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Global Media Journal: Canadian Edition

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© 2019, *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition* Volume 11, Issue 1, pp. 23-38

ISSN: 1918-5901 (English) -- ISSN: 1918-591X (Français)

Contemporary Feminist Politics of Veganism:

Carol J. Adams' The Sexual Politics of Meat and Alternative Approaches

Ayce Feride Yilmaz

Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul

Abstract:

Vegan ecofeminism growing out of ecofeminist ideas has been one of the first critical theories that explicitly politicized food and its cultural representations in terms of gender. As a diverse body of scholarship and activism, it has cogently demonstrated how meat has historically figured and continues to do so in interrelated oppressive structures, practices and meanings inscribed in diverse media. Nonetheless, ecofeminism in general, and vegan feminism in particular, have assumed an ambivalent trajectory ranging from prolific to dismissal as essential thinking. Feminist and critical media scholarship seem to have had its due share out of this dismissal of vegan feminism from broader critical theory as current feminist media research preserves its anthropocentric focus in dealing with diverse contemporary media phenomena. This paper attempts to reintroduce the theoretical and practical contributions of vegan ecofeminism for critical media scholars in an era of rapidly expanding digital landscapes and transnational media industries and growing global social inequalities and ecological destruction. The introductory part of this paper tries to make this paucity more clear within the landscape of feminist media research. This point leads to a brief revision of (vegan) ecofeminism's history and presentation of Carol Jay Adams' The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist Vegetarian Critique as the epitome of the field illustrating intersections of oppressions around gender, species and other social categories forcing their way into dominant cultural imageries and media in terms of meat eating. Subsequent sections review the charged reception of (vegan) ecofeminist insights and their demise and comments on contemporary theoretical discussions on gender politics of veganism and related growing trends. Having forefronted the history of and current debates on vegan feminism in scholarship and research, the final part highlights some potential arenas of media research where this versatile body of knowledge problematizing intersecting social categories may be extended to compensate for its mainly anthropocentric focus.

Mots-clés: Vegan feminism, ecofeminism, feminist media studies, gender politics

Introduction

As a critical body of knowledge, feminist scholarship in media studies has a considerable footing expanding over two decades that challenged mainstream theories on mass, organizational and interpersonal communication. In doing so, diverse studies converged on the importance placed on the problematization of political economy of media production, oppressive and patriarchal frames, and the impact on the experiences of women and other identities. This critical and experiential focus along with its sensitivity to diversity in participants and methods, tackled various situations involving media phenomena, challenged dominant media systems and their cultural forms and tried to understand the production, context and impact of communication systems and contents – primarily in relations to women's lives, experiences and identities.

As such, these studies took issue with formulating more critical and sound theories deriving from grounded and standpoint epistemologies of marginalized groups to challenge androcentric theory and methodology in communication research. Research topics ranged from status and everyday practices of women in different media professions, textual analyses of news coverage, advertising and other media modes along with their cultural and social components and implications and audience studies involving meaning making and self-construction (Aldoory and Toth, 2001). Issues around the politics of representation and identity seem to have gained recurrent relevance in globality, whereby scholars like Shome (2006) emphasize that global technologies and industries such as fashion, entertainment, music etc. create hybrid spaces, practices and identities that resist any notion of the audience as culturally stable and static.

Relatedly, the consolidation of new technologies, digital platforms and transnational media industries have evoked considerable critical attention from feminist media scholars in questions of their potential for social change, as well as their roles in reproducing existing gendered tropes in new guises. For instance, Press (2011) makes the point, in the neoliberal era, where arguments for post-feminism such as achieved meritocracy and sexual freedom are increasingly promoted, phenomena such as cyberbullying and other harmful occurrences in social networking are commonly treated by mainstream news coverage as isolated instances or parts of teen culture rather than enduring structural inequalities and cultural meanings with immense impacts on women's lives and well-being. Similarly, Duffy and Pruchniewska (2017) problematize the rhetoric of empowerment available for women in the form of independent digital employment such as life style and mommy blogging and craft economies. Drawing on interviews with self-employed women, the study concludes these digital venues reproduce many prescriptions of femininity by encouraging decorum, sociability and caring and soft sell techniques of gradual relation building, interactive intimacy and compulsory visibility.

Notwithstanding feminist media studies' engagement with these important questions, trying to uphold frameworks open to diversity, scholars continue to call for enhanced inclusivity in research engaging women and other marginalized identities located within varying intersectional nodes of oppressive social categories such as class, race, ethnicity and nationality. This state of affairs is reflective of increasing validity of similar intersectional frameworks and standpoint epistemologies within broader feminist theory. Intersectional analysis has increasingly proved invaluable for problematizing cultural phenomena and revealing interlocked oppressive meanings embedded within intersectional structures and social categories

Yet, as calls to increase intersectional analysis within feminist media studies rise, one area remains that has been consistently denied access to such analyses. This involves the question of nonhuman animals and their nonconsensual and violent incorporation into oppressive human cultural

forms and media primarily via metaphors of meat and meat eating. In this regard, research, theory and methodology of numerous critical disciplines, including media and cultural studies, remain largely anthropocentric while challenging the androcentric. This fact is all the more unfortunate given that such questions on nonhuman animals charged insertion into interlinked representations of human social categories have a prolific history within ecofeminism and vegan feminism. As this paper will demonstrate, in many critical studies, the dismissal of nonhuman animals as valid areas of research is a product of controversies within broader feminism that has come to unfairly label vegan ecofeminism as a form of essentialist thinking.

Major parts of this paper, then, aim to make feminist and other critical media scholars familiar with this charged history of vegan ecofeminism by tracing the ways in which its insights gradually became pushed to the margins of feminism. Additionally, it introduces the contemporary landscape of gender-politicized veganism where new identities, performances and embodiments emerge and try to recuperate these ideas by mobilizing their politics. Accordingly, the major aim of this paper is to make a case for insertion of vegan feminist insights into critical media research and draw attention to some of the ways in which these might be harnessed in larger research areas. As a result of the current era of extensive digitalization, expanding new technologies and transnational media industries encourage the production of hybrid cultural forms and complicated meanings at a backdrop of growing social inequalities and unprecedented ecological destruction. The rich tradition of vegan ecofeminism, marked by holistic analyses of oppressive cultural forms and social structures, implicates human and nonhuman actors and the environment and should be brought in dialogue with critical media research.

In congruence with this point, this paper invites critical media scholars to consider these questions within established areas of media research as content, textual, audience and identity while also moving beyond an anthropocentric focus. Moreover, the last part of the paper raises additional ideas concerning the need for dealing with matters of reception, resistance and negotiation in the form of different vegan identities, embodied practices and forms of activism to be investigated within the parameters of digitalization, neoliberalism and post-feminist discourses.

A Brief History of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism, as a perspective, places the question of nature on the feminist research agenda from the mid 1970's and 1980's onwards and was deeply influenced by the counter-cultural and environmental health movements of the preceding years. Drawing on this era's core idea of intersectionality, numerous feminist scholars were alarmed by the inadequate and anthropocentric analytic focus that failed to acknowledge how the oppression of nature and animals was structurally similar to the oppression of women (Gray, 1979; Gould Davis, 1971; Holliday, 1978; Starhawk, 1979). Nascent ecofeminist attempts aimed to compensate for this paucity and trace the implications of various interconnected oppressive social categories and practices for women and the natural environment.

These emerging insights were prompt to point out how the dualistic conception of nature and culture long served to maintain the ecological superiority of humans in general and the cultural superiority of men in particular (Kings, 2017). Following this understanding, early theoretical insights and research set out to explore how the trajectories of Western domination historically imposed themselves in similar ways on women, animals, nature and other subdued groups (Corea, 1984; Warren, 1987). For instance, as one of the foundational pieces, Griffin's Woman and Nature (1978) explored how women, animals, nature, people of color, slaves and other groups, as well as phenomena such as the body, emotions, and sexuality, were given a feminized status to legitimize their oppression by male dominant social structures and processes. In a similar vein, Merchant's The Death of Nature (1981)

provided historical evidence into the joint subordination of women, indigenous peoples, queers, nature and animals at the conjunction of Western capitalism, colonialism, science and rationalism. Hetero-sexualization of culture-nature relations and interrelated animalizing and naturalizing discourses around race, class and gender were thus major research concerns within these projects that, by the nineties, began investigating the logic and structure of (patriarchal) oppression and domination as analytic tools (Cantor, 1983; Plumwood, 1993).

Although not explicitly defined as intersectional[1], this literature was pivotal in initially assessing how nature, animals and gender were crucially implicated within intersecting oppressive categories and institutions. Equipped with this scholarly surge, feminist activism of 1980's and early 1990's inserted these perspectives into different protests and movements against corporatism, unsustainable energy production, militarism and anti-nuclear protests (Gaard, 2011).[2] Concomitantly, intersectional ecofeminist perspectives proved fruitful to analyze as diverse international issues as women's health, birth, poverty, "non-Western development", animal rights and urban ecology etc. (Caldecott and Leland, 1983; Diamond and Orenstein, 1990)

Based on this promising sprout, it was unfortunate that, starting in 1990's, ecofeminism faced a serious backlash from poststructuralist and Third Wave feminists who labelled it as essentialist. This dismissal heralded a gloomy trajectory for vegan ecofeminism for a number of reasons. Gaard (2011) argues this was unfairly based on an interpretation of ecofeminist writings, namely cultural ecofeminists' work, proposing a cultural closeness and exaltation of women, nature and animals in primordial earth based cultures, and on involvement of certain ecofeminists in goddess spirituality movements. As such, post-structuralism feminism came to regard all entire ecofeminist ideas as instances of essentialist thinking.[3] As discussed below, vegan feminists have been proactive in challenging such charges. This stigma, for Gaard, has spiraled to such an extent that, (vegan) ecofeminist literature has been discarded from current mainstream feminism and its perspectives dismissed from academic women's, gender and queer studies. Her review demonstrates how despite the bulk of material and experiential theory and research, ecofeminism increasingly became anathema in academic journals, practices and institutions which alienated different activist groups to such an extent that, today, many scholars have renamed it (i.e. ecological feminism, feminist environmentalism, critical feminist eco-socialist analyses or hybrid global feminist environmental justice).

Development of Vegan Ecofeminism

Given that animals were already recognized as strongly implicated within the web of diverse oppressions by ecofeminists, it was no surprise that vegetarianism became a practice long adopted by feminist cultures. Yet, in early views, no explicit call for vegetarianism or veganism was to be found in mainstream feminism and the designation of meat eating and speciesism as overt forms of violence fraught with gendered meanings was missing in many analyses (Gaard, 2002). This contribution came from vegan ecofeminists. Alongside ecofeminism, vegetarian and vegan feminist views gradually consolidated themselves from the end of 1980's onwards forwarded by numerous influential scholars and activists (Adams, 1990; Birke, 1995; Curtin, 1991; Donovan, 1996; Hawkins, 1998; Kheel, 1988).

Similar to the rise of ecofeminism, this move was apparently an extension of increasing attentiveness towards intersectional positions within ecofeminism and drew its material and ideas from this earlier work. Although many first wave feminists and subsequent activists advocated animal welfare reforms or adhered to vegetarianism, vegan feminism emerged with an explicit agenda aimed at questioning the politics of food along with producing charged mediated representations for revealing the intersections between misogyny and speciesism – primarily in Western cultures. Vegan eco-feminists

maintained that a focus on the workings of particular institutions such as industrial animal production or particular phenomenon such as Mad Cow Disease requires feminist perspective that draws on the most inclusive theory (Gaard and Gruen, 1993). In other words, as the logic of domination with its accompanying oppressive representations were inherent in such phenomena and effect as diverse subjects as animals, workers, women, nature and global North-South relations, for vegan feminism analyzing many such issues invariably requires a profound intersectional outlook. In a similar vein, because speciesism in cultural imagery and practice predominantly operates in conjunction with and reinforces racism, classism, sexism and the domination of nature, recognizing these connections of meanings is a must for feminism to generate productive forms of critiques and intervention (Kings, 2017).

With this effort to foreground speciesism within intersections of gender, race, class and ecology, researchers investigated diverse issues such as animal experimentation, industrialized animal food production's links to environmental degradation, world hunger and exploitative forms of labor, social and environmental justice etc. Accompanying this effort was a desire to formulate an understanding of contextual ethics arguing for combining compassion for animals and nature with a reasoned analysis of specific cultural and political contexts (Gruen, 2009).

In light of this burgeoning literature, Carol Jay Adams' The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist Vegetarian Critique (1990) shines as a pivotal work in terms of both popularizing the notion of vegan feminism and helping to enable vegan feminist ideas to make inroads into different disciplines. It has also been one of the most prominent works that has forefronted the meat industry and meat eating as forms of oppression enmeshed in interrelated sets of violent meanings and imagery marked in various media while also presenting veganism as a form of resistance against intersecting oppressive systems. On the basis of this widespread influence, the following section introduces the basic notions and ideas in Adams' book to provide an instance of the ways vegan feminists conceptualize food and its representation as potent nodes often based on the oppression of animals, women and other social groups.

The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist Vegetarian Critique

Growing out of a school project (1975), Carol Jay Adams' Sexual Politics of Meat turned out to be a foundational piece that dramatically extended and popularized vegan feminist ideas. Images drawn from a vast array of cultural items that substantiate this book were later compounded in Adam's The Pornography of Meat (2004). Incorporating additional cultural representations from diverse consumer products from billboards, magazines to menus and even matchboxes sent by avid readers, this imagery was further turned into a slideshow still being performed by Adams on various university campuses and lecture halls throughout the US. Adams' elaboration of her insights have continued over the years with subsequent books and articles (1994, 2008) and recently in her latest book Burger (2018).

In Sexual Politics of Meat, Adams argues that dietary habits unequivocally reflect power relations. That is, she contends that meat eating has been historically tightly linked to power and has been used in mythologies, ideologies and theories to justify various oppressions related to class, race, gender and colonialism. In addition to substantiating this argument by drawing on anthropological texts and works of historical research, throughout her book, Adams proposes the existence of historical link between veganism and feminism. Accordingly, major parts of the text are devoted to retracing this alliance in historical and literary sources through 19th and 20th centuries. Drawing on vegetarian protest literature, ranging from books and magazines of the Romantic period to anti-war vegetarian novels of World War I, Adams posits vegetarianism was historically embraced by various political groups as an alternative to patriarchal meat eating culture and its destructive implications for women and nature. Sexual Politics of Meat validates these arguments through a diverse array of vegetarian feminist

materials such as novels, utopian writings, magazines, cooking and health books, newspapers and autobiographies while also referring to social movements (i.e. suffrage, temperance, anti-vivisection) that historically instantiated this position. Nevertheless, according to Adams, this perspective has since been disavowed and challenged by historians, literary critics and editors. The book maintains, in response to this history, that, today, numerous pieces of contemporary women's writing and fiction still try to illuminate these lost linkages via reference to earlier vegetarian figures, literary texts and their vegetarian protagonists – an act she calls "bearing the vegetarian word".

In Sexual Politics of Meat Adams' most salient conceptual contribution to the politics of food with respect to gender is the concept of "absent referent," a term she elaborated on from an earlier concept.[4] An absent referent is a referent in which an observer may perceive via inference yet fails to apprehend and reflect on the original and literal experience upon which this referent is based. In this vein, one fails to grant an absent referent an independent existence, let alone acknowledge the literal experience related to it. Furthermore, the functioning of the absent referent enables an exploitative relationship or representation to occur. In other words, what is absent implicitly refers back to the oppressed group yet precludes the outward establishment of this very connection thereby erasing any responsibility.

As one of the most striking aspects of her argument, Adams observes that in Western patriarchal capitalist societies, women and animals act as overlapping absent referents in both the language and cultural imagery of food and meat eating. Cultural images of meat, meat animals and meat eating are highly sexualized and laden with erotic overtones making literal women, their objectification and even rape culture absent referents. Conversely, cultural images of sexual violence and pornography often implicate animal butchery and consumption, but the actual violence in these processes as well as the existential meaning of animals, are rendered absent. In both cases, the other party's oppression is reinforced by reference to another form of oppression. Moreover, the structure of overlapping absent referents links seemingly unrelated forms of violence against women and animals and institutionalizes patriarchal values such as masculine control, absorption, violence and dominance into a symbolic order that, in turn, trickles down to lived reality and practices.

Within this framework, Adams opines, meat is intertwined with numerous oppressive meanings and practices that gets constantly culturally re-inscribed through its consumption. From this viewpoint, veganism should be seen as a moral-political act that seeks to subvert this relation by intentionally restoring the absent referent into consciousness. For Adams, the structure of the absent referent regarding nature, animals and women are so subtly ingrained in language and conceptions within dominant culture that even radical feminist theories and women's discourses participate in its usage. This happens, for instance, when one likens being raped to "feeling like a piece of meat" or alternatively exemplifies natural destruction as the "rape of the earth". Last but not least, Adams proposes a cycle of objectification, fragmentation and consumption, in both literal and metaphorical senses, that is reflected in dominant food cultures. In other words, after being brutally fragmented into body parts and linguistically renamed for consumption purposes, the ontological meaning of animals entirely disappears and is replaced by meat as a free metaphor conducive to being collapsed with various themes related to gender, sexuality and race etc.

Another equally vital point Adams forefronts centers on the concept of "the feminized protein". This pertains to the idea that in all geographies where factory farming has been institutionalized, consumers unequivocally benefit from the alienated labor and the abuse of reproductive cycles of female animals. This the case when cows and hens are seen to be trapped in crowded farming facilities and invariably exposed to tremendous violence and exploitation as they are forcefully inseminated (i.e.

raped), seen solely as products of their reproductive activity, (i.e. milk, eggs), have their babies stolen from them and are eventually taken to be slaughtered as meat. Indeed, clinical psychologist jones (2007) observes that hens rescued from egg factories have been profoundly traumatized by gendered forms of exploitation in as much as the modern farming practices pervert sex roles and cycles for profit in supplying dairy and meat products. The dairy consumer, in turn, partakes in this very exploitation and terror consuming what Adams calls "the feminized protein". In this sense, milk, eggs and other dairy products are not food items per se, yet literally stand for and represent the end products of gendered forms of labor exploitation and violence. [5]

Notwithstanding the significance of Sexual Politics of Meat, Adams' recent pieces still contend the enduring relevance of her ideas as the postmodern era tends to even more strongly embody various forms of the sexual politics of meat. She discusses several potential contributors to this phenomenon such as the global exportation of the animal industrial complex along with pop culture and pornography embracing, in a more enhanced and fetishized manner, the familiar misogynist and speciesist scripts of popular meat cultures and their advertising on diverse media. Nonetheless, she further stresses how this proliferation, reaching at times overtly hostile forms, is also indicative of a sense of threat brought about by subversive vegan efforts (Adams, 2010).

Adams' recent insights also point to such diverse phenomena as the reassertion of anxious virility stressing meat consumption in the US in light of global terror events, rising pro-carnivorist and raw meat trends by celebrity chefs or "caring" movements such as slow food or locavore which need to be analyzed within the parameters of postmodernism's political economy and cultural imagery (Adams, 2010). Yet more significantly, Adams regards the most alarming feature of post-modernism as the replacement of absent referents by cultural referents resulting in a complete ontological eradication of meat culture's targets – both animal and women respectively. This dramatic phenomenon is, according to Adams, what contributes to the increasing masculinization of animal rights movements and organizations, most prominently PETA. Many such organizations end up partaking in sexual politics of meat by manipulating cultural referents such as supermodels, actors or fictional figures such as Mickey Mouse while paradoxically claiming to challenge animal exploitation in industrial meat production without addressing the actual affected referents. As such, for Adams, post-modernism seems to further remove the consciousness and individuality of oppressed subjects rendering any vegan feminist idea as absolutist. This also clearly alludes to the aforementioned rejection of veganism and animals within academia, predominantly in its post-structuralist leanings, as "serious" subjects of inquiry, an alleged posture of challenging essentialist and totalizing epistemologies (Adams, 2006). Based on such ominous trends, Adams considers it crucial that promising academic disciplines such as critical animal, media studies and posthumanism, along with feminism, do not fall into this trend and maintain contact with critical thinking and activist practices that seek to re-establish the absent referent in the cultural imagery of food.

Reception of and Charges against (Vegan) Feminist Ideas

Despite setbacks in light of charges of essentialism and Adams' concerns with respect to the pitfalls of postmodernity, Adams' and other vegan feminist work seem to have been considerably influential in the emergence of multi-disciplinary field of Critical Human Animal Studies and has strongly contributed to different ideas in Posthumanism.[6] Scholars in Critical Animal Studies come from and incorporate insights from diverse fields such as sociology, history, philosophy, literature, psychology, visual arts-cinema, media and cultural studies, behavioral biology, science-technology and health studies. Major concerns in CAS and Posthumanism center on the agenda of disrupting speciesism and anthropocentrism

in scholarship via novel paradigms and formulating new non-hierarchical ways of human-nonhuman relatedness and ethics in theory and practice.

Despite this considerable influence, it is unfortunate that vegan feminist ideas have been quickly incorporated into existing anti-essentialist backlash against ecofeminism and were thus subject to the gradual exclusion from mainstream and poststructuralist feminism and broader academia. In one of the most well-known strongholds of such criticisms, George (1994) argued that ethical vegetarianism and feminist ethics were essentially irreconcilable as the former tends to uphold a morally prescriptive universal ideal by implicitly assuming an essential human physiological norm suited to veganism. This alleged essentialist and universal stance is argued to inevitably discriminate against various groups (e.g. women, infants, children, elderly, the poor and people in other cultures) with diverse nutritional needs, socio-economic circumstances and uneven access to food. This argument proceeds to contend that a sound feminist ethics must invariably affirm the general goodness of the female body and abstain from assigning arbitrary moral burdens on women and other groups and thus it cannot subscribe to veganism. For George, the notion the vegan ideal is an accessible and easily adoptable practice through sufficient education and nutritional supplements, fails to acknowledge that vegan feminism presupposes a modern wealthy industrial society and ends up being class biased and culturally elitist. Similar major criticisms of essentialism and ethnocentrism include Dixon's The Feminist Connection between Women and Animals (1996) and Stange's Woman the Hunter (1998).

Vegan feminists, in turn, countered these charges by emphasizing the value laden and methodologically biased tendencies of prevailing nutritional studies and stressing alternative studies promoting benefits of vegan diets. Most importantly, they posited that industrial farming and meat eating practices, and along with their accompanying cultural imagery, had been imposed on societies as part of cultural imperialist agendas. Other proponents stressed that ecofeminists have always been alert to formulating contextual forms of ethics and experiential theories that couple a consideration of local context and power relations with utmost sensitivity towards the environment, animals, and oppressed human groups (Adams, 1995; Gaard and Gruen, 1995; Donovan, 1995).[7]

As noted, this early rift between vegan ecofeminism and broader feminism seems to have persisted even today. Along with the essentialism debates of the prior decades bearing a major stigma against (vegan) ecofeminism, Twine (2010) discerns a certain disgust response among many feminist academicians against taking up questions of animals as it signals a charged history of misogyny enmeshed with essentializing and dehumanizing discourses, representations and practices. Similarly, Birke (2010) contends feminist social sciences' hesitation to include discussions of animals seems to be rather deliberate, having occurred in feminist theory as a strong reaction to biological determinism and historic association of women with animality and body. Irrespective of this charged history, coupled with earlier tensions and stigmatization, the fact remains that in broader feminism and critical thinking, vegan feminism' stigmatization as essentialist thinking and/or an unrealistic enterprise prevails. As such, approaches trying to employ a critical lens within diverse disciplines tend to uphold the predominantly anthropocentric focus even within intersectional frameworks, rarely engage with vegan ecofeminist theories and research rendering these marginal topics in graduate studies as well (Gaard, 2011; Potts, 2010).

Other scholars, in problematizing these tensions, insist that a sound intersectional feminist theory and politics may encourage a more critical engagement with these questions. Consequently, recent calls urge feminists to expand research and theorizing in many disciplines to include the study the relationship between human political relations, nonhuman animals, and the more than human (Twine, 2010). Certain scholars suggest this move towards renewed dialogue should be initiated by ecofeminists and vegan

feminist scholars by disavowing the tendencies to prioritize gender-species dyad as primary focus of analysis (Deckha, 2012). This argument posits that analytic prioritization of a binary gender understanding inadvertently feeds into dominant misconceptions of essentialism and ethno-centralism and prevents building connections with different critical ideas and groups that see veganism as holding subversive potential. The next section seeks to elaborate on these calls and, in doing so, points to the future of the gender politics of veganism.

Calls for Coalition among Different Gender Politicized Groups

Regarding the current calls for coalition building in terms of gender politics of veganism, some ideas derive their energies from radical criticisms of Adams' work and broader ecofeminism. These points are similar to earlier criticisms but tend to instead identify the locus of essentialism in the persistence of the gender binary in Adams' and vegan ecofeminist work. That is, although these threads acknowledge the importance of Adams' work in exposing the misogynist underpinnings of meat culture, they criticize most of the ecofeminist literature for having been stuck in the tendency to reify man and woman as universal categories. In effect, they render the presence, embodied experiences and politics of other groups such as sex workers, transgender and queer people and sex radical feminists largely invisible. This invisibility is further suggested to preclude questions and analyses on how these groups' oppressions articulate with that of animals in cultural imagery and practices such that their gender politics may collaborate with vegan agendas.

Additionally, vegan ecofeminists are also charged with claiming that pornography and sex work are indicative of women's unconditional subjugation (Hamilton, 2016). This antipornographic stance, evident in much of ecofeminism, is argued to portray many social actors in offensive terms and deny their agency in the process. For instance, it is claimed that ecofeminism objectifies sex workers as mere victims of sex industry by drawing unfair parallels between consenting adult women and nonconsenting animals murdered by the meat industry and to crudely brush off diverse experiences, along with different forms and scales of violence, in each case. For critics, such crude conflations along with continuing uncritical referral to Carol J. Adams' and related antipornographic vegan ecofeminist works (strengthened by citation practices across similar scholars and texts) seem to reify a specific canon in much of animal studies, posthumanism and critical thinking on the link between food and cultural imagery. Overshadowed by this canon, and presented as the epitome of vegan feminist theory, an important body of feminist/queer scholarship on gender, sexuality, psychoanalysis, visual culture, alternative pornography and postcolonialism regarding animals has remained invisible (Grebowicz, 2010).

Recently, the idea of enhancing coordination among various gender politicized vegan groups by stripping the dominance and binary gender understanding of the aforementioned canon has begun to resonate in contemporary gender research. For instance, in her study of Berlin's meat non-consuming subcultures, Koletnik (2014) argues that applying transgender as an analytic category in vegan ecofeminism can enhance ethical and political solidarity within feminist projects and help transcend gender identity politics built upon gender binary tenets. Here, transgender is understood as involving any individual and group who recognize interlocked oppressions around gender, food and other social categories and practices and defy numerous hegemonic regulatory regimes via their veganism and other material embodiments. Koletnik's participants were manifesting their socio-political stances and their self-making via an array of material instances involving diet, gender, performativity, choices of accommodation and consumerism. Koletnik remarks that studying such groups may shift focus from rigid identity categories towards an idea of "dis-identification" coming from transgender and queer

studies and proposes this prospect be called "ethical trans feminism" bearing the potential to transcend simplistic usages of identity.

Similarly, Simonsen (2012) argues for a queer form of veganism affirming the notion of "shared deviation" from discursive mechanisms of anthropo and hetero normative society (Giffrey and Hird; 2008). Accordingly, queer is understood as a subversive enterprise in general and does not just bear on sexuality. Therefore veganism should be read as thoroughly queer through its critique of the gendering of food and its destabilizing anthropo-normative communal bonds solidified through a "queer" concern for other species and their oppression in the meat industry and culture. This potential of destabilization is also often crystalized in the notion of "killjoy". For instance, Twine (2014) makes this point emphasizing vegans' powerful role as killjoys in contesting normative happiness, orders of anthropo and heteronormativity crystalized in the practice of women preparing food (i.e. meat) for the family and marked by cultural imageries of domesticity and "familial harmony".

It is important to add that positions embracing notions such as "queer" and "killjoy" often warn against ending up in yet other forms of reified identities and, instead, emphasize constant opposition to imageries and performances inherent in dominant communal principles (e.g. hetero-normativity, anthropo-normativity). In this account, as vegans in their subversive attempts evoke similar patologizing responses as feminists or other gender non- conforming groups do such as being portrayed as joyless and stiff killjoys secretly longing carnal and sexual appetites, queer veganism strongly warns against describing veganism as a lifestyle or trend. Becoming vegan is thus understood as requiring a process of constant transformation in pursuit of normative demands on gender, sexuality, consumption and diet and embracing the unforeseeable outcomes that may come from this effort. Here, similar to the notion of "ethical transfeminism", "vegan queer ethics" is coined as a term to denote the potential of "shared deviation" (Simonsen, 2012).[8]

Utilizing Nascent Theories

Within this discussion, it is important to note that contemporary vegan gender politics makes an effort to take advantage of the emerging theoretical insights on performativity, new materialism and labor. Simply put, performativity approaches see human and animal as relationally performed and co-produced within a set of material and semiotic processes. Here, the idea is that performativity, similar to its role in gender studies, is quite fruitful as an analytic tool to examine and deconstruct co and intra actions of human and nonhuman actors that produce various discourses and practices regarding the human-animal binary (Barad, 2003; Birke, Brydl and Lyke, 2004).

For instance, such nascent insights of performativity, along with new materialist approaches, point to how lab rats figure in a series of material interactions with humans and lab technologies to co-produce a set of objectifying discourses that comprise the institution called science. This outlook further illuminates animals' unseen agency and participation within this material and semiotic realm that may well be extended to institutions of factory farming, meat industries and food cultures. In accordance with this point, new materialist approaches urge the body, biology, organic processes and activities be included in cultural and political analyses to reveal their part in different hierarchy subverting performances, discourses and institutions without the fear of essentialism that surrounded such subjects in the past. For instance, following this thread, theories of labor have begun to think about animals as laborers under capitalism enduring, in a series of interrelations with humans, diverse forms of violence based on species and body- physiology that figure in various social discourses. For example, in a vegan feminist reading of power, Wrenn (2017) discusses how, in a capitalist system, power is defined by control over and exploitation of the "feminized human and non-human bodies" to extract value and

privilege in the form of labor and raw material and examines how this process becomes linked to various masculinizing cultural discourses whereby consumption gets inscribed within scripts of misogyny and speciesism.

Epilogue

As this paper has attempted to demonstrate, vegan ecofeminism has been a comprehensive and versatile theoretical and practical framework that effectively problematized food as a site of oppression, implicating diverse social meanings, practices and actors, while also serving as a source of resistance. It successfully generated a diverse array of work that both theoretically and historically investigated how different subjugated groups became interlinked within oppressive institutions and cultural meanings and continues to do so in neoliberal and postmodern configurations. The foregoing discussion has tried to illustrate how contemporary debates around vegan feminism seem to concur on the need for stronger alliances drawing on more sophisticated theories to analyze the parameters of these configurations.[9] This section, in turn, tries to reveal these analyses may be harnessed by and greatly profit from contributions of critical media scholars.

Directly linked to the previous section, feminist media studies with their traditional focus on experience, identities and everyday settings, coupled with the renewed relevance of audience studies in the digital age and transnationalism, can bring multiple gender politicized vegan identities to the fore. Apart from analyzing such groups' subjectivities and meanings involving negotiation and resistance towards dominant cultural forms, this research can also focus on performativity as indicative of political identity. Various modalities of performativity ranging from personal narratives, performance art, online blogging and posting, street protesting and other forms in everyday settings and interactions might be an illuminating and interesting way to ask how the body and other forms of materiality function as containers and conveyers of alternative meanings.

Additionally, since feminist media scholars are already engaged with transnational media forms and industries asking complex questions on the politics of representation, reception, identity, influence and impact, similar inquiries might be extended to matters around nonhuman animals and meat cultures. In particular, researchers could study the various cultural meanings in different meat cultures including global consumerism, cosmopolitanism, taste, status etc. with respect to how they interact with locality, gender and other social categories. Theories of labor and new materialism can be drawn on to problematize violent human-animal corporeal interactions ingrained in factory farming and the moves via which they become articulated with transnational and local cultural meanings. In this regard, although being a tentative proposition, I believe the notion of "the feminized body" can be fruitfully used as a construct whereby material instances of hierarchical human animal interactions get re-inscribed through various cultural phenomena.

Last but not least, as online transnational channels and digital platforms increasingly figure in facilitating collective actions and constructing novel social identities and meanings, important questions might be asked with regards to (vegan) feminist and animal rights social movements and activisms. For instance, in her elaborate piece problematizing the potential of building a vegan feminist network in the digital age, Wrenn (2019) describes how the third wave animal rights movement is characterized by increasing professionalization, digitalization and corporatization with a male managerial elite reinforcing patriarchal values both in organizational structure, (online) campaigning strategies and street protests. She makes a strong case delineating how animal rights protests and campaigns in their online and collective action formats strategically use women's bodies as sites of shocking sexualized and physical violence likening them to animal bodies to extract capital from the viewer. This tendency, in turn,

reinforces androcentric and anthropocentric hierarchies and rape cultures. Within this state of affairs, Wrenn posits, recognized vegan feminist activists and scholars are mostly unwilling to enter online platforms, although she alludes to sprouting modes of digital vegan feminist platforms that have begun to expose and challenge animal rights movement's misogynistic cultural scripts. Similar and additional questions might greatly benefit from attention by media scholars in analyses of interactions of old and novel discourses and conversations on transnational digital activist platforms and the tensions between different online movements. Equally important are questions with respect to the political functions and efficacy of digital activism and the potential, or lack thereof, for creating intersectional collective grounds and solidarities on the face of neoliberal trends of individualized discourses and politics.

In effect, this paper set out to invite critical media scholars to get re-acquainted with vegan feminist knowledge when asking questions about cultural and social facets of mainstream and alternative media phenomena and their reception and negotiation in lived experience as well as embodied and other performances and identities. It also stressed the importance of asking questions within the context of digital venues of communication and activism, potentials for new conversations and mobilizations in terms of progressive social change and justice embracing both human and nonhuman animals' lives and dignity. This agenda seems worth taking to mitigate the anthropocentric focus of critical media studies in the global context of neoliberal and post-feminist arguments and rhetorics.

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Footnotes:

[1] The term intersectionality was explicitly coined to feminist literature by Kimberley Crenshaw in 1989, however this outlook has long been prominent in a vast array of works in feminism and broader social theory

[2] Greenham Common women's camp (1981-2000), Women's Pentagon Actions (1980, 1981) and Clayoquot Sound actions (1994) were the most prominent among these.

[3] Goddess spirituality refers to a set of spiritual beliefs and practices growing out of 1970's that challenged the institutionalization of patriarchal world religions. Put rather simply, these assertions grant fundamental importance to "femininity" and "feminine principles" and stringently refuse a male dominated theology. They embrace the conception of the ecosystem as a Goddess and emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings. Some works also attempted to politicize this spirituality and women's engagement therein (e.g. Finley, 1991).

[4] The term absent referent was first used in Margaret Homans' *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (1986).

[5] Further substantiating this fact, Adams alludes to Derrida's discussion of this point in his radical lecture "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)" (2002) which underscores the gruesome amount of industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal and genetic violence animals have endured in industrialism of the last two centuries

[6] It is also noteworthy that Adams' assertions have made inroads into disciplines that rely mostly on positivist epistemologies such as psychology. Recent studies in psychology have begun to empirically check Adams' ideas on the link between meat eating and masculinity (Rothgerber, 2013; Love and Sulikowski, 2012) while other strands of research take issue with the interlinked violence against women and animals (Potts, 2010).

[7] The elaboration of an ethics of care linked to questions of tolerance towards cultural dietary diversity and limits of vegan universalism are still at the forefront of current ecofeminist debates (Acambora, 2014; Curtin, 2014; Donovan, 2014; Taylor, 2014).

[8] Employing this theoretical backdrop, some research efforts explore everyday employment of veganism to look at how it accommodates or negotiates this subversive potential (Twine, 2014). Such research sheds light on the presence of mundane strategies such as the explicit performance of veganism (e.g. cooking for an omnivore) with the potential to inculcate new meanings or implicates various negotiation processes of boundary maintaining and cohabitation ranging from temporal and spatial arrangements to wholesale adoption of vegan sexuality (i.e. only sexually and romantically engaging with vegan partners).

[9] Considering, similar calls for communication and cooperation were already raised long ago by some ecofeminists, (vegan) ecofeminism's stigma of essentialism seems to have taken a considerable toll to undermine its potential. In 1997, Greta Gaard made a case for a queer form of ecofeminism that can benefit from both feminist and queer theories on issues such as the oppression of the erotic by a male reason that historically feminized, naturalized and animalized indigenous queer populations. She also called for investigating concepts such as "natural order" or "unnatural behavior" that figured in similar and different ways in the persecution women, queers, animals and nature in Western colonialism, Christianity and science.

About the Author

Ayce Feride Yilmaz is a Ph.D. candidate in Social Psychology at Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir. She holds BA degrees in Psychology and Sociology from Bogazici University, Istanbul and an MA degree in Comparative History from Central European University, Budapest. She works on topics related to gender, identity and collective memory trying benefitting from different critical theories and interdisciplinary approaches.

Citing this article:

Yilmaz, Ayce Feride. (2019). Contemporary Feminist Politics of Veganism: Carol J. Adams' The Sexual Politics of Meat and Alternative Approaches", *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition*, *11*(1), 23-38.