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White normativity, animal advocacy and PETA's campaigns

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Abstract
In this article, I argue that some of the campaigns that People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) carried out in the USA are white normative and that the presence of this normative whiteness is symptomatic of the same larger problem in animal advocacy. I contend that PETA's campaigns are white normative for two sets of reasons. First, PETA's campaigns promote racist hierarchies; second, their campaigns contribute to black people's disengagement from animal justice, undermining the pursuit of black justice. Further, I argue that, even though PETA's campaigns are symptomatic of how many animal advocates are white normative, this does not need to be the case, for there are advocacy alternatives that resist normative whiteness.

Keywords
Animal advocacy, white normativity, PETA's disavowal, black veganism

Introduction

The framing of mainstream animal advocacy within white settler or dominated nations like the USA has produced a *racist* impact. A significant number of mainstream animal advocates have framed their ethical praxis through the tropes of *white normativity*/*normative whiteness*. Nevertheless, there has been some resistance, especially from more popular animal advocacy groups, to acknowledging this (Brueck, 2017; Danielle, 2010; Ko and Ko, 2017; Nocella, 2012). This being

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the case, the presence of white normativity is problematic because it may reify and perpetuate racist injustices in the societies where it occurs.

In this article, I wish precisely to provide an argument for the claim that animal advocacy in the Global North is white normative, with a special focus on campaigns occurring in the USA. I carry out this task by looking at three campaigns by one of the most popular and influential animal advocacy groups, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and their campaigns: 'Are Animals the New Slaves?', 'Glass Walls' and 'anti-SeaWorld'. My argument is that normative whiteness operates within PETA's animal rights praxis, and this can be used as an illustration and case study of white normativity in animal advocacy. Particularly, I offer two sets of arguments. First, I argue that PETA neglects how their methods of campaigning promote racial hierarchies; second, PETA contributes to black people's disavowal of claims of animal injustice, and this disavowal undermines the pursuit of black justice. Further, I argue that, although PETA's campaigns in this regard are symptomatic of a more general white normativity found throughout much animal advocacy in the US, there are important and instructive exceptions that reveal how animal advocacy can be shaped in a more inclusive way.

Note that the main debates about white normativity in animal advocacy have been carried out beyond the academic setting in activist settings; hence, the main contribution to knowledge offered by this article is to share a rigorous scholarly assessment of whether PETA promotes white normativity, and how this point can be used for a general argument about animal advocacy in the Global North.[1] Though I rely strongly on recent scholarship (Deckha, 2013; Harper, 2010; Kim, 2015; Ko and Ko, 2017), my argument is original in three ways. First, it offers an in-depth and detailed development of the idea of white normativity and links it to the theory of disavowal presented by Kim (2015). Building on this, I extend this concept of disavowal to tackle the question of white normativity within the campaigns I will be analysing. Second, I identify various forms of white normativity that have not been previously identified in this way; particularly, I offer arguments about how their campaigns construe an image of the white saviour, build white normative socio-psychological, communication and economic spaces, while developing further how PETA provokes mutual disavowal, all arguments that the aforementioned scholars have not carried out previously. Third, I refute the idea that normative whiteness is a necessary consequence of animal advocacy by systematically analysing forms of resistance to normative whiteness within animal advocacy by pointing out what some marginal animal advocacy groups have done differently from PETA.

To show how normative whiteness operates within specific PETA campaigns, I will start by briefly outlining PETA's campaigns. In the next section, I will argue that PETA's campaigns are anchored in white normativity to the extent that they disavow the negative impact of their campaigning methods on black people. In the third section, I contend that this disavowal contributes to some black people distancing themselves from engagement with animal justice issues. This also

reinforces white normativity because animal justice issues are morally and politically relevant to overcoming anti-black racism. So, to the extent that PETA's campaigns contribute to distancing black people from engaging with animal justice issues, they do contribute to undermining black struggle and thereby uplifting white normativity.

Four important clarifications ought to be made. First, the concepts of 'white normativity'/'normative whiteness' and 'animal advocacy' are key to the argument, so they ought to be defined. By 'white normativity'/'normative whiteness', I mean the universalization and establishment of the cultural meanings, economic and social practices and beliefs of those individuals *perceived* as 'white'. White, as a category, is not a static, naturalized category; instead, it is an unstable social concept that has changed throughout history. This categorization currently tends to refer to individuals from the Global North perceived to have white pigmentation, a European kind of hirsuteness, and a particular bone structure, expressed in the head and face, as well as with a perceived moral-religious lineage of European-Christian descent (Bethencourt, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Farr, 2004; Lopez, 2006).

Animal advocacy can be defined as being carried out by organizations trying to promote changes in the way that people and institutions treat animals. This can usually be divided into animal welfarists, who emphasize gradual improvements in animal care and a reduction of animal suffering, and animal abolitionists, who defend a wholesale change in the treatment of animals, abolishing their use.

Second, the focus on PETA is relevant because it is one of the most influential and famous animal advocacy organizations for addressing the rights of animals and, as such, has a global reach that has significantly impacted other social movements and the general public. Animal advocacy is large and diverse, but the study of PETA's campaigns is important precisely because PETA is especially influential in animal abolitionist advocacy, with many groups around the world mimicking and being inspired by it; further, it is also the case that many animal welfarist groups are strongly influenced by them. Given PETA's influence and popularity, understanding its activism will help with an understanding of how many other animal advocates' activism functions.

Third, there is substantial evidence that the ways in which black people suffered oppression during antebellum slavery share relevant similarities with the ways that animals suffer oppression today in laboratories and farms (Spiegel, 1996). Thus, the issue in this article is not whether such comparisons can be made with empirical accuracy, but how such a comparison may reinforce racial hierarchies.

Fourth, methodologically, this article takes a non-ideal theory approach to the problem of white normativity in animal advocacy. Recently, some philosophers have been concerned that normative theory was too detached from real-world politics and, therefore, could not offer a guide to real-life normative problems. Hence, a debate interrogating the methodology to be used to develop normative prescriptions for the real world has emerged (Simmons, 2010; Valentini, 2012).

This methodological debate has been framed in a Rawlsian conceptual terminology and is, broadly speaking, divided into two perspectives, the ideal and non-ideal theory (Rawls, 1999). The terms can refer to a variety of sub-debates, but the one relevant here is the debate about the significance of social, economic and political factors for moral theorizing.

Ideal theorists contend that philosophers should altogether reject the need to look at social reality for moral theorizing (Simmons, 2010; Valentini, 2012). According to this view, philosophical work on normativity ought to be a kind of abstraction that represents the actual as a simple deviation from the ideal and not worth theorizing in its own right. Ideal theory, therefore, relies on an idealization of reality that excludes or, at least marginalizes, the actual in the theorization (Valentini, 2012).

Non-ideal theorists, contrastingly, consider that certain social facts are crucial for moral theorizing and that the ideal theory approach abstracts away from realities that are crucial to understanding the actual ways that injustices occur (Simmons, 2010; Valentini, 2012). To hold a non-ideal approach, therefore, means to consider the actual obstacles for justice in society as an important aspect of moral theorizing (Mills, 2005).

In this article, I take this philosophical approach of looking at white normativity theoretically by offering a well-argued explanation of how certain forms of campaigning can potentially lead to negatively racialized outcomes. This approach is applied by employing the literature of whiteness studies and critical race theory (Bethencourt, 2015; Hooks, 1987; Lopez, 2006) to explain how a certain form of campaigning in virtue of its characteristics can be a form of white normativity.

PETA's controversial campaigns

In this section, I will outline three of PETA's campaigns that I later contend engage in white normativity. One of PETA's main campaigning strategies is to use shock advertising, i.e. a technique that consists of passing a content-rich message that instills strong negative feelings in the target audience in order to trigger critical thought and positive behavioural change (Matusitz and Forrester, 2013). PETA uses a variety of shock advertising methods; the one that is relevant for this article is the campaigns where human suffering is compared and linked to animal suffering.

Two examples of these were the controversial exhibits named 'Are Animals the New Slaves?' and 'Glass Walls' shown at the Natural History Museum in New York and a shopping mall in Washington DC, respectively. In these exhibits, panels showed images of animal cruelty juxtaposed with images of USA antebellum black slavery. For example, there was a photo of a black man being lynched in Indiana, in conjunction with the image of a cow hanging by its feet while being slaughtered. Other photos showed black people being bloodied and burned, juxtaposed with photos that depicted similar treatment of domesticated animals. There were also images linking the Civil Rights movement with the animal

liberation movement. Quotes from 1960s' USA Civil Rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr could be found on the panels. These quotes and images were, however, not used to refer to black suffering; instead, they were instrumentalized as a way to emphasize animal suffering, with the assumption that anti-black violence is a phenomenon from the past and that animals are the new 'blacks'.

Another controversial PETA campaign was the filing of a lawsuit in the USA District Court in San Diego accusing SeaWorld of keeping five whales in conditions that violate the 13th Amendment ban on slavery. They argued that the Orcas were, by any definition, slaves, given that they were 'kidnapped from their homes, kept confined, denied everything that's natural to them and forced to perform tricks for SeaWorld's profit' (*The Independent*, 2011). In this campaign, the juxtaposition with human imagery was not prevalent.[2] However, in one of the videos in this campaign named 'Captivity Is Slavery', PETA showed an animation of an African-American woman affirming that enslavement and oppression of African-Americans is in the past: 'And today I can stand today as a free woman' – and that now one ought to focus on liberating animals from injustices, without mentioning any of the current forms of anti-blackness (PETA, 2019). This deflection to the past was suggestive that black injustice had been overcome and that the USA is thus a post-racial society.

These campaigns were perceived by various organizations and individuals as reflecting white privilege (Harris, 2009). For example, a spokesman from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) affirmed that the exhibits instrumentalized and humiliated black people: 'Once again, Black people are being pimped. You used us. You have used us enough' (Johnson, 2017; Wright, 2016). This quote suggests that the NAACP's interpretation was that the campaigns disregarded and ridiculed black people's history and feelings and was a way to gain publicity at their expense.

In the official responses to the accusations of racism, PETA spokesman, Collen O'Brian, affirmed that

> We understand that the panel ... may make some people uncomfortable at first glance, but we hope that it will inspire further reflection on the idea that oppression is, sadly, still alive today on factory farms, in circuses and in laboratories. (Wright, 2016)

Likewise, the PETA Communications Director affirmed that 'the goal of the exhibit is not to equate nonhuman animals with African-Americans' but,

> 'to compare the oppression of certain groups of people in the past to the continued oppression of animals today. It points to the terrible level of suffering that has been inflicted upon various individuals throughout our history and points out some of the cruelty that still goes on in society today. (Wright, 2016)

These official responses indicate that PETA justifies the campaigns because they stimulate emotions such as abhorrence and induce disgust for animal farms

as a result of the connection that individuals would subsequently make with antebellum slavery. Further, in their responses, PETA failed to acknowledge that racism is still part of current societies by either not mentioning anything about current forms of racism and, thereby making this racism absent, or explicitly referring to it in the past tense.

White normativity and PETA's disavowal

In this section, I will show how PETA engages in white normativity, and how through their disavowal of foregrounding injustices to animals they background injustices towards black people. Following Kim (2015), I use the term 'disavowal' to refer to the actions of activists that occur when addressing one kind of oppression, one also acts in dis-association and rejection from other kinds of oppression. This act of disavowal can be intentional or not and can take a variety of forms from deliberately refusing to acknowledge that others have a valid claim to unconsciously reproducing a social pattern that injures other groups (Boisseron, 2018; Kim, 2015). What these actions have in common is that acts of disavowal are a turning away from other forms of oppression; by turning away one is closing off ways of imagining oneself in relation to others and re-inscribing other forms of oppression (Kim, 2015).

This fragmented and disconnected way of relating to others results from a specific way of looking at social issues, what Kim calls 'single-optic vision', seeing a social issue from a single vantage point only, thereby diverting attention from morally relevant aspects of a certain or related issue (Kim, 2015).

In this section, I identify PETA's white normativity as a disavowal of how their campaigns may contribute to white normativity fueled by anti-blackness. In particular, part of the problem is that the connections between struggles made by PETA are made in a way that privileges animal justice while perpetuating black injustice.

The first argument about white normativity is that PETA disregards the fact that some forms of anti-black racism still exist in the present and are not only historical problems. PETA frames their campaigns through the assumption that racial violence against black people is a phenomenon of the past, invoking either images from antebellum USA or the Jim Crow era – both as examples of formalized/legalized racism. There is no conceptual understanding that racism still operates against black people in the USA and worldwide; however, it does manifest structurally and more invisibly. This disregard is an act of white normativity because it not only contributes to maintaining and un-addressing inequalities, but also provides a socio-psychological space that erases white feelings of guilt and unfair privilege.

Note that a central and potentially indispensable aspect of the oppression of black people has been and is animalization (Kim, 2015, 2018). Animalization refers to the classification and ranking of oppressed peoples of colour as non-humans and as having animal-like characteristics (Bethencourt, 2015). This animalization

was, indeed, routinely used within pro-slavery ideologies to justify slavery, blocking potential empathetic emotional reactions towards the oppressed, so that a sense of social obligation was not activated (Bethencourt, 2015; Kim, 2018).

This animalization has also been intertwined with the bodying of blacks, the understanding of blacks primarily as bodies, i.e. beings without viewpoints, emotions or interests (Ko and Ko, 2017). As Achile Mbembe (2017) points out, blackness signals a body – an animal body – without access to subjectivity.

The black body has routinely been perceived as an object of fear by whites (Mbembe, 2017). As a result of these negative categorizations, black bodies have been routinely over-analysed and over-surveilled. During antebellum slavery and throughout the twentieth century, pseudo-scientists categorized black men as less intelligent and more physically fit for hard labour, and black women were often classified as more lascivious because of their physical characteristics (Bethencourt, 2015; Hooks, 1987).

PETA routinely refers to these as past injustices, especially noticeable in the SeaWorld video and PETA's pseudo-apologies. However, note that the USA (and, indeed, most, if not all, parts of the world) is not post-racial and that the forms of white normativity described above are still present (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Goldberg, 2015). Indeed, dehumanizing animal–human comparisons are still present in the current societies (Harris, 2009; Ko and Ko, 2017). For instance, black athletes are routinely socially perceived as less intelligent but physically strong, when compared to white athletes (Ferber, 2007). This expression of black athletes as less intelligent, but stronger than white ones, is how dehumanization operates. Another example is the mass imprisoning of blacks, which manifests a fear of the black body and a need to overanalyse its movements and actions; in order to overanalyse it, the body must be confined and over-surveilled (Rios, 2007).

Taking this on board, PETA, when foregrounding animal injustice and insisting that racism towards black people is historical, displaces black subjugation creating the boomerang effect, whereby 'black subjugation is sent back into the past only to return to the present with greater force' (Kim, 2018: 24). PETA disavows the claim that racism still exists but by displacing black subjugation and referring to it as a past injustice, makes current racism worse. For by unrecognizing that black people have a valid claim about current forms of racism, attention is diverted from current forms of racism – such as mass imprisonment of black people – blurring these current forms, leaving such oppressions unnamed and unaddressed and, therefore minimized and perpetuated. The silence caused by this deflection of black oppression to the past ignores injustices towards black people and, thereby, preserves the existing privilege of whites and the oppression of blacks (Boisseron, 2018; Kim, 2018).

In addition to this, the deflecting to the past contributes to a racial mythology based on a level-playing-field narrative that gives whites the possibility of inhabiting a social and psychological space free from the guilt of participating in current black subjugation. For, by throwing subjugation into the past, a socio-psychological space remains free of the guilt that comes from participating in racism. This is because it

absolves people from the idea they are contributing to current inequalities; as such, it contributes to a socio-psychological context where whites are free from guilt about one's privilege and others' subjugation.

The second form of normative whiteness is the disavowal, whereby the campaigns reinforce negative ways of perceiving black people and, particularly, ways that anti-racist movements have been trying to dispel. Broadly speaking, the way that imagery tends to be perceived is strongly conditioned by the social context of where and when it is displayed; owing to the fact that there is still substantial covert racism in the USA, then PETA's imagery will be perceived in a racist way. As the previous examples demonstrate, black people are still bodied, animalized, objects of fear, as well as over-surveilled and overanalysed; hence, the social context of the exhibits is one where these stereotypes persist. As a result, the perception will tend to be at one with a racist gaze, a place where these white stereotypes are reinforced, especially because the imagery is not contextualized in relation to positive views of blackness.

Taking this on board, PETA's campaigns subordinate blackness in order to defend animals, to the extent that, given the racist history of animal–human comparisons and its ongoing relevance, their campaigns will likely be perceived as a racist gaze. In particular, as anti-racist groups have emphasized, it is important to positively publicly affirm racialized groups' history, identity and image (Bonnett, 1999; Modood, 2000, 2015). This is because there are still many negative societal stereotypes circulating about blacks and their bodies, but also because the propagation of such negative imagery has the effect of reinforcing stereotypes that produce internalized racism. PETA not only does not positively affirm black bodies but actually does the opposite; namely, through their campaigns that publicly propagate negative bodily imagery which fuels white negative societal stereotypes about black people, while also contributing to the dissemination of images that reinforce the internalization of negative self-image for black bodies. Indeed, the images of blacks in PETA's expositions are images of people who are sick, degraded and dirty, and this is conjured with stereotypes that imagine the black body as linked to images of disease, degradation and death; there is a significant stigma to relating disease, especially HIV, with blackness (Oro, 2012).

As in the previous argument, it would *only be the case* that this negative imagery of black people was not reinforced if black people had been entirely reincorporated into the human, unbodied, not feared by whites and not over-surveilled; indeed, only if blacks were totally reincorporated in positive categories and these negative ones were completely dismissed would they be 'able to serve as nondescript exemplars of this category' (Kim, 2018: 17). However, as this is not the case, the exhibits reinforce white negative ways of perceiving black people. Taking this on board, PETA is not only simultaneously contributing to the reinforcement of negative societal stereotypes, but also fueling imagery that nourishes internalized racism.

The third way that the campaigns are white normative is because, when making the comparison of oppression in order to uplift animals, they take a white experience and sensibility as a starting point; resultantly, they disavow the relevance of

black history and experience and how their campaigns negatively impact on black people's emotions and ways of perceiving the world. Even if it were the case that PETA is right about injustices being located in the past, it ignores that black people tend to collectively equate this surveillance of bodied experience and ambition, exposure and being referred to or compared to an animal, to the experience of being dehumanized; this is surely the result of centuries of white supremacy influencing black consciousness and causing it to be constantly vigilant (Harper, 2010).

Angela Harris's comments on the strategies of mainstream animal advocates raise precisely this point:

> The dreaded comparison also ignores the dynamic relationship between people of color and animals given their historic linkage in the white western mind (...) Animals — and for African Americans, especially primates — activate, I think, this urge to disassociate on the part of people of color, based on the intuition that our dignity is always provisional. PETA's animal liberation campaigns (...) assume a comfort in associating oneself with animals and animal issues that people of color can only assume with difficulty. (Harris, 2009: 27)

The exhibits take white experience as universal, disregarding black people's experience. The act of disavowal here consists of using a racialized method of communication, with analogies that disregard the negative impact that it may have on blacks. This universalization of white experience simultaneously reifies white experience in the public realm while disregarding black experience, feelings and emotions by either considering them the same as white or considering them unimportant and, therefore, absent (Boisseron, 2018; Ko and Ko, 2017).

Mutual disavowal and connections between struggles

In the previous section, I argued that PETA disavows how their campaigns contribute to the injustices black people suffer. In this section, I wish to argue that the campaigns are white normative to the extent that they contribute to black people disavowing claims about animal injustice. I argue that this distancing weakens the pursuit of black justice, and, by weakening it, one is reinforcing the white normative status quo.

I forward this argument via Kim (2015), showing how disavowal can potentially lead to mutual disavowal. Mutual disavowal occurs when each group elevates its own suffering and justice claims over the suffering and justice claims of other groups; this elevation partly or wholly invalidates the other's oppression as a matter of political and moral concern (Kim, 2015). So, mutual disavowal occurs when at least two groups disregard each other's claim as politically and morally relevant.

The reasons why black people are dissuaded from engaging with animal advocacy are explained above. Namely, PETA's white racialized framing of animal

advocacy that fails to recognize that anti-blackness and racial injustice, via systemic racism, exist and cause suffering and inequities, while doing this relocates this reality to a by-gone era where the (white) imagination is left to assume that real racism has ended and animals are the 'new blacks'; by doing this, acting in disharmony with anti-racist groups, white socio-psychological safe spaces are fuelled (Boisseron, 2018; Brueck, 2017; Harper, 2010; Harris, 2009; Nocella, 2012).

These factors reinforce the idea in the black community that animal advocacy is white; this can mean it communicates that animal justice is a worry that only concerns whites or is a covert way to promote racism by prioritizing animals over black people or subtly showing racist imagery to reinforce anti-black stereotypes. As a result, the campaign contributes to black people disavowing the importance of addressing animal injustice. This is because by using those methods of communication, PETA gives the impression that one has to choose between one form of justice or the other or that the achievement of animal justice requires or justifies the neglect and reinforcement of racial injustices. This helps to force a move from blacks to single-optically look at the issue of animals, i.e. simultaneously unacknowledging the relevance of justice for animals as well as animal justice for the pursuit of racial justice (Boisseron, 2018). By provoking a disengagement from animal justice issues, it also undermines and distances blacks from pursuing black justice, owing to the fact that animal and black justice are connected in various ways.

First, techniques of oppression can be deployed across species. Indeed, the techniques used and developed for animal husbandry were later used for the enslavement of blacks and other oppressed groups (Patterson, 2004; Spiegel, 1996). Particularly relevant for this case are the tools that allow for the punishment, control and so forth of black people, which had mostly been used on animals previously.

Second, the struggles are connected because a vegan diet can help address the health disparities that result from the racism suffered by many blacks. Note first that many black people, especially African-Americans, suffer from higher rates of excessive eating and meat-eating diseases, such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (American Heart Association, 2019; Bahr, 2007; Danielle, 2010).[3]

One reason for this is due to different forms of systemic racism, such as the fact that black people tend to live in poorer neighbourhoods where access to food options is mostly limited to convenience stores and fast-food chains which offer fatty and processed food. Thus, black people in the USA are not afforded the same food and health resources as the collectivity of, say, white people in the USA. Hence, routinely, members of black communities have little control over their food choices (Food Empowerment Project, 2019; Harper, 2011; Ko and Ko, 2017). Another reason is that some black people adopted a bastardized version of the colonizer's diet, which is a legacy from antebellum slavery. Particularly, enslaved Africans were generally fed with food remains and poor quality food by the colonizer, and this became integral of many black people's habits till today, causing a variety of health issues for black people.

Taking this on board, black health disparities can be understood as inequities caused by systemic anti-blackness, and veganism can be seen as a form of anti-racism, to the extent that a meat-free diet may lead to help improvements regarding health issues partly caused by meat-eating. Most of these medical issues are related to meat eating or excessive fat, but a vegan diet tends to be less fatty and caloric, so would be able to free many from these diseases or at least help diminish them (Greger and Stone, 2016; McQuirter, 2010; Norris and Messina, 2011).

A third reason why there is a connection between animal and black justice is that animal farming is strongly connected to the phenomenon of environmental racism. Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate environmental health hazards that are suffered by racial minorities, despite whether due to targeted prejudice or resulting from ingrained institutional bias or even mere chance. Environmental racism may take many forms but relevant for this context is how pollution differentially harms communities based on colour. These include racial minorities being burdened by a disproportionate number of facilities that pollute the air, soil and water with life and welfare threatening poisons and pollutants (Brulle and Pellow, 2006; Pellow, 2016).

Factory farms and slaughterhouses are major sources of pollution, as proximity to them increases exposure to water, soil and air contamination. Black community neighbourhoods and working areas tend to be located near factory farms and slaughterhouses and are therefore highly affected by these, suffering higher number of respiratory ailments, methemoglobinemia, asthma, depression and fatigue (Food Empowerment Project, 2019).[4] More precisely, as a result of the close connections between black people and poorer class status, the communities and working places of blacks tend to be located in more polluted areas. In addition, many of these communities do not have access to alternate means of earning an income and have to work at slaughterhouses and factory farms, thereby being exposed to hazards more often (Harper, 2016; Ko and Ko, 2017).

This is integral to the factory farm system, as consumers demand high amounts of factory-farmed meat, and, as a result, entire communities continue to be negatively affected by pollution and toxins. Plant foods may be potentially linked to toxic chemical use; nevertheless, because of the quantities of plants needed to feed animals raised for food, the choice of a vegan option is related to reducing one's pollution footprint (Food Empowerment Project, 2019; Harper, 2010; Ko and Ko, 2017).

How is the neglect and disengagement of these connections and animal justice issues relevant to the argument that PETA contributes to promoting white normativity? By not addressing these injustices, the negative impact that these injustices have on black people is maintained, perpetuated and other, related, injustices may be formed; this, in turn, uplifts the white normative status quo.

To the extent that there are some oppressed groups where techniques of oppression can develop, other groups, especially historically and currently discriminated ones, are also at risk (Spiegel, 1996). Allowing the development of techniques of domination and oppression by dominant groups increases the likelihood of

domination of already socially, vulnerable groups, like black people, because of the possibility of techniques being deployed across species. In other words, techniques used to oppress one particular group can also be used to oppress another group, and, surely, the ones who are vulnerable are the ones who are the most likely victims of this oppression. They are the most likely victims, because, as animalization is one of the central characteristics of racial status hierarchies, the development of forms of animal solidifies the necessary tools and techniques for racial oppression to occur (Kymlicka, 2018). For, if one of the primary ways to oppress black people is through animalizing them, then the existence and development of techniques that oppress animals increase the ways to oppress vulnerable minorities and possibility of transferring the use of these techniques on them.

Not addressing health disparities and environmental racism contributes to reinforcing the aforementioned health issues caused by these. That is, it contributes to maintaining systemic racism which creates an unhealthy black body affected by disease and pollution. Moreover, by creating unhealthy black bodies, unhealthy nutrition and environmental racism validate in the white imaginary the idea of the black body as degraded, in contrast with the white body.[5] In addition, the degradation of the black body through unhealthy eating and environmental pollution serves to reinforce the negative self-imagery of black people.

Note, as well, that health is a pre-condition for the enjoyment of most rights; generally, one can fully participate in social, political life only if one's health allows one to do so. For example, if one has severe respiratory problems, one's mobility is curtailed and, thereby, means we are less able to participate activities than if we did not have this problem. Hence, the creation of the unhealthy black body serves as a form of exclusion, incapacitating individuals from fully participating in socio-political life.

A related issue is that when black people are distanced from animal justice issues, this diminishes their opportunity to participate in public life as knowledge makers. Groups like PETA are platforms that contribute to the making and disseminating of ideas. To the extent that barriers for black people to participate in these are created, black people are being excluded from contributing to knowledge-making and dissemination; rather, it is the dominant white communicator who is disseminating the ideas.

Finally, distancing from the animal justice issues of black people has an additional psychological benefit for whites. As Du Bois (2019) has contended, there are socio-psychological benefits to being white, rewards that raise self-esteem.[6] The outcome of having black people not endorsing animal justice issues is that it allots a certain kind of psychological wage to whites. Particularly, in this case, the distancing of black people allows the white person to appear as the civilized white saviour, caring for animals, in contrast with the uncivilized black who is too focused on their own struggle to care.

Resistance to white normativity within animal advocacy

My argument that PETA's campaigns are white normative may be challenged for either overstating or understating normative whiteness. According to the

overstatement set of objections, PETA's campaigns are, contrary to my point, non-racist, integrative of black people and contribute to a less racist society. First, research suggests that individuals who are not speciesist and tend to not make distinctions between humans and animals are also more likely to be less racist (Gullone and Arkow, 2012). Hence, PETA and animal advocates, in general, by blurring the human–animal divide, are, indeed, contributing to the elimination of racial prejudice.

Second, it can be argued that when white people see these images of black bodies suffering, the reaction is to identify themselves as the oppressors. Owing to the fact that white people are extremely concerned with being identified as racists, the reaction will be to distance from any kind of racist-related behaviour. Hence, the campaigns are effective in dispelling racism because they provoke a reaction of dissociation from any racist-related behaviour.

Third, it could be argued that PETA is not disavowing current racial injustice and that PETA is simply affirming that institutional slavery is in the past. Therefore, the objection is that my argument mischaracterizes PETA's point about the comparison.

Another objection could be that the campaigns are not white normative, because, for PETA and many other animal advocacy campaigns, there are many black elements, such as the black woman in the SeaWorld video and the various quotes from African-American civil rights activists.

In reply, the blurring of the human–animal divide may contribute to challenging racism, but it is insufficient in doing so. There are cases in history where people were simultaneously racist and non-speciesist. For instance, the Nazis saw themselves and other humans as animals and members of the animal world. But they also believed that some animals (the predator kind) were superior to other animals, and this justified the mistreatment of those they perceived as lower kinds of animals – like Jews (Sax, 2013). So, the empathy with other humans also depends on a broader ethical view and how racism fits into this.

Moreover, part of the problem with PETA's campaigning is that it tries to blur the human–animal divide by ignoring that the animalization of blacks still exists and without making a clear connection as to why the blurring is relevant for black justice (Kim, 2018; Ko and Ko, 2017). Consequently, blacks appear as reduced to mere instruments to measure animal suffering (Boisseron, 2018). By doing this, the way that PETA challenges the human–animal divide rests upon the elision of blackness and therefore on re-inscribing anti-blackness and distancing blacks from animal justice issues.

The second objection misunderstands the dynamic of contemporary racism. Contemporary racists do not, indeed, wish to be classified as such. However, the avoidance of the classification is usually not done by acting in a non-racist way; instead, a socio-psychological space is generated that either immunizes whites from guilt or creates barriers for others to classify white people as racist. Hence, if anything, the allusion to institutional slavery reinforces the contemporary racist idea that contemporary societies from the Global North are post-racial, and

precisely because slavery is classified as something from the past, one can see oneself as a non-racist because one is not a slave owner. Put differently, the image of the old racist is a negative image that allows the new racist to see a positive non-racist identity. For the 'real racist' is understood to be the old racist, and this image of the other as racist, provides the space for the contemporary racist to not be understood as racist because the contemporary racist does not share the features of the old racist. The comparison, therefore, actually reinforces white racism to the extent that it fuels contemporary societies as post-racial.

With respect to the third objection, note, first, that this interpretation is too charitable of PETA's position. As mentioned, PETA routinely uses terminology suggesting that racism is in the past, and, in their aforementioned official responses, they not only failed to acknowledge racism as a contemporary phenomenon, but also refer to racism as a matter of the past. In fact, PETA equates racism with institutional slavery, and by, referring to the latter as something from the past, it implies that racism is currently non-existent.

Even if it were the case that PETA meant only institutional slavery, this still fails to acknowledge how some black people are still one of the main victims of slavery or slavery-like treatment today. Black people in West African countries, such as the Ivory Coast, work in conditions of slavery in the production of cocoa and sugar (Brueck, 2017; Food Empowerment Project, 2019; Harper, 2010). Moreover, even if the conditions are not of slavery, many black people live in conditions of extreme exploitation and discrimination, which are very much alike slavery (Brueck, 2017; Food Empowerment Project, 2019). Thus, even if PETA is not referring to racial injustice in general, there is still disavowal of racial injustices to the extent that PETA fails to acknowledge that many black people are still some of the main victims of slavery or slavery-like treatment. Hence, even if it were the case that PETA only refers to institutional racism, PETA's campaigns are still white normative to the extent that they are disavowing current forms of black suffering.

In fact, PETA fails to acknowledge the existence of these forms of contemporary black suffering in other aspects of their advocacy. On PETA's website, some vegan products are advertised as cruelty free, but some of these products are the result of slavery and exploitation of people of colour in the Global South. For example, many of the chocolates advertised as cruelty free in PETA's website are, in fact, the result of black slave labour in West Africa (Harper, 2010, 2011, 2016). What this other example of PETA's campaigning suggests is that, indeed, the disavowal of contemporary forms of black exploitation and enslavement can be found in various elements of PETA's advocacy. Therefore, the disavowal of current forms of racism, including slavery, is integral of PETA's campaigning.

Finally, the presence of black people in PETA campaigns does not refute the argument that the campaigns are white normative, particularly the argument that whites appear as saviours. The presence of blacks in these campaigns is cosmetic simply providing an appearance of inclusiveness and racial diversity, while in fact the black presence displaces black ways of thinking. This is because the black

bodies in PETA's campaigns are not used to advance black justice; instead, they simply function as vessels for a white discourse that wrongly affirms that anti-blackness does not exist, disregarding black feelings, perpetuating negative black imagery, contributing to undermining anti-racist goals and not clarifying the connection between animal and black justice. So, black bodies, in PETA's and similar animal advocacy campaigns, may ignite critical moments of discovery in animal injustice, but do so through the mystification of the black person's status. The result is that blackness is an absent present despite its blatant reality. Thus, the black absent presence cannot be used as a counter-argument because of it being a form of displacement.

In addition, the point I made earlier is that the *likely effects* of the campaigns are to reinforce racial hierarchies and dissuade, inadvertently or not, black people from campaigning for animal justice issues. Hence, even if it were the case that black people are not absent in the campaigns, it is still the case that the campaigns have the *overall effect of distancing black people and promoting racial hierarchies*. These effects are what makes the campaigns white normative, allowing whites to appear as saviours, even if unintentionally.

A different set of objections is that my argument is white normative because, by endorsing some animal advocacy's ideas, which are white, this endorsement makes also my argument white normative.

I reject this line of objection; nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that much animal advocacy and, indeed its image, is white. Historically, concerns about animal justice were often an excuse to repress racialized groups' practices, justify civilizing missions and instead promoting white practices (Deckha, 2013). Furthermore, as narratives of African-American slaves demonstrate, animal justice has sometimes been used as a form of humiliating black people, assigning them a lower moral status than non-human animals (Johnson, 2017). Hence, animal advocates have a legacy that is loaded with racism; indeed, very little has been done by mainstream animal advocates, like PETA, to dispel the image resulting from this legacy. I do not wish to argue that animal advocates have an inherited duty to address this racist history, but if animal advocates fail to do so, the racist image will likely remain, and, if this happens, white normativity will be maintained.

In addition, despite the fact that these campaigns that use the slaves–animal analogy were popularized by PETA, many animal advocate groups also use this analogy and similar methods. Indeed, in the USA and Britain, it was animal advocates who first used the analogy, and, today, it is not uncommon to see animal advocates using it (Brueck, 2017; Harris, 2009; Nocella, 2012). Also, many animal advocates disavow the relevance of racial justice issues for their campaigns and use negative imagery and methods of communication that assume whiteness as universal. For example, during the SeaWorld Campaign, many animal groups used images of African slaves being traded with the comment 'Not as Bad as SeaWorld. Happier than an Orca'! Therefore, even though PETA's campaigns were more popular, this method is not uncommon, reinforcing the white image and, indeed, the white normativity of the movement.

Animal advocacy within white dominated nations like the USA and Europe is comprised primarily of white people (Wrenn, 2017). Whether such domination is intentional or not, mainstream movements comprised mostly of white people will, by default, shape their campaigns through what Arnold Farr (2004) refers to as 'white racialized consciousness'; that is, how white consciousness is collectively shaped via racist structures and ideologies. Social movements are platforms of power and voice, and the fact that, broadly speaking, this is occupied by whites is a manifestation showing that whites are the ones with power and voice (Ko and Ko, 2017).

In addition to this, various important voices of animal advocacy do, indeed, engage in white normativity. Vegans of colour have denounced that some prominent advocates in the movement have engaged in racism, comparing blacks to gorillas (Brueck, 2017; Harper, 2011; Nocella, 2012). Another important animal advocacy voice, Gary Francione (2017) fails to acknowledge the whiteness within the movement, accusing black vegans who criticize white male supremacy in the movement of bigotry and 'unabashed narcissism'.

The fact that prominent animal rights organizations like PETA and other influential prominent activists root their praxis in white normativity influences the functioning of many other advocates. Advocacy does not exist in isolation; advocacy groups react to other groups and, indeed, are influenced by these as well as socio-cultural forces. Particularly and as an example, smaller advocacy groups are influenced and replicate the actions of larger advocacy groups. As Donna Maurer (2002) points out, many small groups in the USA and worldwide openly imitate many of the campaigns of these larger movements and use them as models for their own activism. Therefore, given PETA's and other prominent voices influence larger communicating platforms, if they perform whiteness, this will substantially shape advocacy, because many other groups will mirror their actions.

Hence, much animal advocacy has a strong white element and image. Examples from PETA and other prominent voices in animal advocacy demonstrate that white normativity is a significant issue in advocacy, for they are extremely influential in the animal advocacy context and other advocates will certainly mimic their actions; moreover, the fact that many members are white and that there is a legacy of racism in animal advocacy which has previously been unaddressed reinforces this idea that animal advocacy faces this problem of white normativity. Having said this, it is important to point out that, even if there are many animal advocates who engage in white normativity, animal advocacy is not completely homogeneous and not necessarily white normative (Harper, 2011; Jones, 2014).

In fact, the idea of human exceptionalism was challenged by African-American slaves; and even though African-American slaves like Frederick Douglass were not animal advocates, some scholars have noted that they did demonstrate resistance to white exceptionalism by not necessarily engaging in human exceptionalism (Johnson, 2017). Also, black people in the USA have been involved in environmental and animal justice issues. Alvenia Fulton, in the 1960s, was possibly the first black American to start and own a vegetarian healthy food restaurant.

The restaurant aimed at addressing the fact that the black American community was suffering from nutrition-related diseases. Also, in the 1960s, the black American vegetarian Dick Gregory contended that, for true black liberation, it would be necessary for blacks to examine and change their 'unhealthy' soul food habits (Walker, 2003).

The main wave of involvement with animal and environmental activism within African-American communities occurred in the early 1980s although, indeed, many black environmental organizations tend to view environmentalism as an extension of the 1960s civil rights movement. An example is the Philadelphia Community Rehabilitation Corporation, founded by Rachel E Bagby, which tried to operate a village community in a nonhierarchical way between human and nonhuman nature, within a black residential neighbourhood. Their actions encompassed recycling, literature dissemination and workshops. Another example is the People for Community Recovery, an organization founded to address the exposure to toxic waste in residential areas (Walker, 2003). Today, we can still see many groups or single activists who engage in such issues, such as Sistah Vegan and Queen Afua (Afua, 2009; Harper, 2016).

A second point is that, even though many animal advocates are white, there are also identity characteristics of animal advocates that can make the advocacy less white normative; namely, that animal advocates tend to be liberal and left-leaning, and the left tends to be more empathetic to racial justice issues (Maurer, 2002; Wrenn, 2017).

Furthermore, it is important to point out that neither animal advocacy groups nor the movement itself are internally homogeneous. Some research suggests that many members of mainstream animal groups are also engaged in anti-racism, even though the organizations they support and the loudest voices in their organizations are not and promote covert racism; so, it is also the case that the loudest opinions voicing animal advocacy are not necessarily the most common (Wrenn, 2017).

This fact alone, however, is insufficient to contend that many members are not, consciously or not, promoting racism; as Joyce King (1991) argues, some people may believe that they are committed anti-racists but, in fact, their actions promote racism. For example, some supporters of colourblindness genuinely believe that this is an anti-racist stance when in fact it promotes its opposite. Nevertheless, the point is that being liberal, left leaning and already engaged in such struggles tend to be signs of people who are disposed to be more empathetic towards victims of racism.

On top of this, there are groups with a smaller reach which endorse an inclusive approach to animal justice, without re-inscribing racial oppression in their actions and discourses. These include the Food Empowerment Project (FEP), Sistah Vegan, Project Intersect, Vegan Advocacy Initiative, Vegan Feminist Network and Vegan Princess Warriors Attack.

Take the case of the FEP, a pro-vegan food justice organization. FEP understands that oppressions work in concert and therefore when campaigning do not simply focus on animal exploitation; rather, they focus on various dimensions, such as how some food products contribute to human slavery, environmental

pollution and structural racism-poverty-sexism. Their campaigns and brochures inform consumers about how their food choices may impact on different animals, the environment, ethnicities, classes and gender and how to consume animal and human-cruelty-free healthy food without damaging the environment. For instance, regarding palm oil, FEP informs its audience that, even though it is a vegan product, it also perpetuates contemporary forms of slavery. Rather than using shock advertising, FEP tends to organize workshops, provide information and help to build community groceries and gardens that give individuals vegan alternatives (Food Empowerment Project, 2019).

Groups like FEP carry out animal advocacy in a different way from PETA. First, they are actively engaged in campaigning with members of anti-racist movements. They read the work and collaborate in campaigns relevant for justice towards racial minorities. Second, they do not simply use racial minorities in their campaigns for cosmetic purposes; instead, in addition to being actively involved in various struggles relevant for racial minorities, they also amplify these people's voices in conversations and in the movement (Brueck, 2017; Nocella, 2012).

Third, groups such as FEP do not endorse the idea that just by virtue of being vegan, one is not contributing to human oppression or exploitation. Instead, they understand that there are various forms of injustice, like racial injustice, that are still relevant today and that these need to be addressed together; further, they recognize that if oppressions are not addressed together, this may reinforce some of them. So, they tend to reject single-issue advocacy, i.e. focusing on one form of exploitation at a time, instead, realizing the links of various forms of domination and the need to act against them in concert (Brueck, 2017; Kim, 2015; Nocella, 2012). These groups consider that although it is possible to have intersectional single-issue advocacy, single-issue approaches tend to simplify problems which, in fact, are complex conjunctions of social, economic and environmental factors. This simplification, in turn, is likely to make invisible various forms of oppression. Hence, complex and multiple-issue advocacy tends to be preferred to single-issue advocacy (Jones, 2014).

Fourth, the groups understand that the ways in which one engages with animal justice issues matter, and it ought to be done acknowledging that people have different perceptions and experiences of the world. Hence, because of this acknowledgement, they do not instrumentalize historical oppression of people of colour or other historically oppressed group to promote animal justice; indeed, using such analogies would be neglecting the feelings, emotions and experiences of those who are non-white (Brueck, 2017; Nocella, 2012).

Finally, they understand that there is no standpoint of racial innocence; so, as a guiding idea for their campaigns, they foreground the awareness of their social positioning and educate themselves about different social positionings in society so as to avoid, inadvertently or not, fueling economic and socio-psychological forms of white privilege (Kim, 2015).

Taking this on board, even though much animal advocacy engages in normative whiteness, there are groups which follow the above-described methods which resist white normativity. Therefore, despite the fact that normative whiteness is a problem in animal advocacy, this is not an issue that all advocates have and it is not an inevitable problem of animal advocacy. What the systematic explanation of these alternative forms of campaigning demonstrate is that it is possible to pursue black and animal justice together.

Conclusion

In this article, I contended that some of PETA's campaigns engage in normative whiteness and that this is illustrative, but not an inevitable consequence, of current animal advocacy in the USA and the Global North. To demonstrate this, I offered two sets of arguments. First, I argued that PETA reinforces white normativity through disavowing how race is still a socially relevant category and that racism continues to exist today. Second, I defended that PETA's campaigns contribute to provoking mutual disavowal. More precisely, they distance black people from animal justice issues and thereby contribute to undermining black people's struggle for racial justice. This, in turn, reinforces white normativity.

Moreover, I contended that, despite the fact that many animal advocates engage in white normativity and that there is, indeed, a problem of this being widespread, animal advocacy is not inherently white normative. Rather, there are already groups engaging in a more inclusive approach and aspects of the animal movement that can potentially promote more integrative approaches. These forms of advocacy have, however, been largely neglected and are not mainstream. Further research should focus on effective ways to promote a more inclusive advocacy among leading animal advocacy groups.

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Notes

1. Currently, North American culture tends to be hegemonic, so the USA offers a good illustration of what happens in the Global North.

2. There are images online where black and whale suffering is compared, but none could be found on their website.
3. I am not suggesting that PETA does not know this; potentially, PETA is aware but ignores it because it is not a method that attracts as many supporters as other methods.
4. It is not only black people, but racialized disadvantaged groups who work in the animal food production industry who suffer environmental racism and who are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards.
5. The dynamics of binary identity formation is the same as mentioned in the previous section.
6. Even though the general point about the psychological benefits of whiteness applies here, Du Bois (2019) was not referring to a case like PETA's; instead, he was referring to the white working class.

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