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Human-Woman-Animal : contexts, paradoxes and ambivalences of the sexual politics of meat

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Human-Woman-Animal: contexts, paradoxes and ambivalences of the sexual politics of meat

The direct impulse to write this essay has been the recent twentieth anniversary of the first edition of Carol Adams's famous book-manifesto *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. It has been one of the most influential texts of ecofeminism and vegetarian/vegan movement, that can be situated – theoretically and historically – in different contexts, even though the author herself does not claim to be a theorist but rather an activist. However, an openly engaged attitude does not disqualify empirical observations of reality and theoretical claims, which in this case, I believe, deserve further reflection.

Since my main line of thought in this paper revolves around the problematic status of women as culturally ambivalent beings in terms of their humanity and animality, or their ambivalent human/animal condition, I shall focus my reflections on two contexts: ecofeminism and animal rights (especially the question of meat eating). These two contexts naturally share a common ground, but they are by no means equivalent. They do, however, meet naturally in Carol Adams's theory, which I will examine in detail in the second part of the essay along with some polemical standpoints.

Humans and other animals – ecofeminists vs patriarchy

Let us begin with some remarks on relations between humans and other animals. A paradox can quite easily be observed here: animals function for people in a double role, as objects of sentimental affections and objects of unseen, repressed, unbelievable cruelty. That means that one can at the same time sincerely cry over the sad fate of homeless cats and eat a product of cruel practices such as a steak. There is no actual difference between the cherished cat sitting on my lap and the cow I eat for dinner. The difference between their fates lies in the difference of my per-

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ception: I treat the cat as subject, whereas the cow is transformed into an object. It seems that this is not only a matter of individual preferences: it is just as much, or perhaps even principally, a matter of what culture classifies as living subjects and dead objects – this distinction is not clear and seems irreducible to the difference of species. It has been argued that the moral classification of living beings is not equivalent to classification of species (see, for example, Singer 2006). However, despite these arguments, it seems that the attitude still dominant in our culture is speciecism: the idea that our moral obligations to other living beings depend on to what species they belong.

Our everyday relations with animals are strongly marked, at best, with deep ambivalence, and at worst, with deep hypocrisy. There are several spheres where the question of our moral obligations towards other animals is quite urgent, especially in terms of the level of cruelty they entail: testing drugs and cosmetics on animals, breeding and slaughter of animals for meat, creating skin/leather and fur, using animals for entertainment (such as hunting, circus, corrida, dog and cock fights, zoo). There are also less direct forms of human practices (especially for entertainment) that affect other animals, such as fireworks, dazing wild birds. Most people would be willing to sacrifice life and well-being of animals to save human life, while more and more people tend to condemn the use of animals for entertainment, such as corrida (they seem to be less inclined to condemn less direct forms, such as fireworks), which is reflected in changing laws. However, the remaining forms of using animals seem to provoke much more controversy. Some may ask why continue testing cosmetics when we practically have enough products to fit all needs; why healthy animals are infected with ill cells and substances that will most probably kill them, while deeply deficient humans are saved from that fate. They would point out that we should rather work on other techniques of testing than settle on inflicting cruelty. The same applies to meat, leather and fur: humans don't need them to survive, therefore the question arises whether they have the right to use animals to produce items they don't need. The opponents would argue that treating animals as machines, processing feed into meat, leather and fur for our own fancy is immoral and is an instance of unjustified speciecism. Others do not see any problematic issue here because they claim that we do not have any obligation to animals, since animals are not moral beings and thus do not warrant moral obligations.

I have mentioned earlier the speciecist claim that the moral value of a living being depends on its species. The problem with speciecism is not the claim that differences exist between species, but rather the moral and practical consequences of this claim. Consequently, the rights of certain species are more important (or even exclusive) than the rights of other species, especially when these two sets of rights are in conflict – the interest of one species wins over interests of other species.

In view of this reflection, can we still treat meat eating as ethically neutral? The question is not as simple and one-dimensional as it sounds. There are nuances that should be taken into account, whether we are proponents of a radical

or moderate version. Does the way of obtaining meat make a difference? Does it concern meat in general, non-human meat or only some kind of meat? Even if we decide to abstain from eating meat, can we make this decision for others, for example for our children or pets? Supporters of animal rights have argued against all possible arguments for the necessity of eating meat: economic, physiological and other. They claim that there is no rational, defensible reason for continuing with these cruel practices, the only reason for eating meat is a cultural and individual culinary habit, which cannot morally justify the means of obtaining it. They assert that for most people instrumental use of animals for food, but also for fur, leather or entertainment, has nothing to do with survival or even well-being, but only a force of habit that is not subject to reflection because of its omnipresence and cultural practices of denial, such as changing the name of a piece of life that is an animal on our plate into a steak. (I shall come back to the cultural process of transforming a living being into an absent referent later in this essay.) They believe that such attitude is an instance of speciesism, which is just as reprehensible as any other condemnable “-ism”: racism, sexism etc.

The question of whether animals are beings that deserve certain rights resonates with similar questions posed by opponents of acknowledging the rights of women, people of color, slaves and other groups that were excluded even from the “brotherhood” of the first “democratic” constitutions. They functioned more like a property at their master’s disposal, similar to animals, even humanoid ones, today. Therefore, there seem to be some analogies between the current debates on the rights of animals (or at least our moral obligations to animals) and arguments invoked in the past debates on slavery and the rights of women. Historically this is, of course, a complex process, but there has been an observable trend of arguing against rights of women, slaves, the mentally handicapped, animals, etc.: in many cases the exploitation (or at least denial of basic rights) of certain groups or categories of living beings was based on their “lesser humanity” or “greater animality”, exemplified by their alleged irrationality and inability to function on their own.

This ambivalence concerning the fate of women and animal has been quite strongly present in the history of Western culture and ideas. Beginning with the Bible and the Book of Genesis, where “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (Genesis 1:28); and Aristotle, with his regard of females as naturally passive, subordinate and more animalistic than males, but less than slaves. At best the proposed attitude was paternalistic: woman, slave, animal, mentally handicapped etc. are lower beings that cannot take responsibility for their actions and make rational decisions, therefore we do it for them. We incapacitate them as a sign of our care for them. We give ourselves the right to control them for their own good. For example, the argument of care was frequently invoked in the context of forced sterilization of women (often without their knowledge) and people with various disabilities. Medical experiments were conducted on people

of color and disabilities (not to mention Jews in concentration camps). In all these cases, just as in contemporary debates on animals, there were two main lines of arguments: either it was for the sake of “more human” humans (disposability of “less human” humans, logic of domination) or for their own good (logic of care).

It would be impossible to draw any valid conclusions in this matter in such a short essay, but one thing seems quite clear: whether we include animals into the domain of rights and moral obligations or not, we should nevertheless avoid their suffering, even if there may be a difference in the extension of this rule. Some may argue that we should avoid any suffering, others would restrict this rule to *unnecessary* suffering. Another important distinction concerns animal welfare and animal rights: “Animal welfare advocates argue for stronger laws preventing cruelty and requiring humane treatment. [...] By contrast, animal rights advocates oppose any and all human use of animals” (Sunstein 2004: 4). Both standpoints, however, accept the premise of protecting non-human animals against suffering.

One of the most important contexts for any theory that seeks connections between women and animals, or nature in general (be it the commonality of oppression or some kind of more mystical connection), is ecofeminism: both as theory and as activist movement. The notion is believed to be coined by the French writer and activist Françoise D’Eaubonne in her essay *Le féminisme ou la mort* in mid-nineteen seventies. However, the movement did not flourish until the mid-eighties, which was symbolized by the appearance of two classic anthologies: *Reclaim the Earth* (1983) and *Healing the Wounds* (1989). Ecofeminism can be regarded as simultaneously a theory, system of values, social movement, political standpoint and practice (even, in a way, a lifestyle). From the point of view of this essay, the most important aspect of ecofeminism is the set of philosophical assumptions on which it was founded. The fundamental claim of ecofeminism is that all forms of oppression – of women, animals, nature, children, the Third World, etc. – are interconnected and have common ground, a common enemy, so to speak: androcentric culture. As Radford Reuther summarized it: “In patriarchal law, possession of women, slaves, animals and land all are symbolically and socially linked together. All are species of property and instruments of labor, owned and controlled by male heads of family as a ruling class.” (Reuther). In its theoretical ecofeminism dimension explores systemic connections between various and multidimensional forms of exploitation of women and nature.

Sherry Ortner in her influential essay *Is female to male as nature is to culture?* (Ortner 1974) points to the virtual universality of the subjection of women observable in almost all known cultures. Her explanation of this tendency is women’s status: an anthropologically ambivalent status caused by association of women with nature. Just as nature is defined as something that is overcome and controlled by culture, so are women. Ecofeminism continues this line of thought and claims that it is not anthropocentrism that is responsible for the exploitation of nature and women, but androcentrism inscribed into the very notion of culture. Western culture in particular seems to be, according to ecofeminists, organ-

ized by apotheosis of rationalism, thinking in terms of binary oppositions and logic of colonization. This logic organizes relations between people and nature, as well as between men and women (Plumwood 2003: 43). One of the consequences of thinking in terms of binary oppositions is the radical discontinuity between nature and culture. A woman has an ambivalent position in this respect: she is human, i.e. belongs to culture, but in the chain of culturally grounded binary oppositions she is opposed to a man, which makes her less human, closer to nature. This is a cause of depreciation of “typically female” characteristics and activities, but is also sometimes perceived as a potential: women, as anthropologically ambivalent, could become a vehicle of overcoming the trap of anthropocentrism. Ecofeminists demonstrate how women and nature are oppressed by the same structures of domination, how their fates are conceptually, historically, symbolically economically, linguistically and empirically linked. Women are animalized (cows, bitches, foxes, bunnies, pussies, etc.) and nature is feminized (for example, mother nature that is fertile or barren). “Animalizing women in a patriarchal culture where animals are seen as inferior to humans, thereby reinforces and authorizes women’s inferior status” (Warren 2000: 27). On the other hand, “the exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing (not masculinizing) them; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing or animalizing (not masculinizing or culturalizing) them.” (Warren 2000: 27) It is the patriarchal context that makes these tendencies harmful for animals, offensive for women, and depreciating for both. Thus ecofeminists criticize the traditional objectification and instrumentalization of nature and women. Rejection of such attitudes would result in treating nature as active subject and thinking of it in terms of cooperation and flourishing rather than use or exploitation. Nature, animals, women and men would then constitute elements of the biological continuum liberated from systems of domination.

Carol Adams and sexual politics of meat – the eatable and the rapeable

All the above issues converge in one of the most controversial ethical issues in ecofeminism: the relation between animal rights – or, in a broader version, ecofeminist approach to relationships between human and nature – and vegetarianism. Some ecofeminists are quite radical in their advocacy for vegetarianism or veganism. One of them is Carol J. Adams and her concept of the sexual politics of meat. Her claim is well summarized in the following quote: “Not only is animal defense the theory and vegetarianism the practice, but feminism is the theory and vegetarianism is part of the practice” (Adams 2010: 217). Other ecofeminist theories propose a more modest version of “contextual ethical vegetarianism”, while others contest any connection between feminism and vegetarianism. I shall now discuss the radical version of Carol Adams and two polemical standpoints.

Carol Adams is a proponent and advocate of a deep connection between feminism and vegetarianism/veganism. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, she examines in detail the process of social construction of the eatable body and human beings as carnivores. She demonstrates analogies between the culturally constructed “naturalness” of eating meat of other animals and “naturalness” of the subjection of women to men. In our everyday life while eating meat we interact with concrete, individual beings that in the process of social conceptualization are transformed into what Adams theorizes as absent referent. The result of this process is the transformation of dead/slaughtered animals into meat and living animals into the carriers of meat. This ontology, Adams claims, is the product of ideology, and “... if women are ontologized as sexual beings (or rapeable, as some feminists argue), animals are ontologized as carriers of meat. In ontologizing women and animals as objects, our language simultaneously eliminates the fact that someone else is acting as a subject/agent/perpetrator of violence.” (Adams 1991: 136). The agency of humans buying dead animals is removed by linguistic transformation of something we do to animals (“someone kills them so that I can eat them”) into what they are (“meat animals”). Ideology becomes ontology (Adams 1991: 136–137; Adams 2010).

What is the sexual politics of meat? In Adams’s own words: “It is an attitude and action that animalizes women and sexualizes and feminizes animals” (Adams 2010: 4). Reducing men to women and women to animals constitutes a chain of cultural degradation. Such an approach facilitates for our consciousness the transformation of the other into food. “*The Sexual Politics of Meat* means that what, or more precisely *who*, we eat is determined by the patriarchal politics of our culture, and that the meanings attached to meat eating include meanings clustered around virility.” (Adams 2010: 15). Following the ecofeminist tradition Adams argues that the essence of patriarchy is the control of bodies: women’s bodies and other animal bodies. She illustrates her claim of analogies between the way patriarchal culture treats women and animals with many examples of imaging women as animals and animals as women in advertising, popular culture, everyday life (a menu in a restaurant sexualizing meat in order to make the dishes more desirable for clients). She develops visual representation of women as meat and meat as women in a kind of sequel to *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, *The Pornography of Meat* (Adams 2003), published thirteen years after the original edition of the book.

Adams is one of the advocates of the view that a vegetarian diet is much healthier than one involving meat and the only explanation of people still adhering to meat eating is the cultural habit grounded in patriarchal culture. Even more so, if we realize that the ultimate object of exploitation is a female animal, it is the products of their bodies that are exploited and their children are taken away and eaten. The deeply violent aspect of patriarchal culture is visible in treating animals as food. I think one should add that it is even more so in use of animals for entertainment (such as corrida, hunting, cockfights). Further reasons for arguing that there is a connection in patriarchal culture between the treatment of animals and

of women is the fact that food is classified according to gender: men are associated with meat and women with vegetables (Adams 2010: 27). In view of this idea the question arises: who should be vegetarian? Only feminists? Women in general? According to Adams, everyone should become vegetarian. If only feminists or only women became vegetarians, it would in fact mean prescribing to the sexual politics of meat. The basic assumption of the standpoint expressed in the book is that the oppression and exploitation of “women and other animals” (Adams 2010: 29) are interconnected and have common ground – patriarchal culture, whereas the strong claim of the whole book is that patriarchal beliefs, associations and practices are harmful for everyone: men, women, animals alike. Acknowledging it and changing practices (e.g. becoming a vegetarian) is better for everyone involved, including the oppressors, since men are also forced by culture into the role of oppressors, just as women and animals are forced into the role of victims.

Adams grounds the need for ethical vegetarianism not only in gender distinctions, but also in class distinctions. “My concern in this book is with the self-conscious omission of meat because of ethical vegetarianism, that is, vegetarianism arising from an ethical decision that regards meat eating as an unjustifiable exploitation of the other animals” (Adams 2010: 30). She demonstrates how historically culinary preferences and availability of certain kinds of food have signified and strengthened class distinctions and relations of power within patriarchal society: “Dietary habits proclaim class distinctions, but they proclaim patriarchal distinctions as well. Women, second-class citizens, are more likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods in a patriarchal culture: vegetables, fruits, and grains rather than meat. The sexism in meat eating recapitulates the class distinctions with an added twist: a mythology permeates all classes that meat is a masculine food and meat eating a male activity.” (Adams 2010: 48). Who is entitled to eating meat in the situation of deficiency? The answer, according to Adams, is almost universally white men in a position of power. Therefore, “the hierarchy of meat protein reinforces a hierarchy of race, class, and sex.” (Adams 2010: 53). She quotes early anthropologists who argued that savages adhering to a vegetarian diet did so because they were closer to animals than humans themselves, thus proclaiming meat eating as the sign of biological and civilizational development.

The central aspect of Adams’s reflection is the connection between the exploitation of women and animals in patriarchal culture. One of the most moving fragments of her book concerns violence: she traces striking similarities between rape and butchering. These similarities, Adams writes, are grounded in the same cultural process: being transformed into absent referent through language. The animal disappears physically (it is dead), in language (it becomes meat) and symbolically (it becomes a metaphor, in cases when someone says he or she “feels treated like meat”) (Adams 2010: 67). Cultural positioning of women as absent referents, especially in the context of rape, takes a very similar course, hence the similarities of their fate: “Sexual violence and meat eating, which appear to be discrete forms of violence, find a point of intersection in the absent referent. Cultural images of

sexual violence, and actual sexual violence, often rely on our knowledge of how animals are butchered and eaten.” (Adams 2010: 68). In fact, the same refers to all “humans in animal condition”: infants, women, the poor, blacks, the insane etc. (Adams 2010: 69). It could perhaps be argued that any minority group or excluded group is a potential or actual subject of this mechanism of being transformed into an absent referent. Adams cites, for example, the studies comparing ghettos and slaughterhouses.

In both cases that are of our concern here – women and animals, rape and butchering – living subjects are turned into dead objects. The key element of this process is a literal or symbolic dismemberment of bodies: be it the body of a woman or of an animal. Women’s bodies and their parts are culturally consumed, just as parts of other animals are materially consumed. “What connects being a receptacle and being a piece of meat, being entered and being eaten? After all, being raped/violated/entered does not approximate being eaten. So why then does it feel that way? Or rather, why is it so easily described as feeling that way? Because, if you are a piece of meat, you are subject to a knife, to implemental violence. Rape, too, is implemental violence in which the penis is the implement of violation. You are held down by a male body as the fork holds a piece of meat so that the knife may cut into it.” (Adams 2010: 81/82).

In the spirit of what is sometimes ironically called “political correctness,” Adams is advocating the change in verbal and visual language we use when we talk about bodies of women and animals – the language that conceals violence by transforming living beings into absent referents. When they work for support of this mechanism, cultural texts, images, metaphors contribute to the proliferation of “false consciousness”, as radical thinkers would call it, although Adams herself does not use this term. It seems appropriate in the context of her theory, because by subjecting to the mechanism of absent referent, we accept this concealed cruelty, oppression exploitation etc. as “natural” and without alternative. A distinct example of this would be a woman eating meat.

Taking all this into account, Adams consequently supports attempts to change the language of describing human relations with other animals. Even my frequent use of the phrase “people and other animals” here would follow this tendency. We should avoid using euphemism and use “kill” when we talk about killing, not refer to ourselves as masters of animals, but rather their companions etc.: “Guilty people try to cover up their horrifying cruelties against, and backward exploitation of, non-human animals with deceptive euphemisms like the ones above. Say it like it is, and correct others when they don’t, so that people will realize the true nature and full extent of the suffering we inflict on other living beings.” (Mola *et al.*, reprinted in Adams 2010: 95). The first line of defense against meat eaters would then consist of using their own strategy: challenging the “obviousness” of language, changing the interpretation, writing a new story, in which cruelty and subjection of animals will be retold. The following quotation summarizes Adams’s view: “To understand ethical vegetarianism, we must define meat eating. [...]

Meat eating is to animals what white racism is to people of color, anti-Semitism is to Jewish people, homophobia is to gay men and lesbians, and woman hating is to women. All are oppressed by a culture that does not want to assimilate them fully on their grounds and with rights. [...] Meat eating is the most oppressive and extensive institutionalized violence against animals.” (Adams 2010: 100). Yet another reason for all people to become vegetarians, not only for women or feminists.

However, most feminists, even ecofeminists, do not advocate vegetarianism, or at least their position is formulated in a more balance way. Even if they accept the basic premise of ecofeminism, namely that oppression of women and animals are generated by the same structure of domination embodied in patriarchal culture, strict vegetarianism does not necessarily follow from this statement. Deane Curtin, for example, argues that the rhetoric of rights does not apply to animals because it can grant animals rights as long as they are similar to people. In other words, it is governed by the “assumption that moral status depends on identity of interests,” whereas “feminist ethic tends to be pluralistic in its intention to recognize heterogeneous moral interest” (Curtin 1991: 64). The rhetoric of rights thus understood assumes conflict that needs solving; it is rationalistic and has universalist pretenses, whereas the feminist approach is dialogical, relational and contextual.

Drawing on these arguments, Curtin postulates “contextual moral vegetarianism”, relativized to different contexts and interests. From this point of view our relations with animals should be adjusted to a concrete situation and need. It can, for example, take the shape of the following rule: “I do not kill animals for me, but I would for my starving daughter.” The question of meat eating can be relativized geographically (when we take into account the lack of other healthy diet) or whether it is a part of our ritual interaction with animals. However, asserts Curtin, “[if] there is any context [...] in which moral vegetarianism is completely compelling as an expression of an ecological ethic of care, it is for economically well-off persons who have a choice of what food they want to eat; they have a choice of what they will count as food” (Curtin 1991: 70). There are other dieting options available and factory farming is cruel and harmful for the environment.

Adams is very critical of moderate versions of vegetarianism proposed by Curtin and other ecofeminists (e.g. Warren 2000: 125–145). She challenges the assumption that the way that animals are killed or whether we respect them before we kill them (as in the case of ritual or so called “clean” killing) or any other circumstances influence our moral evaluations of eating animals. She points out that this view is self-contradictory because it assumes some kind of reciprocity. For example, in the case of “relational hunt” our benefit seems obvious, whereas it is unclear how it would benefit the killed animal. There is no such thing as contextual vegetarianism, concludes Adams: “We either see animals as edible bodies or we do not.” (Adams 1991: 140).

There are also conceptions that object to such (or even any) connection between feminism and vegetarianism. For example, Kathryn Paxton George ac-

knowledges historical, psychological and cultural links between these two attitudes and practices, however, she claims, ethical vegetarianism is in fact in contradiction with feminism. Founding her claims about the consequences of vegetarian and vegan diets for people of different age, sex, race, class, place of living, etc. she argues that the line of reasoning supporting ethical vegetarianism is usually grounded in traditional ethical theories, mainly in utilitarianism. It states that even though sometimes animals, as well as people, can be killed for the greater good, in a model situation inclination to meat eating is a matter of taste and not a matter of necessity or health, and thus there is no justification for killing animals. This approach recognizes that for some people animal products can be necessary to maintain health and normal functioning (for example for children), and in such cases the rule stating that eating animals is immoral is suspended in view of the greater good – the health of this person. However, the claim that eating meat is generally unnecessary for good health and normal development in fact includes white men of the age twenty five to fifty living in developed societies. Therefore, we create a moral rule that most people are not able to follow and have to regard themselves as exceptions. Among those people are very often women (if only menstruating, pregnant, breastfeeding, after menopause etc.) and thus, they are “routinely excused for doing what would normally be considered wrong, they are relegated to a moral underclass of beings who, because of their natures, are not capable of being fully moral. They are physiologically barred from *doing the right thing* because they are not *being the right thing*” (Paxton 1994: 425). By assuming a male ideal or model, ethical vegetarianism turns out to be the product of masculine domination.

PETA.xxx: women as/for animals – small case study

Even if the connection between the symbolic status of women and animals, or feminism and vegetarianism, is not obvious or simple, it is, nevertheless, exploited by activists on both sides, calling into question the commonality of aims. Images that use the sexuality of women to promote animal rights seem to contribute to the animalization of women and thus contribute to their ambivalent anthropological condition that has been one of the contexts of their oppression. These images try to appeal to our aesthetic sensitivity while trying to reach our moral sensitivity, but with immoral means. As Adams notices: “...we can comprehend the problem when animal rights organizations chose to use pornographic ads to reach meat eaters: they are speaking to the *male subject* and assume he basically cannot change. We who object to the sexual politics of meat imagine something better. We imagine that the male subject truly can change.” (Adams 2010: 6).

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) campaigns fit very neatly into this picture. Famous controversial campaigns include pictures of naked attractive female celebrities in sexual poses with a caption “I’d rather go naked than

wear fur”; naked tattooed celebrities of both sexes in a campaign “Ink not Mink”; naked female celebrities in a campaign “All Animals Have the Same Parts.” PETA explains on their website (in the section titled *Why does PETA sometimes use nudity in its campaigns?*) that this strategy, while controversial, is the lesser evil, since it reaches a lot of people without considerable financial outlays, since they capture media attention.

It should be noted that some campaigns also use naked male models, however, they are rarely used in a sexualized or eroticized way. They, instead, display masculine power. For example, the images in a campaign against circuses and keeping animals in chains uses the image of a woman in chains that has pornographic connotations (she is portrayed as helpless and enslaved – a popular pornographic motive), whereas the image of a naked man is powerful: he is shown as powerful and actively fighting the chains.

The most recent campaign that generated a lot of public interest and media comments is Peta.xxx project. PETA announced that they were going to launch a pornographic website offering access to porn but showing violent and cruel treatment of animals. When you try to access the site you are welcomed with “Now that we have your attention” and further explanation: “We know that there’s more to life than sex and that you have multiple interests. Now it’s time to see a few PETA videos considered so “hardcore” and so “offensive” that no TV stations have dared to run them. PETA believes that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any way. At PETA, we use every available opportunity to share this message – we always have and always will. For many animals, it means the difference between life and death. Learn more about PETA at peta.org.” The question, however, remains whether in this case the ends justify the means.

Conclusion: should feminists/women/people be vegetarians?

It seems that in some respects the cultural status of women and animals has been historically and symbolically similar. There is, however, one essential difference: “an enormous void separates these forms of oppression of people from the form in which we oppress the other animals. We do not consume people. We do consume the other animals.” (Adams 2010: 100) Of course, in a way it is contingent – which animals we treat as eatable and which not. There are cultural variations in that respect: horses and dogs are eatable in some cultures, pigs or cows are forbidden in others. Some peoples have eaten the flesh of their own members, flesh of people from other tribes. There is a publication published in Poland, *Kuchmiakanibala, czyli 22 potrawy z człowieka (The Cannibal Cookbook, or 22 Human Dishes)*: an instance of black humor that plays with this idea, along with sexist and racist stereotypes. It looks like a regular cookbook, and inside we can find recipes for

dishes made out of human beings. The names of dishes are mostly language games untranslatable to other languages.

Even if there is this difference I mentioned above in treating woman and animals, what remains valid is the fact that women's anthropological status is problematic, as Adams's theory of absent referent demonstrates. Adams had argued deeply and convincingly that there are interconnections between feminism and vegetarianism. Her claims seem to be well documented and arguments well formulated. In the preface to the twentieth anniversary edition of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, she emphasizes that treating women equally or non-human animals in a humane way is not a sacrifice on the part of humans, but a creation of a world better for everyone, or rather for every living creature. It is quite an idealistic perspective and, as tempting as it is, to assume it one would have to ignore a large part of reality. Namely the part driven by conflicts of interests, struggles for limited resources, hierarchies of social structure and power. It rather shows that the easiest to convince are the already convinced because they have nothing to lose, but it does not answer the question how to convince those, who in their own opinion lose something: power, nutritional elements, entertainment, power, choice, freedom of taste etc.

It seems that being aware of these facts and arguments not only all feminists but all women, if not all people, should become vegetarians. They do not. How does one combine knowledge of suffering, lessons from history (oppression of women, slavery), condemnation of racism, etc. with eating animals, using their skin (which becomes leather) and fur, using them for entertainment?

The strategy of rational argumentation (whether it concerns women's rights or animal rights) assumes that people are rational beings, with consistent world-views and ethical beliefs, according to which they act. They are not. There are many reasons why people act in a certain way towards each other, towards other animals and the rest of nature. They may be simultaneously motivated by various, even self-contradictory factors: religious, emotional, aesthetic, moral, social, individual dispositions. All these factors are grounded in culture, including its iconography and systems of associations; they are the reflection of cultural hierarchies and as such they influence actual behavior. One of the principal reasons or motivations for people to take any action is their own interest. Therefore, even though theoretically groups/beings subjected to oppression and exploitation should take common action against not only their own oppression but oppression and exploitation in general or of any other group, it usually does not happen – the oppressed groups secure first and foremost their own rights.

On the other hand, if the claim that discriminated women and exploited animals have a common enemy, patriarchal culture (note: not men but patriarchal culture), any action or kind of resistance to it will benefit all oppressed groups. However, even if the claim of the common oppressor is legitimate, there is still no direct connection between advocating animal rights (or at least their well-being) and improving women's situation. Historically the fight for women's rights

benefitted first and foremost white middle-class well-situated women of the Western world and did not translate directly into the improvement of other groups of women (e.g. women of color, in other cultures etc.), though there probably are indirect connections. On the more individual level, being a vegetarian does not necessarily make anyone a better person in relation to other people. Rousseau was a known misanthrope, but was willing to include animals into the moral community. In the Preface to *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* he wrote: "It seems, in effect, that if I am obliged not to do any harm to my fellow man, it is less because he is a rational being than because he is a sentient being: a quality that, since it is common to both animals and men, should at least give the former the right not to be needlessly mistreated by the latter." (Rousseau 1754/1992: 14). Hitler's alleged vegetarianism, a common example in this line of argument, may not have been actual, but the fact is that the Nazi period in Germany was the time of brutal persecution of certain groups of people (also by associating them culturally with animals, for example Jews portrayed as cockroaches) and simultaneously the time of a very modern approach to animal rights. Sometimes being a vegetarian, egalitarian and a good person in general does happen to go together, as was allegedly the case Pythagoras, who held egalitarian views and was a vegetarian. There is a famous story reported by Xenophanes: "Once, they say, he [Pythagoras] was passing by when a dog was being ill-treated. 'Stop!' he said, 'don't hit it! It is the soul of a friend! I knew it when I heard its voice'" (Russell 2013: 42).

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Słowa kluczowe: ekofeminizm, feminizm, wegetarianizm, Carol Adams, prawa zwierząt

Key words: ecofeminism, feminism, vegetarianism, Carol Adams, animal rights

Abstract

The direct impulse to write this essay was the recent twentieth anniversary of the first edition of Carol Adams's famous book-manifesto *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. One of the most important themes in Adams's work is the commonality of fate of women and animals in patriarchal culture. I use this idea to point to the ambivalence of women's anthropological condition in an androcentric world, or rather the world in which "anthropocentric" in practice means "androcentric", since the model or the standard of humanity is masculinity. A woman only partially fits this model, thus her anthropological state of suspension between culture and nature, humans and animals.

Adams draws from this a radical postulate of necessary connection between being a feminist and a vegetarian. There are two main contexts for this idea. Firstly, the broader context of the complex relations between humans and other animals is marked with ambivalence, hypocrisy, simultaneous cruelty and sentimentality. I point to the areas that in my opinion need urgent rethinking from this perspective. Secondly, there is an ecofeminist context: a philosophical theory and activist movement that constitutes the background for Adams's theory.

An especially valid element of Adams's theory is her description of the mechanism of transforming women and animals into absent referents. From this point of view I refer to controversial PETA campaigns, which use animalized woman's sexuality in order to promote animal rights.

Człowiek – Kobieta – Zwierzę:
konteksty, paradoksy i ambiwalencje seksualnej polityki mięsa

Impulsem do napisania tego eseju była niedawno miniona dwudziesta rocznica wydania książki-manifestu Carol Adams *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. Jednym z istotnych wątków prac Adams jest zwrócenie uwagi na wspólnotę losu kobiet i zwierząt w kulturze patriarcalnej. Wykorzystuję ten wątek do wskazania na ambiwalentną kondycję antropologiczną kobiet w androcentrycznym świecie lub też świecie, w którym określenie „antropocentryczny” znaczy w gruncie rzeczy „androcentryczny”, ponieważ wzorcem czy modelem człowieczeństwa jest męskość. Kobieta jedynie częściowo wypełnia ten wzorzec, stąd jej ambiwalentne rozpięcie między kulturą a naturą, zwierzęciem a człowiekiem.

Kontekst dla namysłu nad wynikającym z tego radykalnym postulatem Adams dotyczącym związków feminizmu i wegetarianizmu stanowi, z jednej strony, złożoność relacji ludzi ze zwierzętami, naznaczonych ambiwalencją, hipokryzją, jednocześnie okrucieństwem i sentymentalizmem. Wskazuję przy tym na obszary tych relacji szczególnie domagające się przemyslenia. Z drugiej strony, kontekst ten stanowi ekofeminizm: teoria filozoficzna i ruch społeczny, w który koncepcja Adams się wpisuje.

Szczególną uwagę przy analizie koncepcji Adams poświęcam jej opisowi mechanizmu zamiany kobiet i zwierząt w nieobecnego referenta, który wydaje mi się szczególnie trafny i wart dalszego rozwinięcia. Z tej perspektywy nawiązuję do ambiwalentnych kampanii PETA, które wykorzystują kobiecą seksualność, animalizując ją w celu promocji praw zwierząt.