Drs. Laura Wright and Catherine Carter

April 4, 2021

Literature Sample: Comprehensive Exam

Question 1: Toward a More Ordered Relationship with Nonhuman Animals in Poetry

In his collection *Literature for Nonhumans*, the poet Gabriel Gudding declares, “There can be no pastoral as long as there is a slaughterhouse” (27). Here he refers to a tradition, especially in poetry, of portraying an idealized version of humans’ relationships with non-human animals, particularly as shepherds with wide-roaming flocks. Gudding points out that this depiction is dishonest because the majority of nonhuman animals, including some of these “free-range” sheep, cows, and goats, are killed in industrial slaughterhouses. As Gudding argues, humans cannot continue to represent our relationships with nonhuman animals in such an idyllic way as long as this representation does not reflect reality.

Poetry also has a long history of using nonhuman animals as metaphors for human experiences. Well-known poets like Mary Oliver and the earlier Romantics treat these subjects not as actual subjects but as vehicles for their own epiphanies (Carter). Carol J. Adams criticizes this tradition with her notion of the absent referent: in this case, the poet refers to the nonhuman animal through imagery or metaphor, but the animal is not present in the poem as a subject. Similarly, in “‘A Grain of Brain’: Women and Farm Animals in Collections by Ariana Reines and Selima Hill,” Rachael Allen argues that poetry has a history of using animals as symbols. Allen asserts that in their collections *The Cow* and *A Little Book of Meat*, respectively, Reines and Hill undermine this tradition. For example, Reines disorders conventional syntax in poems like “BLOWHOLE” in order to call into question humans’ relationships with nonhuman animals. In this essay, I will explore what an ordered relationship with nonhuman animals might look like, according to the poets Robinson Jeffers, Nickole Brown, and Kathryn Kirkpatrick. Jeffers dubs humans’ first slaughter of a nonhuman animal our “original sin” and has one of his speakers fantasize about being eaten by vulture. Brown and Kirkpatrick are vegan and therefore have both similar and different views on our relationships with nonhuman animals than Jeffers has. I will also analyze the work of two Black vegan poets (Mary Spears and Tara Sophia Bahna-James) to determine whether an ordered relationship with nonhuman animals is even possible.

In his 1938 poem “Original Sin,” Robinson Jeffers depicts humans’ first slaughter of a nonhuman animal. Obviously, this description differs greatly from the Biblical story of Genesis, which, as Peter Singer puts it and ecofeminists have supported, blames the fall of humankind on a woman, a snake, and a tree. Jeffers, by contrast, describes a group of early humans, perhaps even Neanderthals, catching a mammoth in a pit and then burning the nonhuman animal to death. He portrays these early humans as incredibly unappealing, not just through their actions, but because of their stench and their excitement and happiness in the face of the mammoth’s capture and death. Jeffers makes clear that we humans are animals ourselves by aligning us with apes; the first two lines of the poem read, “The man-brained and man-handed ground-ape, physically / The most repulsive of all hot-blooded animals” (Jeffers, “Original Sin”). Jeffers also emphasizes that these ape-like creatures are the ancestors of modern humans; the lines “These are the people. / This is the human dawn” are stressed by comprising the shortest stanza of the poem. Some animal studies scholars, like Hal Herzog, argue that humans’ consumption of nonhuman animals enabled our evolution, while others contend that it was the process of cooking more generally, including that of starches, that allowed our brains to develop. Whatever the case may be, this consumption has grown to a level where not only are billions of nonhuman animals killed every year for food, but raising them contributes heavily to pollution and climate change. Jeffers reflects our collective guilt over this development with his lines “As for me, I would rather // Be a worm in a wild apple than a son of man.” Nevertheless, he then qualifies this statement with “But we are what we are” and accepts that “all are vicious” (Jeffers, “Original Sin”). He ends the poem with the depressing ideas that, because of our actions, all evil is deserved, and death is the only way for us to be cleansed.

Jeffers expands upon this notion of death as a form of cleansing in a later poem, “Vulture” (1963). In this single stanza-long poem, he describes a vulture circling the speaker. At first, the speaker hides from the nonhuman animal, and then they address him directly, “My dear bird, we are wasting time here. / These old bones will still work; they are not for you” (Jeffers, “Vulture”). Thus, the speaker at first rejects the vulture’s seeming desire to eat them. However, in the next line, they begins to admire the vulture’s beauty and later tell the reader,

I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten

by that beak and become part of him, to share those wings and those eyes—

What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment;

What a life after death. (Jeffers, “Vulture”)

This idea of becoming part of the vulture after death adds to Donna Haraway’s theory of enmeshment: that nonhuman beings are part of humans because “the human genome is found in only about 10 percent of all of the cells that make up the human body: ‘The other 90 percent are filled with genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such’” (Wright 13). Jeffers’ speaker reverses this concept by imagining how a human can become a part of a nonhuman animal. In their view, nonhumans eating humans balances out our consumption of them. Haraway adds, “Response and respect are possible only in these knots, with animals and people looking back at each other directly” (qtd. in Wright 13). In Jeffers’s poem, the vulture has clearly sighted the speaker, and the speaker not only looks back at him but addresses him directly. Philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas have theorized that humans’ recognition of our mutual humanity occurs in this kind of gaze. In the case of “Vulture,” the gaze is more of an acknowledgement of our common animality. While this exchange of glances is possible, popular methods of burial today make the consumption of deceased humans by nonhuman animals difficult. We may be able to choose more traditional methods that allow our bodies to return to the earth, but the nonhuman beings who would consume us are not those whose bodies we regularly eat. Thus, the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals idealized in “Vulture” is unlikely to make up for our “original sin.”

Vegan poets view nonhuman animals in ways that are both similar to and different from Jeffers’s. As the chapbook’s title implies, in *To Those Who Were Our First Gods*, Nickole Brown’s speakers often address nonhuman animals directly. They also portray early humans’ relationships with nonhuman animals differently than in “Original Sin.” The title poem is an “offering” to nonhuman animals, and rather than depicting early humans killing nonhumans, it contrasts sacrifice with worship: animals were not “made as sacrifice for your altars but were / the temples themselves” (Brown 18). In this poem, Brown portrays men in particular as harming nonhuman animals; the only boy who cares for them is accused of being gay. This association of toxic masculinity with violence against nonhuman animals follows from Carol J. Adams’s *The* *Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. Brown also aligns women with nonhuman animals in the previous poem, “Wild Thing”: “I was just another / animal, and like all animals / desired, we would suffer” (Brown 15). Because men objectify women and nonhuman animals, they oppress both of these groups. Therefore, throughout the book, Brown’s female speakers recognize their animality and forge alliances with nonhuman animals. Adams shows that women often experience solidarity with nonhuman animals because each is on the subjugated end of the human-animal and man-woman binaries.

Returning to “To Those Who Were Our First Gods,” in the last section of the poem, Brown describes the Biblical Samson’s hair being used by nonhuman animals to make their homes. Samson is known for having torn a lion apart with his bare hands and later extracting honey from a hive of bees that formed in the carcass. The bees’ occupation of the lion’s corpse is another example of enmeshment, but Brown, like Jeffers, then turns Haraway’s theory on its head by having nonhuman animals use part of a human’s body. The nonhuman animals’ taking of Samson’s hair illustrates that the use of human body parts by nonhumans is possible while humans are still alive. Like Jeffers’s in “Vulture,” Brown’s speaker sees this exchange as a form of justice, addressing Samson: “Your strength, taken from you, / but given back to whom / it rightfully belongs” (Brown 20). The loss of hair from a haircut may seem like no harm done, but for Samson, his hair gives him strength, which Brown’s speaker argues belongs to nonhuman animals. However, the animals who take his hair (spiders, birds, rodents, dogs, and possums) are not the same ones who Samson harmed. Nevertheless, the loss of his hair symbolizes a reduction of the toxic masculinity that has enabled him to hurt nonhumans and suggests that he may not be able to do so in the future. The use of the pronoun “whom” here for nonhuman animals, like Jeffers’s use of “him” for the vulture, is also significant because it rejects the objectification of nonhuman animals that the typical pronoun “it” represents.

The first poem in the chapbook, “A Prayer to Talk to Animals,” continues this theme of religion as the speaker asks god for the ability to communicate verbally with nonhuman animals. Like Jeffers’s speaker in “Original Sin,” Brown’s identifies their humanity as a sin: “forgive me, Lord, / how human I’ve become” (Brown 9). They also recognize their animality (“Am I not an animal / too?”) and ask to be made more nonhuman (Brown 9). By begging for claws instead of “ten pale, useless moons,” the speaker seems to view nonhuman animals as superior to humans, a reversal of the usual species hierarchy (Brown 9). Jeffers’ speaker in “Original Sin” similarly rejects the species hierarchy by preferring to be a worm rather than a human. Brown’s speaker’s goal in talking to nonhuman animals is to atone for humanity’s sins:

Would you let me

tell your creatures how sorry

I am, let them know exactly

what we’ve done? (Brown 9)

It seems unlikely that nonhumans animals would not already know what humans have done to them, at least on a personal level. However, the idea of telling nonhuman animals “exactly” what we’ve done specifies the broader scale of the cruelties to which we have subjected them. Describing these oppressions in detail to their victims would likely be more traumatizing than productive. Moreover, a verbal apology for these subjugations does not seem sufficient. Brown would likely agree with the latter statement given her veganism.

Brown addresses poems not just to Samson and nonhuman animals but to Mary Oliver. In “No Ark,” she contrasts Oliver’s idyllic rural landscapes, populated with wild nonhuman animals, to her speaker’s own urban environment in which there are “few animals left” (Brown 21). The only animals Brown mentions are domesticated ones (stray kittens and “poodles with painted nails”), birds (including a “pet-shop / parakeet” and a robin in the midst of litter), and a moth (Brown 21). She juxtaposes these with Oliver’s “marsh hawks” and “wild geese” (Brown 21). Brown tells Oliver, “Ain’t too many creatures worth a poem / like yours” (Brown 21). However, these nonhuman animals are worthy of a poem for Brown. The allusions to the Bible continue with the title of the poem and the lines “things were once different back / when Noah had plenty to gather before the storm” (Brown 22). “No Ark” illustrates that humanity’s ability to rescue animals from impending doom, like climate change, is dwindling along with the number of wild animals. Nonetheless, Brown’s speaker tries to help by moving a moth from her car to the grass. She fears that “he would be taken / by beak or tooth [or] smashed by tires or stomped by some brat’s shoes” (Brown 22). These fears embody not only the harshness of the wild and urban environments but human cruelty to nonhuman animals. In fact, another character laughs when Brown’s speaker attempts to save the moth. An ordered relationship with nonhuman animals may not be possible because of this lack of empathy as well as the lack of wild animals themselves.

However, at the beginning of the next section, in the poem “Against Despair: The Kid Goat,” Brown presents two characters who have a great deal of empathy for nonhuman animals: Trina and Barb, who run Animal Haven Farm Sanctuary in Asheville, North Carolina. These women take in nonhuman animals who are injured and unwanted, and they care for them. Using a direct address, Brown puts the reader in the shoes of these characters as they treat a sick kid goat. The direct address helps the reader empathize with the nonhuman animal as well as Trina and Barb. The goat dies, as the women expected he would, but Brown stresses that the effort to save him still mattered. Just as “every living / thing deserves a name,” all sentient beings deserve to die as peacefully as possible (Brown 36). The relationship between humans and nonhuman animals at the farm animal sanctuary is not ideal because the nonhuman animals are still in captivity, but there is currently no other option than captivity for domesticated animals. At the sanctuary at least, unlike on a factory farm, the animals receive care and are able to live out their lives. Thus, this poem represents a more ordered, if not perfectly ordered, relationship with nonhuman animals.

The final poem in *To Those Who Were Our First Gods* is entitled “Mercy.” In it, the speaker, like that of “A Prayer to Talk to Animals,” begs nonhuman animals to speak and ask humans for mercy. This idea of humans listening to nonhuman animals appears on either end of the book as Brown dedicates it to Gulliver, “a dusty old sheep with three legs [who] taught [her] to listen to what animals might have to say” (7). There is a common misconception, even within the animal rights movement, that nonhuman animals are “voiceless.” They may be voiceless in the sense of not having power, but they communicate in their own ways, verbally and otherwise. Therefore, a nonhuman plea for mercy, even in humans’ language, may be of no use. Most humans are already not hearing what nonhuman animals have to say. A more ordered relationship would involve us listening to them and doing what we can to help them.

Kathryn Kirkpatrick is another vegan poet who advocates for a more ordered relationship between human and nonhuman animals. Throughout her collection *Our Held Animal Breath*, like Brown and Jeffers, Kirkpatrick recognizes that humans are animals. The title of the book comes from the last line of the final poem, in which humans watch with concern as a rabbit sits on an exit ramp. The lines “the common release / or our held animal breath” refer to both the humans’ breath and the rabbit’s (Kirkpatrick 95). Thus, the title reflects the solidarity between humans and nonhuman animals in their attempts at “survival” (Kirkpatrick 95). Near the beginning of the book as well, Kirkpatrick’s speakers identify with nonhuman animals. In “Strange Meeting,” the speaker asks, “Is this how an animal feels / on the other side of a human eye?” (Kirkpatrick 22). This line adds to the idea of the gaze from Jeffers’s “Vulture” and Haraway’s theory of enmeshment by having a human put themselves in an animal’s place in this exchange of glances. In the next stanza, Kirkpatrick reveals that the speaker is “a woman speaking / to men [she doesn’t] know” (Kirkpatrick 22). Kirkpatrick practices ecofeminism, a philosophy which holds that women are especially able to empathize with nonhuman animals because of their similar positions in these power dynamics. Kirkpatrick’s speaker continues to look through her “animal / eye” and sees the damage humans have done to nonhuman animals and the earth: “I saw clearly // all they had done and would do / to make a world we’d be losing fast (Kirkpatrick 22-23). The pronoun “they” refers to the men in the meeting who “knew about power / in ways [the speaker] may never” (Kirkpatrick 22). Those in power are the ones who have done the most harm to nonhuman animals and the earth. Because the world will soon be lost, there may not be time to achieve an ordered relationship between human and nonhuman animals. The use of the pronoun “they” acknowledges that humans and nonhuman animals collectively will lose the earth. Humans’ “original sin” has led us to this point.

In a previous poem, “At the Turkey Farm,” the speaker observes birds on a factory farm. Here the gaze occurs from the human to the nonhuman animal, as it more typically does, especially in poetry. This sight causes the speaker to question the ethics of raising animals for food in this way. They ask about the turkeys, “When we eat them do we take in their longing / for the unentered meadow, their sadness / for the sky they cannot fly into?” (Kirkpatrick 21). Thus, Kirkpatrick’s speaker wonders if humans absorb the emotions of nonhuman animals when we consume them. The meaning of “take in” here could be both literal, as in adopting these emotions ourselves, or figurative, as in considering that nonhuman animals have these emotions. In that latter case, the answer to this question, unfortunately, is often no. As Adams explains, the function of the absent referent enables humans to forget that the meat they’re eating was once an animal. The animal agriculture industry relies on this disconnect in order for humans to continue consuming nonhuman animals. As for the former case, Kirkpatrick’s speaker goes further by speculating that, after eating the birds, “[p]erhaps we become them, soldered to brutal / twilight as their suffering bodies enter our own” (21). Here, like Jeffers’s speaker in “Vulture,” they evoke Haraway’s theory of enmeshment. However, this consumption reverses that in “Vulture,” in which the bird might eat the human. The regular consumption of the nonhuman animal by the human is much less ethical, especially when the nonhuman animal is raised on a factory farm. Kirkpatrick’s speaker suggests that “[a]s fair game in the wooded cove, / … [the turkeys’] welcomed spirits would not haunt us” (21). Therefore, they propose that a more natural relationship of hunting would be more ordered. Similarly, in her poem, “I Am Sistah Vegan,” Tasha Edwards asserts, “Hardly am I ever haunted by what I ate” (83). Veganism offers a more ethical alternative to hunting because no sentient beings *have* to die for plant-based food, although some sometimes do (mice killed while grain is harvested, for example).

Kirkpatrick depicts hunting in a previous poem, “On the Shooting Preserves.” Here she tells the story of how, in 1910, George Moore of Whiting Manufacturing bought 1,600 acres of the Smoky Mountains and turned them into a shooting preserve for his wealthy clients. Moore imported animals like buffalo and Colorado mule deers, who are not native to the area, in order for him and his friends to kill them. Seven years later, it became too cold for the men to hunt there, and some of the animals, like boars, escaped. Others were sold. Kirkpatrick’s speaker seems much more critical of this instance of hunting with the final lines: “Such wily lives that find a way to live, / thwarted” (20). Moore’s approach was less natural than the hunting suggested in “At the Turkey Farm” because he brought in non-native animals. Like “Strange Meeting,” “On the Shooting Preserve” portrays men damaging the earth and thwarting nonhuman animals’ lives. Their actions make a more ordered relationship between human and nonhuman animals difficult.

Black women vegans provide another perspective on this relationship between human and nonhuman animals. In the poem “Eyes of the Dead” in *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, Mary Spears’s speaker comes “face to face / With the carcass of an adult pig” (80). The speaker notices the pig’s wide-open eyes and realizes, “Those eyes must have looked at his killer / Begging for his life” (Spears 80). The speaker’s glance at the pig enables them to imagine what the pig’s last moments might have been like. Seeing the pig whole, unlike the way we normally encounter pig flesh packaged and plated, also helps restore the absent referent of terms like “pork” and “ham.” Spears’s speaker thinks that the pig’s gaze “[m]ust have said to someone / ‘I have a right to exist’” (80). Therefore, she questions why the killer could not empathize with the pig and spare his life. The speaker, a Black woman, then begins to make connections between the ways that her ancestors were oppressed and the ways that we treat nonhuman animals today, calling animal agriculture “the slavery of animals” (Spears 81). I will expand upon this comparison in my next essay, but for now here is one of Spears’s juxtapositions: “The mother cow breastfeeds the human race / My ancestors breastfed the white race” (80). A white speaker would not be able make these personal connections. Like women, Black people are better able to identify with nonhuman animals because of their own dehumanization throughout history. Spears’s speaker quotes someone saying, “What’s the big deal?” “It’s just an animal,” and they answer, “I could have remembered a time / When someone might have said the same about me” (81). This identification allows for a relationship of solidarity between human and nonhuman animals.

Another contributor to *Sistah Vegan*, Tara Sophia Bahna-James, discusses two forms of terror in her poem. The first comes “From knowing / We can be harmed” and the second “from knowing / We have the power to hurt” (Bahna-James 78). The speaker decides that the second form of terror is our greatest fear and speculates,

Perhaps this is why our dogs

Can look into our eyes

Unflinchingly

With unconditional love

It is not because they are too stupid to know that someday

We may casually break their hearts

But because they are wise enough to know that

They will never break ours (Bahna-James 78)

Here dogs gaze into humans’ eyes and recognize their side of their relationship with us. Of course, our relationship with dogs is far from ideal because they are dependent upon us for all of their basic needs. Some experts assert that dogs domesticated themselves, but that does not excuse our breeding, genetic manipulation, and other mistreatments of them. Moreover, dogs do break our hearts (when they die, for example), but it can be argued that they never do so intentionally. The relationship with nonhuman animals that humans should strive for is one in which we also do not do them any intentional harm. A vegan lifestyle seeks to avoid this kind of intentional harm by rejecting the direct products of nonhuman animal suffering.

At the end of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gabriel Gudding defines “zoopoetics” as “a new movement in literary theory and practice that treats nonhumans animals as individuals with agency, as conscious world-having individuals worthy of moral consideration—not as metaphors for human tribulation” (Gudding 113). Many of the works discussed above could be considered part of this movement. These authors view nonhuman animals as true subjects and acknowledge their ethical entanglements with them. Many depict humans gazing at nonhuman animals and vice versa, recognizing their mutual animality. Some of the humans not only look back at the nonhuman animals directly but address them directly, as in “Vulture” and many of Brown’s poems. Jeffers and Brown also add to Haraway’s theory of enmeshment by showing how nonhuman animals can use parts of human’s bodies. In “Vulture,” Jeffers’s speaker presents this relationship as the ideal one between human and nonhuman animals, atoning for our original sin. Brown, on the other hand, emphasizes listening to and caring for nonhuman animals, and Kirkpatrick suggests hunting as a more ethical alternative to factory farming. As Brown and Kirkpatrick show, women in particular feel a sense of solidarity with nonhuman animals because of their places on the subjugated end of their respective binaries. Spears adds that Black people can make similar connections between their oppressions of those of nonhuman animals. Finally, Bahna-James recommends that humans not exercise our “power to hurt” others (78). Veganism helps us avoid wielding some of this power, and thus, along with listening to and caring for nonhuman animals, it represents not a perfectly ordered relationship with them, but a more ordered one. This relationship is certainly possible.

Works Cited

Adams, Carol J. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Allen, Rachael. “‘A Grain of Brain’: Women and Farm Animals in Collections by Ariana Reines and Selima Hill.” In *Literature and Meat since 1900*, edited by Séan McCorry and John Miller. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 143-59.

Bahna-James, Tara Sophia. “Terror.” *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, edited by A. Breeze Harper, Lantern Books, 2010, pp. 78-79.

Brown, Nickole. *To Those Who Were Our First Gods*. Rattle, 2018.

Carter, Catherine. “Re: Comps Reading List.” Message to Sarah Rhu. 30 March 2020. E-mail.

Edwards, Tashee. “I Am Sistah Vegan.” *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, edited by A. Breeze Harper, Lantern Books, 2010, pp. 82-83.

Gudding, Gabriel. *Literature for Nonhumans*. Ahsahta Press, 2015.

Herzog, Hal. *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It’s So Hard to Think Straight about Animals*. HarperCollins, 2010.

Jeffers, Robinson. “Original Sin.” *Poem Hunter*, https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/original-sin.

Jeffers, Robinson. “Vulture.” *Poem Hunter*, https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/vulture.

Kirkpatrick, Kathryn. *Our Held Animal Breath*. WordTech Editions, 2012.

Reines, Ariana. *The Cow*. Fence Books, 2006.

Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Rights Movement*. HarperCollins, 2009.

Spears, Mary. “Eyes of the Dead.” *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, edited by A. Breeze Harper, Lantern Books, 2010, pp. 80-81.

Wright, Laura. *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*. U of Georgia P, 2015.

Question 2: Negotiating the Intersections of Race and Veganism

Veganism is often perceived as a “white person’s thing,” even though African Americans are the fastest growing segment of the vegan population in the United States. This misperception is due to a number of factors, such the class privilege required to afford specialty vegan products and sometimes even to access fresh fruits and vegetables. Nevertheless, some Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and poor people overcome these barriers and pursue a vegan lifestyle. They recognize that the reason animal products are sometimes more affordable than plant-based foods is due to the large subsidies the government provides to the animal agriculture industry and that the reason fresh fruits and vegetables are often hard to find in poor communities of color is due to food apartheid. They also understand that the definition of veganism, according to the Vegan Society, includes the phrase “as far as is possible and practicable” (qtd. in Wright 2); it is about doing the best that you can in the circumstances in which you find yourself, not striving for perfection. Dismissing veganism as a “white person’s thing” or a “rich person’s thing” erases the efforts of these vegans of color and poor vegans.

Black feminist scholar A. Breeze Harper expresses her concern with the common view that “veganism equals thin white body” (loc. 179-192). This concern among others led her to create the blog *Sistah Vegan Project* and edit the collection of essays and poems *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*. The anthology contains writings by Black female vegans and vegetarians of all ages. They offer a variety of perspectives on the experience of being Black female vegans in the United States. Harper assembled the collection in part to disrupt the notion that veganism is a “white person’s thing.” Highlighting the perspectives of vegans of color is crucial to rejecting this stereotype.

The importance of representation also led Aph Ko to compile the first list of 100 Black Vegans and start the blog *Black Vegans Rock*. Ko explains, “I felt compelled to do this after I witnessed conversations from animal rights activists about the ‘whiteness’ of the movement” (Ko and Ko 13). Her work was unfortunately met with racist comments from the broader vegan community, such as the hashtag “AllVegansRock,” which she describes as “The All Lives Matter Hashtag of Veganism” (Ko and Ko 13). In spite of this negative reaction, Ko continued to explore the intersections of race and veganism and, along with her sister Syl, founded a new blog called *Aphro-ism*. Entries from this blog are collected in the book *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*. In one essay, Aph and Syl Ko coin the term “Black veganism” to refer to the way that activists “think about and articulate the animal situation as they see fit through their lived situation” (53). The Ko sisters support many of the ideas from *Sistah Vegan*, such as Harper’s decolonizing approach, but they challenge others, like comparisons between the treatment of nonhuman animals and the oppression of BIPOC.

In this paper, I will review the agreements and conflicts between *Sistah Vegan* and *Aphro-ism*, especially as they relate to the connections between the subjugations of nonhuman animals and those of BIPOC. Then I will examine how characters negotiate the intersection of race and veganism in two novels: Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*. All of these works are written by, and primarily about, cisgender women. As Kimberlé Crenshaw’s original theory of intersectionality tells us, gender and racial identities cannot be separated, and Black women in particular experience a racialized form of sexism. Claire Jean Kim writes, “Gender is not an independent category that is analogous and parallel to race, but rather a category that is refracted or lived through race” (qtd. in Ko 89). That these authors and characters experience gender through their race is worth keeping in mind while reading this analysis.

***The Dreaded Comparison***

Another factor that contributes to the misperception that veganism is a “white person’s thing” are the comparisons that animal rights activists sometimes make between the historical oppression of BIPOC and the present-day oppression of nonhuman animals. While these comparisons have come to the fore again recently within the vegan movement, they can be seen most dramatically in People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)’s past displays juxtaposing images of animal abuse with those of US slavery and the Holocaust. The NCAAP, among many other groups, condemned these exhibits as racist. Discussions surrounding these projects also inspired Harper to create *Sistah Vegan* in order to find out more Black vegans’ perspectives on this issue. Many of the contributors to the anthology cite Marjorie Spiegel’s *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, which explores in detail the parallels between US slavery and the treatment of nonhuman animals. In her essay in the collection, Tara Sophia Bahna-James explains, “*The Dreaded Comparison*’s primary task is the examination of the similarities between the social and economic conditions that made human slavery and allowed it to continue in the U.S. for as long as it did. It is a striking parallel that shows how American factory farming is allowed to continue today” (Harper 160). In other words, Spiegel does not compare the victims of these atrocities but the systems that enable them to occur, an important distinction. Much of the offense taken to PETA’s displays seems to come from the idea that the animal rights organization is aligning BIPOC with nonhuman animals and/or equating their oppressions. The perceived comparison of BIPOC to nonhuman animals is especially controversial given the use of dehumanization to oppress BIPOC throughout history. Delicia Dunham states, “Black women have been likened to these beings and thus subjugated as such by speciesist racists. So there is frequently a gut reaction against being referred to in any way that recalls that subjugation” (Harper 45). As Patricia Hill Collins among others have shown, white men have animalized and sexualized Black women in particular in order to justify violence against them. Syl Ko supports this explanation for why BIPOC take offense to comparisons of their oppressions with those of nonhuman animals: “*Animal*. We, as black folks, react very strongly to this word when it is used to draw any sort of relation or comparison to us. After all, the label *animal* was and continues to be one of the most destructive ever applied to us” (Ko and Ko 20). I will expand upon Ko’s analysis of the “animal” label below.

While some contributors to *Sistah Vegan* dismiss the comparison as offensive, others endorse it from their points of view as Black women. For example, Michelle R. Loyd Page draws the comparison herself: “In the U.S., how we treat food animals is reminiscent of how people of color were treated” (Harper 4). Nia Yaa recalls “seeing animals packed on farms and in trucks” and observes, “They were being treated just like our enslaved ancestors” (Harper 94). Adama Maweji dubs factory farms “modern-day slave camps” (Harper 137). These Black female vegans are able to make these connections in part because of their own experience as the descendants of slaves. This positionality matters when drawing these comparisons. Harper explains that “it has been the *tone and delivery* of the message [that racism and speciesism are linked]—via the white, class-privileged perspective—that has been offensive to majority of people of color and working-class people in America” (20). BIPOC are better able to make these points to their own communities, and white activists should leave it for them to do so if they wish.

However, Aph and Syl Ko complicate these perspectives on the dreaded comparison. Syl attributes the need to try to close the gap between human and nonhuman animal oppressions to “mainstream or standard articulations of animal oppression/speciesism,” writing that “these simplistic characterizations miss the ways in which these struggles and these wounded subjectivities relate to one another” (Ko and Ko 84). Instead, she argues that racism and speciesism are inextricably linked because BIPOC are animalized and nonhuman animals are racialized. She explains that “the organizing principle for racial logic lies in the human-animal divide, wherein the human and the animal are understood to be *moral opposites*” (Ko and Ko 66). White colonizers defined the ideal human as white, cisgender male, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc., and therefore, they consider everyone who does not fall into these categories to be less than human. They particularly see BIPOC as less than human because they animalized them in order to justify their subjugation under systems like slavery. Ko continues about the comparison, “this debate only makes sense on the assumption that we continue to understand speciesism as independent and animal-specific and, as such, a phenomenon that *requires* connection to other struggles” (Ko and Ko 84). Speciesism is not animal-specific because white colonizers have wielded it against BIPOC. Thus, the struggles for animal liberation and Black liberation are already intertwined.

Syl Ko asserts about white supremacy and speciesism, “the ‘humanity’ trumped up in one narrative is the same ‘humanity’ trumped up in the other. If we want to make a connection, this is the connection we should be making. We’re really not ‘comparing’ anything in this type of thinking. We’re noting a common source” (Ko and Ko 87). Spiegel similarly notes a common source of these oppressions in the structure of capitalism, but the Ko sisters add a more ideological perspective. They discourage focusing on the bodies of the victims of these subjugations, as Spiegel and the PETA campaigns do. Aph Ko writes, “Comparing and contrasting the literal/physical violations these subjects experience misses the conceptual boat since the reason why they are each oppressed is precisely because they are all citizens of the same subhuman space. Naturally, their oppressions might physically resemble one another since they have a common oppressor” (Ko and Ko 89). The oppressor, as well as the system of oppression, is the same in the cases of both speciesism and white supremacy. Syl Ko states that instead of making comparisons, “All we need to do is focus on and make salient ‘the human’ in both cases” (Ko and Ko 87). This human is the idealized western white man.

Aph Ko has further developed these ideas in her recent book *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out*. As Claire Jean Kim explains in the foreword, Ko’s argument is that “white supremacy is zoological in character, and the concept of ‘animality’ is the most important weapon in its arsenal” (Ko xiii). White colonizers have weaponized animality against BIPOC, and for this reason, Ko suggests that the Black liberation and animal liberation movements should not be separated. She builds on the work of Lindgren Johnson, who writes, “The focus … is not on how African Americans shake off animal associations in demanding recognition of their humanity, but on how they hold fast to animality and animals in making such a move, revising ‘the human’ itself as they go and undermining the binaries that helped to produce racial and animal injustices” (qtd. in Ko 106). Black liberation activists will sometimes call for equality with slogans like “We are not animals” and “We are human too!” These cries for inclusion in the category of “human” ignore the fact that humans are animals. They also fail to recognize the way that the concept of “humanity” is racialized. In their place, Johnson and the Ko sisters propose a sense of solidarity with nonhuman animals in racial justice work. Syl Ko states, “In recognizing our strange status explicitly in terms of the grand division that makes all ‘isms’ possible, the human-animal dichotomy, we voluntarily align ourselves with our fellow beings, those who do not belong to homo sapiens, in solidarity as we all somehow continue to thrive despite the crushing weight of the figure ‘the human’” (Ko and Ko 75). This alignment relieves the need for the comparisons that Spiegel and many of the authors of *Sistah Vegan* make.

**Decolonizing the Body: Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions***

Like the Ko sisters, Harper and many of the contributors to *Sistah Vegan* take a decolonizing approach to their veganism. However, Harper and her contributors focus on decolonizing their physical bodies, as well as their minds, through diet. They explain that the theft of Black people from their native lands in Africa and their subjugation under slavery led to the colonization of their diets. Most traditional African diets are primarily plant-based, while slaves had to rely on scraps from their oppressors’ animal product-heavy meals. This use of the leftover parts of nonhuman animals has evolved into modern-day soul food cuisine which, the authors in *Sistah Vegan* argue, along with food apartheid and inequities in the health care system, leads to health problems in the Black community. In the preface to the collection, Psyche Williams-Forson adds, “we cannot all drink milk and eat foods from the bread and cereal group, especially when these foods do not represent our ethnic heritage. Moreover, it is not ethical and it is not culturally appropriate to insist that we do so” (Harper loc. 139). Many BIPOC cannot digest lactose because dairy products were not a large part of their ancestral diets. Physician Milton Mills coined the phrase “dietary racism” in reference to the USDA dietary guidelines which recommend daily dairy consumption (Harper 187). In the poem at the beginning of her essay “Black-a-tarian,” Ma’at Sincere Earth describes the colonization of diet simply with the line “We have accepted another race’s diet for our own” (Harper 70). Sincere Earth and other BIPOC avoid meat and dairy in order to heal their bodies from the legacy of colonialism.

Tsitsi Dangarembga’s 1988 novel *Nervous Conditions* illustrates the process of colonization of diet in 1960s colonial Zimbabwe. The protagonist Tambudzai (Tambu) and her family live on a rural homestead where they eat a traditional plant-based diet. *Sadza*, a thick porridge made from grains, is their staple food. Tambu’s mother supplements the *sadza* with vegetables grown in her garden and is thus able to feed her family cheaply. The women and children also pick and eat native fruits. In their traditional Shona culture, they do not often consume meat. In fact, Tambu’s family only eats meat on special occasions, particularly when male relatives come to visit.

Tambu’s cousins Nyasha and Chido, on the other hand, who live by the missionary school where their father is the headmaster, have become “too civilised … to be amused by eating *matamba* and *nhengeni*,” types of native fruits (Dangaremba 276). Western food at the mission has colonized their diets. They eat animal products much more often because their family can afford them and because these foods make up a large of part of the western diet they became accustomed to while living in England. When Tambu moves in with her extended family to attend the missionary school herself, she has trouble eating their Anglicized food. At her first meal at the mission,

[t]he food looked interesting, which made me suspicious of it since I knew that food was not meant to be interesting but filling. Besides the rice, there was something that might have been potato: I could not be sure since it was smothered in a thick, white, tasteless gravy. Although I gallantly placed small portions of it in my mouth, it refused to go down my throat in large quantities. (Dangarembga 83)

Tambu is used to eating for sustenance and survival, not pleasure. The potatoes she is familiar with become unrecognizable under a western-style, notably *white* gravy. The dish embodies the colonization of her diet with animal products. Tambu is barely able to eat it, and her aunt Maiguru sympathizes: “‘When we first went to England,’ she was saying, ‘it was terrible. It took me months to get used to the food. It has no taste’” (Dangarembga 84). Maiguru and her family have adjusted to the western diet, while Tambu has not yet done so. She is relieved when her aunt requests some *sadza* for her to eat instead.

After the meal, Tambu has a nightmare about the colonization of her brother Nhamo’s diet: “Dribbling a ball gracefully through maize plants that had sprung up in the football field of our old school, he paused from time to time to pick a fat, juicy cob and stuff it into his mouth. The cobs were full of white gravy. … I saw him eat and became alarmed that he would make himself ill with the strange mealies” (Dangarembga 91). Tambu’s family traditionally uses maize to make *sadza*. However, in her dream, white gravy has corrupted this plant food just as it did the potatoes at her previous meal. Nhamo died of mumps after moving to the mission. While mumps are not necessarily caused by diet, Tambu’s nightmare implies that the colonization of Nhamo’s diet may have led to his illness. This implication supports the authors’ of *Sistah Vegan*’s theory that the imposition of western foodways onto indigenous populations contributes to health disparities between white and Black people. Tambu’s dream supports this hypothesis.

The morning after her nightmare about Nhamo, Tambu witnesses her cousin Nyasha having bacon and eggs: “I found time to be impressed by these relatives of mine who ate meat, and not only meat, but meat and eggs for breakfast” (Dangarembga 93). By the time she returns to the homestead for Christmas, Tambu has become accustomed to eating animal products herself, and she is dissatisfied with her family’s offerings: “Bread and margarine! I would have preferred egg and bacon!” (Dangarembga 136). The food at the mission has successfully colonized her diet and her thinking. Tambu’s mother Ma’Shingayi observes this change in her daughter and rebukes her: “‘If it is meat you want that I cannot provide for you, if you are so greedy you would betray your own mother for meat, then go to your Maiguru. She will give you meat. I will survive on vegetables as we all used to do. And we have survived, so what more do you want? You have your life. Go to your Maiguru and eat sausage’” (Dangarembga 143). Ma’Shingayi values food for subsistence rather than enjoyment as Tambu also did before she went to the mission. Ma’Shingayi references the traditional plant-based foodways of the Shona in contrast to the western meat-laden diet. She also situates herself in opposition to Maiguru; Ma’Shingayi has given her children life, while Maiguru feeds them animal products. Nhamo and Tambu both gain weight from their diet at the mission, and Nhamo even appears closer to white from the nutrition: “Vitamins had nourished his skin to a shiny smoothness, several tones lighter in complexion than it used to be” (Dangarembga 52). The western food colonizes him, and he pretends to have lost his ability to speak Shona. Ma’Shingayi attributes Nhamo’s death to colonization: “‘It’s the Englishness,’ she said. ‘It’ll kill them all if they aren’t careful,’ … She went on like this for quite a while, going on about how you couldn’t expect the ancestors to stomach so much Englishness” (Dangarembga 207). Her ancestors could not stomach so much Englishness partly because of their plant-based diet.

None of the characters in *Nervous Conditions* identify as vegetarian or vegan. Instead, Nyasha suffers from both bulimia and anorexia nervosa. Many scholars have interpreted her eating disorders as forms of resistance to colonialism, particularly because the colonizers’ texts are figured as food throughout the novel. For example, at the end of the book, Nyasha shreds “her history book between her teeth” (Dangarembga 205). However, through her purging and rejection of animal products, Nyasha also resists the colonization of her diet. Tambu only witnesses Nyasha refuse food on the homestead once, shortly after her move back from England. She has a choice between milk and vegetables for lunch. Milk is usually a rarer commodity on the homestead than vegetables. At first, Nyasha chooses milk because dairy is more familiar to her from the western diet to which she has become accustomed. However, once she sees that everyone else is eating the vegetables, she remembers that the traditional Shona diet is plant-based and wishes to return to it. After this event, Tambu does not recount Nyasha refusing food on the homestead again. Nyasha only does so at the mission where her diet is westernized. She also never purges on the homestead, where the meals are more traditional. Therefore, Nyasha resists the colonization of her diet by refusing and throwing up western dishes while eating plant-based ones.

In *The Postcolonial Animal: African Literature and Posthuman Ethics*, Evan Maina Mwangi writes, “Although they do not openly advocate vegan ethics, African authors grapple with the possibilities of alternatives to meat-eating” (8). Dangarembga does just this with her portrayal of traditional plant-based diets on the homestead in *Nervous Conditions*. Mwangi defines the term “vegan unconscious as an affirmative expression of [this] potential” (9). The vegan unconscious is at work in the novel when Nyasha rejects animal products and when Tambu expresses her aversion to killing chickens for her male relatives’ visits. Unfortunately, because of its disordered nature, Nyasha’s resistance to the colonization of her diet is ultimately unsuccessful. The contributors to *Sistah Vegan* offer a more sustainable way to decolonize their bodies through veganism.

**Vegan for the Animals: Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian***

While many of the authors of *Sistah Vegan* practice veganism primarily for health-based decolonization, others are vegans for animal rights. This diversity of perspectives supports the Ko sisters’ assertion that Black veganism “suggests that there are lots of equally legitimate ways to understand, articulate, and resist how it is that animals are negatively impacted by our systems of power” (Ko and Ko 53). Another woman of color, Yeong-hye, the protagonist of Han Kang’s novel *The Vegetarian*, becomes vegan out of concern for nonhuman animals. She then encounters resistance to her veganism from her South Korean culture, her oppressive husband, and other family members. Yeong-hye’s husband narrates the first third of the novel, but her thoughts are represented in italicized passages throughout. On the day she becomes vegan, she throws away all of the animal products in her house and tells her husband, “I threw the eggs out as well. … And I’ve given up milk too. … I couldn’t let those things stay in the fridge. It wouldn’t be right” (Kang 19). Yeong-hye’s disposal of the eggs and milk, and later her leather shoes, indicates that she has become not just vegetarian, but vegan. Her statement that “It wouldn’t be right” to keep these products of animal suffering shows that she is vegan for ethical reasons.

Yeong-hye attributes her rejection of animal products to a dream she had the night before she became vegan. She continues to have these dreams throughout the novel, and they are represented in the italicized sections. The dreams involve her being surrounded by meat and eating it raw while blood drips on her body. She seems to have killed someone in a barn, and she sees a face (whether it is hers or the victim’s is unclear) reflected in a pool of blood there. Her thoughts reveal that the night before the dreams began, she was mincing frozen meat and cut her finger. Perhaps the sight of her own blood restored the absent referent of the animal whose flesh she was chopping. She also later discloses that her father killed a dog who bit her when she was a child. Her family then ate the dog’s flesh, and she remembers how the dogs’ eyes, which had watched her while he died, “*seemed to appear, flickering on the surface of the soup*” (Kang 48). This time, the absent referent of the meat is restored through the gaze between her and the nonhuman animal. Although Yeong-hye insists that she didn’t care about the dog’s death when she was younger, she seems to feel guilt over it now. As she describes it, “*Something is stuck in my solar plexus.* … *Yells and howls, threaded together layer upon layer, are enmeshed to form that lump. Because of meat. I ate too much meat. The lives of the animals I ate have all lodged there”* (Kang 54). The word “howl” suggests that one of these lives may have belonged to the dog. Thus, Yeong-hye’s dreams and thoughts prove that she has chosen veganism to avoid these painful feelings that she believes come from eating meat.

Yeong-hye’s husband is unhappy with her vegetarianism, especially because of the way it affects his own diet at home. Her disdain for meat also affects her desire to have sex with him. She begins to reject him because his “body smells of meat” (Kang 22). She later wants to have sex only with men who appear plant-like, painted in flowers. This preference indicates that Yeong-hye might be “vegansexual” and is also a sign of the ethical nature of her veganism (Wright 124). Like most heterosexual omnivore men, her husband reacts with hostility toward her new sexuality. He even begins to rape her regularly.

After Yeong-hye tells her husband that she will never eat meat again, he reflects,

I was lost for words, though at the same time I was aware that choosing a vegetarian diet wasn’t quite so rare as it had been in the past. People turn vegetarian for all sorts of reasons: to try and alter their genetic predisposition toward certain allergies, for example, or else because it’s seen as more environmentally friendly not to eat meat. Of course, Buddhist priests who have taken certain vows are morally obliged not to participate in the destruction of life, but surely not even impressionable young girls take it quite that far. As far as I was concerned, the only reasonable grounds for altering one’s eating habits were the desire to lose weight, an attempt to alleviate certain physical ailments, being possessed by an evil spirit, or having your sleep disturbed by indigestion. (Kang 19-20)

None of the reasons he lists include a concern for nonhuman animals, other than the Buddhist priests’ vows, which he dismisses as irrelevant for his wife. Caitlin Stoibe notes that, in South Korea, vegetarianism is “normally only associated with Buddhist monks” (788). The only motives that Yeong-hye’s husband thinks are legitimate for becoming a vegetarian are those that would improve one’s own personal health. He later says that he would understand his wife’s veganism if she were nauseated by meat or if she had given up animal products in order to lose weight, but although he recognizes the dream as the cause, he never acknowledges that his wife is vegan for ethical reasons. Because he is a superficial person, he takes comfort in the fact that going vegetarian is “apparently in vogue” (Kang 23).

Nevertheless, vegetarianism is rare in South Korea, and other people surrounding Yeong-hye find her veganism confusing. One evening, she goes to dinner with her husband, his boss, and some other executives and their wives, and of course she refuses to eat the meat the waiter serves her. Her husband’s boss responds, “Well, I knew that some people in other countries are strict vegetarians, of course. And even here, you know, it does seem like the attitudes are beginning to change a little. Now and then there’ll be someone claiming that eating meat is bad … after all, I suppose giving up meat in order to live a long life isn’t all that unreasonable, is it?’” (Kang 28). Like Yeong-hye’s husband, his boss can only comprehend vegetarianism that derives from health concerns. He sees strict vegetarianism, or plant-based eating, as a phenomenon from other countries, perhaps a “white person’s thing.” Similarly, the executive director’s wife asks Yeong-hye, “Was there some special reason for your becoming a vegetarian? Health reasons, for example … or religious, perhaps?” (Kang 29). Yeong-hye says no and that she had a dream. Out of concern for appearances, her husband speaks over her and gives a health-related reason for her vegetarianism. Although he lies, “[o]nly then did the others nod in understanding” (Kang 30). Similar to the way that the idea that veganism is a “white person’s thing” erases vegans of color, the idea that one could only be vegetarian for health reasons erases people who are vegan out of concern for nonhuman animals. Yeong-hye’s husband speaking over her also illustrates his subjugation of her.

Unfortunately, Yeong-hye develops an eating disorder, which worsens until the end of the novel when she refuses to eat anything at all. Her thoughts reveal that she does not intend to lose weight; in fact, she is distressed about the shrinking of her breasts, which she views as the only part of her body she can trust because “*nothing can be killed by them*” (Kang 39). Caitlin Stoibe writes, “Some may dismiss Yeong-hye’s dietary choices due to her gradual lapse into anorexia, arguing that one cannot objectively classify an individual’s ethics if they are mentally ill. I take issue with this position because it privileges the very same carnophallogocentric rhetoric that regulates women’s bodies” (788). Yeong-hye’s husband attempts to regulate her body by telling her parents about her veganism and weight loss. Her family meets her veganism with dismay similar to her husband’s boss’s. Her parents and her siblings and their spouses stage a family meal during which they confront her about her diet. Her mother and sister provide meat-based dishes, and when she refuses them, her father hits her and tries to force-feed her a piece the meat. “Don’t you understand what your father’s telling you?” he says. “If he tells you to eat, you eat!” (Kang 43). Yeong-hye’s father is a patriarchal figure who served in the Vietnam War and used to beat her when she was child. In this scene, he mirrors Babamukuru, Nyasha’s father in *Nervous Conditions*, who also hits his daughter and insists that she eat at his orders. Like Nyasha, Yeong-hye resists patriarchal control by refusing to eat.

Several of the characters present in this scene, including Yeong-hye’s husband and brother-in-law, observe that Yeong-hye responds like a nonhuman animal to her father’s assault. As her husband describes it, “my wife growled and spat out the meat. An animal cry of distress burst from her lips” (Kang 46). The sounds Yeong-hye makes resemble those of a nonhuman animal, perhaps even the dog who her father killed when she was a child. Her brother-in-law remembers that she “glared fiercely at each of her family in turn, her terrified eyes rolling like those of a cornered animal” (Kang 72). She meets her family members’ gazes the way the dog met her own, trying to get them to recognize her animality. Immediately after the attempted force-feeding, Yeong-hye cuts her wrist (notably with a fruit knife), and as her brother-in-law recalls it, she “tried to hack at [her body] like it was a piece of meat” (Kang 72). This depiction of the human body as meat acknowledges that humans, like nonhuman animals, are made of flesh. As Yeong-hye’s eating disorder worsens, she enters a liminal space where she wishes to be neither human nor animal but a tree. From her brother-in-law’s perspective, her voice becomes “the quiet tone of a person who didn’t belong anywhere, someone who had passed into a border area between states of being” (Kang 76). Syl Ko refers to BIPOC as being on the border of the human-animal divide and writes, “We can see that by existing in this strange, liminal space, the space of being not-quite-human, we are forced to reconceive and reject the standard articulation of what speciesism is and how to fight it” (Ko and Ko 75). Because veganism is so rare in her culture, Yeong-hye has few options for fighting speciesism other than her eating disorder. Stoibe adds that Yeong-hye’s lack of vocalization about the similarities between how nonhuman animals and BIPOC (especially women) are treated suggests that she “perceives both the intersection of varying forms of oppression between all living beings, and the difficulties of drawing a ‘dreaded comparison’ between nonhuman subjects and historically dehumanized peoples (Spiegel 3)— particularly women of color” (Stoibe 794). Thus, in *The Vegetarian*, we find a character negotiating the intersection of her race and her veganism without making the comparison but instead by occupying the borders of the human-animal binary.

**Conclusion**

Both Yeong-hye and Nyasha are the products of patriarchal, colonial cultures. South Korea was colonized by Japan and Zimbabwe by Great Britain. These structures limit the characters’ ability to fight against their own oppressions and those of nonhuman animals. Nevertheless, in *Nervous Conditions*, the vegan unconscious intersects with race to depict traditional African plant-based diets as preferable to western animal product-heavy ones. Yeong-hye’s culture intersects with her diet to deny the ethical nature of her veganism, but she resists this erasure. The fact that both Yeong-hye and Nyasha have eating disorders points to a need for more positive portrayals of vegan women of color in literature. *Sistah Vegan* and Aph Ko’s *Black Vegans Rock* provide some examples, but having more in fiction as well would be beneficial. As Laura Wright demonstrates, there is also a need for more depictions of non-toxically masculine vegan men. The companion volume to *Sistah Vegan*, *Brotha Vegan: Black Male Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, came out earlier this year. It will be interesting to read what these men have to say about the intersections of race and veganism, as well as colonization and patriarchy.

Works Cited

Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*. Ayebia Clarke, 2004.

Harper, Breeze. *The Sistah Vegan Project: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*. Lantern Books, 2010.

Kang, Han. *The Vegetarian*. Hogarth, 2015.

Ko, Aph and Syl. *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*. Lantern Books, 2017.

Ko, Aph. *Racism as Zoological Witchcraft: A Guide to Getting Out*. Lantern Books, 2019.

Mwangi, Evan Maina. *The Postcolonial Animal: African Literature and Posthuman Ethics*. U of Michigan P, 2019.

Stoibe, Caitlyn. “The Good Wife? Sibling Species in Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*.” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2017, pp. 787-802.

Wright, Laura. *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*. U of Georgia P, 2015.