

Published as Ariel Salleh, 'Sighting Animals through the Lens of Hegemonic Masculinity', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 2009, Vol. 20, No. 1, 130-134.

Review of Marti Kheel, *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.

Not all ecofeminists make use of Marxist constructs in their analysis, and Marti Kheel is a case in point. Even so, her book *Nature Ethics* is well aware of the ways in which the market economy shapes assumptions about nature in environmental philosophy. As she notes: “philosophers have tended to view other-than-human animals in instrumental terms, as ‘stock’ or ‘resource’ to be conserved for present ‘value’ and as an ‘investment’ for future generations.”¹ Kheel draws on the work of contemporary Australian socialists, who adapt the Gramscian notion of hegemony to explain the political function of unconscious gender stereotypes: “hegemony operates through both externalized force and internalized consent ... hegemonic masculinity is conceived not simply as an attribute of individual men, but rather as a diffuse worldview that inheres in institutions, power relations, and ideas.”² Kheel’s book is a powerful expose of “hegemonic masculinity” in the writing of four pioneering environmental ethicists: three Americans—Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, and Holmes Rolston III—and an Australian, Warwick Fox.

The author is a visiting scholar at the Graduate Theological Union and a longtime advocate for animals. So it is no surprise to find that her secondary agenda in *Nature Ethics* is to provide an ecofeminist framework for veganism. She links her two agendas this way: “Just as men under patriarchal society view women as their antithesis in the quest for masculine self-identity, so too humans have often viewed animals as a foil for the establishment of human identity.”³ The human use of animals to bolster a sense of species superiority is also noted by psychologist Kenneth Shapiro, who writes that: “animals are employed as a categorical foil representing precisely the absence of reason and relative autonomy, hallmarks of individuality.”⁴ Is this why Darwinism is still rejected by some publics? Is the idea of evolution too threatening to this comforting identity of men over animals? For Sarah Palin’s political style notwithstanding, this is indeed, a masculine identity. As Carol Adams puts it in her classic book *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, the oppression of women and other-than-human animals run parallel. It is “a cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption ... Consumption is the fulfilment of oppression, the annihilation of will, of separate identity.”⁵

Of course, templates for masculinity and femininity vary across time and

space, but in today's rapidly globalizing corporate monoculture, it is the dominant sex-gender tradition that needs political attention. The rise of capitalism and the industrial division of labor exacerbated existing gender differences by setting up men and women with competing employments, social trajectories, and value constellations. Understanding this socio-economics is necessary to account for contemporary sex-gender differences, but it is not a sufficient explanation. Kheel complements the structural analysis with material from the psychological literature, particularly the fraught nature/nurture debate. And in passing, she does a valuable service in demonstrating how Carol Gilligan's important work on an "ethics of care" versus an "ethics of justice" has been repeatedly misconstrued by an impatient academic readership.⁶ Kheel elaborates: "... in the post-Enlightenment Western tradition, care has been relegated to the realm of personal relations, distinct from the 'more important' public sphere which is the province of moral theory."⁷ By this view, justice is owed to individual rights holders who earn "the wages" of respect, whereas care, traditionally associated with women, is outside of the moral economy. Care is perceived—and diminished—as a "natural capacity."

As with the discussion of veganism, *Nature Ethics* moves away from a mandatory ethic, to explore "why it is" that empathy for other-than-human beings is so absent in modernity. The book follows several ecofeminist studies on the exploitation of non-human animals. In addition to the rich and prolific output of Carol Adams, Andree Collard and Joyce Contrucci, and U.S. Green activist Greta Gaard, are notable contributors to this literature. Alternatively, ecosocialists may be drawn to Josephine Donovan's application of Lukacs' theory of class consciousness to non-human species, since, in Kheel's words: "other-than-human animals also have a sense of themselves as more than commodities."⁸ Few ecosocialists have attended to the exploitation of animals; although Richard Levin and Richard Lewontin endorse their intentional capacity as "workers," and U.K. Marxist Ted Benton argues strongly for vegetarianism.⁹ As for the utilitarian animal liberationism of Peter Singer and animal rights philosophy of Tom Regan, Kheel finds both rather masculinist, along with pronouncements of the Earth First! cadre.¹⁰

Marti Kheel sketches out the environmental destructiveness of capitalist livestock production in soil degradation, water pollution, and greenhouse gases. And she alerts readers to the risks of genetically modified animal foods. There is no doubt that the causes of both ecological sustainability and global social justice would be greatly helped if the so-called developed world simplified its consumption habits. But this book outlines its approach to veganism as a response to the suffering of animals. Such compassion is well developed in Buddhism and in some minority societies from which Westerners might learn a great deal. This said, the book has a distinctly North American feel, and contemporary capitalist economic impacts on life at the neocolonial periphery are not discussed. However, Kheel does unpack the relation between class, sex-gender, imperialism, and the sport of hunting. It is common knowledge that gender dualisms are reinforced by the image of "man the hunter," but it is less often realized that hunting is "a symbolic display of class superiority, proclaimed through enacting the roles of conqueror and provider."¹¹ Plato is said to have celebrated the "virtues of the aristocratic chase," and it is not only conservatives who blood themselves

for the political fray.

In the final days leading up to the presidential election, Senator John Kerry made a campaign pitch that required no words ... Clad in hunting attire, with blood dripping from his hands, a double-barreled shotgun in tow, he was photographed along with his companions, emerging from an Ohio cornfield brandishing three dead geese.¹²

Aristotle considered the hunting of animals a training ground for young men off to war. And indeed, a lust for predation and drive to protect were combined in the burgeoning U.S. conservation/preservation movement. A first generation environmental “progressive,” Theodore Roosevelt, once a sickly child, would come to realize his manhood through the hunt, justifying this as the modern way of curbing men’s primal aggressive drives.¹³ But there was a further rationalization, as Kheel adds, “Roosevelt’s emphasis on the value of hunting as sport was also part of a larger military philosophy that endorsed warfare as a means for advancing American imperial designs.”¹⁴ The “preservationist’s” attitudes in relation to “life” were certainly a confused mixture of objectives. Not only did their new federal regulations displace native peoples from their livelihood, their worship of nature led to the domestication of wild species by confining them to managed conservation zones. Equally confounding is the contradiction between Aldo Leopold’s “biotic holism” and his desire to control large predators of game by the rifle. Leopold’s sense of “the ecological community” was riddled with hierarchical assumptions: for instance, “thinking like a mountain” allowed the abstract overview needed for instrumental management; species were idealized entities rather than living flesh and blood; and a good part of Leopold’s focus was on the psychological benefits of “husbandry.”¹⁵

The standard masculinist obsession with hierarchy reappears in Holmes Rolston’s environmental ethic: a godlike transcendence of mind over matter, and fertile nature celebrated as “mother and wife ... the bosom out of which we have come.”¹⁶ Rolston’s designation of the ecosystem as “cardinal value” leads him to the odd position that “duties to animals are less stringent than those owed to plants, since plants serve a greater instrumental good in the ecosystem.”¹⁷ In Rolston, duties to the ecosystem resemble the Judeo-Christian mandate which enjoins humans to love their Creator more than creation. But Rolston’s ecosystem also resembles the capitalist economy in which the market takes on greater importance than the individual humans who work in it. Thus, “value appreciates with humans,” who “cash in on, and spend, what is naturally given.” Humans “ought not to spend biological capital without a resolute effort to engineer an alternative.”¹⁸ Whereas meat eating is said to be homologous with natural predation and the cow is “a meat factory pure and simple,”¹⁹ “a duty to a species is more like being responsible to a cause than to a person. It is a commitment to an *idea*”²⁰ —that is to say, a higher order pursuit.

The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess introduced “deep ecology” as an antidote to existing formulations in environmental ethics, and to counter the shallowness of “policy environmentalism.” No more axiological rules, rationality should be replaced by “a new sensibility.” But as Kheel observes, even the deep

ecological notion of “biospheric egalitarianism” typically omitted concern for the exploitation and suffering of particular animals.²¹ Soon enough, Warwick Fox would lift deep ecology to a more abstract plane with his notion of “transpersonal ecology.” An amalgam of Naess, Buddhism, Freud’s tripartite personality theory, and Maslow’s need hierarchy, Fox’s post-ethical vision posited an “expanded Self.” This implied an ontological “identification with all that exists,” eventually, evolving into a “cosmological identity.”²² But deep ecology soon attracted the scrutiny of ecofeminists, who pointed out that the “expanded Self” was displaying the routine features of hegemonic masculinity all over again.²³ This “ethic” was detached from the socio-political conditions of class, race, and sex-gender domination; it subsumed women’s experience under its own; and it lacked interest in non-human sensibilities.

Nature Ethics is intended as remedial rather negative towards environmental philosophy—and Kheel gives credit where it is due. She acknowledges that Roosevelt anticipated the limits to growth thesis; that Leopold discovered the importance of biotic interdependence; that Rolston emphasizes local narratives over formulaic obligation; and that Fox at least tries to place humans in/with other species. But there is no doubt that each environmental ethic reveals multiple inconsistencies, and these, largely due to unexamined masculinisms. Their striving for a holistic ecological vision lacks embodied connection to the material cycles of nature. Instead, what is produced are sweeping historical, evolutionary, or metaphysical schema, with no “ethic of care” for the living individual. But then, in Spinoza’s words, that would be “mere womanish pity” ...

What does the field of environmental ethics have to offer ecosocialists? Studies in ethics have generally taken for granted terms that Marxists see as moralistic and ideological. But “environmental ethics” purports to be an open, applied, transdisciplinary project, one that sets out to deconstruct given assumptions about humanity-nature relations.²⁴ As such, it could well enhance anti-capitalist research and activism. Further, the work of ecofeminists in environmental ethics is critical in a double way: for while spelling out the socio-political implications of how nature gets to be defined and used, ecofeminist scholars like Kheel show how humanity-nature relations are imbricated in a pervasive sex-gendered politics. The exploitation of labor, of women, of animals, and so-called “natural resources” are profoundly gendered activities—an important detail for ecosocialists strategizing the structural transformation of capitalism.

Notes

¹ Kheel, p. 16.

² Kheel, p. 37. See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, University of California Press, 1995; and R.W. Connell, "Hegemonic Masculinities: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 6, 2005, pp. 829-858.

³ Kheel, p. 172.

⁴ Kenneth Shapiro, "Animal Rights versus Humanism," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1990, pp. 9-37, p. 27.

⁵ Kheel, p. 243, citing Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (New York: Continuum, 1990), p. 47.

⁶ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁷ Kheel, p. 223; although Kheel would agree with feminists who argue that care is not always appropriate: a battered woman, for example, needs to learn to care for herself, not others.

⁸ Kheel, p. 228. The reference is to Josephine Donovan, "Feminism and the Treatment of Animals," *Signs*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2006, p. 319. See also Andree Collard and Joyce Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Greta Gaard, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

⁹ Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins, "Animals Have a Complex Nature," *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, No. 4, June 1990; Ted Benton, *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights and Social Justice* (London: Verso, 1993).

¹⁰ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon, 1975); Tom Regan, *Defending Animal Rights* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001). For Earth First! see: Bron Taylor, "Earth First! From Primal Spirituality to Ecological Resistance" in Roger Gottlieb (ed.), *This Sacred Earth* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

¹¹ Kheel, p. 74.

¹² Kheel, p. 69, citing Lois Romano, "Kerry Hunting Trip Sets Sights on Swing Voters," *Washington Post*, October 21, 2004.

¹³ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Wilderness Hunter* (New York: Putnam, 1893).

¹⁴ Kheel, p. 93.

¹⁵ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

¹⁶ Kheel, p. 142, citing Holmes Rolston III, "Can and Ought We to Follow Nature?," *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1979, p. 28.

¹⁷ Kheel, p. 148.

¹⁸ Kheel, p. 142, citing Holmes Rolston III, *Environmental Ethics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 116.

¹⁹ Kheel, p. 150, citing Rolston, p. 83.

²⁰ Kheel, p. 153, citing Rolston, p. 144. Rolston's emphasis.

²¹ Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long Range, Ecology Movement," *Inquiry*, No. 16, 1973, pp. 95-100.

²² Warwick Fox, *Toward Transpersonal Ecology* (Boston: Shambhala, 1990).

²³ This literature spans decades, but for starters: Ariel Salleh, "Deeper than Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1984, pp. 335-341; Marti Kheel, "The Liberation of Nature: A Circular Affair," *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1985, pp. 135-149; Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self and Gender," *Hypatia*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1991, pp. 3-27; Karen Warren, "Ecofeminist Philosophy and Deep Ecology," in Nina Witosek and Andrew Brennan (eds.), *Philosophical Dialogues* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

²⁴ The field remains dominated by U.S. journals: the first to be set up was *Environmental Ethics* in the late 70s, and *Organization & Environment* followed. The U.K. journal *Environmental Values* came on the scene in the 90s.