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Whiteness and the Animal Question: Revisiting Coetzee's Postapartheid South Africa

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Abstract: Scholars such as Evan Mwangi argue that postcolonial animal studies is all too often considered through white environmentalist perspectives, a point exemplified by the critical focus on white perspectives provided by writers such as J. M. Coetzee, Barbara Gowdy, and Lauren Beukes. Such focus bestows the authority to care for African natures to (white) Western visions of worldmaking. Mwangi's criticism suggests the white environmental discourses that have informed prominent readings of *Disgrace* (1999). The uncritical discourse of animal welfare in the postcolony has ties to apartheid governance and its rhetorical legacy. Through a comparative reading of Coetzee's *Disgrace*, the rhetoric of euthanasia used by animal welfare organizations, and contemporary reporting on the state of the animal, I outline a historical centering of white environmentalism—in particular welfarism—in institutional South African discourses about the animal. In opposition to assertions that the animal becomes a vehicle of redemption for the main character, David Lurie, and other redemptive readings of white characters in the novel such as Bev Shaw, I suggest that *Disgrace* reveals the legacies of white nationalist imaginaries that continue to undergird state and institutional environmental discourses in South Africa. The purportedly humane ideologies of animal population control and welfare perpetuate white interests. *Disgrace* reveals the tension between institutional expressions of care and the forceful integration of postcolonial nations into global markets, which sustain colonial legacies of white worldmaking.

Keywords: animal welfarism, postapartheid animal, whiteness, postcolonial literature, white environmentalism

I. Introduction

This article is part of a larger project that aims to make visible the colonial legacies that continue to affect the ways in which the animal is integrated into postcolonial national development and global practices. The majority of the animal encounters within supposed structures of care that the project looks at are deadly or otherwise life-altering. Yet, animal welfarism marks the systemic violence against animals as humane responses to the "animal problem."[1] The people who work or volunteer at institutional animal welfare sites (including those criticized below) genuinely love and care for animals. However, the same people participate in and sometimes advocate for systemic violence against animals in the name of humanity. Most of these animal lovers[2] trust institutional frameworks of care—from public benefit organizations and municipal shelters to national governments and public media—to act in the interest of the animal and cultivate a practice of care. Nevertheless, those practices of care perpetuate violence against animals (euthanasia, sterilization, animal husbandry) as humane solutions to sharing our environment with them. This article focuses on institutionalized discourses of care, in particular animal welfare discourses. The ideologies of "humane" treatment that frame these discourses, I argue, enable the unhindered exploitation of the animal. The grammar of the humane overwrites the injustice of systematically killing, sterilizing, and altering animals and forecloses the hard, uncomfortable work of imagining other possibilities for co-existence.

I suggest that the challenge of caring for animals in the postcolony in our current moment lies in our recognition of the singularity and simultaneous multiple kinds of animal suffering within institutionalized frameworks of care. Animal suffering is singular in the sense that the extent and scale of the animal's commodification are incomprehensible and unparalleled. Moreover, animal death remains overwhelmingly invisible and unmournable.[3] While scholars in the field of animal studies or adjacent discourses have attempted to find an analog to animal suffering, such attempts are often limited. Marjorie Spiegel, for example, compares the transatlantic slave trade and the oppression of animals in industrialized societies (23–26) and J. M. Coetzee's Elizabeth Castello

references the Holocaust to mark the "efficiency" of global industrial meat productions (*The Lives of Animals* 21). Such comparisons have limited success in including the animal in historically distinct systems of oppression to which the animal is only ever adjacent and passive. Caring for animals in the postcolony requires attending to how the animal animates and is animated by forms of worldmaking. Thus, while animal suffering is singular in its form, it is also multiple as the animal faces its entanglement with modes of domination through discourses of humanism, imperialism, and, as I argue, welfarism in efforts of decolonization.

Animal studies, including the study of animal rights and liberation discourses, often considers the animal through welfarism and its institutional pathways. Similar to how these discourses have been criticized as complicit in reproducing the very mechanisms they set out to dismantle[4]—mechanisms that privilege the human experience—the dominant ideology of welfarism enables the continued killing and exploitation of the animal under the cover of humane treatment. Such ideologies reveal a telling parallel between animal studies and postcolonialism; postcolonial studies has also been accused of "continued academic Eurocentricity" (Harrison 4)[5] and often neglects non-Western perspectives when reading postcolonial texts. It seems par for the course that postcolonial animal studies is all too often considered through and within white environmentalist perspectives, a criticism that Evan Mwangi argues is exemplified through the centrality of white South African writers such as Coetzee, Barbara Gowdy, and Lauren Beukes. Such overrepresentations of Western environmental perspectives wherein scholars interpret the animal as part of their decolonial efforts, I suggest, inform some of the most prominent interpretations of Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999).

The dominance of white environmental lens in readings of *Disgrace* and the animal in South Africa more generally mark an absence of African perspectives on the animal and the need to work through the imperialist ideologies that drive animal welfarism. This article pays attention to the necropolitics of the animal, the authority to dictate who is able to live and who must die, to reveal the ideologies of welfarism that attempt to distinguish ethical and unethical ways of killing animals. In the novel, the various ways of killing the animal (euthanasia,

industrial/"cultural" slaughter/execution) affirm rather than dismantle racialized perceptions of care and relationality. Through a comparative reading of *Disgrace*, the rhetoric of euthanasia by animal welfare organizations, and contemporary news reporting on the state of the animal, I outline a historical centering of white environmentalism, in particular welfarism, in institutional South African discourses concerning animals. The novel shows how the purportedly humane ideologies of animal welfare reveal an investment in nation-building in which the animal is ultimately disposable. In opposition to assertions that the animal becomes a vehicle of redemption for the main character, David Lurie, and other redemptive readings of white environmental characters in the novel such as Bev Shaw, I suggest that *Disgrace* reveals the legacies of white nationalist imaginaries that continue to undergird state and institutional environmental discourses in South Africa. *Disgrace* exposes the tension between institutional expressions of care and the forceful integration of postcolonial nations into global markets.

II. *Disgrace* and the Animal

Disgrace tells the story of a white South African professor of English, David Lurie, who loses his university position after refusing to take responsibility for raping his student, Melanie Isaacs. In the aftermath of what he describes as his "disgrace," the story follows David's decision to spend time with his daughter, Lucy, who runs a farm in the rural Eastern Cape. Following Lucy's advice, he begins volunteering at the Animal Welfare Clinic. David is neither fond of animals nor the people who care for them. His work at the underfunded clinic mostly involves assisting Bev Shaw with the weekly euthanization of mostly healthy dogs. David's participation in killing the animals he gets to know begins to take a toll on him. Yet his newfound love for animals and their well-being does not make him question the validity of the practice. In fact, David participates in the euthanization of his favorite dog a week before the dog's time is up. Many scholars read this as an act of care that signals David's redemption from "disgrace."

Scholars such as Tim Herron, Mike Marais, and Lauren Wright argue that the novel makes a pragmatic statement about new possibilities for

human-animal relations in postapartheid South Africa. These readings are often sympathetic and redemptive of the novel's white characters, particularly David. Along these lines, David's transformation into an animal lover who expresses empathy for vulnerable life, as well as Lucy's refusal to report the rape that happens to her later in the novel, signify to Wright a positive trajectory in "a trial-and-error model of education and becoming, for blacks and whites alike, as they struggle to find a common ground" (97). This suggests that violence against animals and women as well as their positioning at the bottom of the nation's priorities are simply the markers of shared struggle toward decolonization. What remains unexamined are the ways in which animal suffering and death are justified in the process.

Even as animals are not directly included in Wrights' trial-and-error vision of decolonization. Herron, Marais, and Wright frame David's empathy for the animal and the novel's representation of welfarist ideologies as part of the necessary but somewhat uncomfortable work of decolonization. Herron argues that there is a "transformative" force to the "shared suffering" (473) of David and the animals in the clinic, while Marais reads David's participation in the practice of euthanasia as a redemptive, selfless act "in the dog's interest" (78). Although Wright argues that *Disgrace* highlights the interdependence of animal and human rights, she concludes that "if there is to be a 'new age' in South Africa, it is, perhaps, more likely to be ushered in by David Lurie" (102). This "new age" of environmental justice in South Africa, introduced by one white man's alleged redemption, ignores the continued systemic violence against animals and its explicit connection to white, Western environmental perspectives on animal welfare. Similarly, David's complaint that he has to meet the sheep he will consume and his deliberation over whether or not to eat the mutton Wright reads as a growing commitment to vegetarianism. She interprets his ultimate decision to eat the mutton despite his moral conundrum as an act of compromise to celebrate the landownership of Petrus, Lucy's Black neighbor and employee to whom part of her land has been transferred. For Wright, David displays the "willingness to engage in a celebration of black empowerment" (100). In other words, Wright sees David's transformation

into an animal lover and his corresponding acts of care as the logical result of learning to care for animals rather than, as I show below, a legacy of anti-Black governance that secures white nationalist imaginaries in a transitioning postcolonial nation.

Other critics who discuss the animal in *Disgrace* explicitly acknowledge connections between animal welfare and the upholding of colonial structures and ideologies but nonetheless continue to produce redemptive narratives of whiteness. While scholars such as Lucy Graham and Greta Olsen recognize the historical function of guard dogs to protect white South Africans and their property and indicate that "dogs have generally acted in the interests of white power" (Graham 8; qtd. in Olsen 124), their readings affirm white authority in the care of animals. Olsen convincingly argues that the novel shows that concepts of animality have displaced the responsibility of violence, yet she sees David as a guide through "a journey away from the complacency of gender and imperial supremacy" who "models an every wo/man's awkward lurching towards grace" (143). Graham's reading of *Disgrace* productively accounts for the often unacknowledged parallels between the novel's two rape narratives, in which the violence of one rape narrative is contextualized through white desire and another through Black animality.[6] Even as Graham registers how *Disgrace* challenges a rhetoric that refuses to rigorously examine white violence during and after apartheid and criticizes readings sympathetic to David's perspective, she ultimately suggests that he "stumbles upon a stunted form of care for the 'plain ordinary' Bev Shaw and for the dog to whom he gives the gift of death" (12). Just as Graham criticizes a lack of acknowledgment that David's "affair" with Melanie was rape rather than seduction, I believe there is a need to acknowledge that David's "gift of death" is necropolitical rather than humane. Readings that emphasize the ethical potential of David's relationship with the animal disregard the enabling legacy of the white national imaginary.[7] Although scholars have usefully explored the role of animals and the operations of whiteness in the novel discretely, it is crucial to explore them in conjunction with one another to account for the white national ideologies that continue to permeate the governance of non-human animals and environments in South Africa.

III. The Postapartheid Animal and the Legacies of Apartheid Ideologies

Care for animals in the novel, the postcolony, and the world often revolves around the control of animal populations, particularly those animals that are not neatly integrated into industrial society (street, feral, neglected, and unwanted animals). In this model of care, the grammar of supposedly humane solutions justifies the control, displacement, alteration, and killing of the animal. Much of the rhetoric of animal welfare mirrors segregationist ideologies employed during colonial rule. Under apartheid, the rhetoric of segregation focused on population issues. The purported rapid population growth of Africans compared to white European settlers in South Africa shaped nationalist arguments about African overpopulation as a pressing public health concern.[8] Eugenics, a discourse that is "predicated on the idea that social and political objectives could be efficiently achieved through the deliberate manipulation of genetic pools" (Dubow 154), provided a framework for reproductive policies. These policies responded to fears of "the vulnerability of white civilization in the face of the numerical preponderance of Africans" (156) and the purported "fear of racial 'degeneration'" (155). Tom Maultrie and Saul Dubow suggest that fears of the vulnerability of white civilization were anchored in a rhetoric of "swamping" and "flooding" (Moultrie 220) and that the threat of "the rising tide of color" (Dubow 156) saturated the paranoia with urgency. Narratives of overpopulation and resulting mechanisms of control, I argue, also frame animal welfarism in postapartheid South Africa. *Disgrace*'s representation of the practice of euthanasia relies on the rhetoric of overpopulation and draws attention to the necropolitics of the animal in South Africa.

There are three acts of violence against animals in the novel that signal the colonial legacies that shape the necropolitical territory of the animal: the euthanasia of companion and livestock animals at the Animal Welfare League, the shooting of Lucy's dogs on her farm, and the slaughter of two sheep. The narrative frames Bev and David's standing appointment to euthanize superfluous homeless animals as humane and necessary given the state of the nation, while the latter two acts of violence, those committed by Black men, are presented as morally

reprehensible. Thus, even though there are fit animals killed in every scenario, euthanasia, as the state-sanctioned solution to a purported overpopulation crisis, is considered humane. In contrast, the shooting is characterized according to the Black perpetrator's alleged animality, and the slaughter is represented as ethically backward. These opposing representations, as I demonstrate below, result from a continued disavowal of colonial legacies of violence against animals under apartheid.

The novel explicitly places animals in a position of crisis in a transitioning South Africa in which "a time must come" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 219) when animal lovers will carry the burden of the embodied reminders of the purported overpopulation crisis. Readers witness the killing of animals, over and over again, as the novel sets up a distinction between different practices of killing them. The social, political, and actual death of animals is negotiated through the animal's necropolitics. Achille Mbembe define necropolitics as "the ultimate expression of sovereignty [that] largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its fundamental attributes" (12). He suggests that necropolitics are closely related to the nation and its biopolitics, the political power over life. Mbembe explains that "the exercise of sovereignty, in turn, consists in society's capacity for self-creation through recourse to institutions inspired by specific social and imaginary significations" (13). In this dynamic, I understand institutionalized animal welfare in the postcolony as "inspired by the social and imaginary significations" (13) of white vulnerability in the restructuring of the nation. In the context of South Africa's colonial history and neoimperialism, a reading of animal necropolitics makes visible the destruction of not just precarious animal bodies, but those of humans and other life on the margin, which are classified as disposable in the name of development.

The representation of animal welfarism as nowhere "on the list of the nation's priorities" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 73) in a postapartheid state sets up a picture of institutional and ideological decline. In *Disgrace*, the Animal Welfare League and its values are represented through Bev Shaw, who runs the Animal Welfare League, and the soon-to-be converted David. The narrative carefully contrasts the once-flourishing Animal Welfare

Clinic with the worsening condition of the building that "smells pungently of urine" (80). Because of these conditions, David sees animal welfare as a crumbling institution, a dying "subculture" fighting "a losing battle" (73), language that echoes fears of the decline of a white national imaginary. The once active charity, a symbol of the success of white nationalism and its environmental ideologies under apartheid, is now neglected like the animals it sets out to protect. In many cases, the shelter is a hospice rather than a hospital; David describes the animal welfare clinic kept running by Bev Shaw as "a place not of healing . . . but of last resort" (84). The animal shelter thus carries the tragic responsibility to solve the purported overpopulation crisis that is addressed both by sterilization and euthanasia. As Bev explains:

> The trouble is, there are just too many of them. . . . They don't understand it, of course, and we have no way of telling them. Too many by our standards, not by theirs. They would just multiply and multiply if they had their way, until they filled the earth. They don't think it's a bad thing to have lots of offspring. The more the jollier. Cats the same. (85)

If we believe Bev, the problem of the animal is numerical, a problem that animals themselves cannot register. She frames human intervention in the lives of animals as necessary, in the interest of the animal population, and the only humane solution. It is Lucy who makes the connection for the reader between the decay of the animal clinic and the purported animal overpopulation. Bev is fighting this battle alone, Lucy explains, because "there is no funding any longer. On the list of the nation's priorities, animals come nowhere" (73). In the postapartheid state, it seems, animal control is the burden of environmentalists aligned with apartheid's animal welfare institutions. In light of colonial and imperial histories, a positioning of white, Western interventions as the necessary work of developmentalism perpetuates the centering of white governance of nonwhite and nonhuman populations.

The centering of white governance as necessary for the nation's well-being is suggested most strongly through the echoing of particular critical concepts of population control under apartheid. David explains

that "the dogs that are brought in suffer from distemper, from broken limbs, from infected bites, from mange, from neglect, benign or malign, from old age, from malnutrition, from internal parasites, but most of all from their own fertility" (142). The listing of fertility among a wide assortment of diseases and injuries, often a product of animal life in the vicinity of human environments, equates the animal's nature with dysfunction and disorder. In this context, "fertility" is a keyword that brings to mind the apartheid-era discourse that presented Africans' fertility as the looming downfall of white civilization. The Commission for Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu within the Union of South Africa, a commission founded to address the political, social, and economic effects of African population growth on white population growth, shamelessly promoted racialized ideas about fertility to cultivate segregationist ideologies: "[I]t cannot be assumed that [Africans'] attitude towards reproduction will change quickly enough in a spontaneous manner to realize the fruits of economic development in the form of higher material standard of living" (Commission for Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu qtd. in Moultrie 225). In other words, Africans' population growth is presented as a problem of the right "attitude towards reproduction" (225). The use of the word "attitude" suggests Africans' varying ideas about reproduction but also implies a sense of resistance. The commission's statement, perhaps inadvertently, links African population growth to a lack of insight about the importance of a "higher material standard of living" (225). In *Disgrace*, David and Bev link animal suffering and neglect to their fertility and lack of understanding, mirroring the logics of segregation.

The idea that the animal's own nature justifies its extermination is the driving logic of euthanasia in animal welfarism. Animal welfare organizations such as the Animal Anti-Cruelty League (AACL) have rhetorically well-crafted policies regarding euthanasia that suggest the executioners' love and care for the animal. The AACL is one of the largest independent animal welfare organizations in South Africa with branches in eight locations including Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Gqeberha. While the AACL is one of many animal welfare and rescue organizations in South Africa, the organization, founded in 1956, presents a

useful case study. While welfare institutions do not actively advocate for euthanasia, they suggest that euthanasia is a necessary evil to combat feral animal overpopulation and a product of people's lack of consideration for animal well-being. AACL's description of the circumstances under which they practice euthanasia is delineated in this statement from their website:

> [I]t must, however, be understood that while every effort is made towards achieving this 'happy outcomes goal' [adoption], there are times when due to the dynamics of kennel life and factors beyond our control, this is not always possible. There are, and will continue to be times when, due to these very factors, a decision has to be taken between the kennel, veterinary and behavioural staff where it would be in the best interests of the animal concerned, to be humanely euthanized by our compassionate and caring hospital staff, who ensure that the dignity of the animal always remains their priority. ("Animal Anti-Cruelty League's Policy")

The statement defers accountability for the animals' fate to "factors beyond [the AACL's] control" including "the dynamics of the kennel life," a very vague criterion. This rhetorical evasiveness allows the AACL to justify the euthanasia of healthy, non-suffering[9] animals as long as the killing is done humanely. This ideology of humane treatment, which determines fit animals unfit to navigate the world outside unless they are pets, is also the philosophy of the fictional Animal Welfare League that Bev struggles to keep operating. There, at the end of each week, Bev and David solve "the week's superfluous canines" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 142). David emphasizes that, while the amount of time that each dog spends on the euthanasia list varies, "a time *must* come, it cannot be evaded, when he will have to bring [them] to Bev Shaw in her operating room" (219; emphasis added). This supposed inevitability of animal death is understood as benevolence for animals in crisis.

Similarly, the inevitability of the animals' fate in the AACL statement is offset by the love, care, and compassion of the euthanizing staff before, during, and after their deaths. The novel characterizes Bev Shaw's and,

in the end, David's participation in euthanasia in terms of similar notions of care and love. When David decides to euthanize the dog he has developed an emotional bond with, he imagines himself euthanizing the dog humanely: "Perhaps he will carry him in his arms . . . and caress him and brush back his fur so that the needle can find his vein, and whisper to him and support him in the moment when, bewilderingly, his legs buckle" (219). While David is not oblivious to the animal's experience of the process, he justifies his role by "giving it what he no longer has difficulty in calling by its proper name: love" (219). In labelling David's participation in euthanasia "love" (219), the narrative presents the governance of animals is presented as necessary assistance and care "in the best interest of the animal concerned." Thus, David's actions perpetuate the notion of euthanasia as care, validate the killing of fit animals as necessary, and reveal that such care is marked by a loyalty to the mechanisms of animal welfare rather than the individual animal.

David's reflection on public opinion, the function of euthanasia, and the organizations that carry it out show how compassion for and killing of animals are intimately intertwined. He reflects, "When people bring a dog in they do not say straight out, 'I have brought you this dog to kill,' but that is what is expected" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 142). The animal in crisis is a problem to be solved. David similarly identifies that "what is being asked for is, in fact, *Lösung* (German always to hand with an appropriate blank abstraction): sublimation, as alcohol is sublimed from water, leaving no residue, no aftertaste" (142; emphasis in original). Yet euthanized animals leave their trace and begin to haunt David. As he begins to "help Bev Shaw *lösen* the week's superfluous canines" (142), he questions whether or not he has "the gift of hardness" like those professions in which "cruelty is demanded in the line of duty" (143). Put differently, David's narrative point of view frames the practice of euthanasia, and consequently his involvement, as the duty and burden of animal welfare.

The reframing of euthanasia as a duty of care displaces the violence of the procedure. Such displacement becomes both a ritual and philosophy for David's role as an unwilling animal lover. His practice of care, which questions how the animals must die but not if, demonstrates how

the grammar of the humane shapes the animal's necropolitics. David's proclaimed love and care before, during, and after death is intended to preserve the animals' dignity. In the same way that the AACL stresses the importance of "[ensuring] that the dignity of the animal always remains [the] priority," David is concerned with the "disgrace of dying" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 143) and the possible dishonoring of the animals' bodies. His Monday ritual of burning canine bodies at the incinerator is thus an act of reclaiming the animals as well as his own grace and honor. It is this notion of dignity and honor, of a faith in the humane treatment of the animals, that David instrumentalizes to secure his belonging in a changing South Africa. Linguist Paul-Mikhail Podosky argues that using morally implicit language, such as "humane killing," invites a focus on how the animal is killed "while ignoring judgments about whether or not such killing ought to happen" (76). More specifically, he argues that a distinction should be made between "*killing humanely* and a *humane killing*" (76; emphasis in original). While killing humanely points toward the "process or method of killing, [humane killing] refers to the justness or fairness of ending life" (76); the latter blurs the line between procedure and practice, between mechanisms and ideology. Letting live thus becomes impossible in the animal welfare institution's deployment of euthanasia as care.

IV. "This is the Country. This is Africa": Livestock Slaughter

In South Africa's history, the integration of animals into colonial world-making systems often developed parallel to racialized ideologies about who is best equipped to control such integration. For example, as discussed earlier, the dog was a significant instrument of white nationalism under apartheid. In addition to Graham and Olsen, scholars such as Louise Green identify a close connection between the employment of animals—for military pursuits[10] and private protection—and the maintenance of white national imaginaries during colonialism and the postapartheid era. The dog, "sanitized through domestication" (Ballard 1074), symbolizes the success of Western civilization. According to Richard Ballard, Western civilization encourages "sympathetic, non-utilitarian and non-violent encounters with animals" (1075). On the

other hand, practices such as the slaughter of livestock—often used to celebrate marriage, birth, and funerals (Qekwana et. al. 34–41), and, in the case of *Disgrace*, land ownership—threaten white national imaginaries. Ballard traces what he terms "moral panic" (1075) caused by the backyard slaughter of livestock after the end of apartheid. As more Black residents moved into white neighborhoods, backyard slaughter began to disrupt the sympathetic imaginaries of white living that carefully outsourced violent encounters with animals. Backyard livestock slaughter troubles the white urban ideologies of animal welfare in which violent encounters with the animal, such as industrial meat production, are kept out of the public eye. The perceived ethical discrepancy between private slaughter and euthanasia reveals differing conceptions of authority that run along racial lines. In *Disgrace*, a tension arises between David and Petrus. Petrus celebrates the land transfer with the slaughter of two sheep, whose well-being becomes a concern for David.

Few studies are concerned with the well-being of livestock in the process of slaughter, particularly what Daniel N. Oekwana and his co-authors refer to as "traditional" slaughter as opposed to institutionalized, governmentally regulated slaughterhouses (34). Such studies often focus on the strict analysis of quantitative data and cautiously navigate around political tension as though it can be separated from ongoing colonial, civilizing history. The main criticisms of Oekwana's study, for example, focus on unsecured transport of livestock, a lack of water or food during transport or before slaughter, and slaughtering animals without stunning them first. The range of criticisms implicitly frames care for animals according to the ideology of humane killing, which focuses on the how but not if the animals should be killed. This one-sided ideology produces a particular kind of knowledge that can only affirm humane ideologies of killing and limits alternative discourses of animal welfare. Once again, the grammar of the humane forecloses discussions of what humane treatment of animals means and whether or not it translates to actual care.

David's criticism of Petrus' slaughtering of sheep expresses similar welfare concerns; the fact that the sheep no longer have access to grass and water is the reported source of David's disapproval. His concern for the sheep's quality of life and the preservation of their dignity in death

reflects David's ethical concerns: "I'm not sure I like the way [Petrus] does things—bringing the slaughter-beasts home to acquaint them with people who are going to eat them" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 124). The slaughter conflicts with the kind of sympathetic encounters that animal welfare discourses imagine. David is grouchy about the fact that he has to know the sheep whose mutton he's supposed to eat. Lucy criticizes this ethical loophole: "What would you prefer? That the slaughtering be done in an abattoir, so that you needn't think about it?" (124). The difference between the slaughterhouse, the Animal Welfare Clinic, and Petrus' property contributes to the illusion of institutional authority. Similar to the Animal Welfare Clinic, the slaughterhouse engages in industrialized killing, but this fact is neutralized through a recourse to the implicit ideologies of welfarism. Lucy's wake-up call, which reminds David that "this is the country. This is Africa" (125), reminds us how animal necropolitics indicate that certain geopolitical borders of the humane run along racial lines. While David interprets Lucy's commentary as a lesson on "country ways" (125), she affirms the idea that Black South Africans perpetuate violence against animals. David thus indirectly portrays Petrus' practice of killing animals as an ethical shortcoming and less humane. The only difference between David's sacrifice of the dog and Petrus' sacrifice of the sheep is the bleached ideology of animal welfarism in which livestock slaughter is barbaric and euthanasia is humane. David's perspective thus reveals how animal necropolitics map a moral code for the killing of the animal and highlight the limits of animal welfare ideologies. The varying representation of practices of slaughtering livestock in which David's way of killing animals is ethical (or care) and Petrus' way is ethically questionable seem racially motivated. Such differentiation, I argue, marks animal welfarism as a tool of white governance and authority.

V. A Coup de Grâce

In *Disgrace*, such racialized morality affects the necropolitics of both livestock animals and companion ones, such as the dog. Critics of *Disgrace* have examined the dog's ideological and social function for anti-Black governance under apartheid; for Gabela Baderoon, this

function "explains why the *kind* of affiliation Black people have with dogs remains fraught with political meaning today" (349, emphasis in original). This is a meaning that Lucy off-handedly invokes when David inquires if she is not "nervous by [herself]" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 60) alone on the farm. She asserts: "There are the dogs. Dogs still mean something" (60). Lucy's sense of safety is built, first and foremost, on the political weight of dogs in the protection of white property. Yet what remains implicit in Lucy's reassurance is that white people's associations with dogs are also, as I quoted above, "fraught with political meaning today." Nonetheless, white people's responsibility for the violence they commit against the animal is overwritten by the implied relationality between Blackness and animals.

The neutralization of white violence frames David's account of the execution of the dogs in Lucy's care. One morning, three Black men appear in Lucy's yard and force their way into the house under false pretenses. While Lucy is raped by two of the men, David is knocked out and locked into the bathroom. From the bathroom window, David witnesses one of the men shooting the dogs in their kennels. Before the men drive off, they pour gasoline over David and set him on fire. The attack on the farm centers on three encounters with violence: the violence of David's mutilation, the violence of Lucy's rape (which remains implicit as David does not witness this firsthand), and the seemingly unnecessary violence against the dogs. David understands the last as an affirmation that Black South Africans perpetuate violence against animals. His account repeatedly invokes morality and the notion of disgrace:

> Now the tall man appears from around the front, carrying the rifle. With practised ease he brings a cartridge up into the breach, thrusts the muzzle into the dogs' cage. The biggest of the German Shepherds, slavering with rage, snaps at it. There is a heavy report; blood and brains splatter the cage. For a moment the barking ceases. The man fires twice more. One dog, shot through the chest, dies at once; another, with a gaping throat-wound, sits down heavily, flattens its ears, fol-

> lowing with its gaze the movements of this being who does not even bother to administer a *coup de grace*.
>
> A hush falls. The remaining three dogs, with nowhere to hide, retreat to the back of the pen, milling about, whining softly. Taking his time between shots, the man picks them off. (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 95; emphasis in original)

David's depiction is an interplay of carefully assigned intent and anthropomorphic interpretations of the dogs' suffering. David's graphic depiction of the man's process of killing and savoring each execution suggests the man is an experienced killer. His descriptions of violent actions carried out with ease and the impact of those acts on the confined animals emphasize a power imbalance that allows David to position his own killings of the animal against the man's process of killing. In establishing the man's violence as something that comes with ease and practice, David strategically animalizes the Black man, "this being" (95), while seeing himself as an animal lover. David defends the killing of dogs through euthanasia as necessary care and condemns the killing of dogs with other weapons as inhumane; the former is thus moral, the latter immoral.

This belief enables David to see himself as the preserver of the animals' dignity, in contrast to the attacker. Some of the dogs shot do not die instantly, yet the attacker does not "bother to administer a *coup de grace*" (95). The representation of mercy killing as the minimum decency given to those less powerful is firmly situated in the concept of necropolitics. This depiction draws a connection between power and duty of care that undergirds the consideration of the animal in welfarism.

For David, this duty extends to the body of the animal after death. On Mondays, after the animal clinic's killing sessions, "he drives the loaded kombi to the grounds of Settlers Hospital, to the incinerator, and there consigns the bodies in their black bags to the flames" (144). Because he believes he has become an animal lover, he "offers himself to the service of dead dogs" (146). And because David needs to preserve the dog's dignity, he disposes of the bodies himself. Leaving the bags overnight would mean that the corpses would mix with the weekend's

pile of disposable items: "waste from the hospital wards, carrion scooped up at the roadside, malodorous refuse from the tannery—a mixture both causal and terrible" (144). David is "not prepared to inflict such dishonor upon them" (144). The scene at the incinerator signals South Africans' desensitization to violence that is normalized through the merciless processes of colonialism. Although David is concerned with the dignity of the dogs he killed, he is less concerned with the women and children picking through the same waste. His service advocates for "his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing" (144), but does not advocate for a world in which women and children do not have to rummage through medical waste for survival. Violence is both neutralized and invoked as it secures his new identity as an animal lover. David asserts his humanity in conjunction with the animal. Yet he fails to acknowledge the violence of the white governance that he so ruthlessly invokes in the process of securing his humanity.

VI. Whiteness, Gendered Violence, and the Postapartheid Animal

The invocation of violence and neutralization of white national ideologies continue to impact animal necropolitics in contemporary South Africa. In December of 2021, *The Mail & Guardian* published an article that outlines legislative and structural departmental shortcomings[11] in the enforcement of Animal Protection Act 71 from 1993 and the lack of interdepartmental consultation in the drafting of the new Animal Welfare Bill passed in March of that year (Bega). The article quotes Karen Trendler, former National Council of the Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA) wildlife manager, who concludes: "Part of the problem with animal welfare is not necessarily the Acts, or who is enforcing it. But if you have a country that is so desensitised to violence . . . then animal welfare is at the bottom of the list" (Bega). A good twenty years after *Disgrace* received critical attention for its representation of South Africa's postapartheid race relations and animal welfare,[12] the outlook is bleak. The animal remains at the bottom of the nation's list of priorities.

Trendler's statement also alludes to a correlation between violence and animal welfare within the continued project of national development. South Africa has one of the highest rates of rape in the world. Trendler's statement sets into close proximity gendered violence and violence against animals in a way that evokes the history of apartheid. Under apartheid, "fears of the rape of white women by black m[e]n . . . was used to justify the earliest segregation laws in South Africa, which have disastrous implications for the country's black population in the twentieth century" (Graham 5). In the white South African public imagination, violence against women was a racial issue and thus justified segregation and control of nonwhite people. This history of violence against women during apartheid encourages a re-reading of animal welfare organizations such as the AACL, whose philosophy on euthanasia I analyzed earlier. Olga Allen, who founded AACL, traces the history of the organization: "At this time [1956], the Anti-Cruelty League's (as they were formerly known) mission, [sic] included the harboring and care of abused women and children, but it soon became apparent that this would be a difficult mix to maintain and that concentration should be given to the area of animal welfare" ("Anti-Animal Cruelty League History"). Population control and reproductive policies under apartheid particularly affected Black women's reproductive health and respective families. It is thus surprising that violence against women and children was not equally prioritized. The unrecognized mechanisms of authority show significant parallels with practices of euthanasia on healthy animals and efforts of mass sterilization that I suggest border on theriocide.

Further, even as violence against Black women and children, as well as against animals in South Africa, can be linked to apartheid, such interconnections remain understudied. Black feminist scholar Zakkiyah Iman Jackson registers an intersection of race, gender, and the animal in the formation of Blackness as a form of being throughout colonial and imperial histories. She draws attention to "the roles of gender and sexuality in the production of blackness as 'animal man'" that have often been ignored as the less "profound category of difference" (5) in the construction of whiteness and Western concepts of the human. In *Disgrace*,

we witness the suffering of Black women and children in physical proximity to scenes centered on the animal. This suffering, however, is not the focus of the scene but part of its worldbuilding. The narrative thus seems to draw attention to white people's relative indifference towards violence against Black bodies. The Animal Welfare League and the incinerator at Settler Hospital, institutional loci of humane killing, are also locations of violence against women and children. At the clinic, "there are children all around [David], begging for money" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 80) while at the incinerator women and children pick through the trash. While David does not identify the women and children as Black South Africans, he uses racial signifiers such as the "*muti* shop"[13] to place people who "hang about" (145) in the vestibule of locations of white care for animals. Animal welfare in South Africa reflects a historical investment in white well-being that coincides with the nation's well-being. The explicit link between violence and welfare, in which Black women and animals slip through institutional cracks, reflects an ongoing privileging of white national ideologies at the expense of nonwhite and nonhuman animals and natures.

VII. Conclusion

While scholars like Mwangi analyze the postcolonial animal in African literature and from an African perspective, other scholars draw on environmental discourses shaped by whiteness. These latter discourses often represent non-Western approaches to animal experiences as uncivilized and inhumane. In *Disgrace*, David's desire to reduce animal suffering and preserve their dignity in and after death, his concern for how the animals die but not why, secures white standards of living and his belonging in a changing nation. *Disgrace*'s vision of animal welfare, depicted through David's perspective, racializes perceptions of animal care so that sacrificial animal slaughter is morally condemnable and institutionalized euthanasia is reasonable and necessary. The rhetoric and ideologies of animal welfare organizations and contemporary reporting on the state of the animal in South Africa brings to light a historical centering of white, Western environmental perspectives in institutional discourses of animal welfarism. Redemptive or reparative readings of

David's character, ones that suggest he regains "grace" and perspective in his care for the animal, ignore the instrumentalization of animals and their disposability in the revitalization of white lives.

Animals, dogs in particular, remain politically fraught in a postapartheid context. Studies of the history of the dog in South Africa history[14] and in apartheid defense forces show dogs' and wolves' entanglement with narratives of white nation-building and interests. Their roles as guard dogs (of particular properties or in national defense) and their ability, when used as companions, to produce a normative vision of the white, middle-class family signal their significance for processes of reconciliation. The ongoing representation of animals as at the bottom in a hierarchy of value perpetuates stereotypes of Africans' inability to care for the animal. Organizations in South Africa such as the AACL need to account for the nation's continued investment in white nation-building. The postcolonial animal has the potential to decolonize futures and decenter Western philosophies of knowing that scholars such as Mwangi and Jackson (and myself) have identified in the intersection of anti-Blackness and neoimperialism. This means that postcolonial, animal, and environmental studies need to be critical of animal welfarism and its supposedly humane ideologies as a form of care.

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Notes

1 Similar to the representation of race relations in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the "race problem" or "Negro Problem"—a conceptual perspective criticized by Du Bois for its explicit focus on Black Americans as a problem (77–98)—the animal is often seen as a problem to be solved. Such studies indicate that for human-animal relationality to enter new theoretical territory, scholarship will require analyses that decentere Western philosophies of science.

2 I use "animal lover" as an umbrella term to identify people who care about animal well-being in the broadest sense, from people who evince a sympathetic attitude to ones who perform acts of care and advocacy.

3 DeMello stresses the toll of "how animal lovers suffer from the vast unmourned deaths of animals" (xviii).
4 See Deckha and Mwangi. Both scholars show that many welfarist mechanisms intended to protect animals such as anti-cruelty laws or wildlife conservation perpetuate colonial ideologies.
5 Wright also outlines the legacies of this Eurocentricity as it intertwines with mechanisms of colonial silencing.
6 When David catches one of the young men who raped Lucy spying on her while she is in the shower, David calls him a "filthy swine" (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 206).
7 The term "white national imaginary" describes the nationalist vision of white South Africans that led to apartheid and permeates institutional structures such as animal welfare to this day.
8 See Dubow for an argument that segregation fueled a variety of white interests (145) and Moultrie for a discussion of segregation as it relates to the purported vulnerability of white civilization and the rhetoric of population control.
9 Notions of an animal ableism come to mind when we see killing fit animals as the greater loss or sacrifice.
10 Green argues that during apartheid, wolves were imported into South Africa to be used as biological weapons intended to secure the apartheid government.
11 The article references South Africa's Center for Environmental Rights' report "Fair Game? Improving the Well-Being of South African Wildlife." The executive summary of the report states:

> The legal regulation of wild animal welfare in South Africa follows the traditional—but outdated—distinction between animal welfare and biodiversity conservation. Captive wild animals under the physical control of humans, whether held temporarily or permanently, straddle the divide between inter-departmental and concurrent national and provincial jurisdiction, due to a statutory regime unintended and unsuited to addressing the issue of wild animal welfare. In practice, the current legal regime ultimately provides little protection for wild animals (CER).

12 For example, Graham writes that while *Disgrace* was well received internationally, "[i]n South Africa . . . the novel has had a more ambivalent reception, and there has been disenchantment with an author who, in the post-apartheid context, would choose to write about interracial rape and a disgraced academic who learns to care for dying dogs" (4). Not all of the dogs in the novel are dying; most are healthy but considered unable to live outside domestic structures. Does this not suggest we have to rethink what caring for animals looks like?
13 Muti-shops are shops or markets that sell traditional South African medicinal plants.
14 See Van Sittert and Swart for a history of domestic and imported dogs of European origin in South Africa. They argue that dogs have been integral to its social

and cultural landscape. They examine the impact of colonialism and race relations on dog ownership and care. Baderoon cites former South African President Zuma's claim that "'[s]pending money on buying a dog, taking it to the vet and for walks belonged to white culture and was not the African way, which was to focus on the family'" (349). Baderoon considers this a postapartheid nationalist disciplining of "Black authenticity" (350).

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