

People and Animals: Green populism as posthuman subjectivity on digital media

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In the age of the Anthropocene, Chantal Mouffe's recent normative attention to a widening of rights in a 'new left populism' (2018) invites an engagement with new forms of subjectivity that goes beyond the strictly anthropocentric. This raises the research question: How can the expansion of rights claims within a new green populism, as expressed on social media, be seen through the lenses of posthuman subjectivity? The paper explores how current environmental movements articulate new green populism with antagonistic frontiers (Laclau 2005) along two lines: the rethinking of 1) human-animal relations as seen in movements advocating a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle and 2) human-nature relations as articulated by climate protest movements. The frontiers are articulated in a mediated format both online and offline as rights claims involving citizen subjects enacting political claims legally, performatively, and imaginatively (Isin & Ruppert 2020: 45). For Braidotti, a post-anthropocentric subjectivity decentres the subject as occupying a humanist centre thus "expresses and embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building" (Braidotti 2013: 49). This gives rise to a multiplicity of frontiers showing the interconnectedness between the self with the nonhumans or Earth others thus calling for a widening of justice and solidarity as advocated by Mouffe (2018; 2022).

The paper will draw on three forms of human-animal relations, and three case studies, all of which are vested in anthropocentric political frontiers: the exploitative, the exotic, and the submissive relation rendering visible animals as food, as wildlife and as pets.

Case study 1 analyses the how vegan activism articulates the relation between humans and animals as a frontier of *exploitation* through the Danish Vegan Party's use of Instagram and Facebook during their campaign in the national elections in 2019. The posts stand out as activist and include illegally obtain documentation of animal cruelty in Danish farms.

Case study 2 explores the *exotification* of animals in citizen-led actions to protect green city space, Amager Commons, in Copenhagen. These were conducted on social media alongside on-site activism such as occupying trees and green spaces. Besides human recreation, a central argument for preservation of nature were to protect biodiversity, in particular endangered animals.

Case study 3 explores *submission* as a human-animal relation through images of pets and domesticated animals on Facebook and Instagram, focusing on aspects of anthropomorphism and other strategies of submission.

Based on the case studies, the paper argues that the expansion of rights to include the more-than-humans can be rethought from at least two perspectives. From Laclau and Mouffe

(1985), we learn to place this embeddedness in a negative ontology. Not only are human bodies and selves intrinsically tied up with the lives of animals, but the unique status of human rights is defined by the very denial of non-humans' rights. From Braidotti (2013; 2019), we learn to acknowledge and appreciate the embodied and embedded nature of any endeavour to articulate, challenge, or rearticulate human's relations with their non-human others.

References

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