

## **Whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about factory farming**

This is how we might alter a famous quote by a philosopher and a representative of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer, who wrote in 1939: „Whoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism.“ (Horkheimer 2005, s. 226) He pointed out that fascism is not just a random deviation from the standard or a defect of a naturally-occurring alliance between liberal democracy and capitalism, but that it is in the shadow of a concealed consequence of the contradictions of capitalist production logic awaiting its opportunity. The radicalization of individuals and whole societies are affected by many factors, however, these are often related to the systemic crisis of capital accumulation and economic growth, which are vital for the stability of capitalism.

Like Horkheimer, who searched for the systemic causes of fascism, we may also think of other equally serious problems in today's world, such as climate change or the so-called “animal production”, which is strongly linked with it. At first glance, many may think that the title of this essay combines two absolutely different and unrelated spheres of our lives. Therefore, we will gradually shed light on the legitimacy of this claim and clarify the deadlock between capital and farms. But to do that, we must start in the ancient past.

### **Domestication as Desecration**

According to many archaeologists and historians, the first domesticated animal was a dog. Some claim that this happened 15,000 years ago, but there are also data that go far beyond. The dominant way to obtain food during this period was hunting and harvesting. This changed during the Neolithic era, about 10,000 years ago. People gradually transformed from hunters and gatherers to farmers, and domesticated sheep, goats, pigs, cows or horses for work, food and production materials. However, the relationship between man and other animals has radically changed with domestication. It was not just a tame for a particular purpose; for the first time, the animal became the property of a person who, thanks to it, had the power to control the animals, trade them, and transform them to their advantage. Thus, the natural evolutionary forces have been replaced by targeted activities of the human hand and humility towards other animals has gradually changed to superiority. (DeMello 2012, p. 84–87)

In general, there is a belief that, without domestication, human civilization would not experience such a rapid development today. Animals served us as a stable source of food, such as means of transport or work tools, but they were also our close companions and protectors. The combination of these factors with others has also resulted in the emergence of the first trading hubs and city

states. (DeMello 2012, p. 88) In addition to the benefits for human civilization, such a development was also positive for the animal kingdom. This relationship is also referred to as mutually beneficial cooperation, especially in the case of the so-called “animal stock” – the animals trade their security from predators and enough food for life under controlled conditions. However, such thinking is considerably ahistorical and looks at the past under a certain ideology. Moreover, it is a history written by people.

Based on his historical analysis, the American sociologist David Nibert described completely different contexts resulting from the effects of animal domestication. According to him, the idea of domestication as a mutual cooperation is very inadequate. He considers subjugation practices associated with domestication to be a profound disturbance to the lives of sentient beings. Therefore he refers to the process of domestication as a *process of desecration*.<sup>1</sup> It is the: „ ...systematic practice of violence in which social animals are enslaved and biologically manipulated, which results in their objectification, subordination, and oppression. Through domeseccration, many species of animals that lived on the earth for millions of years, including several species of large, sociable Eurasian mammals, came to be regarded as mere objects, their very existence recognized only in relation to their exploitation as ‘food animals’ or similar socially constructed positions reflecting various forms of exploitation.“ (Nibert 2013, p. 22)

Such animal degradation, according to Nibert, also had a negative impact on the human world. The introduction of animal control undermined the possibility of creating a just and peaceful society. Indeed, the hierarchical position against animals and the violence against them has often been transformed into violence among the people themselves. “Dehumanisation” brought to perfection in animals have been realized in humans with phenomena such as slave trade, colonization, or as a stigmatization of all “others” – women, people of different race, or physically or mentally handicapped. However, we are not able to sufficiently explain the gradual systematic repression of people and other animals without addressing the social relationships that led to the situation. The institutionalization of oppression has often been linked to the material interests of the elites, for which the state and its repressive and ideological possibilities have been a good partner.

Animals, and especially those we used for work and food, have never been too well off in human societies. A chronicle that would tell a story from their point of view would look very different from what can be found in history written by humans. In this imaginary chronicle of animal history, two crucial moments would be particularly highlighted. The first would be domestication as a time period of depriving the evolutionary freedom of thousands of animal species. The second black

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<sup>1</sup> The author uses the term “domeseccration” (from “desacrate”) as the equivalent of "domestication".

point in history would indicate a period beginning around the 18th and 19th centuries. Their suffering has intensified many times with the global development of the capitalist and industrialized way of producing goods.

### **Capital as killing**

While domestication has desecrated animals, capital has also drained the last of their lives. As Marx said: „... capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.“ (Marx 1985, s. 627) For capital to exist as capital, it must constantly grow and expand. Its aim is not to meet the needs, but to produce goods for sale on the market with a profit perspective, regardless of the impact on the natural environment and the lives of people and other animals. In the Descartes' logic of capitalism, an animal in factory farming is only a machine in machinery, a mindless body, goods for sale, consumption, and subsequent profit. This process of the so-called *commodification* has not escaped anything alive or even dead. Individual animals are simply interchangeable with other anonymous pieces of animals. Their value and importance is determined by a heartless economic calculus.

Industrialized food production methods fully developed in the 20th century. This is how a very historically specific model of gathering food came into being. Most people have been separated from the production process, as well as from direct contact with the species they eat. However, to achieve the cheapest and fastest production of “animal foods”, it is logical that something else has to be neglected and somewhere else a negative consequence must arise. For instance, one of the results is the unnaturally rapid growth of animals supported by hormones and antibiotics, in addition to their short life and limited movement. In addition to the artificial environment, absolute control is also ensured by genetic manipulation and cloning of the “most productive” animals. The idea is to keep costs as low as possible and to pull productivity upwards. This system cannot be “humanized” by introducing practices to improve animal welfare either. They are still reduced to property and goods. However, intensive farming does not only affect the lives of animals inside these darkened buildings. The animal industry has a significant share in increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, thus significantly contributing to climate change. (FAO 2006) Notorious is also the pollution of groundwater, where animal excrement leak, as well as intensive use of natural resources and many other adverse effects on the surrounding nature.

Of course, the rationalization of production and automation in the breeding and slaughter of animals has also had an impact on people who have to work in farms and slaughterhouses. Both female and male employees are equally subject to productivity maximization. Since the first halls have been launched, the workers working there were mostly migrants and various socially marginalized groups of people, who have been miserable and without the possibility of

establishing unions. Low or no safety standards, fast work with sharp objects, contact with infected animals, air full of dust and dirt - all this has contributed to making work in the meat-processing industry one of the most dangerous and mentally challenging jobs ever. For many, it may come as a surprise that the “dismantling” line for slaughterhouses contributed to the creation of the first assembly lines. Henry Ford, known as the first to introduce cheap mass production of cars, was inspired by a slaughterhouse system in Chicago. The work there was divided into follow-up sections, where the workers performed a simple task and where the machines helped lift the heavy bodies of the animals. Many industrial innovations came from where their killing improved. The historian Charles Patterson even claims in his book *The Eternal Treblinka* (2003) that these techniques, together with Ford's known affinity for the Nazi regime, led indirectly to mass killing of Jews. It was not without reason that Theodor Adorno, Horkheimer's fellow from the Frankfurt School, who also had Jewish roots, uttered a famous sentence: „Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they're only animals.“ (Patterson et al. 2003, p. 76)

Throughout the history of mankind, it has been unprecedented for meat to be as frequent on the menu as it has been since the 20th century. In addition to serious environmental impacts, this is directly related to the development of so-called civilization diseases. When asked why people eat so much meat, we are tempted to answer that it is because of the expansion of farms and thus better affordability of meat. However, farming did not arise because there was first a demand from society for meat, milk and eggs. On the contrary, farms have expanded mainly because the development of industrial production methods has enabled the emergence of automation, resulting in the generation of huge profits for a narrow group of people. The dairy and meat processing industry is one of the most powerful and richest in the world, and it is also heavily subsidized by the state. As a result, there is necessarily a fear of losing this position. The profits of the producers depend heavily on whether people consume enough of what they produce. The immense resources of these companies are therefore used to influence consumer habits through advertising and lobbying politicians.<sup>2</sup> They then also directly and indirectly finance research and development of methods for more economically efficient exploitation.

Anthropologist Barbara Noske focused on the long evolution of these relationships and practices, and introduced a concept called the *animal-industrial complex*, later further developed by Richard Twine. (Twine 2012, p. 15) They pointed out the issue of using animals for food not as a purely ethical problem, but as a wider part of the mechanisms associated with capitalism, which allow mass killing and normalization. The current situation of “animal stock” and other animals exists

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<sup>2</sup> The direct entry of businessmen into politics, as in the case of Czech Prime Minister and owner of Agrofert Andrej Babiš, is not exceptional either.

primarily due to the financial and power interests of market players. In addition to farms, farmers, growers, owners of slaughterhouses, fast food, various financial institutions, lobbyists and governments are involved. Together, they form a strong network that is interested in increasing animal consumption for food. Of course, this does not mean that other factors are not significant, but the principle of capital accumulation is a unifying and driving imperative in the background.

The cycle of life and death in factory farming is a metaphor for the cycle of capital accumulation. A cow is born only to produce profit to its owner. Then it gets sucked up and down to the point where it cannot bring more value than the cost of keeping a cow alive. Then comes the death. Meanwhile, however, the cow was artificially fertilized several times and gave life to another wheel in the machine. This is a daily reality for billions of animals that will continue until the logic of capital accumulation is replaced by the principle of meeting the needs of human and non-human animals simultaneously.

### **De(con)struction as renaissance**

The factory farming did not just emerge out of nowhere. Its history of cruelty is linked to the history of domestication, or to the process of animal desecration, and has intensified with the global development of the commodity form of production. Not every animal abuse is a consequence of capital pressure, but capital activities always have extreme effects on animals inside and outside farms. The normalization of the view of animals as resources for human needs is, by its very nature, ubiquitous in capitalism. This is undoubtedly a great ethical problem, but, at the same time, despite its socio-economic causes, it is an unsolvable problem. However, overcoming capitalism alone is not a sufficient condition to end factory farming. In addition, the apparent neutrality and the nature of a comprehensive industrialized approach to producing the products needed to meet needs have to be confronted. It is also important to change our relationship to food. An essential part of this transformation is our understanding of the role of animals in the revolutionary process as equal partners and as witnesses of the destructive power of capital and its state.

The analysis of capitalism deepens the understanding of the relationships that led to the emergence of factory farming and refines criticism from flat paternalist phrases to the radical transformation of the relationship between humans and other animals. It is only by overcoming the sense of alienation to humans themselves and to their work that the systemic preconditions for overcoming the alienation of people from nature and its other inhabitants can be fulfilled. In other words, getting rid of species superiority and structurally conditioned dynamics of oppression and exploitation of animals is impossible without getting rid of the superiority of capital over people. Therefore, I keep insisting on the eligibility of the title I chose for this essay. Whoever is

not willing to talk about capitalism (and overcome it) should also keep quiet about factory farming. Finally, even Horkheimer understood the emancipation of the society as the change in relation to animals.

It is perhaps clearer now why I mentioned the deadlock between capital and factory farming in the introduction. Marx talked about the capital as of a dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor. In order to live, it must parasite others. The de(con)struction of the nature of the system of this commodification of life is a good starting point for writing a new chronicle of animal history – a history without factory farming. After their metaphorical as well as real desecration and killing, a renaissance could occur that would eliminate the parasite and restore life to all dimensions of the global planetary society. American sociologist Steven Best calls this view, which perceives the interconnection of different types of oppression, a policy of total liberation. (Best 2016, p. xii) The vision of the world, where there will be no killing of the proletarians of different races, religions and animal species, is (and for some time, will probably remain) a dream utopia. Nevertheless, I think that trying to achieve the ideal of total liberation is not vain.

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