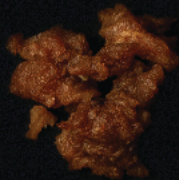


T.O.F.U.

T.O.F.U. MAGAZINE

ISSUE 15 CAPITALISM NOVEMBER 2019



MAKING CHANGE

WILL SIMPLY
EATING ALL THE
VEGAN THINGS
SAVE THE
WORLD?

Issue 15

Totally and Obviously Fucked Up is a pro-intersectional, anti-oppression, vegan magazine that aims to extend the conversation beyond the plate. Since 2007, T.O.F.U. has been independently publishing the work of authors, artists, activists, and other awesome associates in order to do exactly that. Thanks to readers like you, their words and artwork have been seen around the world.

For more information, please visit tofumagazine.com.

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About the Cover

We actually tried shooting this cover at the same time as the one for the last issue. I was home for a visit, so I could actually take part in the photo shoot with Devon Crosby. Sadly, neither one of us liked the shots we were taking, so we shelved it for the time being.

Months later, after plenty of shaping and reshaping of veggie beef pellets, we finally managed to get something we were happy with while I was on the other side of the world: a vegan Pac-Man.

So, why Pac-Man?

First, what better way to represent capitalism than with a character that has to consume everything to save himself?

Second, the products used to make the cover (Daiya cheese and Gardein beef) were both from companies that sold out to larger corporations involved in animal agriculture, testing, etc. As veganism continues to grow, this sort of controversy is going to remain a big issue.

Finally, referencing a retro vidoe game was meant to illustrate progress. Just like video games, the popularity of veganism has grown. For better or worse, there are countless options that cater to many tastes and can be accessed in a wide variety of ways. Whether or not this is helpful is yet another topic with no clear answer.

Altogether, despite the lack of clear answers wthin the issue itself, I couldn't imagine doing the cover any other way.

The Artists

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Special Thanks

Kudos to my Patreon subscribers who went above and beyond the usual pledge level:

Dan Hanley, Don Nicholson, me&you. Body, and Reiner Beh

Also, continued thanks and appreciation to **A Well-Fed World** for supporting the work of T.O.F.U. for so long.

Finally, as always, **Devon Crosby** wrangled the products and manipulated the lighting to get the cover shot, and a tremendous thanks goes out to him for his continued acceptance of my weird concepts and this whole endeavour.



From the Editor

I don't think I've ever really hidden the fact that I'm not a fan of capitalism. Back before T.O.F.U. even existed, I was running an independent music label and events company called Tumbleweed Entertainment that focused more on creating and promoting things rather than making money from it all. Sadly, like so many creative endeavours, the reality of needing money eventually won over, and my days in the music industry have been few and far between for a long time.

Of course, that's not to say I've become great at making money since then. Quitting a well-paying job to focus on a magazine that had basically been a hobby before that point isn't exactly the kind of thing you do when you're thinking about things like retirement or buying a house.

Without a doubt, the last five years of T.O.F.U. have been a struggle and I suspect the future will continue to be so for some time, but I still don't regret walking away from financial security for the sake of doing something that makes me happier. Obviously, there's plenty of privilege in the fact that I could choose to do that, and most people in the world are not in the same situation.

For that reason, and many others detailed in this issue, talking about capitalism doesn't come with any easy answers. As the authors point out throughout the pages, escaping it isn't easy, but it's something we all need to work together to try and do for the sake of everyone on this planet and even the planet itself.

Whether you simply choose to be more well-informed when it comes to the purchases you make, or you work within your community to develop local networks built on kindness and compassion instead of commerce, any change you can make might seem small to you, but it can add up when we do it together.

In solidarity,



03



17



35

Contents

From growing a small garden to helping to feed Puerto Rico in the midst of a disaster, fighting capitalism can take many forms. One thing is for certain though: it takes a community.

Content Warning: articles within this issue contain references to eating disorders, homophobia, depression, violence against animals, genocide, abuse, the residential school system, and suicidal thoughts/actions.

Focus

- 03 Enclosure
- 35 Veganism and Marxism as Ecology-Minded Praxis
- 69 It's In Our Heads, Too
- 81 (Re)Building Together

Spotlight

- 17 Eat Yout Ethics
An Interview With Lauren Ornelas
- 45 Big Ideas, Mini Mall
An Interview With Herbivore Clothing, Food Fight!, And Scapegoat Tattoo



45



69



81



Enclosed

THOUGHTS ON CAPITALISM,
GARDENING, AND MORE

WORDS BY KENYA GUTTERIDGE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MONIKA ADREKOVIC

Tucked away in my garden, trough in hand, the haphazard fence my partner Sam had years ago so lovingly made for me swaying gently, if a bit precariously, in the wind, I feel at utter peace. But in this seemingly innocent, simple scene, I am put in touch with multitudes of histories and whole other worlds – some reassuring, many deeply unsettling, and most made of a cruel mixture of both, originating in our existence on a living world, hurtling towards nothing short of a sort of apocalypse. Et in Arcadia ego.

My being in my garden tells of histories of genocide, long-reaching legacies of displacement, and colonization. These legacies, and my implication in them, carry right up into the present. Through my

garden, I am put in touch with the personal histories of my relationships to food and to my body, and, from that point, with the constricting tales that all of us inherit from heteropatriarchy and capitalism about how to relate to these vital parts of our miraculous lives on Earth. The heat of freshly turned-over soil and the assemblages of critters that populate it also hold me accountable to a world beneath and before the one that sought to commodify all that lives and breathes. As the dappled light flickers over all the layered stories that bind me to this place, in time with the feeling of the wind on my face, I am also reminded of my connection to a greater-than, to something outside of the divisive constrictions with which capitalism has straddled this world when life itself is objectified, captured, and up for sale. Et in Arcadia ego, but at least it's to Arcadia that I belong.

To my mind, my fence is most prominently a symbol of the love I share with my partner, a real live-by-doing, love-by-doing, hands-in-the-earth type. Yet fences have long been some of capitalism's strongest and most visceral supports, and they have severed connections of love and care between people of all kinds, providing the scaffolding off which capitalism builds. Many trace capitalism's beginnings to England's enclosure laws, when "private property"



Enclosure is the basic ethos of capitalism: it is through the delimitation of the relationships we have to the Earth, one another, and ourselves that it gains its power.

was established as a legal concept through the installation of fences like mine. These laws saw England's land, which was up to that point largely public – host to meetings, sports, and other community-building events – cut up into pieces and assigned to isolated families and individuals.¹ Capitalism established itself inside these early enclosures, exporting itself from Europe through colonization to sustain the ever-greater need for profit by exploiting other lands, other peoples.

Borders have long sustained capitalism by falsely declaring the world's natural "resources" exploitable by colonizing nation-states, to the detriment of the first peoples of the land upon which these nations claim their place, and to the land itself. Capitalism has always been about shutting us in and pulling us apart, and it is clear that enclosures constrain more than space. From the mother dairy cow's separation from her

veal-crate-bound child to the pervasive decimations of whole families in the face of refugee crises, growing exponentially thanks to climate genocide and imperialist border regimes,² the severance of community and family relations reverberates infinitely in all directions from the will to profit. Enclosure is the basic ethos of capitalism: it is through the delimitation of the relationships we have to the Earth, one another, and ourselves that it gains its power.

In an obvious way, veganism resists this enclosure. Emptying the cages, widening our circles of compassion: our movement, if it can be named as one, is so often articulated as an opening. Yet it gets incongruously framed as a mode of "ethical consumption," in which discrete individuals engage, meant solely "for the animals." This misformulation conceals the multiple ways animals' situations under capitalism are

1. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved 24 September 2019 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/enclosure>
2. A recent report has estimated that the number of climate refugees – those forced to migrate because of rising sea levels and temperatures, drought, and other climate change-related ecological crises – will reach beyond 140 million by 2050. For just one of countless examples, as I write this, the Indian government has evacuated hundreds of its villages facing severe drought. Meanwhile, imperialist border regimes are tightening in the U.S.A. and elsewhere. There are currently between 40,000 and 60,000 people being detained by ICE, more than ever have been in American history. Such centres are horrifically overpopulated, a fact that is abundantly clear from the images of them. A quick Internet search will reveal the tremendous violence that pervades this system: separation of families, lack of adequate healthcare, and blatant violence against those being detained by ICE agents are commonplace. It is through violent means (i.e. through slavery and colonization) that the U.S.A. came by the capital that makes it a "safe haven" for so many (as is the case with the Canadian state), and it is violent entitlement of these so-called Western states to the Earth's "resources" that is propelling ecological crises in India and elsewhere in the so-called "Global South" at a rate not yet felt in much of the U.S.A. and Canada.

symptomatic of the vaster will to commodify all life. It imagines us each, as individuals, responsible for upturning a system that undergirds every aspect of our world. I can remember when I went vegan, after being introduced to it – as so many of us are – as a practice of consuming “ethically.” I can still feel the constriction in my chest that I felt in those early days, poring over images of tortured farm animals in the supply closet at the coffee shop where I worked, overwhelmed at the responsibility I now had to end their pain. The system seemed so far beyond my individual reach, and the helplessness I felt in facing it did wonders to exacerbate the sense of helplessness I already felt, and that so many of us feel in the face of the massive systems through which capitalism exercises its power. It weighed heavily on my heart-mind-spirit for years to imagine that I was not doing enough and never could to free the animals. I felt belittled by the experience, far from the empowering tale of “choosing compassion” I shared with my friends in a desperate bid to have them join me in looking at the animals whose short, dark lives meant so little to a world intent on profit.

Although I have ultimately come to attribute my switch to veganism with a lot of the healing work I’ve done in relation to food and my body, as a woman growing up under heteropatriarchy, I cannot understate the

struggle it took. I suffered from disordered eating patterns in a disturbingly young time of childhood, and crouching on my floor over a packet of cereal in the small hours scanning labels for milk ingredients in the glow of my fridge light was retraumatizing, to put it mildly. The constant hyper-vigilance I had around eating as I made “the switch” brought lifelong body-food struggles to the excruciating surface. Though my commitment to divest from animal agriculture would eventually see this struggle give way to a love of my body and cooking I had thought impossible, it is not a journey I would imagine anyone could undertake, and it is not an experience I would wish on anyone who’s been brought up under diet culture and heteropatriarchy. It felt like just me, knowing that I could never save all the animals, but that maybe I could try if I only scanned the label enough times. The form of veganism to which I was first introduced reproduced so much of the capitalist ethos: I was alienated, a mere consumer, individuated and defined by how I spent my dollar and nothing more. My heart felt heavy, my body tight with helplessness: an enclosure.

I considered gardening something of a last stop on a line of inquiry into food and its politics – an inquiry that veganism had launched for me. Trying to grow at least some of my own food felt like a way to sew

together a number of my food politics goals. I divested (if only in part) from the abuse of agricultural workers and animals inherent in large-scale food production, as well as the unimaginably vast amount of fossil fuels needed to bring most ingredients to my door. Of course, I have never managed to grow anywhere near enough food to sustain myself, but eating whatever I can from my garden still feels like a worthy cause. Besides, it’s brought me so many of those earthly, in-the-moment pleasures that capitalism tries to deny us all.

Through my garden, I have learned to believe in my own power to create, to give life, and I have moved into a more intimate relationship with food than my fretful child-self could have ever imagined. I have sustained myself through my garden – I have survived. I let my fingernails grow caked with dirt, I learn what the earth breathing feels like, I share in the pleasures of my little Eden with caterpillars and butterflies alike. The stalks of kale grow as tall as little trees, visible from the back door – as is the canopy of little cherry tomatoes amongst the vines that now line my fence. But even in a space so replete with earthly pleasure, hauntings remain. The water that courses through the veins of my raspberry bush – no small amount – is colonized water, the lifeblood of

the Great Lakes and all its human and animal peoples. In my first year of gardening, Sam and I went to the city dump to get the free compost they make available to those who can’t afford the pricey store-bought kinds, nor have the time-money-energy to start their own. My plants live off microplastics, bits and pieces of the refuse of far-flung consumer lives. *I am a creature of the mud, not the sky*,³ and my garden doesn’t let me forget it.

The beginning of each new season with my garden requires the hardest work: the physical, dirty job of weeding, overturning the soil, and tilling it so that it becomes level and loose enough for new life to grow. Whenever I do this, I am magnificently impressed – if also thoroughly frustrated – with the lilies of the valley, a waxy-leaved plant with small white bells when its flowers, whose root systems are so vast and complex that they’re perennial mainstays in my garden, try as I might to rid myself of their obtrusive beauty. They have clearly evolved a spectacular technology for survival. Whenever I try to uproot them, pulling hard at the deepest part of them I can reach, they snap clean in two, leaving behind a translucent-white stem, unabashed, ready to languidly unfurl another set of waxy leaves and white

3. Haraway, Donna. (2017, November 26). When Species Meet. Univ Of Minnesota Press. P. 4.

blooms. Unlike any of the other plants indigenous to my garden, their root system appears infinite and unyielding, for all the dozen or so lily-of-the-valley inhabitants that live there are connected by one network, which will forever remain beyond my senses. To reach it would be to unearth a whole world – a world that wants neither to be seen nor touched.

I am not of the land that I clear, till, and plant each year, and these early-season practices bear the powerful echoes of the centuries-long genocide that continues to be attempted against the peoples who are.⁴ I am a benefactor of genocide, a descendant of some of the earliest white colonizers to arrive on Turtle Island⁵ and expropriate its earthly wonders. My ancestors were part of a group of French Huguenots fleeing persecution for a religious way of being, Protestantism, that would soon come to define the world matrix of power through the

colonial tyranny enacted in its name. Though I am unsure where these ancestors first settled themselves, I know that my being in my garden was facilitated by them. Whatever riches they came by were thanks to the land and the people who had cared for it for millennia prior to their arrival, and these riches have trickled down to my hands, through the generations, from them.

I know, as much as I try to resist this sense of the world and often find myself genuinely reviled by it, I have benefitted unaccountably to have had my ancestors' way of thinking imported here, too. This revulsive philosophy might be called capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, or humanism. We would be right in every case, as these violent structures all make such intimate, co-constitutive bedfellows. My ancestors' way of thinking was that which commodified land, animal, and human alike. It is this way of thinking that facilitated my

family's purchase of the place where my garden rests, a place bustling with the activity of diverse peoples – Wendat, Mississauga, Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabeg, and many others— long before the arrival of the first white person. It is this way of thinking that facilitated its so-called purchase under Treaty no. 13, as dubious and haphazard as so many land deals made by Canadian colonizers,⁶ for which the first peoples of this place have never seen anything close to reparations.⁷ It is through this way of thinking that I came to consider my garden as an object-place – mine, plain and simple. I have only recently acquainted myself with my ancestry and just begun to understand that the thinking that upholds capitalism – these patterns of objectification and enclosure – is that of “my” people, white people. I am still learning how my ability to survive and sometimes to even thrive under capitalism has been facilitated by cutting myself off at the root: imagining that I am my own alone and not also the glint in the eye of these long-gone ancestors, that I am not indebted to the land and the original peoples

who live here, to whom harm has been done in the name of “capital” for centuries – capital reserved for colonizers like me.

As repulsed as I may be to admit to it, I benefit, then, from not only imagining myself discrete from my roots, but from the ongoing attempt to snap the original inhabitants of this land off at theirs, too. The last residential school, the most crystalline attempt to do so on the part of the Canadian settler state, closed the year after I was born, and the one closest to me – Mohawk Institute, a mere hour-and-a-half drive from my garden – only 26 years prior. This schooling system, with its counterparts in settler states the world over, sought to dispossess the first peoples here of their families, homes, and the ways of knowing and being in the world that came with and from them, and to force them into the way of the colonizer by violent means. The ways of being and knowing and living in the world that Canada sought to destroy in Indigenous children were diverse, taking as many forms as the peoples and lands from which they

-
4. I do not mean here to liken the first peoples of the land where I live and this regional plant. This has the stench of the ages-old colonial trope of placing Indigenous peoples firmly in a romanticist, colonial vision of nature as “savage,” wild, at once frozen in time and always-disappearing (a trope that we notably often hear repeated in so-called environmentalist, vegan, and humanitarian discourses today). I make this risky analogy not to collapse Indigenous peoples with nature, but to introduce my implication in displacing and doing violence to living beings who rightfully belong where I do not, and where I certainly have no right to kill or do harm. I believe the unsettlement that the lilies of the valley bring me is a generative one, and it foregrounds the more vital unsettlement required of uninvited guests on Indigenous lands in learning of their implication in ongoing colonial violence. This analogy also underlines the failure of the genocidal project of Canada to disappear the lands it occupies of its peoples, and the ongoing fight taken on by the peoples of Turtle Island for decolonizing and Indigenous futures from contact to the present day.
5. Turtle Island refers to a creation story held by the Anishnabeg, which tells of the land known as “North America” to colonizers as resting on the back of the Great Turtle (Mikinàk, in Algonquin). For an Algonquin telling of this story, see: <http://www.anishinabestation.ca/en/the-creation-of-the-world>.

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6. Also known as the Toronto Purchase, this deal could be called questionable at best from its very origins: four Mississauga chiefs' signatures were affixed separately to a blank deed with no description of the actual land being “purchased.” For more information, visit <http://mncfn.ca/torontopurchase>.
7. The small sum of \$145 million, less than many of the towering condo buildings that now line Toronto's shores, was paid to the Mississaugas of the Credit after an expensive 24-year legal battle on their part. This small sum does not account for the many peoples who have lived with, benefitted from, and cared for this land long before this shoddy deal was made, nor does it account for the centuries-long and ongoing exploitation of the land and so-called resources of the place “Toronto” has claimed. It also puts enormous cost—in terms of money, time, and energy—onto the Mississauga defendants, the ones who were wronged in the first place.



came. But the inhibition of the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the lands from which they come, forcing a vision of man's mastery over nature in its place, is essential to capitalism. Canada has long sought to cut Indigenous peoples off from their root systems, and while we have, thankfully, ultimately failed in this project, the harm we've done in its name is irreparable, and we continue it still.⁸

As a political tactic, an individualistic, reductionist consumer-driven version of veganism is only a mechanism for survival under the current conditions – much as the lily snapping itself off for the moment – and not a means of radical change, of upending the commodification of life itself. Vegans of colour – most often women, femmes, and queers – have been actively engaging this “single-issue” veganism⁹ as a problem for some time, arguing from various standpoints that pitching veganism as a mode of ethical consumption “for the

animals” misses the entanglements that violence against animals bears with forms of human oppression and betrays a distinctly white and colonial way of seeing the world. It is to authors like Aph and Syl Ko, Julia Feliz Brueck, and Dr. A. Breeze Harper that I owe my introduction to this mindset.¹⁰ This “single-issue” formulation keeps us from feeling the many ways that animal agriculture is knotted in and amongst other forms of enclosure and dispossession, beyond the bounds of the gestation crate or transport truck.

For instance, recent reports have pointed to the exploitation of prisoners and undocumented immigrants as food-production labourers, within and beyond the slaughterhouse. A Bloomberg article reported on the extremely unsanitary, underpaid, and precarious conditions under which slaughterhouse sanitation workers do their jobs.¹¹ These workers, most often undocumented immigrants with few

alternatives for employment, make little more than \$200 a week for a job that frequently requires them to hose down moving machinery that was made to kill, in the middle of the night, in cavernous and poorly ventilated rooms, dark and full of the stench of blood and hydrogen peroxide. If they don't suffer long-term bodily harm from repeated exposure to these conditions, they are not at all unlikely to get seriously injured or even killed in the process, to virtually no detriment to the corporation. Given the violent and over-demanding nature of this work (to put it mildly), extreme exhaustion and stress are also commonplace – contributing factors to conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder or debilitating anxiety.¹² Such are the conditions for a world bent on profit enough to require cheap labour from undocumented immigrants, and

to need, just as badly, for these workers to have a lack of claim to any political rights.

Another recent article traces the ways in which anti-immigrant policies in the U.S.A., whose echoes can be felt around the world (including and especially here in Canada), are creating a deficit of the skilled labour for which farmers have come to rely on these undocumented labourers.¹³ Since capitalism depends on the exploitation of these precariously situated workers, farmers have turned increasingly to contracts with prisons, leasing their inmates as field labourers at a rate not seen since the Jim Crow era.¹⁴ It is especially worthwhile to consider this alongside the demographics of prison populations, in which Black, Indigenous, queer, trans, and disabled people are alarmingly overrepresented (especially when these identities

8. Indigenous children are heavily overrepresented in the Canadian foster-care system today, in a pattern that bears haunting reminders of the residential school system. [While Indigenous children constitute 7% of the Canadian population, they represent half of the children in foster care](#), typically forcibly removed from their homes and families. This is a crisis in reproductive justice that rarely gets the attention that discussions about abortion do.

9. Often aptly referred to as “white veganism.”

10. For more on these theorists, see *Sistah Vegan Project* by Dr. A. Breeze Harper, *Aphroism* by Aph & Syl Ko, and *Veganism in an Oppressive World: A Vegans of Color Community Project* edited by Julia Feliz Brueck. There is much more scholarship on this issue than these works, but for me it was these three books that first introduced me to critiques of white and/or “single-issue” veganism.

11. Waldman, Peter and Mehrotra, Kartikay. (2017, December 29). America's Worst Graveyard Shift Is Grinding Up Workers. Retrieved 24 September 2019 from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-12-29/america-s-worst-graveyard-shift-is-grinding-up-workers>

12. For a well-researched summary of the issues that face slaughterhouse workers, see <https://foodispower.org/human-labor-slavery/slaughterhouse-workers>.

13. Towards the end of my process of producing this piece, ICE conducted [the largest workplace anti-immigration raid in over a decade of US history](#), specifically targeting seven rural Mississippi chicken slaughterhouses where they knew that most of the workers would qualify as undocumented immigrants. ICE has a history of targeting animal agribusiness facilities for precisely this reason. It later emerged that many of the women employed at the slaughterhouse had recently brought [a large class-action sexual misconduct lawsuit against the employers](#) (exploiters). It is hard to miss the entanglements of the exploitation of undocumented immigrants, women, and animals here. ICE terrorists captured 680 people in a single day, tearing them from their loved ones, including many young children. [No charges have been brought against the owners of these facilities](#).

14. Rice, Stian. (2019, June 7). How Anti-Immigration Policies are Leading Prisons to Lease Convicts as Field Laborers. Retrieved 24 September 2019 from <https://psmag.com/social-justice/anti-immigrant-policies-are-returning-prisoners-to-the-fields>



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intersect).¹⁵ Whether immigrant or convict, these workers are shut out from society – legally, symbolically, and even physically. To the best of capitalism's ability, they are kept unseen and unheard. It is no accident that it is those already oppressed under the heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, colonial structure of capitalism who are forced to keep the cogs of the system turning. It is no accident that their labour is done in secret, in the dark, behind bars.

It is a choice to see the situation of farmed animals under capitalism as its own issue, rather than as a symptom of a broader colonial will to commodify all life. At best, this is a mistake and, at worst, a reproduction of the very systems that support all that veganism positions itself against, and a colonial re-assertion of humans' division from the natural world. We claim we're a "voice for the voiceless," designating animals out of communication, rather than asking how we came to think of them as "voiceless," asking where else we have decided communication is impossible – across disability, for instance, or language – and how we might take this as a chance to re-think what communication can be. Rather

than reckoning with the many entangled ways in which we are complicit in ongoing violence, we rearticulate a colonial humanism, a language of "denunciation, prohibition, and rescue, such that . . . animals can only be victims."¹⁶ We claim we're "cruelty-free" by doing our best to divest from animal agriculture, rather than reflecting on the ways cruelty is always bound up in a system that considers all that lives and breathes objects; rather than recognize that we will be complicit in exploitation so long as capitalism survives. We grip pitifully at the stem and leave the roots intact.

But veganism can be an opening. There is a reason it so often gets articulated as such. The compassion I have learned to feel for animals has certainly felt like an opening of my heart – one that continues to this day, five years later. Allowing myself to see animals as their own persons with their own interests has meant continuously learning to see the worth in them that I had denied, dissolving the clear border between "human" and "animal" I had taken as a given. Veganism not only demands the literal opening of the cage, crate, and truck –

15. To cite all of these demographics in adequate detail is beyond the scope of this essay, but a quick internet search will immediately reveal the overrepresentation of all of these populations in the U.S.A. and Canadian prison-industrial complex, especially when it comes to Black people in the U.S.A. and Indigenous people in Canada. See <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54972-eng.htm> for Canadian statistics.

16. Haraway, Donna. (2017, November 26). When Species Meet. Univ Of Minnesota Press. P.335.

deciding to see what we had once considered something as someone is an opening, too. It is one thread at which we might pull in the hopes of unravelling this system, alongside so many other movements with which we share our dream of a freer, more just world. We must build veganism around a paradigm that roots itself in compassion and takes stock of our complicity in a world already compromised by the forces of colonization, capitalism, and imperialism. In the age of apocalypse, it is imperative that Indigenous lands are returned to Indigenous peoples, that borders are opened, prisons abolished, and all that keeps us from knowing ourselves as a part of a larger whole – a living Earth – is dissolved.¹⁷

When I spend time in my garden, I feel cradled by the love of my partner, warmed by the sun on my skin, and in closer connection with food and my body than the forces of heteropatriarchy or capitalism ever wanted for me. In my garden, I feel truly and deeply invested in a relationship so rigidly denied under these intra-related systems of violence – my relationship to this mortal

planet. Yet even in this natural idyll, I am unsettled by the reminder of my non-belonging – there are legacies of violence that live through my being here. These complex histories, political and personal in nature, do not undo or deny each other, but inform and entangle each other in infinite knots. The fence is a token of one doting femme’s love for another, a symbol of the abiding and unconditional queer love I share in with my partner. It is also a fence, a colonial and violent claim on my place here, the physical evidence of my legacy in displacing the peoples of this land and expropriating its living wonders. Even in this innocuous scene lurk the violent legacies that forge me as white, as a colonizer, as a woman, and as a vegan.

I will have to reserve a full imagining of what veganism-beyond-capitalism could look like for another time,¹⁸ but can say with certainty that I believe that a truly compassion-rooted veganism would dispense with paradigms of outright prohibition, monolithic imaginings of what it is to practice it, and dualistic redeployments of the categories of “human” and “animal.” It is my belief that such a

17. It is beyond the scope of this piece for me to describe what form a world beyond capitalism might take. Indeed, it is beyond the scope of my imagination to dream this up on my own. It is crucial that we do not focus solely on critique of the current systems, as I have done so heavily in this essay, but that we also work our way towards dreaming up the world we want to live in and bringing it into being.

18. I believe the critique I have launched against veganism-under-capitalism here is crucial to tackle, but it is only after such a critique is taken seriously that the real work can begin. We need to generate new stories, new connections, and new worlds that best reflect our values – both in their harmonies and in their differences.

veganism would understand the socially stratified ways in which we are responsible to the Earth and our fellow peoples and critters, given our implication in legacies of violence done to them, for us. It would take stock of the specifics of our relationship to land, animals, Earth, and place under the paradigms of capitalism and colonization, putting the burden on the colonizers who established, maintain, and benefit from this system to undo them – and to advocate to those like them for a veganism that takes these nuances seriously.

To imagine compassion as the core of veganism is what gives me such great hope for its place in a future beyond capitalism. Compassion – seeing, knowing, being in touch with others in all their complicities and complexities – is the last thing capitalism wants for any of us. We must begin to root ourselves in compassion rather than consumption, to open the space of what it means to be human, of what it means to be an animal, of what it means to share in the destiny of this planet. Through this opening, we can draw ourselves into animals’ sphere of relations, and them into ours – where we have all been all along: our only home.

ABOUT

Kenya Gutteridge is a white settler writer born and raised in the city called “Toronto,” which rests on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Wendat, and Mississauga peoples, among others. She currently lives with her partner, Sam, and her dog, Vicky, in “Kelowna,” the unceded land of the Syilx Okanagan peoples, where she goes to school. She edits and contributes to the online feminist journal That’s What [We] Said. Her other writing, focusing primarily on justice issues relating to food and reproduction, can currently be found through her Instagram.

📷 [@water.sign](#)



An Interview With Lauren Ornelas of Food Empowerment Project

QUESTIONS BY SARAH LOUISE | PHOTOS BY F.E.P.

When Ryan asked me to interview Lauren Ornelas, founder of the Food Empowerment Project (F.E.P.), I knew it would be the perfect fit for this issue on capitalism. Us vegans are currently experiencing a time where it seems we have infinite choices each way we turn. While this certainly feels convenient, as consumers, we have a very powerful opportunity to do our research, raise our voices, and vote with our dollar whenever possible.

When it comes to food and agricultural capitalism, F.E.P. is doing crucial work to educate us about our ethical footprint and how we can do better. This work includes, but is not limited to, addressing worker conditions, food access and health, environmental racism, and striving for sustainability. With its roots in vegan activism, F.E.P. helps to bridge the gap between veganism and these important aforementioned ethical considerations. From multiple apps handy for ethical grocery shopping, to carefully managed campaigns, to vegan Mexican and Filipino food recipes, F.E.P. provides invaluable resources to the intersectional vegan community. With so many active campaigns and outreach happening at F.E.P., it's no surprise that Lauren and I had a lot to cover in this interview.

First, for those who may not know the organization and yourself, could you tell us what motivated you to start the Food Empowerment Project? Also, what were you up to prior to F.E.P.?

I got started in the animal rights movement in 1987 in San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A., when I was in high school. When I began, I was already aware of and participating in the boycott of grapes called by farm workers, as well as boycotting products from companies that were still vested in apartheid practices in South Africa. My sisters and I were raised by a single mom. I had gone vegetarian when I was in elementary school, but because we didn't have much money, I was unable to stick with it as I was forced to eat the food that others brought us. I went vegan in 1988, and decided to go to college to advocate for the rights of non-human animals.

In 1987, I started my first animal rights group while in high school, and I have been active in the animal rights movement since then, participating with and or running grassroots and national organizations.

Eventually, I was told by some in the animal rights movement that my desire to advocate for non-human animals and human animals was seen as "hurting the animals," and this led me to start Food Empowerment Project in 2007. As a Chicana, seeing many issues as connected has come naturally for me. Also, during this time, I worked from 2007 – 2013 as the campaign director of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition. I began doing F.E.P. full-time in 2013.

F.E.P. is a vegan food justice organization that seeks to connect issues of oppression and show people how their food choices can have a powerful impact, both locally and globally. We have various tools to promote veganism and help others go vegan, including our website veganmexicanfood.com, which is in English and Spanish (as is our main website). We also have a new website, veganfilipinofood.com, which is in English and Tagalog, and we do monthly outreach in our community to educate commuters on how babies are separated from their mothers in the dairy industry. (We are located in an area that the dairy industry promotes as the home of "happy cows.") We recognize that as an organization that promotes veganism for the animals, we are encouraging more people to eat produce, so we advocate for the rights of farm workers as well. We support boycotts called by farm workers themselves and work on legislative and regulatory changes. We also coordinate an annual school supply drive for the children of farm workers. As part of our work, we create awareness about slavery and child labor in the chocolate industry. We contact companies that use chocolate that make vegan options to ascertain where their cacao beans are from, and with this information, we have a list on our website of chocolate that we do and not recommend – which is also available as a free app for Apple and Android phones. Also, some vegan stores use our Chavez the rabbit tags, which indicates the companies we recommend. It is imperative that vegans remember that just because something is vegan does not make it cruelty-free. We also ran a

Photo (Previous Page): Valeria González, Food Empowerment Project's Operations and Development Manager, at F.E.P.'s monthly anti-dairy demo.

campaign to get Clif Bar to be transparent about where their cacao beans were sourced – we were successful, but we do not recommend the company. The final part of our work is to support access to healthy foods in Black and Brown communities. We conduct surveys in these communities (only when asked to do this work) looking at their access to fresh fruits, vegetables, “meat,” and dairy alternatives, as well as other information. We then do an assessment and release a report to share with policymakers, and we share it with community organizations to help them justify and fundraise to continue their work. From there, we do focus groups in these communities (where we pay participants for their time and knowledge) to find out what their barriers are and what they see as possible solutions. In our current work in Vallejo, California, U.S.A., we also coordinate an annual free event that celebrates the community, has speakers, performers, and vegan cooking demos, along with free vegan food that is available all day. We’re also working to get a worker-owned cooperative in the most-impacted area.

Finally, we started a new annual effort called Fight for the Ocean. In honour of Dr. Sylvia Earle, we coordinate an ocean clean-up on August 30. Our goal is to expand this effort.

It's our understanding that F.E.P. has active chapters in the states of California and Washington. Can you tell us what each chapter is currently focused on? Does F.E.P. have plans to extend to other areas?

Thank you for asking me this, as this is an issue I've been thinking a lot about lately, and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss it. Yes, F.E.P. has a chapter in Washington State, but that is all that currently exists. I have been asked since the beginning about starting various chapters all over the U.S.A. and in various countries. It has not happened for a variety of reasons: one is bandwidth and the other is an unsettling feeling I've had about this, which I've only started to understand over the past few months. When one person asked to start a chapter in another country, it was not an English-speaking country, and I explained to the person that it could not be called Food Empowerment Project. They were surprised, but there was no way I could see an English name in a country where English was not the primary language.

Over the past several years, I have expressed a deep concern I've had over what I called “the colonization of the animal rights movement,” where organizations start chapters in other countries and these chapters follow the same work that is being done by the HQ. (Full disclosure: From 1999 – 2006 I started and ran Viva!USA, a chapter of Viva! in England.) I have worried about this, as many of the countries that have these chapters have had animal rights organizations existing in them since I worked on the international campaign against Procter & Gamble from 1995 – 1999. I worked with activists and organizations that participated in our campaigns, but also did their work their way in their own communities. And herein lies where my concern stems from:

grassroots activists who know their communities better than outsiders are being told how to do activism rather than being allowed to do activism their way.

Please do not get me wrong – I think it is important that grassroots and national organizations should and must work together to support each other's campaigns and efforts. We need to work together and also respect the knowledge of the activists in their own communities and I am specifically referring to advocacy and not service-based chapters.

I want to make clear, I am not challenging any organization, just the idea – the concept. Nor am I overlooking the impact that social media has had on activism.

I often look back on things like factory farms, and I wish we could have stopped it before it got started, and I guess that is what I am talking about here with chapters – nipping the idea in the bud.

I feel the same way about chapters internationally and in the U.S.A., which I've explained to our chapter in Washington, and we are still trying to figure it out.

I worry that we are perpetuating a form of colonization within the U.S.A. and stifling creativity and cooperation with the grassroots in the U.S.A.

Way too often I have heard activists who are no longer with a chapter express that they are now alone, not being able to do activism (and there

could be different reasons for this), but some feel they don't know how to do anything without a chapter guiding them. There is an inherent problem with chapters that do not empower activists to think for themselves and give them tools to move forward with their own ideas and efforts.

Instead of activists being able to come up with their own ideas and work with whom they want to, they are now programmed to think that there is only one way to create change.

As someone who grew up in Texas and lived in places like Atlanta, I feel that outreach there (to truly serve people thinking of animals differently vs. making ourselves feel good) would require different types of outreach than it would here in California. Just as I feel working on veganism really needs to be handled differently than, say, working on animals in entertainment or fur.

I certainly don't have all the facts and information and could be wrong, and maybe some groups are doing this well.

I know not everyone is going to want to start their own organization, but such individuals can still participate and join in with those organizations they support. And organizations like F.E.P. are eager to help individuals assist with things like our Fight for the Ocean effort or our Shame on Safeway campaign. Also, I am always willing to help individuals start their own group – which of course can just be two people!



***Food has been used as
a tool to keep people
oppressed by
labouring to keep
corporations
(primarily owned by
white men) in power
and exploit the most
vulnerable.***

Photo: Free vegan buffet at F.E.P.'s annual Vallejo
Healthy Food Fest.

Unfortunately, I no longer see local organizations doing the type of amazing grassroots activism I used to see in the late '80s and early '90s, when there were so many small organizations doing their own thing and supporting the work of other groups with such creativity. They were their own entity and able to think and do what they felt made the most sense – taking and leaving what they wanted from other organizations. Grassroots activists can still support the campaigns and efforts of national groups, but they don't need to be chapters to do this.

And, I know, I was one of those activists, and I have been doing this non-stop for more than 30 years. I do not say that because I know more now; I say that because I know for a fact that the passion, creativity, and differences made for the animals have come from the grassroots, and we need to rethink the notion that large vegan/animal rights organizations need to colonize the U.S.A. Now I see so many burnt-out activists who were part of chapters and who feel alone and lost when they are not part of a chapter. If they had their own group and/or participated with various organizations, it might not be that way.

I dream to see a variety of grassroots activists (even just two!) heading up organizations that work in their community, running campaigns on their own – as well as participating in those started by others. To make it even more perfect, they would have a consciousness about how important it is to work in true solidarity with other issues.

I know that's a long answer to your question, but I wanted to be candid – this is just how I am thinking about this issue right now.

Thanks for all of that context- I appreciate you going into depth regarding chapters and how F.E.P. plans to move forward. It's clear that F.E.P. has a multi-faceted approach to its activism, which is sadly rare for other organizations. Can you tell us why you feel such an approach is important? With this issue's focus being capitalism, it'd also be great to hear how you feel your approach works within or outside of a capitalist system.

I do not believe there is only one way to create positive societal change, and when you look at the food system in the U.S.A., it was never created to benefit the most vulnerable, so a variety of tactics and allies are necessary to dismantle it.

Food and water—necessities for survival—have been commoditized in our capitalistic world. When you look at food, the capitalist system has never worked to benefit Black and Brown people or even the poor. Food has been used as a tool to keep people oppressed by labouring to keep corporations (primarily owned by white men) in power and exploit the most vulnerable.

We have to work within this system by trying to remind people that what we represent is not that radical. I admit, I do my best not to use terms that society has deemed scary or polarizing and show them that what we are advocating for is very basic: compassion, dignity, justice, and a concept of doing no harm.

With each area of our work, we have to use different approaches such as solidarity with the farm workers who pick our food. We don't call boycotts of produce, as we do not know as much as they do, and by doing so, there would be a possible backlash that could actually affect the workers. So, we follow the workers' lead – if they call for a boycott, they have determined this is the avenue where they want and need support. Corporate campaigns can make a huge difference and impact farm workers who work for those companies all over the world. We know these corporations do not care about the farm workers, but many do not want to be perceived negatively by their customers and so some make changes like paying their employees more. We also work on supporting legislation and regulatory changes. There was a regulation on the books in California that when the picking season was over farm workers would be required to move out of labor camps and move at least 50 miles (roughly 80 kilometres) away. This had a detrimental effect on the education of the children of these workers, as they would be forced to change schools multiple times. After working with other individuals and groups for a few years, we were actually able to get this regulation changed!

This type of advocacy is huge and important work. Earlier on when you mentioned some felt you were "hurting the animals" by advocating for human animals as well, it gave me a familiar feeling. It can feel frustrating to hear veganism itself referred to as a "cruelty-free lifestyle", when not all vegan activism factors in the issue of human rights in

agriculture, food production, and food service work. When bringing this up to vegans who might not have explored this idea, I find this can be met with resistance, including rhetoric such as "keep these issues separate," which is so tough. Have you found this as well? Where do you think this resistance comes from?

Absolutely. We hear this mostly from vegans – as if advocating for one negates the other. I think it comes from a place of privilege, and others have talked about this as well – the fight for justice has no limitations. Unfortunately, some people dismiss or discount the various human rights abuses that are still incredibly real in the U.S.A. Some of us feel intensely the injustices placed on others and don't see that we can wait until we accomplish one thing before we start working on another—we see these issues as connected. I imagine it's similar to the way that Frederick Douglass understood the need for abolition and for women to have the right to vote, and there's also Dolores Huerta, who has dedicated her life to advocating for the rights of workers, women, LGBTQ, and more. The threads of oppression are connected as is the path to liberation, and we must work to weave them together.

If someone would like to start considering the previously mentioned issues in their food and lifestyle choices, where would you suggest they start?

I think the first thing they can start with is actually looking at the food they're buying and doing it with

intention. We like to call it “eating your ethics.” Look at the produce, and if they can afford it, buy organic for the sake of the farm workers. Without sounding too self-serving, they can check out our website foodispower.org for more information on bananas, coffee, chocolate, and wine. We also have information on our website about palm and sugar, and, of course, how animals are raised and killed for food. But overall, those with privilege can certainly see each purchase they make as a responsibility and figure out as well if what they are buying meets their ethics.

In terms of things like clothes, we recommend the Worker’s Rights Consortium.

You’ve mentioned another of your other existing sites earlier on, VeganMexicanFood.com, and how you are advocating for food decolonization. Could you share with our readers what food decolonization means to F.E.P. and how this fits into your objectives?

We are deeply aware of the effects of colonization on our food, our cultures, and our land. We also know that our indigenous ancestors before colonization were not vegan and that colonizers brought many non-human animals to our lands to eat. They feared that by eating our foods they would become inferior (i.e., indigenous).

We feel it is important to recognize the legacy that this has on our people still today. Many people are what we call “lactose normal.” We feel this is a more appropriate term than “lactose intolerant,” as that word puts the onus on people of colour, as if



Yes, indeed, voting with your dollars in a capitalist society is important, but that is not enough. It is imperative that we use our collective voices to speak out against corporations that do harm and advocate for those who are most negatively impacted by capitalism.

there is something wrong with us for not being able to digest the milk of another species. Remember, the Spanish brought cows and goats to the Americas as part of colonization.

We also advocate, as much as we can within a capitalist system, to fight the framework of colonization, which makes those who are in positions of power feel they can exploit and/or oppress every living being and treat them as mere commodities.

Most recently with Vegan Mexican Food, we have turned it into a booklet that is available in English and Spanish, and we are preparing to run ads in Latinx/Spanish-speaking newspapers for people to order them for free.

We also just launched our VeganFilipinoFood.com in English and Tagalog! We are really excited to share these delicious recipes that highlight Filipinx foods without animal ingredients, while modelling that it is possible to eat vegan and still incorporate comfort foods. Filipinx culture places a high value on caring for their community and for the land that sustains them.

A lot of folks have apprehensions towards organic food, which seems to stem from lack of access. Often, organic products can be cost prohibitive. Personally, I have felt conflicted about this. However, F.E.P. brings up the very real and important issue that dousing products with chemicals is very harmful to workers. While we can certainly vote with our dollars, how else can we as

consumers bring attention to the importance of this?

I have never quite understood people’s apprehensions towards organic. It is clearly not perfect, as it can be expensive; however, a goal to use less agricultural chemicals (not saying they don’t use any) is good for workers and the environment and also does not support an industry that has no regard for life. To me, this is more about not wanting to consume a product that is harming others.

When we survey Black and Brown communities that lack access to healthy foods, they all express a desire for organic, as it is pretty nonexistent in their communities. We have found that many are very aware of how these agricultural chemicals harm the workers.

Yes, indeed, voting with your dollars in a capitalist society is important, but that is not enough. It is imperative that we use our collective voices to speak out against corporations that do harm and advocate for those who are most negatively impacted by capitalism.

Promoting organic products is just one way in which you push consumers to consider farmworkers. You’ve also held annual school supply drives for the children of workers, and done numerous other things directly with people involved. Can you speak a little about why this is important, and whether or not you’ve seen improvements since you started such actions?



Personally, I feel it is important to advocate for justice and fight against inequality and oppression in any form it takes. If you have the privilege of eating one or a few times a day, you are afforded the opportunity to make a positive difference in this area. And given that as vegans our diet is predominately plant-based, we owe it to those who pick our food to ensure they are treated with dignity and respect and paid well – especially those of us who are vegan for ethical reasons.

We coordinate a school supply drives for the children of farm workers as a way to give back to those who feed us – all of us – unless you only eat food you grow. Change comes too slowly, and so the school supply drive gives us the ability to immediately try to make a difference in the lives of these children. Their parents sacrifice and do all that they do and work in a very oppressive system for their children to have more and to have an education. Our school supply drive is not done as an act of charity, but to help to right an injustice and lend our support for their children to succeed.

Jumping back to the topic of access, it can feel so out of touch when we're told a "vegan diet is easy for everyone", when there can in fact be many barriers surrounding access to fresh food and vegan alternatives. Can you speak to some of the other ways in which F.E.P. is working to change this, so that there is less of a gap in access to good food in the future?

Our work first and foremost serves to support the work already being done and amplify the voices and needs of the community. Currently, we are still working in Vallejo, California, where we have done an assessment on the availability of healthy foods (fresh, frozen, canned fruits and vegetables, "meat" and dairy alternatives, and more) and conducted focus groups to determine what the current barriers are as well as what some of the solutions might be. We have also brought up other possible solutions to community members: interest in growing their own foods and worker-owned cooperatives.

We also coordinate a Vallejo Healthy Food Fest where we have speakers who focus on nutrition and veganism, there are cooking demos, music and dance performers, and free vegan food that is available all day. Along with all of that, we are trying to get the city to pass an ordinance to prevent corporations from using restrictive deeds or non-compete clauses to block grocery stores and building support for worker-owned cooperatives.

We follow environmental justice principles and only go into communities when we are asked to.

Overall, we want people off a system that was not meant to benefit them, as these systems are indeed built on a capitalist framework. Ideally, it would be great for everyone to be able to grow their own food and be empowered by the ability to feed themselves; however, we know that not everyone

Photo: Happy recipient of school supplies from F.E.P.'s annual School Supply Drive for the Children of Farm Workers.

has the privilege of access and/or “owning” land. Therefore, we believe that worker-owned cooperatives provide a solution where the owners would be a part of the community—it would create local jobs and foster skills, and the wealth would benefit the community. Also, with worker-owned cooperatives, they decide everything, including where profits go.

I was shocked to learn from F.E.P. that Safeway has a policy where once they close down a location—they are able to put a clause on the land where competing grocery stores can not move in for between 10-15 years! This limits food access to these affected communities so much. I noticed that F.E.P. has encouraged us not necessarily to boycott Safeway as a community grocery store, but rather to continue shopping there and save our receipts. Can you go into some detail as to why this is important to the Shame on Safeway campaign?

Yes, it is very hard to believe that grocery stores have the legal right in the U.S.A. to place restrictive deeds or non-compete clauses on properties that they no longer occupy. This indeed has a detrimental impact on community health – primarily that of Black, Brown, older people, and those who are disabled. At this time, we have not called for a boycott, as we are hoping that Safeway cares when they hear from those who currently shop there; however, if an impacted community

would like a national boycott to be called, we will support it.

Most corporations seem to only care about two things: their reputation and money. Our goal is to show them, by the use of saving receipts, that their customers do care and will take their business elsewhere if Safeway does not do the right thing and be a better community partner.

Again, we do not feel as if grocery stores are the solution to the lack of access to healthy foods, but they should definitely not be a barrier. Some of these restrictive deeds and non-compete clauses have lasted for more than 30 years. A current one in place would deprive a community from having a grocery store for a generation, thanks to Albertsons (Safeway’s parent company).

Learn more on [our website](#).

I recall being in Washington a couple summers back and coming across protesters at Whole Foods regarding Driscoll’s berries- was F.E.P. involved in this campaign? To inform ourselves more directly, do you have suggestions on where to find more information about food & farm workers strikes so that we know which companies to avoid and/or reach out to encourage change?

F.E.P. coordinated protests in support of the Driscoll’s campaign in Sonoma County, where our organization is based, but had not coordinated any

Photo: Food Empowerment Project’s Board Member, Sharon Daraphonhdeth, and volunteers at one of their Shame on Safeway protests in San Francisco., California, U.S.A.



in Washington. That's a great question – staying tuned into organizations that work on farm worker justice issues, such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, can be helpful. F.E.P. also promotes various campaigns and boycotts called by farm workers from around the world.

I watched one of your videos from this time last year, where F.E.P. was discussing a worker-owned cooperative in the city of Vallejo. What brought about the connection to this co-op, and what do you feel the benefits of this worker-owned model are? Have you seen, or do you foresee more of these popping up either via F.E.P. or other groups?

After our focus groups we coordinated in Vallejo, we found that out of our seven groups (of about 35 people), only one person was familiar with worker-owned cooperatives. Due to this fact, we coordinated three public meetings in Vallejo where we connected them to one of the owners of Mandela Grocery in Oakland, a worker-owned cooperative, so they could learn more and ask questions.

Thanks so much to lauren for this conversation, and the F.E.P. team for providing us with all of the resources we've discussed. If you're interested in learning more, I highly encourage you to follow F.E.P. on social media.

You can also choose to financially support them through their [website](#). Thanks to the resources F.E.P. provides, I now feel fully equipped to go ahead and bake some chocolate chip cookies, with Cocoa Camino chips, because you can never have enough F.E.P. approved chocolate, am I right?!

We are working with community members to bring one to the most impacted area of the city. Overall, we would love to see more worker-owned cooperatives popping up as these are ways for community members to be workers and owners vs. money going out of the community.

For our readers out there now left marvelling at the wonderful work of F.E.P.- could you share some suggested resources and/or actions for those of us who wish to put these ideas to practice in our own communities?

Our website has loads of information in both English and in Spanish. We would also love to have activists join in our efforts by becoming a Shame on Safeway campaigner, taking part in our Fight for the Ocean actions, and checking out our other areas of work.

Suggested Links

[Eating Tips](#) | [Resources](#) | [Chocolate List](#)

ABOUT

lauren Ornelas is the founder/director of Food Empowerment Project (F.E.P.), a vegan food justice non-profit seeking to create a more just world by helping consumers recognize the power of their food choices. She is the former executive director of Viva!USA, a national non-profit vegan advocacy organization that Viva!UK asked her to start in 1999, and for which she investigated factory farms and ran consumer campaigns. In cooperation with activists across the country, she persuaded Trader Joe's to stop selling all duck meat and achieved corporate changes within Whole Foods Market, Pier 1 Imports, and others, and she helped halt the construction of an industrial dairy operation in California. She was also the spark that got the founder of Whole Foods Market to become a vegan. In addition, lauren served as campaign director with the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition for six years.

- [foodispower.org](#)
- [veganmexicanfood.com](#)
- [veganfilipinofood.com](#)
- [@foodempowermentproject](#)
- [@foodempowermentproject](#)
- [@FoodIsPower](#)

Sarah Louise is a vegan entrepreneur and blogger, living in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

She is most happy when teaching others the magic of vegan cooking, spending time with her dogs, or watching some good 90s television (The X-Files and Buffy are top choices!)

If you'd like to see what she's up to, or recommend a spooky comic book or podcast, you can find her lurking about the internet here:

- [sarahlouiseAF.com](#)
- [@sarahlouiseAF](#)
- [@bluerosevegan](#)



Veganism and Marxism as Ecology-Minded Praxis

WORDS BY OSCAR CAMPBELL | ILLUSTRATION BY JULIA BEUTLING

I want to talk about a curiously under appreciated intersection between veganism and Marxism. If these are ever discussed together, it is typically adversarial—with Marxists construing veganism as a kind of petit-bourgeois individualism, and vegans construing Marxism as human-centric and uncaring about the environment and non-human animals. These are, to be sure, particular strains in each theoretical body that activists sometimes engage in that may fit these descriptions, but I want to

suggest that they need not be so polarizing in general.

Personally, I am committed to both veganism and Marxism because they can compliment one another, provided they are carefully articulated. As a political commitment, veganism is supported by Marxism with a richer understanding of the dynamics—a direct result of capitalism as an economic system—which help to constitute the ruthless exploitation of animals and the destruction of the environment, especially imperialism; Marxism, on the other hand, can absorb from veganism an active opposition to thought and action that regards humanity as the central concern. When taken together they can help us better understand how to tackle industrial animal agriculture. Since it is only through the

recognition that capitalism creates and sustains the conditions of massive, industrial agriculture that either can be overcome. When this is properly understood, we can more effectively engage in activism both as Marxists and as vegans.

It's likely that anyone reading this won't need to be persuaded about the benefits of veganism. I do think it is important, however, to articulate the predominant—but not the only—strategy involved in veganism as a political movement. Employed by mainstream vegan activism, the strategy is something like this: It would be enough to simply ensure that animal-exploiting corporations feel the impact of a reduced demand for animal products, and that they realize engaging in such practices is harmful towards animals, humans, and the environment. If corporations do take notice, the idea goes, they will follow the demand and make fewer animal products in favour of plant-based alternatives—meats, milks, cheeses, and so on. The problem with this, of course, is that it is individualistic. It makes the solution solely about consumer choice, based on the notion that (through the “power of the dollar”) you and I will get a corporation to stop producing cow's milk and instead switch to almond, soy, or some other alternative. This is unfortunately simplistic, but it's also where it seems to me that Marxism can be useful for vegans,

because it provides a powerful analysis of how capitalism operates—and why, importantly, the above tactic does not actually work on its own.

Marxism can offer a more holistic account of the processes which give rise to animal exploitation. The theoretical body of Marxist analysis provides a conception of nature that resists the inherent processes of alienation and commodification that are some of the most infamous aspects of the capitalist system. Marx was in fact keenly aware of the profound ecological destruction that is wrought by capitalist production, especially in the field of agriculture. As the Marxist sociologist John Bellamy Foster has argued in Marx's *Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, Marx's concept of metabolic rift is crucial to understand why this is so. Put simply, metabolic rift is the process by which the interpenetrative relation between humans and the natural world—which includes animals—are artificially, violently separated and all are transformed into commodities in the service of profit. In other words, it destroys the mutually beneficial relationship, or metabolism, that existed between humans and their environment, including with animals. Foster notes that Marx, in the unfinished manuscript *Grundrisse* (1857–58), was already aware of the globalizing effects of this process when he observed Britain's need to import seed,

guano (dung used as fertilizer), and other such things required for agricultural production. He realized agriculture was clearly no longer self-sufficient and had already been transformed into a commercial industry that essentially rendered agriculture unsustainable.¹ This separated domination is the hallmark of capitalist society, which transform the living—nature, humans, and animals—into mere objects. Marx, in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, argues the process of alienation consists of three characteristics of separation: from the natural world (including other humans as well as the environment and animals), from the labour process itself, and from the end-product of that process—all because humans do not produce to meet their needs, but create commodities, things, for profit that is taken for a minority of owners instead of commonly owned and used for the benefit of everyone.² This is an essential feature of capitalism and is part of what makes that system inherently unsustainable. Imperialism, then, is also extremely concerning for us as vegans precisely because, once the domestic market is dominated, it must necessarily reach

outwards for new opportunities of exploitation.

As Marx and Engels memorably put it in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.”³ As capitalist economies develop, they necessarily tend toward creating monopolies. This is because, for the capitalist, it becomes increasingly apparent that it is better for their profits if the full range of the process of producing goods and services is undertaken by one, or maybe a few, corporations in any given industry, rather than between many different ones. This results in the concentration of productive forces at such a high degree that free competition is suppressed, and industries are dominated by a minority of producers. In fact, once the monopolies have entrenched themselves, it is neither desirable nor possible to return to any so-called free competition: at this point, production has been irreversibly socialized, but the benefits from this socialization remain with those supposed captains of

1. Foster, John Bellamy. *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. London: Monthly Review Press: 200. P. 155–159.

2. Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

3. Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. *The Communist Manifesto*.

industry. Indeed, while it might be tempting to think that this concentration means there would be less crises, economic or otherwise, in reality it breeds them—as the relationship between agriculture and the associated industry later will illustrate—because it means corporations will be more likely to take risks which, betting on the future massive capital accumulation, it must take once internal markets are dominated. The result is nothing more than possible or actual immense profits for those corporations, and (regardless of the former obtaining or not) further misery is assured for workers, animals, and the environment.⁴

The dairy industry where I live is an apt example: Both Farmers Dairy and Scotsburn, the two largest suppliers of dairy milk in Nova Scotia, Canada, are owned by Quebec-based Agropur Cooperative. According to the cooperative's 2018 financial report, Agropur made almost \$7 billion in profits last financial year.⁵ (I was unable to find similar information for one of their plant-based competitors, Earth's Own—a brand that makes almond and oat milk—since, unlike Agropur, its financial information is not easily accessible.) I did,

however, find that the Earth's Own brand is owned by Agrifoods International Cooperative (a British Columbia-based cooperative), alongside the So Fresh brand of non-dairy milks, as well as numerous dairy companies. What would the motivation be for these international cooperatives to divest from dairy products, if they can continue to profit from them in addition to profiting from the non-dairy alternatives at the same time? This is no less the case for the conglomerate—Conagra Brands—that owns both Gardein and Earth Balance as well as Reddi-whip, Vlasic, Birds Eye, and numerous others that make non-vegan products.⁶ It is clear why the standard consumer-based tactic advocated by many mainstream vegan activists and organizations is ultimately unsuccessful in getting corporations to stop producing animal products, not merely to offer plant-based alternatives in addition to them. The animal agriculture industry, like capitalism, cannot be reformed into good behaviour when it is inherently driven to exploit and oppress humans, animals, and the natural environment by its profit motive. Economically, corporations (or

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4. Lenin, Vladimir Ilych. (1963). Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism. Selected Works, Vol. 1. Moscow: Progress Publishers..
5. Agropur Cooperative. Annual Report 2018. Retrieved 24 September 2019 from <https://www.agropur.com/en/our-cooperative/finances/annual-report-2018>
6. Conagra Brands. Our Brands. Retrieved 24 September 2019 from <https://www.conagrabrands.com/brands>



...as the demand for meat reaches a historic low, meat companies can rely on their 'alternative protein' products to make up for that lack of demand, without the need to cease production of the latter entirely.

cooperatives) can continue to do both and profit immensely and, since they are monopolies, they can afford to lose money in dairy or meat sales because they can just as easily rely on their plant-based options instead. An article in the Washington Post from June 13, 2019 by Laura Reiley observed: Tyson Foods sold its 6.25 percent share of Beyond Meat, since it intends to release its own line of 'alternative protein' products—which immediately made Beyond Meat's shares drop by four percent. Nestle, too, intends to release its own plant-based 'meat' products as well.⁷ In other words, as the demand for meat reaches a historic low, meat companies can rely on their 'alternative protein' products to make up for that lack of demand, without the need to cease production of the latter entirely.

The Distance Between Us

In terms of the overarching philosophies of the animal advocacy movement, there are essentially two approaches that are frequently in opposition: welfare and rights.

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7. Reiley, Laura. (2019, June 13). Who Are You Calling Chicken? Tyson Foods is Getting Into the Business of Plant-Based Meat. Retrieved 24 September 2019 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/06/13/who-are-you-calling-chicken-tyson-foods-is-getting-into-business-plant-based-meat/>

Welfare advocates suggest that it is a capacity for sentience—the ability to feel pain or pleasure, for instance—that should be the primary motivator for our opposition to animal exploitation, so we should reduce suffering and that this will eventually lead to the end of exploitation. Put another way, the more people recognize that animals are capable of sentience, the less likely they will be to exploit them as if they are merely machines. This is sometimes articulated by how close animals may come to human capabilities for certain forms of cognition. Rights advocates, on the other hand, typically take the property status of animals to be the main cause of their exploitation: A farmer may actually understand that his cow is perfectly capable of sentience, but as their property they should nevertheless be free to do with their animal as they wish—including transforming them into profitable objects. What is most curious, however, is that most proponents favouring each approach do not connect either the wholesale denial of sentience or the property status in particular to capitalism as an economic system with definite social relations—despite recognizing the brutal alienation that is necessarily involved in both processes.

As Marxist philosopher Ted Benton has observed in his article “Humanism = Speciesism: Marx on Humans and Animals” from the journal *Radical Philosophy*, our “treatment of animals as mere means to external purposes, and the dissolution of their social bonds with one another are . . . features of commercial agriculture which have become progressively intensified since Marx’s day with each technical reorganization of agricultural production.”⁸ Benton reminds us that “ethical critique of such practices should not be seen as an alternative to a Marxian critique of modern capitalist forms of labour-discipline, but, rather, an extension and deepening of it.” In fact, it is precisely this increasing distance between human and animal that capitalism is also at fault for—the rift between the two is due in no small part to our failure to recognize that the needs shared between humans and animals are not fundamentally different, even if they may be satisfied in dissimilar ways. Benton’s food example is helpful. He points out that both humans and birds, for instance, experience hunger and seek out food to satisfy that need. Furthermore, food can be obtained and consumed in a way that is immediate and meant only to sate desire; in other words, there is no real satisfaction to be had in the

8. Benton, Ted. (1988). Humanism = Speciesism: Marx on Humans and Animals. *Radical Philosophy* 50. P. 4-18.



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S.E. Owens & Company is a Compliance and Accounting firm specializing in helping people who are making the world a better place. This includes helping animal rights organizations, non-profits, and political campaigns. We make sure our clients’ finances are in order, and that they comply with all federal, state, and local filing obligations. This allows organizations we partner with to spend their time focusing on their important work.

We believe strongly in supporting our community, and as such, the other half of this ad features an organization you should know more about. The Raven Corps is a dedicated group of teenagers and young adults who are working from a vegan perspective to help other groups create positive social change. We support them, and we think it would be great for you to support them as well.


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whole process of nutrition, if it is done merely to subsist—which, again, can be the case for humans and birds alike. Where it becomes something more than that, however, is at the point where we begin to figure out “the species-specific way in which humans meet their needs they share with other species,” as Benton put it, since birds too have their own culture through which certain items are considered to be food, others not, and the ways in which they are consumed is conveyed. It may sound odd to some people to refer to these habits as bird culture, but I think that is merely a vestige of human-centric thought—the view of animals

Meet the new face of activism.

The Raven Corps is a rapidly growing group of young vegans who are combining new tools and youthful enthusiasm to protect the environment and stand up for social justice. To become a Raven or an ally, visit theravencorps.org



as being merely creatures of irrepressible habit or mechanical behaviour. Centring our view around humans is, after all, exactly what we vegans should seek to dismantle!

Marxism, then, can provide us with these incredibly useful analytical tools to understand the reciprocal relationship between agricultural production and our treatment of animals in society more generally. We see that the disastrous effects of capitalism serve to alienate us from nature, animals, and ourselves. Marxist thought offers not just a critique of one of the most popular tactics of vegan activism around consumption habits, but also

provides a rich understanding of how commodity production severely damages all life without regard for species in the rapacious search for profit. As the German Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation have argued in their “18 Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation” published last year, it similarly makes sense for Marxists to adopt a vegan orientation because it is clear just how destructive the specifically animal-based agriculture industry is today—and the

only way forward is one which overcomes the inherent contradictions of capitalist production, not the half-measures of softening their blow.⁹ Imperialism is the root cause of the ruthless expansion of capitalism today, and our consumption choices alone cannot move against the tide. We must take, by degrees, ownership of production and distribution so that the natural world can be enjoyed by all, human and non-human animals alike.

9. Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation. (2018, August 19). 18 Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation. Retrieved 24 September 2019 from <http://links.org.au/marxism-animal-liberation>.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE

1 If you are unfamiliar, learn about the processes of capitalism: There is no shortage of excellent material about Marxism to read, including from Marx himself, as well as those influenced by his writings such as V. I. Lenin. The Communist Manifesto is the obvious place to start as it provides a general overview of communism as a political philosophy and situates it, both historically and theoretically, in a broader socialist context. Educating yourself is the first step; you must understand what you are fighting against first in order to do so effectively!

2 Make anti-capitalism a central organizing principle of your activism: If there are no groups around you doing this already, you can start one yourself. There may be groups that do good work that stop short of this kind of fundamental change, and you can try to encourage them to adopt anti-capitalism as well! (This goes the other direction also: If you’re already a member of an anti-capitalist organization, encourage them to think about principled animal advocacy too).

3 Make an effort to connect with Indigenous peoples around you and understand the specific ecological and agricultural practices they use. If capitalism is the root cause of environmental destruction, with animal agriculture being a considerable factor involved, then settlers should have this common goal alongside Indigenous peoples of seeking its destruction. Of course, vegans should not engage with Indigenous people in a colonial way—like when some suggest Inuit who engage in sustainable, subsistence seal-hunting are the same as corporations that hunt seals for profit—nor should any knowledge shared be appropriated.

ABOUT

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Big Ideas, Mini Mall

AN INTERVIEW WITH HERBIVORE CLOTHING,
FOOD FIGHT!, AND SCAPEGOAT TATTOO

QUESTIONS AND PHOTOS BY CHELSEA LINCOLN

I remember Food Fight's one year anniversary party. I showed up with a container of vegan cookies, barely out of the oven in time to make the event. Dennis Kuninich, then a presidential hopeful, was set to judge a chocolate chip cookie contest, and I was excited to participate. The space was not large, but a good size crowd showed up to celebrate all things vegan. I was so nervous, since I prided myself on my baking abilities, and would have been crushed if I did not win. Luckily, Dennis held up my cookie as the winner, and I couldn't have been happier!

In the early years, Food Fight!, Herbivore Clothing, and Scapegoat Tattoo were all next to each other in small spaces that they made work. Back then you could walk into Scapegoat and potentially get a tattoo right then and there, as me and a friend did one day. When they moved into a new space, eventually dubbed "the vegan mini mall", vegans in town celebrated more space, more products, and the addition of a vegan bakery next door.

As some of you may know, being able to go into an establishment where everything inside is vegan really does make a difference. You don't have to meticulously look at every label, or try and find a tag to see what material something is made of, or ask a million questions to make sure no animals were harmed in whatever it is you're interested in.

Of course, that one year anniversary party was a long time ago, and since then veganism has changed a lot. As a long-time vegan, I have seen products come and go, and a few come back. Although there is lots more selection for vegan food today, there are some products that I truly miss that I sometimes wonder what happened to them. Along with the increase in choices, social media has also played a large role in how activism and veganism is discussed and done. Sadly, it often feels like most vegans prefer to talk about yummy food, rather than calls to action.

With all this in mind, I set out to talk with the people behind the vegan mini mall to get their points of view on veganism, capitalism, and more. Thankfully, three of the four were interested in talking with me. And so, here is my interview with Emiko and Chad of Food Fight!, Michelle and Josh from Herbivore Clothing, and Brian from Scapegoat Tattoo.

Tell us your story! How, when, and why did you get started?

Herbivore: We started in 2002 with one shirt design paid for on a credit card. Josh is a graphic designer, and we wanted to do something positive for animals. We talked about where we could volunteer or maybe find jobs (Josh applied at PETA, got rejected) that would help the cause, but nothing seemed right until we thought about really direct ways to spread a message, via t-shirts. We were so passionate about veganism, and wanted everyone to “wake up” to the reality we’d learned! Josh came from a punk rock background, Michelle had the credit cards and sales experience, so it made sense to do it ourselves. We figured out how to print shirts, build a website, set up Paypal, etc. There was a big learning curve, but since we didn’t have any money, we had lots of time to figure things out as we couldn’t grow very quickly. Thankfully, we have, and have had, some really amazing employees over the years who are a tremendous help. Basically, nothing has changed: If something needs to happen, you go learn how to do it, and you make it happen.

Scapegoat: Totally by accident, followed by some intention. I was working at a tattoo shop out in Milwaukee, and I got a loan from my buddy Jazz to open my own shop. I loved veganism, and had been vegan for about a

decade at that point, but I loved tattooing too. I knew that there were conflicts with tattoo supplies containing animal products, and it was tough to navigate my ethics in other shops, so it was time to move on and explore my own business. Food Fight! had their shop up on Division St., and the spot next door was available as well.

Food Fight! (Emiko): We opened in September 2003. From the idea to opening day, it only took us about three months because we had no idea whatsoever what we were doing. We were in our 20s with nothing to lose. We started because we were personally tired of shopping at three different stores to get everything we wanted, so we thought it would be a good idea to make a store that we’d wanna shop at. One where you didn’t have to weave through meat and dairy aisles to find vegan food.

I remember the first anniversary of Food Fight! at the old location, and the beginnings of Herbivore and Scapegoat at the same location. It was such a big deal for the community when the vegan mini mall opened up. How did the concept of the vegan mini-mall happen?

Herbivore: We opened that first office in 2005, shortly after our daughter Ruby was born. It was in Food Fight’s storeroom under the stairs. It felt magical in a lot of ways.



We were in our 20s with nothing to lose. We started because we were personally tired of shopping at three different stores to get everything we wanted, so we thought it would be a good idea to make a store that we’d wanna shop at. - Food Fight!



Speaking for ourselves, we had absolutely no idea what we were doing or getting into, but being with our friends who were all doing the same thing was a big inspiration to keep going. - Herbivore Clothing

Like-minded people having a physical space to meet and talk was a huge deal, and Food Fight! made that happen. Everybody grew and got better at what they were doing there, and in 2007, Lisa Higgins, who owned Sweetpea Baking, but was only doing wholesale orders, said she wanted to open a brick and mortar bakery and we should all

team up and be in the same building. She found the location at 1211 SE Stark Street, and we all signed leases, built out spaces, and moved in. Speaking for ourselves, we had absolutely no idea what we were doing or getting into, but being with our friends who were all doing the same thing was a big inspiration to keep going. It was daunting

looking into the empty shell of the building thinking we had to have walls built, electrical wiring run, bathrooms built, signage made, permits pulled, on and on. But it all got done, we opened the doors, and the community that had been building showed up and supported us all. Things have changed so much since then, but for us,

seeing that community grow and new people coming, and people from all over the world stopping by is an amazing feeling.

Food Fight! (Emiko): It was all just the right timing. We needed to expand, and so did everyone else. At the time, Sweetpea Baking Co was owned by Lisa Higgins, and she was

just doing wholesale, so she was ready to open a brick and mortar. Honestly, the biggest challenge we met was something a lot of people still don't know, but at the same time we opened, I had sudden kidney failure and had to start dialysis. Opening the store was easy compared to dealing with that, and the aftermath of juggling a new store with a major illness meant a complete life change.

Scapegoat: Yep, just the right timing. Michelle and Emiko explained that exactly.

Being vegan for over 20 years, there has been a lot of changes! Some of my favourite products are no longer being made, but many other options are now available. The activism in vegan circles is also dramatically different. What changes in veganism have you noticed since first opening your doors?

Herbivore: When we opened the store, the group of people interested in animal rights, or environmentalism seemed so small. It was fun knowing everybody and it was easy to spread the word about various fundraisers or protests or whatever was going on. But at the same time, it was really depressing that you COULD know everybody. Any kind of real progress outside of our small community felt impossible or a million years away. It felt very fringe or alternative. Lots of great work was happening, but we needed more people. We have always tried to find a way to get people

to care about and get active about issues that are a real bummer. Attracting new people to something that will bum them out is really hard! Who wants to be bummed out? So trying to grow the community was a big challenge, and there were lots of times we'd stare at each other and ask "why don't people give a shit?" We still feel this way about lots of issues. People drop out when they don't see the changes they want in a short amount of time. We realized that demanding to see results was really just centering our own wants, and not helping the causes we care about. And that doing the work for the rest of our lives is better than burning brightly for a couple years then quitting. We see ourselves as a small part of a huge movement now and the positive results we want may not happen as fast as we want, but that is ego getting in the way. Veganism has gone in a million directions since we started, some we love, some we don't love as much, but we don't have a crystal ball and we don't know what will change the most hearts so we do what we do, support what we support, and hope everybody else does the same.

Scapegoat: Products come and go. I try not to mourn them. As for activism, it feels like it's a little on the back burner, or maybe I'm just not as connected as I once was. What I do find encouraging is that the community seems to be expanding both in size, but also

in its interests. Animal rights is now starting to finally be seen as part of a larger set of issues, such as social and environmental issues.

Food Fight! (Emiko): Veganism has gone from being an alternative to mainstream. For better or worse, it's up for debate. There are goods and bads to it. Some folks think the mainstreaming of veganism is completely positive, and some think otherwise. Some folks think it gives more people access to vegan food and creating more vegans, and some think it's just adding to the destructive capitalist system and making billionaires richer by their appropriation of veganism. It goes on and on.

Have you had to change the way you operate over time due to changes in customers and the vegan community?

Herbivore: The mission for Herbivore has never changed. From day one, the goal was to show people that being vegan is a reasonable and attainable life that can positively affect, in some way, almost every issue you may care about, be it animals, environment, your health, sexism, racism, worker's rights, etc. We've changed in that we sell way more types of products than we used to, and that we've found different ways to try and spread the message. We've also embraced anybody who walks in the door and is even a little bit interested in eating

less animals and animal products. At first, it felt like we were only talking to other vegans. With all the mainstreaming that has happened, we now get to talk to all kinds of people who are open to these messages for the first time. For example, a while back this older couple came in looking kind of bewildered and scared. Michelle talked to them. They had literally just left the doctor. The husband was told he had to change his lifestyle or he would die of heart disease. The doctor told him animal products were killing him. They didn't know what to do, but they were scared and they went straight to the vegan mini-mall. Michelle talked cookbooks with them, showed them specific recipes that would be way healthier, but still satisfy their personal tastes. Then she walked them over to Food Fight! and helped them get the ingredients to go make the food. They came back a few months later and were feeling great, much healthier, and had read up on the different aspects of veganism (not just health) and were fully on board with the animal rights message. I say that to say when we started, our only real way to discuss veganism was from an animal rights perspective. Over the years, as more people have become interested in veganism, for whatever reason, we've learned to meet them where they are and talk about what their interest is, while also linking it to animal rights and the other movements we care about. We've all got so much to learn

and understand about each other so staying open minded and positive, we've found, is the only way to get to those conversations where change might happen.

Scapegoat: Tattooing has gone through a pretty major vegan transformation. When I opened, I had to call every company and hope they'd be honest with me. Now, pretty much everything is labelled and certified. So that's great. It gives us the ability to focus on other things and the other communities that are under attack. I was seeing deficits in mindfulness when it comes to tattooing and the art communities in general, which reflected larger deficits in representation in anyone who wasn't a white-male Tattooer. I was aiming to create a space where other creative people could come and feel comfortable, safe, and respected. Scapegoat has definitely grown out of being seen as just "the vegan tattoo shop", which is what I've always wanted. We're respected by our peers in the tattooing world, as well as within the vegan community, thanks to trying our best not to compromise our morals while expanding our focus.

Food Fight! (Emiko): We went from being primarily focused on animal rights to sharing that focus a lot more with human liberation and its connection to animal liberation. What we choose to primarily focus on promoting now is not just a single-issue AR cause. Just focusing on animal



I think at best, vegan consumerism gives people a foot in the door. Aside from that it becomes a distraction. And I won't lie, I'm distracted by the shiny new vegan thing all of the time. - Scapegoat Tattoo

rights issues is an old way of being vegan now. We all know we can't make more vegans until we start working to liberate the humans being oppressed by the same systems as animals, so it makes sense to care about human causes. We do a monthly fundraising program by donating all gratuity and cash from our donation buckets to a different organization every month. More than half are orgs that have nothing to do with veganism or animal rights. You'd be surprised by how many vegans make crappy comments and protest about us fundraising for non-AR groups, and how many people tell us we're racist for supporting Black Lives Matter. Of course, when we do promote vegan groups or businesses, we love to focus on those run by Black people of colour (POC) vegans. There's so many Black, POC, and queer vegans doing so much cool shit in this town and elsewhere, and they're changing the vegan norm that's been in place for decades. We need this change. And through history we know Black and POC folks are the ones who start revolutions.

When I first went vegan, I didn't even think about the fact that not all vegan products are truly cruelty-free, but now we have wonderful vegan organizations like Food Empowerment Project that campaign against slavery-sourced chocolate, farm workers' rights, and other things. As a

company, how do you decide which products to sell/use? Do you have any specific guidelines you follow? Do you have any guidelines to protect human labourers as well?

Herbivore: Our guidelines are that everything we sell is vegan and not made with sweatshop labor. If those standards are met, we then think about whether the product fits with various other criteria, such as not using racist, sexist, homophobic, or other offensive language. Then we look at things like sustainable packaging, the type of company we'd be working with, and so forth. We prefer to work with smaller companies who we can develop relationships with. As a small company, supporting others is important to us. We then also have to decide if we think the product is actually a good match for our store and our customers. It's always really fun when we pick something new up for the store that hits all those marks. Also, because this is the reality - we have to choose things that will sell. That may sound obvious, but things like style, price, availability, etc. all matter too. The greatest message could be printed on a color that nobody wants to wear, for example. So even though we have different or more focused ideas about what to have at Herbivore, in the end it's gotta bring in sales!

Food Fight!: We used to be able to be really picky with which brands we carry. But now with the mainstreaming of veganism, many terrible billion-dollar corporations have bought and sold and bought vegan brands, so nearly all of the popular brands of vegan food customers want are owned by pharmaceutical companies, slaughterhouses, dairy companies, etc. It feels like a lost cause sometimes, but we try our best.

Scapegoat, in an issue of Driftwood Magazine, you discussed the difficulties of finding vegan tattoo products and working with a company to develop new ones. Could you tell us more about this? Herbivore and/or Food Fight!, have you also worked with companies to create vegan options that you knew there was a demand for? Or perhaps consulted with companies who were looking to start making products?

Scapegoat: What happened was that we found out that our stencil paper was not vegan. I had called and emailed when I opened Scapegoat and was told that they used no animal products. Well, turns out, that wasn't entirely true. The stencil paper contained beeswax and lanolin. So, I contacted the company and asked if there was any way they could make a vegan stencil paper. I had done some research on alternatives to the ingredients they used, told them I'd buy whatever it took to make

it...silence. Then, about a year later, they came out with a certified vegan stencil paper. I guess the son of the company's owner was vegan at one point and convinced his dad that it was important to people and they listened to him.

Herbivore: Hmmm....the second question, we've talked to lots of people over the years about how to get going. Usually it's business advice that we've picked up by doing something totally wrong and learning a tough lesson (ha!). We're always excited when someone tells us about their big idea and love to help if we can. I can't remember any specific times we were helpful in developing a product with others, but we've shared lots of information with people looking to move their project forward: anything from helping someone understand accounting software, to how a book deal works, to how to start their own t-shirt company.

Food Fight! (Chad): We haven't really worked with anybody big, but have made some suggestions to smaller companies over the years that have worked out to allow their product to get our vegan-thumbs-up.

As a fat vegan, I know the importance of inclusivity when it comes to things like local restaurants not having accommodating seating. Are there ways you make your business more inclusive? More accessible?



We pay taxes that get spent in a million ways I don't agree with and that are directly opposed to my ethics. I don't know how to get out from under that system. But since that system doesn't reflect our values, we use our company to support those values.

- Herbivore Clothing



Herbivore: We are always trying to get better at this and are always learning from customers how. As for different body types, we try and feature different size models in our photos (our models are usually our co-workers and the process is usually "hey, the new shirt got delivered, throw this on so I can take your picture and get it on the website right now!") Being a tiny company, that ends up with our site only showing the same (lovely!) people over and over. We've learned that we have to slow down and plan photos better and make plans with people to model so we can represent and include a wider range of people. We also try and offer sizing and styles that can work for the widest range of bodies. This is not always easy, as sometimes certain styles don't work with certain bodies and sometimes the smallest or largest sizes aren't consistently available. We try and counter that by doing special orders for folks when they don't see something that will work for them. We always want to help our customers get what they want and we are always trying to represent folks more widely.

Scapegoat: We've already tried our best to make our accommodations accessible for everyone. The cool thing is that tattoos are for anyone who wants them.

Food Fight! (Emiko): Being a Chicana/Japanese vegan woman in a very white-dominated vegan world, I try to be an

example of a veganism that isn't viewed by the general public as the norm. In interviews, I always try to mention the inherent racism within veganism, among other issues. We use the store's social media as a platform to spread a vegan message of anti-colonialism and anti-white supremacy, and every month we fundraise for a lot of local, non-vegan organizations. One of the funnest ways we try to be more accessible is by giving space to local, vegan BIPOC and Queer businesses to have pop-ups and build community with the folks we've been able to reach over the years.

Vegan consumerism is the thought that you can create change through the purchasing of vegan products. How far do you think vegan consumerism will get the vegan movement? What do you believe are its limitations?

Herbivore: I have no idea. I'm not being cheeky, I really don't know. I don't think it's as simple as labelling the buying of anything as consumerism and thinking of that process as all the same no matter if you're buying socks or a Fugazi record. I've bought a lot of socks in my life and none of them changed my life. I've bought every Fugazi record and they all changed my life. Somebody wrote us the other day and said they were shy and avoided tough conversations, but saw a design we did (Veganism is Feminism is Veganism) and said they were going to buy it and wear it with pride and not avoid those

conversations any more. It's consumerism, but is that the same as if they had bought socks? Or what if someone who says they could never give up cow cheese goes into Food Fight! and buys some Miyoko's vegan cheese and realizes they can quit cow cheese, so they do? That is a consumer interaction, but with a huge impact. I know it's far more punk to think of consumerism as all the same and all shallow, but I think that's too simple. If a product is a vehicle for an idea that can positively impact a person, or cause, or a community, than it means more than just a pair of socks. (I'm sorry I keep bagging on socks, they are wonderful too.) So I don't know how to answer this question.

Scapegoat: I think at best, vegan consumerism gives people a foot in the door. Aside from that it becomes a distraction. And I won't lie, I'm distracted by the shiny new vegan thing all of the time.

Food Fight!: Speaking as someone who benefits from capitalism, capitalism is never going to be a positive on any movement. Capitalism is its own limitation, forever and ever. We already have seen and are seeing huge animal killing businesses investing and buying up vegan brands. It gets to the point where we ask ourselves—how is buying vegan food products saving animals when the people killing the most animals on a global scale are benefitting

from it and are still killing thousands of animals a day? That seems like the biggest limitation within vegan consumerism. There's no data, yet, saying less animals are getting killed because people are buying more vegan products. —Emiko

Just living life and trying to do the least harm can be difficult. Oftentimes, you have to make decisions between convenience and other ethical factors. How do you balance your ethics with making a profit to keep your doors open? Are there any compromises you recognize you need to make?

Herbivore: Well, doing anything in a capitalist system is problematic. We pay taxes that get spent in a million ways I don't agree with and that are directly opposed to my ethics. I don't know how to get out from under that system. But since that system doesn't reflect our values, we use our company to support those values. We donate as much money, product, and pro-bono design work as we can. We volunteer with various organizations. We take care of our employees in a city that keeps getting more expensive. This is how we've run Herbivore from the beginning and how we always will. My vision of a perfect world doesn't involve business at all, nor does it include the need to try and convince people to care about animal and human suffering, or the environment. But here we are. Admitting mistakes and accepting compromise are



Support what you want to see more of in the world. But don't believe that just because a business is animal-free that they get a pass on other important issues and deserve your support.

- Food Fight!

great learning tools. Being successful, whether in business or promoting animal rights, isn't about winning or being right all the time. It's naive to think that way and it prevents us from reaching more people and communicating.

Scapegoat: I'm constantly weighing my options. I have so many struggles with how polluting and wasteful the tattoo industry is. Luckily, that's also being addressed right now. We've always been aware of this and always have and will continue to try to do our best.

Food Fight!: We balance our ethics and making a profit by being stressed and feeling like shit a lot. -Chad

I feel better by being able to have this established business to promote great things vegans of colour are doing, and by trying to use our business as a platform to educate other vegans to maybe think of what's happening outside of the white, vegan-norm box and realize oppressions are connected. I like living by example, so maybe other folks can see vegans of colour exist, bi-racial vegans exist, and we can have positions of power in veganism to take back what white people want to continue to get credit for creating. Hopefully, it might inspire others who look like me or come from similar backgrounds as me to go vegan, too. -Emiko

How do you feel about large corporations buying out smaller vegan companies or starting to offer vegan options of their own? Do you try and compete with these corporations?

Herbivore: As for competing, I don't think that's applicable to us. Although if Urban Outfitters started selling vegan message shirts I guess I'd have to think about it. As for large corporations, we will always be on the side of the smaller, independent companies. That's our personal interest and the kind of company we prefer to see in the world. I'm a big fan of folks who choose not to sell and keep total control of their vision. I'd love to see those companies get all the funding and support they need to compete with non-vegan alternatives, but not have to be bought by major corporations to do so.

Food Fight! (Chad): Capitalism is an asshole.

Obviously running a small business is all-consuming, but do you participate in other forms of activism? Do you have any practices of self-care that allows you to run your business and participate in activism?

Herbivore: The ways we've chosen to contribute and that we feel are most effective are helping groups fundraise by donating products, doing pro-bono design work, and creating a vegan identity that is positive, educational, and normalizing of

veganism. We also speak at events, and do cooking demos here and there. We volunteer our time. We work with lots of groups, but our favorites tend to be sanctuaries. As for self-care, we spend time with friends, travel when we can, and hang out with our rescues. I feel like the most important thing I've learned in terms of activism is no matter what, do not let yourself burnout. As I said earlier, giving everything for a couple of years, then dropping out is far less effective than doing the work for your whole life. We've seen so many people burn out and become negative and cynical. Negative, cynical people have never inspired anyone, and have never helped any movement.

Scapegoat: I suck. I feel like I'm constantly working.

Food Fight! (Emiko): At this moment, I love working with immigrant youth with Pass the Mic music camp (for immigrant and refugee youth). I love teaching drumming and music, and being able to give these kids a moment of fun to be themselves in a country that doesn't want them here. It is an extreme privilege for me to be able to do this. I self-care in the same way.

What is the importance in supporting vegan businesses? Besides supporting your companies, how else can people support vegan businesses, both locally and globally?

Herbivore: Vegan businesses can provide access to far more than just vegan products. They can be meeting places, event spaces, fundraisers, communities, and more. Going back to the second question above, you said "It was such a big deal for the community when the vegan mini mall opened up." It was a big deal for us too, and, without all the community support over the years, we would have never made it! We feel a huge responsibility to and have a massive appreciation for our customers. It's important to support vegan businesses if you want them to exist. Amazon is breathing down all of our necks!

Food Fight!: Support what you want to see more of in the world. But don't believe that just because a business is animal-free that they get a pass on other important issues and deserve your support. -Chad

I think we need to prioritize supporting vegan businesses run by Black vegans and other vegans of colour. -Emiko

Scapegoat: Yep, I can't really add anymore to what Herbivore and Food Fight! said. They've nailed it.

Anything else you would like to add?

Herbivore: Stay positive, never quit. Don't centre yourself in discussions, this is not about you. It's about animals! Actively work on how you discuss issues so you can

communicate effectively on behalf of the animals, humans, and the earth. You weren't born as aware as you are now. Accept that everybody has more to learn and you should help them, not turn them off to the whole discussion.

Scapegoat: Speaking specifically about tattooing, seek out an artist based on the art they make, don't just seek out a "vegan" tattooer. While we might share your passion for veganism, we all have our artistic passions we're pursuing and aren't just vegan copy machines.

It is great to hear the different perspectives of veganism, including the changes we are seeing and what may be in our future. Thank you so much Emiko, Chad, Brian, Michelle, and Josh for taking the time to share your stories, perspectives, and voices! In closing, please support your local small businesses, especially those run by vegans and vegans with marginalized identities.

Food Fight!: Pick your battles. -Chad
Listen more. Learn more. Get out of the vegan community sometimes and see what's happening in other ones. The vegan lifestyle world tends to see the world through rose-colored glasses. See how you could build bridges with other communities. It's not just about food and animals. -Emiko

ABOUT

Herbivore Clothing was founded in 2002 by Josh and Michelle. They still have more to learn and more to say! #cantstopwontstop talking about veganism because animals are still on plates.

herbivoreclothing.com
[@herbivoreclothingcompany](#)
[@herbivoreclothing](#)

Scapegoat is (apparently) the world's first vegan tattoo shop, which opened in 2005 by Brian Wilson.

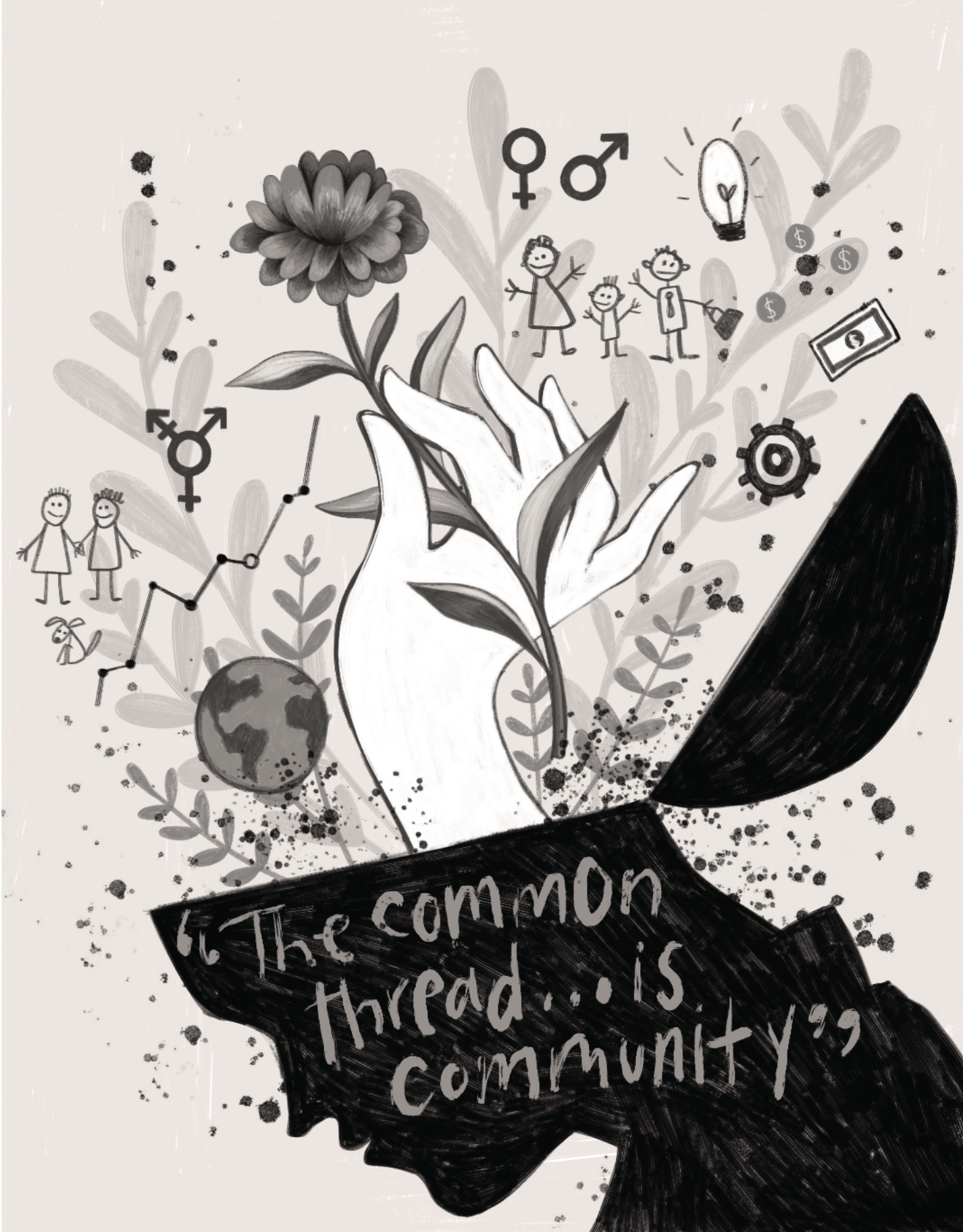
scapegoattattoo.com
[@scapegoat-tattoo](#)
[@scapegoat_tattoo](#)

Food Fight! is a small, independent vegan grocery store with two locations in the Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. metro area. They try their best... mostly.

foodfightgrocery.com
[@foodfightgrocery](#)
[@ffgrocery](#)

Chelsea Lincoln has been doing social justice work around veganism and fat acceptance for over 20 years. She runs the Fat Vegan Voice blog and facebook page that creates inclusion in the vegan community by honoring body diversity and supporting fellow fat vegans. She spends her free time going on nature adventures, photographing wildlife, and playing with her companion animals- cats, rats, and guinea pigs.

fatveganvoice.com
[@fatveganvoice](#)



It's In Our Heads, Too

(ON MENTALLY DIVESTING FROM CAPITALISM)

WORDS BY LILIA TRENKOVA | ILLUSTRATION BY MENEKA REPKA

Fact: today capitalism exists to make rich people richer at the expense of sending more people into poverty...or at the very least in perpetual debt.

There's a lot that people around the world have been doing and are still doing in order to divest from capitalism when it comes to money, food, and objects: from freecycling community groups,¹ to credit unions,² to worker cooperatives,³ to gift economies.⁴ The common thread among these various alternatives is community. While capitalism is based on growing profit and concentrating wealth, ways to go against involve growing community and distributing the wealth so that everyone's needs are met instead, and

whatever surplus there is gets put back into the community.

But capitalism's grip goes deeper than how it controls our material quality of life. It also affects our relationships with one another, our relationships with land and the nonhuman world, and our relationships with ourselves and how we grow.

About two years ago, I pulled away from publicly organizing in activist communities, partly because of burnout, and partly because I needed to centre myself in order to take charge of certain pressing physical and mental health issues. Ironically, I was able to do this because around that same time I also began working full time with that luxurious item called health insurance. So there I was--using a benefit I received because of capitalism (health insurance

through employment in a corporate business), in order to heal from pains coming from anti-capitalist work and people. How absurd!

In healing, I had to unpack this too. Why did I feel guilt for taking care of myself, and could I have done this without leaving my activist work? How could I balance this zooming in on my needs with the zooming out that allows me to learn and grow and contribute to my communities? And also, why is it that we so often get hurt in relationships with our families (biological or chosen) and within our communities?

The following will be a combination of thoughts, observations, experiences, and visions about this more internal grip that capitalism has on us and how we relate to one another. My perspective is that of someone who grew up in Eastern Europe through the transition from a state dictatorship into yet another building block of capitalism; of a white able-bodied immigrant to a colonized land; and of a queer, non-binary person who came out later in life.

I was born in Bulgaria in the early 80s, at the tail end of 40+ years of oppressive government, a regime that is referred to in history books as “communist”, but which in practice was a dictatorship. Typically,

dictatorships are led by a single person, but in the case of Bulgaria and the rest of the Eastern Bloc, it was the state. The early 20th century organizing and revolts that took place in Eastern Europe (starting with Russia in the 1920s) looked to decentralize power: meaning, to remove the ruling monarchs and upper class, and to make the people hold that power collectively instead. What happened, however, was the forming of a large state militaristic apparatus that laid down the rules and punishments for breaking those that protested. In terms of economy, the goal was to not allow wealth hoarding (as in capitalism) and to level out rich and poor...except what happened was that the state appropriated everything: land, housing, businesses...anything that could be considered “wealth”. And this class issue that had been central to the original Marxist thought and organizing? That simply transformed without doing away with class at all: the new people in power and their allies became the rich, and the working class remained working class. The way to move up the class structure was to join the Communist Party and accept its order without question. The way down, on the other hand, was much easier, and any form of dissent would do, even the telling of a political joke.

Sure, wealth hoarding was less visible than in “the West” (what we called Western

Europe and North America) because our “leaders” had to at least pretend it wasn’t happening, and there were some social safety nets in terms of access to housing and food. However, they were unavailable for people who did not want to join the Party or who were not able to be “productive” in the ways they were expected to (such as disabled people), or who were already marginalized (such as ethnic minorities, queer people, sex workers, and many artists). Along with this, people had no autonomy over where and how to live...and how to think. Community wasn’t always something people grew up into as part of their identity or something they chose as a means of belonging; often community was something they were either forced into (such as mandatory military service) or pushed into by necessity (such as bartering for goods during food shortages).

I grew up in the capital city of Sofia in a two-bedroom apartment with my parents, grandmother, my brother (born six years after me), and, for a few years, with my aunt and cousin as well. In that same apartment, my grandmother had previously raised her four kids, first with my grandfather, and then by herself once he passed away prematurely. My grandmother then also helped raise me, my brother, and all my cousins. While most people I knew had more personal living space, it was quite common



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to have households with three generations of family and an extended family that's...well...not so extended, but rather all up in your face. Family was central to community.

There were often power outages, which we would spend playing music or cards under candlelight. There were only three TV channels (one being in Russian), so we weren't missing out much anyway. There were also water outages, but those were scheduled by neighbourhood. So, when we were out of water, we would go shower at my cousins' place across town, and vice versa. Going to the neighbours to borrow a cup of flour was as normal as the sun rising every morning.

But so was fear, especially for my parents' generation. No one in my family was a member of the Communist Party (the only ruling power), and we didn't have "connections" there either. My father would regularly get harassed by the cops for having a beard, but he knew it wasn't just because of that. One of the neighbours in our building was an informant for the state security agency, planted there because of my grandfather, who had studied international relations and law in "the West". Less so in the 80s when I was growing up, but in the decades prior, everyone knew someone whose parents were abducted by state security in the middle of the night and

never seen again; my grandmother lived with the fear that this could be her husband any day, and her children were born into that fear.

My parents raised me with love and with what I believe were the best of intentions, but I still inherited that fear and internalized it deeper: the fear of being oneself (and, to this day, I struggle with this). I knew I inherited it when I realized I had no language for my gender and sexuality. I literally had no language. I never knew any queer people in Bulgaria, and the only words we had for "gay" were slurs. The only times you heard about queer or gender non-conforming people were when they were beaten up (or worse) by skinheads in a park late at night. Bulgarian language is so gendered that even in saying something as basic as, "I would like a coffee", I have to gender myself in the verb conjugation. So I hid my crushes, became ever more confused about gender, and learned to dissociate. It wasn't until I moved to the U.S.A. at the age of 18 for college that I began to explore and own my queerness. In doing so, I first found queer culture (in part through the many more than three TV channels) and then queer community, namely the power of what people call "chosen family". Queer people speak of "chosen family" because very few are fully accepted by their biological families. For queer people, chosen family



means an inner circle of community with unconditional support: something a lot of us lose access to once we "come out". Chosen family is where the fear of being oneself should melt away. Despite this, it's taken me until now, in my late 30s, in also coming out as a gender non-binary person, to finally begin to strip that fear and to be at peace with who I am as a whole person.

I never had a queer chosen family back in Bulgaria, and I'm not sure I would have been able to have one had I stayed there. Here in the U.S.A., my chosen family consists of (mostly) queer anticapitalists and social justice activists. It has morphed over the years as people came and went; with some, we outgrew one another, with others we grew away from one another, and yet with others we continue to grow together as new ones have joined us.

Yet even within the most justice-centred activist communities and the most fierce-loving queer groups I've been a part of, I've seen collective pains and conflict that go deeper than organizing styles, skills, or personalities. Having watched from the sidelines the past two years, I now believe that we internalize some of the very same capitalist patterns and behaviours as the ones we speak out against. The following are the top three that I've observed.

1. VALUE

Our relationships all have different purposes based on our connections and what we share. Yet we also ascribe value to them and how we view their longevity, even with our closest people. But purpose and value are not the same thing, as much as capitalism wants them to be.

Capitalism tells us that we have a huge amount of choices (um, how many brands of potato chips are there?) - but then it also tells us that some of these choices have a higher value. It's why people line up overnight when the new iPhone comes out, but not when a new laundry machine comes out: an iPhone is as much a tool as it is a social symbol, whereas a laundry machine...well that's just a laundry machine, whose only purpose is to wash clothes. (Capitalism had this power even in the time and place I grew up in: the grass was surely much greener in the mythical "West")

Could it be that this affects how we treat each other too?

"I'm going to date this person until someone else (the next, better model) comes around."

"One of my children is good because X, so I'll support them more, but the other one is bad because Y, so I'll support them less."

"If I help you today, you need to be available to help me tomorrow."

And could it be that we in turn internalize this in how we speak of ourselves?

"My partner is only with me until they meet someone else who's better than me."

"Because of Y, I don't deserve to be loved and feel good about myself."

"I feel guilty asking for help today if I haven't helped you previously or if I can't return the favour tomorrow."

In capitalism, anything and anyone can be-- and is--assigned value and profited from, including our feelings and relationships as individuals and in community. We rank potential matches like we do restaurants on Yelp as we swipe through Tinder for our next partner. We collect people like items on a shopping list or video game prizes. We block, cancel, and replace them when they don't fit right away like we do with shoes. We even use the actual word "invest" to quantify the energy we put into our relationships and compare our "investments" as if they're bank portfolios (which one gives us more "profit"?) We bemoan the "price we pay" to fit into social expectations, yes, but also to be with one another. We blame our bodies for not fitting into clothes when it's the clothes that are designed to not fit our bodies. We don't feel good enough, or lovable enough,



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or [fill-in-the-blank] enough...and in a weird way we like feeling this way too because it's easier. It's easier to exist within a framework than not, and capitalism is the type of framework that is easy to fall back on or plug back into...because we know it's there and it will welcome us...because as long as we have a purpose within it, we will also have value.

My personal struggle in this regard has been the finding of purpose without qualifiers. What am I actually good at? Can I list the things I'm good at without comparing myself to others? What happens if I take a profound lesson from the disability movement and tell myself that my value is inherent and not pending on how "purposeful" or--worse--on how "productive" I am at a given moment? Why is it so much easier to see that inherent value in others than in myself? And yet what's up with this urge to rant, to pass judgement, to complain and focus more on the bad than the good...how do I not just unlearn but also un-feel it? I have yet to answer any of these questions.

2. DEFAULTS

The second pattern I've noticed we do is falling back on default ways of thinking and being in areas where we haven't yet unpacked.

In a supermarket, there's regular coffee, and then there are flavoured coffees. There's plain marinara sauce, and then there are the other marinaras with more added ingredients. In clothing, we call such defaults basics: solid neutral colours that can go with anything. When it comes to products, these defaults help us navigate through the many choices in front of us, and provide us with a baseline we can come back to if none of the other options work. And this too is a framework that we apply to our relationships, and specifically family structures, or how we live with each other. What has become the default such structure when it comes to family? The so-called "nuclear family": a household consisting of two parents who can (typically) reproduce together, and their children.

The nuclear family has become the default in capitalist society because it's the most productive family unit: more taxes, more spending, more dependency on the current economy. It also fits the ideals of whitewashed Christian values. The oldest instances of this type of family are from pre-colonizer England. It started showing up elsewhere when the English began colonizing the world, and most significantly with the start of industrialization through the 1950s in the U.S.A.⁵ Small family units mean that people can relocate more easily but that also they can--and have to!--



dedicate more of their lives to their jobs rather than non-monetary labour like community organizing and care. Add patriarchy, and this is how domestic labor and childcare has fallen onto people assigned as women. Sadly, this issue existed within the supposedly communist country I was from as well. People assigned as women were encouraged to join “the workforce”, but people assigned as men were not encouraged to do child care or domestic labor, so this work continued to fall on the former.

We’re taught to aspire to one day have our own nuclear family, and we have entire industries to prop this up, from romantic comedies to engagement rings, to suburban development...to retirement homes, where people go when they no longer serve a nuclear family purpose.

There’s nothing wrong with being in or wanting to be in a nuclear family. One beautiful thing about its structure, for example, is that it (ideally anyway) centres children and their growth--although we could also argue that the only reason for this is that children are future money-making adults.

Just because it’s portrayed as a default though, doesn’t mean that it is. Really, it’s a type of chosen family (assuming there’s consent between the two people), except that it has certain implications within

capitalism. At the very least, more nuclear families mean more housing units. In non-urban areas, this translates to “land development”: more land becoming privatized (i.e. colonized) and chopped up into small lots with more consumption-related infrastructure such as utilities, roads, and gas for the cars that move through these roads. In urban areas, nuclear families mean more demand for buildings (both for housing and for workplace/business), which contributes to displacement and gentrification as cities grow into bigger hubs of wealth.

Since the nuclear family consists of two adults by definition, it is also more susceptible to falling into patterns that discourage growth, but that fit right into the capitalist framework. Taking each other for granted, building up expectations not grounded in reality, thinking of our roles in relationships as transactional...I give you this, you give me that...haven’t we all seen or experienced this? And worse, because a nuclear family is by nature more private, it’s easier for violence to take root undetected by community.

Lastly, the nuclear family is idealized as a unit of two cisgender, heterosexual people. This is dangerous because it erases anyone who isn’t either of those things, even if they are in a nuclear family, and erasure, too, allows for violence.

I’m not advocating for any family structure over another or the abolishment of the nuclear family. What works for some doesn’t work for others, and that’s OK. It’s OK to live in a triad, or a 10-person interspecies house/sanctuary, or alone in a studio apartment, or in a house with four generations of family. It’s also OK to try all of these out, or change our minds. What’s not OK is for people to not have access to a home, or to lose access to a home because of who they are.

Where I’ve had to unpack things here for myself has been defining what (chosen) family means to me and setting boundaries with people based on how close to me I want them to be, rather than defaulting to what’s socially expected. Since the default family structure is the extended family in Bulgaria, I have had to set such boundaries with a lot of biological family members, some intentionally and others as they naturally happened.

As a co-founder of a now latent organization, I’m also unpacking defaults when it comes to grassroots organizing structures. I see a parallel between the nuclear family and how we default to forming activist groups, where founders become the “parents” until some of the “children” become the successors...or until the organization crosses over into the non-profit sector and adopts a corporate structure...even if the founders never envisioned either of these as options.



3. **BINARIES**

Defaults and binaries are two sides of the same capitalist coin, both reinforcing the idea that there is a “correct” way of being, designed to serve those in power. Pink or blue, paper or plastic, Democrat or Republican, good or evil, human or animal...who actually benefits from this reducing down to two options? The gender binary for example, the claim that there are only two genders and that they correspond to very specific body type and organ combinations--that’s a norm imposed to control people’s bodies. Specifically, it’s a Christian colonial norm.⁶

When we internalize capitalist binaries, we too perpetuate oppressive ideas and behaviours. They limit our power and visioning. They make us see things as either/or, black or white, and we miss out on complexity and nuance, and opportunity to grow. To put it in activist-speak, binary thinking is a tool of the oppressor, and we’ve adopted it. Binaries show up in our perceptions, feelings, and how we behave in our relationships.

How often have we said (or at least thought) these words to our partners/comrades/collaborators?

“I’m right, and you’re wrong.” - when actually, we can both be right and both be wrong at the same time.

"You're either my supporter or my critic." - when you can love/support me and still critique me.

Binaries can unfortunately show up as a result of trauma too: personal as well as generational/systemic, including the trauma of capitalism itself. This is where it gets tricky, and it's sometimes hard to tell the difference. This is where allowing myself the space and time to process has allowed me to also give myself kindness, rather than judgement.

Overall, coming out as a gender non-binary person in parallel to taking hold of my mental health has helped me accept other things about myself that I previously saw as conflicting--and to begin to see myself as whole: because of, rather than in spite of, my complexity. Just because I experience epic anxiety and self-doubt at times (including in the process of writing this piece!) doesn't mean I am broken or undeserving of love. I am more than the sum of my parts.

When I sent in my submission ideas for this issue of T.O.F.U., I didn't realize how much of this I was still figuring out myself and hadn't yet verbalized. I began to doubt myself, Who am I to be writing about mentally divesting from capitalism? What makes me an expert? Why would anyone want to read what I have to say when my work hasn't even been relevant in two years?

In pushing through these blocks, the writing changed course multiple times and never felt finished. And then it hit me that this is the whole point: that my work is always in process and it will never be finished. I myself am a work in progress, and just because I took time off actively organizing doesn't mean I stopped doing work or being present for my communities. I am no expert, but no one else is either. We can be experts in things from the past; when it comes to the future though, we can be visionaries, and then work on realizing these visions. Binaries, and defaults, and predetermined values--these are rules of capitalism that limit our visioning powers. Perhaps they also limited the visioning powers of the 1940s communist activists and caused them to recreate oppression.

In taking the past two years for myself, I've essentially focused on becoming more gentle and forgiving with myself. This now helps me better hold myself accountable for my own behaviour and actions. I'm the most aware I've ever been of who I am and where I am, of where I end and where others begin, and--my favourite part--of where we overlap. I don't know what's next for me in terms of organizing work, but I'm feeling the first bits of excitement about it.



ABOUT

Lilia Trenkova is a queer activist, designer, and maker, originating from Bulgaria. In 2014, they co-founded the activist group Collectively Free, which organized on-the-ground, often high-risk, actions for both animal rights and human rights issues, using disruptions, street theatre, and collaborations. Lili works as an architectural designer though their experience and interests range from music and set design to food service, to permaculture and herbalism. Their inner work currently focuses on healing and transformation--within the context of community and movements.

 collectivelyfree.org

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(Re)Building Together

THE THREAT OF DISASTER CAPITALISM
AND WHY WE NEED TO FIGHT IT

WORDS BY MICHELLE CARRERA

PHOTOS BY CHILIS ON WHEELS

It was eight days after Hurricane Maria, a Category 5 hurricane, had blazed through Puerto Rico and left the island without power, communication, water service, food, or potable water. I sat in the airport terminal in New York City with my seven year old son, Ollie, next to me. I bit my nails. My heart beat fast. *What were we going to find? How were we going to do this? Would we survive it? Was it reckless to jump on the first flight I could find?*

"Will someone rebuild Puerto Rico like it was before?" Ollie asked.

"It's up to all of us Puerto Ricans, right? To build it even better than it was," I responded.

He nodded. The answer was enough for him, but I was sitting on the edge of fear, and I wasn't so sure.

For the most part, those behind mutual aid projects have reimagined new ways of coming together, a new model for how to organize ourselves and our communities when tragedy strikes. Unfortunately, we are not the only people that have seen opportunity. Disaster capitalists often find their way in as well.

In Puerto Rico, I saw disaster capitalism at play, firsthand. From establishing curfews,

using restricted news access to push forward their own strategies, closing ports that brought in aid supplies and food, a reluctance to lift the Jones Act to allow international ships to bring in aid, (and then, upon pressure, only lifting it for 10 days, which is not nearly enough time for ships to arrive), and back-door million dollar contracts for services not provided, plenty of groups were there for the wrong reasons. For example, Whitefish, a one person company with ties to

Trump, received a \$300 million dollar contract for re-building the electric infrastructure.² Similarly, a one person company in Atlanta received a \$156 million dollar contract for providing 18.5 million meals, of which only 50,000 meals were provided.³ Not to mention the long-term privatization of the electric system provider,⁴ closing of public schools, community displacement (250,000 people fled the island), and land-grabs that also occurred.

Needless to say, it wasn't easy to witness. The despair and hopelessness that comes from seeing your homeland be exploited for its resources is gut-wrenching. To see your people dying because capitalism makes it so that people have no access to electricity, to hospitals, to fresh water, to food is despairing. In the aftermath, numerous corporations made millions, while 4,645 people were estimated to have died.⁵



[It takes] advantage of catastrophes to institute corporate economies with the most minimal of regulations. 'Disaster capitalism' is premised on radical laissez-faire goals that are essentially two-fold: 1) to achieve corporate privatization and windfall profits; and 2) to diminish the public commons and social safety nets through austerity.

- Mark Karlin, Truthout¹



Sadly, none of this was new. What happened in Puerto Rico seemed to follow the script of what happened in New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina in 2005. After Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans became a testing ground for disaster capitalism, and the George Bush administration put into play policies that would change disaster relief from thereafter. Aside from the usual shock and awe policies, including delayed response, displacement of communities, criminalization of survival, and privatization of public spaces (7,000 public school teachers were fired, and most public schools were closed and replaced with charter schools),⁶ Hurricane Katrina became the moment when government responsibilities turned to private-sector service provision through contracts with for-profit corporations. For example, Halliburton's KBR unit had a \$60 million gig to reconstruct military bases along the coast, and Blackwater was hired to protect FEMA employees from looters. Along with this, Parsons was brought in for a major bridge construction project in Mississippi, and Fluor, Shaw, Bechtel, and CH2M Hill—all top contractors in Iraq—were hired by the government to provide mobile homes to evacuees just ten days after the levees broke. Their contracts ended up totalling \$3.4 billion with no open bidding required.⁷

Not coincidentally, another country made mostly of people of colour was also victim to disaster capitalism after a tragedy. During the aftermath of Haiti's earthquake in 2010, millions in private international aid was sent. At the same time, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines was investing \$55 million to build pier facilities along the coastline in Labadee and turn the town of Milot into an eco-tourist resort, which displaced the communities that lived there at a time when they were vulnerable from the effects of the disaster. Along with this, Bill Clinton, enlisting the support of George Soros, built a \$50 million new industrial park to expand the textile sweat labour industry. Clinton believed that the already cash-strapped Haitian government could create more jobs by lowering the cost of doing business, including the cost of rent.⁸

Providing Relief?

As part of the only vegan food relief organization on the ground after Hurricane Maria, the Chilis on Wheels (CoW) team experienced hours-long lines in the sun to enter supermarkets only to face empty shelves. There wasn't a fruit or vegetable in sight, but plenty of Kraft Mac and Cheese boxes. Not a bottle of water could be found, but plenty of Coca Cola bottles were available and restocked every day.

In the relief stage, FEMA took charge of providing meals, which were contracted out to providers. They took weeks to span out to remote areas. When they finally made it, they distributed thousands of bags of Frito Lays, Skittles, M&Ms, and Snickers. To a population that was already suffering the effects of a colonizing culture of fast food, a lack of access to healthy foods, and an exponentially high rate of diabetes and heart disease, these bags of "food relief" served to further decline health, and once again encourage a dependency on animal products. Even in the case of successful efforts, such as Jose Andres, a chef from Spain who organized thousands of meals, animal flesh and related products made up most of what was served.

Thankfully, Chilis on Wheels food supplies came through private planes. Cars would line up outside the smaller private airports, waiting on supplies from family members living in the diaspora, (Puerto Ricans living in the U.S.A. and abroad) with the resources to ship these items. In our case, our activated networks of support arranged these accommodations, coordinating with other Puerto Ricans and collectively renting private charter planes to deliver goods. It was the only way to receive supplies before the post office resumed operations close to a month after the storm, and before the ports re-opened. Since communications were also mostly down, and internet service was

restricted, we would receive telegram-like short texts with flight info and supply lists.

Although a whole network of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora had collected supplies and sent them through shipping containers, those supplies took weeks/months to arrive, if at all. Even when they did, they would be taxed upon receiving, possibly seized by officials, or even "lost" only to be found stashed and hidden a year later with all the provisions rotten inside.⁹ Recently, new details have emerged as a result of the release of a private chat between Ricardo Rosello, the former governor of Puerto Rico, and members of his cabinet, and it has been discovered that the First Lady of Puerto Rico, Beatriz Rosello, was part of a corruption scheme to alter the accounting numbers of supplies received and delivered.¹⁰

In Puerto Rico, disaster capitalism was exacerbated by a lack of food sovereignty. The Nyéléni Declaration suggests that there are a range of conditions that are necessary for food sovereignty to be obtained, such as a living wage, tenure security and security of housing, cultural rights, and an end to the dumping of goods below the cost of production, disaster capitalism,¹¹ colonialism, imperialism, and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), in the service of a future where, among other things, 'agrarian reform revitalizes inter-dependence between consumers and producers'.¹²



The pillars of the capitalist food system – concentration of market power, vertical integration, exploitation of labour, and increasing corporate control of the resources required for food production – are completely at odds with the pillars of food sovereignty. The farm income crisis, food insecurity, diet-related disease epidemics, and the externalization of environmental destruction are all just symptoms of a deeper root problem.¹³

For the entire country, food sovereignty is a complicated subject spanning decades of assaults on access. Due to its colonial relationship with the U.S.A., what was once a thriving agricultural island, is now largely a food desert, relying on imported goods. Eighty-five percent of the food that Puerto Ricans eat is imported, and 90 percent of that comes through a single port on the island, the Port of San Juan, as well as a single port in Jacksonville, Florida. Currently, most agricultural land is owned by U.S.A. corporations such as Bayer, which oversee monoculture fields meant mainly for export or testing purposes. Locally owned industrial farms, following the instructions of the Department of Agriculture failed when their mono crop fields were destroyed by the storm. Thankfully, locally-owned smaller organic farming initiatives arose in the past decade and proved crucial to individual communities after the storm. These local farms withstood the power of the hurricane due to intercropping using traditional and native crops to the island such as yuca, taro, yams, and other root vegetables that grew underground and were thus ready to be harvested days after the hurricane.¹⁴

In New Orleans, "Hurricane Katrina severely damaged the city's food retail market infrastructure, reducing the number of supermarkets in the city and drastically cutting residents' access to fresh food. And

the city placed in the top 10 metropolitan areas experiencing the greatest amount of food hardship in 2009.¹⁵ There were 30 supermarkets in the city before Hurricane Katrina. Two years after the storm, only 15 had returned. An additional five were rebuilt in 2009, bringing the total count of supermarkets in the city to 20. Yet the average grocery store in New Orleans serves nearly 16,000 people, twice the national average."¹⁶

Haiti also has a complicated history with food sovereignty. The U.S.A. and International Financial Institutions urban industrial strategy dismantled Haiti's trade barriers and opened its economy to food imports, mainly from the United States. In 1986, the U.S.A. government successfully pressured the local government to, among other things, slash import tariffs and reduce subsidies to domestic agriculture, thereby destroying their local economy and their inability to sustain the population with their own food production.¹⁷

To try and fix this, many Haitians are calling for a ban on food aid in the medium to long-term. Although farmers understand that aid was necessary during the crisis following the earthquake, they say that the government needs to back local production to replace the aid; otherwise a dependency on multinational food and seed companies could overtake Haiti's market even more.¹⁸

For the People (and the Animals)

Sadly, non-human animals are also affected by disaster capitalism. The clearest example of this can be noticed from the Exxon Oil Spill in Alaska in 1989. In the cleanup process, 450 sea otters were captured. Sea World was contracted to take charge of otter rehabilitation, of which only 197 of them were released back into the ocean, after an extensive tagging process that generated millions of dollars for the manufacturing technological companies. A total of 37 otters—13 pups and 24 adults—were distributed to the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Tacoma, Washington, the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, the Vancouver Aquarium, Sea World San Diego, the Monterrey Aquarium (only temporarily, then sent to Vancouver), and Marine Land Umino-Nakamichi in Fukuoka, Japan. The Exxon spill served as an opportunity for these businesses to obtain their sought-after display animals. Another mechanism of animal captivity that was put in place following the spill was Alaska SeaLife Centre, a private aquarium and marine mammal research facility and rehab centre that was largely paid for with a portion of Exxon's civil settlement fines for the spill. The Centre opened in May 1998 in Seward, AK. A private, non-profit corporation employing 105 full-time employees and a staff of volunteers and interns, the centre aims to combine public education with scientific knowledge generation. Today, as many zoos

and marine spaces have rules banning the "harvest" of wild specimens, "rescue" animals become a key means of bringing new animals into captivity circuits.¹⁹

A movement that wants veganism to be adopted world-wide by everyone, must take into consideration access to food, and must work on the systems that serve as a detriment to that access. That means that vegans must care about food sovereignty, work against disaster capitalism, actively work within these fields, but most importantly support activists in their own communities already doing this work. Thankfully, there are a number of groups focused on such things right now, including Food Empowerment Project (F.E.P.) and Grow As You Are.

Led by Lauren Ornelas, F.E.P. encourages healthy food choices for people at the same time that it discourages corporations from pushing unhealthy foods into low-income areas, empowers and supports local farmers and agricultural workers, and works in solidarity with international food sovereignty movements. Their work is exceptional in supporting farm workers and following their lead. Within this same issue, Lauren gives an example of how they operate:

"With each area of our work, we have to use different approaches such as solidarity with the farm workers who pick our food. We don't

call boycotts of produce, as we do not know as much as they do, and by doing so, there would be a possible backlash that could actually affect the workers. So, we follow the workers' lead – if they call for a boycott, they have determined this is the avenue where they want and need support. Corporate campaigns can make a huge difference and impact farm workers who work for those companies all over the world. We know these corporations do not care about the farm workers, but many do not want to be perceived negatively by their customers and so some make changes like paying their employees more. We also work on supporting legislation and regulatory changes. There was a regulation on the books in California that when the picking season was over farm workers would be required to move out of labor camps and move at least 50 miles (roughly 80 kilometres) away. This had a detrimental effect on the education of the children of these workers, as they would be forced to change schools multiple times. After working with other individuals and groups for a few years, we were actually able to get this regulation changed!"

Another organization doing great work in regard to food sovereignty is Grow As You Are. They empower communities to grow food veganically, which ensures the growth process is organic and devoid of animal products. They partner with organizations

and individuals and help design, install, maintain, and train people that work in public and private urban spaces where food is produced using agro-ecological principles. They created the Good Shepherd Agro Ecology centre in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A., a three-acre farm that has devoted itself to researching, training, and teaching these principles as well as growing almost 7,000 kgs of food since 2012.

When it comes to relief work, a lot has to be done as well. In this field, vegan organizations like Chilis on Wheels, Food For Life, and A Well-Fed World offer a number of services, such as providing much needed food to people, educating folks on how to adopt plant-based diets, the political radicalization of marginalized communities that are victimized by disaster capitalism, and increasing awareness within vegan communities that the current systems in place are stacked against veganism.

Chilis on Wheels provides ongoing food relief to a variety of communities in need, including food relief in the aftermath of natural disasters. CoW also established Casa Vegana de la Comunidad, a vegan and sustainability community centre in Puerto Rico, that, aside from continuing to provide vegan meals three times a week, creates a space for local activists to lead workshops on veganism and sustainability, make liaisons with other community projects leading the way in food



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sovereignty, and retake agro-ecology and place it in the people's hands.

Food for Life, founded in 1995, is the largest vegan food relief organization in the world. Through their 211 affiliates in 60 countries, they serve two million plant-based meals daily, and often come in to locations after a disaster. Spiritual in nature, their work also includes health education, eco-farming, schooling, animal rescue, and animal care.

A Well-Fed World is a hunger relief and environmental advocacy organization advancing plant-based solutions to bolster global food security and mitigate climate change. Through their Global Grants program, they provide financial security to highly effective, on-the-ground programs providing immediate plant-based food and veganic farming assistance for people in their communities.

Coming Together

The approach to widening veganism within a world context necessitates that we look at the systems that are in place preventing access to food, and allowing people to have rights over food policy. The way mainstream vegan organizations perform advocacy in other countries is not only a reproduction of colonialism and neo-liberalism, it's also not effective. What is the point of vegan education if people don't have access to fresh



food? What is the point of vegan education if people can't make decisions over food policies that govern the way food is grown, harvested, packaged, transported, and consumed? What is the point of vegan education if people are displaced from their homes/land/countries and so focused on survival, they have no space for foresight or ideology?

Disaster capitalism, disaster relief, and a lack of food sovereignty are major roadblocks to accessible veganism because people aren't able to make choices. "Perhaps we need to do the inverse. Use disastrous times to create the bottom-up, deeply democratic alternatives that, during ordinary times, might seem more trouble than they're worth. These alternatives may be small scale at first, but they can function like seeds in a supersaturated solution. Without these particles, a solution can remain in a dissolved state. But add the 'seeds' and crystals rapidly take shape and grow."²⁰ Including veganism in mutual aid work against capitalism is crucial in dismantling the system that keep humans and non-humans from being free.

What kept many alive after the hurricanes and earthquake, and is keeping them alive today, is a culture and economy of solidarity, or mutual aid. Community members come forward as first and second responders. In New Orleans, they saved people from roofs, in Haiti they rescued people from rubble, in




Puerto Rico they saved people from winds. They shared whatever food they had, and they took their machetes to cut down fallen trees and clear roads. They built relationships with their neighbours, and made ties across communities. These new relationships, built on loyalty and trust, carry us forward in bigger struggles.

In Puerto Rico, for example, the result of these new ties was evident in the successful political manifestations to oust the Puerto Rican governor, as mobilization reached even typically apolitical sectors. This was a result of the work done after the hurricane. This is what happens when we practice solidarity.

I was nervous eight days after the hurricane; and the following year and a half that I spent there doing relief and rebuilding work were intense and filled with sweat, anger, and tears. But there was also a lot of joy. Cooking together, eating together, developing friendships and community that sustained one another filled us with a fighting spirit. In coming together with various communities in Puerto Rico, I better understood that only through cooperation and liaisons in solidarity with people working to be free can we fight for non-human animals to be free as well.

ABOUT

Michelle Carrera is a queer vegan Puerto Rican liberation activist. She founded Chilis on Wheels in 2014, making veganism accessible to communities in need; and the Casa Vegana de la Comunidad in Puerto Rico in 2018. She is also a Board Member of the Microsanctuary Resource Center. She was co-founder of Latinos for Animal Protection in 2009, which served animal protection organizations in Latin America, and organized a Vegan Latinos in NYC Meet-up, which fundraised for Latin American vegan organizations from 2015-2017. She is a professional translator and ghost-writer, and currently lives in between Puerto Rico and New York City with her human unschooled child, rescued dog, and chicken companions.

 chilisonwheels.org
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Priceless

Capitalism's reach is far, and it has a long history in much of the world, but it's possible to imagine a different future. As the authors within this issue suggested, there are plenty of actions we can take, both personal and as a community, to ensure that things are different down the road.

Hopefully, you're now better prepared to take part in these actions thanks to what you read, and I know that T.O.F.U.'s future is better thanks to you choosing to read it. As I stated in the intro, whether or not I'm able to make a living from this publication isn't as important as knowing that people are getting something from it.

After all, playing a part in creating change in the world is something you just can't put a price on.

Thanks for caring,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Ratz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end.



A Well-Fed World is a Washington, DC-based hunger relief and animal protection organization. We chip away at two of the world's most immense, unnecessary, and unconscionable forms of suffering... the [suffering of people](#) hungry from lack of food, and the [suffering of animals](#) used and abused for food.

We connect the hunger-meat issues and work to strengthen:

- vegan feeding & farming programs
- farm animal care & rescue efforts
- pro-vegan advocacy & community building

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It's easy to donate! Donate on behalf of people you care about or they can donate on your behalf. Give the gift of vegan food to people in need without harming animals.

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Ashraya Initiative for Children



Poplar Spring Sanctuary by Mark Peters

~how beautiful is a world that is healthy, well-fed, and kind all at the same time~