to the level of non-dog owners due to the burdens of dog ownership. We would only be able to determine whether a dog increases or decreases the owner's well-being if we collected data from the subjects both before and after acquiring the dog. Another example is the relationship between physical activity and dog ownership. Without longitudinal studies, it is not clear whether getting a dog makes someone more active (because they walk more with the dog) or whether being active in the first place (i.e. they walk a lot) increases the likelihood of owning a dog (Utz 2014). Only longitudinal studies can determine whether the "pet effect" truly has a positive impact on owners' well-being.[3] The majority of current studies have been conducted on dog-loving people who probably prefer to report their positive experiences, and therefore representative samples should be used to explore possible negative effects. People who have had a dog but no longer have one should also be included in the studies, as this would give a more realistic picture of the burdens of dog ownership.

2.3 Human Fertility Rate

At present, it is still largely unexplored whether dogs being considered as family members reduces, increases, or does not affect people's biological fitness (reproductive success). I posit that one of the many reasons for people's declining fertility may be that their urge for care is

[3] For detailed studies on "pet effect", see, for example, Serpell 1990; Allen 2003; Charnetski et al. 2004; Smith 2012; and Levine et al. 2013.

diverted toward dog keeping. Dogs, requiring much less resources than small children, can satisfy at least partly the psychological and emotional needs of their owners for attachment and care. Conversely, dog ownership might positively impact fertility rates by providing an opportunity to test a potential partner's or future spouse's caregiving skills. If the partner proves to be a good caregiver, it may increase the sense of security when considering having children, which might have a positive effect on fertility rates.

2.4. Social Networks

It is a fascinating question whether dogs help or hinder the complexity of people's social networks. Does a dog bring the owner closer to other people, or does it distance them? Depending on the role and personality of the dog and the owner, their relationship, and the social milieu, both scenarios are possible. For example, an aggressive or extremely shy dog may prevent the owner from socialising with others, or a dog with separation problems may not be left alone, cutting the owner off from many activities, whereas a sporting dog may foster many new friendships in training and competitions.

2.5. Gender Differences in Dog Ownership

According to ethnographers, women play a greater role in the lives of dogs than men do (Chambers et al. 2020). Women are also the ones who usually take care of dogs in modern households, for example, feeding and cleaning up after them (Herzog 2007). Women are the ones who 'baby talk' to dogs more often (Volsche et al. 2020). In one experiment, eye contact only increased oxytocin levels in women but not in men (Kekecs et al. 2016). These findings support the theory of biological embeddedness in dog ownership. However, it is very important to note that men are underrepresented in related research, generally barely 10%, and to understand the role of gender in dog ownership, male participation should be increased (Herzog 2007).

2.6. Cultural Differences in Dog Ownership

Research on dogs focuses on Western cultures, but attitudes towards dogs vary significantly from culture to culture, and this variation may be related to environmental constraints, disease burden, and livelihood systems (Herzog 2014). For example, dogs appear to be less useful in warm environments and, surprisingly, in cultures that rely heavily on animal husbandry (Chambers et al. 2020). Cultural comparisons of dog ownership and attitudes toward dogs can help us understand the divergent role of dogs in societies and may also bring us closer to understanding the origins of current trends.

2.7. Welfare of Dogs

While the dog population is growing thanks to human preferences, some individuals, most often short-headed (brachycephalic) dogs, can suffer from a number of diseases that, despite veterinary care, can compromise their quality of life. It is important to investigate why and how selection for child-like traits affects the brain and morphology of dogs and, thus, their behaviour and health. The identification of individuals and breeds that tolerate urban human environments well is an important line of research (King et al. 2009). Many dogs do not tolerate urban living conditions well, with confinement and constant control leading to behavioural problems. Researchers need to help develop educational campaigns for potential dog owners so that they can make informed decisions based on the dog's needs, personality,

and the owner's lifestyle. It is also essential that people are educated about what healthy dogs look like (Bognár – Kubinyi 2023). A related welfare issue is that a very close emotional relationship can delay euthanasia, thereby prolonging the suffering of a terminally ill dog (Wallis et al. 2023), although some authors argue that the process prepares the animal for death and depriving them of it means denying their right to die on their own terms (Sanders 1995).

2.8 The Role of Pet Species Other Than Dogs

In many countries, cats are more popular pets than dogs. In Switzerland and Austria, for example, there are three to four times more cats than dogs, and they can form close relationships with humans (Pongrácz – Szapu 2018; Herzog – Rowan 2019; Ines et al. 2021). Ferrets, rodents, rabbits, and parrots can also be ideal pets, with significantly lower maintenance costs than dogs (see, for example, Hernádi et al. 2012; Reinhold et al. 2019; Dobos et al. 2023). What makes a species an ideal pet and what makes it a family member requires further research.

2.9. Robots and Animated Characters in Companion Roles

Social, autonomous, caring robots or animated characters might replace, at least partially, companion animals. Animal training methods can also be used to develop robotic behaviour (Kaplan et al. 2002). Robots may also be able to express attachment to their owners (Kaplan 2001; Krueger et al. 2021). Early experiments with children playing with AIBO, a dog-like autonomous robot and a real puppy showed that the limited capabilities of the robot resulted in less structured behavioural interactions (Kerepesi et al. 2006). However, in a more recent study using a more responsive robot, 11-12-year-old children spent more time interacting with the robot than with the dog (Barber et al. 2021). Although children self-reportedly preferred interacting with the live dog, they experienced more positive emotions after interacting with the robot when it was attributed higher mental abilities. Further research should investigate under what circumstances it may be preferable to keep robotic pets rather than real ones. For example, one study found that PARO, a seal-like robotic pet, reduced stress and anxiety in elderly people with dementia (Petersen et al. 2017).

2.10. Social Debate on Childcare

Humans have an innate, evolutionary need to connect with others and to care for someone, especially children (Hrdy – Burkart 2020). Today, however, adults have limited opportunities to interact with young children. For example, as mentioned above, nine out of ten Hungarian adults do not spend time with children under the age of six [based on the dataset of (Kubinyi – Varga 2023)]. This is a relatively new phenomenon in human history, compared to the three hundred thousand years of evolution, as more than twelve thousand years ago, in prehistoric times, children were most likely raised by a community, with all adults having regular contact with the children of their group. I argue that this change is probably challenging for both children and parents, which might be one possible source of mental health problems. At the same time, I suggest that in those who are not raising young children or caring for others, there can be an insatiable and sometimes unrecognised desire to care for others.

Many people not only care for their own dogs but also prepare dogs for adoption. Foster dog parents are temporary caregivers who provide a transitional home for dogs in need until they find a permanent home through adoption. It would be interesting to examine whether

foster caregiving is related to limited access to social support from relatives, a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others, a desire to do good, and a need for love and respect. Exploring these questions could also help explain why people are more likely to take on dog fostering rather than child fostering, where there are fewer foster parents than needed (see, for example, Kaasbøll et al. 2019).

Since not all cultures channel what I consider an accumulated urge to care for dogs, it is worth considering whether this might be the most beneficial way for society in Western cultures. It would be important to carry out research to answer the question of why people choose to care for dogs rather than children in their neighbourhood, extended family, or circle of friends, while, from a human evolution perspective, caring for children would be more justified. Several explanations are possible. For instance, dog ownership is currently a culturally accepted, simpler form of caregiving compared to raising children in Western cultures. Furthermore, institutions have taken over child-rearing responsibilities, and there is a lack of socially established, well-defined methods for the voluntary (unpaid) care of non-biological children. For example, there have been initiatives to involve residents of local nursing homes in local daycare,[4] which is an excellent idea and could probably be done with minimal organisation. However, nurseries, kindergartens, and primary schools could also host local volunteers for a few hours a day after appropriate psychological screening. It would be worth starting a social dialogue on whether some of the biological urges to care for the vulnerable, especially young children, could be redirected towards children. It might also be better for dogs, who do not necessarily enjoy being treated like 'fur babies.' Raising an emotionally balanced and caring generation could lead to a more caring community for all, which will have a positive impact on the quality of life of both dogs and humans.

In summary, the combined consideration of the evolutionary and the cultural aspects of dog ownership offers a new perspective for various scientific and applied fields, including animal welfare, veterinary science, behavioural genetics, neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and consumer research. The development of science-based guidelines based on this theory can improve the welfare of both animals and humans.

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[4] For an example in the UK, see Pidd 2024.

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CHAPTER 3

A Scoping Review of the Roles of Pets in Families between 1980-2023 from a Gender Perspective

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review the international literature on the role of pets in the family, with a particular focus on the differences that previous literature has found between men and women in this regard. For this purpose, we use the scoping review method. In this framework, we collected international journal articles published between 1980 and 2023 that dealt with our chosen topic. Based on the results of the scoping review, we found 49 articles that matched the focus of our research. After reviewing them, the following topics emerged: the emergence of fictive kinship between humans and animals, the related flexible role of pets within the family. In addition, some of the journal articles analysed the different types of attachments between pets and their owners, and related to this, the issue of grief at the loss of a companion animal is often at the centre of these studies. Finally, the focus is also on how pet caregivers form partnerships and whether pets can be a substitute for children.

Keywords

pets, companion animals, family, partnership, childbearing, scoping review

1. Introduction

Pets play an increasingly significant role in people's lives in 'developed societies'[1] in the 21st century. Often, we refer to them not just as 'pets' but as 'companion animals,' indicating their primary function for pet 'owners' to build social connections with them (Soares 1985; Turner 2006; Volsche 2018). In this study, the terms 'pets' and 'companion animals' are not used synonymously; rather, all household animals are considered pets, but only those pets with whom the participants have a strong emotional attachment are considered companion animals.

In many households, pets, particularly dogs, are no longer seen merely as nonhuman animals (hereafter 'animals') but as members of the family. This is highlighted by the expression 'fur baby,' which pet owners increasingly use to refer to their pets. Alongside the evolution of the roles of pets, the dynamic and relational system has led to changes in people's roles in the pet-related relationship. Rebekah Fox and Nancy R. Gee state that just as pets have become companions (Franklin 1999), pet 'owners' or animal guardians have

[1] We acknowledge that the term 'developed societies' is a contested term. See, for example, Lewis 2015.

become caregivers (Franklin 1999 qtd. in Fox – Gee 2016). In the study, we continue to use the term 'pet owner'; however, we consciously distinguish contexts where 'caregiver,' 'pet keeper,' or 'guardian' would be more appropriate, considering the subtle yet significant differences between these roles.

The terminology for describing the human role in companion animal relationships is constantly evolving, introducing new categories that reflect more progressive attitudes and practices towards animals. Beyond the term 'owner,' new categories such as 'pet parent,' 'guardian,' 'caretaker,' and 'pet slave' are becoming increasingly popular. However, the systematic literature review by Marcos Díaz Videla et al. (2023) reveals that the interpretation of the pet owner's role may not only have an impact on the human caregiver through identification with the animal but also has a role in shaping identity.

Pamela Carlisle-Frank and Joshua Frank (2006) conducted a nationwide survey in the United States in 2006 with 305 participants. In their research, they examined how dog owners identify themselves in the animal-human relationship and how certain owners perceive their roles in the lives of their animals, and whether their perception influences their behaviour towards their pets. Participants could choose from three designations that best fit them: 'owner,' 'guardian,' and the designation 'owner-guardian' for those who see themselves in a role between the two. The results revealed that 63.3% of the participants considered themselves as guardians, of which 77% were female and 23% were male. Meanwhile, 22.3% identified themselves as owners, with 69% being female and 31% male. Those who chose the designation between owner and guardian accounted for 14.4%, with 82% being female and 18% male. The research also indicated that those who identify as owners are more willing to purchase pets, while guardians are more inclined to adopt. Furthermore, owners were more likely to give up their pets due to significant life changes compared to dog keepers who identified with the guardian role.[2]

Pet parenting encompasses dynamics similar to the caregiving and nurturing relationship between parents and children in the realm of animal care. Pet parenting can be defined as the human investment of money, emotions, and time into companion animals, which is analogous to parental investment in children (Volsche et al. 2022b). In this attitude and practice, the emphasis is on treating the animal as they were a human child, and the owner uses the term 'parent' as part of their identity within the relationship (Volsche et al. 2022b).

Based on research, most dog owners who define their pets as family members often perceive them in a childlike status (Owens – Grauerholz 2018; Shir-Vertesh 2012; Laurent-Simpson 2017b). This raises the question of how pet ownership may influence decisions related to having children and how pets can alter roles, shape the development of relationships, and impact dynamics within the family.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of research conducted between 1980 and 2023 on the evolving roles of pets, particularly companion animals, and most specifically dogs within the family. The choice of starting our literature review from the 1980s is because, by this time, key elements of the Second Demographic Transition, such as changes in fertility behaviour and transformations in family and marital/cohabitation relationships, were already noticeable. We have compiled and analysed studies focusing on how various pets, especially dogs, become family members in contemporary societies

[2] These findings align with those of Rebekah Fox's (2006) and Nickie Charles' (2016) respective studies, which suggest that pets occupy an ambiguous status in 'Western' societies, being on the verge between subject and object, irreplaceable family member and replaceable property. The flexible status of pets is discussed in detail in subchapter 4.2.

worldwide. Unlike ethologists who investigate the impact of these changes on animals, our approach, using the scoping literature review method, seeks to uncover how these changes can influence the lives of pet caregivers and families. We particularly focus on understanding the role of pet keepers in decisions related to relationship formation and childbearing. What impact does living with a pet considered a family member have on pet keepers? How can the roles of pets, specifically dogs, change throughout the life cycle of families, and how can they integrate into different stages of family life? Additionally, our scoping literature review has brought up topics such as how pet caregivers cope with the loss of their pets and how perceptions of pet death have evolved over time, as reflected in mourning notices and epitaphs.

2. Methodology

In our study, we employed the methodology of a scoping review, as proposed by Micah D. J. Peters et al. (2015). The goal of a scoping review is to provide a map of literature on the researched question, rather than offering a synthesised, comprehensive result on a particular question or area (Munn et al. 2018). Nevertheless, a scoping review can identify the types of research conducted in a specific area, contribute to clarifying key concepts and definitions, showcase the methodologies used to investigate the issue, uncover additional questions awaiting examination and potentially serve as a preparatory step for a systematic literature review (Munn et al. 2018). An important feature of our chosen method is that the qualitative evaluation of literature is not part of the procedure; hence, we refrained from undertaking such an assessment.

Journal articles were sought in the Web of Science and Scopus databases based on predetermined keywords. Our choice of keywords was based on terms found in studies previously reviewed on the topic, as since September 2022, we have been collaborating with the Momentum Companion Animal Research Group, led by Enikő Kubinyi, on a joint interview-based study. One of the research questions in this collaborative effort explores how dog ownership may influence the reproductive decisions of individuals. Preliminary literature searches related to this narrow topic yielded limited results. Consequently, the idea of employing the scoping review method emerged, with an expansion of the research question. We not only collected literature on how dog ownership influences decisions related to childbearing but also explored the role of pets, especially dogs, in family life.

The primary criteria for keyword selection involved using terms identified in previously collected articles. These terms included 'pet parent*,' 'companion animal,' 'pet attachment,' 'dog parent*,' 'human-animal interaction,' 'interspecies,' and 'human pet.' The asterisk * following 'pet parent' and 'dog parent' indicated the inclusion of all variations of these terms, including 'dog parenting,' 'dog parenthood,' 'pet parenting,' and 'pet parenthood.' The search for keywords was conducted within the abstracts of articles.

We focused on peer-reviewed, English-language journal articles published between 1980 and 2023. Specifically, if research findings were published in forms such as book chapters or working papers, they were excluded from the search. While we did not restrict the search by geographic area, we did limit it by scientific discipline. In the Scopus database, we focused exclusively on the social sciences. In the Web of Science database, however, such a specific limitation was not possible. Consequently, we considered the following sub-disciplines:

sociology, anthropology, social work, and family studies.[3] Notably, the field of psychology was intentionally excluded. This decision was motivated by our desire to avoid primarily psychological approaches and because a significant number of such articles are available, which would have complicated the processing of studies. We did not search for studies in the Google Scholar database due to the lack of options for discipline-based filtering and the potential inclusion of a large number of natural science articles.

The abstracts collected for this study were reviewed by all three authors, and collectively, we assessed whether they aligned with our narrower topic, namely, whether they reflected how dogs participate in the lives of families or individuals who consider them as family members. If all three of us agreed that the topic of the article was relevant to the focus of our research, we read the entire study.

Table 1 illustrates the search results for various keywords in the two databases and indicates how many of the results were considered relevant. We categorised articles as non-relevant for obvious reasons, such as searches for the term 'interspecies' often examining the relationship between domesticated and wild animals. The keyword 'companion animal' yielded many articles not focusing on the dynamics of family and pet ownership but, for example, exploring the potential connection between loneliness and pet ownership or the impact of the caregiver's death on the pet. The term 'pet attachment' often examined the relationship between a pet and their owner from a psychological perspective, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic, or focusing on validating the possible measurement of attachment. The keyword 'pet parent*' mostly covered our research interest, and nearly all articles in this category were included in the analysis.

Table 1. Scopus and Web of Science results for the search terms

Keywords	Scopus Total found	Scopus Appropriate articles	Web of Science Total found	Web of Science Appropriate articles
Pet parent*	14	6	6	5
Companion animal	608	23	121	17
Pet attachment*	59	3	29	4
Dog parent*	12	0	2	0
Human-animal interaction	226	0	86	3
Interspecies	519	4	117	3
Human-pet	201	6	16	2

Source: Authors' selection based on the literature search

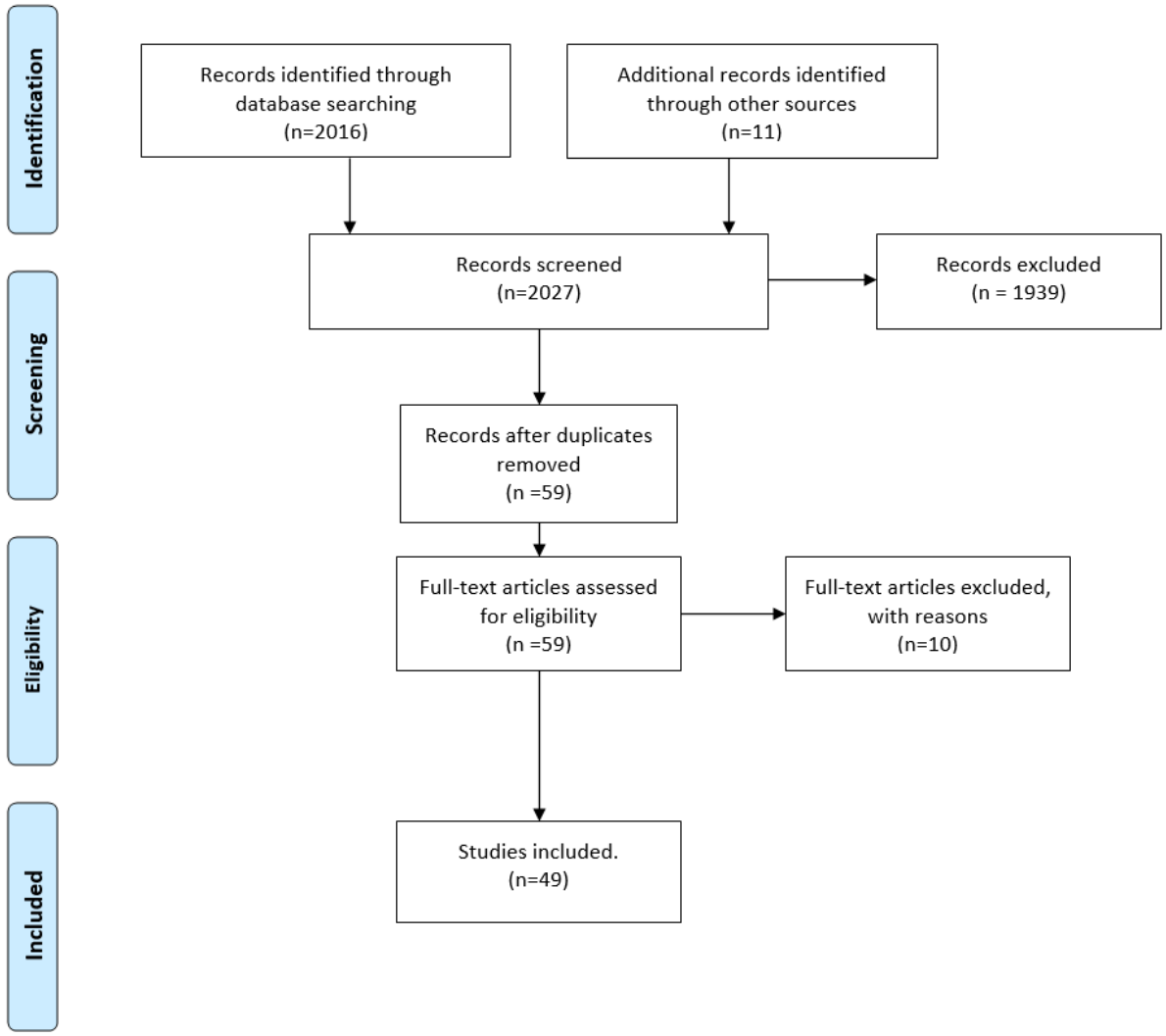
[3] We chose these four sub-disciplines within the social sciences because the other sub-disciplines were much more specific, such as women's studies or ethnic studies.

From the two databases, we collected a total of 76 articles; however, some articles were present in both databases, so duplicates were removed. Subsequently, we read through the articles and assessed whether they truly focused on the sought-after topic. Finally, we identified a total of 49 articles that were relevant to our investigation.

Additionally, we encountered articles that were not found during keyword searches in either the Web of Science or Scopus databases. Later, however, these articles became part of our literature review when we discovered them through references in the previously selected studies. We identified a total of eleven such articles and included them in the analysis. Therefore, after the multi-phase literature review, we read a total of 59 articles.

Figure 1 illustrates the stages of literature collection, prepared following the methodology suggested by Peters et al. (2015).

Figure 1. PRISMA[4] flowchart of the scoping literature analysis



Source: Authors' selection based on a methodological study by Peters et al. (2015)

[4] http://prisma-statement.org/prismastatement/flowdiagram.aspx

3. Parameters of the Literature Database

The examined articles used quantitative analysis in nearly half of the cases, predominantly relying on online survey data. Some of these studies were based on their own data collection efforts, such as extracting information from gravesites in a pet cemetery, which researchers later analysed. The overwhelming majority of qualitative research employed the methodology of interviews, with a few relying on ethnographic observations. Only a small percentage of the articles involved literature reviews, and among them, only one can be considered like the literature review presented in this study.

In terms of the animals focused on in the studies, most studies primarily investigated the owners of dogs, occasionally extending to cat owners. Additionally, in some cases, research included owners of less conventional pets such as birds, reptiles, or horses. In the present study, the authors included those articles that focused specifically on dogs.

Geographical classification was based on the location of the research or the source of the data. Nearly half were conducted in North America, the majority in the United States. South America contributed articles from Argentina and Brazil. In Europe, texts were published from the UK, Sweden, and Italy. Oceania provided articles from Australia and New Zealand. Additionally, studies reported empirical data collection from Asia, including China, Japan, and Israel. One comparative study worked with data from both the United States and India.

4. Main Themes Emerging Based on the Literature

After the three authors had read the selected articles, we collectively identified several relevant topics, utilizing one article for multiple themes when applicable. This section of the study is structured based on the identified thematic areas. Initially, we delve into the development of fictive kinship between humans and animals, exploring how pets become integral family members. We then shift our focus to studies examining the roles that pets can play within family life and how these roles may evolve along with family life cycles. Then we present the attachment to the pets and how it affects the well-being of the keepers. Reflecting the evolution of the bond between humans and animals, studies also examined how owners grieve the loss of their pets; this topic is presented in the fourth subchapter. The last two subchapters do not generally explore the role of pets in the lives of families and individuals but rather associate them with specific life events.

4.1. Fictive Kinship, Hybrid Households

Increasingly, researchers use the term 'fictive kinship' to describe the relationship with pets (Charles 2016). The term 'fictive kin' refers to a person who is not connected by blood or marriage ties to the family unit but is treated as a family member (Ball 1972 qtd. in Auster et al. 2020: 263). Most studies report that pets are often considered as family members, and in this sense, they can be seen as fictive kin (e.g., Auster et al. 2020; Belk 1996; Franklin 2006; Díaz Videla et al. 2023; Wilson et al. 2013). An Australian study based on a 2000-person nationwide representative survey examined the relationship between people and pets, finding that 88% of the respondents considered their dog as a family member (Franklin 2006). Similarly, in the United States, a Harris Poll (2011) online survey conducted in 2011 with 2184 participants, including 1328 pet owners, found that 91% of pet owners considered their dogs as family members.

In addition to the term 'pet,' the use of the term 'companion animal' has also become increasingly common, especially in connection with dogs and cats. This term implies that

these animals have become companions to humans, indicating a shift in the roles between pets and their owners. According to Adrian Franklin (1999), existential uncertainty – the feeling that one can no longer rely on stability in key areas of life – manifests not only in the increasing prevalence of pet ownership, such as more people having dogs in their households but also in new postmodern relationships with animals. In these relationships, animals have transformed from 'pets' into 'companions,' and owners have transitioned from 'owners' to 'caretakers' (Franklin 1999:86 qtd. in Fox – Gee 2016: 109).

Considering companion animals as fictive kin leads to the formation of so-called hybrid households, where the boundaries between humans and animals become blurred. However, this blurring always occurs in the context of power relations since companion animals enter households as dependents, requiring care (Carter – Charles 2013; Smith 2003; Power 2008). Therefore, it is not coincidental that most people attribute child status to pets within the family (Peterson – Engwall 2019).

Since when has humanity regarded companion animals as fictive relatives? According to Franklin, since the 1970s, we have shifted towards new forms of intimacy between humans and companion animals, resulting in "hybrid" households (Franklin 2006). However, the claim that pets being considered family members is a new phenomenon is debatable, as intimate relationships between humans and animals, especially humans and dogs, have existed for hundreds, if not thousands, of years (Charles 2016). In this sense, the term 'companion animal' not only reflects how roles in human-pet relationships have changed, which might be the case, but more precisely, it also reflects a shift in people's *attitudes* towards animals, acknowledging a more equal relationship than ownership and control (Mohanan 2023). The widespread acceptance of companion animals as fictive relatives is indicated by studies conducted in various parts of the world. For example, there are studies from China where interviews were conducted with women who own pets (Tan et al. 2021) or where 503 dog and cat owners were surveyed (Su – Martens 2020). Additional studies are available from the United States, including Wendy G. Turner's (2006) theoretical overview of the role of pets in family life and how these roles change during different stages of the family life cycle; from Canada, where 23 interviews were conducted with dog and cat owners (Laurent-Simpson 2017b); from Australia, where Cecelia J. Soares (1985) summarised previous studies on the role of pets in families; from Israel, where Dafna Shir-Vertesh (2012) conducted interviews with 52 young, childless, pet-owning couples; and from Japan, where Shelly Volsche et al. (2022a) conducted a survey with 615 dog and cat owners. These studies reveal that the treatment of pets, especially dogs, as family members manifests in two main ways: through the anthropomorphism of the animals and the extension of family rituals to pets.

Since the presented studies primarily focus on owners of dogs, and rarely cats, we will illustrate rituals related to them. For a dog (or a cat), participating in family events means eating, sleeping, and playing together with the family, as well as taking part in special family occasions, events summarised by several authors as rituals (Belk 1996; Fox – Gee 2016). Pets are not only invited to family gatherings but are also celebrated with birthday parties organised by their owners. Some studies found that in hybrid households, pets receive birthday gifts just like children or other family members (Walsh 2009). Most often, pets are considered as children within the family. Both Andrea Laurent-Simpson's study (2017a), which involved interviews with 14 pet owners, and Jessica Greenebaum's study (2004), which included interviews with 16 dog owners, revealed that owners often refer to their pets as 'fur babies.' Pets are often associated with qualities such as being affectionate, forgiving, gentle, uncritical, and available, and it is believed that they offer unconditional love. Furthermore,

the basis of the relationship, like that between a mother and a baby, is fundamentally non-verbal. That is, dogs and cats are similar to young children in many respects, but the needs of animals can be satisfied more easily than those of a young child;[5] being a 'pet parent' involves lower emotional and time costs than being a 'traditional' parent (Blouin 2012).

4.1.1. Gender Differences

Harold A. Herzog (2007) compared gender differences in human-animal interactions based on the results of previous research. Nicole Owens and Liz Grauerholz (2018) conducted 39 interviews in the United States with individuals who consider their pets as family members. These studies report that women generally exhibit more empathy or positivity towards animals than men, and they tend to view pets as family members and children to a greater extent than men (Herzog 2007; Owens – Grauerholz 2018). However, as we will see later, treating pets as family members has its limits, and their roles are much more flexible than those of children.

4.2. Flexible Role of Pets within the Family

Russell W. Belk (1996) conducted a study in the United States, where he interviewed a total of 39 individuals with pets, examining the impact of pets on their owners' lives. Based on the results, he concluded that treating a pet as a family member requires the perception of the animal as possessing human qualities to some extent, either as a human or quasi-human (Belk 1996). Various studies, both theoretical and empirical, propose multiple categories for the role of pets interpreted as family members. According to Belk (1996), a pet can serve as a substitute for a child or even a grandchild for those who do not have children. However, some couples consider their pets as trial children to prepare for parental roles through them.

In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, Fox (2006) interviewed 16 pet caregivers and found that, alongside anthropomorphising companion animals, a dual status persists: pets are viewed both as persons and as property. The status of companion animals is characterised by ambivalence, navigating between person and non-person, living being and property, and family and other dualities (Sanders 1995; Beverland 2008). Charles (2016) explored how dogs and other companion animal species become family members, collecting data from two different sources. She used the results of a questionnaire completed by 244 individuals published in 2009, focusing on the relationship between humans and animals. Additionally, she analysed 21 interviews conducted between 2011 and 2012 with individuals who owned companion animals. Charles concluded that despite human-like qualities, companion animals retain their animal status, creating a boundary between human and animal (not quite human, but no longer purely animal). The status arising from this boundary, along with changing power dynamics which still favour humans, allows for the adaptable nature of the role of companion animals, depending on the current situation or life stage.

Turner (2006) provided a descriptive typology based on the family life cycle, relying on the heteronormative classical family model, illustrating how the role of companion animals can change within a family structure. Turner identified six stages. The first family stage is that of the independent young adult (1), where the animal satisfies the individual's need for companionship. In this stage, the animal often serves as a roommate or best friend for the

[5] We acknowledge that this idea might be contested. Since the basis of the relationship between the human and the companion animal is largely non-verbal, and, additionally, the animal belongs to another species, in many cases, people will not know what the pet's needs are.

(single) person. The second stage is that of the newlywed couple (2), where the couple may choose to have a pet to practice their future parental roles. The animal assumes the role of a child in the life of the young couple. Among the members of the couple, the woman is more likely to see the animal as a child, thus forming a stronger bond with the animal compared to the man. The third stage is the family with young children (3), where the pet no longer plays a substitute role, the level of attachment decreases, and less time is devoted to the pet from the parents' perspective. However, children within the family may still view the pet as a companion or sibling. The fourth stage occurs when there are adolescents in the family (4). In such cases, children progress towards autonomy, gaining new responsibilities during the process of separation from their parents. It is common during this period for families to acquire a new pet, and the care and upbringing of the pet often become the responsibility of the adolescent. During the "empty nest" period (5), when the children leave home and the parents are left alone in an empty nest, the bond with the pet may be rekindled, and the pet may once again play a substitute role. This is particularly characteristic for women, who can re-experience their nurturing desires through the pet. In the later stages of family life (6), such as family reorganisation, coping with potential losses, mourning, or creating new situations, the companion animal can play an essential supportive role, helping overcome loneliness and isolation.

Turner's theoretical typology is well-supported by Shir-Vertesh's (2012) empirical research. Shir-Vertesh observed young couples with companion animals over several years in Israel. The study aimed to answer how the role of pets changed in the lives of young couples after having children. Based on the study results, Shir-Vertesh used the term "flexible person" for pets since their role adapted to changes in the human life cycle (2012: 420). In most families, the pet had a central role, and couples agreed that the relationship within the family with the pet was similar to that with a child. The research identified four patterns related to the flexible role. Pets viewed as trial children could prepare young couples for parenthood by requiring care and responsibility. The child-substitute role of pets was characteristic of couples not having children, where the companion animal emotionally satisfied individuals in a less demanding and dependent relationship compared to having a young child. In families treating pets almost like children, the companion animal did not serve as a trial child or substitute but occupied a position between the two. When the pet had a significantly different role from that of the child, parents treated them as a family member but not as their child, and it generally remained unclear precisely how they viewed the pet as a family member. During the study, three case studies were conducted where the roles of pets changed so much after the birth of a child that the pets were placed outside the family in another household (Shir-Vertesh 2012).

4.3. Attachment and Well-Being

In the human-pet relationship, the question of the role of pets within the family regarding attachment is inevitable, as the relationship between the parties not only influences their relational system but also affects behavioural patterns resulting from it. Attachment theories, in the context of studying and measuring attachment, have appeared in various forms in the studies. Volsche et al. (2022a) highlighted that attachment theories related to pets can be traced back to the work of John Bowlby, considered the father of attachment theory in the field of British psychoanalysis. As Volsche et al. define it, the concept of human-animal attachment refers to "the emotional bond felt and expressed between a companion animal and its guardian. [...] Companion animals provide security and meet a person's

emotional needs, much like a child or a parent; hence, pet attachment theory encompasses a degree of emotional bond, physical proximity, and caretaking" (Volsche et al. 2022b: 3). Melissa Laing and Christopher Maylea (2018) qualitatively analysed online comments on an article dealing with pet euthanasia. In this study, they based their analysis on the relational theory of attachment between humans and animals, which captures the dynamics of attachment between people and animals, satisfying desires for companionship, love, care, and emotional support.

Based on this approach, the attachment between humans and animals includes emotional, physical, and caregiving aspects, resembling relational patterns among humans. Charles (2016) argues that we live in an era where the privileged status of humans is being questioned, leading to a stronger, emotionally charged attachment between humans and animals, which is reflected in family practices. Pets can provide a different type of relationship than our human companions or family members, as they offer caregivers a stable and unquestionable source of love in an increasingly uncertain and unstable world (Franklin 1999 qtd. in Fox – Gee 2016: 109). The increasing use of human names for pets, an example of anthropomorphism, can be an expression of the owner viewing the pet as a person (Brandes 2009). In addition to names, the way owners refer to their pets is also an indicator of attachment. Scales examining attachment styles include categories related to pets such as 'child,' 'best friend,' 'companion,' 'animal,' and 'partner,' reflecting attachment relationship patterns. New expressions like 'fur baby' or 'fuzzy kid' are strong indicators of the quality of the relationship between humans and pets, resembling a parent-child relationship in this case. The extent to which pets are involved in family events also shows the existing attachment (Belk 1996; Walsh 2009; Auster et al. 2020). Besides becoming part of human ceremonies (Christmas, family photos, birthdays, family gatherings), pets also have their own celebrations (such as the animal's birthday).

The establishment of intimate bonds with companion animals may exert positive effects on the mental well-being of their guardians. Allen R. McConnell et al. (2019), who conducted a questionnaire-based study in the United States, arrived at similar results. They found that the acceptance of pets as family members can contribute to better mental health for pet keepers, as these animals can alleviate feelings of loneliness and depression by providing emotional support. This bonding also often helps those who experience a lack of social connections or loneliness and supports the well-being of socially marginalised groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community (Díaz Videla et al. 2023).

4.3.1. Gender Differences

Attachment to pets can be a response to changing social relationships or their absence in modern societies. Research conducted by Volsche et al. (2022a) in Japan revealed that female participants were more inclined to have a dog than a child. This inclination is influenced by structural changes, such as the second demographic transition, as women gained more space for self-realisation in the labour market, leading to a delay in childbearing. However, the desire for attachment to a partner, the need for physical closeness, the desire for care, and coping with loneliness remain, and pet ownership seems to be a suitable solution for many to satisfy these needs (Laurent-Simpson 2017b; Turner 2006; Soares 1985).

Research that approaches the issue of attachment with quantitative measures has used various attachment scales and questionnaires to determine the extent and degree of attachment. John Archer and Jane Ireland (2011) conducted a survey in 2011 among dog keepers in the United Kingdom, with 418 respondents, examining the attachment to their

dogs. They found that singles were more attached to their pets than married individuals, and women exhibited stronger attachment than men.

Several studies have explored how people's relationships with their pets change over time and how owners cope with the loss of their pets. The processing of losing a companion animal may strongly correlate with attachment styles. Previous research has shown that anxious attachment styles, experiencing continuous uncertainty in relationships, and strong attachment are associated with higher levels of grief (Cowling et al. 2020). The following subchapter will present research related to the loss of companion animals.

4.4. Loss of Companion Animals

Surprisingly, a significant portion of the articles – almost a quarter – examined topics related to the loss of companion animals, such as the historical changes in pet epitaphs and obituaries or the challenges in making decisions related to euthanasia. These studies are linked to the themes of pet caregivers and family because they found that the loss of companion animals is just as painful as the death of a close family member – often equated with the death of a child. We assume that research in this category is prominent because one of the most significant differences between dogs considered 'fur babies' and children is that dogs have a shorter lifespan, therefore 'dog parents' often have to face the death of their 'furry child.' The perception of pets as family members is often reflected in the grief experienced by their owners (Cowling et al. 2020). Furthermore, pet owners extend many practices previously associated only with the loss of human family members to animals, such as writing obituaries (MacKay et al. 2016) or creating memorials for their deceased pets (Brandes 2009; Dickinson – Hoffmann 2017). These phenomena are well-illustrated by the study of Jill MacKay et al. (2016), in which they analysed 130 obituaries specifically about dogs, or Stanley Brandes' (2009) ethnographic research examining memorials in American pet cemeteries.

Although the nature and extent of grief following the loss of a companion animal often coincide with what is experienced after the death of a close relative (Gerwolls – Labott 1994; Wong et al. 2017; Laing – Maylea 2018), grief related to the loss of a companion animal has several aspects that distinguish it from traditional grief. For example, the significant difference in life expectancy between humans and dogs results in pet keepers having to confront the inevitability of losing their dogs. The anxiety stemming from this is referred to as "anticipatory grief" and, while it can occur in human relationships, it is much more characteristic of the relationships between pets and humans (Laing – Maylea 2018: 223). David Redmalm (2015), in his research interviewing 18 Swedish pet owners between 2010 and 2012, identified further differences between the grief over the loss of a pet and the loss of a human relative. Pet keepers experience a unique ambivalence in their grief, where they may simultaneously view their pets as irreplaceable and as beings that can be replaced. This duality complicates the grieving process, as dog caregivers navigate feelings of loss while also considering the possibility of moving on with another pet.

Another characteristic of grief following the death of pets is the sense of "disenfranchised grief," referring to the notion that the environment of pet keepers does not attach particular importance to the loss of a pet (Laing – Maylea 2018: 223). Therefore, mourners cannot express their grief, and they do not receive the level of support they need (Laing – Maylea 2018; Wong et al. 2017; Cowling et al. 2020). According to Millie Cordaro, grief over the loss of a companion animal is "a normative grief process that carries additional complexity because societal attitudes toward the death of a companion animal deter grieving pet owners from openly mourning their pet" (Cordaro 2012: 284 qtd. in Laing – Maylea 2018).

4.4.1. Gender differences

In the study by MacKay et al. (2016), which examined posts on a website dedicated to pet obituaries, a complex picture emerges of the role dogs in their caregivers' lives. One of the most frequently recurring patterns was the expression that the lost pet was more than a simple animal – rather, they were regarded as a family member, some considering the pet as a child. From their study, another noticeable pattern emerges: women tend to be more inclined to articulate their grief following the loss of a companion animal. This pattern is underscored by their analysis of grief statements; where the gender of the caregiver could be determined, a predominance of instances revealed self-identification as female parental figures. Furthermore, there seems to be a difference in the degree of experienced grief between genders. Nortey Botchway et al. (2023) conducted a questionnaire-based study in Ghana, examining grief following the loss of companion animals. According to their results, women experienced a higher level of grief after the death of a companion animal.

In the following two chapters, we shift our focus from a general review of pets' roles in the lives of individuals and families. Instead, we concentrate on how companion animals impact specific life events: the formation of romantic relationships and the decision to have children. We explore how having a companion animal affects the establishment and dynamics of human relationships, beginning with an examination of how companion animals influence the formation and dynamics of romantic relationships.

4.5. The Effect of Companion Animal on the Formation and Dynamic of Partner Relationships

As the overview above reveals, pets can substitute missing human connections. Often, individuals with more solitary and smaller social networks form closer bonds with their pets than those with less loneliness (Archer – Ireland 2011). This can lead to pets replacing human relationships, such as a romantic partner (Veevers 1985). A Chinese study conducted in 2020, based on 34 interviews, highlighted that urban middle-class Chinese women prefer living with a pet rather than getting married. The participants explained their decision by emphasizing that living with a pet offers more freedom and involves fewer compromises compared to living with a man, while pets also provide unconditional love and help avoid loneliness (Tan et al. 2021).

4.5.1. Gender Differences

In an American online survey (Gray et al. 2015) with 1210 participants in 2014, the authors examined the roles of dogs and cats in the dating lives of single Americans. They hypothesised gender differences due to women paying more attention to the well-being of their existing pets and, therefore, being more concerned about the relationship between their pet and a potential partner. Results showed that single women and men did not differ significantly in the likelihood of bringing a pet on a first date or choosing date locations based on their pets. However, a small percentage of both men and women (less than 10%) mentioned they would bring a pet on a first date. Both men and women similarly considered using their pets as an excuse to end a poorly going date (men: 7.1%, women: 8.6%). Notably, women reported a higher likelihood of being attracted to someone because of their pets. Women were also more likely to evaluate a date based on how their pets reacted to the partner. Furthermore, women were less likely to date someone who did not like pets compared to men.

The presence of pets not only affects the formation of romantic relationships but also influences the dynamics of existing relationships. Similarly to children, pets can serve as emotional barometers, mitigating stress in relationships (Allen – Blascovich 1996). If pets are treated as family members, the perception of feelings of jealousy, anger, control, guilt, and fear may arise in them. For instance, pets often display jealousy when their caregivers kiss or hug someone.

In the case of a breakup, some couples may argue over the custody and visitation rights of their pets, similar to disputes over the custody and visitation rights of children. However, legally, pets are considered property, so guardianship, supervision, and well-being are not necessarily viewed in the same way as with children. Therefore, couples typically resolve disputes among themselves without resorting to the courts (Walsh 2009).

4.6. The Companion Animal as a Child Substitute

As fertility rates have been decreasing in developed countries, the perspective that pets are family members has become increasingly prevalent, and more and more people consider pets as child substitutes (Wong et al. 2017). Pets may be capable of replacing children since, for many, they satisfy the desire for caregiving without requiring the same level of sacrifice and commitment as having a child (Laurent-Simpson 2017a). It is becoming more common for people who experience parenthood through their pets to refer to themselves as the parents of their animals (Peterson-Engwall 2019; Volsche et al. 2020). According to Owens and Grauerholz (2018), those without children or those whose children have grown up and moved out are more likely to identify as parents of their pets and behave accordingly, resembling the dynamics of a parent-child relationship.

Laurent-Simpson (2017b) examined the relationships between various dog keepers and their dogs, finding patterns that were traditionally characteristic of a parent-child relationship. These patterns included a high degree of care and empathy towards the animal, and childless dog keepers often made significant lifestyle changes to be able to provide better care for their dogs. Additionally, the study indicated that for individuals who experience parenthood through their pets, it is essential for their immediate environment, such as grandparents or siblings, to reinforce their role as parents.

Pets resemble children in multiple ways, such as the sense of pride or guilt caregivers feel regarding their behaviour, similar to raising a child. While the needs of animals are lower than those of children, taking care of an animal is still akin to parenting but less demanding, making it easier for the caregiver (Volsche 2018). Laurent-Simpson's (2017b) qualitative study in the United States revealed that some childless participants conducted a cost-benefit analysis, choosing pet ownership over having children due to lower associated costs. In a Swedish qualitative study (Peterson – Engwall 2019), 15 consciously childless women were interviewed, four of whom had dogs. These women reported that their maternal instincts were directed towards their dogs rather than young children. While some participants emphasised the responsibility associated with pet ownership as limiting personal freedom, others considered it equally restrictive as parenthood (Peterson – Engwall 2019). One participant even mentioned that her experience with pet ownership strengthened her decision not to have children because taking care of a pet was already a significant responsibility, and she did not want to further limit her freedom (Peterson – Engwall 2019).

4.6.1. Gender Differences

In terms of gender, most studies found that women are more likely to consider their pets as family members compared to men (Herzog 2007; Owens – Grauerholz 2018; Archer – Ireland 2011), often viewing them as small children. Furthermore, research suggests that childless women are more inclined to anthropomorphise their pets (Blackstone 2014; Gray et al. 2015; Turner 2001). Turner (2001) examined the role of pets in women's lives through the question of euthanasia. By conducting interviews with eight women who owned pets, she argued that childless women are more prone to anthropomorphism because society expects women to have a strong desire to nurture living beings. When this desire is not fulfilled through motherhood, women tend to build a parent-child relationship with their pets (Turner 2001).

In another study (Turner 2001), women without children, some of whom had adult children who had moved out, were interviewed. All women with children reported having a stronger connection with their pets either before or after their children left home. This study reinforced the idea that childless women are more likely to develop a 'maternal' relationship with their pets than women who live with their children.

5. Conclusion

In our research based on the analysis of international journal articles published between 1980 and 2023, we explored how companion animals, especially dogs, fit into family life and examined their impact on decisions related to childbearing and the formation of partner relationships. The results indicate that companion animals play an increasingly significant role in family life. Many people now report considering their companion animals as family members, often attributing child status to them. Particularly, childless women frequently refer to their companion dogs as 'fur babies' and a similar phenomenon is common in families where children have already left the nest (Archer – Ireland 2011; Owens – Grauerholz 2018).

The status of companion animals is more flexible than that of children and can change throughout family life cycles (Turner 2001). Couples expecting a child often view their pets as a trial child or a substitute for a child, while the arrival of a small child may temporarily push pets into the background (Shir-Vertesh 2012). After the children grow up, pets can regain their child status. Additionally, the role of pet owners transforms into caregivers (Fox – Gee 2016). The development of strong emotional bonds between humans and animals leads to the creation of new family models, forming hybrid human-animal families (Franklin 2006). However, such intense emotional bonding can also have disadvantages, especially when dealing with the grief after the death of a companion animal, which may become as challenging as mourning the loss of a close relative. Moreover, the lack of an accepting environment can further complicate the grieving process (Laing – Maylea 2018).

Having companion animals can also influence the process of partner selection, particularly for women, who often seek partners that have a good relationship with their dogs (Gray et al. 2015). Furthermore, it can affect reproductive decisions as well. Especially women's reproductive choices are influenced by having companion animals (Laurent-Simpson 2017b). However, the relationship between caring for companion animals and reproductive decisions is complex: on the one hand, there may be individuals who choose pet parenting over motherhood due to lower costs. On the other hand, there are also many conscious women who avoid getting a pet to preserve their personal freedom (Peterson – Engwall 2019). Although the studies show geographical diversity, they were mainly conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries with middle-class women. Future research

may be necessary, involving different social classes and regions to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of companion animals within families.

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CHAPTER 4

Abandonment in Arabia: Acknowledging Feline Experiences (*Felis silvestris catus*)

Sarah Oxley Heaney

Abstract

Cat (*Felis silvestris catus*) abandonment in Saudi Arabia is a widespread phenomenon. While studies in 'Western'[1] countries have identified factors contributing to companion-animal relinquishment, the phenomenon in Saudi Arabia has not previously been examined. This study aims to bridge this gap through interviews, questionnaires, and social media analysis, delving into the effects of abandonment on cats in the region, as well as uncovering the reasons behind relinquishment and the broader factors influencing cat abandonment. Using grounded theory techniques and utilising the framework of The Five Animal Welfare Needs relating to all domestic morethanhuman animals, the research offers a comprehensive perspective on the reported impact on the affected cats. Results indicate that the Animal Welfare Needs of cats on the streets of Saudi Arabia are not met.

Keywords

cats (*Felis silvestris catus*), felines, abandonment, morethanhuman animal, relinquishment, Saudi Arabia

1. Introduction

"There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you…"
('Surah Al-An'am [6:38] - Al-Qur'an al-Kareem', n.d.)

"When he was brought to me, my initial dismay at his mangled, stick-like legs and his emaciated body gave way to a reluctant acceptance. I was torn, not eager for the responsibility of yet another cat. Annoyance and frustration lingered, but the reality was clear: if I didn't care for him, he'd face the harsh streets as a paraplegic cat, and would certainly suffer. Two days later I was in love. We'd connected. Mikey, a victim of some unknown abuse or accident, disabled and incontinent, revealed his smart, forgiving, loving personality (Figure 1). Soon after Mikey's passing a few years later, Phoenix entered my life (Figure 2). Found in the rain, wandering the street emaciated, bearing the scars of his skin

[1] I acknowledge that the term 'Western' is a contested term. For example, see Browning – Lehti 2009.

scalded by another undetermined event. As he overcame his past experiences, began to feel safe, we reciprocated each other's efforts to form a deep connection. My first-hand experience of witnessing the daily suffering of cats and exposure to their suffering through social media and cat rescue activities reveal an unrelenting wave of abandoned and community cats in need in KSA (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). This issue remains relentless, overwhelming, and regrettably, under-addressed."

(The author)

Figure 1. Mikey

Source: Sarah Oxley Heaney, 2013.

Figure 2. Phoenix

Source: Sarah Oxley Heaney, 2019.

This research engages with anthrozoological literature to explore aspects related to cat abandonment. While this article deals with the effects of urban living on cats, Oxley Heaney (2023) investigates the reasons given for relinquishment and the underlying factors behind cat relinquishment in KSA. Through a critical analysis of academic literature and employing grounded theory techniques, this research aims to help weave a tapestry of knowledge and understanding regarding cat abandonment in Saudi Arabia. Establishing this foundation is crucial for effectively addressing the issue in KSA. Understanding cat abandonment is one of the initial and vital steps in planning effective cat management programs (Finkler – Terkel 2012). Therefore, this research strives to provide the groundwork for enhancing cat welfare in KSA. The ultimate aim is for this study to serve as a catalyst, paving the way for the development of a subsequent action plan aimed at improving the lives of urban-living cats in Saudi Arabia.

2. A Review of Literature: Centering the Cat

The global phenomenon of morethanhuman animal abandonment is predominately framed in anthropocentric terms: emphasising economic costs, and considering morethanhuman animals to be pests, trash, and nuisances (Hansen et al. 2018; Jarvis 1990; Robertson 2008). Studies tend to focus on collective numbers of cats posing problems to humans (Algar – Brazell 2008; Elizondo – Loss 2016; Flockhart et al. 2016). While research often focuses on identifying human motivations for, and the repercussions upon human stakeholders

abandoning or relinquishing their pets (Casey et al. 2009; Coe et al. 2014; DiGiacomo et al. 1998; Fatjó et al. 2015), it frequently neglects or overshadows the impact of relinquishment on the morethanhuman stakeholders.

Despite calls (for example, see Arluke – Sanders 2010) to "bring in the animal" (Wolch – Emel 1995: 115), a significant proportion of academic literature concerning relinquished companion animals focuses predominantly upon human-centred costs. Rarely is the question reversed to reflect upon the impact of human relinquishment-activity upon the morethanhuman animal. In anthrozoological literature addressing companion-animal abandonment, the emphasis often falls on population control (Ash et al. 2003; Kay et al. 2017; Lessa – Bergallo 2012; Robertson 2008; Schmidt et al. 2007; Short et al. 1997; Stoskopf – Nutter 2004); the consequences of abandoned morethanhuman animals on wildlife (Bloomer – Bester 1992; Kitts-Morgan 2015; Short – Turner 2005) or the effects on humans (Dabritz et al. 2006; Gunther et al. 2015). Additionally, studies may explore the perspectives of shelter workers (Anderson et al. 2013; Baker et al. 2007; Cohen 2007; Frommer – Arluke 1999; Reeve et al. 2005; Rohlf – Bennett 2005) or those relinquishing morethanhuman animals (Marder – Engel 2002; Patronek et al. 1996; Weng – Hart 2012). In such articles, cats and other companion animals are often treated as problems, described dispassionately simply as numbers to be controlled. Some articles do seek to comprehend the effect of shelter life on companion animals (Coppola, Enns, et al. 2006; Coppola, Grandin, et al. 2006; Gourkow – Fraser 2006; Kry – Casey 2007; Ottway – Hawkins 2003). However, studies such as those by Joshua Frank scrutinise the cost of euthanising 5.7 million morethanhuman animals in the USA every year, but not the effect on the morethanhuman animals themselves (2004: 108). Scant attention is given to the consequences of companion animal abandonment upon themselves. This research aims to shed light on the experiences of abandoned cats in KSA, presenting their stories to be witnessed (Dave 2014) and to give a voice to their experiences as the reasons for their abandonment are explored.

Cats are often labelled with various adjectives, based on factors such as ownership status or location, including terms like "street cats" (Jaroš 2018: 369), "urban" (Jarvis 1990: 169), "household" (Lowe – Bradshaw 2002: 69), "homeless" (Grimm 2009: 1489), "stray" (Algar – Burrows 2004: 131; Fatjó et al. 2015: 426), "free-ranging" (Ferreira et al. 2011: 25970), "free-roaming" (Finkler – Terkel 2011: 203), "colony" (Stoskopf – Nutter 2004: 1361), "community" (Levy et al. 2014: 269), "feral" (Griffiths et al. 2000, 59), "pet" (Levy – Crawford 2005: 1355) and "companion cats" (Stella – Croney 2016: 2). However, these classifications often lack flexibility, and the boundaries between them are porous. A 'feral cat', for example, is defined by some as "untamed and evasive" (Levy – Crawford 2004: 1354). However, this description could apply to abused pets, who have lost trust with humans. Julie K. Levy et al. define feral cats as those not having received human socialisation or having been abandoned and no longer trusting humans (Levy – Crawford 2004). It can be argued that even cats bred in or destined for homes still may not receive socialisation due to neglect, abuse, or being allowed to choose whether or not to socialise (Levy – Crawford 2004).

The connection between human adjective-labelling and the biography, history, and physical and psychological conditions of the cat is also obscured. Contemporary categorisation terminology does not define the experiences, personality, or psychological make-up of a cat. A cat bred under human control might, in fact, have a fearful personality with no desire to socialise with either humans or other cats. Conversely, a 'street' cat may have a confident and friendly personality actively seeking human contact. These categories and their inherent challenges may arise from the prevalent perception of morethanhuman

animals as a homogenous group (Derrida 2008), rather than adopting approaches that recognise them as individuals (Bear 2011).

Moreover, traditional categorisations rely on cat characteristics or ownership status, not on intrinsic value. Although there have been attempts to challenge this paradigm, such efforts still predominantly reflect the human perspective in the interspecies relationship, exemplified by terms like 'furbaby' or 'companion cats' (New Zealand Government 2018). Existing static definitions are centered on a state of human dependency; for instance, stray cats are described as "formerly owned cats that have been separated from their owners" (Clancy et al. 2003: 1541), categorising 'stray' and 'companion' cats human-dependent, while labelling feral cats as non-dependent (Farnworth et al. 2011) and implying being 'out of control' (Hill et al. 2022: 1). These definitions also lack consideration for dynamic change, ignoring the potential shift in cat-human relationships due to factors such as injury or disease, abandonment or even cat agency. It is essential to recognise that these definitions are not static but rather fluid and subject to change. Filip Jaroš characterises such changes as "Umwelt transition," signifying "a systematic change within the lifecycle … from an individual, population or species perspective" (2018: 368).

3. "Umwelt Transition"

Considering Jakob von Uexküll's (2010) concept of "Umwelt,"[2] Morten Tønnessen (2009) posited that this notion presupposes a stable environment. He suggested that any life-changing events affecting an "individual, population or species" (Jaroš 2018: 368) would consequently bring a change in Umwelt. Tønnessen coined this an "Umwelt transition" (2009: 47). As discussed below, this concept forces us to think of the changes and potential challenges each cat faces when their Umwelt, or subjective lifeworld changes. They must attempt to adapt or transition to new surroundings and experiences which impact their physical and psychological states.

Each individual cat that moves acting on its own agency, or is being relocated from the relatively secure environment of a climate-controlled, resource-rich home to the challenging environment of the street must also face an "Umwelt transition". As illustrated in Figures 23 and 24 (presented in the research findings section), which capture reported perceptions of cats' emotional states and ability to cope with their Umwelt, it becomes evident that the transitions pose problems. As mentioned earlier, it is empirically challenging to discern whether a given cat was abandoned, lost, or born on the street. However, cats that appear healthy yet exhibit signs of confusion, cluelessness, and apparent helplessness may be assumed to be undergoing an "Umwelt transition," suggesting potential abandonment in their recent history.

Categorising street-living cats as either street-born, lost, or abandoned is not easy without a comprehensive understanding of the local cat community (Oxley Heaney 2021). Additionally, cats' reactions to humans are influenced by familiarity and trust rather than a human-constructed category solely based on time-static location. Hence, in the context of cats found in the streets in Saudi Arabia the author opts the term 'community cats' where these cats may be street-born, lost, or abandoned, but they are all considered ethically

[2] Uexküll used the term Umwelt to refer to the subjective experiences of living beings, as opposed to their environment. One organism's Umwelt may be different to another organism's despite residing in the same environment, due, in part, to their sensory abilities.

significant (EASE 2017) who have a "life worth living" (Mellor 2016a: 1). By reframing and centring morethanhuman animals as individuals, transcending collective labelling (Derrida 2008), and embracing the notion of them being "more than species" (Bear 2011: 299), we can truly acknowledge them for their unique personalities, needs, and desires, no longer confining them to the margins of research (Bear 2011: 299).

The research unveiled various representations of cats among participants, ranging from viewing them as objects, commodities, pests, trash, or disposable entities, to sources of entertainment, collectives, and income (Figure 3). However, cats were also acknowledged as victims, individuals, companions, family members, refugees, and survivors.[3]

Figure 2. Research participants' perceptions of community cats as…

But "what's in it for the animals?" asks Lynda Birke (2009: 1). What do the cat research participants stand to gain or lose from (unknowingly) participating in this research? This research attempts to give them a voice through expert (veterinarian interviewees) and non-expert (rescuers and individuals) witness testimonies. The goal is to challenge the prevalent practice of abandonment and raise awareness about the struggles these cats face to survive on the streets. As William Lynn points out, "animals cannot organise and challenge the practice for themselves: they require human interlocutors to speak and act in their interests" (1998: 285). Moreover, by recognising cats as individuals, a new, cosmopolitan, and compassionate humano-cat (Jaroš 2018) relationship may be nurtured. Thom van Dooren suggests that "knowing more draws us into new kinds of relationships and, as a result, new accountabilities to others" (2014: 9).

[3] For more on people's attitudes towards cats in Saudi Arabia, see Oxley Heaney 2021, which discusses how Islamic principles regarding morethanhuman animals guide communities to respect all living beings, but, as the research findings in this chapter show, these rules are often violated.

Shifting the focus onto cats as individuals with agency allows for the reframing of relinquishment, specifically abandonment, as problematic for cats at an individual level. This challenges the normalised view, where 'uncontrolled' cats are seen as problematic from an anthropocentric standpoint. Understanding cats as individuals necessitates considering the concept of agency, which involves freedom, free will and action, creativity, and originality (Barker 2003). Agency implies subjectivity, intention, and the ability to make choices (Steward 2009), applicable to both humans and morethanhuman animals in posthuman perspectives (Latour 1996; Coole 2013; Braidotti 2013).

Agency is also seen as the knotty, intertwined relationships between actors (Lindgren – Öhman 2018, Bennet 2010), whether human or morethanhuman animals. Furthermore, agency is also shaped and restricted by the "structure" of the "recurrent patterned arrangements which influence or limit the choices and opportunities available" (Barker 2003: 448). Cats can thus possess agency as individuals, but their actions may be constrained by environmental, geographical, physical, psychological or even biopolitical situations within which their agency may be stifled.

4. The Five Animal Welfare Needs

The Five Freedoms paradigm, originating from a seminal 1965 report by Rogers Brambell (1965) has shaped morethanhuman animal welfare thinking since its inception (Mellor 2016a). Initially crafted to address the needs of farmed morethanhuman animals, this set of principles has had a profound impact on addressing domestic morethanhuman animal welfare needs. However, the broader dynamics on a wider multispecies community cannot be ignored (Ryan et al. 2019). While the Five Freedoms are conventionally applied to captive morethanhuman animal husbandry, Clare Palmer suggests that "domestication changes animals' natures, making many of them dependent on human beings" (2012: 7). Consequently, it can be argued that humans bear a moral responsibility to ensure cat welfare standards align with these foundational Five Freedoms.

The evolution of these principles led to the adaption of The Five Freedoms into the Five Animal Welfare Needs (henceforth AWNs) applicable to all domestic morethanhuman animals (Ryan et al. 2019). The AWNs provide a valuable framework for comprehending the fundamental welfare requirements of morethanhuman domestic animals. The AWNs encompass the necessity for: a suitable environment; a suitable diet; the ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns; appropriate housing with or without other morethanhuman animals; and the protection from pain, suffering, injury, and disease (Ryan et al. 2019). Notably, recent updates propose the inclusion of the "promotion of positive experiences and states" (Mellor 2016b: 1). The standards were intentionally designed to be accessible to non-specialist morethanhuman animal welfarists (Mellor 2016b), aligning well with the methods of this research. These research findings are framed by the AWNs and borrow from Mellor's discussion on moving beyond the Five Freedoms (Mellor 2016a).[4]

[4] I acknowledge the evolution of the animal welfare frameworks, through freedoms, domains, needs and provision and aims. The use of a mix of these frameworks provides the best lens for analysing the feline landscape in KSA at the time of writing.

5. Present Findings and Discussion

The figures within this report encapsulate the dynamics between research participants and their perceptions of how cats, especially abandoned cats, fare in the street environment. The perceived magnitude of these issues is conveyed via the frequency within which interviewees, questionnaire participants and social media posts reference them, offering a glimpse into the views of a limited sample of cat-welfare stakeholders within KSA (Oxley Heaney 2023). The effects are not articulated in medical terms but are presented as narrated by the participants and reflected in social media content. It is essential to note that more systematic reporting is required for enhanced research accuracy. This data presented is acknowledged as providing a snapshot of perceived concerns, with the aim of fostering a recognition for the necessity of further in-depth study.

5.1. Effect of Street life on Cats Framed by the Five Animal Welfare Needs

5.1.1. The Need for a Suitable Environment

The ability of cats to cope on the street, according to Jaroš (2018), may depend on whether the cat is accustomed to a street-cat culture, or a heavily human-dependant, humano-cat culture. Jaroš (*ibid*) describes pedigree cats as confined and selectively bred through human-controlled reproduction, framed through a Western context. In KSA, although people refer to their cats according to breed types, for example, Shirazi, Himalayan, American, Persian, Siberain, Siamese, and, recently, hypoallergenic, there is no formal pedigree system in place. Human-controlled cat breeding occurs where cats are often chosen based upon their appearance by sellers commodifying cat bodies, customers who want their cats to "marry" (a euphemism for sex), or by people who refuse sterilisation and become overwhelmed with cats (Oxley Heaney 2023). Many intentionally bred cats are medium or long-haired, fluffy, and many exhibit brachycephalic features (Figure 22). Notably, no cats for sale are sterilised.[5] Consequently, when cats reach sexual maturity, some individuals feel compelled, either due to frustration or a perceived duty to the cat, to release the cat onto the street to fufil their right to mate. Many intentionally bred cats are mated to obtain certain physical appearances (white, fluffy cats being very popular) and "breed" personalities expected to be conducive to easy handling. However, these traits do not equip cats for survival in an urban street environment.

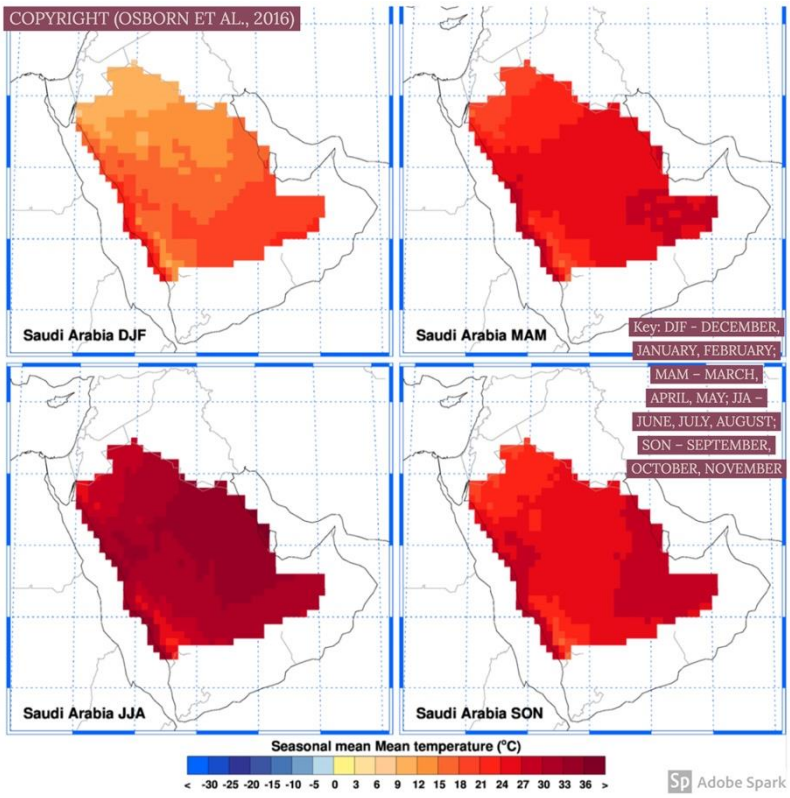
Abandonment locations are often chosen away from the cats' homes to prevent their return, and are often placed in areas frequented by humans (Figure 7). The belief underlying this practise is that some abandoners attempt to mitigate the impact of abandonment on the cats by placing them where they may find food, shelter and/or water or hope that someone will pick up the cat. In these urban spaces, cats can find themselves in often hostile surroundings. Cats accustomed to kindness, food, and water must now contend with indifference or varying degrees of potential violent incidents. Whether seeking assistance or attention, expressing fear and attempting to physically or mentally dissociate from their new Umwelt, cats are exposed to danger.

[5] Feline sterilisation is limited, often influenced by factors such as cost, accessibility, and societal views of cats' 'rights' regarding parenthood/expression of sexual desire. For more on feline sterilisation, see Oxley Heaney 2023.

5.1.1.1. Saudi Arabian Climate

Geographically, KSA is predominantly desert, constituting 95% of its total land area (N.A.S.A. 2005). Arable and forested regions cover less than one percent of country's land area (Hopwood 2016). Figure 4 illustrates that mean temperatures were consistently in the high 30s (degree Celsius) from 1961 up to 1990. Jeddah experienced temperatures exceeding 52 degree Celsius in 2010 (Alawi 2019), and cities like Tabuk, Riyadh, Dammam, and Jeddah routinely witness temperatures exceeding 45 degree Celsius (pers. comms.). Very few places in the desert or urban spaces offer sanctuary from extreme temperatures. Cats are known to experience environmental stress and hyperthermia (Hanneman et al. 1977) and research participants report finding cats panting, in heat stress, unable to cope with the hot climate (Figure 5). Saudi Arabian cities also experience freezing winter temperatures (Al Arabiya 2017; Arab News 2016) and urban communities additionally face annual flooding (Figure 6), both of which, as the results show, jeopardise cats' welfare (Figure 5).

Figure 3. 1961 - 1990 average annual and seasonal mean temperature in Saudi Arabia



Source: (Osborn et al. 2016)

Figure 4.

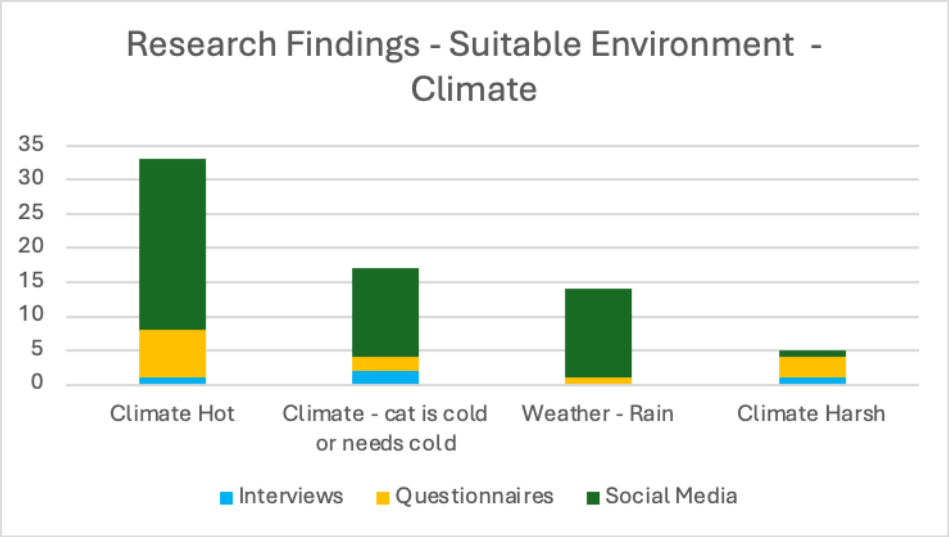
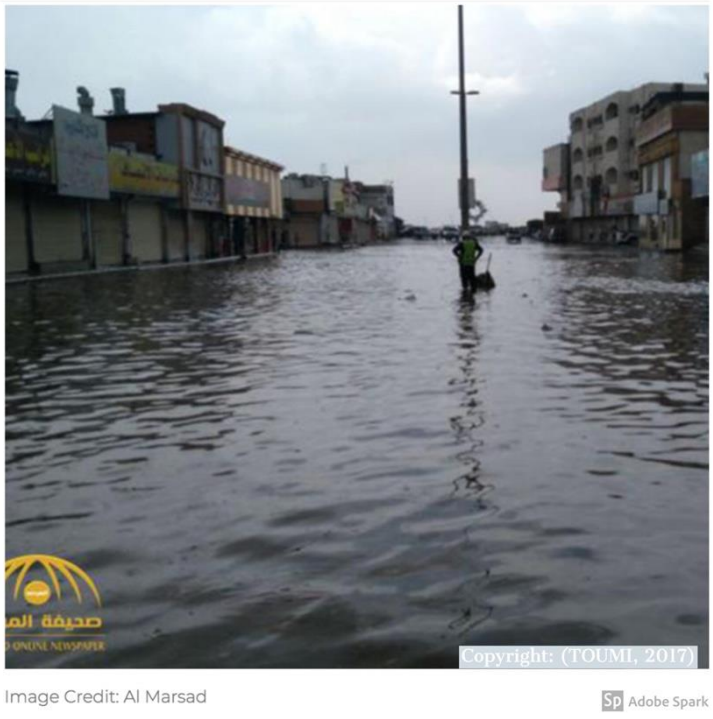


Figure 5. Flooding in Jeddah



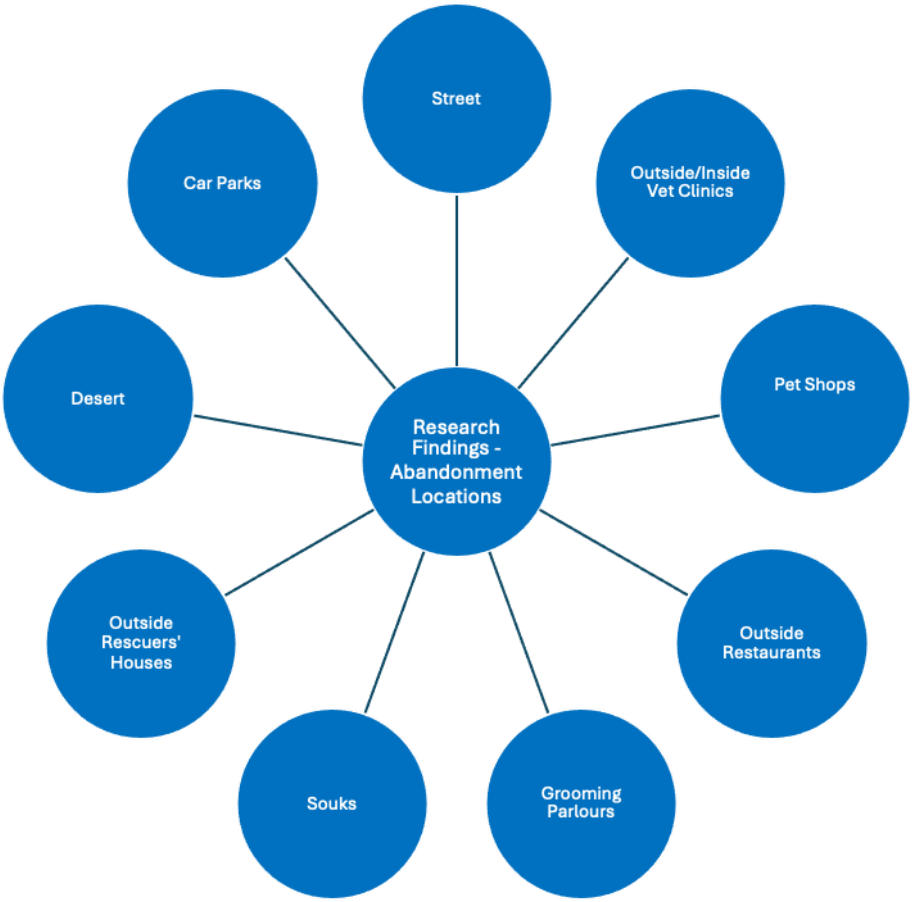
Source: (Toumi 2017)

Flash flooding has become more frequent, with cities such as Riyadh (Nahiduzzaman et al. 2015; Rahman et al. 2016), Jeddah (Ameur 2016; Youssef et al. 2016), Makkah (Dawod et al. 2011) and Tabuk (Abdelkarim et al. 2019; Abushandi 2016) amongst some of the cities all at risk of annual flooding.

5.1.1.2. Rescue and Abandonment Locations

Rescue and abandonment locations as depicted in Figure 7 were reported as predominantly being outdoor spaces such as streets, carparks, outside shops and restaurants, souks, veterinary clinics, and rescuers' homes[6] where cats were exposed to the high summer temperatures. Notably, manmade urban spaces often contribute to the urban heat island (UHI) effect, a phenomenon caused by anthropogenic heat resulting from solar irradiation on urban building materials (Mohajerani et al. 2017). To mitigate such exposure, abandoners resort to leaving their cats inside veterinary clinics, pet grooming salons and in boarding facilities where they do not return for their cats. Additional locations include parks (which contain irrigated foliage) or on compounds where there is known to be a managed cat colony. In their quest for shelter, cats often seek refuge in back yards[7] or attempt to enter buildings where they are often found in the stairwells of apartment blocks. Figure 8 shows that the need for a suitable environment, one of the Five Welfare Needs (Ryan et al. 2019), "[b]y providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area" (Mellor 2016a: 3), is not being met.

Figure 6. Research findings: Abandonment locations



[6] Many rescuers refuse to reveal their location due to such actions.

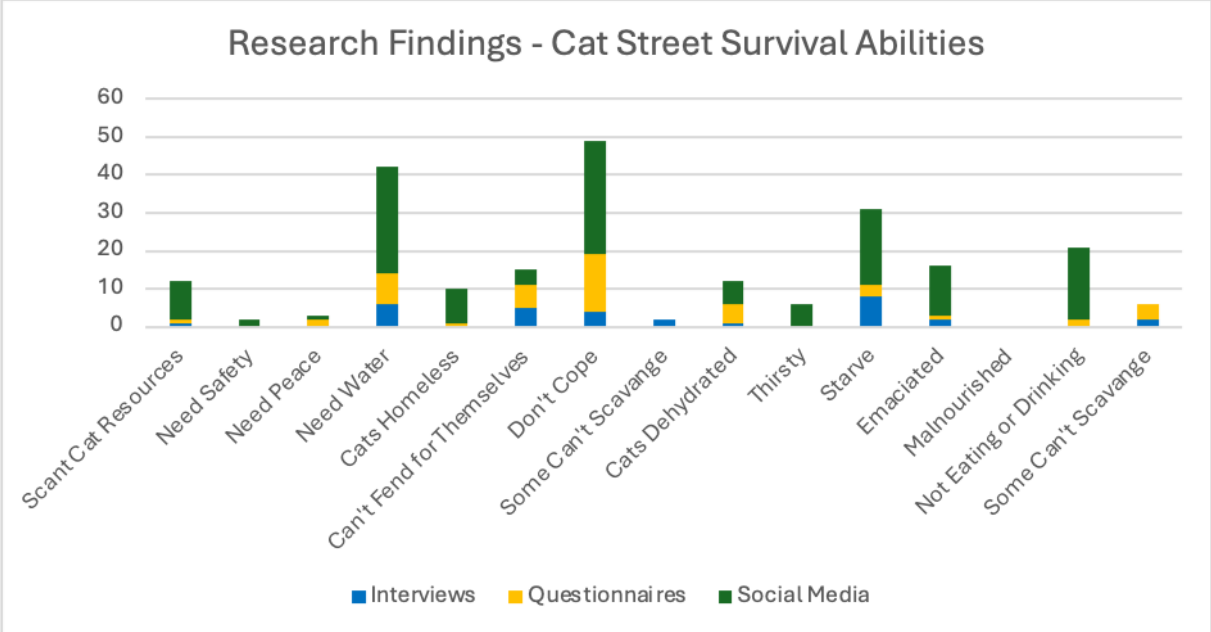
[7] Back yards of houses traditionally have high walls to prevent human intrusion but may have some type of watered garden area which provides shade.

Figure 7. Research findings: The need for a suitable environment

5.1.2. The Need for a Suitable Diet

A suitable diet ensures freedom from thirst, hunger, and malnutrition. The research results on cats' abilities to locate adequate nutrition are presented in Figures 9, 10 and 11.

Figure 8.



5.1.2.1. Street Food Sources

The quest for food sources becomes another transitional challenge for cats on the street. In KSA, cats regardless of categorisation rely on human proximity as the desert surrounds all urban spaces. Some are able to catch rats, pigeons, even scorpions and camel spiders, though this poses risks of injury, especially from the venomous latter two groups. A significant portion of their sustenance comes from scavenging in garbage skips or food waste left on the street. Some human neighbours do leave food out for the community cats. While Saudi Arabian street-based community cats may not be able to communicate their biographies directly, there are clues. For example, tamis bread, a popular and inexpensive food available in many city locations, is a food sometimes eaten by cats. It is crucial to note that, as research interviewees pointed out, food obtained from garbage lacks adequate nourishment. Cats are described as thin, starving, emaciated and skeletal (Figure 10). In addition to the challenges of starvation and malnutrition, accessing water proves difficult, leading to dehydration, renal failure (Burkholder 2000), heart disease (Campbell – Kittleson 2007) and, ultimately, death.

Figure 9.

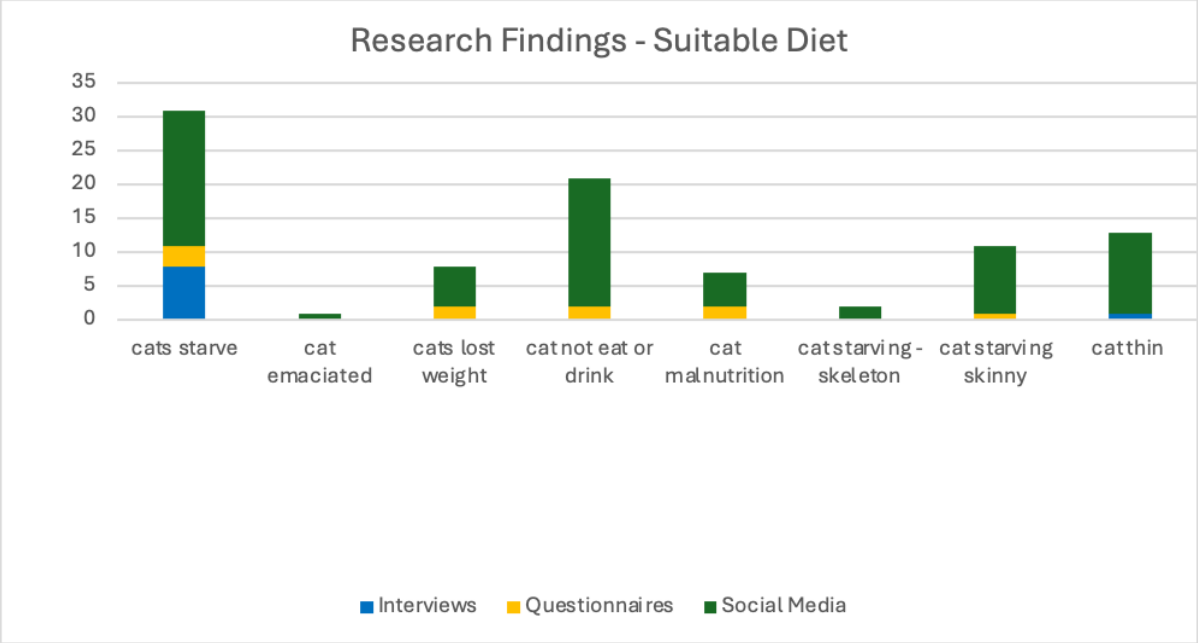


Figure 11 shows that the need for a suitable diet, one of the Five Welfare Needs (Ryan et al. 2019), by minimising "[b]y providing ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour" (Mellor 2016a: 2), is not being met.

Figure 10. Research findings: The need for a suitable diet

5.1.3. The Need for Protection from Pain, Suffering, Injury, and Disease

5.1.3.1. Diseases

Disease prevalence is high among unvaccinated cats (Slater 2007) and factors contributing to starvation and malnutrition extend beyond food scarcity to include the inability to eat. Domestic cats are hosts to several viruses (Pontier et al. 2009), and participants reported feline herpes virus (FHV), feline calicivirus (FCV), and feline parvovirus (FPV) as extremely common viruses which are efficiently transmitted diseases (Pontier et al. 2009). Images of cats frequently appear on social media where help is requested for cats, often exhibiting very severe symptoms. Research data from social media illustrate infected eyes (Figures 12 and 13), ranging from mild conjunctivitis, ocular discharge to bulging eyes leading to blindness. These diseases also cause upper respiratory tract infections and nasal discharges. FCV leads to painful mouth ulcers. Blindness, mouth ulcers, and breathing difficulties pose life-threatening risks for affected cats.

Figure 11. KSA 'street' cats with virus related issues

Feline panleukopenia (FPL) additionally induces severe hemorrhagic gastroenteritis, frequently resulting in dehydration and eventually, death. The high prevalence of FHV, FCV, and FPV amongst cat populations in KSA is likely to be comparable to studies on other cat populations (Hellard et al. 2011; Pavlova et al. 2015). Since a significant number of street-living community cats and many in homes lack vaccinations, they remain vulnerable to these viruses.

5.1.3.2. Injuries

Injuries are not consistently documented by any of the research participants. The data revealed 1,620 injuries (Figures 13, 14 and 15).[8] Head injuries were the most frequently reported (349), 243 involving eye injuries. There were 305 instances described as cats having 'broken bodies', including 76 cases of paralysed cats, 91 instances where body parts were described as 'destroyed', and 86 reports of lost body parts. Leg injuries totalled 219, with 63 paw injuries and 36 radial nerve injuries; skin injuries amounted to 119, encompassing burns and degloved body parts. Other reported injuries included tail injuries (52), mouth injuries (74), bone breaks (34) and neck injuries (25).

[8] The data analysed from these social media accounts covered a period of one year from only 3 of many KSA social media accounts.

Figure 12.

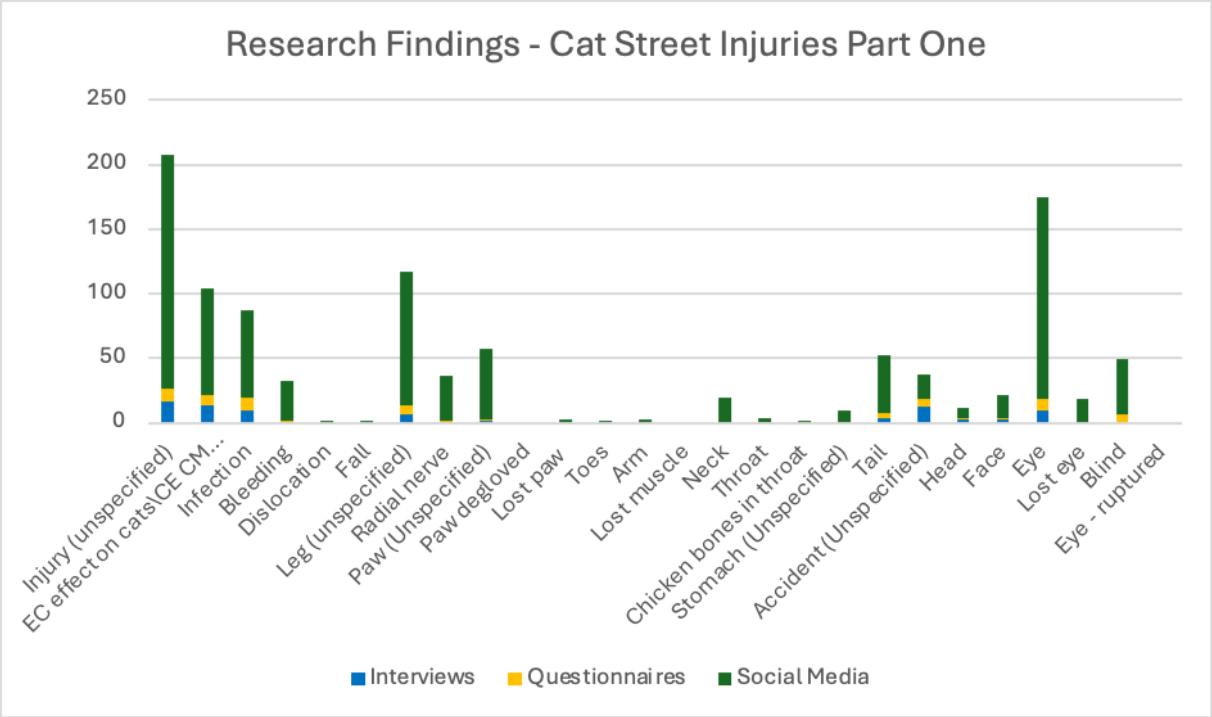


Figure 13.

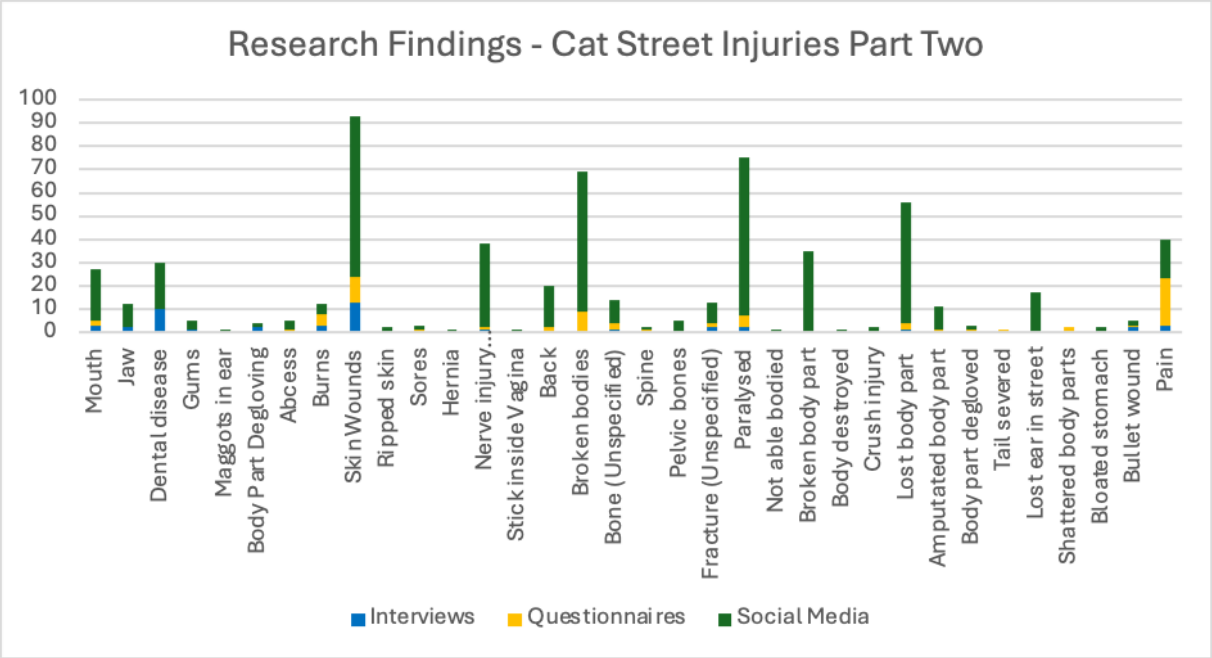


Figure 14. Cat injuries

Interviewee A remarked upon the resilience of cats, who recovered from injuries that, as a seasoned medical professional, they would anticipate cats to succumb to. This resilience, however, may indicate how untreated cats can endure, clinging to life despite pain. The severity of their injuries often determines their capacity to remain alive.

Figure 16 shows that the need for protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease, one of the Five Welfare Needs (Ryan et al. 2019), "[b]y prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment" (Mellor 2016a: 2), is not being met.

Figure 15. Research findings: The need for protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease

5.1.4. The Need to be Able to Exhibit Normal Behaviour Patterns by Ensuring Conditions and Treatment which Avoid Mental Suffering

5.1.4.1. Fear and Distress

Street hazards contribute significantly to fear and distress, as testified to in this research, including 114 instances of abuse (Figure 17), 109 cases of killing (Figure 18), climate-related challenges (69) (Figures 5, and 8), attacks by other cats (32) (Figures 24 and 27), being trapped (20) (Figure 18) and car accidents (13). Drawing on my autoethnographic voice, I can attest that car accidents are a frequent cause of fatal and incapacitating injuries.

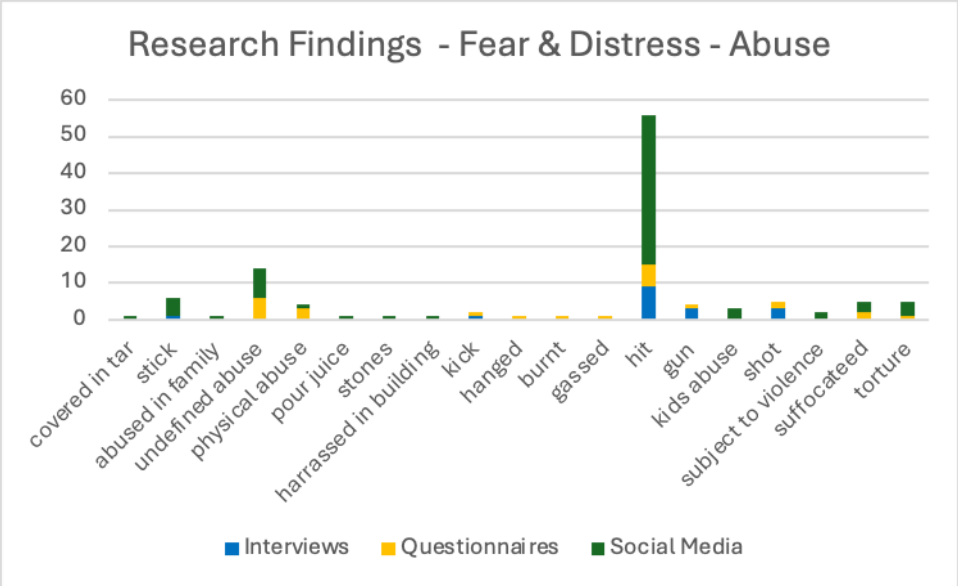
Nida Intarapanich et al. (2016) discuss the challenges in distinguishing motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) from non-accidental injuries (NAIs), emphasising the importance of attempting to record such distinctions to advance morethanhuman animal welfare. Witnessing accounts from participants describe cats subjected to deliberate physical abuse, including being hit, stoned, kicked, shot, hanged, burnt, and having juice and paint poured on their bodies (Figure 17).

Cookie, who was rescued as an abandoned kitten, has faced significant challenges. He was hospitalised twice; the first time was due to a road traffic "accident",[9] and the second he returned home after being missing for a few days with his tail no longer functional and his face and eye bruised on one side. According to the vet, Cookie had likely been swung by the tail with his head knocked into the ground. Cookie now chooses not to venture beyond the perimeter of his home. Unfortunately, not all cats are as fortunate. A spate of cat shootings resulted in many cats dead or suffering from injuries, with many succumbing (Al-Sulami – Fareed 2017; O'Connor 2017). This case highlights the impact of social media in Saudi Arabia. While many abuse cases may go unnoticed, viral hashtags, such as the one used in this case (#WeDemandThePunishmentOfCatsKiller), seem to have provoked action. In this instance, the perpetrator was arrested. However, casual abuse appears normalised, indicating the complex challenges faced by abandoned and other community cats in Saudi Arabia.[10]

[9] Participants report motor vehicles being deliberately used to injure cats.

[10] Of course, morethanhuman animal abuse is not uniquely Saudi. Harold Herzog and Arnold Arluke's (2006) anthropology of cruelty has identified links between morethanhuman animal abuse and domestic violence (also see Ascione 1999; Ascione et al. 2007; Flynn 1999, 2000; Merz-Perez 2003; Shapiro – Henderson 2016).

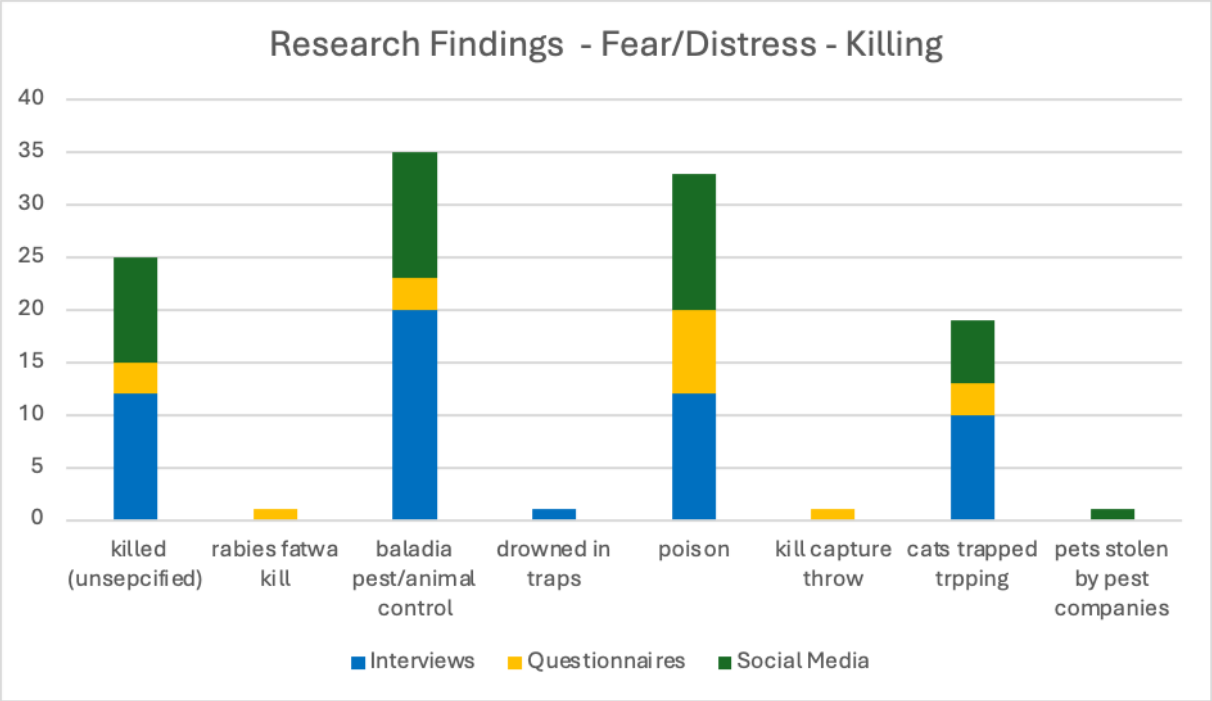
Figure 16.



"Mikey was discovered, left paralysed and incontinent, a victim of an MVA or a NAI. Despite his injuries, he demonstrated his agency by refusing to use his bespoke wheelchair, preferring to drag himself with his well-developed forearms. He chased insects, scooted across floors, and relished basking in the sun. He was given as much freedom as he wanted, except for venturing into the traffic-laden streets. Our bond was profound from my perspective, and I believe he reciprocated the sentiment, responding to his name, cherishing hugs, and sharing a form of eye-to-eye contact. We would exchange long blinks, and our eyes communicated deep affection. The thought of abandoning him on the street was inconceivable. To deconstruct our co-developed interspecies relationship by subjecting him to a long-distant remembered street cat culture and Umwelt, would have resulted in a traumatic Umwelt transition into a wretched attempt at existence."

(The author)

Figure 17.



5.1.4.2. Killing

Although killing is considered *haram*[11] in Saudi Arabia, with certain exceptions, such as morethanhuman animals used for food (Masri 2007), instances of cat killing still occur. Unlike in India, where 'street dogs' are protected by the law from killing (Srinivasan 2013), community cats and dogs in KSA have no such protection and are occasionally poisoned. Research participants reported some discrepancy regarding who authorises the (sometimes mass) poisoning of morethanhuman animals. Nonetheless, cats are reported to have been trapped and drowned (while still in the trap) and trapped then abandoned in the desert (sometimes still in traps) by the baladiya.[12] Any cat in the targeted trapping area, whether a companion animal with outdoor access, abandoned, lost, or residing in the vicinity was reported as taken without discrimination. Figure 18 presents research data on cats killed.

5.1.4.3. Cats' Condition

Even cats that avoid injury, hazards, and disease do not appear to fare well. Figure 19 highlights medical issues participants reported cats suffer including birthing difficulties, disabilities, disease, parasites, ear mites and fleas, and long-haired cats are frequently described as matted (71) and dirty (42). The research data does not distinguish between brachycephalic and non-brachycephalic cats. However, special mention is made here of the brachycephalic condition (Figures 20 and 22) as respondents agreed that a brachycephalic cat would be less successful at street survival than a non-brachycephalic cat, although all respondents believed that no cat 'type' thrived on the street and all faced insuperable challenges to longevity. Particular problems were fur matting, from mild to severe, where

[11] *Haram* means forbidden by Islamic law.
[12] The baladiya is the Saudi word for 'municipality'.

pelting or epilation occurs (Figure 21), specifically a problem for KSA-popular long-haired brachycephalic cats.

Figure 18.

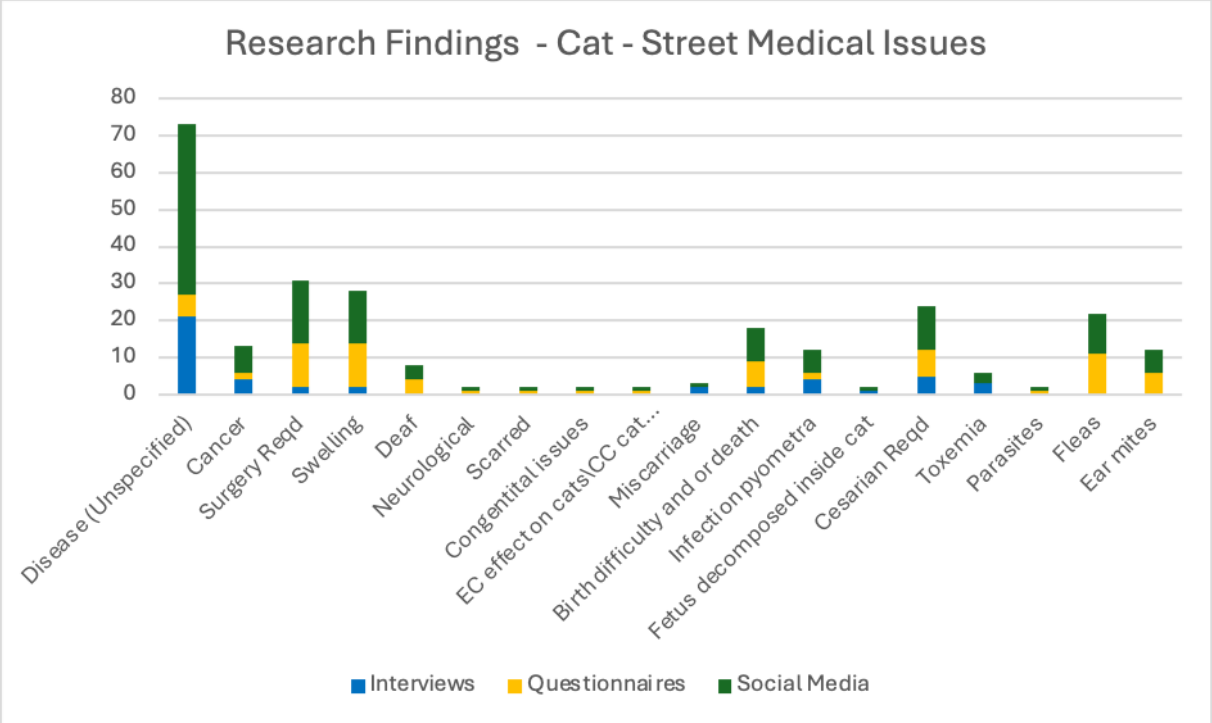
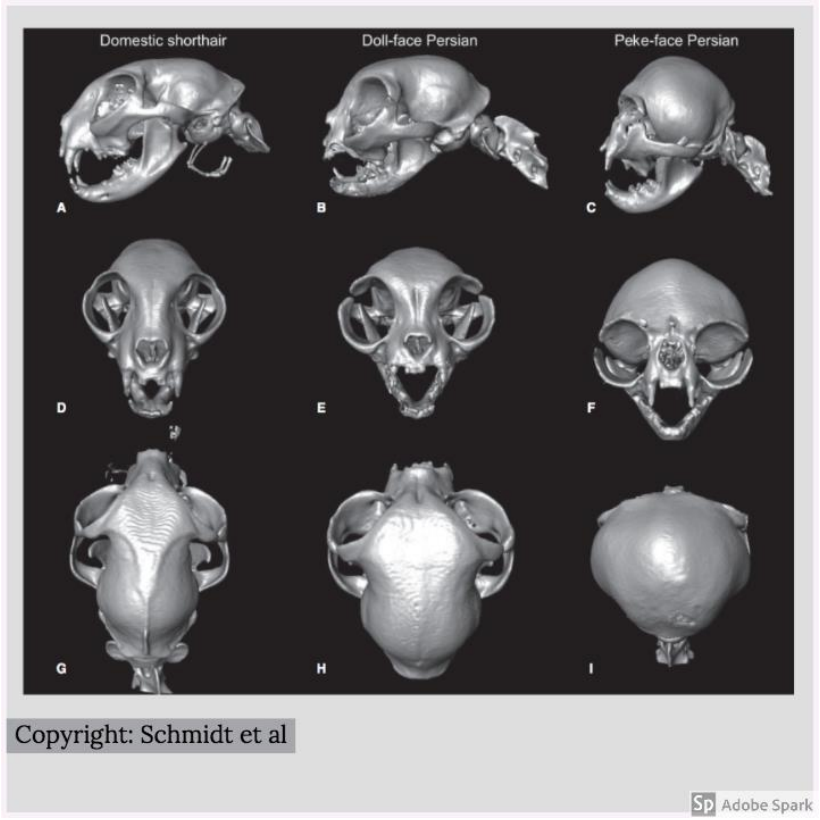


Figure 19. Phoenix, an abandoned brachycephalic cat

Source: Sarah Oxley Heaney, 2019.

Figure 21. Research findings: left - pelting; centre - pelting skin damage; right – epilation

Figure 20. Brachycephalic cat head morphologies



5.1.4.4. Brachycephalic Head Morphology

Figure 22 presents CT scans comparing a domestic shorthair with two brachycephalic typologies showcasing profound aberrations in the peke-faced cat (Schmidt et al. 2017). Brachycephalic syndrome is prevalent in brachycephalic breeds (Dupré et al. 2013) and is directly related to a specific head morphology where the shortening of the bones in the face and the surrounding areas alters the relationship with the surrounding soft tissue (Schlueter et al. 2009). This syndrome is associated with various health issues, depending upon the deformation, which range from mild I *(ibid)* or 'doll-face' (Schmidt et al. 2017: 1487), to severe IV (Schlueter et al. 2009) or 'peke-face' (Schmidt et al. 2017: 1487). In severe cases, the nose is pushed above the level of the lower eyelid (*ibid).* The syndrome presents "multilevel obstruction of the airways" (Mellema – Hoareau 2014: 104) and "secondary structural collapse" (*ibid).* Additional dysmorphologies include narrow nostrils, enlarged tonsils, laryngeal collapse (Mellema – Hoareau 2014), tracheal collapse (Dupré et al. 2013), eyelid dysfunction where eyelids are harder to close due to protruding eyes, resulting in increased risk of damage to the cornea (International Cat Care n.d.), persistent ocular discharge (*ibid),* dental crowding, mal-positioned teeth, dental disease (Mestrinho et al. 2018) and difficulty eating (Grannum 2024).

Cats that are generally bred and sold as commodities in KSA are reported as being predominantly long-haired and frequently brachycephalic. These "paedomorphic" (Serpell 2019: 58) and neotenic (Gazzano et al. 2015) features, exhibiting "infantile characteristics" (Estren 2012: 6) may be fundamentally alluring to humans (Serpell 2019). However, the desirability of such features comes at a cost to the morethanhuman animals that bear them (Serpell 2019). While the deliberate creation and breeding of brachycephalic cats may be considered "highly calculative and manipulative" (Tuan 2007: 149), research participants find the abandonment of cats with debilitated morphological survivability merciless.

Cats with severe brachycephaly face challenges breathing and eating, exacerbated by extreme temperatures and difficulties in finding appropriate food sources outside their home environment. These factors alone significantly diminish life expectancy and intensify the likelihood of suffering (Hale 2013). Fraser Hale advocates the banning of intentionally reproducing brachycephalic cats, akin to calls for the bans on declawing (Downing 2017) and dog tail docking (Lefebvre et al. 2007). Hale points out that not only "the animal effectively bites itself every time it closes its mouth" (Hale 2013: n. pag.) but the "entrapment of hair, food, and bacteria" (*ibid)* in the exaggerated folds of the palate cause chronic pain, and disease often hidden from the ill-informed 'owner'.

5.1.4.5. Psychological Welfare

Beyond brachycephalic cats, it is important to note that other cats suffer injury, starvation, hazards, abuse, distress and mental distress and suffering. Figure 23 illustrates a multitude of conditions which contribute towards mental suffering, These conditions include descriptions of cats as dirty (72), matted (19) or unable to cope with long hair (23), tired (28), motionless (9), collapsed (10), comatose (5), exhausted (3), lethargic (2), weak (31) and crawling (4). Additionally, Figure 24 also portrays a broader spectrum of conditions causing mental suffering. Among those not previously mentioned, almost 90 were reported as dead, 50 as dying, and 76 as suffering.

Figure 21.

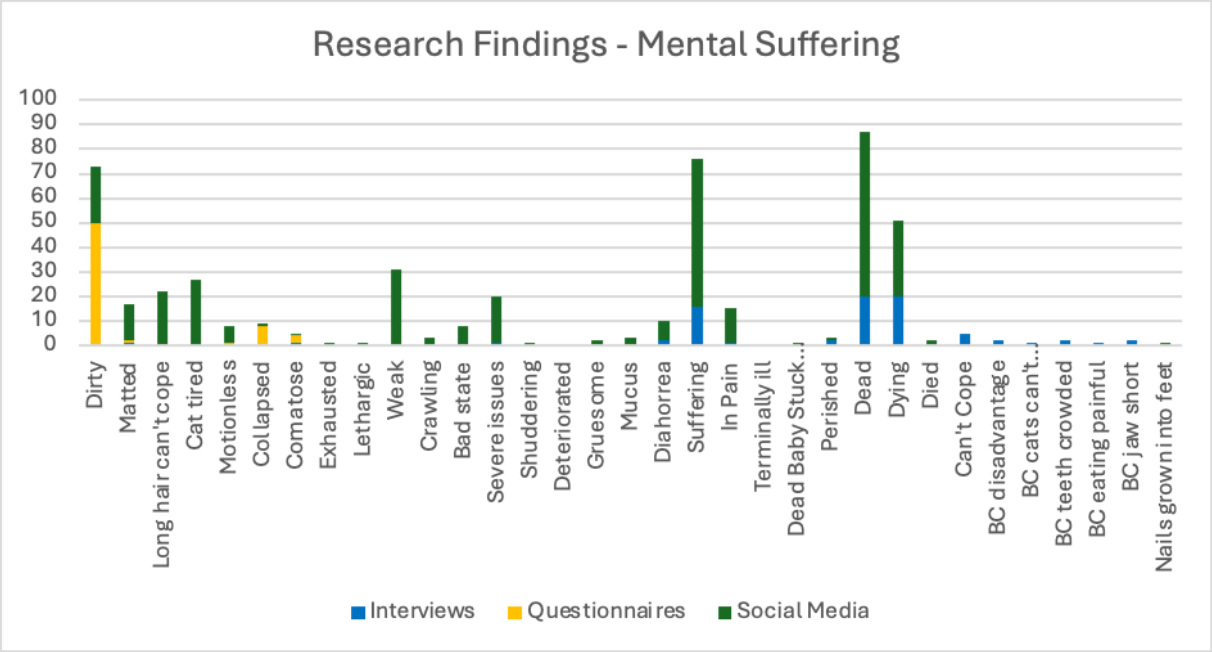
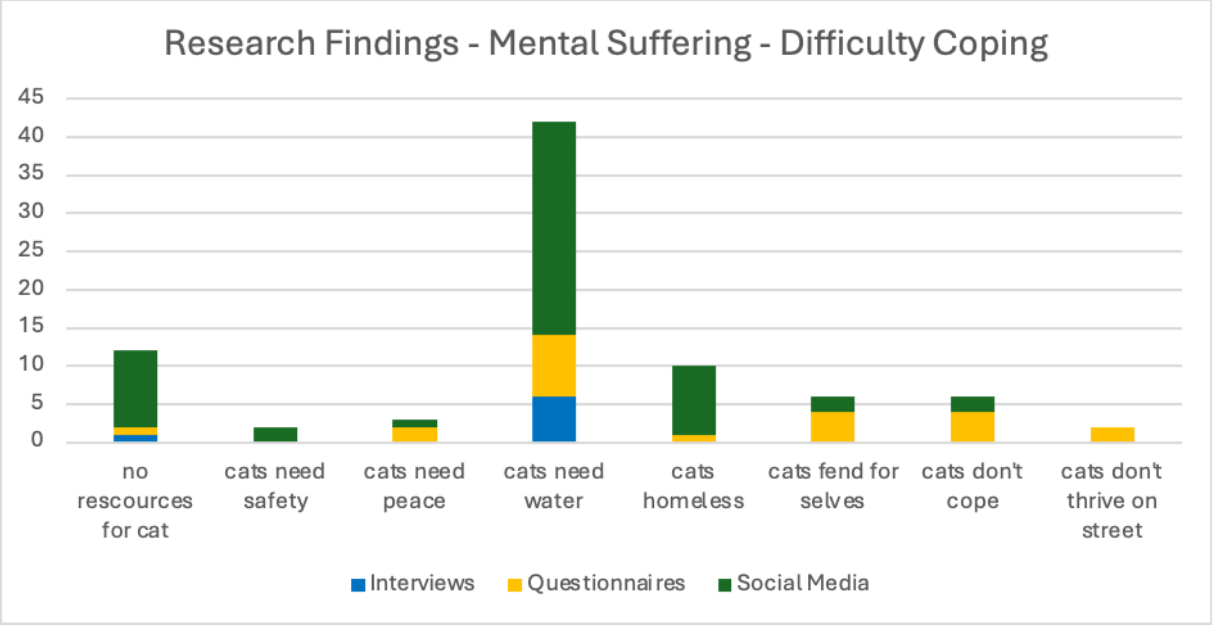


Figure 22.

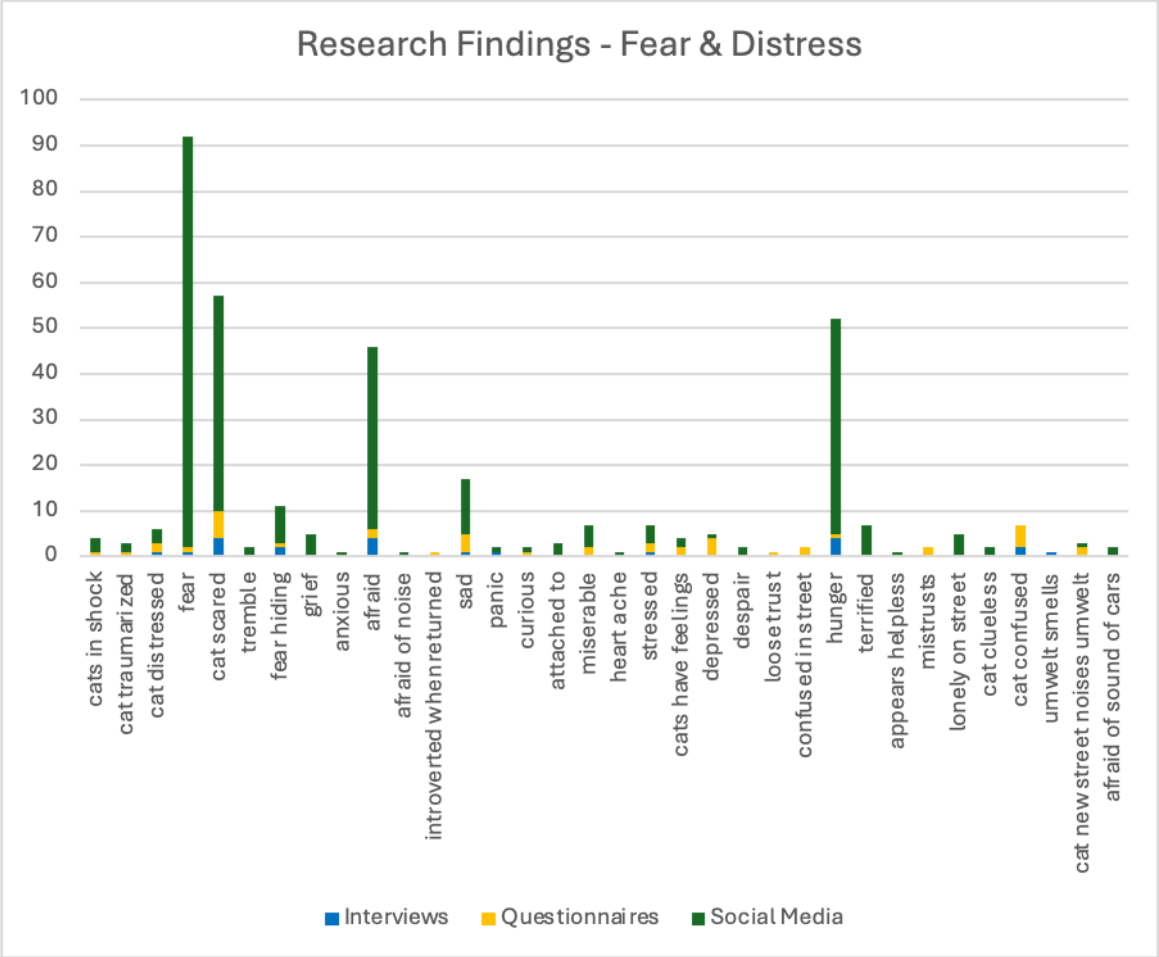


5.1.4.6. Emotions

Mental suffering often finds expression through emotions. While "defining 'emotion' is a notorious problem" (Scherer 2005: 698), emotional modalities include "expression, bodily symptoms and arousal, and subjective experience" (Scherer 2005: 698). According to Marc Bekoff (2008), the acknowledgement of emotional existence in morethanhuman animals is widely accepted in the contemporary scientific community. Emotions are typically triggered

by "stimulus events" (Scherer 2005: 700). Street hazards, injuries, poor conditions, lack of resources and an unsuitable environment all contribute to stimulus events. Cats navigating the challenges of the street, throughout one, or a series of, Umwelt transitions are likely to be particularly susceptible. Indeed, emotional responses can vary in intensity and are subjective for each individual cat, depending on the nature of the stimulus event(s).

Figure 23.



Cats observed in the streets demonstrated emotions that align with mental and physical distress. Cats highlighted (Figure 25) are described as displaying fear (94), being scared (56) and afraid (46). A few are described as friendly, which concerns many social media participants, who perceive the friendliness as exposing the cats to abuse. Hunger, when experienced in a negative context, can be conceptualised as an emotion (MacCormack – Lindquist 2019), which can lead to a dysfunctional relationship between anxiety and emotional eating (Alexander – Siegel 2013). Such dysfunctions can render adopted cats vulnerable if adopters are unprepared for or unaware of such issues.

Studies show morethanhuman animals can experience psychological stress and fear (Alworth – Buerkle 2013; Kry – Casey 2007; Moberg 1985; Tynes 2014) as well as environmental stress, hyperthermic stress (Hanneman et al. 1977), travel stress (Venable et al. 2016) and noise stress (Coppola, Enns, et al. 2006) including from anthropogenic noise

(Wright et al. 2007). Although there is no specific academic study on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in domestic cats, research on parrots (Yenkosky et al. 2010) and dogs (Dao 2011), has confirmed that these morethanhuman animals experience PTSD. Anxiety-related disorders have been recognised in elephants (Shannon et al. 2013) and chimpanzees (Ferdowsian et al. 2011). Participants in this study reported observing anxiety-related symptoms in community cats such as depression, anxiousness, refusal to eat and introversion (Figures 25 and 26). For example, Sasha, abandoned in the desert, witnessed her sibling being attacked and killed by dogs. It took a year for her to trust rescuers and display signs of affection. This shows that emotional stimuli, such as road traffic, encounters with unfriendly people, hunger, thirst and fear are likely to cause significant stress during Umwelt transitions for cats. Figure 26 shows that the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns, one of the Five Welfare Needs "by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering" (Mellor 2016a: 2), is not being met.

Figure 24. Research findings: Conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering

5.1.5. The Need to be Housed With, or Apart From, Others

5.1.5.1. Multispecies Relationships and Families

Old Lady, having endured a series of transitions, was initially discovered in an emaciated condition on a compound, likely abandoned. Consequently, she was transferred to a "sanctuary",[13] and subsequently fostered. After the foster left, Old Lady was housed alone for six weeks, a situation unbeknownst to her initial rescuers at the time, then adopted for another three weeks, until she developed diarrhoea. Consequently, she was returned to her initial rescuer. Unfortunately, Old Lady's journey reflects the common plights of cats in the region, as research participants reveal a pattern where felines are seldom regarded as long-term household members.[14] This predisposes them to numerous Umwelt transitions and multiple instances of abandonment. Each transition breaks bonds, attachments, and relationships that are crucial for a cat's sense of well-being and understanding of his or her Umwelt, whether involving human-cat, cat-cat(s) or multispecies-cat relationships. Bekoff (2015) reports that broken bonds can cause distress. Separation anxiety has been identified in cats when separated from an attachment figure (Schwartz 2002, 2003) and attachment figures may include a range of species in multispecies households. Old Lady died a few days later, while lying in the shaded sun, mourned by one person, and arguably mourning her losses.

While cats may be resilient in recovering from physical injuries, when physical symptoms are gone, emotional trauma and mental suffering may remain (Steel et al. 2011). Extensive research exists on human trauma and anxiety, and some, as mentioned previously, on morethanhuman animal trauma. There is a notable dearth on emotional trauma in abandoned cats, particularly in the context of KSA. It is important to note that the impact of trauma is not exclusive to abandoned cats or vulnerable community cats. Participants also highlighted the distressing conditions in backyard breeding facilities in KSA.

Abandoned, lost or relocated cats face the challenge of integrating into established cat neighbourhoods, often resulting in physical conflicts as reported by participants (Figure 27). Abandoned cats must navigate an unfamiliar 'cat-cat culture' forcing them to reassess their agentic choices and adapt to the dynamics of new living spaces. The struggle to find acceptance adds an additional layer of stress and uncertainty to their already challenging circumstances.

[13] A rented house for cats to have space to recover from physical and psychological injury and/or illness and interact with other cats.

[14] For more on the concept of flexible personhood, see Shir-Vitesh 2012.

Figure 27.

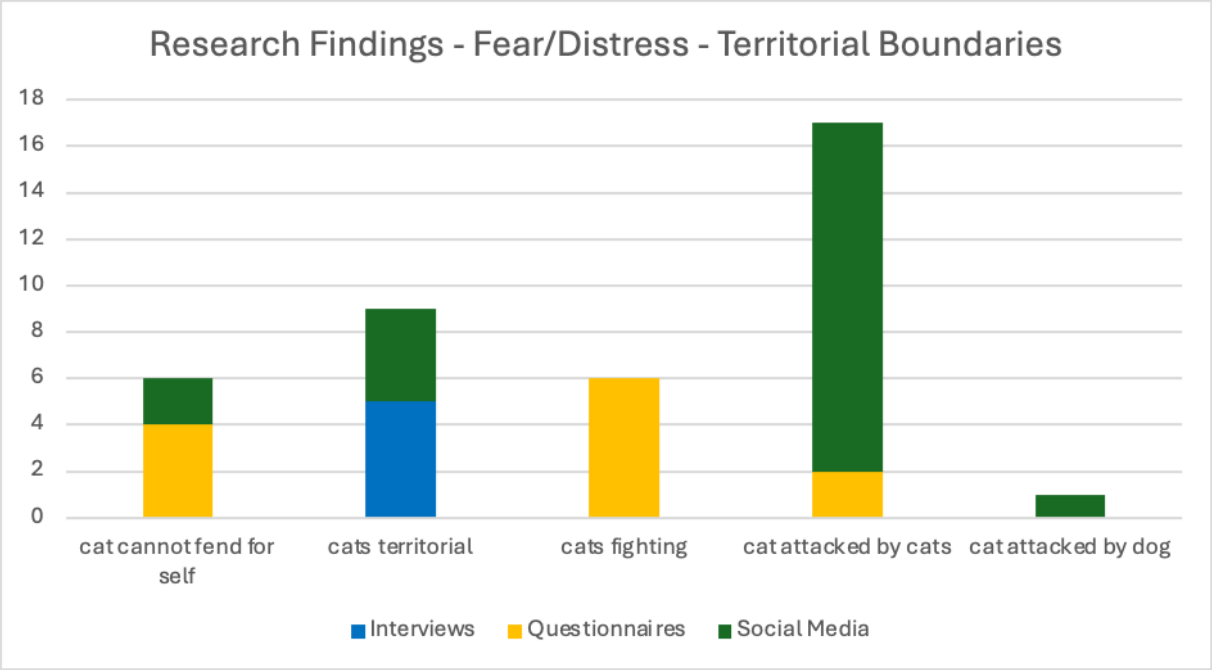


Figure 28 shows that the need to be housed with, or apart from, other morethanhuman animals, one of the Five Welfare Needs, "[b]y providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind" (Mellor 2016a: 2), is not being met.

Figure 25. Research findings: The need to be housed with, or apart from, other morethanhuman animals

6. Summary

The research reveals that a proportion of community cats, including those abandoned, do not live in suboptimal conditions. These cats lack a suitable environment, a suitable diet, experience thirst, hunger, and malnutrition, lack protection from pain, suffering, injury, disease, and mental suffering and are not appropriately housed with other morethanhuman animals, falling short of the Five Animal Welfare Needs, a fundamental standard for domestic animal welfare.

The study employs virtual-witnessing, utilising rescuer testimonies to give voice to the suffering, allowing online observers to witness both the distress and actions of the activist movement. Despite potential concerns of the 'echo chamber' effect of social media, the research does not find any positive aspects of cat abandonment and presents a predominantly negative view of cats living in an urban street environment.

Huw Griffiths et al. studying 'feral' cats in the UK argue that solely-outdoor urban-living cats fare well, suggesting that calling for the rescue of 'feral cats' offers a "singular, negative view" and asserting that cats do not to be saved from "their feral misery" (2000: 59). Varied perspectives on the health of urban living cats is likely to stem from subjective judgements. James Serpell (2019) warns us that such judgements raise important issues as to what matters to morethanhuman animals and what is therefore important to their welfare.

To recap, this research explores the reasons and factors influencing cat abandonment in Saudi Arabia, shedding light on the complex issues surrounding this nationally under-addressed problem. Understanding cat abandonment serves as a crucial initial step in developing compassionate cat welfare strategies in KSA. This research aims to lay the groundwork and to become a catalyst for the development of a cat care framework to improve the lives of cats and their human counterparts in KSA communities.

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CHAPTER 5

Control Your Cats!
The Biopolitics of Urban Cat-Human Relations

Kristine Hill

Abstract

Building upon the author's doctoral research, this paper focuses on discourses surrounding roaming urban cats (*Felis catus*) and Foucauldian biopower over feline bodies. It demonstrates how a biopolitical framework can be applied to understand methods of control and power over other-than-human lives and serves as a means to understand cat-human relations. Whether to protect wildlife or the cats themselves, biopower is exerted over feline bodies via collars, microchips, desexing, and restrictions on roaming. The language of 'domestication,' 'wild,' and 'feral' are translated to different notions of 'catness' and beliefs about what is 'best for cats' and our role as guardians. This in turn shapes social expectations, pressures, and bylaws restricting the roaming of cats. Veterinarian and welfarist recommendations of desexing are instrumental in normalising neutering and spaying, which renders cats less prone to fight or spray urine, and more inclined to be docile companion animals. This essay argues that the desexed cats themselves become biopolitical agents by reinforcing notions of 'catness' and conforming to notions of 'good' companion animals or community members. The paper concludes by discussing how terms such as 'community,' rather than 'feral' or 'street' cats can help change the dialogue and foster more caring multispecies communities.

Keywords

biopolitics, biopower, power words, cat-human cultures, cats, *Felis catus*

1. Introduction

For cats (*Felis catus*) to coexist amongst humans they have needed to abide by human defined rules and social expectations. In past centuries this would have been a simple mutualistic arrangement of feline independence and minimal human control, in return for rodent control and company by the fireside (Bradshaw 2013; Farnworth 2015). It is misguided to think of cats as a ubiquitous collective, just as it would be to think of humans as such. Not only are cats perceived differently across time, space, and culture (see Rogers 2019), but groups of cats reproduce cat cultures and co-create distinct cat-human cultures (Alger – Alger 1999; Jaroš 2018). At the same time, due to their ability to easily shift between being affectionate and independent, as a species, cats are liminal, existing within, outside of, and between different human spheres of classifications (pet, pest, predator, problem, etc.,) (Crowley et al. 2020a;

Holm 2020; Jaroš 2021; Schuurman – Dirke 2020). This liminality still largely informs the cultural perceptions and treatment of cats in 'Western' societies today.

However, cat-human dynamics have changed considerably over the last 100 years, with increasing control being exerted over feline bodies in the form of desexing, collars, microchipping, pedigree breeding, and restrictions on their roaming (Cafazzo et al. 2019; Crowley et al. 2020a; Jaroš 2021; Kurushima et al. 2013; Natoli et al. 2022). Control is exerted over feline bodies in the form of love (protective "pet parenting styles" (Finka et al. 2019; Hill 2024a)), by language (conservationist rhetoric and the media (Hill, 2022; Hill et al. 2022; Holm 2020; Lynn et al. 2019)), by social control (constructions of cultural norms and bylaws), and control by actions (pedigree breeding, neutering, bells and collars, confinement). Drawing on my doctoral research (Hill 2023), this paper focuses on the latter two in the context of urban environments and Foucauldian biopower over feline bodies. However, during analysis it becomes apparent that the various facets of control over feline bodies are interrelated and entangled. For example, beliefs about what is best for a beloved companion cat, and attitudes towards unowned cats and wildlife predation shape how cats are perceived, persecuted, regulated, or cared for in the community. Furthermore, the cats themselves exert agency, and to varying degrees defy or conform to human-imposed restrictions or expectations. This paper explores how cats co-constitute society and assert their agency, while also functioning as both "subjected" and "productive" bodies and biopolitical agents within human-dominated societies (Foucault, 1977: 26).

2. The Language of More-Than-Human Biopolitics

More-than-human biopolitics extends the Foucauldian notion of biopower as a cohesive form of control over human bodies to other animals who also co-constitute human societies (see Asdal et al. 2016; Blue – Rock 2010; Chrulew 2017; Redmalm 2019; Wolfe 2013). Biopower (*biopouvoir* in the original French) was coined by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality I* to refer to "techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault 1979: 140). Biopolitics can be understood as a political mechanism that uses biopower to control society, and is often applied in conjunction with other repressive methods such as knowledge, power, and punishment (Foucault 1977). Rather than punishment being doled out as a deterrent, or means to control a society through fear, biopolitics is more subtle and cohesive and pervades daily life. Biopolitics is productive[1] and not overtly repressive. Rather, biopolitics is the pervasive exertion of state or institutional control over bodies and populations (Foucault 1977). Society itself also becomes an instrument of biopower by shaping social constructions and policing social norms by denying employment or shunning non-conformists as 'deviants' (Atuk 2020; Eklund Purewal 2017). Examples of biopolitics include pathologizing sexuality (Atuk 2020), economising healthcare (Kenny 2015), politicalising sex education (Ramírez-García 2020; Varsa – Szikra 2020), forced or coerced sterilisation (Repo 2019), and the criminalisation of abortion (Eklund – Purewal 2017; Mayes 2021). In all these examples, discourse and choice terminology enabled those in power to convince the majority that their policies were just and necessary. Cary Wolfe pointed out that, while humans are separated from other animals in political thought, the

[1] Productive in that it regulates the bodies and minds of individuals who consequently become complicit in producing social structures and societal norms that benefit those in power – rendering them productive bodies and/or agents of biopolitics.

central distinction within biopolitics is between those who are deemed killable, or less worthy of saving, and community members who deserve protection. The fact that human lives are likewise valued or devaluated allows biopolitical frameworks to be extended to more-than-human animals (Wolfe 2013).

The link between biopower and language was central to my doctoral research, which explored the various discourses surrounding roaming and free-living cats and cat-human relations (Hill 2023). Humans develop and use language to acquire and communicate knowledge of the world around them. Language shapes how we perceive the world. Foucault used the term "power-knowledge" to emphasise how both knowledge and power are interdependent (1977: 28). The wielding of power is dependent on a scaffold of knowledge and claims to that knowledge advance the interests of certain groups while marginalising others. For example, by describing and pathologizing psychiatric conditions, those with psychiatry training wield power of those defined with said conditions (Roberts 2005). In the 1860s same-sex attractions became a subject of medical study, providing a framework by which to suppress homosexuals (Roberts 2005). By pathologizing same-sex attractions, social and legal constraints were enacted against individuals not conforming to the socially constructed norms of attraction and marriage. Language is similarly used to normalise, disguise, or justify our treatment of other animals. For example, 'cull,' 'hunt,' 'murder,' 'euthanise,' 'slaughter,' 'harvest,' and 'execute' are all words that are used to describe the act of deliberate killing. These words either condone or vilify the act based on who is killing or being killed. Michael Wise demonstrated a dissociation of predation from production, exemplified by the colonial conquest of the Northern Rockies, USA, between the 1860s and the 1930s, which "transformed the concept of predation from an indigenous understanding of a livelihood sustained by death into a colonial indictment of humans and animals whose labours did not conform to the new political ecology of livestock capitalism" (2016: 134). Consequently, certain forms of animal death, such as industrial slaughter or the culling of 'predatory' species, are normalised, while those that do not conform to capitalist ideologies are animalised.

Michelle Szydlowski coined the term "power word" to identify words that are used to wield control over animal lives (2021: 47), reminiscent of Foucault's concept of language as a tool for societal control. Power words include 'feral' and 'domesticated' (Hill 2022; Hill et al. 2022; Szydlowski et al. 2022), terms which manipulate how other-than-human animals are perceived, and subsequently treated. For cats, the 'feral' label can be a death sentence (Hill et al. 2022; Sutton – Taylor 2019) or render them objects of disdain or pity (Hill 2022, Hill 2023; Wilson et al. 2018). Likewise, identifying cats as 'domesticated' animals implies they belong in the home, whereas calling them 'wild' suggests they should be free to roam. These are amongst some of the common terms that are extensively used in lay discourses surrounding free-living (unowned) and roaming companion cats (Hill 2023).

3. Talking about Cats: Analysis of the Discourses

My doctoral research explored the various discourses surrounding roaming and free-living cats (Hill 2023). I examined over 2000 online comments from 1800 unique usernames, responding to seven different news articles, magazine pieces, and a You-tube video (Hill 2023). All comments were in English, and although location was not always discernible, most of the comments appear to originate from the UK, US, Canada, or Australia. Emerging themes were examined within existing theoretical frameworks related to animal agency and

guardianship, moral panic theory, biopolitics, and interspecies intersubjectivity (Hill 2022, Hill 2023, Hill 2024a, Hill 2024b). The role of language in shaping how cats are perceived and treated by different human stakeholders was the common denominator throughout. However, there was also evidence of individual cats asserting their agency and influencing their human benefactors. Furthermore, part of my doctoral research involved case-study analyses of cat-human relationships that allowed in-depth analysis of interspecies intersubjectivity (Hill 2023; Hill 2024b). Intersubjectivity refers to the shared space between conscious (subjective) minds where shared meaning can be made (Husserl 1989), and the recognition that more than human animals also possess subjective minds led scholars to develop a concept of interspecies intersubjectivity (see Aaltola 2013; Alger – Alger 1997; Hurn 2012; Irvine 2004; Smuts 2006). My case-study analyses provided examples of joint meaning making within the context of multispecies families and communities (Hill 2023; Hill 2024b). Together with multispecies ethnographic studies of cat-human relations in various contexts, this provided further evidence that cats are active agents in the co-creation of unique cat-human cultures (Alger – Alger 1999; Finkler – Terkel 2012; Hill 2024c; Jaroš 2018; McDonald – Clements 2019; Natoli et al. 2019; Warawutsunthon 2021). Through their actions, interactions, and communications with humans, cats influence how humans perceive, define, and interact with them. However, language and the monopolisation and politicisation of 'knowledge' remains a powerful means by which those in power assert and justify their dominance (Stibbe 2001).

4. Biopolitical Control over Feline Bodies

How we talk about animal others, as reporters, scholars, politicians, marketers, and other social influencers, has real-life consequences for members of that group (see Baker 2001; Hill et al. 2022; Kunst – Hohle 2016; Stibbe 2001; Szydlowski et al. 2022). The media and marketing professionals draw upon the belief systems of their target demographic to sell stories, ideas, and products. During the Covid19 pandemic, UK news publishers used stories about animals being villains (disease vectors) or victims (zoo and companion animals) to promote the political and social ideals of the press and their respective readership (Hooper et al. 2022). How an animal (or group or species) is described in lay discourses also provides insight into how they are perceived, and how much is influenced by society and lived experiences (Hill 2023). Ultimately words lead to actions, and biopolitics depends on the cohesive power of language to persuade and justify state control over bodies.

4.1. The Villains and Victims of Conservationist Rhetoric

One way in which biopolitics encompasses more-than-human dynamics is evident in how nature is ordered, ranked, secured, and regulated (Biermann – Anderson 2017). Conservation science and practice is essentially governance over life and death (Biermann – Anderson, 2017; Hodgetts 2017; Srinivasan 2017). Biopolitical control and manipulation of populations stems from the collection and analysis of data and knowledge-building programmes. For example, ornithologists started cataloguing and tracking birds in the late nineteenth century, and today international networks of researchers collaborate in catching, ringing, releasing, re-capturing, and sharing electronic data on avian migration patterns (Hinchliffe 2016). However, this seemingly benign scientific interest in birds turned political with the advent of H5N1, a highly pathogenic zoonotic virus also known as avian influenza (Hinchliffe 2016).

Through the migratory maps produced by ornithologists "pathways from avian to human lives through the amplificatory effects of domestic bird flocks" led to fear and actions to mitigate the threat (Hinchliffe 2016: 164).

There is strong evidence that cat over-population is a serious threat to biodiversity in many ecosystems, particularly in North America, Australasia, and islands where small wildcat species are not native fauna (e.g. Bellard et al. 2016; Doherty et al. 2016; Legge et al. 2017; Loss – Marra 2017; Medina et al. 2016). This has led to strategies aimed at reducing and controlling feline populations, namely 'feral' (unowned) cats. Several scholars have written about the biopolitics of 'feral' and wildlife management (e.g. Biermann – Anderson 2017; Hodgetts 2017; Holm 2020; Johnston 2019; Srinivasan, 2017). Essentially, control over wild and domesticated animal bodies is exerted to protect that which is deemed worthy of protection. Urban spaces are also shaped by human attempts to control the world around them. Small birds are nurtured and fed, while rodents are removed or killed. Furthermore, the bodies of domesticated species (namely cats and dogs) continue to be subjugated to human control over their freedom and reproduction (Blanc 2020; Redmalm 2019). In a biopolitical analysis of pet keeping, David Redmalm concluded that companion animals "exist on the threshold between invaluable and disposable life" as both commodities and beloved members of the family (2019: 248). As predators of wildlife, cats are framed as the villains if their prey is not deemed killable (Hill 2022).

In Hill (2022) I examined how comments responding to articles related to predation by cats may be contributing to a moral panic over roaming companion cats. An integral part of moral panic theory is the language used by the media and other human actors to villainize individuals within the context of a perceived threat (Cohen 2011; Garland 2008; Goode – Ben-Yehuda 2017; Young 2011). This is driven by a conservationist rhetoric that frames roaming cats everywhere as an ecological problem, rather than engage with the nuances and variables of specific ecosystems (Lynn et al. 2019; Lynn – Santiago-Ávila 2022; Turner 2022). The discourses examined in my datasets flowed from conservation science to the media, and the public reflected the confused and convoluted ways people think (and talk) about cats. However, rather than a single moral panic whereby cats and/or 'irresponsible' guardians are being framed as the villains, there appears to be a secondary, reactionary panic over cats becoming victims of mass culling (Hill 2022). Language condones, criminalises, legitimises, normalises, or justifies beliefs or actions. The media plays a central role in defining the boundaries of classifications such as 'feral' or 'pest' that render groups of free-living animals more killable (Hill et al. 2022; Schuurman – Dirke 2020; Sutton – Taylor 2019). The 'feral' prefix in particular functions to further the feline 'folk devil' trope that is central to moral panic theory (Hill 2022; Hill et al. 2022; Holm 2020; Mica 2010). Even amongst cat guardians, 'ferals' were often perceived being inherently different (undesirable, unredeemable) from the cats they love and cherish (Hill 2022).

Even amongst cat guardians, the predation behaviours of cats are considered a less desirable feline trait (Crowley et al. 2020b; Hill 2023). Predation simply refers to the preying of one animal on another, but when it loses its 'naturalness' it becomes something more sinister and unacceptable (Howell – Taves 2021). For example, when a cat kills a rodent, it is more often considered 'natural' or 'desirable,' but less so when the prey is a small bird. Amongst my datasets, many voices framed cats as 'evil' or 'murderers' of small birds, who 'kill for fun' rather than subsidence. Conversely, cats were defended by others as 'natural' hunters and their behaviour tolerated (and occasionally admired) (Hill 2023). The latter leads to the assertion that cats need to be able to roam freely to live full and happy lives, a position held

by several scholars and cat guardians (Abbate 2020; Foreman-Worsley et al. 2021; McLeod et al. 2015; Palmer – Sandøe 2014; van Eeden et al. 2021). A prominent theme that emerged from my qualitative discourse analysis was the assertion that cats have a moral (and sometimes legal) right to roam, with commenters referring to their own cats, community cats, or roaming feline friends (Hill 2023). Variations of 'no one owns a cat' were oft stated phrases, with comments implying that you cannot expect a cat to comply with human rules such as restrictions on roaming. Conversely, there was the notion that as a domesticated species cats depend on humans to protect them from the many dangers encountered outdoors (Hill 2024a). Domestication also underpins arguments asserting that humans have a duty to protect wildlife from predation by 'out of control' populations of domesticated species such as cats (Hill 2022; Szydlowski et al. 2022). The language of, and perceptions of 'domestic,' 'wild,' and 'feral' frame cats as villains and victims. Similar discourses underpin beliefs about confining cats to either protect wildlife or keep the cat safe (or both) (Hill 2022; Hill 2024a).

4.2. Bylaws and Social Norms

Another form of biocontrol in action is the implementations of bylaws to control behaviours. For example, the twenty-first century has seen smoking bans implemented in public spaces around the world. However, these bylaws could not have come about without epidemiological evidence that problematised passive smoking, nor could they have been successfully implemented without evidence of public acceptability (Young et al. 2010). The same is true for regulations on companion animals (or on companion animal guardians). Using Foucault's theory of governmentality and applying post-humanist insights, Melanie Rock (2013) took the City of Calgary's bylaws on companion animals as a case study to understanding how bylaws were constructed and adopted. Rock (2013) brought to light how both positive and negative associations with cats and dogs influenced the wording, implementation, and compliance with local bylaws pertaining to companion animals. For example, the wording of Calgary's *Responsible Pet Ownership Bylaw* deliberately ensured 'running at large' was not restricted to dogs, following complaints about cats defecating in gardens (Rock 2013).

The notion that guardians ('owners') should control their cat was common amongst those in my datasets who were opposed to roaming cats for a variety of reasons (Hill 2023). Cats killing other animals was a theme most associated with wildlife, particularly birds, but occasionally comments referred to attacks on domesticated animals such as chickens or indoor cats being bothered by neighbourhood cats in their garden. Other trespassing and property damage complaints were also not uncommon. Zoonosis was usually combined with other gripes and comments about roaming cats being generally unwelcome (Hill 2023). Cat predation on wildlife was a particularly contentious issue in of itself, but media reports of the ecological damage caused by cats were also oftentimes taken out of context and used to justify a generic disdain for neighbourhood cats (Hill 2022). Complaints of cats defecating in gardens were prominent, and even those with cats sometimes joined the discourses about 'responsible' pet owners by explaining they keep their cats inside because it is the 'neighbourly' thing to do (Hill 2023).

Sometimes laws are considered necessary to ensure compliance with social expectations, but there is an obvious power imbalance in how these expectations are constructed in relation to other-than-human animals. Laws are enacted and enforced via social mechanisms – shaming non-conformers and reporting transgressors (Garbarino 2022;

Srinivasan 2013). Annika Skoglund and David Redmalm (2017) used the term "doggy-biopolitics" to describe a self-regulatory mechanism that reinforces socialised norms of idealised dog-human relationship. Using America's First Dog (Bo Obama) as an illustrative example, Skoglund and Redmalm (2017) described how Bo was central to public displays of family values. As First Dog, Bo Obama facilitated "a display of cuddly management" and though human–canine relations allowed the president's family "to manifest empathy, a rich emotional life and authenticity" that provided an "assurance that they hold the truest of intentions when it comes to US governing" (Skoglund – Redmalm 2017: 19), importantly, it was Bo's "significant otherness" (Haraway 2008: 165) that allowed more intense emotional expressions and articulations of empathy than would be achievable between human managers and subordinates (Skoglund – Redmalm 2017). Furthermore, such displays depend on socially constructed norms of dog guardianship that are in turn influenced by dog-human intersubjectivity.

The data examined as part of my doctoral studies contained discourses comparing cats to dogs. For the most part this appeared to be light-hearted banter but revealed an underlying tension and disparities about how companion animals and their guardians 'should' behave (Hill 2023). Dogs were frequently presented as an exemplar of the 'ideal pet' and dog guardians as being 'responsible owners' because dogs were not permitted to roam unaccompanied. In response, many comments passionately defended the 'virtues' of cats, namely their independence and 'wild-like' nature. The demographic represented in the comments did not question that a dog's place was in the home and on the leash, or that guardians were responsible for their dog's behaviour. Conversely, there was much disagreement about whether cats should be confined to the home or free to roam (Hill 2023). David Redmalm pointed out how companion animal species are more interesting than those domesticated in other capacities because, although they "are affected by human treatment and change their behaviour accordingly" they are also granted "the freedom to move around in contexts dominated by humans and affect their owners and others" (2019: 243). It is tempting to speculate that cats influence cat-human cultures more than their canine counterparts. Alternatively, it could be that cats represent an anomaly born from their liminal status as neither wild nor fully domesticated (Crowley et al. 2020a; Holm 2020; Jaroš 2021; Schuurman – Dirke 2020).

Amongst the discourses about cats were examples of cats asserting agency. Guardians sometimes lamented over their cat's refusal to stay indoors and constant attempts at escape. Others shared stories of their previously outdoor cat happily settling into being an indoor-only cat (Hill 2023). Stereotypes of cats being aloof and unloving were fervently challenged, with an abundance of examples of cats showing affection and bonding with their humans.

4.3. Desexed Cats as Productive Biopolitical Bodies

A prominent theme amongst the discourses examined in my doctoral thesis was the assertion that cats should be spayed or neutered, especially those who roam (Hill 2023). Although some did support killing as a more effective form of population control, there were no voices objecting to spaying or neutering per se. The effectiveness of neutering as a social norm is supported by data that demonstrates almost 80% of owned cats in both the US and the UK are desexed (Chu et al. 2009; Sánchez-Vizcaíno et al. 2017). However, the belief that other-than-human animals, including companion animals, should be routinely neutered is not culturally universal (Mohd Kashim et al. 2020; Risley-Curtiss et al. 2006). While neutering and spaying of cats and dogs is routinely promoted by veterinarians in the US and the UK for

health benefits, the belief that the benefits outweigh the risks is not universal amongst European vets (Palmer et al. 2012). One reason behind routine neutering of indoor-living companion animals is to make them 'better pets' by circumventing issues that displease humans, but do not directly affect the companion animal's welfare. For example, motivating factors for guardians to neuter include reducing Tomcat spraying, which offends human olfactory senses and damages their furniture (Palmer et al. 2012). An anecdotal observation from cat appreciation Facebook groups is that those who post about their cats having kittens are invariably inundated by comments berating them for not getting their cat fixed. Often the excuse given is that the cat escaped, which is something a queen is more likely to attempt when in heat (Mckenzie 2010).

Clare Palmer (2001) pointed out how the practice of spaying and neutering cats is not simply about making them sterile and preventing unwanted (from the human perspective) pregnancies. The more extensive surgeries are designed to "desexualize animal bodies, and in addition, to produce particular behavioural changes: placidity, docility, less tendency to roam and a slackening in territoriality (and accompanying habits, like urinating on the furniture)" (Palmer 2001: 357). By neutering a cat, we are taking away some of their agency but, at the same time, their desire to roam is reduced. A neutered male will be more content to stay indoors, but he is not the same cat as he would have been if he were reproductively intact. A neutered male is also less prone to urine spraying (Horwitz 2019), and urine-smelling furniture is typically undesired by human household members. While spaying and neutering can be considered biopolitical technologies that control reproduction and behaviour (Redmalm 2019), cats do not consent to desexing nor directly promote the desexing of other cats. Thus, under a Foucauldian framework the repression of his sexual behaviour renders a cat "productive" in that he better fits into the social construct of a 'companion animal' and as such contributes to the social norm of cat guardianship.

5. Feline Community Members

Urban spaces are more than just human societies and human architecture, and human societies are more than societies where humans interact with other humans. Anna Tsing (2012) postulates that the history of humanity is an entwined web of interspecies dependences. According to Dominique Lestel, every human society ever studied has "developed privileged relations (that is to say that they are not purely instrumental) with at least one non-living – animal or vegetable – natural species which is found to be a part of the society considered *ipso facto*" (2014a: 94). Lestel (2014a) uses the concept of "hybrid communities" to understand the relationship between humans and other animals that cohabit the same space. These "hybrid communities" share common interests, attempt to reconcile conflicting interests, and in doing so co-create shared meanings (Lestel 2014b). Nonetheless, the issue of power relations that exist between human and other animals cannot be ignored. This is exemplified throughout my datasets, where discourses were mostly couched in anthropocentric terms (Hill 2023). Nor can one disregard the tendency of human animals to distance themselves from their inherent animality. Furthermore, animality, stresses Lestel, "is determined by the relations that humans and animals develop together, relations that are subject to the history of the human" (2014: 62). In human dominated societies, those animals deemed most close to humans (companion animals), or who please or serve humans in some ways are privileged. Those that threaten or inconvenience humans are vilified and persecuted. Cats as a species occupy a liminal status

of both 'pet' and 'pest' (Crowley et al. 2020a; Holm 2020). However, while cats do assert their agency and influence humans, when they live within human dominated societies, they have needed to conform to thrive.

Regarding the conceiving of rights and responsibilities afforded to different groups of cats in the community – companion animals, free-living, stray, etc. (Schaffner 2022), the political theory of animal rights developed by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2011) in *Zoopolis* might be useful. *Zoopolis* extended modern citizenship theory, which defines universal negative rights due to all sentient beings and assigns positive rights due to them based on our relationships to them as citizens, denizens, or foreigners (Donaldson – Kymlicka 2011). Using this framework, all cats would have the negative right to be free from suffering and persecution, but only certain cats (based on their ties to the area and/or human community members) would have positive rights and be considered community members (Schaffner 2022). This is akin to how humans are granted positive rights, for example, the right to vote in elections or run for office is based on immigration status.

6. Conclusion

The discourses examined in my doctoral studies highlighted the different attitudes and cultural expectations regarding cats and cat guardianship within predominantly English-speaking 'Westernised' societies (Hill 2023). While cats do influence humans, they none-the-less live in a human dominated society. Foucault's ideas about control and biopower were first developed within a humanist framework, addressing the art of government in relation to human societies and the construction of human subjects. A lack of serious consideration of other-than-human subjects reflected the regimes of knowledge and power that reinforced human dominance over other-than-human animals (Chrulew 2017). However, human societies do not exist in a vacuum and no cultures are comprised solely of human animals. Kristin Asdal et al. (2016) suggested two revisions or re-emphases to the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics, namely, that biopolitics should be recognised as not only about humans, and that the relation between life and politics needs both theoretical and empirical specificity. A biopolitical framework can be applied to understand methods of control and power over other-than-human life, and here it has provided a means to understand cat-human relations.

The knowledge produced by, and the language of conservation science have led to the sanctioning of large-scale cat culls, restrictions on roaming, and trap-neuter-release initiatives (see Doherty et al. 2019; Eyles – Mulvaney 2014; Lynn 2015). The latter is also advocated for by welfarists who recognise poor welfare outcomes from over-population (Levy – Crawford 2004; Natoli et al. 2022; Slater 2002). Whether to protect wildlife or the cats themselves, biopower is exerted over feline bodies via desexing. Likewise, the language of 'domestication,' 'wild,' and 'feral' are translated to different notions of 'catness' and beliefs about what is 'best for cats,' and ultimately to social expectations, pressures, and bylaws restricting the roaming of cats. Veterinarian and welfarist recommendations of desexing are instrumental in normalising neutering and spaying, which in turn has led to cats becoming productive biopolitical bodies by behaving as 'good' companion animals or community members.

Biopower is not inherently bad. However, it is important to recognise the power differential between humans and cats, and attempt to consider the feline perspective. Cats are individuals in terms of personality, life history, and current circumstances, and thus have very different wants and needs. What is best for one cat might not be so for another. For

example, insisting all free-living cats are taken into homes and shelters will only benefit a subpopulation and may cause unnecessary distress to unsocialised cats. In some cases, a community approach is preferable, whereby cats are trapped, neutered, vaccinated, and released, and feeding stations are maintained by volunteers to monitor cat wellbeing (McDonald – Clements 2019; Slater 2002). Urban free-living cats are more likely to be viewed positively when referred to as 'community cats' (McDonald – Clements, 2019), a term that implies they belong and fosters a care in the community attitude. Therefore, we can change the dialogue and refer to free-living cats as 'community' cats rather than 'feral,' 'stray,' or 'street' cats.

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CHAPTER 6

‘The Parable of the Chicken’: Humans and Animals in Permaculture Farming

Judit Farkas

Abstract

Permaculture—a lifestyle, agricultural method, and movement that has been gaining increasing popularity in Hungary—poses a number of questions relevant to the field of anthrozoology because of the role animals play in its special approach to the world. In this paper, I seek to demonstrate how animals feature in permaculture farming and its attendant lifestyle, exploring such issues as the relationship between humans and animals it presupposes; how the presence of animals shapes daily farm life, nutrition, and social relationships; what considerations and strategies a family engaged in the practice applies to the development of its flocks, herds, etc.; and what might prompt such a family to change or reduce the number of animals it keeps. I will moreover attempt to explore these topics within a framework that extends beyond mere thoughts on chicken-keeping to posit observations that will contribute to a broader understanding of the relationships between humans and animals, and humans and nature, based on the ethical principles of custodianship and responsibility.

Keywords

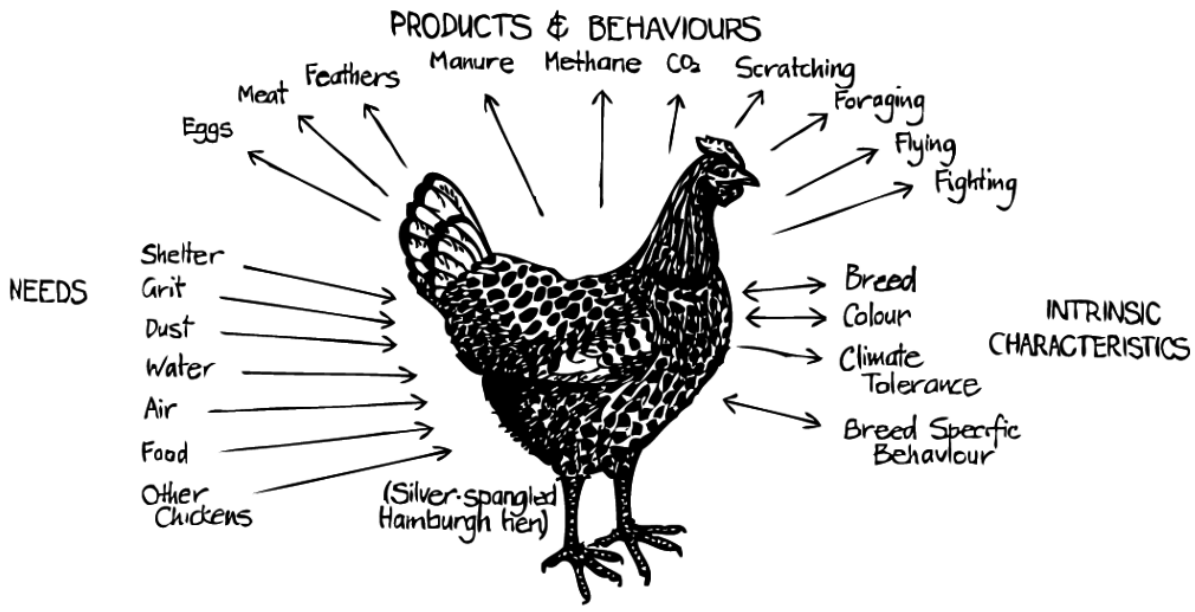
permaculture, ecovillages, multispecies commoning, human-animal relationships

1. Introduction

The title of this paper comes from a book by Bill Mollison (1928-2016), the Australian researcher who is considered the father of permaculture farming. It is a story intended to convey the essence of permaculture by comparing the practices of hen-keeping in factory farms with those in permaculture farms (see Figure 1). Accordingly, the factory-farmed chicken requires the farmer to produce feed and provide shelter, and this in turn requires large-scale agriculture with all its disadvantages—roads, fuel, and the like. Poultry kept in tight quarters for a single, express purpose (eggs or meat) require pharmaceuticals, heat, and various other inputs. As they are not independent, they rely on a great deal of human labour. Furthermore, one might question the quality and health value of the product this process yields. By contrast, the permaculture chicken is kept in the open, where it scratches and turns the earth, removes various soil-dwelling pests for food, and produces fertiliser. Permaculture chickens additionally consume weeds, insects, and snails, and even eat kitchen wastes. At night, they fly into the trees to protect themselves from foxes; by day they roll in the dust to rid themselves of parasites. If they are kept in greenhouses, they will even produce some

heat, protecting seedlings from the frost. They can also be entertaining; and of course, they produce eggs, feathers, and meat for human use. All the farmer has to do is to keep them in a place where all of this is viable, where there is some kind of henhouse, and where they are shielded from the slyer foxes and birds of prey. It is important that the farmer not be his animals' servant (Mollison 1988: 38–39).

Figure 1. Products and behaviours of a hen



Source: (Mollison 1988: 38, Fig. 3.1.)

The word 'permaculture,' a portmanteau of 'permanent' and 'agriculture,' is defined as "'a design system for creating sustainable human environments,' whose underlying ethical principles are the protection of the Earth and its human inhabitants and the fair distribution of goods" (Hungarian Permaculture Association 2024). In Hungary, too, permaculture constitutes a lifestyle, agricultural method, and movement that has become increasingly popular,[1] and that poses various relevant questions for the field of anthrozoology due to the significant role animals play in its special approach to the world.

In this paper, I seek to demonstrate how animals are used in permaculture and its attendant lifestyle, exploring such issues as the relationship between humans and animals it presupposes; how the presence of animals shapes daily farm life and human nutrition; what considerations and strategies a family engaged in the practice applies to the development of its flocks, herds, etc.; and what might prompt such a family to change or reduce the number of animals it keeps. I will moreover attempt to explore these topics within a framework that

[1] The permaculture movement was launched in the 1970s by Australian founders Bill Mollison and David Holmgren. It currently consists of a loosely bound web of local and international educational organisations that operates, as it were, as a 'network of networks'. The movement is closely tied to other grassroots initiatives such as the Ecovillages and Transition Towns Movements (the latter founded by Rob Hopkins, himself a permaculture designer; see Hopkins 2008), as well as various back-to-the-land groups.

extends beyond mere thoughts on chicken-keeping to posit observations that will contribute to a broader understanding of the relationships between humans and animals, and humans and nature, based on the ethical principles of custodianship and responsibility.

2. Research Framework and Methods

Today, numerous grassroots movements and ecological reform experiments seek to respond to contemporary environmental—and closely related social and economic—crises. Examples include ecovillages and other rural ecocommunities formed with the aim of inflicting as little damage as possible on their environments and providing living conditions that are sustainable in the long term. Keith Halfacree has termed this lifestyle "radical rurality," a mode of existence that is community-based, socially critical, deeply embedded in nature, and relatively self-sustaining (2007: 23). Such communities are typically located in remote areas of rural Hungary—either in segregated territories,[2] or existing municipalities—and pursue a way of life that is shaped by ecological principles, using renewable resources and eco-friendly technologies in construction, housekeeping, and waste and water management, and striving toward recycling and restrained consumption. They also attribute increased importance to community life.

I have been studying Hungary's ecovillages and rural eco-lifestyle communities for nearly fifteen years. During that time, I have had the opportunity to observe how such groups form and change and to witness numerous individual stories first-hand. In my research, I use ethnographic and cultural anthropological methods, with primary reference to participative observation and personal interviews, in addition to the study of written sources and digital materials (online lectures, meetings, seminars, etc.). It was in the course of these studies that my attention first shifted to permaculture: I was conducting my principal fieldwork project in a rural ecocommunity that builds largely on the concept of permaculture while living in the home of a woman who was a key figure in the Hungarian permaculture movement. Later, the same community would become a hub for the Hungarian Permaculture Association (Magyar Permakultúra Egyesület, or MAPER).[3]

Fundamentally, permaculture involves the following: the mimicry of natural ecological processes in the human environment and in the course of meeting human needs; the drastic reduction of consumption and energy usage, coupled with recycling; the creation of systems that foster independence (gardens, food and energy supply, community, etc.); the fulfilment of internal requirements via internal resources wherever possible; the use of each system component in multiple roles and the fulfilment of each important task by multiple components; the favouring and reinforcement of mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationships; diversity; and care for the wellbeing of not only humans, but all living things in a holistic approach to the land (Mollison – Holmgren 1978, Mollison 1988, Holmgren 2002). As a young woman I spoke to put it: "permaculture is *not just hoeing your garden*, but much more: it is a worldview and a lifestyle" (for which many would say community spirit is indispensable; KE. 2009).

[2] Here, I am not referring to administrative segregation, as in Hungary, all such communities belong to existing municipal entities, but to population units whose living space is located on the outskirts of a municipality, such as the Gyűrűfű (Ibafa) Krishna Valley (in Somogyvámos) or Galgafarm (in Galgahévíz). For more on the Hungarian ecovillage, see Farkas 2017b.

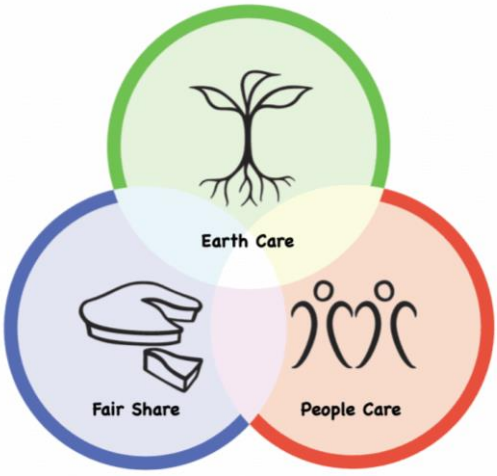
[3] For more on the Hungarian Permaculture Association, see their website: https://permakultura.hu/en/.

The above principles and objectives, together with the ethical considerations expressed by the motto 'People Care, Earth Care, Fair Share' (Figure 2), are closely linked to contemporary ecological and moral issues.[4] According to this point of view,

> the 'tangible' cause of the environmental problems – and of the economic and social ones closely connected to them – is the incredibly rapid growth of the global population with the corollaries of consumption and over-consumption, the overuse and depletion of natural resources, a decrease in fossil fuels, and diverse forms of environmental destruction. But underneath all this lies a worldview that evolved gradually in Europe and became prevalent in modernity. This worldview – with both religious and philosophical roots – removed the human being from the rest of the world, created the dichotomy of nature and society, interpreted the human being as the absolute master and exploiter of nature, and placed economic rationality in the foreground. (Farkas 2024: 7; see also Latour 2014)

The permaculture worldview rejects the interpretation of the human being as the legitimate exploiter of nature; in contrast, it strives to understand the intricate relations between the human being, society, and nature. It is based on an ecophilosophy which "inquires into questions of biodiversity, climate change, ecological integrity, sustainability, and issues of non-humans from the aspects of moral responsibility, intrinsic value and human–nature reciprocity" (Sarkar 2012: 2–4 qtd. in Farkas 2024: 29). Such ethical dilemmas occupy increasing space not only in our daily lives, but also in scientific discourse, interconnecting with each other in various fruitful ways, as we will see in the discussion to follow.

Figure 2. The ethics of permaculture



Source: https://permaculturepriciples.com/ethics/

[4] For more on the anthropological study of permaculture and opportunities for cooperation between the two, see Lockyer – Veteto 2013.

3. Theoretical Framework

Thus, in the study of the relationship between humans and nature, new approaches and theories have recently emerged, stemming largely from the necessity of addressing contemporary ecological challenges. The resulting understanding of the human role in these processes has motivated researchers to seek a new brand of ethics and, at the same time, prompted social scientists to refine their interpretations and understandings of the relationship itself. Examples include the concepts of "plant ethics" (see Kalhoff et al. 2018 and Szűcs 2023), and interspecies and multispecies studies (see, among others, Haraway 2008 and Hartigan 2021), all of which – from their own specific perspectives – draw attention to the necessity of rethinking the human-nature dynamic, where the former is considered to be the master and exploiter of the latter.

Also gaining importance in various disciplines are the concepts of "commons" and "commoning," around which an increasing number of studies have been constructed (see, among others, De Angelis 2006 and 2017, and Ostrom 2010).[5] Within this theoretical framework, the word 'commons' does not mean 'shared,' but rather a place with resources equally available for use and management by all. Most of the studies in question take as their point of departure the set of problems known as "the crisis of the commons," which refers to the observation that people either do not feel the commons actually belong to them, or they do not evaluate such places or resources as important. They then examine how this crisis exacerbates the overuse of resources, deepens the lack of control over how they are used, and accelerates the privatisation of commonly held property, and—beyond that—how all of this affects the management of the natural environment itself. Numerous researchers have even extended the theoretical framework of the commons to ecological systems and the relationship between humans and nature, attempting to interpret co-existence from the perspective of cooperation. The result is a concept called "multispecies commoning":

> the kind of place in which human–animal entanglements are made most explicit. It is where social, biological, and historical processes are so inextricably entwined with wider ecological processes as to be inseparable. … The multispecies commons explicitly deconstructs limited conceptions of the social and weaves them back together with multiple other threads that coalesce to create a greater, tangled web of ecological processes. (Baynes-Rock 2013: 210)

The author of this quote applies this approach in his research, including, for example, his work exploring the cooperation between humans and hyenas in Ethiopia (2013).[6] It is also the framework of multispecies commoning that Laura Centemeri uses to interpret the permaculture movement in Italy (2018) and that, in my case, has helped greatly—in combination with general ecological principles—in understanding how permaculture views animals and animal husbandry.

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[5] A fundamental work on this topic is Elinor Ostrom's *Governing The Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (2010).

[6] Baynes-Rock studied the cooperation between humans and hyenas in the Ethiopian city of Harar. What they found was that humans were feeding the hyenas, who in 'exchange,' refrained from harming their benefactors. The cooperative effort and peaceable hyena population it produced became a tourist attraction, which offered further incentive for locals to maintain the relationship. The Baynes-Rock study covers not only the economic side of the arrangement, but also its cultural and historical aspects.

In a certain sense, my work also relates to multispecies ethnography, an emerging field which Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich describe as follows:

> Multispecies ethnographers are studying the host of organisms whose lives and deaths are linked to human social worlds. A project allied with Eduardo Kohn's 'anthropology of life'— 'an anthropology that is not just confined to the human but is concerned with the effects of our entanglements with other kinds of living selves' (2007: 4)—multispecies ethnography centres on how a multitude of organisms' livelihoods shape and are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. (Kirksey – Helmreich 2010: 544)

My study introduces a mode of operation ethically rooted in a sort of multispecies thinking that derives from a cooperation between all living beings. That notwithstanding, it concentrates primarily on human actors: how they apply the principles that underpin permaculture farming in relation to animals and what role is accorded within that practice to multispecies commoning, that is, how humans strive to make commonly held resources (food, air, water, living space, etc.) universally accessible and secure the general wellbeing—including mutual benefit—of everyone involved.

4. Animals in Permaculture: A Case Study

In a permaculture farm, animals, like other elements, are incorporated into the overall system, where they assume meanings in line with the principles prescribed by the permaculture approach. This system includes not only domesticated animals, but also wild ones, such as mammals (foxes, deer, badgers), birds, insects, worms, molluscs, etc. Given the objective of creating a healthy ecosystem, factors such as support for soil organisms, pollinators, and creatures that provide pest control, including care for their habitats, are of vital importance. This is achieved by avoiding the use of chemicals and instead creating a variety of safe recesses and wet areas. A permaculture garden is, for this reason, nothing at all like the standard, manicured garden, but should resemble an ecosystem in nature, or so the argument goes. Seedlings do not occupy neat rows, the ground is not perfectly weeded and raked, there is no regular design of beds and paths, and the vegetables do not lie in a single, fixed location. Instead, the garden consists of a mosaic of patches occupying various places—including the sunnier spots among the trees—and located at various distances from each other. Piles of decaying branches provide places where animals (hedgehogs, lizards, insects) can hide and/or spend the winter, dead trees are left standing for wood-dwelling creatures to live in and break down, and ground cover vegetation and mulch ensure that the ground remains moist. Sprouting 'volunteer' plants, where not in the way, are simply left to grow. Unmowed patches of wildflowers that support bees and soil life are left in peace and paths to them are opened where necessary. Weeds are not eliminated everywhere, but are used as fodder for domesticated animals, left as food for insects, or even harvested for human consumption. Thus, permaculture farms strive not only for agrodiversity, but also overall biodiversity. To one not used to such sights, the impression will be of a garden that is overgrown, disordered, and unkempt – a picture completed by the frequent presence of domesticated animals: hens scratching under the trees or in empty vegetable patches, goats grazing on bushes, and pigs rooting in the soil (Figure 3). Permaculture, by definition, offers the order of nature, in contrast to the order of a conventional human conception.

Figure 3.

Photos: Judit Ruprech, 2022.

In accordance with permaculture's holistic approach, not only the horticultural practices support the animals, but the animals also support the farms in various ways. The parable of the chicken demonstrates how animals in permaculture farming are multiply beneficial, providing meat, milk, eggs, and manure while also mowing the lawn, turning the soil, eating kitchen wastes, hunting down pests, guarding assets, and even providing entertainment. In return, humans provide animals with a secure habitat that closely resembles the way they live in nature. This attitude is extended to all types of animals (and indeed, life forms in general). Beyond the recesses and hiding places mentioned above, permaculture farmers also put out water for insects and birds. Their jungle-like gardens are excellent nesting places, while the mere absence of chemicals benefits insect populations, which in turn pollinate plants and provide food for birds. Thus, we see that in the permaculture setting, all animals have their place and fill important roles. This notwithstanding, the analysis to follow will focus on the case of domesticated animals in the form of a case study showing how the complement of animals on one farm in particular was developed: what considerations were applied to their selection, how their numbers were determined, and how cooperation between humans and animals manifested. The following, therefore, is offered as a concrete example.

The family under scrutiny consisted of four members—husband, wife, and two children—though the younger members of the family unit, given their secondary school and higher education studies, lived off-farm and thus came home only a few days a month. This observation is important in that the absence of children affected the amount of human labour that could be applied to farm work.

As with most permaculture families I know, this family, too, began their rural life by planting a garden and an orchard and sowing a few fields of grain. Regarding animals, they began with just a dog and a cat, introducing other species only gradually. Animal care is a serious responsibility in any farming situation, one that involves considerable work and an ongoing commitment and that requires caregivers to organise their daily schedules around feeding, watering, pasturing, and milking. Animal care cannot be put off as—under certain circumstances—a vegetable garden can. A farm that takes up husbandry must also develop relationships of mutual assistance and cooperation with neighbours and the wider community, so that there will be others to watch and feed the animals when the farm owners are absent, in need, etc. This is especially true where milk-producing animals are present, because while anyone can collect eggs, milking a cow or goat demands special skills. For the family I studied, at first, another community family—one that had been farming for a long time and was thus already skilled in caring for animals—provided that secure backup in such situations. Though this support family still lends a hand today as the occasion demands, since then, multiple members of the study family have since come to master the ins and outs of animal husbandry and can now themselves help others.

As for the object of that care, the first animals to arrive were the chickens—originally purchased, later hatched. The number of animals was then increased once new land (fields, pastures, woodland) had been acquired. The chickens were followed by goats, known for requiring little care while offering considerable benefits in clearing territory and controlling undergrowth. Food for these animals came primarily from foraging, which accords with the two permaculture principles that animals should be as self-sufficient as possible and that the farm should avoid purchasing feed. Another important consideration with chickens and goats is that both types of animal provide for the kitchen (eggs and milk), even without eventual slaughter. This is a key point for vegetarian families: though animals are a fundamental component of permaculture, one need not necessarily kill and eat them.[7] At the same time, male animals in such households (roosters, billy goats) are a serious stumbling block: in most families, they are given away as per the culture's distributive ethic. Even many meat-eating families choose not to 'import' meat when not producing their own, turning to the consumption of meat only when it is brought by guests. When, however, meat does appear on the farm in the form of 'extras' (roosters, young male goats), these are consumed.[8]

After the chickens and goats, things began to pick up pace, and sheep, pigs, ducks, rabbits, cows (and later their calves), a donkey, and a horse were added. Ultimately, the larger animals spent their days in the pasture, the pigs in a fenced-in area, and the poultry with the pigs, though a small group of hens ranged free in the gardens. Though this latter group moved up into the trees at night, many were snatched by foxes. Part of the reason for keeping so many animals was that the farm operated as a demo site. At the same time, the family wished to experiment *in situ* to discover how various animals could be incorporated into their own, particular system. The lessons learned were then combined with the continued findings

[7] That being said, the permaculture approach does not necessarily equal a vegetarian or vegan approach. This family has both vegetarian and non-vegetarian members. For the topic of regenerative agriculture and animal welfare, see Hargreaves-Méndez – Hötzel 2023 and Weis – Ellis 2021.

[8] This means, among other things, that here, the farm and the food consumed on it are much more closely related than is conventionally the case—that the foods produced exert a greater influence on the farmers' diets than in other households. Thus, the way people eat is shaped both by the principle of seasonality (that one should consume what can currently be harvested), and other factors similar to the one above. For more, see Farkas 2017b.

of other Hungarian permaculture farms so as to be of help to others seeking to adopt the lifestyle.

After several years, the family took the opportunity to rethink its husbandry practices, the feeling being that they 'needed to rationalise'.[9] An important component of this process was to weigh invested time and energy against experienced benefits: to discover what was worth keeping so as not to sap resources and tax the farm's emotional economy.[10] The size and complexity of the farm today vastly outstrips the faculties of two individuals, and as the family's various members exhibited a greater attachment to gardening, they ultimately opted to reduce the number of animals kept: though they loved the pigs and found them smart, clean, and sociable, their rapid reproduction rate meant that they had to go. There was also the problem of providing appropriate pasture for the sheep, while the abundance of burrs made it difficult to keep the animals' wool clean. The well-being of the ducks would have required a larger pond, an amenity that, for the time being, remains a long-term objective.[11] The donkey was bored and uncomfortable with only the horse for company, nor was the animal as useful for hauling or pulling a cart as the horse had proven to be (Figure 4). In the end, she was given away to a place where she became a star animal and received a lot of attention. A side benefit of this was that the family knew where she had gone and could, to some extent, track her progress. Generally speaking, when selling or giving away animals, the family first checked into what conditions they could expect, what living space they would receive, and how they would be treated. They decided to keep the horse, as she could be both ridden, and hitched to a cart or wagon for use in hauling (firewood, straw bales, etc.). The cows (the original purchased female and her heifer calves) also remain, as the farm offered them sufficient living space (pasture and barn), and their milk formed an important part of both the current family diet, and future income plans.

Part of the reason for selling the sheep was an argument put forth by the lady of the house: "The sheep aren't *my* animals," she said; "The baby goats will come to me and be cute; the lambs won't." In other words, the sheep were not conducive to the type of intimate relationship that she liked to have with her animals. This ties in directly with another decision-making factor: that of companionship. "We like to spoil our animals. Here, even the goats are our dogs." Sheep are timid creatures, ones that could never be companion animals as the family understood the term. Still, even with animals that do provide this level of intimacy, the family senses the difference between those born among them and those purchased or otherwise acquired: "We're close in a different way," they say in reference to the calf born on the farm versus the cow they had purchased.

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[9] In fact, the community was characterised in general by pragmatic thinking: even the location of their farm was selected based on practical considerations (water and soil quality, absence of polluting industry, factors supporting and/or restricting an ecologically healthy lifestyle, the community's degree of isolation, the nature of local schools, etc.). See Farkas 2016. This practical approach—as Keith Halfacree discovered in his study of communities that had moved to such rural areas in England—"challenges the abstracted and aestheticised idyllised vision of a neatly manicured and commodified rurality, since it prioritises permacultural concerns about more holistic connections between people and their environment over superficial appearances" (Halfacree 2007: 134).

[10] In other words, the matter of individual wellbeing—of how far one can go in sticking to one's principles and when doing so will work to the individual's or family's (physical and mental) detriment—is also factored in. Feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and self-fulfilment are particularly important, so that when the overall lifestyle quality is assessed, such factors are at least as crucial to the calculus as matters of material benefit. The economic literature calls this "emotional economy". See Birtalan et al. 2022.

[11] By comparison to factory farms, even this was a veritable paradise. Here, perfect well-being should be understood as relevant to the animals' requirements in nature.

In closing, it is worth examining the respective places in this system of the two domesticated animals with which humans are most familiar. Cats, for their part, do not require much care and can live independently in terms of finding food and shelter. Their role in farm life is an essential one of keeping pests, such as mice and other small rodents, under control. Dogs, on the other hand, require more care. They cannot find food independently (unless they are accustomed to hunting birds and other wild animals, which, on a farm, would be a grievous problem). Still, their role as guard and companion animals is an important one. Food for farm canines can be obtained from local resources on the basis of the principle of mutual benefit: dogs can eat the parts of slaughtered animals that humans cannot, so that they do not go to waste.

In this case, therefore, the key factors applied to decision-making regarding animals were 1. time and energy constraints and the animals' relationship to the emotional economy; 2. sentimental considerations; and 3. the well-being of the animals themselves. In short, on the whole, decisions took both the human, and the animal perspective into account.

Figure 4.

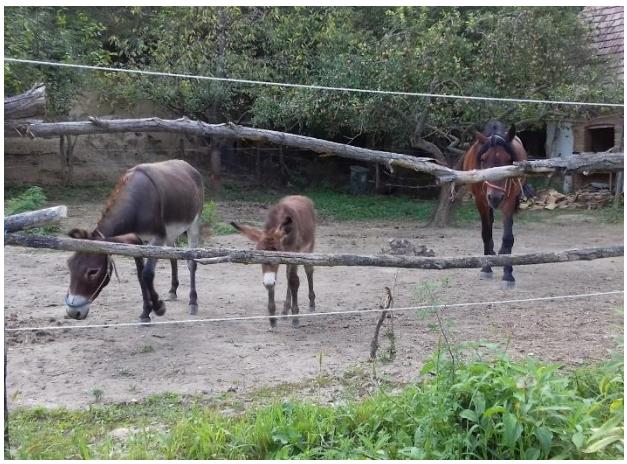

Photo: Judit Farkas, 2018.

5. Summary

Permaculture regards human settlements as socio-ecological systems whose purpose is to decrease or optimise energy intake, including human labour. The method it applies to achieve this is to mimic the healthy natural ecosystem. The farm and farming household in this conceptualisation consists of a community of living beings made up of plants, animals, humans, and invisible soil-dwellers. The members of this multispecies collective utilise common assets together, on a shared basis. It is my opinion that this is a perfect example of what the professional literature terms multispecies commoning. I, of course, do not deny that it is still largely the human component that decides as to what specific creatures make up the system, an observation that applies to both non-domestic animals, and non-domestic plants: farmers will attempt to exclude foxes to prevent them from eating their poultry and use goats to eliminate brush from their pastures. At the same time, in such an environment, humans' decision-making power position and relationship to nature obviously greatly differ from one in which nature is valued exclusively as a resource (food, aesthetic enjoyment). Permaculture

farms stand for ecological fairness, equality among species, shared living space, and shared resource use—for a relationship to nature in which humans strive to be not dominant, but equal; not masters, but assistants; to build upon a foundation of mutual benefit. Though animals do serve to satisfy basic human needs, within the framework of multispecies commoning, they have as much right to local resources, and put forward as great a contribution as their human counterparts do.

Acknowledgment

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CHAPTER 7

The Controversy between Humanism and Posthumanism from the Perspective of the Concept of the 'Assistance Animal'

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to consider the ontological and ethical status of the animal in the context of the controversy between the ideas of humanism and posthumanism, which defines our current state of cultural being. This controversy is mostly reconstructed and represented on the basis of Jacques Derrida's and Donna Haraway's philosophical insights regarding the animal, as well as their delineated guidelines for explanations of the relationship between the human and the animal. The analysis provided in this paper focuses on contemplating the concept of the 'assistance animal'. It demonstrates that both humanist and posthumanist paradigms are characterised by an effort to 'transanimalise' animals—or to ascribe certain characteristics to them that inevitably leave the animal—both ontologically and ethically—in the orbit of human power.

Keywords

human, animal, humanism, posthumanism, ethics, assistance animal

1. Introduction

From time immemorial, humans have sought to transform various aspects of reality for their existential gain. Since human existence has always been (and still is) based on close interactivity with other animals (hereafter also referred to as 'nonhuman animals' and, occasionally, 'animals'), the latter have undoubtedly played a major role in this reality-transforming process. Even certain milestones of humanity's development—such as the emergence of agriculture, the formation of settled communities and political structures, or the rise of religious thinking—were intimately related to the ever-changing relationship between the human and the animal (Ritvo 1997; Henninger-Voss 2002; Kean – Howell 2018; Carew 2023). Although this relation had always been intellectually and practically ambiguous and nuanced (animals were not only exploited, but revered as well), humanistically oriented anthropocentric philosophical and Judeo-Christian thinking, prevalent throughout the 'Western'[1] world for centuries, has allowed for—as the proponents of cultural posthumanism

[1] It should be acknowledged that the term 'Western' is a heavily contested term, and can thus be interpreted and presented in different ways (see, for example, Browning – Lehti 2009); however, it is the belief of this paper's

vehemently claim nowadays—the establishment of various flawed human practices regarding animals (see, for example, Wolfe 2003; Haraway 2008; Braidotti 2013). In turn, all of these practices, in the broadest sense, are constituted by the intellectually faulty belief that the animal is merely an existential 'appendix' to the human.

Proponents of the posthumanist line of thinking regard the process of 'objectifying' the animal critically and in their works typically maintain a view that this process arises from humanist anthropocentrism and is precisely the main reason why the animal is understood and treated today as a mere resource—a raw material that can be utilised in various ways to ensure the full-fledged existence of the human. By intensely criticising this humanist position, which grounds the traditionally dominant hierarchical distinction between the human and the animal, proponents of posthumanism tend to attribute moral dignity not only to humans, but nonhuman animals as well—or, at the very least, grant them an ethical status that ensures them a dignified existence. This alleged posthumanistically oriented conceptual and practical shift in the relationship between the human and the animal is made apparent by the rapidly growing field of animal studies, the intensive development of animal rights, and the relentless struggle of these rights organisations against the various forms of animal exploitation or extermination in experimental research, hunting activities, sectors of entertainment and animal husbandry, the fur industry, and many more.

Regarding academic discourse specifically, in which essential conceptual attitudes regarding the relationship between the human and the animal are formed and propagated, it should be noted that there is an increasing number of studies critical of humanist anthropocentrism as the sole adequate approach for comprehending and conceptualising reality; as such, there is a strong push for acknowledging the existence of other potentialities of experiencing and representing reality, arising from nonhuman animal existence. Much of this research is engaged not only epistemologically, but also ethically (see, for example, Bolton 2014; Lingren – Öhman 2019; Varsava 2014). One could claim that they mainly seek (even if it is not always stated outright) to disprove the traditional humanist view of the animal, conceptually manifested most prominently in the philosophical thought of René Descartes. On the one hand, the latter downplays the capabilities of the animal to experience and comprehend the world (by treating the animal merely as an unwitting being driven by blind instincts, or—to employ Cartesian terminology—a *bête-machine*), and, on the other hand, it establishes flawed models of human behaviour towards animals that encompass various coercive mechanisms, even killing.

In an effort to transcend the limits of traditional humanistically oriented ethical conceptions that relate the trait of dignity with exclusively human forms of rationality (such as the capability of language, the comprehension of oneself as a person and an agent, or the capacity for deliberate and intentional action), adherents of the posthumanist line of thinking tend to derive the dignity of nonhuman animals not from their resemblance to humans, but the very fact of their unique existence, which differs from human existence, and thus cannot be fully comprehended by the latter (see, for example, Derrida 2008; Calarco 2008; Despret 2016). Therefore, posthumanism, as a cultural and intellectual movement, is oriented towards criticising various ontological separations and hierarchies, and enables the emergence of new approaches to the explanation and presentation of inter-being relations constituting reality (see, for example, Wolfe 2010; Braidotti 2013; Ferrando 2019). However, in order to contemplate the problem of the relationship between the human and the animal

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author that the ancient Greek and Roman philosophical and Judeo-Christian religious legacy is what essentially constitutes the conceptual content of this term.

specifically, this paper poses the following question: does such posthumanist, morally oriented conception of the animal simultaneously imply its changing status in relation with the human, or do the fundamental conceptual premises of posthumanism themselves reinforce the dominant relationship between the human and the animal as established historically by the traditional line of humanist thought? The paper seeks to ascertain whether posthumanism, as a theoretical and ethical position that seemingly challenges the humanist paradigm and all practical forms of animal maltreatment that arise from it, nevertheless relegates to the animal virtually the same status of a human 'appendix,' thus propagating their continued treatment as an existentially-dependent being and allowing for increasingly profound—albeit subtler and more refined—ways to enslave and exploit the animal? The study presented in this paper employs the currently prevalent concept of the 'assistance animal' as its analytical focus point.

2. Posthumanism and the Relationship between the Human and the Animal

Jacques Derrida's famous ten-hour talk on the autobiographical animal, given at a conference at the end of the last millennium, became the basis for his posthumously released book *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008). The talk had garnered considerable attention in academic circles even before the volume appeared. It was published in scholarly journals, and predictably became a kind of a manifesto of posthumanist thinking, providing a basis for an in-depth reconsideration of the relationship between the human and the animal. To this day, the studies of this relationship often refer to the context of Derrida's philosophy.

The title of the aforementioned book by Derrida suggests, and its content evidently confirms, that its essential goal is to reconsider the logocentric worldview, the theoretical quintessence of which is derived from Descartes' philosophy and its basic philosophical (or, in a more general sense, cultural) premise *Cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am")—a principle that defines the possibilities of evaluating and representing reality. The philosophical and cultural relevance of this principle for the Western world could hardly be overstated. Western philosophy has always emphasised the importance of rational thinking and the ability to express it through language in the process of cognising the world, and, in this regard, clearly differs from Eastern philosophy, which instead stresses the importance of feeling, belief, authority, and meditative practices. It is precisely the human capacity for rational thinking, on which they ground their existence, that became the basis of the cultural model of Western civilisation. This model allows us to easily perceive and explain the relationship between the millennia-old veneration of the philosophical idea of *logos* and the emergence of modern information society that is based on scientific and expert knowledge. By critically reconstructing the conceptual premises that the intellectual and cultural condition of the Western world is grounded upon, Derrida seems to imply that logocentrism, which has enabled the radical separation of the human and the animal (by attributing *logos* only to the human), is characteristic not solely of the thought of Descartes, but can also be witnessed throughout the entire philosophical tradition stretching from Aristotle to Heidegger, including the philosophies of Kant, Levin, and Lacan (Derrida 2008: 27).

As it can be clearly surmised from Derrida's thought (*ibid*. x), philosophical logocentrism, which considers the animal to be deprived of *logos*, is inseparable from a position of mastery. It is precisely *logos*, or the capacity for rational thinking and language, that becomes the ontological and ethical wedge which hierarchically separates the human from the animal, while simultaneously creating a milieu for manifestations of violence. In the foreword to the

English edition of Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, philosopher Marie-Louise Mallet notes that such conception of the animal as a being deprived of *logos* empowers the human to treat the animal from a non-specifying coercive standpoint. Basing her view on Derrida's insights, Mallet claims that

> the violence done to the animal begins, he [*Derrida*] says, with this pseudo-concept of 'the animal,' with the use of this word in the singular, as though all animals from the earthworm to the chimpanzee constituted a homogeneous set to which '(the hu)man' would be radically opposed. As a response to that first violence, Derrida invents the word *animot*, which, when spoken, has the plural *animaux*, heard within the singular, recalling the extreme diversity of animals that 'the animal' erases, and which, when written, makes it plain that this word [*mot*] 'the animal' is precisely only a word. (*ibid*. x)

In the aforementioned book of his, Derrida describes at length an experience he had one morning when he felt the gaze of his cat observing him in the nude. This situation could only be made possible by the fact of a human subject being seen through the eyes of the Other and the fact of the subject's own reflexive feeling of shame arising from such experience. In presenting his confrontation with the animal's gaze, Derrida reveals how human self-consciousness and self-perception are deeply dependent on other, nonhuman gaze-perspectives. Derrida's insights regarding the detrimental homogenisation of animals, as well as the constitutive importance of the animal in respect of the human, have undoubtedly become the cornerstones of an intellectual foundation upon which animal studies and posthumanist philosophy have risen rapidly. Both of these mutually supportive intellectual directions, influenced strongly by Derrida's philosophical legacy, reject the fundamental humanist idea postulating that human rationality is the only adequate form of representing reality and that human knowledge (including self-knowledge) is absolutely 'hermetic,' that is, not affected in any meaningful way by other coexistent worldly entities.

Derrida's anti-Cartesian motion in the explanation of the human-animal relationship has highlighted the idea that even if we were to assume that an animal's consciousness is not analogous to that of a human (although Derrida himself tended to acknowledge that certain animals, chimpanzees, for example, could be considered more human-like), it is nevertheless apparent that animals have their own particular consciousness. This consciousness can even have a constitutive effect on human self-consciousness; it is also because this other consciousness is unknowable to humans, prompting them to acknowledge the limits of their own consciousness, which cannot exhaust all the possibilities of experiencing and knowing the world. From an epistemological point of view, Derrida's intellectual motion can also be treated as a sort of echo of the revolutionary philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Not unlike how Kant once radically changed the relationship between the cognising subject and the cognizable object by criticising the traditional view that human consciousness conforms to the objects of knowledge (and not *vice versa*), so did Derrida, in turn, enable the critique of the human as the sole knowing subject, while simultaneously explicating the fundamental dependence of this subject's consciousness on other forms of consciousness, perspectives, and knowledge.

Derrida's insights regarding the relationship between the human and the animal became important not only because they question humanist epistemological premises, but also because they attempt to reconsider humanistically oriented ontology and ethics from a

posthumanist perspective. The result of this reconsideration can be briefly described as a transition from the idea of human ontological exceptionality and uniqueness to the idea of human ontological relationality. The latter idea not only emphasises the constitutive significance of other entities to the very phenomenon of 'humanness' itself, but also—through the explication of the ontological relatedness of the human with others entities of reality (the relatedness which, in Derrida's philosophy, is described through the animal's ability to "look back")—acknowledges a necessity of new models of human behaviour (or ethics) in respect to these entities.

However, as noted by the acclaimed posthumanist philosopher Donna Haraway, despite having clearly perceived something more than a "machine reacting" in his cat's gaze, Derrida nevertheless "failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning" (Haraway 2008: 19–20). One can only agree with Haraway's view. Derrida had *de facto* limited his own experience with the trajectory of relating the human and the animal, as delineated by Jeremy Bentham, who emphasised *suffering*, not *logos* as their shared commonality. As suggested by Haraway's insights, this had certain positive ethical implications (ensuring greater human empathy towards animals, for one). However, the full ethical potential of recognising that the animal is more than a machine, and that their experience is not limited to mere reactive suffering but may encompass a much wider horizon of experiential and behavioural possibilities, was left unrealised. Haraway describes it all rather reproachfully, stressing that despite his insightfulness, Derrida did not pose certain philosophically engaged questions. According to her,

> [t]he question of suffering led Derrida to the virtue of pity, and that is not a small thing. But how much more promise is in the questions, Can animals play? Or work? And even, can I learn to play with *this* cat? Can I, the philosopher, respond to an invitation or recognize one when it is offered? What if work and play, and not just pity, open up when the possibility of mutual response, without names, is taken seriously as an everyday practice available to philosophy and to science? . . . My guess is that Derrida the man in the bathroom grasped all this, but Derrida the philosopher had no idea how to practice this sort of curiosity that morning with his highly visual cat. (2008: 22)

It would appear that all these reproachful questions raised by Haraway are posthumanistically oriented, inciting to reveal the entire potential of animal existence, essentially confirming the equality of the human and the animal through what Haraway herself describes as opening up "the possibility of mutual response." However, could it be that beneath this human effort to better 'know' the animal, by attributing it certain abilities (for example, those of "playing" or "working"), lies the good old anthropomorphising humanism, which manifests itself in respect to the animal merely through subtler forms of the latter's enslavement? When searching for the answer to this question, it would be expedient to examine the increasingly popular concept of the 'assistance animal' which undoubtedly includes the tendency to treat the animal morally.

3. Assistance Animal: Posthumanism Manifested, or Merely a New Stage of Humanism?

As it was already mentioned, ethical concepts inspired by posthumanist thought differ from humanist ethics in that the latter only attribute the status of an ethical subject to entities that are characterised by rational thought and language.[2] It is precisely this, despite the fact that intensive research of animals' cognitive abilities has so far prevented us from making the claim that animals (let alone *all* animals) are *logos*-endowed in the same way humans are, that enables us to reconsider the status of an ethical subject itself, and to extend the list of ethical subjects, which includes not only human and nonhuman animals, but also, for instance, robots and artificial intelligence.[3] The primary baseline for suggesting models for more ethical treatments of animals is derived not from the acknowledgment that they are capable of reason and language (even in their own specific ways), but from the fact that they are sentient beings and, as noted by both Bentham and Derrida, are at the very least capable of experiencing suffering.[4] Especially representative in this regard is Peter Singer's widely acclaimed 1975 book *Animal Liberation*, which remains highly influential to the formation of the ethical conceptualisation and treatment of animals, and where the term 'suffering' (and its derivatives) is used hundreds of times.[5] Already in the preface to the first edition of the book, Singer emphasises the aspect of suffering that originates from flawed human behaviour: "[t]his book is about the tyranny of the human over non-human animals. This tyranny has caused and today is still causing an amount of pain and suffering that can only be compared with that which resulted from the centuries of tyranny by white humans over black humans. The struggle against this tyranny is a struggle as important as any of the moral and social issues that have been fought over in recent years" (2002: xx).

Nevertheless, as noted by Haraway in her critique of Derrida's philosophical passivity in posing questions regarding the multitude of animal abilities, representing the animal through the lens of suffering has virtually left it constrained in the orbit of human will—or, as one could reasonably claim, confined within the limits of a specific kind of ethics, which could be termed 'pity ethics'. Because of this, the animal's inner potential for ontological and ethical

[2] Virtually all thinkers of posthumanism who stress the complexity of the ways in which reality can be experienced and perceived, typically maintain a critical view of the humanist understanding of ethics, which associates ethical status with rationality and capacity for language. Such critical view is also characteristic of some thinkers who, albeit not often listed among the classics of posthumanism, are nevertheless very relevant to the field of animal studies: Peter Singer, for instance, was intensely critical of the criteria of rationality and capacity for language because of their arbitrariness and use as an argument to justify human supremacy in regards to animals (Singer 2002).

[3] This is also proven by the fact that there is an increasing number of scholarly works intensively discussing the ethical status of artificial intelligence and robots (see, for example, Gunkel 2012; Floridi 2023; Bryson 2010). Among other aspects, they examine whether or not AI-controlled robots should be provided with certain rights. While scholars are busy discussing these questions, Saudi Arabia has already taken practical measures, granting citizenship to an AI-driven humanoid Sophia in 2017.

[4] It should be noted that such a reasoning for the ethical status of the animal is characteristic of certain thinkers of posthumanism, such as Kari Weil. In her paper "A Report on the Animal Turn" (2010), Weil refers to the sentience-based notion and practice of ethics as the "counterlinguistic turn" (12) and the "ethical turn" that has followed in its wake (13). As she describes it, the ethical turn is "an attempt to recognize and extend care to others while acknowledging that we may not know what the best form of care is for an other we cannot presume to know. It is a concern with and for alterity, especially insofar as alterity brings us to the limits of our own self-certainty and certainty about the world . . . this effort to attend to the ineffable is itself an ethical act" (13).

[5] The title of the fourth chapter of this book, "Becoming a Vegetarian… or how to produce less suffering and more food at a reduced cost to the environment," which, among other things, urges the reader to take active personal measures by changing their practical behaviour with animals, is a direct appeal to the motive of suffering.

autonomy was not fully realised. It also prevented the gradual revelation of the animal's potential for agency, as could have been done, for example, by elaborating the idea that at least some animals are capable of working. Such 'agencification' of animals (as well as their 'socialisation' by showing that they are not merely Aristotelian self-sufficient 'closed' systems,[6] but beings whose capacity for action opens them up to the world) would allow to consider ethical treatment of them not as a wilful human decision regarding adequate behaviour with other, nonhuman beings, but as an obligation arising from the very fact of the 'richness' of animal existence (or their dignity, if we were to use moral categories).

While animal studies are intensively focused on researching the cognitive abilities of animals in order to determine whether or not they are capable of language (even distinctive ones that are only partially comprehensible to humans),[7] some researchers, inspired by the spirit of these studies and echoing Haraway's philosophical belief in the actual existence of 'broader' animal abilities, attempt what could, in the most general sense, be presented as 'envoicing' the animal. Such initiatives include, but are not limited to, Vinciane Despret's attempts to present the extensive spectrum of perception and behavioural potentialities in animals, as exemplified by her book *What Would Animals Say If We Asked the Right Questions?* (2016). Additionally, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro seeks to expand the field of reality studies, as well as the Anthropocene condition that largely defines it today, by introducing viewpoints that engage with reality in a limited manner. For example, he refers to the relevance of the polar bear's viewpoint as one such perspective.[8]

Therefore, while various animal studies are intensively trying to prove that animals, or at least some of them, are physiologically capable of speech (understood in the most general sense, that is, attributing animals with such capabilities as rational thought, self-reflection, environmental empathy, understanding of causality and prediction of consequences, deliberated expression of needs and feelings), there is no doubt that their ethical and moral status is already 'speaking,' and increasingly loudly at that. The expansion of animal rights is evidence enough of this.[9] The larger part of the population (at least in the Western world) is aware that animals have certain rights that prove their status as legal and ethical subjects. In turn, this rapid shift in the treatment of animals (or at least some species) is also reflected in the fact that animals are increasingly ascribed certain moral traits, such as bravery or devotion to duty.[10] Few would be surprised today to see animals given honourable awards for

[6] This Aristotelian concept of the animal, which treats animals as beings whose existential interests are extremely narrow, never transcending their biological limits, was essentially characteristic of the entire classic philosophical thought, the tradition of which extends at the very least from Aristotle to Descartes.

[7] The gorilla Koko, who died in 2018 at the age of forty-six, is often given as an example of an animal capable of speech. Although Koko did not use human language, it is nevertheless maintained that she used a particular vocabulary containing more than a thousand words, and also understood several thousand English words. Koko's language skills are compared to those of a human toddler (see, for example, Main 2018; Koko.org 2024).

[8] "Seeing from the Point of View of Polar Bears" is the title of his and Déborah Danowski's interview given to Kristupas Sabolius (Danowski – Castro 2021).

[9] In a way, the expanding geography of the ethical and legal status of animals is also supported by a recent event that took place in South Korea while this paper was being prepared. On 9 January of 2024, South Korea's parliament passed a bill which banned breeding, slaughtering, and selling dogs for their meat. To this day, one can find many restaurants in South Korea which serve traditional Korean dishes made of dog meat. However, it would seem that the passing of this bill will not only force these restaurants to change their menus, but also become the catalyst of change in traditional Korean cuisine.

[10] The attachment of (human) moral traits, such as bravery, devotion to duty, and selflessness to animals is not a recent phenomenon. There are many famous examples dating back to ancient times, including Homer's Argos, King Arthur's Cavall, Togo, Hachiko, Smoky, and, arguably the most-well known canine icon of bravery

their loyal and selfless service (sometimes, not unlike heroic humans, they even receive such awards posthumously).[11] Even less surprising is that animals are being frequently involved in various labour practices,[12] where they are given the rather venerable title of 'assistance animals'. Even though the term 'assistant' seemingly denotes a subordinate status of the assisting subject in respect to the assisted subject, when applied to an animal it still carries an uplifting connotation; an animal described as an 'assistant' is perceived not as an irrational and unpredictable being, but one gifted with a certain degree of rationality and other noble abilities, such as being capable of acting purposely and helping others, thus implying a potential to provide utility and create common good. In view of the above, it can be reasonably stated that the philosophical question posed by Haraway regarding the animal's ability to work, at least at a practical level, has a rather apparent answer.

Still, the seemingly ethical and moral wish of the human to view and represent animals as both heroes and assistants does not reveal what conceptual premises determine this human wish. Is it merely a consequence of the posthumanist goal to equalise the ontological and ethical status of every existent being? Or perhaps it should be treated as a new developmental stage of humanism, grounded on the human conviction that we are capable of knowing the full extent of the animal essence and being sure that the qualities we attribute to them are, indeed, inherent to them? Are animals truly the way we think them to be, or is it that we are simply seeking to make them as such? This controversy can also be posed as a question as to why Derrida's considerations regarding animals stopped precisely at the point Haraway, in turn, suggests we should start?

When searching for answers to these questions, it would be expedient to examine the increasingly popular (and morally loaded) concept of the 'assistant animal.' Nowadays, animals are increasingly being treated as noble helpers. For instance, they often serve as a stand-in for specific senses or otherwise aid the human in their daily life. Guide dogs for the blind are a perfect example of this practice. However, does the usage of moral vocabulary in regards to animals really change their ontological status and their relation with humans? One could reasonably claim that the animals, despite the ever-increasing list of kind words used to describe them, still remain in an instrumental relation with humans. Moreover, in order to earn all these humane descriptions that presume their moral value, animals have to do (or, more precisely, suffer through) a lot. For example, one can think of how long it takes to train an assistance dog for the blind. Guide dogs must endure the training, the socialisation, and various other techniques aimed at neutering their wolf-like nature, just so they can even

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and heroism—Laika. Having these examples—all of which are dogs—in mind, it is interesting to note that the celebration of moral traits in animals depends on how closely the species is perceived to be related to humans.

[11] In late 2023, for example, a dog named Reqs who worked for the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service was awarded the PDSA Order of Merit, given for the devotion of animals to their owners and others. During the eleven years of his service, Reqs participated in more than five hundred fires. According to the organization in charge of giving the award, this medal was "a fitting tribute to his lifetime of dedication and hard work" (BBC 2023). Today, Reqs is retired and busies himself with more canine-typical activities, such as playing with his toys and enjoying long walks. In turn, the PDSA Gold Medal is awarded to animals for their bravery and devotion to duty. The absolute majority of animals given this award are dogs that have saved human lives and served with extreme devotion, sometimes at the cost of their lives. Nevertheless, the list of awardees also includes a Gambian pouched rat named Magawa, who received this medal in 2020 for locating land mines left over from the Cambodian Civil War.

[12] Nowadays, animals are not only being employed in military, police, and firefighting services, but are also increasingly involved in various therapeutic and social work practices. Some researchers are attempting to examine this process not only from a human perspective, but also from that of animal welfare (see, for example, Serpell et al. 2010).

begin to orient themselves in the world the same way it is common for the human—a being of a different nature—to do. We could simply ask: is it something the animal genuinely wishes for themselves—to be transformed into an assistant, for example? Despite an increasing number of studies seemingly confirming that animals do, indeed, possess a rather wide emotional spectrum, a semblance of rationality, and a need for socialisation (see, for example, Bekoff 2007; Bekoff – Pierce 2009; Safina 2015; Andrews 2020), how many of us actually bother to ask for the dog's opinion on whether they want to assist anyone? Do we even have the capacity to do so, let alone interpret the 'answer'? The fact is that we simply force the dog to assist us. Thus, to use Singer's expression, boldly asserted in the title of his aforementioned book, defining animals through a moral vocabulary does little to "liberate them," and may just do the opposite. By accessing the deeper 'rational' layers of animals, we reveal increasingly profound prospects for their exploitation. Back in the day, the dog—without straying too far from its wolf-like nature—protected the homestead by barking loudly, used his fast legs to herd animals or track and chase after prey during a hunt. Of course, in order to perform these functions, the dog required specific training, which could only have resulted from a coercive relationship between the human and the animal. Entire books are dedicated to discussing this human–animal dynamic, for example, Justyna Wlodarczyk's work *Genealogy of Obedience: Reading North American Dog Training Literature, 1850s–2000s,* which points out that there has been a long-standing practice of obedience training for dogs, where animals are forced to do certain things they would not otherwise do willingly (2018). Over time, however, the list of dog 'functions' has been vastly expanded; today they 'assist' people with disabilities, serve in children's education processes, psychotherapy sessions, not to mention such functions as sniffing out drugs, patrol work, saving people from burning buildings, or capturing fleeing criminal suspects. When we see all these mini terriers and spitz dogs sporting tiny haircuts clearly given to them not at their own volition, but because of our human tendency to fulfil our own aesthetic desires, one could reasonably wonder if animals—dogs, in this particular case—really want to do any of these things.

Of course, this question is more profound than it may seem at first glance, and encompasses much more than canine fashion trends. It is a question of whether the animal indeed possesses an ethical voice of his or her own—as an entity endowed with a unique nature or is it that we humans continue to speak in their stead. For example, the previously mentioned interview by Castro and Danowski, discussing the issues of the reality-defining state of the Anthropocene, suggests employing the point of view of polar bears. Such suggestion, characteristic of posthumanist thinking, is undoubtedly an effort to dethrone the dominant humanist-anthropocentric worldview, in order to supposedly make viable other, nonhuman worldviews. But here arises a fundamental epistemological (and also ethical) problem: could it be that the suggestion to see reality through the eyes of polar bears, for example, is merely a trick to increase human power in relation to other beings precisely by envoicing them—or deciding by ourselves how specific creatures see and interpret the world and reality?

The problem of different species experiencing the world in different or even incommensurable ways has been contemplated for quite a long time. A perfect example of this is Thomas Nagel's acclaimed paper "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" published in 1974. In highlighting the subjectivity of experience, Nagel persuasively demonstrated that humans are incapable of understating what it truly means to be a bat. Moreover, Nagel insightfully noted that fundamental differences of worldly experience and reality comprehension exist

not only between different species (in the case of Nagel's analysis, the human and the bat),[13] but sometimes among humans themselves. As an example of these differences, Nagel points to the existential experience of people with disabilities, which is incomprehensible to those lacking a respective impairment (1974: 440).

Based on what was said above, we can express reasonable doubt whether humans can fully know other animals and find the ultimate answer to what they are. It is likely that it was precisely because of this doubt that Derrida—despite having acknowledged the existence of a consciousness surpassing a simple 'machine' within an animal's gaze—did not attempt a deeper philosophical analysis of the animal's capabilities or their 'inner being'. By stopping at his personal descriptions of the animal experience, the French philosopher rejected the clearly humanist ambition to *know everything*—in this specific case, to know everything about the animal. However, Haraway's suggestion was different—to try gaining a deeper knowledge of the animal. And yet, considering Haraway's enormous influence on the development of posthumanist thinking, this suggestion of hers inevitably raises a question: are the paradigms of humanism and posthumanism truly radically different and have nothing in common?

The essence of this question becomes clear through the concept of assistance animals, which is undoubtedly Harawayan in the sense that the animal here is understood as a being truly capable of working and simultaneously socially worthy and noble. But is such a seemingly moralising conception of the animal indeed not compatible in any way with the humanist conception of the animal? Are not the efforts to regard the animal as a mere resource (the humanist view) or, due to certain characteristics like the ability to work and assist others, as a moral being (the posthumanist view), simply two sides of the same coin, both representing nothing other than different projections of human power over animals? The very same power that continues to hierarchically stratify all living beings in the world, and refuses to treat nonhuman animals as ontologically unique and autonomous beings, without any pretence of 'transanimalising' them?[14] The very same power, in fact, which tries to remake animals into something other than they are—by either treating them morally or as a material resource to be utilised? The real danger we often do not notice, but should be very

[13] When it comes to the incommensurability of worldly experience and comprehension between humans and animals, the author of this paper is always reminded of a funny story (even if its truth value is difficult to verify, considering the Internet is chock-full of false information and the author of this paper is hardly a zoologist or animal expert) he once read on an online forum, in which a girl (or at least a user who introduced themselves as a girl) described how every night she went to sleep, her pet boa would slither inside the bed and stretch his body parallel to hers. Although the girl took it to be a display of her pet's affection, other members of the forum, however, were quick to point out that this was not the case. According to them, the girl's beloved pet was, in fact, measuring his potential victim to see if it was small enough to devour. This anecdote serves as an illustrative example of the incommensurable understanding of reality that exists among different species.

[14] The concept of 'transanimalisation' used throughout this paper refers—by way of the tendency to 'moralise' the animal, typical of posthumanist thought—to the emerging reevaluation of the animal and their ethical status, prompted by a desire to see 'something beyond' the animal, which, in respect to the animal's autonomy and well-being, can have less than positive consequences. Notably, philosopher Michael Hauskeller also employs the term "transanimal," albeit in reference to most people's perception of themselves as superior animals. Regarding the relation between transhumanism and animalness, Hauskeller notes that belief in our own supremacy leads to a desire to remake the rest of the animal kingdom—precisely due to perceiving other animals as wretched, limited beings that can, through human effort, be liberated from their existential "childhood" (Hauskeller 2017). Although the concepts of 'transanimal(isation)' used in this paper and Hauskeller's text are different, posthumanist and transhumanist paradigms of thought nevertheless have a common point—a vehement refusal to treat an animal only as an animal, an ontologically unique, self-sufficient being.

cautious of, lies in the fact that as long as we continue to talk in the animals' stead, seeking to attribute them certain characteristics, we inevitably retain our dominance over them. In this regard, the humanist and posthumanist paradigms do not seem to be all that different from each other, since they are both marked by an underlying notion that empowers further—even if subtler or more refined—exploitation of animals, postulating that we humans are capable of knowing what animals are in their very essence and determining their existential abilities and wishes.

4. Conclusions

This paper allows to assess anew the current ontological and ethical status of the animal, and also expands the possibilities for elucidating the controversy of humanism and posthumanism that has come to define the cultural state of the current world. It is commonly thought that humanism and posthumanism are mutually incompatible intellectual and cultural positions, revealing and presenting radically different ontological connections and ethical relations between the entities constituting reality. On the one hand, humanism explicitly postulates an anthropocentric worldview, proclaiming the human to be the centre of all creation, which all other worldly entities are (or should be) dependent on. On the other hand, posthumanism opposes the anthropocentric notion that hierarchically structures reality, rejecting it as ontologically groundless and ethically flawed, and seeks instead to reveal the interrelatedness of all creation, thus demonstrating the existential equality of all entities constituting it.

However, as proven by the analysis of the relationship between the human and the animal provided in this paper, such opposition of humanism and posthumanism, which implies that the two have neither theoretical nor practical commonalities, is at the very least contentious, irrelevant, and even misguiding. This is suggested by the fact that even if we were to agree that the posthumanist line of thought, unlike humanistically oriented thinking, aims to present the animal as a being to whom both ethical and moral categories can be applied, it nevertheless retains, much like humanist thinking, a rather explicit tendency to 'transanimalise' the animal—or to present it from the position of human will by ascribing the animal certain characteristics. This tendency is realised both theoretically and practically as an effort to reveal the horizons of animals' experiential and behavioural possibilities. According to the humanist paradigm, these horizons should be understood as extremely narrow. The animal here is presented as a being deprived of *logos*, and thus cannot be compared, let alone existentially equated, to the human. This form of presenting (or 'transanimalising') animals is considered unacceptable in the posthumanist paradigm, which in turn tends to emphasise not the animals' lack of *logos*, but the very insufficiency of the logocentric worldview itself. This paradigm emphasises the idea that animals (or at least some of them) have certain capacities for thinking and speaking (even if they are expressed in a very particular way), and seeks to show that knowing the multifaceted existence of animals and acknowledging their relevance to the human should not be limited by the exclusively human understanding of *logos*. Even if we assume that animals lack *logos* (or that it manifests itself in ways that humans cannot fully comprehend), this does not mean that animal existence is somehow indigent or that they are undeserving of comprehensively better treatment.

Both Derrida and Haraway can be rightly considered to be the leading developers of the posthumanist view of the animal. It would appear that Haraway was the more consistent

representative of this approach, considering that she was much more active than Derrida in asserting the capabilities of animals, and in this way not only transcended the limits of so-called 'pity ethics' but also—by postulating the potential for animal agency and sociality—expanded the possibilities for moralising the animal. This Harawayan position is compatible not only with the widespread idea regarding the ability of animals to act bravely and nobly in exceptional situations (like saving human lives, for which they are later awarded special medals), but also with the increasingly popular idea that animals are able to be assistants—or to perform noble and much-needed work for people requiring of help (for instance, due to a disability). And yet, as demonstrated in this paper, such effort to moralise animals, from which Derrida refrained, can be reasonably treated not as a 'liberation' of the animal but, on the contrary, as a new—even if much subtler and more refined—strategy for the enslavement of animals. This strategy is grounded on the increasingly profound (even if allegedly so) human knowledge of animals, which inevitably restricts them within the orbit of power wielded by the human seeking to 'transanimalise' them, where the ontological and ethical status of the animal, established by the humanist paradigm, does not undergo any essential changes.

In delineating the guidelines for future research on the basis of the analysis provided in this paper, it should be noted that considering the current state of the field of posthuman studies, a more comprehensive examination of humanist and posthumanist paradigms is required, aimed towards explicating not only the differences between these paradigms, but also the possibilities for their convergence. It would also be expedient to examine the relationship between the tendency to moralise the animal (enabled by posthumanist thought) and the increasingly widespread and dominant idea of transhumanism, which postulates the necessity for a radical remaking of and control over the entire creation.

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CHAPTER 8

Tracing the HumAnimal Boundary: The Wild Child in Jill Paton Walsh's *Knowledge of Angels*

Rebeka Kuszinger

Abstract

Feral children not only make us concerned with the inherent aspects of humanity, but they also challenge the human-animal boundary. Set in the Middle Ages on a Mediterranean island, *Knowledge of Angels* evokes the myth of Romulus and Remus: Amara is a girl brought up by wolves outside the realm of civilisation, which has made her savage, animalistic in terms of lacking the faculty of language and other 'human' traits. After being found, she is used as a subject of an isolation experiment in tracing whether the knowledge of God is innate in humans. The analysed novel investigates the limits of the category of 'human,' the necessity of care and the lack thereof. Drawing upon post-anthropocentric discourse, the present paper dissects the ways *Knowledge of Angels* explores the humAnimal boundary by focusing on the portrayal of the feral child's body and on the significance of the isolation experiment.

Keywords

children, humAnimal boundary, violence, wild children, feral children, vulnerability, creatureliness

1. Introduction

Investigating the humAnimal[1] boundary, this article revolves around the figure of the wild and mute child in Jill Paton Walsh's *Knowledge of Angels* (1994). Its premise is twofold: first, it proposes that such children can be seen as symbolic sites of anxiety where the vanishing boundaries of 'the human' are explored; and second, that the portrayal of such child characters enables, or rather forces us to rethink our ideas of abuse and care relations. The child character that Walsh's novel portrays is subjected to different forms of violence from negligence and sexual assault to starvation. Yet, the text is not exclusively concerned with violence against children; instead, it signals how cruelty, vulnerability, and care transcend the humAnimal boundary. As Adriana S. Benzaquén suggests in *Encounters with Wild Children*, "the response to the wild child furnishes a test case of a community's capacity to care and a society's ability to tolerate or accept the different" (2006: 10). The main theoretical

[1] Animal studies scholars often employ the word 'humAnimal' to refer to the permeability of the human-animal divide (see, for example, Acampora 2006; Taylor – Signal 2011; Haraway 2016). In this paper, I use the phrase 'humAnimal' to designate how feral children conjoin the human and the nonhuman animal in a dynamic, flexible, hybrid state that problematises the human-animal divide.

background of this paper comprises post-anthropocentric approaches, which allows me to read the analysed novel through the concepts of "the creature" and "the creaturely" and thereby map the various ways in which the novel challenges the boundaries of 'the human.'

The notions of "the creature" and "the creaturely" are traced by Anat Pick in *Creaturely Poetics*, in which she starts out from one of renegade Jewish Catholic thinker Simone Weil's ideas: "The vulnerability of precious things is beautiful because vulnerability is a mark of existence" (qtd. in Pick 2011a: 3). Following this thought, Pick arrives at the definition of "the creaturely," according to which the creature is "first and foremost a living body—material, temporal, and vulnerable" (2011a: 5). For Pick, the creaturely "is primarily the condition of exposure and finitude that affects all living bodies whatever they are" (Pick 2011b), suggesting that vulnerability transcends the species divide. In a similar vein, Matthew Abbot articulates that the creature is "a being that dwells in the gaps between species, a threat to the very system of classification" (2007: 86). *Knowledge of Angels* uses the figure of the feral child to explore the notion of "the creature" and how it reflects the interrelatedness of animals and humans, suggesting that "the creature" conveys the meaning of a "more capacious mode of relatedness and reciprocal exposure of the human" (Vermeulen – Richter 2015: 2). Stories about wild children, as Benzaquén notes, "vividly expose the ways we include others within, or exclude them from, our definitions of the human. For this reason, they may induce us both to reconsider narrow conceptions of the human and humanism dependent on a universal or normal subject and to decline antihumanist positions whose ultimate effect is to perpetuate the argument that wild children were somehow *in*human" (2006: 10). The notion of "the creature" and that of "the creaturely" thus allow me to analyse Walsh's novel from a post- or rather, anti-anthropocentric perspective. I suggest that the novel stages situations that are symptomatic of "the radical breakdown of the human/animal distinction" (Calarco 2015: 6), which the character of the feral child manifests both through the hybridisation of human and animal traits and through showing the signs of creaturely vulnerability.

Wild children are often referred to as 'feral children,' a phrase that calls for a thorough analysis of the difference between 'feral' and 'wild' children.[2] The word 'feral' derives from Carl Linnaeus' definition of *Homo ferus*, a species category within the subgenus of *Homo diurnus*.[3] The two possible translations of the Latin *ferus*, as Benzaquén explains, are 'wild' or 'savage' (2006: 17). Besides the fact that both have slightly different connotations, 'savage' highlights the connection between wild children and the *exotic* 'savages,' thereby also downplaying the question of "whether the people concerned are children or adults" (Benzaquén 2006: 17). N. T. Rowan and Tracy L. Timmins investigate the ways this term has previously been defined in human-animal studies. As they note, Adrian Franklin, for instance, "dates the term feral back to the 17th century, when it was used as a synonym for the wild. It was not until the mid-19th-century that feral took on its typical contemporary meaning of referring to non-native captive or domesticated animals" (2016: 141-142). While 'feral' is usually "understood as a value-neutral descriptive term that applies to animals who have

[2] Such children are referred to by many names besides 'wild' or 'feral': Benzaquén gives the example of "beast-children", but she also mentions distinct names that were coined for children reared by animals, such as "wolf boy," "bear child," and "swine girl" (2006: 17).

[3] In the twelfth edition of *Systema naturae* (1766), the Swedish naturalist Linnaeus divided the genus *Homo* into two distinct subgenera: *Homo nocturnus*—comprising chimpanzees, orangutans, and other anthropoids—and *Homo diurnus.* The latter includes three species, *Homo sapiens*, *Homo monstrous*—comprising debated human anomalies—and *Homo ferus*, which includes feral children, for instance, the wolf-boy of Hesse and Peter of Hannover (Douthwaite 2002: 15).

escaped domestication and have 'gone wild'", we may also see it "as a name that humans have the recognised capacity to give to other animals as part of an ongoing process of justifying and cementing control over them" (48). The term 'feral' thus exposes the permeability of the boundary between the tamed and the untamed, but humans have repeatedly used it to reinforce such categories and hierarchies.

Moreover, the immense changes in human society and culture led to the need to distinguish between native wild and feral animals: the former was conceived of as a stable unchanging category (140), whereas the latter were and still are seen to be "encroaching illegitimate outsiders" (49). Rowan and Timmins therefore adopt Franklin's view, according to which "the term feral is about making and maintaining human taxonomic boundaries rather than representing how animals 'naturally' are" (49). This understanding, they conclude, makes it "a representation of nature in disorder" (49). If feral animals are deemed 'unnatural' within nature and are seen as beings to be tamed, by the same token, the idea of the feral child signals an immense rupture of taxonomic order and an ambiguity in the interpretation of 'the human' and its relation to 'the animal.' However, as Rowan and Timmins suggest, the word 'feral' is used in the "continual re-forging of order" (49), namely, the maintaining of taxonomic boundaries between the tamed and the untamed, the civilised and the wild, 'the human' and 'the animal.' For this reason, the term 'feral child' has been widely criticised. Benzaquén, for instance, dispenses with it entirely in her monograph about wild children. Elaborating on the disparity between the two notions, she explains that "the notion of 'feral child' conveys an aspiration to a certain type of objectivity and scientificity, and the acceptance of a set of assumptions about the proper way to produce knowledge about people" (2006: 17). She adds that the term 'feral child' suggests that it is opposed to a "normal (or civilised, or socialised) child" (17-18). The blatant anthropocentrism of the term 'feral child' is also noted by Barbara Noske, who argues that "animal-reared children are often heedlessly lumped together with children reared in complete isolation and children in severe confinement" (1997: 162). I agree that the term suggests that there is a correct and 'natural' way of being human and thereby gives possibilities for capturing and experimenting on children while it also legitimises abuse on animals. The novel analysed in this paper criticises the ideas behind the adjective 'feral,' portraying a child character who, in different ways, challenges the anthropocentric understanding of what it means to be a child and along with that, a human being.

The second half of the phrase 'feral child' or 'wild child' is no less wrought with difficulties. Although children are often conceived of as innocent due to the influence of romantic (often labelled as Wordsworthian) ideas, Gail F. Melson points out that children are also often seen as "the animal human, in the instinctual, untamed substrate that humanity shares with other species" (2001: 35). Thinkers like Sigmund Freud and Georges Bataille also share the view that sees a connection between children and animals and that it is through socialisation that these 'animal' urges can be channelled towards humanity (Melson 2001: 35). In a similar vein, Joanne Faulkner argues that the child "conceived as an underdeveloped, nascent human, has come to represent the anthropomorphous animality adult humanity leaves in its wake" (2011: 74). She also notes that both the child and the animal are "separated from a status of (full-)humanity by virtue of a lack of reason and moral capacity; both also constitute a reserve of life that supports adult humanity" (74). Thus, both the child and the animal function as the 'other' of the adult human, against which humanity is defined, as also suggested by Jack Halberstam, who claims that "[w]hile children and animals are often classified together as liminal beings situated on the endless shifting border between nature and culture, they are

also extra-social, pre- *and* posthuman, and they represent a kind of otherness to the adult human subjectivities against which they are always deemed to be lacking" (2020: 56). The convergence of the figure of the child and the animal is present in *Knowledge of Angels*, where the child character, Amara, is used to stake out the limits of 'the human,' reflecting on ways in which "[t]he child and animal are instrumentalised to the ends of 'proper' (adult) humanity, constituted as problematic subjects of experience the better to reflect the problematic interests of human reason" (Faulkner 2011: 75). Faulkner adds that children and animals are taken to indicate not only "the limits of the human," but also "the limits of ethics and politics," because "their opinions are not solicited, and their interests are not measured in their own terms" (75). Since the term 'feral' disguises the vulnerability and the tragedy of feral child characters, and reinforces their role as instruments in staking out the limits of 'the human,' in my analysis, following Benzaquén's approach, I use the term 'wild child,' which acknowledges the permeability of the human-animal boundary rather than reinforcing anthropocentric categories.

The analysed novel is modelled after actual stories of wild and isolated children. In the epigraph, Jill Paton Walsh notes that *Knowledge of Angels* is based on the true story of Marie-Angélique Memmie Le Blanc, also known as The Wild Girl of Champagne or The Maid of Chalons, a feral child who was spotted in an orchard near a French village in 1731. Douthwaite describes that "her feet were bare and she wore only rags and skins on her small black body," also noting that she was able to skin and eat a rabbit uncooked, had huge thumbs and long fingernails (2002: 29). According to the story, the bishop of Chalons placed her in a hospital where nuns looked after her, and under their care, "she was gradually 'humanized'", meaning that among others, she learnt to speak the French language (Douthwaite 2022: 29-30). Besides such accounts, the narrative of *Knowledge of Angels* also evokes historical isolation experiments conducted on children, the purpose of which was usually to prove "the superiority of a particular ethnos or faith" (Steel 2019: 41). The first record of such an attempt dates back to the fifth century BCE. Karl Steel describes that while Egyptians considered themselves the oldest nation on earth, others argued that "the honor belonged to the Phyrgians" (2019: 43). According to Herodotus's story of Psamtik I, in order to prove this point, the pharaoh "had children raised in isolation with a herdsman commanded never to speak to them, with the expectation that children freed from educational meddling would produce the primordial language, spontaneously" (Steel 2019: 43). The advisers of Psamtik understood the cries of the children as the Phyrgian word for bread, thus claiming that Phyrigians were the oldest culture.

In *Knowledge of Angels*, the point of the experiment conducted on the wild girl is similar to the story of Psammmetichus since it aims to prove the innate knowledge of God in humans and with that the superiority of humanity and its capacity for faith. The narrative revolves around situations in which the wolf child, Amara, challenges the workings of what Giorgio Agamben calls the "anthropological machine," the mechanism that serves to distinguish 'the human' from 'the animal'. The characterisation of 'the human,' Agamben asserts, is a contradictory task; language, for instance, "was presupposed as the identifying characteristics of the human" (2004: 34), however, it is "not a natural given already inherent in the psychophysical structure of man; it is, rather, a historical production which, as such, can be properly assigned neither to man nor to animal" (36). *Knowledge of Angels* features a girl in this prelinguistic state, which makes her what Agamben calls a "nonspeaking man—Homo alalus" (36). As he claims, however, this figure "is no more than a presupposition of speaking man, by which we always obtain only an animalization of man … or a humanization of the

animal" (36). This means that a human being without the capacity of language is often degraded to the level of animals, as it can be seen in the novel, whereas an animal with the capacity to learn communicating through human words (e.g. primates, dogs) is often elevated to a human-like status. This predicament leads to Agamben's definition of the "anthropological machine," which is constantly at work in our cultures and serves to reinforce the perceived difference between humans and animals.

At the centre of the "anthropological machine," there is a state of exclusion, within which, "like a 'missing link' which is always lacking because it is already virtually present—the articulation between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being and living being must take place" (38). Yet, this state of exclusion, according to Agamben, is perfectly empty – in the sense that it is based on arbitrarily made up criteria – and what "would be obtained … is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a bare life" (38). The concept of "bare life" (zoē) is explored in Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998). Ancient Greeks originally had two different words for what contemporary European languages mean by 'life': *bios* (the form/manner in which life is lived proper to an individual or a group), and *zoē* (the biological fact of life, common to all beings). In Agamben's terms, "bare life" is a marginal way of living; hence it is furthest from the political sphere. Living outside of social norms, the existence of wild children is purely about survival: their life is reduced to the level of *zoē* for they live outside of political dimensions and are not recognised as the part of society. Like creaturely vulnerability, the "bare life" of wild children thus has the potential to challenge "the anthropological machine" as it is something that is shared by all – both human and nonhuman – beings. However, as historical examples show, this state also gives ample grounds for those in power to animalise wild children or, conversely, to use them as tools for proving the superior nature of humans and, particularly, of those groups and individuals who represent the accepted notions of 'humanity' specific to certain places and times.

2. *Knowledge of Angels*

Knowledge of Angels portrays a wild child, Amara, who was raised by wolves before being discovered by a group of shepherds whose flock she had been feeding on for while. Set in the Middle Ages on a deeply religious, fictitious Mediterranean island, Walsh's novel reflects both long standing anxieties and particularly medieval Christian notions about the human-animal divide. Cardinal Prince Severo conducts an experiment on the child in order to learn whether the knowledge of God is innate or not; at the same time, a shipwrecked stranger, Palinor, is washed ashore on the island, and claims to have no religion, which is considered there a sin. He is sent to prison for his heresy, and the cardinal calls for the island's leading scholar, Beneditx, to convince Palinor about the existence of God. Amara plays a key role in the debate, but the experiment does not go according to plan: towards the end, Beneditx starts to question his own faith. Meanwhile, an adolescent girl, Josefa is sent to a cloister by her father to have some schooling in order to become a nun. After Amara arrives at the cloister, one of Josefa's responsibilities is to look after the wolf-child and she emerges to be one of her main caregivers. Focusing on the portrayal of Amara's body, which occasionally assumes the perspective of the caring Josefa, I suggest that Walsh's narrative revaluates the boundaries between 'animal' and 'human' by emphasising the significance of nurturing and its absence. By doing so, the novel reinforces the critique of the expression 'feral child,' suggesting that

her description as a "feral child" or "wolf-girl" serves to obscure the true tragedy of Amara's existence, which stems from parental neglect.

The body of the wolf child, Amara is portrayed through different perspectives, and although Josefa is more or less able to categorise her as human, most of these viewpoints reinforce normative, anthropocentric ideas. A mixture of clashing perspectives is projected on Amara's corporeal form, resulting in the incomprehensibility of the wolf-child. The first time Amara is depicted in the novel, she is considered to be a monster that is killing the sheep, so the shepherds are alarmed. Jaime notes that "[i]t bites very deep", contemplating the possibility that "it must have fangs" as well (Walsh 1994: 16). After such discussions, the shepherds set out to kill the creature who is taking the sheep and they find footprints in the snow: "[t]here was a marked difference between its front paws and its back paws – the back paws had long claw marks in front of the paw mark, only the fron prints had the strange inverted claws. Like a hare it left leg-marks as well as footprints from time to time, and now and then its bloody burden dangled low enough to scrape and stain the sunlit purity of the ground" (Walsh 1994: 18). This passage implies that the creature's body is too abnormal to be that of a child. Furthermore, she is repeatedly referred to as "the thing," which suggests that she is neither human nor animal but a monster occupying an object-like status. Even after noticing that the monster they aim to murder is a human child, the description does not change; with the repeated use of the pronoun "it" to refer to the girl, the language signals her percieved status as an animal or an object. The latter is emphasised by Jaime's reaction to Amara: "He was thrown into the pit of dejection by the knowledge that a child could become no more than a wolf – or worse – less than a wolf, for a wolf at least is natural" (Walsh 1994: 22).

When she arrives at the nunnery, Amara is described in animalistic terms that highlight her wildness, otherness, and monstrosity. The inspection itself can only take place when Amara is unconscious, as otherwise, the nuns are unable to get close to the child. Imprisoned in the cloister, Amara, the girl who previously lived freely in the mountains without other people, is looking for a means of escape and considers the nuns as enemies. The description of her actions evokes the image of a wild animal, or a violent, hideous beast confined in a cage:

> The snow-child fled to the furthest corner of the room and crouched there, facing them and snarling. The nuns quailed at the sight, but unflinching they advanced on her. When Sor Coloma tried to hold the creature it snarled, a low rumbling warning growl, and then struck out with its nails, leaving a line of parallel scratches down the nun's arm, with the droplets of blood starting up along it. Bravely, Sor Coloma tried again. This time her hand was bitten severely enough to wring a cry from her, and the creature dashed away to a far corner of the room. (Walsh 1994: 102)

Although the text refers to Amara alternatively as "snow-child" and "creature", the verbs used to describe the violent actions of the girl evoke those of a wild animal rather than a young human being. Her actions seem to be senseless and threatening, which is underscored by the references to her "warning growl" and nails. After repeated endeavours, Sor Blancha "picked up a panel of wattle that was leaning against the wall … and the others copied her. A wall of wattles advanced upon the child. Cornered, she crowed, seeming terrified. At the last minute she turned back, and crouched facing the wall" (102). These lines show that the nuns are unable to approach Amara, they have no means of creating any form of connection with

the child who, in return, constantly recoils from the nuns, seen by her as a threat. The child is therefore alternatively portrayed as a threatening wild animal and as a vulnerable creature exposed to much bigger and threatening creatures than her. The origins of the beast-like, wolfish features of Amara's body are often seen as attributes that developed due to being raised by wolves, or, in other words, learnt "from the wolf, the foster-mother," as it is explained by the cardinal, Severo (96), who expounds the view that humans are naturally different from animals, having overcome and shed all traces of savagery and bestiality. Yet, by presuming that savagery and violence can be overthrown by a human infant, the cardinal also ironically evokes nineteenth-century behaviourist and developmental theories which considered education as a humanising process, the great tamer, and asserted the idea that without civilisation and education, children remain unhuman, wild, uncultured and animalistic (Malone et al. 2020: 30). The contradictory views held by Severo's character suggest the arbitrary nature of the human-animal divide.

Not much later, when she is inspected for the first time by the nuns, her description is overlaid with another, clashing perspective. Sor Blancha, who happens to be the local animal expert, examines the strange creature while Amara is unconscious:

> Drawn by pity, horror and curiosity in equal measure, the nuns of the little community gathered in the infirmary, and watched Sor Blancha, the best of them for knowledge of animals, inspect the creature. The bluish appearance of its skin was only a deeply ingrained filth, and the distorted huge head it seemed to possess was the matted and encrusted mass of verminous hair, which overhung the face. Now that the child was drugged and the face was not screwed into an animal grimace, the human features could be seen to be normal: what was not normal was the child's posture. (105)

As an object of the nuns' gaze, Amara is distanced from the category of 'the human.' The description of her inspection, however, indicates a shift in perspective, which amounts to a shedding of her animal features together with the "bluish appearance of [her] skin," which turns out to be a removable layer of filth rather than a part of her 'nature.'[4] With the animal features stripped off her body, the description dismantles the animalising gaze through which Amara was portrayed before this scene, depicting her increasingly as a malnourished, neglected child. Being drugged takes away not only consciousness from Amara, but renders her passive as well; interestingly, being seen as a child, or least a vulnerable creature, can only be achieved at the cost of agency. Sor Blancha, however, is unable to uphold this view, and she keeps identifying the creature as an animal, locating the creature's "non-humanity" in a vague general demeanour rather than in particular physical features: "what was not normal was the child's posture" (105). This unconscious posture is more disturbing than either the acts of snarling and cowering precisely because it cannot be located in any particular feature: the features that make her seem animal-like are interiorised into her body, making her seen as 'abnormal' in a general sense. At the same time, the fact that she is referred to as a child

[4] This might suggest that in the portrayed world filth is considered to be a characteristic of animals, while cleanliness – both in the physical and metaphysical or moral sense – is considered to be a characteristic preserved for humans, and, within humans, especially for those who live a pious life like the nuns. The latter idea is reinforced by the description of the order of Sant Clara at the beginning of Chapter 11. However, this notion is later undermined by none other than Sor Blanca, when she reminisces that once as a child, she witnessed how clean a wolf's den was. This moment can also be seen as something that breaks down the working of the "anthropological machine," where one of the cogs is the binary between filth and cleanliness.

does not necessarily indicate that she is placed in the category of 'the human,' for the figure of the child is in itself a pivotal and ambiguous site for the categorisation of 'the human.'

Amara's anomalous state is also evident in the scene in which she is simultaneously perceived by an outsider and a pack of dogs. The kennel boy, Esteban lets his dogs out into the garden of the cloister, unaware that Amara is also there. First, he only sees a creature running with his dogs: "He had expected the dogs to run in and fetch out a fox or a rat or some such; he had not expected something to run out - passing him in a single bound and mingling at once with the pack" (116). Not much later, he "glimpsed a hairless sort of dog among them, and cursed. It would get torn to pieces, whatever it was. He ran to the side door of the barn to fetch the meat from his bag - not till they were fed would the dogs calm" (116). Although at this point he is not sure what he sees, he considers the creature vulnerable amidst his dogs; his concern is intensified when he realises that the creature running with his dogs is in fact a child: "Esteban got a clear enough glimpse of the hairless creature to see what it was. He thought to see the child mauled to death" (117). Among the dogs, Amara's state as a neglected, malnourished, and abused human body is visible and highlighted. Yet, the animals seemingly do not consider Amara an outsider:

> The dogs were fighting over scraps, but it ran fearlessly among them, going on all fours. The king of the pack growled; the child crouched. Running round it the king dog sniffed its anus, and then returned to the fighting over shares in the meat. The child bolted a share, unopposed. Then, taking a bone in her teeth, retreated to a corner and settled down, calmly holding the bone under her arms as if they were paws and rubbing it on the ground to loosen the scraps of flesh. (117)

Amara's ability to obtain her share of raw meat proves that she is accepted by the dogs. What Amara finds is not a place of danger, but instead, a community in which it does not matter if she is an animal or a human, for she is accepted for what she is: a creature that wants to eat. Investigating stories about feral children, Steel explains that "what the children find themselves in, then, is not the wilderness, not pure nature, lawless and the untamed, but rather a care relation, with no expectation of reward" (2019: 60). The following moment in the novel reinforces the previously established care relation and sense of community between Amara and the dogs: "Esteban vaulted over the fence and, striking to left and right with his stick, attempted to quell the hounds and beat a path through to the child. The dogs defended her; he might as well have been trying to separate one of them from the rest" (117). Although seemingly it is the pack of dogs that means danger to the creature, this scene suggests otherwise. Esteban's attempt to save Amara from the dogs seems to fail; being defended by the dogs suggests that, from the perspective of the animals, it is Esteban who means harm to Amara. He "reached the child and picked her up", then "dropped her, and she fell outside the fence. Instantly, she bounded away into the scrubby herbage beyond the barn, headed across the path into the forest" (118). At first, Esteban is unable to recognise Amara as a child, but when he finally does, she is already accepted by the dogs as a creature like themselves. Esteban's failure to do the same – his inability to think outside the "anthropological machine" and recognise the girl's anomalous state – is what jeopardises her safety.

Amara's disappearance highlights the complexity of her position concerning the human-animal boundary. Not being able to find the girl, Josefa is worried, and one of the nuns tries to comfort her by reminding her that Amara "fended for herself before" (122), to which Josefa

answers: "[b]ut we disarmed her - we cut her claws" (122). This realisation indicates Josefa's acceptance of Amara's anomalous condition and physique. She seems to understand how Amara had changed during her time with the wolves as well as the possible consequences of human intervention. Deprived of her metaphorical and physical claws, the girl becomes less wolfish, which makes her defenceless in the world she is familiar with. Analysing the account of the 12th-century wolf child of Hesse ("Chronicle of the Thuringian Benedictine Monastery of Peter of Erfurt"), Steel claims that the story is not about the emergence of the beast within, rather, it is "a story about a pliable substance … shaped contingently by whatever mode of care or attention surrounds him" (2019: 71). Steel's claim is relevant to Amara as well, yet there is a limit to this pliability, which is also the symptom of her uneasy position in the "anthropological machine": devoid of any agency, she is unable to function properly either as a human or a wolf, which makes her even more vulnerable.

This vulnerability is further underscored by the fact that, while she is missing, Amara is raped by a group of shepherds. In other words, the danger in which she finds herself stems from human violence: the tentative and incipient 'humanisation' she has undergone among the nuns makes her recognisable not only as a human being but also as a young woman, and, as such, a possible target for rape. Yet it is not necessarily her perceived humanity and femininity that make her a victim of sexual assault, for rape itself is not an act that differentiates humans from animals. The shepherds who assault Amara are regularly involved in beastiality, pursuing sexual contact with their ewes, who are, in this sense, as violated as the girl. As the shepherd's case implies, animals are just as – if not more – likely to be violated. In other words, vulnerability to violence is something that connects certain human groups and individuals and animals. This is also supported by the fact Amara is dehumanised by the act of rape. The trauma of the sexual abuse makes her "for the first time half willing to be handled, as though she had learned to divide detested humanity into friend and foe" (Walsh 1994: 134). The fact that Amara becomes more passive and more amenable to care demonstrates how vulnerability and abuse transcend the humAnimal boundary, for now, her existence is determined neither by her wolfish traits nor her unveiled humanity, but by the very fact that she needs care.

In the portrayed world, it is only when the fact that she was nurtured by wolves is withheld that others start to see her not as a monster but as a vulnerable creature. After she is found, the nuns call a doctor, Melchor Fortessa, to inspect the assaulted child without telling him about Amara's past. Through the perspective of the doctor, the discourse suddenly changes: "[t]he patient, who was covered with terrible weeping sores, was lying in a strange position, very twisted and was very wasted" (136). Observed from the doctor's perspective, Amara's posture is no longer a vague marker of her animality or her status as a wolf-girl who cannot be placed into one definite category, but the demeanour of a severely neglected and abused child who is in need of medical care. Although the doctor is baffled by her state and finds her odd, he states that "the source of the trouble is not the site of the trouble. You are treating a disorder of the skin, but it is not because the skin is disordered that she suffers these blemishes, but because she is malnourished" (138). His diagnosis reveals the reasons behind the tragedy of Amara and that the wolfish, 'abnormal' traits are only inscribed on her body, but the source—neglect, malnourishment, and abuse—lies underneath. Following the doctor's medical advice results in a change in Amara's body language: "Very slowly the crook in her legs was unlocking, and she was able partly to straighten up if she urgently wanted to. She had become accustomed to the people she saw every day, though she still ran away and hid in corners from anyone else. She seemed to be reconciled to clothing some of the time,

and would even try to struggle into her shift when she was hungry, holding it clumsily in her unpractised hands" (143). The change is also attributable to the affectionate care Amara receives from Josefa, who talks to her about the outside world and massages her legs every day (142). As a consequence of Josefa's actions, Amara undergoes a reversed metamorphosis, engendered not by neglect but by care. Rather than simply subverting the workings of the "anthropological machine," Walsh's narrative of the feral foundling thus reinterprets the boundary between the categories of 'the animal' and 'the human' by highlighting the need for care and the consequences of its lack, which apply to all creatures irrespective of their species identity. Referring to her as a "wolf-girl" indicates that the tragedy of Amara's life consists of her being raised by animals, disguising the fact that she was abandoned by her family. Humans are absolved from the blame, which is shifted indirectly to animals who, from an anthropocentric perspective, represent savagery and the lack of civilisation.

In *Knowledge of Angels*, the story of the feral child cannot be simply understood as a "regressive narrative of the emergence of the beast within" (Steel 2019: 71); instead, it stresses the necessity of care and the existence of different care relations. Despite the abuse Amara endures, her existence remains indivisibly intertwined with the notion of care. Maria Puig de la Bellacasa argues that the feminist ethics of care[5] "recognise[s] the inevitable interdependency essential to the existence of reliant and vulnerable beings" (2017: 70), adding that care is "concomitant to the continuation of life for many living beings in more than human entanglements" instead of it being a "moral order" (70). Of course, as she explains, not every relation can be considered caring, yet, "very few could subsist without some care. Even when caring is not assured by the people/things that are perceptibly involved in a specific form of relating, in order for them to merely subsist somebody/something has (had) to be taking care somewhere or sometime" (70). The care that Amara received from the wolf pack does not countervail her tragedy, yet the fact that she was part of this care relation prior to being found at the beginning of the novel cannot be overlooked. Although her being raised by a wolf pack distances her from the traditionally defined category of 'the human,' leaving her with animalistic attributes, the wolf community kept her alive, something which Amara's family did not even try to achieve. Amara's state thus simultaneously embodies the aftermath of neglect, that is, "the biocidal absence of care" (Bellacasa 2017: 70), and suggests that care relationships transcend the species divide.[6]

Knowledge of Angels calls attention to the necessity of care and its different forms through the figure of Josefa, one of the few characters who perceive Amara as a vulnerable creature and thus offer her care. Although she is an adolescent, legally a child, and as such, she is closest to the wolf-girl, to be Amara's caregiver is her conscious choice: "only she could truly understand the child's diseased behaviour, because she had watched for longest, she had thought about her hardest. The other sisters … had given up, had concluded that the child was a hopeless case … She would never give up. She would never desert her charge" (Walsh 1994: 140). For Josefa, Amara emerges as her "charge," a creature in need of immense care, which initiates a care relation between the two minors. Josefa's interest in Amara is rooted in

[5] The feminist ethics of care largely draws on Judith Butler's notion of vulnerability, which conceptualises this state as a mutual interdependence (see, for example, Butler 2004; 2021).

[6] At one point in the narrative, it is also speculated that Amara was abandoned because she was not developing normally. Being abandoned (potentially) as a child with some kind of developmental problem or disability would put Amara in an even more vulnerable position. Furthermore, since disability is often perceived as some kind of animality (which, in Amara's case, could have propelled her parents to abandon her in the first place), Amara's state not only embodies the aftermath of neglect, but also gives an insight into the ways the mistreatment of animals and disabled humans are interconnected (on this subject, see, for example, Jenkins et al. 2020).

her deep commitment and emotional investment: "The child would live, the child would walk, the child would speak, or she, Josefa, would die in the attempt to save her" (141). The religious and spiritual meaning of the word "save" is undoubtedly present, but so is the concrete meaning that Josefa is prepared to give her own life to save Amara from physical danger. This ambiguity also suggests the complex constituents of "giving care," indicating that Josefa's role as a caregiver could not be more different from that of the wolf pack. Joan C. Tronto suggests that care is too often "described and defined as a necessary relationship between two individuals, most often a mother and a child" (1993: 103), while in the wolf pack, Amara presumably belonged in a web of relations. The nuns also take care of the child, however, Josefa's role as a caregiver makes her indispensable to the entire community (Walsh 1994: 140), excluding the nuns from the dyadic relationship of the girls.

Reflecting upon the bond between herself and Amara, Josefa is careful not to identify their relationship as loving. She "would have called her feeling - a heady brew of fascination and revulsion - a struggle to devote herself to her duty; she might have called it hope, perhaps. She would not have called it love" (141). Yet, although not much older than Amara, she seems to take upon herself a mothering role, transforming their relationship so as to fit the dyadic understanding of care. The care relation between Amara and Josefa evokes the Christian version of love, *agape,* which is most famously illustrated in the parable of the good Samaritan, and which translates in Latin as *caritas* – most frequently reprsented in visual art through images of mothering*.* The care relation between girls is built upon the needs of the wolf-child and on the conscious decision of Josefa to tend for her even though at first she considers it a "burden to be hated" (140). Surmounting this struggle requires self-sacrifice from Josefa, something which can "only be achieved in *caritas*" (Arendt 1996: 91). In *Love and Saint Augustine*, Hannah Arendt explains that, in Augustine's view, neighbourly love springs from *caritas* (93) and it "goes back to two basic relations: first, a person is to love his neighbor as God does (*sicut Deus*); and the second, he is to love his neighbor as he loves himself (*tamquam se ipsum*)" (93). Apart from Josefa, there is no other character who embodies this *caritas*-type of love, one that is fuelled by the need of the vulnerable and is selfless.[7] For example, Josefa is able to disregard the fact that for Amara she only exists as someone who provides food:

> it is a burden to reach out towards a creature who always flinches, to speak to a creature who never answers, to use kindness that is repaid unvaryingly by snarls, bites and scratches, to keep company with a creature who is wretched, and constantly pining to flee away. Pity is soon beaten into the ground by such trials, even rampant pity like Josefa's. But the child needed her with a simple and absolute need, the need for food. While it would eat only meat, and only Josefa could prepare it, it needed her as a babe needs a mother's breast. (140)

Josefa's struggle to refer to her emotions as love underscores her self-sacrifice and thereby the text's portrayal of *caritas*. Her love towards Amara, as the quote suggests, grows in spite of the burden Amara inflicts upon her. Therefore, the novel evokes the Christian image of maternal love as the basis of their relationship, which involves sacrifice and focuses on the needs of the other. The text oscillates between the perspective of Josefa and Amara in the

[7] Although the character of Jaime also feels a deep responsibility to protect the child and, in this regard, he can be considered as Amara's guardian, his relationship to the girl is not as intimate and does not involve as many sacrifices as in Josefa's case.

portrayal of *caritas*; on the one hand, it explains the reasons for Josefa's self-sacrifice, and, on the other hand, it views this relation from the side of the subject receiving care by highlighting her sole need for food. In addition, seemingly, Josefa's sense of care is built upon the constellation of the words 'pity' and 'need,' which reinforces the perception of Amara as a vulnerable creature transcending the human-animal boundary.

Depicting Josefa as the sole caregiver of Amara, *Knowledge of Angels* also indicates the possible shortcomings of such dyadic care relations. According to Tronto, "[i]n assuming that care is dyadic, most contemporary authors dismiss from the outset the ways in which care can function socially and politically in culture" (1993: 103). The risks of this restrictive conception of care are indicated in the text when Josefa falls ill: the child "became recalcitrant again. She would not wear her shifts, she would not attempt to go upright, she sulked and snarled, and resumed the habit of skulking in corners" (Walsh 1994: 149). The absence of Josefa as the exclusive custodian leads to the breakdown of the care relation, pushing the neglected girl back into a state of extreme vulnerability. No longer being a care receiver, Amara reverts to her previous state, making herself unapproachable again. However, the absence of Josefa also forces Amara to search and ask for her, as a result of which she acquires the ability to say her name, although in a distorted fashion: "Ssfa" (150) is the only sound she can utter at first before she acquires more words and is even able to string together simple sentences. The fact that the first word she is able to say is the name of her caregiver strengthens the connection between language and care, reinforcing Josefa's instinctive insight: unlike the representatives of the Church, she suggests that they should be talking to her more, for talking to babies "is how babes are loved … A mother sings and talks ceaselessly to a babe from its first hours. She has no thought of waiting for it to understand her" (109). Although Josefa is unable to escape the anthropocentric perspective entirely, for she sometimes states that Amara listens to her only as a dog might (113), her approach is in contrast with that of Severo, since she does not consider language an innate faculty or a natural part of being human, but a faculty that is rooted in acts of caring and is itself an act of caring.

After Amara's attempts to call for Josefa, the stance of the nuns also changes. Prior to that, "Sor Blancha tried to coax her back to her best behaviour, but truth to tell, the sister resented every moment of it, because she was anxious about Josefa, and wanted to nurse and cuddle *her*" (149). For them, caring is restricted to unequivocally human relations, and Sor Blancha's reaction shows her struggle to place Amara into the category of 'human.' The change, however, is under way: "[f]rom that moment, instead of just chattering to the child, the sisters began to teach her. They began the great game of pointing and naming, greeting mumbles and broken sounds with pleasure, and rewarding anything remotely like the desired word with smiles, and praise, and promises of meat" (151). Their eagerness to teach Amara, "that instinct to foster, to cherish and teach, that flow of tenderness towards the helpless which was dammed up in the nuns by their childishness, suddenly found an object and a purpose" (151). The dyadic relationship of Josefa and Amara thus begins to transform into a wider web of relations which also includes the nuns, allowing Amara to behave "[l]ike any child": for instance, she "played one sister off against another, ran away and hid when Josefa looked for her to massage her legs, refused to eat at mealtimes, and then begged pitifully for food an hour later, discovered quickly where the soft hearts and swiftly relenting natures were to be found" (151). Whereas the nuns view their care as contingent on the child's willingness to learn human speech – a criteria that aims to seperate her from her animality and thus reinforces an anthropocentric notion of care – Amara's evolving relationship with the nuns

recalls the bond she likely shared with the wolves who raised her, which outlines both a collective and a multispecies perspective of care and nurturing.

Rather than suggesting that we cannot entirely dispense with the "anthropological machine," the ending of the novel highlights the different perspectives this machine upholds and, at the same time, conceals. Although Amara cannot be fully reintegrated into the category of 'the human,' her otherness and autonomy are understood and acknowledged by the nuns who put Amara's needs before their own by letting her go. Although, for the nuns, taking care of Amara still means mostly a duty assigned by Severo, Josefa's care has added an affective component as well, transforming their care relation: "Josefa contemplated life without Amara with a limitless dismay … But she knew an equal dismay in thinking about Amara's life, locked up for ever in the narrow compass of Sant Clara … forever locked in and forever locked out. And Josefa understood love; she had been loved until her mother died. She knew by unconsidered instinct that love involves letting go" (260). While at the beginning of portraying their relationship, the novel undercuts the romanticisation of the dyadic care relation, here, a more idealised picture of care relation is offered. Yet, letting Amara go means a call for a re-evaluation of the role of these relations.

During a previous visit by the Inquisitor, Fra Murta and Severo, Amara's answers proved that the presumption about the knowledge of God being innate is false. Being able to conduct a conversation with a couple of words, she tells them that there is "[n]othing in sky" (208). Unsurprisingly, Fra Murta is dissatisfied with the answer and decides that Amara still lacks the language to give proof of the knowledge of God. Meanwhile, Josefa and the nuns decide to let Amara go, for they understand that she feels trapped in the cloister and that it is "cruelty to keep her here, like caging a bird, or tethering a young horse," as Sor Blancha explains (259). Deciding to defy their vow of not telling anything about God to Amara, Josefa instructs her what to say during Fra Murta's next visit. Although her sin is forgiven when she makes a confession before taking her final vows as a nun, she consciously chooses this transgression in order to help Amara break free from her imprisonment. After the last visit of Fra Murta, when Amara falsely talks about her experience with God, Jaime, the shepherd who originally found Amara among the wolves, takes her away to an ice hut to be an ice-keeper, telling the local community that Amara "had a troubled childhood" (281). When the girl leaves the cloister, Josefa "embraced her, Amara stiffened and clenched her teeth. She permitted herself to be held and kissed, however" (279). Unlike the previous scene in which Josefa tries to hug Amara, this episode indicates that being held, kissed, and hugged does not depend on human or animal features: these acts seem to belong to certain care relations and relationships which blur species differences, and therefore question the whole idea of the "anthropological machine."

3. Conclusion

'Snow-child,' 'monster,' 'wolf-girl,' 'creature' – four labels that describe the existence of Amara from different perspectives, suggesting that her existence is in a constant limbo between the categories of 'the human' and 'the animal,' and, as such, she is a glitch in the "anthropological machine." However, for a long time, other characters use her to reinforce the conceptual human-animal boundary. For instance, Severo and Beneditx use the child to prove the innate knowledge of God in humans and thus to support an essentialist notion of 'humanity' in opposition to 'animality,' arguing that humans are born with an inherent potential for redemption – a quality they believe animals lack. At the same time, Amara's

existence ceases to be illegitimate as other characters start to view her as a neglected child, and she can no longer be used to justify an anthropocentric worldview that rests on the conceptual human-animal divide. Such phrases as 'wolf-girl' and 'snow-child' disguise her real state: a vulnerable creature in need of care. Evoking Pick's concept of "the creaturely" – "the condition of exposure and finitude that affects all living bodies whatever they are" (Pick 2011b) – Amara's state transcends the species divide, constantly lingering on the humAnimal boundary as the girl is exposed as a vulnerable subject suffering from neglect and abuse.

As a wild child, Amara's being is reduced to the level of what Agamben calls *zoé* or "bare life," for she has lived outside of poltical dimensions. However, after she is found, she becomes the main subject of an experiment that aims to find out whether the knowledge of God is innate. As a nonspeaking human, she is used to maintain the humAnimal boundary, which makes her existence, ironically, political. The portrayal of her body is another aspect that reinforces her anomalous state. She is alternatively portrayed as a threatening monster and as a vulnerable, neglected child. The shepherds who find her cannot help but see her as a violent monster, one of them going as far as to consider her "less than a wolf" – a reaction which reflects the child's paradoxical state. Yet, some characters, along with the pack of wolves who raised her, are able to see Amara as what she truly is, a creature in need of immense care, thereby pointing to a post- or anti-anthropocentric ontology and ethics.

Through the portrayal of Amara's relationships to – both human and nonhuman – others, the novel illustrates the shortcomings of dyadic bonds and enables us to conceive more than human care relations. Suckled by wolves, Amara was the part of a care relation where she learnt to protect and feed herself. Yet, her tragedy is not undone by the care she receives by the wolf pack, for the state of her body reflects the "the biocidal absence of care" (Bellacasa 2017: 70). In the nunnery, Josefa is able to consider Amara as a vulnerable creature and takes the wolf-child into her care. At the same time, the novel paints an image of the possible shortcomings of such a care relation; after Josefa falls ill, she is unable to take care of the child, who does not trust the nuns in the same way she puts her trust in Josefa. Eventually, however, the nuns soften towards the child and start to teach her, as a result of which Amara yet again finds herself in a web of care relations. And still, although the novel accommodates perspectives that perceive Amara in terms of care and expose her state as an abused child, the "anthropological machine" persistently maintains her status as a glitch within the system. The novel ends with her running away "into the unbroken solitude of the inviolate snow" (Walsh 1994: 284), returning to her "snow-child" identity, suggesting that it is only far from humanity that Amara can exist outside of the "anthropological machine."

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