

‘There are no chickens in suicide vests’: the decoupling of human rights and animal rights in Israel

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In this article, I consider the shifting politics of animal rights activism in Israel in relation to human rights activism. I find that whereas in the past, human and animal rights activism were tightly linked, today they have become decoupled, for reasons I explore in this article. Although human and animal rights activism once shared social and ideological foundations in Israeli society, today much of the current animal rights activism is assertive and explicit in its disregard for human rights issues, such as the ongoing occupation of Palestine and the treatment of Palestinians. This decoupling has been heightened by the appropriation of animal rights politics by a right-wing state for the purposes of ethical legitimization. This article considers the dilemmas of ethical responsibilities towards humans and animals as it plays out in one of the most vexed political environments in the world. I consider the shifting politics of human and animal rights activism, and demonstrate how they implicate and entangle each other in the context of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I further consider what the decoupling of the human and animal rights movements might suggest regarding the ongoing academic critique of human rights and humanism.

Nir¹ was agitated when I met up with him at his apartment in south Tel Aviv in the fall of 2012, despite the fact that he had asked me to join him for an event on an issue close to his heart. I had known Nir, a vegan and animal rights activist from central Tel Aviv, since 2008, during a previous period of fieldwork. He had offered to bring me to an event he heard about from a fellow activist, Tom, but I learned on arriving that they had just recently fallen out. Nir had been an activist since the late 1990s, and Tom was new to the animal rights movement. Both in their late twenties and pursuing their studies, they had quickly formed a friendship. A few days earlier, Nir had invited Tom to a salon gathering to discuss ongoing efforts to help the Palestinians living under blockade in Gaza. Nir assumed that Tom would be sympathetic to human rights causes on the basis of his animal rights activism, and was surprised when Tom balked, forcefully informing him that he didn't care about the Palestinian struggle, and wasn't interested in any of his leftist politics. Ethical veganism has become a national phenomenon in Israel (Reuters 2015), but while the previous animal rights movement was once solidly embedded in the Israeli political left, and specifically in its human rights causes, this is not the case today. Nir's mistaken assumption about Tom reflects this shift. Nir was upset, but decided to

accompany me to the event nevertheless. At Rabin Square, we watched from the side as Israelis of all ages were lining up at stations to have their arms tattooed with numbers, a ritual inscribing in flesh being carried out in solidarity with the animal victims of factory farming.

The recent surge of animal rights activism in Israel is larger and more mainstream than previous initiatives. It also distinguishes itself in its very explicit decoupling from human rights activism. In the past, animal rights activism in Israel was part of leftist politics, and relied on the same ethical and political rationalities as the human rights movement, which was closely associated with it. Domestic human rights activism in Israel has had a significant political presence owing to almost fifty years of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Numerous violations of basic human rights are endemic to Israeli practices of occupation, including restrictions of movement, collective punishment, abuse, and more. Having reached its peak in the Oslo era (1990s), recently, the human rights movement has lost support domestically, subject to a rightward shift in Israeli politics (Shamir & Sagiv-Schifter 2006). It is in this context that the current animal rights movement has risen in its new manifestation divorced from the political left.

Human interactions with animals often index and symbolize fraught intra-human relations (e.g. Cassidy 2002; Song 2010). In this article, I compare animal rights politics of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which had strong ties to human rights politics and ethical humanism, with the current animal rights movement. As exemplified in the scene above, there is a significant amount of antagonism between animal rights activists of the different movements. This article considers the experience of ethical dilemmas of violence towards humans and animals as it plays out in one of the more vexed societies in the world. I examine the decoupling of the animal rights movement from the human rights movement in order to illuminate the ethical and political stakes of their divergence. In the clash between the new animal rights movement and its still active predecessor, each side critiques the other as perverting ethical priorities, revealing deep rifts. I examine the process by which the politics of animal rights has abandoned the commitment to human rights, at times adopting a strongly right-wing, anti-Palestinian stance. I further demonstrate the ways the state inserts itself by appropriating this political issue for its own interests, and especially for the purpose of ethical legitimation. I go on to consider what this shift might mean for the ongoing academic critique of human rights and humanism. While activists of the earlier movement articulated their claims through the ethical regime of humanism and the commonality of suffering, the latter movement has adopted an approach focused on the commonality of agency that foregrounds questions of guilt and innocence. I argue that this case demonstrates the limited value of theoretical ethical critiques outside the political context of their articulation. It affirms that a specific theoretical approach cannot guarantee political justice, an outcome that depends on how the approach is articulated and deployed in practice.

This article draws on fieldwork conducted during 2007-9 with vegan military refusers dedicated to human rights, as well as fieldwork conducted during a major upswing in vegan and animal rights activism in the broader Israeli society between 2012 and 2015 with individuals of many different political stripes. During this later period, in addition to conducting fieldwork and interviews among new animal rights activists, I re-established fieldwork relationships with my interlocutors from the earlier animal rights movement to see how they experienced this new mainstream phenomenon.

I take as a starting-point for this inquiry recent insights by scholars on the anthropology of ethics, specifically of ordinary and everyday ethical questions (Lambek 2010). This approach is fitting for this case, as the dilemmas regarding the correct ethical relationship with animals, such as whether or not to eat them, are routine and often faced multiple times a day. Furthermore, scholars of this approach, such as Webb Keane (2010) and Cheryl Mattingly (2013), demonstrate that everyday ethical judgements are fundamentally social, made not alone or in the abstract, but rather in communication with the community as mutual expectations are negotiated and actions and intentions are justified. This insight is especially important to the case considered here, because animal rights activism should be understood as a public reckoning over ethical norms. Furthermore, this account follows the ‘ordinary’ approach by privileging lived experiences of ethical evaluation over abstract deliberation (Das 2010: 377). Abdellah Hammoudi has termed this approach ‘practical articulation’ (2009: 51), referring to the concrete way people relate to ideas at specific times, in context and in motion. This concrete approach is contrasted with other treatments of humanist ethics in recent anthropological accounts.

This account draws attention to the ways the reckoning between animal and human rights unfolds in an ongoing context of political conflict. The ethical claims at play are embedded in controversial political issues, and at times are appropriated for political goals and state control. However, the proper evaluation of the stance-taking described in this article should not be a judgement of ‘sincerity’ or ‘bad faith’ (see Keane 2010 on sincerity). Rather, the evidence suggests that while ethical judgements regarding animal rights are not formed in abstract contemplation of ‘the animal’ and ‘rights’ outside the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they are also not completely determined by politics or deployed cynically purely for political expedience. Instead, my interlocutors ‘cross-pollinate’ ethical and political discourses, inserting animals into the politics of Palestinian occupation, and inserting Palestinians into the context of animal rights discourse. This case contributes to anthropological understandings of ethics by drawing explicit attention to the importance of political context to ethical dilemmas. It expands on insights into the social nature of ethical deliberation by showing how ethical norms are negotiated hand-in-hand with the foreseeable political implications of such norms.

Animal rights activism in the bosom of left-wing politics

I conducted my first fieldwork research between 2007 and 2009 with Jewish Israelis who refused to perform their mandatory military service because of reasons of conscience – most often violations of human rights brought about by the Israeli occupation. When I began my fieldwork with Israeli pacifists, I noticed very quickly that an unusually large percentage of my interlocutors who defined themselves as pacifist were also vegetarian or vegan. Wary of ethnographic ‘mission creep’, I initially tried to maintain focus on what I considered the ‘relevant’ motivations for their pacifism towards other humans. But I eventually found that the reasons underlying their opposition to eating animals were closely related to the reasons for their conscientious objection to military service. Indeed, there were many examples in which military refusers referenced animal rights in addition to human rights in their letters of refusal to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). In Western societies, in which meat-eating is hegemonic (in contrast with Buddhist or Hindu cultural practices), veganism and animal rights activism is often aligned with the political left (e.g. Adams 2015), and this was certainly the case with this group.

I participated in an activist group for young pacifists that offered activities including readings, films, and discussions. The group's purpose was to support young pacifists in considering their options in avoiding military service. From the beginning, it was clear that this goal was informed by an ethical approach based on a human rights and humanism. Animals rights were linked to questions of occupation, human rights, and Palestinians from the very first. This impression became even stronger as I began in-depth interviews with the members of the group. For example, when speaking to Karen about her path to military refusal. She recalled:

I guess it all started when I started getting into the animal rights scene. A few kids at school were saying things like 'meat is murder', and I didn't really think about it before, I just kind of ate what was on the table or in the refrigerator. I started doing some research, and I couldn't believe what I saw. Once you see those pictures of the animals suffering, I don't think it is possible to continue to eat meat. So I became part of this scene, handing out flyers in school and also doing some graffiti on Rothschild Boulevard. I spray-painted 'I don't eat things that come out of a chicken's pussy', on the side of a building. Anyway, people started talking about the army also. I was reading about the things from Betzelem [a human rights NGO] about the occupation and the treatment of Palestinians, and it reminded me completely about the way people were raising animals for food. How they were basically keeping Palestinians in cages and not letting them move around, it was like the videos of the animals that couldn't move. I decided my position was against causing suffering and the military was causing suffering, because of how many animals and Palestinians it was torturing and killing. So I decided not to enlist.

The connection between the suffering of animals and the suffering of Palestinians was ubiquitous in discussions among this group. The juxtaposition was initially jarring as the equivalence between Palestinians and animals has been more commonly made in order to dehumanize Palestinians, and thus legitimize violence against them. In the Israeli public sphere, Palestinians have been compared, not infrequently, by eminent politicians to cockroaches (Israeli Military Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan) and grasshoppers (Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir), crocodiles (Prime Minister Ehud Barak) and snakes (Israeli Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked), and generically to animals and beasts (Israeli Deputy Minister of Defence Eli Ben-Dahan). Dehumanization in those cases is done discursively and symbolically, denying full humanity and human characteristics to Palestinians in order to deny them the ethical responsibility owed to fellow humans. For example, in March 2015, a philosophy professor from Connecticut College gained attention for a Facebook posting that described the situation in Gaza over the previous summer as 'a rabid pit bull chained in a cage, regularly making mass efforts to escape'. Many claimed that this comparison to a pit bull reflected the attempted dehumanization of Palestinians, and thus racism. The online petition calling for the university condemnation of the professor noted that '[d]ehumanization has been used all throughout human history to justify genocide, colonialism and hatred of many communities' (quotes in Mulhere 2015).

Above, and in my ongoing conversations, it is evident that in this version of animal rights thought, the principle of preventing unnecessary suffering is extended to include animals as well as humans. Peter Redfield (2013) has summarized the premise of humanitarian thought as the idea that human beings are a species that should not be made to suffer. Ideas regarding the proper treatment of animals have a long history in humanist thought. The Bible establishes human dominion over animals (Genesis 1:26), and this is central to ideas concerning the 'humane' treatment of animals, which in turn reflect a concept of responsible stewardship. European laws based on humanist principles preventing certain forms of cruelty against animals, especially domestic

animals, go back at least to the seventeenth century. Dog-fighting, cock-fighting, cock-throwing, badger-baiting, bull-baiting, bull-running, and other forms of blood sport were all targeted for humane intervention (Ritvo 1987). Paternalistic care for animals emerged in tandem with ideas of empathy as a guiding force in moral regulation. For example, Jeremy Bentham articulated the problem of animal protections in a way that has influenced thinking on the humane treatment of animals ever since: ‘The question is not, Can they reason?, nor Can they talk?, but, Can they suffer?’ (2007 [1789]: 311).

Fieldwork with the animal rights activists in the early 2000s reveals a reliance on the humanist politics of suffering and compassion. This is an ethical approach that has been heavily critiqued of late by a number of philosophers and anthropologists, who claim that its rationality produces and reproduces problematic politics. Didier Fassin (2011) has suggested that the focus on suffering displaces other, more robust forms of social justice, such as those based on rights. Miriam Ticktin (2006; 2011) has also criticized the politics of universal suffering, arguing that they reinforce hierarchies and inequalities, and thus produce the exclusion of those suffering from the political community by casting them as passive victims in need of heroic intervention. Ticktin has herself extended these observations to the field of humanist animal rights politics, which rely on an imagined mute and passive suffering animal in need of rescue. She notes that this reliance on humanist values reproduces distinctions between the noble rescuer and the mute rescued that underlie forms of exploitation familiar to us in human society (Ticktin 2015). Thus, it is claimed that the politics of humanism are unfit to produce justice, both in human society (Bornstein 2012; Fassin 2011) and in our ethical responsibility to animals (Haraway 2008; Ticktin 2015). In the critique of humanism, it is proposed that an alternative politics of responsibility is needed, one that divorces itself from the problematic concept of suffering, and, in the case of animals, one that moves away from paternalistic notions of responsible stewardship. We will see that the latter animal rights movement does abandon humanist ethics, though it does so in ways that are locally embedded and politically unanticipated by these calls to do so. Specifically, owing to the ongoing regional conflict, the embrace of animal rights outside the humanist grammar enables and becomes complicit in aggressive political stances against Palestinians.

Israel’s new animal rights movement

While the earlier animal rights movement described above was relatively small, ethical veganism has become an ubiquitous national phenomenon in Israel over the last three years. (Overly) optimistic activists have even predicted that Israel will soon be the first vegan nation. One of the first mainstream incursions of the animal rights/vegan message was a video lecture of Jewish American vegan activist Gary Yourofsky. The video is called ‘The best speech you will ever hear’, and it was translated into Hebrew by two animal rights activists. Yourofsky compares meat-eating practices to slavery, torture, and murder. He challenges the school of thought that allows for the concept of ‘humane slaughter’, claiming this is a contradiction in terms akin to humane rape, humane slavery, or a humane Holocaust.

This video has been enormously popular in Israel. It has been viewed on YouTube by hundreds of thousands of Israelis and featured on prime-time television. Public figures, including journalists and politicians, have called on people to watch the video and change their eating habits. The video has even been screened for the public by at least one municipal government (Modi’in, July 2012). Animal rights activist groups

have formed or been reinvigorated. For example, the animal rights group Anonymous was founded in the 1990s, but has become a household name in the last few years. By contrast, the group 269life, which staged the public brandings described in the beginning of the article, was created in 2012. Further, countless Facebook pages and websites have been created to share information about animal rights and veganism.

Vegetarianism and veganism have moved very quickly from the upper-class ideological margins to the mainstream. In a recent survey, 10 per cent of Israeli society reported being vegetarian, and another 5 per cent reported being vegan, while 40 per cent reported having a friend or relative who had become vegetarian or vegan in the last year. Another 13 per cent said they were seriously considering becoming vegetarian or vegan, and more than 50 per cent of Israelis reported changing their eating habits recently to include less meat (Aharoni 2014). I spoke with many Israelis who had become vegetarian or vegan after being educated on veganism, not by leftist activists, but by their mainstream relatives, friends, or coworkers. Businesses in Israel have responded accordingly, with a few restaurants becoming entirely vegan, and many more increasing their vegan options in order to be included in businesses identified as 'vegan friendly' (Halutz 2013). Even large chains like Domino's pizza have changed their practices, and now offer a vegan pizza option, only available in Israel (Arad 2013).

Newly converted vegans and vegetarians were also quite easy to find. I found new activists handing out flyers and posting stickers in public areas and on bathroom walls. Rina was a typical example of a newly converted vegetarian. I met her at a café of the chain 'Aroma', where I overheard her asking the waiter if the avocado sandwich on the menu was vegan. (It was not; he suggested the vegan omelette sandwich.) Rina was a svelte 49-year-old, and two-month-old vegan. She lived in an upper-middle-class suburb of Tel Aviv with her husband, three children, and their dog, Gili. Rina played on a local women's throwball team (*cador reshet*, a game similar to volleyball), and one of her friend's on the team, Tami, had introduced the women on the team to the Gary Yourofsky video and had made the idea of veganism realistic for them. Rina told me that she was never a huge meat-eater, and she was deeply affected by the materials she saw on-line. She also told me that she recoiled at the images of factory farming, and could not help think of their dog, Gili. She also said Yourofsky's argument that there is no such thing as 'humane slaughter' was undeniable. 'How can you kill something in a humanitarian way?! Do you say sorry to the cow?' Initially, Rina had been sceptical about whether vegan food would be too restrictive and difficult to prepare. But Tami had invited the throwball team and their families over for dinner one night to show them that this food could be satisfying and simple to prepare. When Rina's husband gave the verdict that the food was not terrible, she made the change.

The latest animal rights movement has impacted a far broader contingent of Israeli society than earlier efforts did.² Accordingly, among this group, I found far fewer ties to the traditional Israeli left (anti-occupation positions) and human rights organizations. The Israeli left is relatively small, and often activists wear many hats on issues considered politically symbiotic. But those involved in the new vegan movement are far more likely to be single-issue activists or enthusiasts. As a result, the current politics of animal rights activism cuts across the traditional divisions of Israeli politics, and produces alliances that would have previously been politically unlikely, if not impossible.

Contributing to their widespread popularity, animal rights issues have received significant official support (many would argue more than human rights issues have), and have reached a degree of mainstream consensus uncommon in Israel. The Israeli

legislature, the Knesset, has adopted the global movement of Meatless Monday,³ and does not serve meat on this day in the government cafeteria. Israel's President, Reuven Rivlin, is a long-time ethical vegetarian. Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has also very recently shown significant concern with animal rights, supporting Meatless Mondays (Ravid 2013*b*), and limiting his own consumption of meat (Eichner 2013). He stated in a government meeting that his opinion was changed after reading a book by Yuval Noah Harari, saying, 'I understood from the book that animals have more consciousness than we thought. It bothers me and causes me to think twice' (Ravid 2013*a*).

Interestingly, both President Rivlin and Prime Minister Netanyahu are right-wing politicians. So too is Israel's Minister of Agriculture, Uri Ariel. Ariel belongs to the far right party Beit HaYehudi, he is a leader of the settlement movement, and has been singled out by a group of moderate Israel and Palestinian scholars as one of the four most egregiously anti-peace Israeli politicians. In his previous role as Housing Minister, he used housing tenders to extend Israeli settlements in the West Bank and he has intentionally undermined international peace efforts. He visits the Al-Aqsa Mosque, particularly during times of tension, in order to demonstrate Jewish sovereignty over this Muslim holy site, and he called for the establishment of a Third Jewish Temple there. Ariel has also been very pro-active in his official role on behalf of animal rights. After video footage revealed abuse at Israeli slaughterhouses, he immediately shut down the plants, ordered cameras installed in all slaughterhouses throughout Israel, and pursued indictments against individual slaughterhouse employees who were shown to engage in abusive practices. He stated: 'I will show zero tolerance towards harming animals' (quoted in Udasin 2015*a*), and 'I will operate with zero tolerance regarding the subject of animal welfare, and against those who perform acts that should not occur from either a Jewish perspective or from the perspective of the laws of the State of Israel' (quoted in Udasin 2015*b*).

Based on the fieldwork I conducted during 2011-13, this abutment of animal rights and right-wing politics reflects a broader shift in the Israeli animal rights movement. Current animal rights activists do see it as an ethical choice, but for many it is not one that is necessarily connected to the political claims of the left in Israel, specifically the issues of human rights, the occupation, or relations with Palestinians. When I asked Rina about human rights, she seemed confused and told me she didn't see the connection. I explained to her that I wanted to understand more about the people who were adopting veganism, including their different stances and politics. She responded:

Ah, ok. I think human rights, it's a very pretty idea. But basically, today it is only used by the Europeans and the Arabs to criticize Israel. They don't know what it is like here. They think it is all innocent victims, but we are dealing with terrorists, and it is not always nice and pretty. My son is in the military now in the territories, and the things he tells us when he comes home on the weekends, you can't believe it. Even a child is not really a child over there. Even the children are sometimes terrorists.

She told me that she had voted for the right-wing Likud party and Netanyahu for many years, not seeing any other viable alternative among the other parties. She told me her husband and her oldest son had voted for the far right Jewish Home party (Habeit Hayehudi) because they were fans of the politician Naftali Bennett and particularly his august military service.

Rina's support for right-wing politics and antagonism towards human rights discourse was common among those drawn to the new animal rights movement. I

interviewed twenty-three new activists, many on multiple occasions, and communicated with dozens more on-line. I found that they came from the whole spectrum of Israeli politics as concerns issues such as human rights, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and civil rights for Palestinian-Israelis. Moreover, these new vegetarians described their decision to stop eating meat as ethical (health benefits were only occasionally mentioned as a side-benefit, never as a primary motivator), but unrelated to their other political beliefs. Even the leftists among the group, none of whom were part of the radical left as my previous interlocutors had been, were reluctant to make a connection between their recent ethical conversion and their beliefs about human rights. They found the connection to be forced. For example, Gil told me,

I guess I'm a leftist, and I support human rights, but I think that is different because the veganism is an ethical issue, and the human rights is more political. I mean, clearly it is ethical as well, but I feel like for me they aren't related. Even if I became a right-winger, I would still be vegan.

Those on the right who rejected human rights were even more emphatic about the distinction. Orna told me, 'But human rights is not the same thing. We aren't eating Palestinians for food, we aren't taking their children from their mothers, we don't wear their skin as clothing. We give them electricity, water, jobs, everything they have.'

The decoupling of human rights and animal rights

The decoupling of the new animal rights movement from the left runs against the grain of how people conceptualize animal rights as a left-wing cause in the West, where meat-eating is hegemonic.⁴ In Israel today, by contrast, we find an explicit clash between human rights and animal rights. One development that sparked this clash was also a clear sign that the current animal rights movement has detached itself from traditionally left-wing politics: its embrace by the IDF. While, at one time being vegan or vegetarian in the Israeli military was a nearly impossible feat, today it is recognized by the military as a legitimate life-style and ethical choice that they see as in their interest to support. In November 2012, the IDF posted on Facebook and tweeted an image advertising their accommodation of vegan ethics (Fig. 1).

The IDF now provides faux leather boots and (as of 2014) offers synthetic berets in place of the traditional wool out of respect for vegan ethics. According to the military, hundreds of these berets have already been issued to soldiers. Vegan soldiers receive extra money from the military to supplement their food supply. The military also started serving a vegan, soy-based meat substitute from the Israeli company Chef Man (Benari & Kempinski 2011). In July 2015 they added a post to Facebook and Twitter with a caption that read: 'Going vegan is a choice – respecting that choice is our obligation. #Meatless Monday' (Fig. 2).

This change is not only about the recognition of veganism as an ethical choice, it is also about public perception both domestically and internationally (note the campaign poster is in English). The IDF is constantly fighting what Yoram Peri has called 'perceptual warfare' (2006: 4), an ongoing attempt to shape public opinion in favour of the military in Israel and abroad. This campaign should be seen as part of a concerted effort to cast the IDF as ethically attuned and morally upright. Here, we see that not only does the political context play a part in determining the ways people think about animal rights and vice versa, but also that the state is an active player in this negotiation.



Figure 1.

The reaction on Facebook and Twitter to this initiative was swift and divided. Many commentators praised the progressiveness of the IDF, and called it a model of a moral military in the world. Some thought it demonstrated how ‘advanced’ Israel culture is. Others immediately reacted to what seemed to them to be a grossly misplaced concern for animal welfare, while the more important abuses of human rights continue. One critic responded, ‘You murdered thousands of Palestinians, including more than 500 innocent children in Gaza last year. You protect settlers who steal Palestinian land and commit hate crimes against Palestinians in the West Bank. How dare you try to whitewash your despicable inhuman crimes by pretending to respect animal rights’. Another posted, ‘I think it is extremely strange from an army, that uses lethal force against humans, to offer vegan berets.’⁵

Anthropologists have noted the ways that the state appropriates hegemonic political and ethical rationalities for the purposes of legitimation (Greenhouse 2005; Muehlebach 2012). Here we see that the idea of animal rights is offered as a benchmark of ethical correctitude and probity that is meant to positively shape perceptions of other state policies, especially its military activities. A further example can be found in Prime Minister Netanyahu’s use of the family’s rescue dog on Facebook. Along with a picture,



Figure 2.

the Prime Minister posted: 'Meet Kaiya, 10-years-old, a lovely dog that has fit in immediately with our family. When my son Avner heard that she was being put down, he asked if we could adopt Kaiya and save her life. Over the weekend we received with warmth and love' (quoted in *Jerusalem Post* Staff 2015). The posts in reply included: 'PM Netanyahu is an amazing, caring and a wonderful leader'; 'I instantly like a Man who loves a Dog; I don't like nor trust MEN in a dress!!! I've stood by Israel and Bibi for the longest time and will continue to do so Shalom!'; and 'Israelis love dogs. We appreciate loyalty'.⁶

Once again, this statement about animal rights was 'cross-pollinated' with the implications for the Prime Minister's and Israel's approach to human politics. But within this same practice, there was also criticism. One poster wrote: 'Why isn't Netanyahu more humane towards human beings?'⁷ A few months later, after Kaiya bit two guests at a Chanukah party, the Netanyahus were forced to surrender her for a ten-day observation in accordance with the law. The Prime Minister took to Facebook again to decry the injustice of the law requiring such quarantine, calling it 'inconsistent with reason and compassion', and, in doing so, sparking debate about the ethics of kennelling aggressive dogs. Again, among the thousands of comments generated, many in support, some

Facebook posters could not resist comparison. One quipped: ‘Not enough, we must destroy the dog house’.⁸ This joke refers to the administration’s controversial policy of destroying the family homes of suspected Palestinian terrorists, and suggests that justice demands that equal punishment be meted out to the Prime Minister’s dog. As one can see in the symbol of Kaiya the dog, some accept the advancement of animal welfare as evidence of ethical quality, while others reject the correlation.

Many see the current animal rights movement in Israel as an opportunity to improve Israel’s image on the world stage and attain legitimacy. For example, Eyal Megged, a popular author, wrote in an op-ed piece published in *Haaretz* that Israelis should support the Prime Minister’s steps towards animal rights:

After all, peace with the Arabs isn’t going to happen, so why don’t Livni and Netanyahu harness their futile efforts on talks with the Palestinians to a goal that would truly make us a light unto the nations? Why not make ourselves the champions of progress on an issue that enlightened people the world over take seriously? (Megged 2013)⁹

In this statement, Megged recommends abandoning the peace process in favour of animal rights issues as a way to bolster Israel’s international reputation. This connection between veganism as an ethical practice and international legitimacy taps into broader general Israeli concern with how Israel is viewed abroad, especially in Europe and the United States.

Many supporters of human and animal rights politics are torn by the current politics. When I met up with my vegan interlocutors of the earlier movement, they had just seen the IDF vegan initiative and were outraged. ‘This is really unbelievable. I don’t even know what to say. I can’t even believe they have the chutzpah to publish this. They are inviting people to make fun of them. They don’t see the hypocrisy?’ The animal rights activists of the earlier movement were appalled by the co-optation of veganism by the military-supporting mainstream. Salon Mazal (a leftist book co-operative and popular consciousness-raising centre amongst the left) shut down a number of years ago, but the anarchist collective that ran it subsequently opened a vegan bar, Rogatka, in Tel Aviv. This bar took the controversial step of banning all soldiers in uniform, as well as products produced in the West Bank, in keeping with their dedication to fight against all forms of oppression, including violence against animals, gender oppression, and the occupation of Palestinians. One of the founders of the bar said banning soldiers in uniform was an effort to make sure that their practices matched their ideology.

The state embrace of veganism and attempts at nationalist advocacy have brought charges from human rights advocates that these initiatives should be thought of as cynical ‘vegan-washing’. The ‘washing’ concept implies white-washing: that is, to cover up or gloss over moral failings. Israel has previously been accused of ‘pink-washing’, which refers to its public relations promotion of its gay/LGBT friendliness in order to promote the country as tolerant and progressive, and downplay its human rights violations and the occupation. Here, vegan-washing refers to the use of Israel’s progressiveness in animal rights issues as propaganda in an attempt to downplay these same accusations. Animal rights activists of the earlier movement who agreed with accusations of ‘vegan-washing’ were often torn between what they felt was intentional obfuscation on the part of the state, and the tangible progress that animal rights was finally achieving through this expropriated politics. Israeli law professor Aeyal Gross (2013) wrote in an op-ed piece that ‘there are many people in Israel whose sensitivity

to the suffering of animals compensates for a lack of sensitivity towards certain groups of human beings – especially the Palestinians, on whom Israel inflicts much suffering'. Another leftist blog points out that though more than a hundred Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military in recent months, Israeli society has for the most part remained silent, and no soldiers have faced consequences. In contrast, the shooting of a camel in the south of Israel generated public uproar resulting in the arrest of two soldiers (Matar 2015). These statements point to the moral error of privileging animals over humans, an accusation typically levelled by those on the left against the current animal rights movement, even by those who have supported animal rights as one of their causes.

The clash between animal rights and human rights often takes place in the commercial sphere. Human rights activists have noted that much of the production and consumption of vegan products takes place in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, where organic and naturalist life-styles are popular owing to an ideological emphasis within the settler movement on attachment to the land. It is also where a significant amount of Israeli agriculture is grown. Vegans and animal rights activists of the earlier movement have lamented the fact that it is easier to find food that is untainted by animal suffering than it is to find food untainted by human suffering. One of my former interlocutors told me that he was initially very excited and encouraged by the increasing number of vegan and vegetarian restaurants in Tel Aviv over the last two years. However, after a short amount of time, he began to notice that the restaurants were not able to provide provenance for the food they were serving; they had no idea where it came from. 'They didn't care if the food was picked by disabled child sex slaves, as long as it didn't have any animal products. So basically, all these new restaurants didn't help me a lot'.

In Israel, the Holocaust is a frequent reference-point for discussions concerning morality, and the debate on veganism and animal rights is no exception. The Holocaust serves as an analogy and point of comparison for both sides. From the human rights camp, in an op-ed piece called 'The Nazis were vegans, too', writer Rogel Alpher intervenes in this debate to inform the reader that when the Nazis rose to power in Germany in 1933, they quickly passed numerous animal rights restrictions, including a ban on the fattening of goose liver for foie gras and the abuse of pets, as well as imposing strict sanctions on the cooking of live lobster and crab in restaurants, invasive animal research, and hunting. He notes that not only were a number of prominent Nazis, including Hitler, vegetarians, but they also held animals in higher esteem than they did many humans. The author quotes Joseph Goebbels' diary as saying: 'Man must not feel superior to animals. Man thinks that only he has intelligence, a soul and the ability to speak. Don't animals have those qualities?' (Alpher 2014). The Nazis' concern with animal rights and lack of concern with human rights is meant to be seen as the ultimate perversion of ethical priorities. The article ultimately seeks to expose the 'grating disparity between the Israeli trend for veganism and the public's indifference to the suffering of the weak elements in society, whether they are Palestinians living under occupation and apartheid, the poor, the homeless or refugees'. New-guard Israeli vegans, he claims, are making a similar perversion to the Nazis, privileging animal rights above human rights.

But new-guard Israeli vegans also reference the Holocaust in order to justify their ethical claims. Some Israeli vegan activists refer to the meat industry as the greatest ongoing holocaust the world has ever known, far exceeding the holocaust of Jews in

numbers and duration, and they cite statistics of billions of animals killed by humans every year in the meat, dairy, and egg industries. Gary Yourofsky, on a visit to Israel, invoked this imagery to defend against accusations from the Israeli political left that he is privileging animal rights above human rights. He was scheduled to speak at Ariel University, which is located in a settlement in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This caused controversy and was seen by some as proof that the vegan movement was deaf to issues of human injustice. In an interview with leftist journalist Haggai Matar, Yourofsky responded to the controversy by claiming that he would not be at all interested in human rights until human injustices attained the proportions of the injustices to animals.

When people start eating sliced up Jew flesh, or seared Palestinian children in between two slices of bread with onions, pickles and mustard, then I'll be concerned about the Middle East situation . . . I don't care about Jews or Palestinians, or their stupid, childish battle over a piece of God-forsaken land in the desert. I care about animals, who are the only oppressed, enslaved and tormented beings on this planet (Matar 2013).

Yourofsky's Israeli adherents softened his language regarding the Ariel visit, while echoing the same message. By the logic of the new animal rights movement, the massive disparity between the scale of human injustice and that of animal injustice requires one to prioritize the alleviation of animal injustice at the expense of comparatively trivial human issues. This extremely literal equivalence, politically and ethically, between animals and humans is a prominent theme. It is one of the features that enables its dramatic decoupling from traditionally leftist, human rights politics by casting human rights violation as petty when compared with violations against animals.

This shift allows discussions of responsibility that were previously impossible under models of humane treatment of animals. When I spoke with current activists who held right-wing political views, my interlocutors would consistently and spontaneously make comparisons of innocence and guilt between humans and animals. Specifically, they would argue that while farm animals had not attempted to harm humans, Palestinians had demonstrated their intentions to harm Jewish Israelis through ongoing terrorism. In nearly every discussion about the public dispute between human rights and animal rights, these interlocutors would produce a remarkably similar statement. Ayala told me, 'So far, a chicken has never tried to blow up a bus'. Tom said, 'Well, maybe if a cow tried to blow herself up in the middle of the market, then I would think about it differently'. Orit was a self-declared right-winger from a middle-class suburb in the centre of Israel. She had become a vegetarian nearly two years before I met her. I had interacted with her on some vegan Facebook pages, and I asked her to meet in person. We met at her large and well-appointed house on one hot afternoon. We sat in her kitchen and drank Nescafé as her three teenage children milled in and out. I asked her about a heated exchange she had with another user on-line, in which they had sharply debated Yourofsky's visit to Ariel University. Orit made a point of rolling her eyes each time I said the words 'human rights', and avoided the term herself. She denied privileging animals over Palestinians.

In my world, everybody starts clean. Everybody gets the same chance. We gave the Palestinians everything, we took them out of poverty, and gave them a life-style they couldn't even imagine. And they still hate us. They teach their children to hate us, and they try to kill us. So we defend ourselves! If animals would organize and teach their children to hate us, and try to kill us, I would feel the same way. But until today, there are no chickens in suicide vests, and the ones shooting rockets at us from Gaza, they aren't the goats and camels that live over there.

Here, animals are not treated as passive victims, but discussed in terms of innocence and guilt. In contrast to the humanist equivalence of Palestinian and animal suffering that we see with the earlier group of animal rights activists, here we have claims that equate animals and Palestinians on the level of agency and responsibility. These quotes all insert animals into stereotypes of Palestinian terrorists, a trope that is circulating in some sectors of the new vegan community. Here, the equivalence drawn between human and animal accountability is used in order to attribute collective guilt to a group of people who are not coincidentally on the other side of a territorial and ethnic conflict. The moral equalizing of animals and humans does not remain abstract but leads these activists to engage in a debate about hierarchies of innocence between the specific categories in their social context. They ask, who is more innocent, chickens or Palestinians?

These statements are challenging in many ways, and they put the critique of the dangers of humanist discourse in a new light. As with the previous movement of animal rights activists, the recent movement engages in the exercise of inserting animals into the ethical dilemmas of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and reciprocally inserting Palestinians into the dilemmas of animal rights. While the previous movement focused on the commonality of their suffering, new-wave animal rights supporters focus on the commonality of their agency and questions of guilt and innocence. In doing so, Palestinians are held responsible for their own denial of basic rights by virtue of their own agency. These are not abstract claims about animal rights and human rights based on contemplation of human and animal agency; they are, rather, embedded in local assumptions and the politics of the conflict. It is significant to note that it is collective responsibility of animals and Palestinians that is invoked. This is consistent with hegemonic Israeli political discourse that separates between us (Jews) and them (Palestinians and Arabs, or other peoples) (Maoz, Steinberg, Bar-On & Fakhereldeen 2002). Moreover, hegemonic political hierarchies are revealed in that Jewish Israelis are posited as the arbiters of both animal and Palestinian culpability and innocence.

Theoretical implications

As we can see, animal rights activists are not only concerned with questions of efficacy in their advocacy on behalf of animals, but also wrestle with the ethical meaning of their activism for the lives of other humans. Animal rights activists of both older and newer movements have strong opinions regarding how their support for animal rights integrates into their broader ethical principles, and what implications these have for their stance regarding human rights. Ultimately, they come to opposing conclusions, one humanist in orientation and the other explicitly not. Much has already been written criticizing the political grammar of humanism and even its application in animal rights activism (Haraway 2008; Ticktin 2015). Indeed, in the ethnography presented here on the animal rights activism of the earlier movement, one can see the critiques of humanist approaches manifested. The focus on the common suffering of animals and Palestinians problematically casts both as victims in need of rescue by activists. This also invokes problematic politics by which certain groups of humans are compared with animals, while others are exempt from such comparisons.

Yet in this article we can also see that political implications of ethical ideologies are not entirely determined by the grammar of expression. This is also apparent in the work of Naisargi Dave (2010). She acknowledges that animal rights activism in India is embedded in the history of liberalism, and associated with high-class Hindu and

anti-minority politics. Furthermore, she notes that the grammar of expression of animal rights activists, who speak in familiar tropes of witnessing, could easily be analytically reduced to anthropocentric humanism. Yet, based on her fieldwork experiences and intimacy with the activists, she resists this ungenerous approach, instead choosing to leave open the possibility that her interlocutors intend a more radical politics, despite the fact there is little evidence in the ideological grammar of the activists' speech that supports this position.

Similarly, the clash considered here demonstrates that the grammar of an ethical stance is a poor predictor of political justice. Animal rights activists of the new movement avoid the pitfalls of humanist politics, such as the trope of the mute victim. Rather, they assert a kind of common agency that responsabilizes both animals and humans alike, and opens them up to discussions about their innocence and guilt. Yet this claim does not occur in a vacuum. It takes place in a region vexed by human conflict and injustice, and, as such, is inevitably implicated both in and by these politics. This results in ethical arguments regarding accountability that may seem strained and of dubious logic, such as the 'chicken blowing up the bus' scenario. However, because this formulation was so ubiquitous in the field, it is also evidence of an ethnographic phenomenon, and an ethical rationality that is influencing the judgement of many people. Thus, genealogical and theoretical critiques of humanist approaches to animal rights are ultimately incidental to their ethnographic manifestation. Theoretical considerations could not have predicted the ways in which these ethical regimes would be deployed in practice, and the (human) politics in which they would have become embedded. Privileging the contextual deployment over the abstract analysis of discourse contributes to the ordinariness of the approach to ethics that has guided this inquisition.

This observation about the importance of context can be seen in other ethnographic examples of the juxtaposition of human and animal ethical relations. I will offer two examples from the literature. The first is an exploration of the Great Apes Project, an animal rights initiative intended to confer legal rights to apes, by Nora Ellen Groce and Jonathan Marks (2000). They observe that one of the methods animal rights activists use to make claims regarding the ethical responsibilities of humans towards apes is the comparison between apes and humans with disabilities. Groce and Marks understand and appreciate the goals of this effort. However, they also note some of the problematic political implications of this juxtaposition. Specifically, they find that the comparison problematically reinforces social dynamics that have limited and excluded humans with disabilities historically. Instead of solely improving the status of apes, which is the explicit goal, the comparison also effectively dehumanizes humans with disabilities and jeopardizes a group that is already subject to discrimination. The initiative not only bolsters animal rights, it also damages human rights in the process. Groce and Marks's observations support critiques of humanism that argue that the focus on weakness produces a limiting and problematic political project that reproduces existing hierarchies of strong and weak, able and disabled, noble and mute (Dave 2014; Ticktin 2015). In our case, we can see strong parallels in the way the earlier movement's equivalence of animal and Palestinian suffering, intended to improve the condition of both, fails to take into account the problematic politics through which humans, and Palestinians specifically, have been compared with animals in order to facilitate their dehumanization.

The other case I would like to consider is that offered by Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi (2012), who examines ethnic violence in Gujarat. He shows how the vegetarian

sensibilities of Hindus were exploited in order to drum up feelings of disgust, and ultimately violence, against local Muslims. Ghassem-Fachandi demonstrates the paradoxical situation by which vegetarianism and the underlying doctrine of non-violence are used to foment fear and anger, and ultimately enable violence against fellow humans in the name of Hindu nationalism. In that case, as in our own, the context of ethnic conflict is deeply enmeshed with the understanding and deployment of the politics of ethical relationships between humans and animals. You could not consider the ethics of vegetarianism in Gujarat outside of the context of human violence by looking at the genealogy and philosophy of this idea in the Hindu tradition, for example. Similarly, the case of animal rights activism in Israel cannot be fully understood outside the context of its deployment in relation to the rights of Palestinians.

Conclusion

In this article, I compare two groups of animal rights activists in Israel, and contrast the relationship of these movements to the politics of human rights activism. The animal rights activism of my earlier period of fieldwork between 2007 and 2009 was deeply embedded in the politics of humanism and human rights. This group of activists saw these causes as linked and saw commonalities in the prevention of suffering of both animals and Palestinians. Animals were suffering from hegemonic practices of meat-eating and factory farming, including death, while Palestinians were suffering from the practices of the Israeli occupation, including violence and collective punishment. This link to leftist politics is common to animal rights and vegan activism in the West, where vegetarianism is not a hegemonic practice. However, the new animal rights movement in Israel has decoupled itself from leftist politics and also from the underlying ideological and ethical grounding in humanist thought.

There has been a sustained academic critique of the humanist ideology that underlies the politics of the earlier animal rights movement, especially the reliance on the concept of suffering. In our case, the focus on the universal suffering of animals and Palestinians reproduces problematic political stances for both. The latter movement avoids the pitfalls of humanism, but does so in a political context with serious repercussions for human justice. We see above that current animal rights politics are appropriated by a right-wing state for the purposes of legitimation, as well as to deny the rights of Palestinians. This phenomenon, local and specific to this political context, is unanticipated by the theoretical critique of humanism. This case reveals not only the problematic aspects of humanist politics, but also the political risks of undercutting humanism in the context of ongoing political violence.

Ultimately, this case suggests that the ethical dilemmas in relations with animals are determined not by abstract contemplation, but in dialogue with other ethical responsibilities, especially those related to other humans. My claim is not that animal ethics only make sense in the context of human ethics, but rather that people constantly juxtapose and 'cross-pollinate' their ethical dilemmas in order to make sense of them. Moreover, this case reveals the ways ethical dilemmas are imbued with local understandings of political violence. Those writing on the anthropology of ethics have elucidated the ways that ethical negotiations are social, demonstrating that 'the right thing to do' is arrived at through an intersubjective ongoing process. This case suggests that this process is also deeply political, and the anthropology of everyday ethics should be especially attentive to this context. Indeed, outside of Israel, on a daily basis people debate their ethical responsibility to animals with an eye to their human responsibilities.

Certainly, the question of consuming animals for food is an ethical problem in many parts of the world, but so are issues such as how much is ethical to spend to save a sick pet, animal experimentation, and modern zoos. This article would suggest that these questions must be considered in the broader political context of human relations of accountability and justice, for example those regarding wealth distribution, health care, disability rights, residential politics and policing, among others.

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¹ I use pseudonyms throughout.

² It is broader in terms of its sheer numbers and the political spectrum it attracts. Yet it moves along similar class lines to the previous animal rights movement, being largely middle class and urban/suburban.

³ This initiative was originally based on principles of sustainability, but in Israel it is implicated in the debates on animal rights.

⁴ However, there are examples of where animal rights and human rights have clashed as competing left-leaning causes, such as in debates around indigenous hunting rights and animal welfare and ecological sustainability (e.g. Wenzel 1991).

⁵ <http://mobile.facebook.com/idfonline/photos/a.250335824989295.62131.125249070831305/1012962835393253/?type=3&p=10>.

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/IsraeliPM>.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/StandWithUs/posts/10153161586407689>.

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/Netanyahu/photos/a.376960237075.156823.268108602075/10153327313287076/?type=3&theater>.

⁹ Similarly, Im Tirtzu, a right-wing NGO, was ordered to donate to charity as part of its penance for bringing a frivolous lawsuit, and contributed the money to the animal rights organization 'Let the Animals Live' (Hasson 2015).

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« Pas de poulets sous les ceintures d'explosifs » : dissociation des droits de l'homme et des droits de l'animal en Israël

Résumé

Dans cet article, l'auteure examine la politique changeante des mouvements militant pour la protection des animaux en Israël en relation avec ceux qui militent pour la défense des droits de l'homme. Elle montre que les droits de l'homme et ceux des animaux étaient étroitement liés dans les mouvements activistes par le passé mais sont aujourd'hui dissociés, pour des raisons qui sont explorées dans l'article. Bien que ces militantismes aient eu autrefois des bases sociales et idéologiques communes en Israël, les défenseurs des droits des animaux affirment aujourd'hui explicitement leur désintérêt pour les questions de droits de l'homme, notamment l'occupation de la Palestine et le sort des Palestiniens. Cette dissociation a été

renforcée par la mainmise d'un État de droite sur la politique de la protection des animaux, à des fins de légitimation éthique. L'article examine les dilemmes de la responsabilité éthique vis-à-vis des humains et des animaux dans l'un des environnements politiques les plus bouleversés au monde. Il examine la politique changeante de l'activisme pour les droits humains et animaux et montre comment les uns et les autres s'impliquent mutuellement et sont entremêlés dans le contexte du conflit chronique israélo-palestinien. L'auteure étudie également les implications du découplage entre les mouvements pour les droits de l'homme et pour la protection des animaux dans le cadre de la critique universitaire actuelle des droits de l'homme et de l'humanisme.

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