

SHEEP-WORK: FOOD EMPIRES AND PASTORAL RESISTANCE
IN THE INTERMOUNTAIN WEST

by
Katy Savage

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis is an attempt to analyze current and historical patterns of violence through the lens of a species of domesticated animal--sheep. I begin by setting down some founding provisions of the economic, political, and social systems within which sheep-work emerged, briefly tracking some of the historical roles sheep have played in the displacement, alienation and domination of other humans by others, from the time of sheep-domestication to the Mormon conquest of Utah. In this trajectory, sheep, embodying cultural ideals of 'property' and 'work,' show themselves repeatedly as able tools of land-theft and genocide. This analysis then opens the way to explore how these same beasts, and the same attempts to set down the meanings of 'property' and 'work,' have been necessary for resistance movements to these atrocities, which clarifies the central importance of food-economies in political and racial conflict. This sets the stage for my second chapter, which explores the forces of oppression in modern sheep-work and its related industries, linking this oppression back to the historical devaluation of food-work. Finally, because I write this in the urgency of ecocide, the privatization of the last remaining peasant commons, and the disappearance of agricultural skills in a forced march to the cities, my last chapter focuses on the paths of resistance brought to light by this analysis of sheep-work. Those same concepts of 'property' and 'work' which have for millennia been tools in the abuse of both humans and ecosystems open themselves up for radical renegotiation by 'neo-pastoralists' and other food activists.

This reconceptualizing work, carried out by those in active solidarity with both farmworkers and small farmers, holds out the promise of forming pragmatic, functioning communities where ecological care is born out of human egalitarianism and joined labor on the land, rather than through the urban-centered coerciveness of federal mandates which seek to ‘preserve’ Nature by clearing ‘wilderness’ of those who work there.

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INTRODUCTION

How Can You Write About Sheep When We're At War?

“Trophy photos of U.S. military personnel terrorizing Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison in 2004 showed, among other things, a naked Iraqi man on all fours, with a leash around his neck, and prisoners cowering before German shepherd dogs. Cruelly, the dog is made to function as a racist prosthetic of the U.S. military’s power to animalize ‘the other,’ *a power that applies in the first instance to the animal itself.*” (Shukin 10, emphasis in the original)

When I met Ian in Boston, he said we would go to Paul Revere Square to see a fence of blank dog tags, memorial to the dead and wounded soldiers of two wars. Instead we sat talking at a café, me sipping limp chai while he drank some soy-orange concoction (he’s nervous enough without caffeine, he says). Gentle-eyed Ian was a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War, planning protests for the 2008 Democratic and Republican Conventions. I was in Boston for a conference on the abolition of nuclear weapons. But instead of foreign policy or protest tactics, we talked of sheep.

He told me that once we ended the wars, he would leave the city and raise Navajo-Churros. Ian told me what he learned as a soldier in Tal Afar in between missions, when he was on-line looking up the milking capacity and wool-growing rates of different heirloom breeds. I told him what I learned as a student, camping in rural Utah with Peruvian shepherders and border collies; or huddled—sun-baked and wind-whipped—in the back of a pick-up on its way to the Navajo Nation to see the Navajo-

Churros in Tuba City, AZ. When an ambulance hurried down the bent road Ian's palms came up hard against his ears. He shivered. The husky leashed to the next table howled.

Ian and his brothers in the black IVAW shirts have lived through moments I couldn't understand. My life has been, after all, the most sheltered, in a Mormon, upper-middle class, suburban, white-dominated community. But if my sheepish ambitions correlate with those of an east-coast war veteran, I timidly insist it is because our places bear analogous bruises. Ian's mission in Tal Afar, an insurgent stronghold, was to "Clear, Hold, Build": clean-slate a city for purified progress. A fitting mission statement for the captains of industry eyeing the wetlands surrounding Utah Lake, the Virgin River floodplain and tortoise lands of St. George: my places, scraped flat, gridded, big-boxed, suburb-glutted, golf-coursed. Clear. Hold. Build. And my words of river bend, red cliff, heron, stonefly, drowned out by the walk-in closets, granite countertops, three-car garages of Ivory Homes. Anger-sharpened nearly to insurrection, I still stand quietly in line at public hearings, mouth my toothless comments, watch mild-eyed at construction sites. Follow orders. Ian's dreams are more troubled, his stress diagnosable: and yet is it too perverse to suggest the demons that prod us are kin? We are haunted by knowing that our kind—our forces, our families—are the destroyers.

Regardless, we both conclude with the rare, western, heirloom animal: the Navajo-Churro, descendent of the first domesticated sheep in the New World. I could conclude that the Churro merely signifies the romance of Escape: the naïve and unrealizable dream to flee civilization, war, progress, the sadism of the everyday—and rest with the mild and timid beasts. In other words: what we always meant by the "pastoral." But I believe the body of the beast resists the simple reading. We turn to

sheep-work not to find a “simple life.” After all, the simple life is granted to us by birthright: labor has been neatly divided and each worker or bureaucrat carries out her single task; all places adopt the easily-navigated garb of the same no-place; the choice for a national leader is rapidly—miraculously—narrowed down to two; all the plants on a field are genetically identical, their harvest of undeviating diameter and hue distributed to everytown’s Wal-Mart. No, the curiosity that pushes Ian and me and other young urbanites toward heirloom sheepherding or subsistence farming is the need to taste complexity.

And in the end, how *could* we expect simplicity or innocence out of work with an animal like the Navajo-Churro? The Navajo-Churro is the mutton and wool of conquistadors *and* the clever appropriation of an indigenous culture, saving the Dinè from a mass cultural extinction. The Churro now signifies an endangered lifeway, environmental stewardship, local economies, and a reprieve from the standardized animals of agribusiness, and yet she remains an irrevocably exploited body, chewing up the desert before being herself eaten and fleeced for human pleasure. And thus when the Dinè elder explains *Dibé bi’ iiana’*—Sheep Is Life—she is speaking also of the lives of vampires and werewolves, skin-walkers and she-gods; she speaks of the life that is raided out of conquistador hands, fed desert scrub, life that is fleeced and toiled over to keep a baby warm or make an unexpected fortune from the elite at a Park City auction. Life that is anything but innocent: life that can be sacrificial, can be property, can be coerced—and can even still be wild. Suckling we fitful undead.

At another moment in history, perhaps, my writing about our nonhuman others could be an act of simplicity, nostalgia, romance. But in a world where hierarchies are

solidifying and control tightening—where my phone might be tapped because I’m known to attend vegan potlucks, and the new line of green products from Clorox has my personal purchasing niche distinctly in focus—the stakes of our interspecies relationships are too weighty for sentimentality. We simply cannot afford it. Jean Baudrillard, speaking of our relationships with domesticated animals, ties together our “affection and social charity” toward animals (including our ‘humane’ belief that animals are “no longer worthy of punishment and of death”) with our penchant to force on them “experimentation and extermination like meat from the butchery” (135). In doing this, he writes, “we have made of them a racially inferior world” (135). Whether domesticated animals are made racially inferior or other races are subsumed into ‘inferior’ species, the logic of domination holds steady: with the prisoners of Guantanamo Bay, we will not hold a trial to determine guilt, as though they were simply human—just as we held no trials for the Japanese prisoners of Topaz, Utah. “Justice” for the “terrorist” body, for the racially inferior body, for the tortured body? Laughable. We may as well demand that each veal calf have a fair hearing before slaughter. Instead, we kennel and leash our prisoners. Or worse, turn them into the animal dominated by the animal we dominate: we make the German Shepherd snarl at the prisoner’s face as he would at an old ewe.

This means that if I am to care about the horrors of my day, I can’t carry on the old activist tradition of parsing out the species lines more clearly, hollering that we must stop treating people like animals, as though each act of torture is merely a taxonomic mistake. Instead, I must read these relations of everyday violence, which is the violence of colorful grocery stores and tidy science labs—in Agamben’s terms, the violence

toward the beings which “can be killed but not sacrificed” (8)—where I can ask why treating someone “like an animal” necessarily requires this steady-handed torture.

The sheep Ian and I aim to work with are the purity of God and the butt of bestiality wise-cracks; the peace of rural living and the hungry mouths demolishing wild lands and justifying the massacre of coyote, bear, wolf. They are our ancient co-evolver and our latest clone. Our lullabies and baby-boots and fodder for our slaughterhouse. This animal is as inscrutable and ambiguous as the West itself, both palimpsests written cross-wise with the nostalgia of shining intentions, brutal building of empire, honest tries at purity, clever side-stepping of hegemony’s death-traps. Yes, we escape into the West as we escape to sheep, but the animal and the land are all of a piece. And as Arches National Park is of the same cloth as our slew of inanely-named gated subdivisions, so white and wooly lambs must be castrated, and probably, you will need to do it with your teeth.

Writing from Sheep-bodies: An Explanation

I trace an old and honored tradition. Sheep skin provided the *tabula rasa* for many of our most cherished concepts. Sheep cells sucked up the ink for our loftiest tomes on Man and God, the animal backing of all the worldviews that never gave a thought to animals except to point to them as tragic negations of our own fullness. We used sheep for this task because they are the animal most bred for unadulterated whiteness, reassuring us that we have the Word: they *are* the blank page (Ryder 730). Now vellum gives way to banks of black, wide-screen computers where I wheedle about in internet databases and effortlessly, endlessly revise my sentences. I make a pretense at

compassion, but the biggest lie would be to suggest that I am no longer writing on animal backs, that my use of animals now is merely metaphorical.

If our extraction and energy economies are deeply tied to animal suffering, animal extermination, then I can only make one weak justification for my work. What I mean to do here is suggest that those of us in the Humanities can no longer speak of the ‘Human Condition’ as separate from our dialogues with nonhuman voices, those upon whom we have relied, whom we have feared, whom we have romanticized or disparaged, those with whom we have co-evolved, those we work with and for—those who belie my flippant use here of the term ‘we.’ In our economic policy that universally commodifies the bodies of nonhumans, in a legal system that denies them rights, and, most distressingly, in a social milieu that seems to regard the analysis of these speciesist factors to be frivolous or fringe, I see a world wounded by the belief that *Homo sapiens* exist in a realm clearly separated from (and superior to) the ‘rest’ of the physical and biological world. Crafting an ‘animal hermeneutic’ of human labor implies pecking at the illusion of human cultural and physical boundedness. Just as our skin-bound bodies are home to more nonhuman cells than human cells, just as our veins are swimming canals for the antibody macrophages responsible for our good health, so our human-to-human interactions are persistently interrupted and guided by the vast menagerie of species we call food or pests, companions or property (see Lingis). Biological ontology leaks: identity boundaries double-back and tangle, and while simplifying these lines may be useful, it may also be, for all of us, devastating.

In the following thesis, I follow several historical and present situations where *Ovis aries* wanders across, meddles with, and co-creates the lines of the ‘Human Story,’

to ask what domestic sheep can teach us concerning our concepts of ‘work’ and ‘property’ in the Intermountain West. Because sheep bodies cross through rugged mountains, fashion shows, holy writ, science labs—in truth, I can’t find the physical or conceptual space so civil or so wild as to be untouched by this animal—my work applies the tricks of several disciplines, including literary theory, philosophy, ecology, and environmental history, as well as ethnographic work and personal narrative garnered while spending time around sheep and shepherders. Throughout, I have also been guided by the methodology of the University of Utah’s Environmental Humanities program, with its emphasis on ecological values and the inclusion of indigenous voices. My guiding rule has been to take seriously Carleton Dallery’s warning that “those who live and work *only* in language, in the coming-and-going of words, may risk departing truth to the extent that their talk excludes work and discipline within other sensory and kinetic modes in relation to concrete, resistant domains such as animals, the soil, and their own bodies” (250). I have aimed to let my notes be nettle-stained, my concepts smudged in lanolin.

This is the reason for my particular focus on viewing sheep through the lens of *work*. It is clear to me that theorizing about our animal others—even in the realm of the humanities—can no longer take place merely on laptops and in lecture halls. Such an approach too easily breeds, on the one hand, the blind cruelty of philosopher Peter Carruthers, positing that nonhuman animals have only “non-conscious experience” (or, for that matter, Heidegger’s reading of other species as “poor in world”); and on the other hand, the modern adoration of animals—a kind of ‘animal chivalry’—which worships a nostalgic concept at a distance from actual mollusks and fleas and two-toed sloths, and

thus stands squeamish before inconvenient biological facts such as parasites and predators. To speak of animals, I have tried to fish my words out of bodily co-existence, at its most banal, quotidian, domestic level, the level of labor.

Another reason for focusing on work is that it forces me to consider daily human necessity, resisting the abstract view of nature that has no place for human hunger. While I can understand the urgent push for justice and compassion toward other species that would strip humans of their claim on the landscape, I worry that it too frequently expresses itself in hatred toward the most vulnerable humans—toward women in the Global South whose birthrates anger us, toward subSaharan Africans whose firewood-gathering has been blamed for the desert's expansion, and toward the workers all over the world who are daily growing, herding, and harvesting the materials we daily use, for little pay in return. As a white, educated, economically privileged environmentalist I don't want to skip over questions of race, class, and gender in an investigation of 'environmental sustainability.' By reaching the animal through the lens of the low-wage labor that feeds us, I can begin asking what sustainability means both ecologically and culturally, for all us animals, in recognition that our well-being is bound up together.

I have chosen sheep to the exclusion of other species not because I deem them the most important beasts to incorporate into the humanities discourse. On the contrary, I believe each plant, animal, fungal, microbial life form holds stories we must discover and give voice to, as a diversity of 'nonhuman hermeneutics' can only enrich our reading of our own species and its cultures, and begin to clarify the startling web of connections present in our "more-than-human-world" (Abram). Rather, I stick with sheep because these beasts provide a focus appropriate to specific questions I have about the

intertwining meanings of property, labor, alienation, citizenship, race and species within the ideological milieu in which I have been raised as a fifth-generation Utahan. Sheep are significant to us not merely as a symbol of the condescension of God or the idiocy of the masses: they were the first obvious casualties of the nuclear radiation that hammered my home. Their deaths in Skull Valley inspired a nerve-gas-detecting alarm system in the west desert, and their continued, hungry lives worry the local environmental community who would preserve both wild lands and wild predators. The lives of sheep and those who labor with them are caught up in our local genocides and resistances, as well as in current tensions between (brown) workers and (white) bosses, and between the ('conservative') desire for land-owners to have complete autonomy over the pieces of ecosystems they hold title to, and the ('liberal') drive for state and federal enforcement of use-limits.

The interspecies story, like our stories of work and war, is easily cast as clear patterns of power and oppression. Just as the Christian God placed 'good' sheep on his right hand and 'bad' goats on his left—an irrevocable bestiary of salvation and damnation—sheep reveal cultural hierarchies which can be simultaneously unexplainable and devastatingly clear. Most obvious is the species hierarchy: we find it right and fitting that humans should fleece and slaughter sheep to fulfill human desires (each death occurring without producers, consumers, or state officials even *questioning* whether such a sacrifice is necessary), while we would consider sheep monstrous and worthy of extinction for retaliating in kind (if the state of predator species on this earth isn't sufficient proof of this, we can read this penchant in many a sci-fi narrative where heroes wipe out entire species of human-exploiting aliens). This hierarchy-building bleeds

further: rancher and ecocritic Barney Nelson explores how domesticated animals are gendered female, while their wild counterparts are rhetorically male. This gender coding complements disparate notions of the nobility, freedom, and beauty ascribed to, say, elk vs. cows, or bighorn sheep vs. domesticated sheep. Such a disparity is not far from economic theories which disparage—and policies which punish—(female or feminized) subsistence farmers and herders, while upholding the value of (male) industrial laborers.

There are further hierarchies among those involved in sheep work. Clearly, some people own the sheep and the land upon which they graze, while others are hired at below-minimum wage to live and work with the sheep. As Charlie LeDuff shows in his exploration of racial politics at a slaughterhouse, those humans who must work closest with animal bodies almost always come from the most disenfranchised races—an explanation for why, while ranch owners in Utah seem ubiquitously white, the men living in sheep trailers are Peruvian, Basque, Mexican, Navajo, Chilean, Nepali. As we trace these systems and rhetorics, we see domestic sheep signifying *lack*, a lack of power. These animals, and the humans most closely associated with them, are the bodies to whom *we can do anything*. They are docile, they are dumb, and thus if God arrives as a lamb, he is a God we will likely torture.

This list of categorizations and hierarchies, while useful in revealing our undeniably exploitative treatment of another species and disenfranchised humans, is incomplete without an adjacent reflexive narrative: how humans are changed by the sheep they work with—or, how those at the bottom end of the power scale might hold wily and unexpected sway over those at the top. Human ideas change sheep bodies, such as when 18th-century sheep-keeper Robert Bakewell announced to the world that he

actually *thought up* New Leicesters before breeding them, causing others to compare selective breeding to an engineer inventing a new machine (Franklin 103). And yet, simultaneously, sheep bodies and behaviors reshape us, not only changing our population densities, our diets and clothes and rates of reproduction, but also shaping our conceptions of what is sacred or vulgar, wild or civil, Us or Them.

Setting aside the question of whether the symbiosis of sheep-work is best categorized as mutualism or parasitism, it remains clear that our biocultural co-evolution has continued through the sheepish birth of capitalism to the wool-spinning Industrial Revolution, forward to lamb-slaughtering agribusiness and on to Dolly and her ilk of bioengineered and cloned sheep, meaning this co-evolution culminates in the direct manipulation of the very materials of evolution. Our worry and excitement over this latest step belies our deep intuition that our alteration of ovinity always includes an alteration of humanity: we are not simply angsty over genetically modified lambchops. What Dolly changes is not only human culture, as it shifts to accommodate the hyper-micromanagement of animal genetics: in addition to this, Dolly is a threat or a promise of the domestication of our own chromosomes, a fundamental alteration of our own reproduction, life, and death (see Franklin).

It is in this transition from narratives of hierarchy (causal explanation: humans did this to sheep) toward narratives of relationship (dialectic or cybernetic explanation: sheep and humans have shaped each others' existence within a larger context), where the story of sheep-work catches me. Our traditional, human-centric narrative is interrupted, trips on itself, leaves a gap: the gap opens new ways of asking questions of brute beasts and their human neighbors. Sheep move from banal and ordinary creatures, clearly

categorized on the Great Chain of Being,¹ to animals existing in an ambiguous borderland niche where a traditionalist past meets a posthuman future, where the wild world meets the built world, where autonomous beings overlap onto exploitable tools—in general, in the fissures between and along the words “environment” and “humanity.”

To set down some founding provisions of the economic, political, and social systems within which sheep-work emerged, in the following chapter I briefly track some of the historical roles sheep have played in the displacement, alienation and domination of other humans, from domestication to the Mormon conquest of my state. In this trajectory, sheep, embodying cultural ideals of ‘property’ and ‘work,’ show themselves repeatedly as able tools of land-theft and genocide. This analysis then opens the way to explore how these same beasts, and the same attempts to set down the meanings of ‘property’ and ‘work,’ have been necessary for resistance movements to these atrocities. This sets the stage for my second chapter, which explores the forces of oppression in modern sheep-work and its related industries, linking this oppression back to the historical devaluation of food-work. Finally, because I write this in the urgency of ecocide, the privatization of the last remaining peasant commons, and the disappearance of agricultural skills in a forced march to the cities, my last chapter focuses on the paths of resistance brought to light by this analysis of sheep-work. Those same concepts of ‘property’ and ‘work’ which have for millennia been tools in the abuse of both humans and ecosystems open themselves up for radical renegotiation by ‘neo-pastoralists’ and other food activists. This reconceptualizing work, carried out by those in active solidarity with both farmworkers and small farmers, holds out the promise of forming pragmatic,

¹ As Lovejoy explains such a chain, sheep are below God, the angels, ‘Man,’ the wild animals, and even those domesticated animals who are “useful” such as horses and dogs. They are above nonmammals, plants, and inanimate materials

functioning communities where ecological care is born out of human egalitarianism and joined labor on the land, rather than through the urban-centered coerciveness of federal mandates which seek to 'preserve' Nature by clearing 'wilderness' of those who work there.

CHAPTER 1

PECUNIARY HISTORIES

“The labourers are first driven from the land, and then come the sheep.

-Karl Marx, *Capital* (470)

Hope in the Bookends of Copenhagen

In the spring before the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, three hundred representatives from indigenous communities around the world met in Anchorage, Alaska to draft a global action plan. In addition to demanding a rapid decrease in greenhouse gas emissions, the summit’s participants asserted the need for the lands and seas supporting indigenous communities to be recognized as “Food Sovereignty Areas,” reserved to “provide the resources necessary for our collective survival in response to the climate crisis,” and free of “extractive industries, deforestation and chemical-based industrial food production systems (i.e., contaminants, agro-fuels, genetically modified organisms)” (Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit 4).

The spring following the failure of Copenhagen, fifteen thousand people from 126 countries met in Cochabamba, Bolivia for the “World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth.” They too crafted a document on the issue of food production, in which they denounce “conventional agropecuaria” (a term combining agriculture and animal husbandry) as a major

contributor to the climate crisis, as well as causing “erosion, salinization, acidification, soil compaction and the destruction of natural biological diversity” (Working Group 17). Aligning themselves against the forces of “globalized capitalist production,” “privatization processes,” “big business,” and “corporations and hedge funds,” this group likewise lists “food sovereignty” as a means of both ending climate change and ensuring justice toward the poor and indigenous. They define food sovereignty as

the right of peoples to control their own seeds, lands, water and the production of food, ensuring, through agro-ecological, local, and culturally appropriate production, the peoples’ access to sufficient, varied and nutritious foods complementary to the Mother Earth, emphasizing autonomous (participative, communitarian and shared) production of all nations and people. (Working Group 17)

These documents clarify that, for many people on this earth, the environmental quandaries of our time are inseparable from food quandaries, making it imperative for us to understand food-work within the narrative of ecological health, human rights, and the material and spiritual well-being of peasant and indigenous communities.

This is the starting point I take in my analysis of sheep-work. As the second document I have cited reiterates, conventional food-work is stained with ecocide and human displacements, providing both the economic impetus and technological ability for empires and transnational corporations to uproot indigenous and peasant communities. And yet these documents speak also of healing through food-work, as though we could actually follow out Holderlin’s promise that “Where danger is, grows / The saving power also” (qtd. in Heidegger 310).

Before we rush too quickly to that saving power, let me describe the danger. I find danger in a food system that, in the U.S. alone, unthinkingly slaughters ten billion mammals and birds every year—animals which lived their short lives in astonishingly

inhumane (and unanimal) conditions (Humane Society of the United States 2). Danger rests in the historical and current decimation of forests for pastures and animal feed crops, as well as water pollution from antibiotics and hormones and the ocean's eutrophied 'dead zones' from animal waste runoff, as well as the fertilizers and herbicides used in growing food for livestock (Steinfeld et al. xxi-xxii). Danger is in a food system, backed by a neoliberal political agenda and transnational capitalism, which appropriates the traditional farming plots and grazing lands of the poor for increased cash crop or market meat production. And danger as well peeks out from a well-intentioned environmental movement which is too weak to challenge the devastation caused by corporate food-making and so focuses on winnable battles, against the most vulnerable, pushing for the use of state force to displace indigenous and peasant communities from their biologically rich homelands—and thus motivating the participants of these conferences to desperately defend their right to food sovereignty.

Amid so many worries over agricultural empire, this chapter focuses on one corner of the history: how domesticated sheep and sheep-workers were partners in a series of uprootings and alienations, from the peasant evictions of Europe to the conquest of America. This sheep-focus on histories of oppression highlights the animal underpinnings of our banal concepts of 'work' and 'property,' exploring how domesticated animals have been used in the service of these ideals to devastate ecosystems and subjugate other humans. From this platform, I examine in greater detail a case-study from the Euroamerican invasion of my own state, Utah. By seeing Utah's Black Hawk War (the largest and longest open conflict between Natives and invaders in Utah) as a war about—and waged through the bodies of—European livestock, we can

begin sketching how genocide and ecocide—and the economic and political ideologies which justify them—are tied up in the actions of every-day food-work.

Property and the Origins of Sheep

At first glance the words ‘sheep’ and ‘money’ have little in common. While the vast majority of people in the U.S. spend the greater part of their lives in quest of a regular supply of money as a basic condition for life, bumbling animal bodies like sheep are largely the concern of a small demographic of ranchers who ultimately trade them for money. For the rest, sheep are largely irrelevant. Money, ostensibly an inanimate object, shows itself to be surprisingly lively—coursing, bodiless, across the globe, altering magnetic traces which make or break whole nations, tirelessly working for its owner, making more of itself. Sheep, living animals, are inert by comparison, tied down to the messy logistics of embodiment. To make the animal again as relevant as a paycheck, I turn to the Latin term which links the two: *pecunia*, the word for ‘money,’ which grows out of the Latin term for ‘flock.’ Similarly, the word ‘capital’ derives from *caput*, signifying a head of livestock (Ryder 649). In the cultural roots of the West, sheep show up as a first commodity, beasts whose bodily use-value at some point and in some places flipped over to abstract exchange-value.

Nineteenth-century sheep researcher William Youatt writes of the Biblical Abraham purchasing a well with seven ewe-lambs, noting that these animals “were *the money* which he paid for this spot of ground; or ‘they were that commodity of known value and general demand which stood in the stead of money,’ proving how universally they had spread, and how generally their value was acknowledged” (15). In a footnote,

Youatt records passages in Homer which note a cauldron as worth twenty sheep, a goblet worth twelve lambs, etc., concluding that “these animals were the means by which exchange or commerce was originally carried on” (Youatt 15). The eighteenth-century Scottish theologian Henry Hunter, also writing on Abraham’s use of lamb-money, sets out a complete bestiary of exchange:

The words belonging to commerce or exchange of commodities, in the Greek language, are mostly derived from the names of certain animals, by means of which that exchange was originally carried on. Thus the word itself which signifies to *truck* or *commute* one kind of goods for another, is derived from that which signifies a *lamb*; the verb which is translated to *sell*, comes from the noun which signifies a *colt* or young horse; the Greek word, which in our language is to *buy* comes from that which signifies *an ass*; the term that denotes *rent* or *revenue*, and that which signifies a *sheep* are of kindred composition and import. (76)

From these recordings in early civilizations, the labor of domesticated sheep was financial, the animals setting out a web of commodity exchange. They were used as bride wealth in marriages, paid as taxes to patriarchs and kings, bartered for land, appropriated by conquering armies (Franklin 91). Sheep-scholar M. L. Ryder writes of a Sumerian “factory system” for wool processing dating before 2000 BC, where tasks were divided among waged laborers (97). Marx even consented that if there *had* been capitalists in antiquity (“though the word does not actually occur among the ancients”), they would be “the nomadic hordes with their flocks on the steppes of Central Asia,” due to their focus on accumulating the original ‘capital’ of livestock (Marx, *Pre-Capitalist* 119). We think of traditionally pastoral cultures as based in nomadic subsistence, and yet in several ancient sheep cultures—including Sumer, Babylonia (a name possibly meaning “Land of Wool” [Ryder 93]), Assyria and Egypt—sheep owners built complex market systems, incorporating universal commodity exchange and wide inequalities in the ownership of the means of production, all focused on the accumulation of sheep-capital.

This ‘capital’ is not accumulated for the sake of so many mutton-roasts and sweaters, but rather to accord to its owners power and status, as sheep bodies become the blank signifiers of an owner’s potentiality, a “uniform currency of prestige” (Graeber *Toward* 169). As such, sheep-capital facilitated systems of fixed hierarchies. Historian Richard Bulliet posits that domesticated animals presented themselves to some cultures as an ideal standard of value and medium of exchange because they facilitated an unequal, long-term accumulation by owners (123). While hunter-gatherer societies are able to remain “fiercely egalitarian” through a careful partitioning of gathered and hunted food, Bulliet posits that the living bodies of animals might have been too difficult to share, providing an opening to class stratification (123). Additionally, while minerals like gold are useful, they do not endlessly reproduce themselves as a flock of sheep can, allowing inequalities in wealth to be easily perpetuated—and exponentially increased—with subsequent generations. We now speak cavalierly of money itself having the ability to make more money, using the language of ownership and control over reproduction which is at the core of domestication (the primal factor of a domesticated animal being their ability to “breed in captivity”). The self-reproducing (and thus eternal) possessions of the pastoralist replace the already-decaying meat of the hunter. In some cultures, an unlimited, growth-oriented financial system is born, and from the start its task is commodifying life and reproductive capacity. Only later could the concept of money be mapped on shiny bits of inanimate matter.

Wealth Disparities and Sheep Displacements

What this means materially is that in those cultures where sheep developed into fungible exchange-units, their existence tended to bifurcate the poor and the rich, becoming the burden of slaves and the fleeces of kings. Anthropologist Sarah Franklin traces out the economic wanderings of the most valuable class of sheep (Merinos) which evolved in Ancient Greece and Rome, where sheep were “bred to clothe the highest social ranks and the emperor” (57). The Merino developed the kind of prestige which later set the foundations for the “earliest monopoly in Europe,” the Spanish Mesta (Franklin 57). In the fourteenth century, as the Spanish monarchy realized it held a monopoly on the production of Merino wool, the entire Spanish economy (and backing political forces) was largely focused on the “growth of Merino wool and the protection of the men who kept the sheep” (Ryder 427). In this interest, the Mesta was formed, a corporation of gentlemen sheep-ranchers who ‘governed’ the Merino wool industry through profligate use of what might now be termed ‘eminent domain.’ They forbade peasant farmers from fencing their crops away from a gentleman’s sheep (or trying to ward them off in any other way), and granted land rights to any Mesta member who had grazed animals on a field for a few months, even without notifying the field owner (Franklin 57, Ryder 427). Ryder says of this period:

Sheep had an enormous influence on Spanish society. They created a wide gulf between the ‘gentlemen’ owners of flocks, who were allowed to graze sheep virtually everywhere, and the socially inferior farmers who were powerless to prevent the devastation of their land by the sheep. This led to a social distinction in Spain in which ‘gentlemen’ would starve rather than work with their hands. (426-427)

While this isn’t to blame sheep for human inequalities, Ryder’s point reminds us that the intangible power of human institutions such as class stratification, rather than

originating from gods or human ideas, is founded in materials, in this case the material bodies of other species. Spain is not the only country where sheep played a significant role in increasing wealth disparity and politically sanctioning the abuse of the poor.

Thomas More, writing a radical fantasy of egalitarian communities, has his foreign narrator explain the conditions in England this way:

your sheep, that are naturally mild, and easily kept in order, may be said now to devour men, and unpeople not only villages, but towns: for wherever it is found that the sheep of any soil yield a softer and richer wool than ordinary, there the nobility and gentry, and even those holy men the abbots, not contented with the old rents which their farms yielded, nor thinking that they, living at their ease, do no good to the public, resolve to do it hurt instead of good. They stop the course of agriculture, destroying houses and towns, reserving only the churches, and enclosed grounds that they may lodge their sheep in them. (15)

This character speaks of the “miserable people” thrown off their lands, selling all of their farming implements and animals for small sums. “When that little money is at an end (for it will be soon spent), what is left for them to do but either to steal, and so to be hanged (God knows how justly!), or to go about and beg? and if they do this they are put in prison as idle vagabonds, while they would willingly work but can find none that will hire them” (16). More’s narrator traces this lack of honest work to the simple arithmetic of shepherding: “One shepherd can look after a flock, which will stock an extent of ground that would require many hands if it were to be ploughed and reaped” (16). More here introduces us to two vices—idleness and theft—which prove to be a recurring complaint in sheep histories, vices which the powerful attribute toward those they have uprooted, as explored in the next chapter. In opposition to this sheep-maintained social stratification, More’s imagination outlines an absurd dream-world where the worth of a person is divorced from the fineness of their woolens, noting, “for, how fine soever that thread may be, it was once no better than the fleece of a sheep, and that sheep was a

sheep still for all its wearing it” (More 62). To confront an abusive hierarchy, More jabs at fancy sheep, who both bear the textile symbol of hierarchy and literally chew down the small property of the poor.

More isn’t the only one to wonder over England’s new man-eating sheep. Later, Karl Marx would point to this moment as a crucial turning point for the world, positing that the changes in the English sheep industry in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were the “prelude of the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production” (*Das Capital* 789). At this time, feudal lords (“in insolent conflict with king and parliament”) forced peasants off the land in order to keep sheep there, and take advantage of high wool prices. This “new nobility” was “a child of its time, for which money was the power of all powers,” notes Marx. “Transformation of arable land into sheep-walks was, therefore, its cry” (*Das Capital* 789). Franklin adds “it is the mercantile activity and enterprise associated with a principal pastoral product, wool, that enables a fund or store of profit to facilitate the emergence of ‘agriculture proper,’ or what might be called capitalized agriculture.” It is thus largely sheep-work that “establishe[d] the crucial infrastructure for the emergence not only of industrial capitalism but the displaced proletariat, the colonial settler, and the expansion of the British empire” (Franklin 54). Displaced proletariat, colonists, expanding empires: sheep, these pecuniary creatures, are tangled tight in the lives of the uprooted.²

² That modern capitalism should sprout from sheep-work is perhaps just a historical quirk—an accident of the Flemish textile market. And yet, taking our animal foundations seriously requires that we pay closer attention to how they are involved in the upbringing of human ideologies, rather than brushing them off as simple pawns in the dialectic of human ideas. If Marx’s analysis of the foundations of capitalism is correct, it means that fledgling capitalism was nourished by the wool off a sheep’s back, which is material grown with the help of very little (human) labor on the land—but requiring more extensive industrial labor to create a finished product which someone would purchase. Unless we are to also buy into the view that modern capitalism is a historical inevitability, it is reasonable to assume that without the “infrastructure” provided by the curly fur of domesticated sheep, we would today be witnessing different economic forces

Throwing peasants off their agricultural land for the sake of sheep gave fledgling capitalism other conditions required for its nourishment, such as “a degraded and almost servile condition of the mass of the people, the transformation of them into mercenaries, and of their means of labour into capital” (Marx *Das Capital* 791-792). Once men and women had no homes, they tended to flood the cities, becoming the new liquid labor force necessary for the industrial revolution. Some few were perhaps rehired as shepherders, newly-minted aliens on home-ground, now paid in the king’s coin instead of the original medium of exchange, animal bodies.

And then there was America. Those who had been stripped of land in England due to the demand of fine fleeces could still shoulder out the darker-skinned residents of distant land-masses. With them, the invaders brought their “portmanteau biota”—including the weed seeds clinging to boots and fur and a flurry of microbes dormant in respiratory and digestive tracts, all pregnant with the possibility of radically reshaping a new hemisphere (Crosby 89). But most obviously, they brought livestock—hardier, coarser versions of the same species that had invaded and occupied their home villages. In wintry New England, sheep were particularly in demand for their wool (Anderson 147). The fledgling colony legislatures did their part, ruling that sheep could pasture on any town common, offering investment insurance or cash bounties to owners, and even in some places exempting the animal from taxation (Anderson 147). Historian Virginia DeJohn Anderson notes “no other domestic animal inspired this kind of protective legislation” (148).

in our lives. This is not to say that sheep single-hoofedly made capitalism: the story of capitalism is also the story of coal, of pine trees, of horses, of nematodes in French topsoil, and more. Our understanding of economic systems is impoverished so long as we do not continuously tie it back to the material forces which shaped its flow.

But the new continent had its hazards: wolves and woods. Sheep had fewer defenses against wolves and bears than did cows, or even pigs. The forests that sheltered these predators were also mutually exclusive with the pasture sheep needed. Even natural pastures required ‘improvement’ before they could be useful to sheep: though nutritive to cows and goats, native grasses were too high-growing and rough for sheep jaws (Anderson 147). The legislatures of New England dutifully offered bounties for wolf heads, organized wolf hunts, and mandated forest-clearing work days, all with a mind for common well-being (Anderson 14). Sheep needs thus guided the fledgling methods of land management of the new continent, providing additional motivation for colonists to eradicate predators, level forests, and radically alter the species composition of America’s grasslands.

The final pesky threat to European livestock on the new continent came from the people already accustomed to living on this land, people who had some nutritional dependence on all those forests now being mown for pastures, as well as on the unfenced cornfields they witnessed being chewed up by wandering and nearly-feral troupes of English animals. Livestock came with a new set of rules, most of which we can presume were somewhat counter-intuitive to Native Americans. For one, these animals were property, not fair game, and it was an immense affront to somebody if even the wildest of these garden-trampling creatures became dinner. Additionally, the onus was almost always on plant-growers to shield their crops from animal hooves and maws—and if that was impossible, to move away.

In sum, livestock became the colonial “advanced guard” for English expansion—as they had been for earlier Spanish invasions on the continent (Anderson 243). In

Anderson's words: "As indispensable to colonial survival as they were inimical to Indian sovereignty, livestock enabled the English to extend their dominion over the New World with remarkable speed and thoroughness" (242). Even though many of the leaders of New England deliberately rejected the kind of private greed which led to the Highland enclosures, domesticated animals were still used for much of the brute force for the task of displacing humans. Those who were indigenous to the continent had no place in these 'commons.' This displacement happened both subtly—as when over-grazing destroyed important food-forest ecosystems—and overtly in the making of multispecies battalions, as when a Maryland planter "repeatedly directed his livestock toward an Assateague town as if they were artillery, intending to inflict widespread devastation" (209). Other New England tactics for getting animals to do the colonizing dirty-work included destroying the fences around Indian cornfields (the very fences that colonists had instructed the natives to build) to allow hungry cows, pigs, and sheep in the area to feed (Anderson 225). Tiffs that originated as disputes over killed or stolen livestock were played out on domesticated bodies—as livestock were the front line of empirical expansion, they were also the most likely targets of Indian retaliation.

If the archetype of the Indian livestock raider is buried deep in our invader consciousness, perhaps it is because the animals meant more to Europeans than simple walking pantries. Raiding and killing livestock in these "guerrilla campaign[s] of opposition to English expansion" (Anderson 230) meant dismantling the colonists' weapons—both their literal land-grabbing tools and their symbols of prowess, their ungulate "advertisements of English cultural superiority" (Anderson 229). One sacred value which the English embodied in livestock was the ideal of private property—of

which the ear-marking, fence-posting English considered themselves the tidy guardians, in opposition to the obscenely communalist Indians. New England invaders held domesticated animals at the center of their economic system (as Anderson puts it, “the conflation of cattle and capital was complete”) (Anderson 143). In 1790, Samuel Deane noted with some surprise that when farmers in New England used the word “stock” they weren’t talking about all the various forms of wealth a farmer could employ to improve the operation, but “only live stock, or the beasts that are kept upon a farm” (Deane 266-67). Capital (as livestock) was thus synonymous both with a moral imperative and with the tools of genocide.

Domesticated animals played a further role in the acquirement and adjudication of property in these tender years of English habitation, as they were central to the notion of *work*. Land and animals were considered by English law to be *res nullius* (‘empty things’), and thus common property until they were “put to use”: Anderson explains that “by investing labor in the land, a person could stake a claim to private ownership” (Anderson 78). This means the uprooted English could make land their own by working it—if they knew the rules for what counted (in the minds of the powerful) as work. Colonist John Winthrop suggested that meaningful labor included “inclosing and peculiar manurance”—putting up a fence and/or running ‘owned’ animals through a spot of land until it became fertile with animal dung (Winthrop 140). While such activity was *labor*, bestowing a civil right to own land, hunting wild animals on a piece land, as the American Indians did, was clearly a form of *recreation* (after all, such was the occupation of idle gentlemen in England), and therefore the Indians didn’t have any claim of ownership on much of the land required for their survival—though they were in most

cases granted ‘ownership’ of their cornfields (Winthrop 141). Winthrop entertains the objection that his group has “noe warrant to enter vpon that Land which hath beene soe longe possessed by others,” only to conclude with the argument that because the Natives “inclose noe Land, neither have any setled habytation, nor any tame Cattle to improve the Land by” the English pilgrims have a ‘civil’ claim to that property, which trumps the Indians’ ‘natural rights’ (141).

In the words of Winthrop and other apologists for New England settlement, the occupiers refer to their definitions of work as though what they are saying is obvious and intuitive, perhaps not themselves recognizing the political reasons for such definitions—just as the Spanish Mesta had political reasons for considering sheep-grazing as more meritorious land-laboring than growing crops. The emphasis on enclosure for the sake of domesticated animals is clearly a child of the aristocratic land-grabs of England. The new occupiers of New England, some of whom had been displaced by those very aristocrats, show themselves to have been convinced by the logic used by the powerful against the peasantry: the enclosure of land for the sake of sheep and cows is the highest in the hierarchy of land-use, and confers its operatives the ultimate claims to land. Both in Europe and in America, the work of beasts of burden wasn’t just to plow fields and provide food—they were also employed to bear English concepts of work, property, capital—to embody the irrefutable logic of empire.

Of course, on the other side of the continent, Spanish invaders and Natives had already commenced similar animal-antagonism, much of it revealing similar tropes about the role of animal capital. In the book *A Plague of Sheep*, Elinor Melville writes of the “ungulate irruption” in Mexico as a “more prosaic, less swashbuckling, less colorful

aspect of conquest” (Melville 1). Melville notes that the introduction of domesticated sheep to the New World

involved not only the addition of exotic species but also a completely alien perception of the natural resources and their use; indeed, it involved the formation of completely new systems of production. The landscapes not only looked different, with new and different animals that radically changed the vegetative cover, but access to and exploitation of the natural resources were changed as well. (8)

As Daniel Richter puts it in his history of New England from the perspective of the Natives, it was “not ownership itself, but the *meaning* of ownership” that “set eastern Indians and western Europeans apart” (54). While Natives were surely familiar with the rights to live or farm or hunt on a certain piece of land, the inflexible property of the English, tied to the accumulation of a category of beings which had never before been possessions (animals), likely appeared to the Natives as embarrassingly “anti-social” (Richter 52). This sheep-invasion wasn’t simply a conquest of land: it was a conquest of the idea of production (or, more simply, of work), and thus a conquest of an ideology of finance and labor. And all this abstract, ideological work was carried out through the mundane medium of beast-bodies.

Animal Property as a Taboo Body

It’s helpful here to engage with current anthropological theory on the meaning of property. The efforts of David Graeber on the anthropology of property helps clarify how perplexing the role of livestock would be to a hunting community who had never made living ungulates their personal property. In an attempt to understand modern phenomena of personal property in the West, Graeber plumbs the classic texts of anthropologists exploring non-Western cultures, believing that these explanations can be

reflected back to analyze our own cultural quirks. Graeber describes the common western category of ‘property’ as a feature of “avoidance relationships”—a technical term which has been used to describe some relationships in indigenous societies in the South Pacific, but rarely applied to the ‘First World’ (“Manners 45). Avoidance relationships often occur when those on the upper end of a hierarchy (frequently ‘representatives’ of those below them as their chiefs, bosses, lords) mark themselves off as distinct from the ‘masses’ by defining themselves as a “collection of abstract properties” rather than a specific, earthy anatomy (“Manners” 45). The ‘masses’ then show respect for authority figures through actions like averting their eyes, referring to them by means of titles rather than specific names, and most simply by staying away from them. As a prime example of the results of avoidance relationships, Graeber cites ethnographies of the New Zealand Maori, and the way their use of *tapu* is similar to the Western world’s use of ‘property’:

Slaves had no [*tapu*] (they were others’ property). Neither did most women (since women could not own property). Otherwise, the extent of one’s *tapu* varied with social position. The higher up the social scale, the more *tapu* one had. A chief’s *tapu* for instance extended to all of his possessions: all of them were set apart, just as he was set apart, from the ordinary world, and it would be as dangerous for a commoner to touch the chief’s things as to touch the chief himself. [. . .] His property was an extension of his person, and his person was set apart from all the world. (“Manners” 22)

Far from being unique to the Maori, Graeber suggests that a system of a sacred-self-extension creating personal property is common wherever hierarchy abounds (we could consider the English nobles who were in significant ways synonymous with their estates). In Europe, these notions of sacred property, once relevant only to the most elite, were popularized through the campaigns of a rising capitalist middle class, creating a mass generalization of the avoidance relationship and, correspondingly, a broader notion

of private property—which explains why colonists would arrive on these shores with a firmly-held belief in the sacredness of their animal property, and the ensuing requirement that all others (particularly the new ‘masses’ of Natives) ‘avoid’ such property (Graeber “Manners” 30-36). When the English defined themselves as property-owners in opposition to communalist Indians, they weren’t simply making an anthropological observation: they were distinguishing themselves as individuals with ‘properties’ (characteristics), while the Indians were a new kind of background residue, a motley crew more or less blending in with the animal, material world.

What this helps us see is that, from the perspective of the Indians, Europeans coming to the New World with owned animals were introducing a system as complex and counterintuitive as Maori *tapu*, whereby certain living fetishes served to create crucial distinctions between individuals, and between ‘civilians’ and ‘savages.’ Further, Graeber explains that in relations of avoidance, whether in New Zealand or Washington DC, it seems to be the case that “the burden of avoidance is always on the inferior party” (“Manners” 40), underscoring just how clearly it was an English power move to insist that the Natives guard their crops against being eaten by English mobile property, instead of the burden being on the English to maintain these boundaries.³ Another anthropologist examined by Graeber notes that eating the Maori chief’s pigs were “tantamount to eating *him*” (Firth 345): perhaps a related notion of sacred self-extension could help explain why the Indians were so forcefully forbidden from eating livestock, and why ignoring

³ Something remarkably similar is occurring in laws concerning genetically modified crops: as it now stands, farmers must guard against patented DNA entering their fields. Even if it is the fault of others that this intellectual property contaminated their crops, they are guilty of theft. Reframing this legal battle in terms of a corporation’s sacred *tapu* might be fruitful means of discussing this mind-bending injustice.

this indictment could result in swift capital punishment—with the English feeling as justified as if they had just dispatched cannibals.

In addition to showing up in the etymology of pecunia, the Latin term for flock is also invoked in the word peculiar. When not denoting the odd and uncanny, peculiar can signify that which is proper to a person, that which a person uniquely owns. Sheep are owned, are a primal form of property, and we have developed an extensive socializing process to make us feel that this system is obvious and just. Yet the sense that animal husbandry is an eccentricity dogs us. Perhaps the deepest peculiarity of this system is what the sociologists have been trying to tell us—that our word ‘property’ never signifies some special relationship between a person and a nonhuman animal or a thing—rather, ‘property,’ like *tapu*, signifies a social relation, a relation between humans (Brace 139, Graeber, “Manners” 21).⁴ If I claim a sheep as my property, this is making no statement concerning my relationship with the ruminant, but is rather a message to other people concerning my sacred self-boundaries. Domesticated animals labor to clarify an owner’s peculiar claim to distinction from—and often supremacy over—others. They intimately mark our identity.

Pieces of property, such as a sheep, move beyond being a bounded, straight-forward possession to create the social hierarchies which determine who is allowed to ‘own’ a place. This is a key to understanding the role of sheep in my own state’s history, where even explicitly anticapitalist settlers utilized these animals for social posturing, as well as for justifying and acting out genocide.

⁴ C. B. MacPherson explains how some of the writing around property in England and New England during this period was explicit on this account: the notion that the right to property is primarily the right to “the exclusion of others” became the foundation for the dominant idea of property both of in the 17th century and today (142, 158).

Peculiar People: Sheep in Utah

Writing about the multispecies conquest of New England, Anderson is clear that she's not explaining a historical quirk. The pattern she sets out:

is thus not so much a tale strictly bounded by time and place as an archetypal story of colonization and westward expansion. Like the first English colonists, subsequent waves of settlers and their American descendants declared that livestock would improve the land and its native inhabitants, but then deployed the animals to displace the Indians. Once the multiplying creatures overran a tract of land, the process began anew. As the advance guard and a primary motive for this relentless expansion, livestock deserve a place in the narrative of American history. In a real sense these creatures, even more than the colonists who brought them, won the race to claim America as their own. (11)

Centuries later and further west, past the continental divide to the Great Basin, we find an anticapitalist, polygamist religious sect, violently driven out of the United States, settling around a salty lake. In my own upbringing as a fifth-generation Utah Mormon, when the existence of Natives was acknowledged, it was generally to tout my ancestors' fair treatment of the groups of Utes, Paiutes, Shoshone, Goshutes, and Navajos they encountered. But even a cursory tracing of the hoofprints through Utah history reveals the same off-kilter calculations of animal capital, working toward genocide.

The Salt Lake Valley is often described by historians as a good toe-hold for the first Mormons because it was a "no-man's-land of sorts," a place "claimed by both the Utes and Shoshones but securely held by neither" (Peterson 49). In standard invasion logic, the land (or the animals, or the trees, or the rivers) belonged to no one, because it belonged to more than one. Nevertheless, this colonizing tale was supposed to be far gentler than others in the region because the Mormons believed they had a special relationship with the people already here. They brought with them the Book of Mormon,

a text supposedly written by the ancestors of the Indians, who were present in America when the resurrected Jesus visited—and who were themselves descendants of the House of Israel. The Book of Mormon prophet Helaman declared of the Indians (or “Lamanites”):

Yea, I say unto you, that in the latter times the promises of the Lord have been extended to our brethren, the Lamanites; and notwithstanding the many afflictions which they shall have, and notwithstanding they shall be driven to and fro upon the face of the earth, and be hunted, and shall be smitten and scattered abroad, having no place for refuge, the Lord shall be merciful unto them. And this is according to the prophecy, that they shall again be brought to the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of their Redeemer, and their great and true shepherd, and be numbered among his sheep. (*Book of Mormon*, Helaman 15: 12-13)

Although the text leaves unclear whether the many prophesied afflictions visiting the Indians were wholly in the past or if they were tasks for the Mormons themselves to carry out, one can assume that Mormons would feel such an honored lineage could not be lightly slaughtered. That the Indians’ redemption is presented in terms of good animal husbandry indicates the capacity for paternalism in the Mormon mindset toward these “brothers”: like domesticated sheep, the Indians were lost if they remained without a master. But further, these verses hint at the nature of the preferred civilizing method—if the ancestors of the Indians knew enough about sheep-raising to use it as a religious metaphor in their sacred histories, then it shouldn’t be too difficult to *return* the Lamanites to their pastoral roots—to domesticate the feral communities back into meaningful work.

Famously, Brigham Young summarized the humane Mormon policy towards Indians as “Feed them, don’t fight them” (Young 79), suggesting that the Mormons (or at least those who gave heed to their spiritual leaders) could comport themselves respectfully toward the Natives. Yet when Indians proved less than eager to be baptized

and adopt the civilizing mission of the Mormons, Young described the position of these “Lamanites” in Mormon cosmology in a subtly different timbre. In April of 1871, several decades into the Indian-proselytizing experience (and following the eye-opening Black Hawk War), Young explained:

There is a curse on these aborigines of our country who roam the plains, and are so wild that you cannot tame them. They are of the house of Israel; they once had the Gospel delivered to them, they had the oracles of truth; Jesus came and administered to them after his resurrection, and they received and delighted in the Gospel until the fourth generation, when they turned away and became so wicked that God cursed them with this dark and benighted and loathsome condition; and they want to sit on the ground in the dirt, and to live by hunting, and they cannot be civilized. (Young 86-87)

Young next described how the Indian Problem could best be solved, perhaps showing his own recognition of the seed of cruelty buried in the humanitarian motto:

And right upon this, I will say to our government if they could hear me, “You need never fight the Indians, but if you want to get rid of them try to civilize them.” How many were here when we came? At the Warm Springs, at this little grove where they would pitch their tents, we found perhaps three hundred Indians; but I do not suppose that there are three of that band left alive now. There was another band a little south, another north, another further east; but I do not suppose there is one in ten, perhaps not one in a hundred, now alive of those who were here when we came. Did we kill them? No, we fed them. [. . .] We brought their children into our families, and nursed and did everything for them it was possible to do for human beings, but die they would. Do not fight them, but treat them kindly. There will then be no stain on the Government, and it will get rid of them much quicker than by fighting them. They have got to be civilized, and there will be a remnant of them saved. I have said enough on this subject. (Young 14: 87)

Die they would. What is remarkable in this passage (apart from its breath-taking cruelty) is Young’s recognition that Mormon foodways—agriculture and livestock production—were themselves tools of genocide—and beyond this, that they were the most efficient tools for the job. Though Young presents this occurring in a somewhat mystical manner, we can speak more materially. When the Mormons touted that their plan was to “feed”

the Indians, they left unspoken their requirements for feeding even themselves: for one thing, they needed large swaths of land to be had without purchase or treaty, which could then be degraded through tree-felling, rampant livestock grazing, and the appropriation of entire rivers for irrigation, all of which would of course displace or annihilate wild fish and game. In a rather elegant equation for domination, in order to have the means to be feeding *anybody* the Mormons decimated Native food supplies, sending the Indians begging of the Mormons to be fed. Their destruction wasn't simply masked by their philanthropy—it was *caused* by it. “Occupation” here conveys fully two meanings: farming is both good honest work, and land-theft.

All this food-work started early: before Brigham Young had even reached the valley, seed potatoes were already in the ground and the creek that was to be named “City” was diverted to irrigate them. By 1850, only three years after arrival, the Mormons had 16,333 irrigated acres, producing 44,000 bushels of potatoes and 107,700 bushels of wheat annually (Worster 77). Environmental historian Donald Worster marvels at such rapid production from a group that had “come without even a fund of experience or capital” (77), yet the fact that these acres also produced nearly five thousand tons of hay that year reminds us that the Mormons *did* have capital, of the oldest and surest sort: livestock to pull the wagons, plow the fields, and provide milk and meat for survival until harvest time.

In true western fashion, cattle dominated both the popular imagination and the historical record whenever livestock are mentioned, even as the sheep industry, providing meat, tallow, milk, and, most importantly, wool, soon “dwarfed the cattle industry in terms of sheer numbers and economic muscle” (Merrell 166). The drier West was ideal

for keeping healthy sheep, and the animals could utilize marginal landscapes and required no further grain to be grown for their winter maintenance—additionally, many of the new converts flocking to ‘Zion’ from Europe had training caring for these animals. Though sheep trickled in with the first pioneers, the industry soon exploded, providing the entire economic basis of several counties—and creating a good living for shepherding families. Sheep thus played a major part in the kind of food-ways which meant Mormon survival, and simultaneous charity and genocide for the Indians.

Even if the Mormon policy was to feed the Indians, this was carried out in the hope that the Indians could soon feed themselves. While Natives who chose to adopt the Mormon religion and lifestyle were referred to as “tame Indians” (Peterson 87), there seemed to be hopes for full-out domestication, as hinted in Helaman’s pastoral prophecy—perhaps it was even hoped that like these obedient flocks the humble Natives could actually become *productive* for their master. In 1855 Garland Hurt, a federal Indian agent visiting Utah, proposed to Brigham Young his vision of creating “Indian farms,” where the natives would be schooled in the arts of plowing, planting grain, and keeping livestock (Farmer 90). The Mormons—and the US Government—set out to teach the Indians *how to work*, and how to own property. Even still, historians writing about this enterprise are wont to repeat the surprising cliché that the newly-arrived invaders were teaching Indians how to be “self-sufficient” (see the film *Utah’s Black Hawk War*). Three Indian farms were established near Fillmore, Manti, and Spanish Fork, conveniently leaving some of the region’s best pasture land—swaths around Utah Lake which had supported the largest and most permanent Indian settlements—available for the livestock of Mormon settlers. Some grain, seed potatoes, and cattle were

distributed to the farms, but locust plagues and a lack of funds from either the US Government or the Mormons helped speed the farms' demise. In under five years the dream of teaching the Indians 'self-sufficiency' was abandoned, and the Farms became mere campgrounds the Indians were "allowed" to use while "visiting" their one-time home grounds (Peterson 103). The Indian agent over the region said of the starving, disease-inflicted Utes on the Farm, "It was a common circumstance to find them frozen to death," while another agent reported to his superiors in 1862, "I am strongly in the faith that these Indians here are worse off to Day, than if they had never seen or herd of a Government Agent" (qtd. in Farmer 100).

Before the Farms were even attempted, Young sent a report to the federal government requesting help in removing the Indians from Utah territory, explaining "We would have taught them [the Indians] to plow and sow, and reap and thresh, but they prefer idleness and theft" (qtd. in Farmer 82). The Farms' subsequent failures were seen as proof that the Indians would cling irrevocably to these pet vices of idleness and theft, rather than fulfill the simple task of transforming en masse into a Mormon congregation (through rapid appropriation of the language, religion, agriculture, and social mores of the invaders). Once more, for these colonists on the fringes of empire, work and property (and the corresponding deadly sins of idleness and theft) were embodied in livestock, and for one more settler saga these beasts became roaming battlegrounds.

Historian John Peterson asserts that the earliest Mormon settlers tried peaceful coexistence with the native inhabitants, "But," he laments, "the herds of cattle and horses the newcomers brought with them were a constant temptation to the large number of Timpanogos Utes who lived in nearby Utah Valley to the South" (49). That the animals

are referred to here as a *temptation*—rather than, say, food, or rent for tracts of land—warns us that this is a morally-charged moment, as the property of the ‘hard-working’ invaders is coveted by ‘lazy thieves,’ insulting all our grasshopper-ant truisms. Less than two years after their arrival, Mormon militia-men made their first incursion into Utah Valley, seeking retribution for the disappearance of livestock in the West Jordan area. They ambushed a group of Utes in what is now Battle Creek Canyon and killed four adult males (Farmer 62). Three days later, several eager Mormons announced their intention to settle in the rich pastures of Utah Valley in order to provide food for “famished cattle” (Peterson 50).

Though these first Mormon inhabitants were made by the Timpanogos Utes to “swear by the sun that [they] would not drive the Indians from their lands, nor take away their rights,” they sited their first settlement—Fort Utah—on the spot of “the great annual gathering place for all the Ute bands of the valleys for two hundred miles, east and south” (qtd. in Peterson 51). This was where the braiding Provo River emptied into Utah Lake, where spawning trout and June sucker (now endangered) would fill the waterway “from bank to bank as thick as they could swim” (qtd. in Peterson 51, see also Stevenson). Historian Jared Farmer has done remarkable work documenting the shift in Utah Valley from one tightly-woven human-animal society (Utes and fish) to another (Mormons and livestock), taking note of the Mormons’ ecological violences which killed thousands of Natives through starvation and epidemic. Most historians treat such deaths as a matter of course: when they speak of “violence” or “conflict” in the region, they are generally talking about guns, cannon shrapnel, and arrows. However, the fact that even these more commonly-told conflicts erupt over—and by means of—livestock, suggests that even this

more obvious violence isn't truly about religious difference, spectacular variances in ideologies, or blind blood-lust. Rather, livestock battles suggest that the true work of invasion and genocide takes place in mundane, everyday, food-chain violence, where the first injuries are caused not by guns but by tree-felling axes, invasive grasses, and ruminant jaws.

When explaining the first conflicts between these two groups on the shores of Utah Lake, historians tend to write about the murder of a Timpanogos Ute whom the settlers called "Old Bishop." The standard story goes that in August of 1849, three settlers shot Bishop in the head because he was wearing a stolen shirt (textile proof of his "laziness and theft"), after which they disemboweled him and filled his body with rocks before throwing him in the river. His resurfaced body was found by his kinsmen. Also to resurface, thanks to Farmer's work, is an alternative motive for Old Bishop's murder, which suggests an opposing direction of thievery. Farmer follows the account of a Mormon settler in the region who recalls an agreement between the two communities, whereby the Timpanogos band of Utes wouldn't kill livestock if the Saints didn't kill wild animals. In this account, Old Bishop met his death when he caught Mormons hunting deer and objected (Farmer 67). Regardless of what actually induced the gruesome murder, this event makes clear that on the frontier 'property'—in both inanimate and animal form—carries the explanatory weight for violence.

Old Bishop's rock-filled corpse, and the ensuing lack of investigative justice on the part of the Mormons, spurred a rash of livestock raiding by the Utes, leaving the Mormons sixty cows the lesser (Peterson 52). One settler reported, aghast, that the Utes "bid Defiens to the Mormans and Sade they wolde Eete Mormon Beefe wen they plesde"

(qtd. in Farmer 70). That winter, Brigham Young sent the Mormon militia to Utah Lake (it is said that he didn't hear the story of Old Bishop until afterward, when his regret came too late) (Peterson 52). Farmer notes wryly that "in order to fight the livestock-stealing Indians, the legionnaires appropriated many horses (for transportation) and cattle (for food) from disgruntled settlers around Salt Lake" (72).

After a battle by the lake, the Mormons sent a "friendly" Indian named Antonga to scout out the Ute village, empty now except for corpses. Antonga then helped the Mormons follow a blood-splattered trail up Rock Canyon, where they recovered the frozen body of Old Elk, a Timpanogos war chief, before stationing themselves to kill or capture many of the returning Utes (Farmer 74). Another militia force headed south, the soldiers no longer bothering to ascertain whether the Indians they were shooting were "friendly" or "hostile" (in the case of the Table Rock Massacre, they cajoled a group out with promises of friendliness before executing all adult males) (Farmer 74). In this "first Indian war," the death count stood at around 103—one white Mormon, 102 Utes (Farmer 76). Farmer summarizes: "The Mormons had made their point: they were prepared to meet specific depredations with general destruction" (76). The almost-exclusive use of the word "depredation" in historical sources to describe the wrongs of the Indians is itself telling: a depredation is "the action of making a prey of," and has been a legal term for the capital offense of driving away the herds and flocks of the powerful. Through "depredations," the Natives were treating livestock the way they treated other ungulates, instead of as sacred representations (and work-imbued proxies) of the Mormons themselves. The ambiguity about whether livestock or the Saints themselves are the

“prey” in such depredations is perfectly in line with Graeber’s reading of property as *tapu* extensions of a sacralized self.

The physical result of the “general destruction” was witnessed by Antonga, called by the Mormons “Black Hawk.” These experiences surely played a role in his development into a war chief fifteen years later, leading combined Native forces in “the longest, bloodiest, and most damaging conflict between Utah’s white settlers and Indians” (Merrell 168). In particular, one can assume that Black Hawk had learned the depths of the white obsession over domesticated animals, and the insult of the rough equation whereby sixty cows cost the lives of a hundred Indians.

Just as the first Indian war erupted out of the settlement of Utah Valley, the Black Hawk War was ignited by Mormon expansion into the Sevier Valley, one of the last places the Utes could still go to procure food (without attempting to beg or steal from Mormons) (Peterson 112). The Mormons recognized that instead of supporting the remaining Utes, this valley could support domesticated animals—boosters cheered that it could be “the finest country for wintering stock in Utah” (qtd. in Peterson 113). Brigham Young even complained to his son that a “principle cause” of such settlement was nothing other than “greed for land and stock” (qtd. in Peterson 113). By the time that the Apostle Orson Hyde met to negotiate with Ute subchief Sanpitch and other Ute leaders in 1864, there were already Mormon settlements in the Sevier Valley locations of Monroe, Richfield, Glenwod, Salina, Circleville, and Panguitch. Perhaps confident in Mormon control of the land and assuming the Utes had already lost, Hyde offered them twenty or thirty animals for a lush valley 150 miles long. The chiefs left, insulted. Hyde moaned

over Sanpitch's "extravagant notions as to the amount of pay he is to receive for the occupancy of . . . the Sevier" (qtd. in Peterson 112).

The tension of the moment is quantified in commodified animal bodies. When livestock raiding broke out in earnest the following spring in central Utah, and Black Hawk's group took 125 animals up Salina canyon, Hyde grumbled "the scamps have already got four times their pay" (qtd. in Peterson 112). Impossibly massive theft by an incorporated group—like a Church or a State stealing a nation's entire land base—somehow easily coexists with text-book notions of barter and free trade: Hyde, after all, was merely examining the current market rate for a plot, and making a shrewd offer in the commonly-accepted tender of living animals. The fact that the land was never 'for sale'; that the Utes were left without real choices as to whether to accept the deal; that the US Government was threatening to forcibly remove the group from the premises and concentrate them on the newly-minted Uintah Valley Reservation (meaning that if they didn't accept this tawdry offering as a 'fair deal' they would likely get nothing); that even miniscule attempts at retribution through taking Mormon livestock were treated as full-fledged acts of war—all this hints that the Sevier Valley negotiations may be a good starting point for asking some pointed questions about 'free trade' as actually enacted across cultures and socio-economic gradients.

Competing ideals of animal property outline the conflict. This was a 'war' where more white herders were killed than white soldiers, where pitched battles were few. Most conflicts took the form of Indians rounding up domesticated animals in the night, often killing herd owners or workers who found them, and Mormons retaliating by killing groups of Indians who were most likely not involved, or at best were forced into helping

Black Hawk's group. In an early raid in Thistle Valley, a Mormon Bishop recalls the ominous sign of "sheep coming into Town without a Shepherd" as the first hint of the attack (qtd. in Peterson 143). Jens Larsen, an immigrant sheepherder, had been killed, along with a dairying family of Mormon dissidents who had settled too far from the town of Fairview.⁵ Raids also spread north of that, to the regions which depended heavily on sheep: Wasatch County saw raids in 1866 and 1867, the largest incident depriving them of hundreds of sheep and cattle and emptying the entire pastoral town of Wallsburg (residents moved into Heber homes for protection) (Merrell 170). Alliances with Navajos, Paiutes, and Apaches allowed the raiding to move south as well, to 'Utah's Dixie,' my own homeground. Though the Utes and Navajo historically had tense relations, the devastation wrought by the forced relocation to the Bosque Redondo reservation ("the Long Walk") encouraged many Navajo escapees to collaborate in the raiding effort. They were led by Manuelito, known to whites as "the most stubborn of all the Navajo Chiefs"⁶ (qtd. in Peterson 216). Peterson explains the animal motivations of this alliance:

[Kit] Carson's operations nearly destroyed Navajo status systems by decimating huge herds of the tribe's cattle and sheep and by displacing thousands of Indians, many of whom were pushed into southern Utah. Since the Navajo social system was much more closely tied to stock ownership than was that of the Utes, it is not surprising that some displaced and indigent Navajos who were anxious to rebuild destroyed herds fell in with Black Hawk. (212)

Though animal ownership stripped resources from Native populations to begin with, it was thus also motivation for Pan-Indian allied resistance.

⁵ Dissidents in Utah Territory reported to news sources in the East that the family had actually been killed by Mormons dressed as Indians, who took the opportunity to teach the unfaithful a lesson. Most historians seem loath to consider this possibility, perhaps having a sense that it's far more impolite to accuse white worshippers unfairly of violence than risk that same mistake with Indians.

⁶ Incidentally, the Navajo-Churro breed survived this era only by being gathered up and looked after by fugitives like Manuelito.

One action of this alliance included driving off the huge herds of St. George resident James Whitmore. Whitmore, who had converted to Mormonism in Texas, brought to Utah a thousand sheep, four hundred cows, and an unspecified number of horses, all of them purported to be “extraordinarily fine” specimens (Peterson 219). Seeing that his animals required more plants than the little desert oasis provided, Whitmore “took up squatter’s rights” in Pipe Springs just south of there, hiring others to watch his animals while he continued living in St. George—meaning he encroached ever further onto untreated Native land, using animals and workers as his proxy colonists (Peterson 219). At the end of 1865, Manuelito and other Indians in league with Black Hawk drove off most of Whitmore’s animals—an act which they had to do piecemeal over a month due to the size of the herds. It also took nearly a month before Whitmore’s foreman noticed—Whitmore was instead notified of the fact by “friendly Indians.” When Whitmore hurried to survey his herds, he and his employee disappeared on the range, never again seen alive (Peterson 220).

A small group of Kaibab Paiutes took the brunt of the punishment for this act, as the St. George branch of the Nauvoo Legion found them in the area with several sheepskins, Whitmore’s coat, and hundreds of dollars. The Paiutes asserted that they had been pressed into service by the Utes and Navajos, receiving these goods as payment for their forced labor, but their ‘wages’ were “evidence enough” of their guilt in the eyes of Whitmore’s family. At least eight Paiute men were killed. One old Paiute man was shot in the femur, but left to live. The next day, a group of the Nauvoo Legion found him with a woman who was attempting to drag him through the snow to safety. They report that she let out a “death yell,” but the man seemed no longer to care if he lived. The

Mormons passed on, but determined that “company safety” required the man’s death, and asked for volunteers to carry out the deed.

Tom Clark said, “Damned if I wouldn’t like to kill an Indian before I go,” and he raced a man named Ward back to the wounded old Paiute to see who got to “blow his brains out.” Clark and Ward left the woman “wailing over her dead husband” and “rode triumphantly back.” At least one trooper, however, looked on the event with remorse. Edwin D. Woolley, Jr., who had argued on behalf of the old man’s life, declared, “I never was so ashamed of anything in all my life—the whole thing was so unnecessary. (Peterson 222)

The Southern Paiutes, to whom my home will always rightfully belong, tell the story of the massacre also. They note the murder of women and children (which the Mormon narrative denies) at the hands of the Mormon guard, and the escape of an old woman who was saved because she used to do the washing of one of the killing party. They say a Mormon shielded her body with his horse from the guns of those who wished his old employee dead with the others. As they left, “the friendly white man gave her some money to try to make her feel better. She threw the money on the ground feeling that it was not worth the lives of her loved ones they had just killed. The money is still there” (Martineau 63). The money is still there: meaning no one in the group has ever consented to the payment, this murderer’s honest try at generosity also the final insult, like a rapist leaving cash on his victim’s nightstand, pushing the pretence that the assault was a fair deal, contracted, paid for.

(One little girl, left an orphan by the Pipe Springs massacre, was given the surname Tillahash, meaning “desolate, barren, or naked,” “The Beginning and the End of a Family” (Martineau 63).

Tillahash: on your land we have gated communities festooned with wrought-iron Kokapelis and pastel Anasazi triangles.

Tillahash: this desert once was not so barren.

Tillahash: I inherited the hands of murderers, are my offerings more tossed coins?)

I pull these tales out of war time-lines because they are the stories I need in order to understand what I am doing here, on Utah ground, with European animals. These stories are my home stories, found only in adulthood, found only after leaving the red hill and black hill and braiding rivers of St. George that I still long after. I repeat these to try to remember something hinted in the shape of the riverbanks, the calls of the sheep and cows that still surround my valley. The heat of the chase of Clark and Ward, the shame of Woolley, all of this is still somewhere deep in my people, even if it is never spoken.

In the end, the Black Hawk War included over a hundred Indian raids. The deaths of around seventy white people are attributed to the war, around double that for Indians (as usual, the bodies of dark-skinned people were deemed less countable). Scores of forts were built by the Mormons to protect themselves and their animals. More than twenty-five new Mormon settlements temporarily disappeared, sucked back into the fortifications of larger towns. Though the Black Hawk War eventually dwindled out due to a long-term war of attrition against native peoples, increasing fragmentation, and a fierce response from federal armed forces to intertribal Ghost Dance gatherings in the 1870s, the Mormon armed forces never had a victorious battle—the Natives' highly mobile forces were never actually defeated in combat. All of this perhaps explains why Utah Mormons, usually so eager over commemorations and anniversaries, have largely forgotten the Black Hawk War (Metcalf 5-6).

Conclusions: Work as Genocide, Laziness and Theft as Resistance

Domesticated animals supposedly provide the technology necessary for humans to stay put—we no longer have to follow the migrating herds when we have our hoofed pantry in the corral—but again and again, we find these animals to be the means of prying people from the land. Sheep-inspired evictions of subsistence farmers in England was assuredly evil, but I can imagine no uprooting more devastating than that forced on the ‘nomadic’ hunter-gatherers of Europe’s new colonies. Neither I nor any of the ancestors detailed in my genealogy book ever had a notion of what it means to have an entire physical, emotional, spiritual lifeway utterly dependent upon and devoted to a particular bioregion, and we can’t understand what is actually at stake with relocation and cultural reformation. Author Jonathan Lear speaks of being haunted by the words of Plenty Coups explaining what life was like once the buffalo were gone and his tribe was relocated: “After this, nothing happened” (2). To put an end to all ‘happenings’ for a people is true genocide, an abuse deeper than simple massacre. In Black Hawk’s world, this dark fate was being forced piecemeal on his people by smiling new neighbors, offering food and asserting they simply wanted to teach him truth, that they cared for their brown brothers and wanted only peace and a healthy trade. Both the extent of the cruelty and its seeming normalcy catches me, hints that I have something to learn from this particular resistance against the economic rules which benefit only the powerful. And it was these resistance forces who saw some measure of success in at least temporarily reversing the tide of white expansion—success unprecedented in Utah history.

There are three points in particular which I wish to dwell on concerning the causes and consequences of this animal-grounded conflict. The first point I learn from the loose composition of the raiders. The warriors who fought with Black Hawk were not representative of an entire Ute tribe—many Utes, including recognized leaders, were trying to maintain good relationships with the Mormons and US Government officials by moving to the Uintah Valley Reservation that the Lincoln administration had established to “concentrate and civilize” their people (qtd. in Peterson 120). Thus unable to label the group “The Utes,” or in accordance to some other national or ethnic identity, we call the forces “Black Hawk’s,” narrowing the entire war down to the whim of one. But what is remarkable about these forces is their pan-Indian composition and sensibility. Utes from bands in New Mexico and Colorado joined, as well as “Goshutes, Paiutes, Piedes, Weber Utes, Navajos, and even a few Shoshonis, Hopis, and Jicarilla Apaches” (Peterson 22). Orsemus Irish, the Utah Superintendent of Indian Affairs at the time, warned his superiors that the Indians of Utah had gotten a grandiose sense that they were connected with the Indian wars raging all around them in Nevada, Idaho, Colorado, and Arizona—that they had a part to play in one united “last struggle” against the white people who were attempting to utterly exterminate them (qtd. in Peterson 120).

Peterson explains that this alliance

was in no way a permanent organization in the first place, and individuals, families, and whole bands came and went as it suited their immediate personal interests—thus the constitution of his raiding band was constantly changing. Also, independent bands and individuals were inspired by Black Hawk’s success to commence raids of their own without submitting to his authority. (Peterson 210)

Trying to fight such undefined forces, the feed-them-not-fight-them Utahans racked up a number of massacres—as well as moral justifications for murdering the elderly, women,

and children. The ambiguity of who exactly was ‘to blame’ for any act in the Black Hawk War reminds us that recent war-frustrations are not a novelty: a loose, decentralized group of systematically oppressed people launch guerrilla attacks on economic-imperialist symbols (murdering ‘innocent’ workers); such attacks are framed by the empire as the blood-lust of a crazed leader and ignorant hatred of the empire’s most revered values; the empire retaliates by using superior technology to slaughter people somehow connected with the ‘terrorists’—or at least those with a similar skin-tone or language or geography. The 1893 Memorial Day edition of *The Deseret News*, speaks of the white veterans of the Black Hawk War as those “engaged in a determined and arduous campaign to compel the Indians to accept terms of peace and cease their murderous incursions into the settlements of the white man.” White, Mormon veterans are thus “entitled to affectionate remembrance because of their heroism and sacrifice in defending the lives and homes of the people against savage and bloodthirsty foes.” (“Memoria” 7). We write a footnote on collateral damage, we fail to count brown bodies, and make the white ones heroes.⁷

And so secondly, the actions of Black Hawk can say something about tactics, something difficult to hear. There is a measure of innocence and moral justification in

⁷ Surely this is back-handed of me, to claim solidarity with my continent’s indigenous peoples, and then compare historic genocide victims to modern terrorists. I understand that the move is rhetorically stupid at this political moment, repelling not only many Euroamericans who would otherwise be convinced of ancestral wrongs, but also likely many Natives. But I am trying to reach a space where we can speak of resistance outside of the stark dichotomy of aggressive evil and ‘nonviolent,’ peace-singing forces for good. As much as many of my generation are drawn to the moral clarity of “Be The Change” activism, some of us are uncertain if the lives of those I love—other species, rich ecosystems—can afford our good consciences and clean hands. ‘Nonviolence’ is a tactic, one that is successful in some situations (particularly if, as during the Civil Rights movement, a movement is backed up by the violence of the federal government). At other times, it runs the risk of the term ‘violence’ expanding to cover any action deemed illegal by the empire—particularly when it comes to dismantling, destroying, or liberating the sacred ‘property’ of the powerful—while the actual violence of our routine participation in a system of exploitation is ignored.

the actions of Black Hawk's group: when the group started stealing animals, and killing herders, it was a matter of survival. Utah Indians were referred to as "unquestionably the poorest Indians on the continent" and one Indian Office employee explained to his superiors "it is really a matter of necessity with these Indians that they starve, or steal" (qtd. in Peterson 116). When we speak of livestock raiding as mere subsistence to stave off starving, we preserve a narrative of innocence which we feel comfortable ascribing to history's victims.

However, once again the details of the animal bodies bound up in the Black Hawk War complicate the narrative. These animals weren't all being eaten by skin-and-bones children: what makes the raids of the Black Hawk War era different from standard background raiding is that Black Hawk turned animal-theft into a lucrative business. The massive amount of livestock raids were possible because rather than trying to keep hold of thousands of animals, Black Hawk and company drove most of the animals to the Taos and Santa Fe markets to Mexican traders, allowing them to quickly turn this stock into other kinds of capital (particularly guns, lead, and powder). These markets were also major centers of the local slave trade—Black Hawk himself was so successful in these markets because he had extensive experiences as a slaver (Peterson 65). I don't bring up such details in order to escape into the standard safety-hatch of academics—which is to call the situation 'nuanced,' suggest there were no clear good guys or bad guys, and thus avoid the need to develop 'problematic' solidarities. Rather, the messy details clarify that resistance to genocide and imperialism can be worldly-wise, glaringly noninnocent, and unapologetically exploit the resource structures of the enemy, and yet still compel some measure of our support.

Lastly, there is something to learn here from my people, the Mormons. The point of this historical narrative is not to find new demons for us to shudder over, this time white and English-speaking but safely in the past. I take it as obvious that the Mormons often behaved with impressive restraint and even generosity when interacting with the indigenous owners of the land. When they didn't, Young was often quick to rebuke them, and plead for them to stop killing Indians, when it likely would have been easier to concede more frequently to massacre. Beyond that, the Mormons were a people with no easy options, having been hounded out of their country by angry mobs. I find their attempts at holding together self-sustaining, mutually-aiding communities far more appealing than the plundering free-for-all that settled much of the West. I am drawn to the Mormon narrative because these people are thoughtful, working hard to do something good in the world. Their communitarian urges are deep in me, their zealotry my most prized virtue. These are my people, and I am deeply grateful for their earnestness and peculiarity—and even for their hard work. I am growing my own garden, putting up food storage.

The point is this: their very lovability makes their genocide-guilt far more instructive. The cruelty of the Mormons rests in the belief that if they weren't actively engaged in war with the Indians—that if they were feeding them instead of fighting them, they had no blood on their hands. Even during the Black Hawk War, Young intoned “when the savages cease their depredations they will be treated with that kindness which they have uniformly received in the past” (qtd. in Peterson 250). And yet it is precisely that past “kind” treatment which hastened genocide—murdering Indians took mundane, quotidian form, like chopping down trees to make pasture for one's flocks. Murder was

an economy, a job. My Mormon ancestors listened to the prophetic suggestions that the near-annihilation of Indians was inevitable (“Die they would”), but believed themselves charitable for trying to make the genocide as painless as possible for the poor folks. This attitude allowed (and allows) the Mormons to maintain an ideal of themselves as kind, generous, and nonracist when compared with others in their situation. When Ward Churchill called the workers in the World Trade Center ‘Little Eichmanns,’ he was saying something true—even as he left out the crucial fact that this Eichmann is a dear aunt who made you a quilt for your wedding, loves her children and Siamese cat, and replaced her lightbulbs with CFLs because she wants to do something good for the earth.

Historian Peter Decker, writing about the forced uprooting of Utes in Colorado, has this insight:

When, in our historical treatment of the Indian experience, the story carries the interpretive burden of an inevitable outcome, the Indian becomes little more than a passive subject unable, if not unwilling, to struggle against the historical forces aligned against him. He is seen as a helpless victim—weak in spirit and unimagined in action. And when a preordained outcome is combined with a passive subject, there are no reasons to look for, or even consider, alternative policies that might have changed the predicted outcome. Nor is there any sense of culpability. If, as the nineteenth-century leaders believed, the ultimate fate of the Indian was ordained by God, then there was nothing that whites could have done, or should have done, to stop the train. (xiv)

The Mormons, more than anyone, exhibited “the interpretive burden of an inevitable outcome,” a penchant for holding tight to declensionist narratives about those with the least power. Finding my ancestors guilty is crucial to my future, inasmuch as their perception is uncannily similar to the mindset of today’s enlightened liberals toward the massive destruction of ecosystems, species diversity, and cultural diversity. Die they will, a remnant saved in zoos, genetic labs, colorful ethnographic or zoological documentaries.

This helplessness is expressed in the face of the poverty of those very same people whose land we still occupy, and with the very same ecosystems devastated by this occupation. When Jared Farmer came to speak at Brigham Young University in 2008 regarding his research on Utah Lake—and the literal and symbolic displacements of Natives in the valley, as well as the ensuing ecological crises assaulting the lake—an audience member brought up the plans to build a causeway on the lake and expand development around it. Though he recognized how this would further devastate the ecology of this land stolen from others, this man asserted, “like any kind of progress, it’s going to happen.” The task of the environmentalist becomes merely to guide this inevitable ‘progress’ down the least egregious paths. Like Brigham, we feel far more fair than others, we are inexorably cajoled into the preservation of our way of life, and we learn the Old Bishop stories—the stories that momentarily make us glimpse systemic injustice—far too late, merely ensuring the next generation has fodder for new condemnatory histories.

Beyond the lessons of raiders and invaders, the animal subjects of such rough exchanges hint of further things to learn. A sheep in late 1860s Utah: she could be the very symbol of the empire, as poignant as trade towers, as her meal is taken from the mown mountains that once fed Indians, as her fleece keeps the white man warm; she could also sustain a Navajo group that has escaped into southeast Utah to avoid forced relocation. In the hands of Black Hawk, she could be driven hoof-to-heel with slaves, all of them to be sold for the cause of resistance. In wars, as in economies, the sheep lives as a pawn in a game between humans. The frequent response for those evaluating history is to be so certain of animal insignificance that the story can essentially be written without

more than a tangential reference to them. What I want to do is start *seeing* pawns, their count and color, wondering if they hold the hints that could move us beyond our solipsistic truisms. As Michael Pollen promises:

Our grammar might teach us to divide the world into active subjects and passive objects, but in a coevolutionary relationship every subject is also an object, every object a subject. That's why it makes just as much sense to think of agriculture as something the grasses did to people as a way to conquer the trees" (xxi).

And the grasses themselves were made by grazers like sheep, the animals that are making us as well. Economic vectors bend and crack wide. We carry sheep around the globe, we cut down forests, eradicate wolves, fight wars, kill off entire races of our own species.

For them, we work.

CHAPTER 2

LONELY WAGES

“You guys wasn’t gettin’ paid to leave the dogs babysittin’ the sheep while you stem the
rose”

Joe Aguirre, sheep ranching foreman in *Brokeback Mountain*

The first shepherd I ever met lived under Little Mountain, outside of Corrine, Utah (the historic “Gentile capital” of Utah). I found him down the road from Thiokol’s ‘Rocket Garden,’ the public monument to nukes made by our local producer of cluster bombs, landmines, and depleted uranium munitions. That’s where I first saw the little white trailer with a rounded top, this one flanked by a make-shift pen for orphaned lambs, a hobbled horse, a barking border collie. The ponds around the camp were brackish mosquito-havens (named “Poison Spring” and “Stinking Spring”), the earth sun-baked and cracked. Retold through the nostalgia of children’s stories, sheep-work takes place on the bright, grassy swards of our Anglo-Saxon heritage, but that day I started learning that in the U.S., sheep-work happens on land like this—rugged, marginal. Like the Thiokol weapons testing facility, sheep can turn a profit from even in the badlands.

I was with a class taught by a friend of mine named Riley, an entomologist who grew up in this desert and worked for Thiokol before he escaped into academia. He

wanted to sample aquatic insects at a creek at the base of Little Mountain, and I went with him to ask permission. The *borreguero* was short, wearing a cowboy hat, belt buckle, with black hair and dark skin. Riley asked, in broken Spanish, if we could camp down the road, and he nodded, “*Si, si.*” As long as we didn’t bother the sheep, he explained, we were welcome.

The next morning the ranch owner came in a GMC truck to our huddle of tents. When Riley told him his herder gave us permission to be there, I heard the rancher respond inside, incredulously, “You talked to him? I haven’t understood a word he’s said in eight years!”

Eight years in the badlands, with no one but border collies to give sense to your words. I never learned the rest of this man’s story, just as none of the people who are fed and clothed by his labor have ever bothered to ask. But this chapter is an attempt to follow out what this herder hinted: that, while many of us rail against the powerful for acting as though they own the world, the abuse of workers and landscapes might be better understood as the owning class’ refusal of *real* ownership, their forced impediments to belonging and grounding relation with people and places.

The following is an attempt to analyze the work I witnessed among shepherders—work of the most lonely of professions, where the laborers are legal aliens (‘resident noncitizens’), and where all species involved are ecological aliens (introduced or ‘invasive’)—in the context of globalized capitalism. Part One of the chapter focuses on the particular alienations among sheep-workers in the Intermountain West. After describing the people and animals I met in the hills of Utah, I attempt to use the tools the university has given me—literary analysis—to explore the ways stories of Western

sheep-work which I brought with me into the field (Ehrlich's *The Solace of Open Spaces* and Proulx's "Brokeback Mountain") can either clarify or occlude the structure of the labor and loneliness I witnessed. The next section, using documents from investigations into the conditions of sheep-workers in the Intermountain West, depicts how the restrictions on relationships required by modern sheep-work can feed the kind of abuse which blurs the lines between free and forced labor. In the final section of Part One, I explore how this clear indictment of the economic hierarchy endemic to sheep-ranching in the West is both supported and complicated by my own field work, which revealed to me the ideological intimacy which can be shared by bosses and employees, even when they are 'supposed' to be in a class war. This requires a more nuanced and careful response by radical labor advocates.

Part Two moves beyond the particularities of Utah sheep-work to explore ties to other kinds of alienated food-work in America. I first examine how the problems of sheep-work align with the problems of agricultural workers in fields, highlighting the labor abuses under investigation in southern Florida, where much of the nation's produce originates. I then explore how the specific alienations of food-work creep from the field up into the factories, as those involved in slaughter and meat-processing are beginning to witness the same kind of 'alien' and homeless workforces recruited to harvest food or herd flocks. Additionally, an analysis of cultural texts surrounding the question of slaughter (*Silence of the Lambs*, *Killer of Sheep* and *The Jungle*) clarifies an entirely new dimension to the kind of alienation adhering to pastoral food production, as our culture's demand for meat coincides with terror over slaughter, meaning an ever-expanding meat-

making industry (and its growing work-force) must be constantly hidden from public consideration.

Lastly, Part Three provides some analyses of the forces of displacement which run through our previous case-studies of sheep-work, farmwork, and meatpacking. First, this includes developing a ‘working definition’ of work which incorporates the *passive* nature of worker experience, a process facilitated by the demon cosmology of labor explained to me by a Peruvian shepherd. This definition clears the way for some concluding investigation into the historical roots of the denigration of food-workers specifically, tied to a deeply-entrenched domination of ‘cities’ over ‘hinterlands.’

Part One: Herding in the Intermountain West

Methods and Cast⁸

My goal was to become a sheep-worker. I thought this first step would be easy—people speak of herding as work with no prerequisites, the kind of poorly-paid job you do when you can’t get your foot into an office, or when you have the wrong skin color. The *New York Times* calls it the “bottom rung of migrant labor,” and migrant labor is already a bottom-rung unto itself (Frosch 1). Speaking of the sheep-keepers on the Navajo Nation, researchers assert “livestock are a means of survival for the unskilled and uneducated” (Wood et al. 26). There they are cared for by women and children and other “persons without job skills” (30). I am skilled, and over-educated: surely I could convince someone to let me have a shot—I was willing to do it for free, after all.

The truth is, I was woefully unqualified. No one ever said these words to me, I had to gather the truth from polite refusals or subject changes. And then from watching

⁸ Names of herders and ranchers altered.

what shepherders actually do. The skills required for this work are many, and I had none of them. No amount of critical thinking or rhetorical analysis could shoe a horse, convince a dog to move sheep away from water and shade, trap and kill a coyote. Mend fences, move hay bales that weigh nearly as much as me. Real work, the kind that actually feeds a person, requires real skills and real education which I utterly lack, and though I kept hearing from those tangentially connected to sheep-ranching families that herding is child's play or women's work, no one would ever dream of actually trusting me with a horse and a rifle.

I gave in to calling my actions 'participant research,' rather than work, putting myself in a situation to coolly observe the strain of workers, measuring out their blood, sweat, tears, in the metric system. My brother-in-law teaches Mormon seminary with a sheep rancher, Spencer Powell, and he convinced Spencer to let me pitch a tent near his herder's camp in the foothills above Henefer, UT. I pushed for a month: Spencer gave me two weeks, saying I'll be bored. My sweetheart Tristan came with me, both as a translator (the herders are from Peru and Tristan is fluent in Spanish) and as a gender mediator, relieving the inappropriateness of one female among males (though our unspousal status in a single tent likely caused some worry). The next summer, Tristan and I got approval to spend a week with the same herder, this time later in the year when he was on National Forest land in the Uintah mountains.

Over two summers we met an extraordinary cast of characters. First, the sheep. There were somewhere between two and four thousand of them, depending on the season, consisting of ewes and their growing lambs. The backbone of the herd was the Rambouillet breed, a line of Merino sheep whose genealogy moves from Spain to Louis

XVI's country estate, and then to the American West, where it became the sheep of choice for modern ranchers. These are "dual purpose" ewes, with both fine wool and a meaty carcass. The ewes who produce the most and healthiest lambs were mated with other Rambouillet rams, their daughters joining the flock to replace the ewes who die or stop reproducing. Their sons headed to the slaughter in the fall, after fattening. As did the offspring of the remaining ewes, who were mated with meaty Suffolk studs, their black-faced lambs growing more quickly than the Rambouillets. There were several outliers to this equation, a few black ewes whom the herders kept around in order to be able to recognize at least a few individuals among a group of animals who are notoriously indistinguishable. Esteban told me that these black sheep are mischievous—if there's a band of sheep missing, you can be certain a black sheep is with them. Conversely, this means that if all black sheep are present, it's likely that the only ewes missing are already coyote-meat. The ewes were larger than I expected, loud and lovely streaming through the mountains. During the day, the lambs formed their own packs, careening back and forth according to their own game logics.

Around seven Grand Pyrenees dogs, beautiful and shy creatures, stayed with the sheep and guarded them from predators. Also roaming the hills of Henefer were several dozen beef cows, sharing grazing with the sheep during the spring and early summer. There were the horses (mild Cheeto, high-strung Winnie, Chance, a princely paint horse). Two or three border collies, obsessively dedicated to their perceived tasks, camped under the trailer (plus six delightful puppies the first year). Also present were an unknown but ever-breeding quantity of Coyotes. Hordes of biting flies in the day, mosquitoes in the evening. The hills of squawbush and scrub oak and wildflowers.

And then the humans. The Powell family has been doing this work since before Utah was a state—in some cases on the exact same grazing plots. Spencer and his brother Heber were the current owners of the sheep and the grazing permits, both old men bearing remarkable resemblances to my dead grandfather. For my first summer with the sheep, Spencer was teaching religion at BYU Hawaii and I communicated with him only by phone—the second summer I met him directly, though our conversations were always short and to the point. Heber had taught math and now sold text books (most members of this family were involved in education in some way or other). I interacted most with Spencer's children and their spouses, most of whom lived in Henefer. It was a simple thing to fall in love with the lot of them, the motherly women cooking up batches of French toast with chokecherry jam, the young fathers patiently teaching their kids the nuances of riding horses. And the kids on and off of those horses—a roaming pack of cousins both fearless and polite, endlessly curious about my family and my research, waging (and winning) cone-flower wars, excitedly describing their work baling hay and docking lambs. I have never met humans more whole than the kids of Henefer, wrapped in family, comfortable in their bodies and working with animals, free to roam wide and explore their places.

And then there is the herder of sheep himself, a man named Esteban who came to the US from Huancayo, Peru, six years ago, leaving his wife and three children behind. When we first met him he was running about unloading bales of hay, bags of salt, barrels of water from the truck that brought us from Henefer. Esteban's clothes were clean and bright, even if showing signs of wear at the cuffs. His shirt collar was crisp, and all of his movements appeared swift and capable. We were introduced: he shook our hands and

smiled wide. We helped load his groceries into his trailer, and I saw this small space too was clean, and even lovely, everything packed neatly in preparation for the bumpy move further down the mountain. One of Spencer's sons, who served a Mormon mission in Latin America and thus spoke Spanish, brought us to the camp, and he and Esteban discussed the recent lamb kills (eleven in a week) and the need to bring in the government coyote trapper. We followed Esteban down a steep hill through scrub oak and squawbush to look at lamb corpses, fly-covered and beginning to bloat. No California bistros for these fatted lambs—one was mostly chewed up by a coyote, while the others were destined to be eaten more slowly, inside-out, by decomposers.

Once the camp was moved and the Powells drove away, we began to set up our camp at some distance from Esteban, in order to give him some privacy. Esteban came to tell us a better camping spot was closer to the trailer, and that he had kitchen facilities we could use and “enough food to make him fat.” Before long we were eating breakfast, lunch, and dinner with Esteban in his camp trailer, away from the biting flies and mosquitoes, each night staying up late to hear his stories. A smooth plank pulled out from under a bench bed, and this became the tabletop. Here we learned that three of Esteban's brothers were also in the US working with ranchers and their animals, all brought there through the labor contractor Western Ranches. This company conducts interviews in Peru, provides migrant worker visas to its employees, and brings them to ranchers who employ them for three years at a time. After three years, the company pays for plane fare back to the worker's home country, where they stay for three months, visiting family and friends. If their boss wants them back after that, they can come for another stint, three years at a time. Esteban was conscious that we would not be

impressed by his paycheck, that white people like us would never work so hard for so little. He told us he knows this, but that \$750 a month triples as it migrates south, and with it his children go to college, they build another level on the house. When he visits home, his neighbors treat him like a wealthy man.

I told Esteban I wanted to know what it is like to be a shepherd, and he eagerly agreed to teach me. There were some impediments to my education: for one, I sleep too much. We woke each morning to find Esteban was already with the sheep, encouraging them down a certain valley before they took location matters into their own hooves. He did invite us to help with his afternoon tasks, such as setting out salt for the sheep on the ridge where they will spend the night, checking coyote traps to make sure they haven't sprung shut on a lamb or dog, or chasing the Powells' cows into their new grazing area (this was generally done with me and Tristan on the four-wheeler and Esteban sprinting on foot through thick brush). Esteban told us he was glad to have the cows to worry about, because he likes having a lot of work to fill his days (before we arrived he spent weeks mending cattle fences, not even having a chance to flip through the Spanish-edition *People Magazine* that the Powells delivered every month). As the day wore on, Esteban was out again on a horse, with the border collies, moving the sheep up to the right ridge for the evening. Though we usually took this time to study, write, and make dinner for the three of us, Esteban agreed to take us with him once. We were able to follow dirt roads for a little while, but in order to move behind the sheep from the right direction we needed to bush-whack our way down into one side of a valley and up the other, Esteban occasionally shouting at the distant sheep, tossing rocks in front of those who strayed to the flanks. By the end, I was scraped and bruised (patches of skin puffing

up white and pink where I had elbowed and slipped my way through stinging nettle)—and, admittedly, confused about what we had just accomplished.

One week in, Esteban’s brother Rodolfo joined us to help bring the sheep off the mountain so they could be loaded onto semis and sent to their fall grazing area in the Uintah mountains. He was older than Esteban, but with a smooth and attractive face, even more carefully dressed. We shared our lentils and quinoa, and they share canned butter beans, spam, instant coffee. We all took turns cooking and washing dishes. And through this, we kept talking, every night. Esteban mapped out his explanations with dining accoutrements: this napkin signifies central Peru, and this spoon the armed forces of Fujimori, the bowl the areas controlled by Shining Path Guerrillas. Or, imagine these pastries are a drug cartel . . . Tristan relayed between us, often getting so caught up in the conversation I needed to elbow him to get a translation. Even with the diagrams, I worried that I have never learned an important language, not Spanish of laborers, or the calls to working dogs, or the patterns of the sheep walking over mountains.

Sheep-Work Written: Loneliness and Nostalgia

Open spaces without solace. The language I do know is that of English literature, memoir, and that mother-tongue did me great disservice not only in keeping me unskilled for real work, but also in failing to prepare me for the laborers. Gretel Ehrlich, in her beautiful book *The Solace of Open Spaces*, promised me that the kind of fellows who choose this work are antisocial by nature. From her experiences on sheep ranches in Wyoming, she writes of quaint sheep-herding “misfits” who have “opted to be an outsider,” “abandoned the world” and “chosen a life of solitude”—generally due to

“women troubles, alcohol, low self-esteem,” or simply because they “prefer the company of animals” (21). She explains that society sees this deliberate choice of theirs as failure, and accordingly “treats shepherders with contempt,” as “second class citizens” (20). Their social failure is even admitted by their political champion in this narrative—Bob, a farm-hand trying to unionize ranch labor. Bob recognizes that unified farm laborers could “have the world on its knees,” as they actually do the most important work in the world. What ruins his leftist plot is simply the shepherd’s social failure: “We’re just too damned ornery. We’d rather starve than agree on anything,” he complains (28). Bob’s one consolation is that “even if we are underpaid, I’d rather herd sheep than have some flat-footed prick telling me what I can and can’t do and when and how to do it” (28). In other words, if shepherders do not have economic or political power, this is due to their own character deficiencies: and in the end, they have a *different* kind of freedom which we urban professionals could admire.

The Solace of Open Spaces is a book born of loneliness, written by a woman “betting against masochism in thinking that solitude might work as an antidote to solitude” (42). And yet the image Ehrlich gives me of the stubbornly isolated shepherd seems to me like an impoverished reading of the lonely. From the start I found Esteban and Rodolfo disarmingly different from Ehrlich’s characters—a difference that only widened as we became friends. Sometimes I blame chance (perhaps I met the outliers), or the time between Ehrlich and me (twenty-five years is enough to remake the industry). But Ehrlich’s characterization of shepherders as socially inadequate runs deeply enough that I worry reactionary politics are at work, the kind that benefits from blaming low wages on a worker’s own incapacities. The workers which I met were

good-humored and gregarious, counting up costs of sending kids to college so they had other options besides U.S. sheepherding and dangerous Peruvian mines. They were doing this lonely work *because* they had strong family relationships. In the meantime they were up at dawn, cooking their own meals, avoiding alcohol if they felt it would offend their Mormon *patróns*. Their only slip in self-abnegation was the cost of calling cards for once-a-month calls back home. In other words, they are surely not here out of “women troubles, alcohol, or low self-esteem.” For workers such as these, those who leave home out of family commitment, loneliness is not a personality quirk, but acute torture.

To be fair, the industry has done its best to seek out the unsociable. The attempt to weed out the gregarious starts in Peru, when the Western Ranch Association quizzes their job applicants. Esteban and Rodolfo tell us the Association asks directly whether you are accustomed to being around people, and to get the job you must lie, say you never go to the city, say you prefer to be alone. When they ask you how many months a *burro* is pregnant, you need to see their trick and respond that only *burras* get pregnant, even if you’ve never spent any time around those animals. You adopt a rural pretense, they tell us, say you are a pastoral person, pretend that you don’t know how to drive, because you need a job—even though this desperate quest for employment is something of an urban phenomenon. You get hired. And then you find yourself spending up to five months without seeing another person. Esteban tells us that when this happens you get depressed, you start thinking of your family and your kids (my eyes wander to a self-help book he has propped by his bed, one about how to maintain ‘*felicidad*’).

In this way, I learned how the sheep industry operates against the grain of sociability, requiring aliens (legally termed “resident noncitizens”), fueling itself off of the painful gap between a worker and his home. William Douglass, emeritus professor of Basque studies at the University of Nevada, Reno remarks that the shepherding work performed by Basque immigrants “placed a man in a situation which at times bordered on total social isolation” (Frosch). But even if shepherders live particularly “harsh, solitary lives” (Frosch), their general situation of home-sickness is not unique: a new survey shows that 80% of the workers in the food and fiber industries are born outside of the U.S. (Stoddard 26), meaning our most grounded production—on the earth, with human hands—demands the most ungrounded laborers, pried off their homegrounds through a variety of tactics. Shepherding has always required the familiarity of place held by pastoral peoples everywhere, farmwork has always required a knowledge of local landforms, plants, weather conditions—and yet today’s most qualified workers in these industries have left their home places several nation-states away. Like Esteban, they live out the many sides of alienation: the act of producing something from the earth is truncated down to a series of orders from a boss or fragmented down to a single act, like the harvest of one plant; the product itself is utterly outside the worker’s control (while herding tender-muscled lambs, the herder eats the cheap canned goods sent up by the *patrón*; while harvesting juicy strawberries, the farmworker hopes to be able to afford dry beans and rice); their labor is a commodity they sell, rather than a social bond (thus a pay check severs any further obligation to one’s employees). Their legal ‘alien’ status aids and exacerbates each kind of alienation: ‘noncitizens’ can’t expect to be allowed to organize for more control over the production process, and social bonds can hardly grow

where all workers and bosses speak different languages and have widely disparate social customs. Above all weighs the loneliness born of brute distance from family and community.

This is more than just a question of *'felicidad.'* Esteban tells us stories of the longest stretch of isolation he's experienced, when he had his own tractor to move his trailer, and thus no boss needed to come to relocate him. When the tractor slipped off a gully and rolled several times, Esteban was knocked unconscious and broke an arm and shoulder. Fortunately, when he came to, he was able to make it to a road, flag down a tourist, and use their cell phone to call his boss for help. Mike, a state coyote trapper we meet in the mountains, tells us later such an experience isn't unusual—and it often doesn't end so well. Mike ("Meester Mike," as we start calling him, after Esteban) is a delightful and jovial man, a natural comedian, eager to show us the tricks of his trade. He is absolutely in love with the creatures he's charged with eradicating and with the graceful English Pointer who stands proudly at the helm of the four-wheeler while he drives. But he grew somber once, when he told us that the work of "these guys" (the shepherders) is more dangerous than we think. Every year he hears how one of them has died from falling off a horse, getting struck by lightning, or simply perishing after getting wounded or sick when no one was around to help them.

Rodolfo, who is generally less demonstrative than his brother Esteban, tells us one night in a low and even voice that in the lonely stretches, you begin asking "What about tomorrow? Will I make it? Will I see next week? Will I still be here then?" He says some use their paycheck to buy musical instruments and try to stay sane by teaching themselves to play, a task which allows you to at least hear yourself making a noise.

“You worry about what would happen if you get hurt or sick and there is no one to find you.” “Sometimes,” he tells us, “you just cry.” They explain that this is the kind of hardship they were born into, their father having died when the youngest was still a baby, their mother having never remarried: it was always up to them to find any work that would keep them alive. Rodolfo says, “*De manera vulgar, decimos ‘golpeado.’ Somos golpeado por la vida.*” Something like: “In a vulgar way, we say ‘beaten.’ We are beaten by life.”

Shepherd Bob’s words fall flat—no one here is rejecting organizing out of orneriness. And though my admiration remains for labor which encompasses these animals in these mountains, I can’t side with Bob and call sheepwork liberation: the workers I know *are* told clearly what they can and can’t do, and when and how to do it. The workers I know *do* agree readily with power, rather than starve. This is, after all, what it means for them to be a worker.

Brokeback Mountain and the nostalgia of real work. The second year we camp by a young couple vacationing in the Uintas with their dog. The woman’s father was a Basque shepherd, and she loves watching the sheep who come and drink at the pond each morning. She falls in love with a wounded Grand Pyrenees bitch who hangs about the camp. When we meet them and tell them I’m here to study sheep-work, her husband nods toward Esteban’s trailer and says “Can’t imagine it’d be too bad to have that job, living up here all summer!” We all chuckle and nod.

I could be inclined to brush off an admiration of shepherding work as something only sentimental suburbanites could concoct, divorced from the real difficulty of this labor. Yet there is something important in the positive reaction of young urban

professionals to work with the sheep on the mountain. Those of us working hunched and hollow-chested in cubicles or libraries have good reasons to fantasize over working on the land, with animals: Esteban's labor is roughly three billion times more beautiful and important than anything I have ever been paid to do. He is making food for people, he is facing the elements and a world out-of-doors. All the same, its beauty is back-breaking, its importance dark, with as many unexpected demands and as little prestige as mothering children. And as is the case with a child-nurturer's labor, the capitalist system is uniquely inept at accounting for value, and fair recompense. People who make food are paid starvation wages: if you want to make a living, be certain not to deal with the essentials of life, with living beings. Through lessons like this, I learn how the Pastoral is the precise location where a meaningful nostalgia head-butts against actual bodily pain.

Another painful feature of beautiful and important work is the synonymy of work-time and life-time. Our oldest and most crucial industries, whether raising corn or young humans, demand perpetual labor. Neither closing time nor vacation days are imaginable concepts when one's work is fully caring for living beings. There is a heady appeal to such labor, opposed to the compartmentalized existence of the kind of nine-to-five 'career' my education set me up for. This spurs a whole demographic of neo-pastoralists and neo-agrarians, radical homesteaders and home-makers, who are burning their time-cards and tucking in to a lifestyle of more meaningful work—reclaiming “land as an inalienable, almost sacred domain, food cultivation as a spiritual activity, and food consumption as a hallowed social ritual” (Bookchin 4). German theorists Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen refers to such people (approvingly) as “lifestyle dropouts,” observing in their reappropriation of subsistence labor, a “slackening of the strict

distinction between work time and leisure time, moving in the direction of ‘life-time’” (105). Such hard-laboring ‘dropouts’ might be inclined to intone with Wendell Berry: “If we do not live where we work, and when we work, we are wasting our lives, and our work too” (79).

But in the maw of globalized, industrial capitalism, the equation between life-time and work-time which is standard in crucial industries turns cold: work is life, but modern wage-labor primly demands a suspension of many of the messy activities of living. For instance, it is generally against the rules for shepherders to have anyone visit them without first getting the boss’s approval; it is unthinkable (and probably illegal) for a shepherd to bring family members to live with him. In modern sheep-work, relationships aren’t just difficult, they’re actual vices, actual crimes. Like the Grand Pyrenees dogs who guard the flock, shepherders are permanently spoiled if they grow too attached to the presence of other people (spoiled dogs, I learned, are either shot or sent to the city animal shelter, there to be killed if they’re not adopted by sentimental suburbanites).

This quandary of work excluding life was portrayed clearly in another piece of English literature, a fictional piece better aligned to my experience than Ehrlich’s memoir. Annie Proulx’s story “Brokeback Mountain,” and the film which later evolved out of it, give me hope that the language of my training can tell me something real about loneliness when it comes to working with livestock. In Utah at least, all of the intense discussion and criticism which faced the film’s release never touched the issue of ranch-work, being focused instead on the apparent oddity of two men in love with each other—either in giddy celebration of this fact or shocked disapproval. It was spoken of as a film

‘about’ being gay, with a cowboy motif added simply for sex appeal and to thumb an Equal-Rights nose at all those red fly-over states brimming with rural tough-guys (now only *supposedly* straight). And yet I believe it is crucial to focus on what this story says about working in the West, particularly the pattern in Ennis del Mar’s life wherein each moment is a mutually-exclusive choice between a meaningful relationship and boss-approved labor.

From the first page of the story or scene in the movie, the labor of Jack Twist and Ennis del Mar is structured to be inimical to relationships. This is no surprise: for many laborers in modern capitalism, the only relationships that are appropriate on the job are those that Graeber would classify as “avoidance relationships”—relationships of property (the relationship which says ‘acknowledge these objects as part of me and thus don’t touch them’) and relationships of command-hierarchies. Even though Jack and Ennis are employed to work closely together, their employer, Joe Aguirre, begins by setting out a structure which maintains isolation (one person at camp, the other always “commuting” to be with the sheep, coming together only for necessities like dinner). Thus, when the two begin spending more time together than they’re supposed to, Proulx writes of their sense of surprise, as they are “each glad to have a companion where none had been expected” (6)—they are surprised to find closeness in a job specifically designed to maintain isolation. Aguirre reveals his own perception of the mutual exclusion of work and love when he condemns Twist with: “You guys wasn’t gettin’ paid to leave the dogs babysittin’ the sheep while you stem the rose.” A sexual encounter necessarily means being a bad shepherd: sex-on-the-clock is obviously inappropriate, and there is no clock-out time (supposedly, the shepherd’s wages—and thus the boss’ control—cover

each moment of the worker's day). And Aguirre seems to have his reasons: when Jack and Ennis start spending nights together up on the mountain, they allow increased predation of the flock by coyotes and a two-herd mix-up during a snow storm. Proulx concedes: romantic relationships tend to wound the profit margin.

Yet, though the two men must pay for the experience later, their time on Brokeback Mountain still shows itself as a kind of temporary autonomous zone, holding out to them a hint of unalienated labor. Although Ennis and Jack never *actually* step out of the world of wages and bosses, they begin acting as though they have—specifically, by forging a social bond where only impersonal, commodified labor was supposed to exist. In Annie Proulx's story, Ennis del Mar remembers the time herding sheep with Jack as “that old, cold time on the mountain when they owned the world and nothing seemed wrong” (Proulx 1). The use of the word “owned” is telling of the property at stake: Jack and Ennis didn't acquire any additional capital on the mountain—they simply broke the barriers separating work and relationships, which made them in a far more real sense *owners* of their worlds—their actions and landscapes. They begin unconsciously mimicking the mutual care of old pastoral couples everywhere, families who own their time and their animals. This is the kind of ownership which makes a profit-hungry manager and capitalist notions of efficiency irrelevant, where it could make sense to kill one of your animals for food, and where a coyote-chewed sheep can be deemed a fair price for a night shared together. In the film, Jack announces early “Can't wait 'til I got my own spread, won't have to put up with Joe Aguirre's crap no more.” Their camaraderie opens a space for the two men to play-act at having their “own spread,” to practice being free—and thus bound to each other in mutually-supporting labor.

In doing this, the men stave off, for a moment, the destructive force of wage labor, which then rushes over them once they come off the mountain. This is a particularly incessant theme in the film version. We see Ennis hurriedly dropping off the two children with his wife Alma at work at the grocery store, explaining “In a big hurry. My boss called, got to run up to the ranch . . . all the heifers must of decided to calve at the same time.” When his wife protests that she is doing her own work, he replies “I can’t afford to not be there when them heifers calve. Be my job if I lose any of ‘em.” Whereas traditional farm systems contain roles for children in caring for animals and plants, the lives of Ennis and Alma reveal a situation where young humans simply don’t *fit* into food-work, whether raising beef or selling it. While the “species life” of the cows can’t be fully ignored (they won’t be calving in accordance to a work schedule), the “species life” of the humans working with them—including the requirements of community and intergenerational nurturing—are deemed irrelevant. Further, this moment couples the division between work and family life with a division between animal-work and animal eating. Ennis calls to Alma as he leaves “Bring home some round steak if you think of it,” an absurd request, considering that he’s about to go work with cows. In modern capitalism, though, while cows are in the country, *meat* is in the city, where it must be purchased by one’s wages. This is why a shepherd killing a sheep for food—fairly standard practice for many pastoral peoples—is played with as a terrible taboo in the film (in the end of a tense moment of expectation, Ennis and Jack shoot a deer instead, an act which is illegal but far less ‘inappropriate’ than killing the animals they raise for others’ meat).

The difficulty of keeping a grip on both work and family dogs Ennis throughout the film. Even after his divorce, when his wife has full custody of the children, he misses one of their monthly visits because it occurs during a cattle roundup. Later when his teenage daughter Alma Jr. asks if she can live with him, he turns her down because “with the roundup coming, I won’t ever be home.” The roundup, bringing the animals in proximity, requires the fragmentation of his own life’s relationships. The film concludes with a small triumph for Ennis, when Alma Jr. asks if he’ll be at her wedding. He responds: “Supposed to be on a roundup over near the Tetons,” but seeing her disappointment, he concedes: “You know what? I reckon they can find themselves another cowboy. My little girl is gettin’ married.” By choosing a meaningful relationship over work, Ennis reaffirms the ‘sins’ committed on Brokeback Mountain. From the perspective of the owning class, these are the breaking points which prove the working class’ idleness and theft.

Ennis’ attempts to hold onto a relationship with Jack are even more at odds with work requirements. In order to even see Jack, Ennis confesses he often has to completely quit his job at the time. This is the meaning of ‘free labor’ which the film pushes: if you wish to maintain relationships, you are free to stop working (though the consequences of penury might be even more dire for relationships). You are not free to hold onto both. The last time Ennis is with Jack, Ennis tells him they can’t be together for a few months: “It’s likely November before I can get away again, after we ship stock and before the winter feedin’ starts.” The fact that he puts their meetings in terms of “getting away” reaffirms that their time together requires a rejection of both work and societal life. From

the start of their relationship, Ennis thinks their only option is “we get together once in a while way the hell out in the back a nowhere” (Proulx 14).

But Jack’s idealist response to their situation is to imagine turning the Brokeback Mountain experience into the real thing, into an actual opportunity to conjoin work and life. He dreams of the two men having “some sweet life together” running a cattle ranch. Squeezed by the demands of Ennis’ work, Jack responds “we could have had a good life together, a fuckin’ real good life, had us a place of our own. You wouldn’t do it, Ennis, so what we got now is Brokeback Mountain. Everything built on that. That’s all we got, boy, fuckin’ all, so I hope you know that if you don’t never know the rest.” Brokeback Mountain is the spot where they came closest to experiencing actual ranch family life together, and yet it can only be “a place of our own” in the sense of nostalgia and souvenir—represented by Ennis’ picture postcard of the place, enshrined in a rented trailer house. It is not their own place in a more fundamental sense—they are not free to work and live on Brokeback Mountain, though they once dared to act as though they were.

And yet, it is true that the elements of this story move beyond the oppression of wage earners in a demanding ranch industry. If wage-slavery and social distaste for farm labor were all the two were facing, one could at least imagine Jack and Ennis one day raising the capital required to start their ranch, *perhaps* even holding the outfit above the waters of debt, and living happily ever after. Even in the work-oriented reading of the film which I’m providing, the men’s sexual orientation obviously provides a crucial hinge in the plot. Though Jack and Ennis could *feasibly* swim against the financial gradient which pushes people city-wards, they still couldn’t combine their work and their

lives because angry neighbors could at any point put an end to both. Ennis lives with the haunting of Rich and Earl, the latter having been battered to a pulp with a tire-iron and dragged around by a rope tied around his penis. It is this bloody ghost which ultimately pushes Ennis to reject Jack's ranching proposal. In Proulx's story, Ennis explains "I'm stuck with what I got, caught in my own loop. Can't get out of it. [. . .] I don't want a be dead" (Proulx 14). The loop is this: there is a difficult path which a person can attempt which will lead to some kind of freedom, of 'owning your world,' bringing labor and life into harmony. But for a gay man in Wyoming, such ownership could be deadly. Certain demographics are ultimately denied ownership, regardless of their financial situation.

The fate of Earl thus holds the same significance as that of the Reverend Isaac Simmons, a sixty-six-year-old black man who was kidnapped and shot in Mississippi in 1944 by white supremacists because he owned nearly three hundred acres of farmland and was seeking a legal guarantee that he could pass the plot onto his children. The men who killed Simmons forced his son to watch, beat him, and gave him ten days to get off the land (Payne 14-15).

For those interested in more than interesting stories, the question that remains for us now is whether there are demographics which are today denied ownership, against the grain of an identity-blind 'free market.' From my research on migrant farmworkers and herders, I would posit that a synthesis form of ownership-denial is taking place. Although immigrants may not be lynched for owning the means of their own production, the economic gradient to doing so is set impossibly steep (not to mention the great legal difficulty for people without papers to obtain legal title to 'first world' land). But more to the point, the economic gradient is against migrant farmworkers *because* of an identity

marker, as personal and unchangeable as Ennis' love for Jack and Simmons' race: the latitude and longitude of a birthplace. Caught in their own loop: trying to create bonds with other humans means needing to leave the country in order to provide for them, stuck in the most alienating of lifestyles. *Somos golpeados por la vida*.

Brokeback Mountain, both in story and film form, presented a remarkable case against homophobia. And yet reading the predominant tension as a frustrated quest for a conjunction of labor and life helps to answer the critic's flippant and common response: why don't they just run away to San Francisco? As director Don Roos put it: "I was so irritated by those stupid, stupid cowboys. I felt like saying 'Guys, get a map. Go to New York. Go to L.A. Your problems will be over if you just get a map'" (qtd. in Mehler 141). What Roos and others miss is that the characters don't simply need the ability to have sex with another man without getting killed. For Jack and Ennis, flight to the urbanized coasts would have simply been one more escape from both their labor and their lives and thus darken the ideal which defined them. It is inane to assume the two men are fixated on work with animals simply because they don't own maps. One imagines how the two would fare with Ennis as a suit salesman, Jack in a call-center cubicle, living together in a gay-friendly apartment complex. We end with the possibility that individuals like Jack and Ennis might be hopelessly queer to the Hollywood crowd, not because of their sexual orientation, but due to their attraction to the ideal of meaningful labor. Urbanites can preach to such workers that they can be cured of this attraction, or that their desires will lessen if they simply abstain, yet this desire for real work could very well be one of the walls the men are wedged up against, and a failure to feel the importance of ranchwork means misunderstanding the entire film. Those who watch the

film without this in mind could too easily end up with simply one more reason to detest the lives of rural, backward barbarians as much as Joe Aguirre detests his herders.

Instead of, say, analyzing the ways that urban over-consumption demands the systemic oppression of all farm laborers, we end up simply wishing to fish a few favored country boys out from the uncivilized wilds and reel them to the saved shores of the city.

“Change This to 21st Century”: Encounters with the Herders
of the Intermountain West

In between our visits with Esteban, we encountered a 16-year-old activist named Comfrey, a young man running away from his parents and into the struggle of anarcho-environmentalism. He was kind and polite, with a London-newsboy flair, trying hard to show that he can hold his liquor and smoke cigarettes nimbly down to the nubbins. From his home in Grand Junction, Colorado, Comfrey works on a zine called *The Red Pill* (in reference to the painful and bravely-chosen truth-giver of *The Matrix*), and shared with me a recent issue devoted to labor abuse in the sheepherding industry. Several residents of Grand Junction—under the instigation of Thomas Acker, a Spanish professor at Grand Junction’s Mesa State College, who studies the treatment of immigrant populations in America—went out seeking interviews with current sheepherders. Their findings assert that sheepherders in southwestern Wyoming and northwestern Colorado, largely H-2A visa holders like Esteban, make around ninety cents an hour and live through minus-twenty-degree winters in inadequate housing, on a paltry diet.

Their guides were three Chilean men who had come to the U.S. on promises of “food, clothing, shelter, and a good paycheck to herd sheep,” but found the conditions far

harder—and the amenities scantier—than expected. The Chileans spoke of bosses holding onto employees' passports as collateral. Two had quit their jobs, only to have their employer retain all of their back-wages (“Slavery in America” 1). When employers justify this practice by citing the cost of the plane ticket here for workers, the result is sickeningly similar to the kind of ‘Company Store Debt’ tactics which guaranteed that employees would remain in permanent indentured servitude—the very practices which the U.S. labor movement was invented to correct. The Chilean guides also shared the story of Jose Alturo, a man from Mexico here on a work visa for sheep herding in the Colorado badlands. While out working, he was bit by a tick carrying a microbe that caused a rare form of encephalitis. They continued:

Each day he grew more and more sick, [but] his boss refused to bring him into town to receive the medical care that he needed. Several other herders came together in solidarity and managed to bring him to Saint Mary’s Hospital in Grand Junction. It was too late, however. He was flown to Mexico after several weeks in the hospital and died before he could come to know his newborn child. (“Slavery in America” 2)

Two of the Chilean guides insisted that, had the work conditions here been portrayed honestly by recruiters in Chile, they “never would have come” (2).

This group was prepared to encounter Spanish-speakers, men from Mexico, Peru, Chile. However, once they reached a sheep trailer out on the cold and windy plains, they were astonished to find that the herder is from Nepal—an experience which would be repeated at each sheep camp they encountered. Spanish-speakers are isolated enough in this region, with its penchant for English-only xenophobia, but one can only imagine the kind of complete alienation, the lack of any support or advocacy structure, that would result from being a Nepali-speaker in rural Wyoming. The herders appeared overjoyed to see them (the author chalks this up to the fact that sheepherding is “most likely the

loneliest job on the continental United States” (1)). One herder, who was able to speak broken English, explained that he had been on these plains for three years, and the last visitor he had was an uncle two years before. He described keeping track of the months by watching the due-by dates changing on the cartons of eggs he received occasionally from his boss (2).

The investigators discovered that the work contracts which the migrant workers sign in Nepal are altered upon arrival in the U.S.: the Nepalese government has strict standards when it comes to work hours and living conditions for migrant workers which the U.S. sheep industry simply cannot meet. The herders work long days, and even when not out with the sheep they are essentially always ‘on call.’ The author describes one worker’s home as “a tiny tin trailer with a bed and wood stove that put out barely any heat. Its window was covered by cardboard and his pantry held nothing but rice, canned beans, tomato sauce, green beans, and a few spices.” His clothing is described as “ragged and well worn, his boots and gloves were held together by duct tape and his bedding was nothing but a thin sleeping bag and a blanket, hardly fitting clothing and bedding for a part of the country that can see wind chill factors in the negative 20s and whiteouts that can literally spring from nowhere” (2).

The author continues:

The next couple of camps were in much the same shape, little tin trailers that should be condemned; mangy, ragged packs of dogs either starved for attention or cowering. Horses standing with their asses to the wind, shivering in huddled crowds, gaunt ribs showing through their thick winter coats and smiling Nepali men who were simply joyous to have someone visiting besides an angry boss yelling at them. (2)

Each of these employees made \$650 a month, under \$7,800 a year. When the author asked the first herder what changes he would like to see in the industry, the herder

laughed and slapped his knee, answering “Change? Change this to 21st century, this not 21st century” (2).

The author concludes:

The right of a worker to quit his job if his boss is abusive and simply immoral in his employment practices should be an inherent right across the globe. In a truly free market this employer would be forced to change their practices or go out of business from a lack of workers. That is not the case in Colorado and Wyoming when it comes to shepherders. (2)

A group brought their recordings of these complaints to the “Taste of Vail Lamb Cook-off,” where the sheep industry was promoting its upscale meat products. In all accounts, it was a cold reception.

Other research corroborates the concerns of *The Red Pill: Colorado Legal Services*, a nonprofit organization, interviewed ninety-three shepherds in the conjoining corners of Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah, finding that these workers “sometimes toil more than 90 hours a week, can’t leave the isolated sites where they work and are grossly underpaid.” Forty-two percent of those interviewed said their employer kept their passports and other documents, and they worried they would be deported if they complained (Moreno). Some employees had been working for as long as eight months without seeing a paycheck (Frosch 2). Even in their alienated condition, which would make shepherders far less likely to seek legal help, the U.S. Department of Labor has carried out investigations finding that 133 shepherders nationwide were owed a total of \$216,443 in back wages. This includes the case of the Colorado ranch John Peroulis & Sons Sheep, the owners of which were found guilty of beating, starving, and exploiting shepherders for an entire decade—and simply fined back wages and an extra \$3,000 (one must assume that the foreign-born have lower ‘standards of retribution’ as well as

lower ‘standards of living’) (Frosch 2). A Colorado State Senator, approached with news of the industry, expressed worry that this is “a situation rife with the possibility of abuse, and I was afraid that we were looking at a situation of indentured servitude, of near slavery, right here in Colorado” (Moreno).

The sheepherders I knew in Utah live in a significantly better situation than the ones detailed by *The Red Pill* report—they made \$100 more a month, lived in more modern and comfortable trailers with warmer clothes, had opportunities to eat some fresh meat, fruits, vegetables. But I remain pestered by these general concerns, repeated again and again in the industry. After all, no one is pretending that we import 80% of all farmworkers because we want greater cultural diversity within our borders. We all know workers are imported because they will submit to conditions which it would be illegal or untenable to ask of U.S. citizens.

Ethnographic Notes on the Logic of Bottom Rungs

In the real pastoral, there is always a carcass, a coyote, a dog’s toes smashed in a trap—a glitch in this glimmering beauty. The stories of other sheepherders, who had clearly been oppressed and abused, kept springing to my mind in the days spent with Esteban, bringing with them confusion over our dubious system of according value to the kind of work he was doing. He is making meat and wool for people, in difficult conditions—meanwhile the magnetic traces which mean money and status and power are pulled faster and faster to the screens of those who ‘make’ nothing, who merely trade around magnetic traces, who herd subprime mortgages. I went up to the mountain to live with the animals, and with the men who worked with them, assuming this would teach

me some clear moral response to our treatment of workers and landscapes. Instead I found only the trauma of twisted and back-bending solidarities. Learning about shepherd abuse through short stories or newspaper articles was far different from grappling with the logic of bottom rungs among bosses and employees who are both dear to me.

To make it worse, my doubts of this economic system are in some ways a betrayal of Esteban, who is in every respect an earnest and ideologically-committed worker, cheerful and capable in his obedience to the *patrón*. He has, over the years, created an intensive system for increasing the average lamb-weight at the time of slaughter. He tells us his family wants him to come home for good, saying they have enough money now to take care of themselves, but he's still holding out for a little more capital, maybe six more years away from his family. This way, he could maybe afford a truck once he gets home, which he could use for hauling and taxi work in Peru. Faced with his cheerful support of the economics of migrant labor, it took until we were about to leave the mountains for the last time for Tristan and me to ask Esteban a question which had long been itching at us. *Do you think this is fair?*

Esteban's first response was to assume that some might think it was unfair of him to be 'taking jobs' in the US as a noncitizen, and spent some time explaining that he was here completely legally. He protested that "no white people do this work, alone up with the sheep in the mountains. I've never seen it; they don't want this work." Motioning around him to the camp, stacks of hay, horses, and the clump of trees where our tent was hidden, he said, pointedly, "maybe they would come up here and look around for a week, try it out, see what it's like, and then go home. They wouldn't last." He and his brothers,

“on the other hand, are perfect for this. We’re really well prepared—*very* prepared. We are used to the loneliness, the cold, boredom, being told what to do, being away from our families. Me and all my brothers are here not because we all recommended each other for the job, but because we are prepared for it.” He told us again the conditions of his upbringing, a home without a father, the entire family squeezed into a house of two rooms, less than double the size of the sheep trailer. Sleeping on nothing but the stretched skins of their own butchered sheep. Job training.

Tristan tried to clarify that he was not speaking of any injustice Esteban was perpetrating, but injustice being inflicted on him—how the *patrón* gets away with paying him half what he would have to pay someone who was a U.S. citizen. Esteban didn’t agree that this was a problem, taking us through a long list of the expenses of owning a ranch, how much oil, hay, trucks, and coyote traps cost. Above that, three herders were each paid \$9,000 a year. “A lot of money! And three times what I could make in Peru! Some people would say the *patrón* is exploiting us, and if he were a rich man with big toy cars I would agree, but he isn’t making much off of us.” The *patrón* couldn’t be doing much more than breaking even. We all consent to this: the trope of the bankrupt farmer or rancher is real and pervasive. We have met many people who have no economic incentive for what they’re doing, except for a heart’s tie to land that’s been so long part of the family, a need to raise the new generation of little humans on precisely this topography, this smell of alfalfa, these goat-musted stables. Tristan recalls the joke a die-hard cattle-rancher in Vernon told us, that if she had a million dollars she would keep ranching until it was gone.

As we leave the mountains, while I was navigating a small sedan over the dirt roads surrounding Whitney Reservoir, Tristan wrote down Esteban's response as well as his thoughts, which he later shared with me. "I knew that everything Esteban had said was true," he wrote "about the sheep business not being very profitable, and white people not being capable of the work." Besides this, he noted, the Powells treated Esteban well, even inviting him to eat at the dinner table with the family on special celebrations, bringing him to town for Henefer's Fourth of July festivities. "But, in the back of my mind," Tristan continued, "I also wondered if Esteban was showing himself to be 'prepared' for this work in one more, crucial way: the ability to take obedience a step further, to creatively and convincingly list the reasons why this is the best he could expect, why sheepmen pass the hardest work on to the 'guest' workers for half of minimum wage to keep their business 'sustainable'—the ability to accept and amplify the logic of hierarchy in their own minds and to each other."

I have fallen head-over-heels for these old Utah ranching families, and I want them to do everything in their power to hold onto their time-loved plots instead of selling to one more suburban housing developer. And yet, how are we to respond if the policies which allow their ranches and our entire food system to survive turn out to be racist? Writer Arundhati Roy demolishes the notion that neoliberal macroeconomics are blind to race, calling it instead the "project of New Racism," where "apartheid as formal policy is generally considered antiquated and unnecessary" only because powerful (white) countries have found far easier ways to "institutionalize inequality" (Roy 88-89). Some few people of color are inducted into the elite to create an image of post-racial power (a practice Roy compares to the annual Presidential Turkey Pardon), while "the remaining

millions lose their jobs, are evicted from their homes, have their water and electricity connections cut, and die of AIDS” (88). Her questions catch at those who want the US to economically protect our dwindling agricultural operations:

Why else would it be that the United States taxes a garment made by a Bangladeshi manufacturer twenty times more than it taxes a garment made in the United Kingdom? Why else would it be that countries that grow ninety percent of the world’s cocoa bean produce only five percent of the world’s chocolate? Why else would it be that countries that grow cocoa bean, like the Ivory Coast and Ghana, are taxed out of the market if they try and turn it into chocolate? Why else would it be that rich countries that spend over a billion dollars a day on subsidies to farmers demand that poor countries like India withdraw all agricultural subsidies [. . .]? Why else would it be that after having been plundered by colonizing regimes for more than half a century, former colonies are steeped in debt to those same regimes and repay them some \$382 billion a year? (89)

I am fed off a power imbalance, suckled by the axioms that the time of some (‘first world’) humans is *worth* far more than the time of other (‘third world’) humans. We shrug and call it ‘standard of living,’ never giving voice to the opposite possibility that people in ‘poor countries’ might need far more resources than we do if they are to defend their families against the violence of war and institutionalized famine, defend their ecosystems against the mass corporate pillaging currently underway, defend their dignity against structuralized racism. We croon out justifications that are astonishingly similar to those we gave (and give) for paying women or American racial minorities less than white men (i.e., women have less expenses than men; or, that’s good pay for someone on the black side of town). In the words of Peter Orwick, executive director of the American Sheep Industry Association, “If it weren’t an attractive job for them, they wouldn’t be here” (Frosch 1). Or, from Dennis Richins, executive director of the Western Range Association: “It’s a hard, lonely life, but why do the shepherders want to come back a second or third time if things are so bad?” (Frosch 2).

These same platitudes could be offered as an explanation for sixteen-year-old prostitutes and twelve-year-old miners, occluding any coercive forces wrapped up in ‘free labor.’ In the end, the explanations wind down to this: desperate people can be coerced with less force, can be more easily impressed with the kind of trinkets we brought to steal the land out from under the Natives. And as in those cases, we in the lot of the prestigious who happen to think all of this is wrong wind up pitying the poor benighted Natives who simply don’t know any better. We don’t stop to examine the real, bodily lack of options of the less powerful, all the reasons one would need to stay on good terms with gunslingers—perhaps even the reasons that one would want to *become* one.

At the end of my first visit with Esteban and Rodolfo, we brought the sheep off the mountain. They asked if I could ride a horse to help them do this, and I responded, eagerly, “Si, si!” It wasn’t exactly true, but I knew I would never be competent for real work if I didn’t hazard something, adopt the rural confidence they had needed to get their own herding jobs. They put me on the horse named *Chiro*, a friendly and relatively calm creature who had eaten some of our sunflower bread earlier. She happened to be, Esteban explained, an Apache breed that wouldn’t wear shoes, her hooves much harder than those of most horses. Her head had to be tied down so she didn’t hurl it backwards and break the nose of her rider. My barefoot, wild Apache mare. When the Powells visited to move camp, they revealed that *Chiro* was “Cheeto”: not vaguely Latin-American sounding syllables, but a very specific, cheese-flavored, modified corn starch snack substance. Cheeto, how our dignity is wounded! And so with Tristan at the four-wheeler and me on a snack, we found ourselves heading at dawn after a sea of sheep. Cheeto had every reason to be frustrated with me. I was a charlatan; she didn’t know me

enough to trust, my body sitting uneasily across her back, primate paws on her reins, heels at her belly—I could be a threat, or, worse yet, I could be incompetent.

When witnessing sheep-work like this, the biggest surprise was the sound. Books about sheep behavior explain that the animals never cry out in pain. Shepherding artist Bill Stockton, in his glorious little book *Today I Baled Some Hay to Feed the Sheep the Coyotes Eat*, worries:

I wish this characteristic of sheep were not so. We have no way of telling, exactly, how much pain we are inflicting on an animal. We don't know how much they can endure; we can only relate their sensitivity to human pain. If this is true—and I hope it isn't—then I'm guilty of being the cruelest of mammals.
(25)

After being with sheep, I begin to suspect that the idea of their inability to express pain stems from their penchant to cry out in what seems like pain so easily that we must call it normal: when they are moved with dogs and men and horses, the old ewes and the lambs shout frantically, trying to keep an auditory hold on each other, thousands of booming wails responded to by thousands of frantic shrieks, all of the tones dropping tragically at the tail-end. If a human yelled like that, you'd think she suspected that at any time she could be shipped to a slaughterhouse.

Bringing them off the mountain means more mangling of their social ties, more astonished and desperate cries. Also dust, but dust and sage and a sense of uncertain strength. The idea was for Esteban and Rodolfo to each bring in one flank, and I'd follow behind, moving the sheep forward, but "*tranquilo, tranquilo.*" After all, when lamb-weight determines all of your profit, the primary goal is always to provide the most opportunities for eating, without the sustained or intense stressors which would drop their weight and toughen their meat. It seems simple enough, but the brothers' movements

were completely counter-intuitive. I'd ask, pointing "*aquí?*" No, they'd respond, "*allí.*" And then begin pushing the sheep up a completely different ridge than the one they pointed to. This was more than a language barrier—this was the difference between men who know the movements of animals and the undulations of terrain, and me illiterate, hurrying to the far outskirts of the sheep, worrying if I don't make it around every one I'll be allowing some creatures to fall behind. Not knowing that sheep *don't* fall behind—the flock is a deathless urge in the face of panic. Cheeto herself fought to cut through the flock at an angle, knowing those left out will push through horses and dogs to make it back to their flock-mates. I finally gave in to the horse body, trying to relax my back and ass and leg muscles, to hide from her my stress and fear.

Hours later, once we got to the last steep hill down into Henefer (tense here: Cheeto tired and displeased, the rope keeping her head down long ago snapped, and me trying to find some respectful way to coerce her down what felt like a forty-five-degree slope), we encountered the Powell family, kids and adults, there to help move the herd along the highway to a corral, where in the morning the diesel trucks would pick up the sheep and haul them to the Uintas. The highway was first the Powell family's sheep trail, and so they retain trailing rights for this day each year. Traffic still moved, but slowly, trying to honk the old ewes out of their way. A couple from California stopped to admire the scenic nature of the event, asking Esteban if they could pay to ride the horses.

Heber Powell, Spencer's brother and co-owner of the operation, was running things here. I had heard rumors that he's not as interested in the sheep industry as his brother is, and it is from Heber's offspring I heard persistent complaints of the stubborn stupidity of sheep, causing me to recognize how respectful toward the animals Spencer's

progeny in fact are. Heber tells Esteban and Rodolfo to move the sheep very slowly, to let them eat all along the highway. When we ask Rodolfo about this, he cannot hide an edge of frustration: if the sheep haven't been eating the long, fresh grass up in the mountains, they're not going to be getting fat on dry cheat grass down here. What he doesn't say is that it is also deathly hot today in this valley, without shade. Also, I know that today is the day that Esteban and Rodolfo are supposed to be able to call their families, an act that is indefinitely delayed as they stand out with the sheep along the searing asphalt. There is no room for them to debate the merits of this plan with their *patrón*. Cheeto becomes increasingly agitated with the heat and my incompetence, until I finally relieve her of my weight. Rodolfo ties her to a large sagebrush, which she then paws up and drags behind her in a wild, sheep-scattering careen that announces she *is* a barefoot Apache mare, no matter what health-risk you name her.

The Powells leave, but Esteban and Rodolfo wait all day by the highway, sitting in the gravel in the scant shade of the four-wheeler, throwing pebbles for the border collies to chase. Tristan and I wander down to the Weber River, and then to Henefer's grocery store, Grumps, to feast on canned pears. My sister, her husband and kids come to pick us up and whisk us back to our urban lives, bringing us Gatorade which we share with Esteban and Rodolfo, still waiting. They are both joking, trying to make the best of it, though it is clear that Rodolfo is angry and Esteban is nervous, trying hard not to question his *patrón's* wisdom, worried that his brother will not be so discreet.

I want to tell Heber that he should ask his employees what *they* think would be the wisest or most fair course of action, I want to suggest an equal shift-system for watching the sheep along the roadside, so everyone can have some time to shower, cool off, eat

dinner. But like Esteban and Rodolfo, I keep my mouth shut. As a researcher, I am, like them, dependent on the goodwill of the boss, and though my risk would be miniscule compared to theirs, I am not brave enough to put in a word for the people who have given us much. Even now, it is painful to force myself to write it out, knowing it is a betrayal of the Powells to put my perceptions of this work relationship to words. Events like this—bringing the sheep off the mountain or lamb-docking—are family festivals for the Powells, where cousins learn young how to work alongside and respect each other, how to use their muscles in honest labor, how to feel out the minds of other species. And this I value more than nearly any activity I can imagine. What I don't dare say, though, is the catch: that it comes at the price of mind-bending isolation for their hired workers, down to this day in the head-splitting sun, their monthly call to their families thousands of miles away indefinitely postponed, until the boss says otherwise. I feel uprooted by the moment, as though it is infinitely large. The archetype of all First-World Fun, which can't be escaped no matter how wholesome or worthy the event. It is still kin to all the video games and plasma-screens whose commercials show the whole family in laughter on the couch, and somewhere off-screen, we guess, is the brown child's body digging col-tan out of the earth to form the wiring of the Wii. To be together as family, we fuel alien-making industries.

Golpeado. Somos golpeado por la vida. That night, Esteban and Rodolfo are driven to the Powells' house where we are eating so we can say goodbye. They have not called their families yet. I cry. I cannot look them in the eyes.

Part Two: Connections to Extended Food-Work

Crops

People in the U.S. speak of finding power in modern mobility, but it is also true that to be an alien, to be ungrounded, is to be vulnerable. In this respect we are all like Antaeus, the giant son of Gaia, whom Hercules could only defeat by lifting him up off the body of his mother earth. Some of us, for now, can pay our way out of the situation: though we don't have any of the skills required to make our food, shelter, and clothing out of our own places, we can finagle for others to do the work for us. All we need to do is ferociously protect the political and economic institutions which make our combined incompetence and luxury possible. The ones doing the work closest to the soil, however, don't have such options. I knew this already about shepherders, but I still had something to learn about the rest of that 80%. Last fall I went to the School of the Americas Watch conference and demonstration at Fort Benning, Georgia, needing to learn more about the connections between this institution and the grossly abusive 'counter-insurgency' tactics being used in Central and South America. But the greatest revelation concerned a different method of coercing Latin American bodies, the vast, implacable coercion of foodways.

A man came from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to tell us that the farmworkers in Florida (who feed Americans fresh fruits and vegetables during the winter) were wedged tight between the binds of wage slavery and slavery of a more traditional sort. In the last decade, over a thousand actual slaves have been freed from the plantations of the South. In the U.S. vs. Flores case, they explain that farmhands "who attempted escape were assaulted, pistol-whipped, and even shot" (Coalition of

Immokalee Workers “CIW Anti-Slavery Campaign”). Other cases explain how abductions, beatings, and insurmountable ‘company store’ debt bring us our winter tomatoes and orange juice. In the seven slavery cases which the CIW helped investigate, the two demographics to be consistently abused are migrants and recruits from U.S. homeless shelters, reaffirming that the indicator of easy exploitation is a home-lack. As one slavery-case prosecutor explained:

I worked as a prosecutor in Brooklyn before I went to DOJ, so I had some experience with poor and displaced communities, but these workers are completely beyond that. They don’t have addresses the same way the people you know do. They’re migrants, they’re undocumented. They have no presence in the system at all (qtd. in Bowe 22).

This week’s price discount in the produce aisle is wrung out of laborers unprotected by addresses.

And if it’s not outright slavery, then in Immokalee it’s a legal wage of forty-five cents for each thirty-two-pound bucket of tomatoes harvested, a wage that has been essentially stuck in place since 1978, meaning that in order to make minimum wage for a day’s labor, each worker needs to gather up two and a half *tons* of tomatoes in ten hours. The simple logistics of the Florida tomato industry facilitate extreme alienation. The workers are from different countries, speaking different indigenous languages, brought together for a few weeks simply to be in cut-throat competition with each other. There aren’t enough jobs for every would-be worker, not enough harvestable fruit for a decent wage for each one that actually gets picked up for the job. A prerequisite for employment is the ability to elbow out others, work too hard to see your neighbor the row over. As John Bowe explains in his investigation of slavery in the tomato industry:

In the postpastoral fields of modern, industrialized agriculture, such quaint notions as worker solidarity are unrealistic. As a former Immokalee tomato

picker named Francisca Cortes told me, every morning is like a free-for-all: when the bus pulls off the highway and into the day's tomato field, workers scramble and elbow one another out of the way in a dog-eat-dog race for the most advantageous positions in the field. A row that faces the sun more directly will have riper fruit, making for easier, faster picking than a row in the shade. A row closer to the collection bin cuts the length of the heavy slog back and forth with a full bucket. Each gradient of productivity is worth another quarter, another dollar. Under these circumstances, [one worker] said with a shrug, 'it's just a bunch of men and some women. You're with strangers. You don't know them. You're not there to say 'What's your name? How are you? How long have you been here?' There just isn't any time for that. (11)

The wretched work conditions of Immokalee metastasize to each piece of earth where food is prodded out of the soil. In a letter to the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Department of Labor referred to farmworkers everywhere across the nation as “a labor force in significant economic distress,” facing “low wages, sub-poverty annual earnings, significant periods of un- and underemployment” (U.S. Dept. of Labor). In a 2008 report on hired farmworkers, the USDA concluded that they continue to be “among the most economically disadvantaged working groups in the U.S., seeing poverty rates that are more than double the rates of all wage and salary employees (Kandel 7). In opposition to cheerful narratives of trickle-down economic progress, the Department of Labor had to conclude that “farm workers not only lost ground relative to other workers in the private sector, they lost ground absolutely” (U.S. Dept. of Labor). Though poverty has long been associated with American food-workers, an Oxfam America report on farmworker conditions finds that “the erosion of farmworkers’ economic, social, and political rights not only has continued but has actually accelerated. Relatively recent practices in the industry have only worsened the situation. A supply-chain model has tightened industry-wide profit margins and further reduced the tiny sliver of the pie left for worker” (Oxfam America 1).

When I ask people in the sheep industry why workers are paid so little, they point to falling wool prices and cheap mutton imports, but the paycheck of sheepworkers—this “bottom rung of migrant labor” (Frosch 1)—is eerily similar to the lot of agricultural workers in industries that are vibrant and growing, witnessing increased demand. An investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor concluded that while the industries which hired migrant laborers are “experience[ing] dramatic output and sales growth, hired and contract labor is not sharing in the rewards of increased growth through increased wages. Wages have been stagnant and, in real terms, have even seen significant decline” (U.S. Dept. of Labor). The key point here is that the poor treatment and poverty wages of shepherders are not unique aspects of a sheep market—though the work is unprecedentedly lonely, they are not alone.

Though each case of abuse or slavery in one of the many webs of food production has its own unique qualities, the systemic causes come to some kind of unity. As agricultural labor activist Laura Germino explains, “Modern-day slavery cases don’t happen in a vacuum” (Bowe 36)—they happen in the context of an economic system which undervalues food-work and a legal system which maintains specific agricultural exemptions from New-Deal era labor bills, ensuring that none of America’s food-workers have “the right to overtime pay, or the right to organize and collectively bargain with their employers” (Student Farmworker Alliance “Facts and Figures”). Germino explains that cases of slavery “only occur in degraded labor environments, ones that are fundamentally, systematically exploitive. In industries where the labor force is contingent, day-haul, with subpoverty wages, no benefits, no right to overtime, no right to organize—that’s where you see slavery taking root” (Bowe 36). John Bowe, a *New York*

Times investigative reporter who wrote a book about his experiences documenting slavery in America, records Germino explaining to him that

for every case of outright slavery making splashy headlines, it is reasonable to assume that there are thousands of additional workers toiling away in abusive, sweatshop like conditions. Conversely [. . .], in labor environments with healthy worker protections—full-time positions with decent wages, benefits, overtime pay, freedom to form unions, and so forth—slavery cases simply don't exist. When was the last time anyone heard of a slavery case in the automotive industry? (Bowe 36)

Oxfam America titled their research on farmwork bluntly: “Like Machines in the Fields: Workers without Rights in American Agriculture.” This report concludes: “Squeezed by the buyers of their produce, growers pass on the costs and risks imposed on them to those on the lowest rung of the supply chain: the farmworkers they employ” (36). Again, the rungs. This pattern should be familiar to me by now: the powerful in England squeeze the peasants off their land in order to grow sheep, and these peasants, turned migrants, in turn devastate entire continents of Natives. Mormons are persecuted clear out of America and in turn feel utterly justified in trying to eradicate a few bands of ‘Lamanites.’ Wool buyers, in a world more interested in cheap synthetic fabrics, squeeze sheep ranchers, who in turn pay employees ninety cents an hour. The executive director of the American Sheep Industry Association worries that any additional costs to ranchers will shut down operations, noting that *two-thirds* of all ranchers have already quit in the last fifteen years due to financial duress (Moreno).

Also squeezed on the lowest rung are the ecosystems which feed our food—the other species we poison and bull-doze off these fertile lands, the rivers and aquifers drained, topsoil washed off or salinated, mountains overgrazed and rife with muddy gullies, young animals bloated with the grain that acidifies their ruminant bellies before

they are slaughtered en masse. Squeezed, as are my own tries at solidarity. I feel the moral imperative of siding with both the expatriate Mormons and Black Hawk; I need the Powells to continue their ranching life on these landscapes in perpetuity even as I insist that all laborers should have not only a living wage but some form of autonomy, some co-decision-making power in determining the direction of future operations. This is the middle-manager quandary—the workers oppressed by the ultimate bosses are the ones most visibly oppressing those beneath them, the foremen of this twenty-first century slavery.

Meat

An analysis of those working with crops helps us map out the extensions of food-worker alienation beyond the hills of herders, and clarifies the problems of workers-vs.-bosses thinking. But there is another dimension to the problems of the pastoral, beyond the rift between ranchers and herders. The final glitch in the pastoral lurks in the conclusion of this all labor of men and ewes, a trauma tied to what it means fundamentally to be working with another species—that we eat. Though the final stage of sheep-work is often occluded from the pastoral image, meat-making presents its own dimensions of alienation in a culture that both demands meat and detests slaughter.

One gorgeous evening in the Henefer foothills, Tristan and I wandered out to watch Esteban move the sheep from a distance. On our way, backs turned to a pink sunset, we found a black-faced lamb alone and flailing, hind leg caught in a coyote trap. These coyote traps, about eight inches long and five inches wide, are round-edged to guard against breaking bones—both to allow for the release of unintended victims like

this one, and to ensure that a determined coyote doesn't have any help in chewing off her own foot to get free. I held the lamb down on his side, trying to calm the terrified animal, while Tristan pried open the metal jaws. This is the only time I actually touched a sheep in these hills. We stepped back, and the disoriented animal eventually jumped up and bounded down the ridge. We felt like heroes.

But the black-faced lamb wouldn't live for long. For all my sense of being a savior, he was still sent to the slaughterhouse a few short months afterward. Stunned, hauled onto a meathook, bled out, skinned, dismembered. This is the biggest gap in the pastoral experience: that even the rewarding labor of providing tender care for animals is ultimately in the service of making meat. Bill Stockton writes that his lambs are "first, lives to be saved, then to be wasted. A paradox for a conscious carnivore—a natural procedure for the insensitive" (41). This is a particularly tough paradox because we believe deeply enough in the primal nurturing qualities of the shepherd to constantly use the idiom of his labor to describe a loving God. While Spencer Powell was at BYU-Hawaii he presented a devotional address to the students, where he discussed how his work with sheep has taught him what it means for the Lord to be a Good Shepherd. No one seemed to be uncomfortable that a man who yearly trucks his animals to slaughter would suggest that we need to be sheep faithfully following our shepherd-God. The responsible shepherd who maketh his lambs to lie in green pastures and drink from still waters is the same who slits their throats on feast days. An honest pastoral must encompass blood and sheep-screams.

But of course, we are incapable of stretching our pastorals that far. If we are going to write of actual meat-making, in our culture the only genre open seems to be

horror. If we try to think through the labor that ends the sheep, we'll make *The Silence of the Lambs*. The spectacularized violence in this film, its cannibalism and human skin-harvesting, only reveals our culture's deep discomfort with our unspectacular, every-day work with livestock. It is, after all, the sheep screams that create the unsolvable trauma in the film, Buffalo Bill and Hannibal Lecter simply cropping up as 'abnormalities,' monstrous line-crossers in a system that is otherwise strictly speciesist, eating and skinning *only* nonhuman animals. Hearing Clarice Starling relate the story of the unsaveable lambs to Lecter, we may feel it our viewerly duty to reinscribe the lamb-deaths into a symbol of human deaths, tying it to the death of the 'innocents' in general. As the lambs are weak beings who suffer for another's luxury, they can easily be made to represent Catherine Martin (the young woman being starved by 'Buffalo Bill' for the easier harvest of her skin) and the human-meals of Hannibal Lecter (further witnessed by his extra meal of lamb, served rare, after he hears Starling's story). However, Starling's trauma is not reducible to a simple symbol of human deaths. She can carry out her job with a level head, can speak of her father's death while remaining "frank," leaving Hannibal disappointed. But when she speaks of the dying lambs Hannibal experiences nearly orgasmic bliss in her emotional breakdown, thanking her breathlessly afterwards. The origin of trauma within the film is thus not among the monsters, but the sheep-workers whom Starling asserts are "very decent": the ones slaughtering the spring lambs for their tender meat and baby-soft pelts.

It is violence that occurs *here*, the violence of grocery stores and dinner tables, repeated daily and uneasily sanctioned by society—rather than the 'monstrous' violence that can be safely cordoned off into the 'abnormal'—that threatens the greatest rupture in

social relations. When Lecter asks Starling at the end of the film if the lambs have stopped screaming, it is she who must be silent, jarred by her inability to confess that the lambs have never stopped screaming, regardless of her heroics: they have only been off-screen—for her, for the audience, for the entire “decent” society.

Even the film which depicts sheep-slaughter outside of the horror genre—Charles Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep*—holds many of the same horrifying conclusions due to its stark depiction of slaughter-work. This remarkable 1977 film, only publicly released in 2007, focuses on a man named Stan and his family in the predominantly black Watts district of LA. Stan, who works all day in a sheep slaughterhouse, explains at the beginning of the film: “Just working myself into my own hell. Close my eyes, can’t get no sleep at night. No peace of mind.” Later, a neighbor jokes that when Stan isn’t sleeping he’s “counting sheep.” Stan looks disturbed, and finally responds, “Man, I guess it’s time for me to get ready to go to work.” Though there are many causes for worry and pain in the film, the weight of Stan’s work in the meatpacking plant is constantly reiterated.

Because this film intersperses the deadening pain of poverty in urban America with scenes depicting such images as the raw play of children in an urban-industrial wasteland, film critics are inclined to conclude that the ‘message’ of *Killer of Sheep* is that life is terrible, but there are moments also of “transcendent joy and gentle humor” (“Killer of Sheep”). But the depictions of Stan’s work insist again and again that this sort of reading has the order wrong: rather, the film asserts that there might be bodily joy, but such moments merely ensure that the horrifying pain of life continues, interminably. One scene of the children playing in the dust around railroad tracks is backgrounded by the sentimental crooning: “A grocer and a butcher, and the people that I meet. / The children

in the playground, the faces that I see, / All races, all religions, that's America to me," only to conclude with a quick cut of Stan at the slaughterhouse cleaning the meathooks while his co-worker sharpens his knives. The cameras then focus on a pair of 'Judas goats,' leading panicky sheep into the facility. If the grocer and the butcher are "America to me," the depiction of Stan's work pushes us to the opposite of sentimental patriotism. Similarly, at the end of the film, the women tenderly rejoice that one of them has become pregnant, while the film cuts to lamb bodies being hoisted onto meathooks to be skinned, to the tune of "This Bitter Earth."

The reading pushed by these juxtapositions suggests that the labor of the people of Watts, their production and reproduction, like the creations of the ewes and the earth herself, are all harvested for the powerful. The babies that the mothers rejoice over, the kids at their inventive and death-defying games, are simply more fodder for the white man's extractive capitalism. One scene focuses on the obvious pleasure one Judas goat has in rubbing his head against the flanks of another, adequate metaphor for the roles of labor and pleasure in the film. The relationships and social pleasures of poor black people are skewed by the state and the market to betrayal: like the Judas goats, the obedient individuals striving for 'success' will simply lead those who trust them to the same deadening existence. If Stan's son stays out of trouble, he will one day earn the right to also complain: "working myself into my own hell." Stan, the film's most mature and contemplative character, is thus also the most troubled, the one who never smiles. He has followed out the trail which promised to raise him to the middle class (as opposed to the open rioting and resistance of an earlier Watts), and found himself stuck in the

maw of capital, a traitor to his loved ones. There is no hidden transcendence in *Killer of Sheep*: much as we demand one, the work of slaughter again and again refuses it.

It's easier and less troubling for critics to ignore the killing of sheep in *Killer of Sheep*, and thus to misread what the film might actually suggest about the lot of the humans who carry out the job. By now we should know to expect such a (non)response to sheep-slaughter. Though our relationships with sheep are long, this form of slaughter is still new enough for our culture to fail at answers. In most pastoral economies, what we value in sheep is their wool, their milk, and their blood, all taken from them without killing. Ryder writes that for the traditional cultures he studied "meat is eaten only on accidental death, or special occasions, and to stave off famine" (68). This is not the case with the sheep of Utah: only lambs drink their milk, only ticks sip their blood. What we want is meat. Our plunge into mass sheep-slaughter, without any cultural work to sacralize the ritual, breeds an opposite-but-equal symptom, a tic, which is a culture utterly incapable of acknowledging the work of lamb-death. Slaughterhouses which once stood in downtown Chicago or New York City are now swept far from city centers (and thus far from hotbeds of union organizing) (Schlosser 154). Sides of beef once carved up by a butcher in front of customers are now hygienically packaged in plastic wrap and styrofoam, each with a neat, white, barcode nametag (for a further discussion of this phenomenon, and its repercussions, see Bulliet). We recognize that meat comes from living animals, but the labor that bridges the two forms is utterly unthinkable—and, as both *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Killer of Sheep* suggest, for many it is deeply traumatizing.

Even the workers closest to the warm animal body are given tools to detach themselves from the meat-motivation of all this labor. The ones who raise the sheep are almost never the ones who kill them: the lambs are whisked away where the slaughter cannot be heard—in Utah they are generally trucked all the way to places like Watts, California. For their part, sheep ranchers can continue carrying out the role of a stern yet nurturing father-god to the sheep. Further, even those on the kill-floor are given an escape from the lines of clear causation. French anthropologist Noémie Vialles observes that in a slaughterhouse,

the first man does not really kill, he anaesthetizes. The second (or third) does not really kill either; he bleeds an animal that is already inert and, in the terms that are in constant use, ‘as if dead’. The result of dissociating death from suffering in this way is as follows: since anaesthesia is not really fatal and since painless (or supposedly painless) bleeding is not really killing, we are left without any ‘real’ killing at all, nor do we have any one person who ‘really’ kills; by separating the jobs, you completely dilute the responsibilities and any feelings of guilt, however vague and held in check. (45)

With a labor such as this, tied to the extremes of social demand and social unacceptability, it is to be expected that here, too, we would find the most wounded of workers. Because the emotional lives of meat-makers are rarely recorded in official histories, we are often indebted to conscientious artists, authors, and filmmakers to document this history, their fictional works opening up rare glimpses of something true about the inner lives of the poor. While Charles Burnett did this remarkably well in showing the interminable isolation of Stan in *Killer of Sheep*, this desire to speak the slaughter-stories that don’t otherwise get heard is also what brought us *The Jungle*.

Upton Sinclair writes of meatpacking laborers far from their traditional homegrounds, the families who have survived emigration together now rapidly eroding due to the inhuman demands of the industry and the city. The Rudkus family is

methodically “beaten” and “swept aside” (Sinclair 137). Like genocide against American Indians, this beating needn’t take place through the overt violence of fists and weapons—Sinclair writes that this family’s destruction “was not less tragic because it was so sordid, because that it had to do with wages and grocery bills and rents” (138). And yet, even though Jurgis’ blunt conclusion from all his suffering is that the trauma of grocery bills means “no working-man ought to marry”—that a laborer should stay away from the vice of human relationships—in this situation, as in that presented in *Killer of Sheep*, there is still the abstract *possibility* of having some time with one’s closest loved ones, of at least sleeping together in the same slum. And beyond this, though this book depicts individuals who have journeyed far from home places, there is some sense of one city now being *the place where they live*—if not an outright home. This is what makes possible the ringing last words of the book, delivered by a socialist organizer: “Chicago will be ours! *Chicago will be ours!* CHICAGO WILL BE OURS!” (341).

But while Jurgis finds himself tragically driven from his family, and as Stan finds himself incapable of connecting with his wife and children, in modern meat-making—as in modern shepherding—homelessness and distance from family members is increasingly a base-line *expectation* for employment. Meatpacking work doesn’t seem to inherently require that a worker be far away from family, as shepherding might, and yet, as Eric Schlosser documents, meatpacking plants increasingly require “a migrant industrial workforce of poor immigrants” in revolving-door jobs (as having a 100% annual turnover rate means slaughterhouse companies never need to pay for health insurance benefits or vacation time) (Schlosser 149, 160). Schlosser writes of IBP Inc. (now Tyson Fresh Meats) recruiting refugees, asylum seekers, and homeless people in

urban shelters, supplying buses to whisk away these laborers to meatpacking plants in the rural Midwest. This company also keeps an office in Mexico City and advertises U.S. meatpacking jobs over Mexican radio stations. A bus system runs from rural Mexico to the rural U.S., bringing to slaughterhouses a steady stream of uprooted labor (Schlosser 162). These developments in slaughter-work are particularly significant as this is the first time in U.S. history that an *industrial* sector requires a migrant workforce (Schlosser 161).

When the roots of our food-work are steeped in alienation, we should perhaps not be surprised to find tactics of displacement creeping further and further into standard American labor, even when that labor has some distance from the soil the civilized despise. The logic of this alienation goes: if you have a family and loved ones, you will need to do certain kinds of work to support them, and if you're not born into a privilege which exempts you from it, that work will require you to live very much as though you didn't have a family or loved ones. Without an address, as a laborer from another country in short stints at plants with 100% turnover rate, there can be no hope to make a city *yours*. Instead, the horror of slaughter spreads beyond sheep-screams, to the workers who are stuck hearing them, in a labor that never frees them as promised, only wraps them further in the chains of a tragedy that is "not less tragic because it [is] so sordid, because that it ha[s] to do with wages and grocery bills and rents."

Part Three: Arbeit Macht Frei

Mooki and Work's Passivity

Work: force acting through a distance. Like physicists, anthropologists and economists are inclined to speak of work in terms of action, movement, accomplishment. And socially, there is always a scent of virtue hanging about such active production. Work might slide into the connotations of drudgery, something difficult and onerous, but even then we Americans—and particularly we Westerners—hold close the inherent merit of work. If you worked for something, you thereby deserve it—the two phrases are more or less synonymous. Outside of capitalist systems, the virtue of work swells even larger: for Marx, the worker's labor essentially accounts for the entire value of a product. As anarchist theorist Bob Black has it, “Curiously—or maybe not—all the old ideologies are conservative because they believe in work. Some of them, like Marxism and most brands of anarchist, believe in work all the more fiercely because they believe in so little else”

(17). Black continues:

Unions and management agree that we ought to sell the time of our lives in exchange for survival, although they haggle over the price. Marxists think we should be bossed by bureaucrats. Libertarians think we should be bossed by businessmen. Feminists don't care which form bossing takes so long as the bosses are women. Clearly these ideology-mongers have serious differences over how to divvy up the spoils of power. Just as clearly, none of them have any objection to power as such and all of them want to keep us working. (18)

What Black somewhat bombastically highlights in his essay “The Abolition of Work” is a second aspect of the meaning of work. Black refers to this second aspect as the “compulsory” nature of work, asserting that what distinguishes “work” from simple “creation” is that work is “forced production,” “enforced by economic or political means, by the carrot or the stick. (The carrot is just the stick by other means)” (18). Although I

see important distinctions between carrots and sticks, Black importantly highlights how, in all our talk of work as so much *doing*, we too frequently miss that work is always also a being-done-unto. This is why simple production or creation doesn't necessarily fall into the realm of 'work,' why the same actions carried out by one without restraints are more likely to be called a hobby, or, in my case, participant research.

For all his eager and efficient labor, Esteban understood this passive side of work. He provided me with a way of thinking through sheep work and its wages by sharing with us the demonology of another kind of work, extraction in the mines of Peru. He shared these stories—where ghosts, hungry for life, meet the living, hungry for money—several times, both summers we were with him. Before herding sheep in the U.S., Esteban explained that he worked with three different mining companies in Peru, work which he found difficult and dangerous (“each day could be your last,” he commented), but which was the only option for many of the people who couldn't afford college. Late one night he told us of a demon, Mooki, the “*dueño de la mina*,” who appears to miners in their dreams and tells them he will eat them all if they don't pay him. Mooki, as the mine's true owner, demands that someone be buried alive (eaten by the mine). If they don't pay, there will be a mine collapse.

Esteban is Catholic, before he came here he taught children their catechisms, and said all of this is Satanic, demonic, and one shouldn't pay attention; but he admits that when he worked at a mine, things seemed different. His grandfather told him of other money-imps, like those in “*campos encantados*” in the mountains, where treasure is buried deep. If you work the field without paying the spirit you will get sick and die (perhaps, Esteban reasoned, from the antimony poisoning from all the metal beneath,

being pulled up by the roots of hungry plants). For this reason, his grandfather once had to bury a live dog in the field. There are spirits also in the lakes, who may come to a road-builder or farmer in a dream and warn “don’t use this water for irrigation, or we will eat your family.” Esteban asks us, “what would *you* do?” If Mooki came in your dreams, “You could bury one person, or lots of people could die in a mine collapse.”

Esteban didn’t know if people went through with the required sacrifice, but there are men, children, teenage girls, who disappear and never come back. People say the girl ran away, or the man went to live with another woman. Or many leave with the explanation of looking for work and never return. Esteban thinks that maybe some of those people are tricked into believing they’ve found work, but are then paid to Mooki. To find a living sacrifice, the boss would need to travel far, he reasoned, recruit workers from other countries perhaps. These he could bury alive with impunity. Even without knowing extensive Spanish, his next words make me shudder: “*igual que yo.*” Just like me.

Sheep are wise to sacrifice: they are the prime recipients of holy slaughter. In this job, the animals are meant as proxy for us, so we can have our lives renewed, our blood-red sins washed white, in the blood of a Lamb. But what good is proxy sacrifice when raising and butchering the beasts still makes us fodder for the hungry maw of life-long wage-labor—a penitence that could mean a lonely, early death (as the coyote-trapper warned us), or at best will require vast swathes of one’s adulthood to be spent outside of community, away from human care? This is why, when Thoreau came to write a word about “Economy,” he could speak only of a strange “penance” paid out “in a thousand remarkable ways” by the workers of his town (3). “I sometimes wonder that we can be

so frivolous,” he observed, “as to attend to the gross but somewhat foreign form of servitude called Negro Slavery, there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both north and south” (7). Here too, in the “quiet desperation” with which Thoreau’s neighbors worked, sits the shadow form of Mooki, a creature not so tangible as fetters, but nonetheless sucking out the lives of the able-bodied.

Cities and Hinterlands

When this wage-labor is focused on the earth, on making food for humans, our previous case-studies of herders, farmhands, and meatpackers reveal new hosts of demons and desperations facing workers. Although the abstract image of small family farmers still maintains a bedrock position in America’s “secular theology” (Jager ix), a bald look at our treatment of such people reveals that farmhands and farm-owners alike are socially stained by their work on the earth, held in deep contempt by an urban culture. Even in academic settings, where racist, classist, and sexist jokes are considered offensive, statements which belittle rural people are wildly popular. This is not a new phenomena: food-workers have always been massed together in the taunts and deprecations of the civilized. The ‘civilized’ and the ‘citizen’ emerged out of cities, the locations where most food isn’t produced, but must be imported from the surrounding countryside (see Jensen 17). Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen observe that like its predecessors, the modern city

is unable to exist on its own and cannot regenerate itself from its own resources. It requires a hinterland from where it imports the food for its citizens, the energy for heating, for factories and advertising signs, the raw material for buildings, clothing, and its whole production of goods. In addition, it needs a hinterland for the deposit of its refuse. This hinterland is by now the whole world. (125)

This hinterland, the countryside, where food is made (and where ore is mined and timber felled), is where the uncivilized noncitizens dwell—in other words, the barbarians, who happen to feed us. Food growers are the original “villains,” the “rustic, low-born” farmers which lived in the sort of backward regions the powerful placed their country houses (their villas).

Although (or more likely, because) urbanites’ lives are utterly at the mercy of food producers in the hinterland, cities find ways to create economic, political, and social dominance over rural populations. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen assert:

The relation between the modern city and the country is structurally non-reciprocal, a unilateral, colonial, master-slave relationship à la Hegel, like the relationship between the First and Third worlds or that between man and woman in our society. Just as in the above-mentioned relationships, the dominant part is in fact and materially dependent for its life and survival on the part that is being exploited, devalued, dishonoured, marginalized, excluded from cultural and civil society. (125)

Philosopher Michel Serres notes: “One day we will have to understand why the strongest is the parasite—that is to say, the weakest—why the one whose only function is to eat is the one who commands. And speaks. We have just found the place of politics” (26).

Through history, wherever a city-building culture emerges, such a culture is bound to feature the institutionalized slavery of food-workers—and, as the “speakers,” to write the history which makes the invention of a city a triumphant accomplishment worth any cost to the noncitizens. As historian and city-skeptic Lewis Mumford put it, in addition to “the universal introduction of slavery and forced labor for both industrial and military purposes,” city-making also requires “the centralization of political power, the separation of classes, the lifetime division of labor, the mechanization of production, the magnification of military power, [and] the economic exploitation of the weak” (186).

Author Richard Manning writes of the invention of agriculture as “not so much about food as it was about the accumulation of wealth. It benefited some humans, and those people have been in charge ever since” (38). This wealth is not accumulating in the hands of those doing the backbreaking labor required by intensive agriculture (who, the anthropological record shows, left behind skeletons with all the signs of severe malnutrition, dwarfed by the strong hunter-gatherer bones which preceded them).

Thus, white supremacist South Carolina Senator William Harper was speaking some truth in 1838 when he wrote:

the institution of Slavery is a principal cause of civilization. Perhaps nothing can be more evident than that it is the sole cause. If any thing can be predicated as universally true of uncultivated man, it is that he will not labor beyond what is absolutely necessary to maintain his existence. Labor is pain to those who are unaccustomed to it, and the nature of man is averse to pain. Even with all the training, the helps and motives of civilization, we find that this aversion cannot be overcome in many individuals of the most cultivated societies. The coercion of slavery alone is adequate to form man to habits of labor. Without it, there can be no accumulation of property, no providence for the future, no taste for comforts or elegancies, which are the characteristics and essentials of civilization. He who has obtained the command of another’s labor, first begins to accumulate and provide for the future, and the foundations of civilization are laid. We find confirmed by experience that which is so evident in theory. Since the existence of man upon the earth, with no exception whatever, either of ancient or modern times, every society which has attained civilization, has advanced to it through this process. [. . .] Servitude is the condition of civilization. (Harper 610,616)

Rather than conclude, as did the Senator, that we should therefore defend slavery, Harper’s logic can prod us to reexamine today’s ‘free-market’ supply lines, giving us the bravery to be willing to question our sacrosanct ideals of ‘civilization.’

Aldous Huxley also conceded that the civilizing act demands forced labor, drawing his conclusions by observing the colonization and national development of the ‘third world.’ Huxley concluded that “every colonial power has found itself obliged to systematize the efforts of its subject by compulsion. Naked or in disguise, as slavery or

in some less brutal form, forced labour has everywhere been employed in the development of wild countries. And it is difficult to see how they could have been developed without it” (135). Huxley was prompted to this observation while visiting Guatemala in 1934, where he witnessed a group of indigenous Guatemalans performing “volunteer labour” on a road at the point of a soldier’s bayonet. Huxley reasoned: “the notion, to us, is extremely distasteful. But, obviously, when you are confronted with the urgent problem of domesticating a wilderness, you cannot afford to be very squeamish in your methods of getting the work done” (134-135).

Huxley’s context makes clear what the work of “domesticating the wilderness” typically means. The workers in this vignette were people who had their subsistence already here in this “wilderness,” individuals who “lacked the ‘civilized needs’ that would drive them ‘voluntarily’ into the wage labor market” (McCreery 303), and thus had to be forced to help destroy the fertility of their land in favor of creating routes for commodity export required by large coffee plantations. At the time Huxley was there, Guatemala was under the military ruler Jorge Ubico, who had pledged in his inauguration address that Guatemala would “march toward civilization,” and had accordingly introduced a ‘vagrancy law’ which declared that the country’s poor would have to work up to one hundred fifty days a year as “taxes” to the State (Hey 28). Such a law could be passed because “Of all the themes about the Indian among the elite, none was more persistent than that he was drunken and lazy and would not work because he had no need to” (McCreery 303). Government-mandated work could be done either on national projects like the road Huxley witnessed or on one of the country’s large plantations

owned by wealthy European descendents (O’Kane 15-16). This created a constant labor force for the plantation owners, to aid their “development” of this “wild country.”

What all of this means is that our use of “noncitizen” labor is nothing new in the fields, that the polite residents of the polis have always seen barbarity in self-sufficient rural-dwellers. The granting of full “citizen” status now follows lines far more arbitrary than the ancient prejudices of town and country: a meridian, a latitude, the path of a fickle river unabashedly labels Us and Them. Nevertheless, we still overwhelmingly require Them—noncitizens, the uncivilized—to bring us our food, even as we still express disdain for workers without first-world latitudes and longitudes, and pay them starvation wages. Their labor blends seamlessly into slavery, and slavery investigators explain that this can happen only because workers are “housed miles from civilization, with no telephones or cars. Whatever they’re told they’re gonna do, they’re gonna do. They’re controllable” (Bowe 13).

When it comes to ‘backward’ rural farmers, who are nominal ‘citizens,’ we must find other ways to cast them as barbarians. Even those responsible for their protection, such as former Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, can complain that the problem with American farmers is that there are too many of them (Berry viii). Farmers find themselves increasingly forced to take orders from a corporate office, and are legally punished for activities like saving seed and not fencing out stray GMO pollen grains—even as they are culturally punished by city-dwellers who portray them as “outdated, provincial, and contemptible” (Berry 4). Wendell Berry notes that any group of people who roots themselves into a landscape “sooner or later become ‘redskins’—that is, they become the designated victims of an utterly ruthless, officially sanctioned and subsidized

exploitation” (4). It took Tristan to point out that he is alluding here to “rednecks,” a fairly unimaginative epithet which nevertheless is remarkable in its honest account of what we despise in food-workers—that they are working outside, comporting themselves towards the earth.

My friends and I interviewed an orchard-owner in Payson, UT, who loves this land and these trees and wants nothing more than to leave it to his great-great-grandchildren. We asked about suburban sprawl, and he sighed and shrugged, saying that he’s been thinking for years about possible alternatives, but it’s simply going to happen. Already several food-producing plots in the neighborhood have been uprooted, paved, lawned, converted to commuter townhomes. His own trees will follow soon—he has been pushed to sell, and now rents most of his family land from developers waiting for the right time to bulldoze the trees and plant lawns. Even as I love these farmers, I hold close my anger at their shrugs, which I see repeated over and over, the shrugs of going down with a whimper, one more case of “the interpretive burden of an inevitable outcome” gnawing out the fight from wise and productive people. The forced march “from hunters to horticulturalists to agriculturalists to urbanists to industrialists” (Keith 72) is accepted as natural, like an ecological succession from bare ground to climax forest: ‘redskins,’ then ‘rednecks,’ and then, at last, the ‘civilized’ (incidentally, surrounded by shantytowns).

My mind goes back to the brave and skillful girls of the sheepranch, destined to see Henefer transformed into a suburb of Salt Lake and Ogden, making sheeptrailing on the highway impracticable. Dried alfalfa will drift into their neighbor’s pools, and the work of making food and fiber will become an aesthetic nuisance. At the same time,

their profits will dwindle, due to competition both with sheep-ranchers around the world and with more ‘efficient’ food and fiber production—like CAFOs and synthetic fleece. The sheep-ranchers of Utah will have even more reasons to push ag-friendly state representatives to drop the minimum wage for ‘guest workers’ like Esteban. If that isn’t possible, the majority of the families of Henefer will give in to the “inevitable” and sell the farm, putting their herders out of work completely. While the kids who can ride bareback, make wild chokecherry jam, bag an elk, raise a bum lamb, will instead be encouraged to find a ‘career’ in the city.

Barbara Kingsolver voices my anger at this sense of inevitability, recently editorializing:

I have heard people [. . .] declare that it is perhaps sad but surely inevitable that our farms are being cut up and sold to make nice-sized lawns for suburban folks to mow, because the most immediately profitable land use must prevail in a free country. And yet I have visited countries where people are perfectly free, such as the Netherlands, where this sort of disregard for farmland is both illegal and unthinkable. (16)⁹

If the denigration of food-work is not inevitable, the next obvious question is what a successful resistance might look like. The similarities we have highlighted between sheep-workers and other agricultural and meatpacking workers does more than reveal how far-flung the problem of food-work alienation is: it also shows how wide solidarities can grow. The analysis of how urban-centered cultures denigrate and abuse food-makers does more than show us how deeply the problems are rooted: it sketches out the agribusiness-empire’s vulnerabilities, the irrational cultural practices upon which such oppression is fully dependent. The sheer size and depth of food problems mean there are opportunities everywhere to resist.

⁹ To explain how Dutch farmers, residing in one of the most densely populated countries in Europe, are nevertheless able to produce a surplus of farm products, see Steiner.

CHAPTER 3

FLOCKING

Golpear a uno es golpear a todos.

-Coalition of Immokalee Workers chant.

Shepherd Bob's vision was to "bring the world on its knees" by organizing farmworkers, and he attributed his failure to the personality failings of shepherders; but what sheep-work has taught me is that oppression on farms and ranches continues due to a careful maintenance of competition among those squeezed. To stay afloat, the rancher extracts as much labor from herders for as little pay as possible, and if the herder or activist researcher rebels or complains, it will be against the *patrón*—too often, they are a closed loop of low-level economic warfare with each step benefitting the most powerful, the multinational industries who buy the wool and mutton, those First Squeezers who never get saddled with a slavery case.

What allows the closed-loop to crack is strategic solidarity, created through hard work in the most alienated of conditions. Some of the most promising work on this comes at the heart of modern-day slavery, Immokalee, Florida. The seat of greatest alienation seems to have created conditions ripe for solidarity—provided the kind moral force, horizontal organization, and brilliant analysis of organizers which has made the CIW a model for campaigns all across the nation. CIW organizer Greg Asbed gives a

window into the making of alliances in his description of one of the Coalition's first actions, a protest march to the house of a labor contractor who had severely beaten an employee. They gathered two hundred people, brandishing the bloody shirt of the beaten employee, and as they marched through the streets, "people just poured out of the camps. It was kind of surreal" (Bowe 28). He concludes, in a conversation with John Bowe:

I don't know if you appreciate—words like *radical* and *revolutionary* don't mean anything anymore. Or they mean the wrong stuff. But here, to reverse the power system from a system where the workers are totally dependent on the crew leaders—to reverse the way it's always been set up . . . When you stay in a town like this where nobody's from here, nobody dies here—unless there's an accident—nobody's family is here, nobody knows each other, to have five hundred guys outside a crew leader's house [chanting] 'You beat one of us, you beat us all' . . . it was like the end of the old Immokalee. (Bowe 28)

Shepherders have their own unique obstacles for building solidarities—particularly the sheer amount of space between them. But the glimmer of possibility remains: Rodolfo's lament: *Somos golpeados por la vida* could be radically reformed to the shouts of the CIW: *Golpear a uno es golpear a todos!*" You beat one of us you beat us all. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Though the CIW began by pressuring growers for greater pay (as well as aiding investigation and prosecution of labor contractors for the worst worker abuses), organizers quickly realized that much of the blame for subpoverty wages and poor working conditions can be placed on the multinational food buyers and distributors. Accordingly, they formed alliances with committed students and consumers to push agreements with a number of fast food, grocery, and food service companies. Thus far Taco Bell, McDonalds, Burger King, Whole Foods, Aramark, and others have committed to pay tomato-pickers a direct fee of one penny for each pound of tomatoes purchased

(which nearly doubles workers' wages), and to have greater responsibility for working conditions.

There are other models for such loop-breaking: the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, representing workers in the Midwest, pioneered 'three-way pacts' between the workers, the growers, and the large companies who eventually sell the 'value-added' product. Additionally, farmers themselves are weaning themselves of dependence on multinational buyers, marketing to local community members directly in increasingly-popular farmers' markets and through produce-shares in Community Supported Agriculture. In Central and South America, the *Movimiento Campesino a Campesino* (Farmer to Farmer Movement) pools small farmer resources to aid in sustainable economic and environmental development, in opposition to both large land-holders and global trade agreements (Holt-Gimenez xvii). Utah's own Morgan Valley Lamb is an example of a slow trend toward exploring farmer empowerment. Owners Jamie and Linda Gillmore (working on "some of the purdiest and some of the most hard-scrabble land you've ever seen," according to coyote-trapper Mike) sell their all-natural lamb at farmers markets, local grocers, and restaurants, building relationships with supporters of local food, environmentalism, and those who worry about the safety of modern industrially-produced meat. Campaigns like the Real Food Challenge incorporate both farmer and farmworker advocacy, in pushing food providers to source environmentally sustainable food that is also "ethically produced, with fair treatment of workers, equitable relationships with farmers (locally and abroad), and humanely treated animals" ("What Is Real Food?").

These impossible alliances, like those formed between Florida tomato-pickers, or between old sheep-ranchers and urban environmentalists, opens the possibility of asking new questions. What would a shepherd coalition look like? Even more radically, what would it take to create positive solidarity between herders and ranchers? Could we imagine the Powell family and their hired herders working toward a system where both groups could continue their labor with respect—rather than carrying out the bidding of multinational corporations who will only allow either group to survive so long as corporate headquarters hasn't found a cheaper and more efficient cash cow?

Graeber, reiterating the fact that “revolutionary constituencies always involve a tacit alliance between the least alienated and the most oppressed,” points to the potential to make alliances with artists, musicians, and creative students (*Fragments* 76). The success of the Student Farmworker Alliance in solidarity with the CIW reaffirms this. But one could surely add to the “least alienated” the girls of Henefer, the families working the land that has been theirs for centuries. These small farmers are seeing land and autonomy slip out of their grasp. In their turn, migrant laborers, already landless and without autonomy, do the work which keeps corporate farms and food distributors in business. Without being able to speculate on the exact form which solidarity would take, the possibility feels ripe.

Questions such as these stir my generation: we are learning to be food fighters. Everywhere I find them, at farmers' markets, in dumpsters, attending fermentation workshops, and in their own yards constructing illegal chicken coops and goat barns. These are the neo-pastoralists and neo-agrarians—reskilling themselves to create food that is healthful for their bodies, their communities, their ecosystems. There is no set

credo for this group of food activists—rather, they are inspired by a loose cluster of theorists, authors, and activists, carrying on a robust debate about what food justice would mean. There are supporters of local, subsistence production, neighborhood farms and CSAs, motivated by the ideas of thinkers like Wendell Berry, Barbara Kingsolver, Michael Pollan, pro-peasant subsistence social theorists like Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, and intensive sustainable farmer Joel Salatin. There are vast, powerful alliances formed by peasants themselves, such as La Vía Campesina. There are the young radicals making illegal copies of anonymous communiqués and zines from militant vegans and the Animal Liberation Front, demanding a cessation of the cruelty we are inflicting on other species through our diets. There are eager permaculturists reading Bill Mollison, David Holmgren, David Jacke, and Toby Hemenway, rooting food forests instead of cornrows. There are philosophers and literary critics, following out the problems of interspecies foodways being explored by Donna Haraway and Jacques Derrida—both of whom are interested in how one can “eat well” (gratefully, givingly, tenderly), but without the hardened self-righteousness of a “good conscience” (qtd. in Wood 31)—or, as Haraway has it, eating our significant others, but “developing indigestion” (Haraway 31). There are many, many more: like a good garden, this milieu is diverse.

All of this means that food activists can shout no easy slogans. Rather, they have on their hands and in their consideration a messy food chain—the farmer, the farmworkers, the rivers, soils, animals (both wild and farmed), the forests. Also the conditions of production of all the inputs on the farm. They face a monster hybrid of the social issues of labor, class hierarchy, ecology, human migration, racism, animal rights

and welfare. This means they sheet-mulch and permaculture their front lawns because they are worried about factory labor conditions in China, they fire-bomb McDonalds because they are nonviolent, they buy Morgan Valley mutton because they deeply love animals, and will not put up with one more salmon-run dammed to irrigate organic wild rice in California to be trucked to Morgan Valley vegetarians. They try to learn how to respect and kill individual plants and animals, instead of entire species and ecosystems. And they are learning to organize, with their alliance chaining together both small-scale, local farmers and migrant laborers, bringing even inimical forces close in their attempt to rectify the primal act of eating.

Laziness, Theft, and the Animals that Make Us

The development of the food movement is rich with possibilities. Let me mention only three. The reason I am myself invested so deeply in movement is that I believe it is capable of changing our meanings of property, work, and domestication.

Property

First, because domesticated animals are *owned* animals, questions concerning appropriate sheep-work must face the issue of property. What would just and sustainable 'ownership' mean, and *who* should do the owning? We've seen that sheep, along with other domesticated animals, played a crucial role in the historical accrual of wealth and status, as well as staking out new territory for swelling empires. The role of sheep in this wild claim-staking continues today, in radically new enclosures of the world's commons.

Five years before the birth of Dolly and her cloned and/or transgenic flock-mates, economist Jeremy Rifkin explained:

The granting of patent privileges over genetically engineered microorganisms, plants, and animals represents the culmination of a five-hundred-year movement to enclose the planetary commons that began inauspiciously on the village green in small rural hamlets scattered throughout England and the European continent. Now even the building blocks of life itself have been enclosed, privatized, and reduced to marketable products. (70)

People who care about environmental and social justice are thus wont to see the very existence of ‘property’ as exploitative. When Rousseau investigated the “origin of inequality,” he was moved to proclaim:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying *This is mine*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, for how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows, “Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody. (207)

The upper crust receives the same insults typically hurled downward: if anyone embodies the vices of *idleness* and *theft*, surely it is the landlords, managers and foremen, plantation owners, patent holders. But laws against loitering and robbery will never touch them: rather, the force of law exists to ‘protect and serve’ their scale of vagrancy and plunder.

When property is so infallibly proven to be theft, I have watched many of my friends resist by divesting. Train-hopping and dumpster-diving, these modern nomads wander between squats and camps, not asking anything from empire, not giving the economy a penny. I respect such people’s politically-motivated asceticism: I wish for there to be more ‘freegans’ in the future. And yet, I worry that such rootlessness cannot breed the kind of communities required to address real problems—or that worse, such nomadism and divestiture is a central part of the neo-liberal, modernizing program. We

should be warned when we recognize that the most fashionable trend for the multinational conglomerates who own the food we eat and clothes we wear is to *throw off* ownership of the production process. In the book *No Logo*, Naomi Klein delineates how many companies seek to “bypass production completely” in a “race toward weightlessness,” putting the majority of their funds into ever-more-compelling advertisements, and a minimum in the materials manufactured or laborers doing the work (197, 4). “Instead of making products themselves, in their own factories,” Klein explains, many companies now “source” their actual final products, “much as corporations in the natural-resource industries source uranium, copper or logs. They close existing factories, shifting to contracted-out, mostly offshore, manufacturing” (197). In this line of brand-based thinking, where what is being sold is not actually an object, but an image of a desirable life, “whoever owns the least, has the fewest employees on payroll and produces the most powerful images, as opposed to products, wins the race” (4). Klein quotes a *Business Week* article declaring “the future belongs to companies—like Coca-Cola Co.—that own little but sell much” (200).

The material result of the race toward weightlessness seems to be the abuse of weighty things, like ecosystems and, notably, workers: “as the old jobs fly offshore,” Klein declares, “something else is flying away with them: the old-fashioned idea that a manufacturer is responsible for its workforce” (197). Klein documents case after case of large, wealthy corporations getting their products made in near-slavery conditions. Many of these workers can’t make a living wage—even in China (and in fact, especially in China), where a living wage is a measly eighty-seven cents per hour. Klein explains:

The only way to understand how rich and supposedly law-abiding multinational corporations could regress to nineteenth-century levels of exploitation (and get

caught repeatedly) is through the mechanics of subcontracting itself: at every layer of contracting, subcontracting and homework [manufacturing which takes place in the worker's own home], the manufacturers bid against each other to drive down the price, and at every level the contractor and subcontractor exact their small profit. At the end of this bid-down, contract-out chain is the worker—often three or four times removed from the company that placed the original order—with a paycheck that has been trimmed at every turn. “When the multinationals squeeze the subcontractors, the subcontractors squeeze the workers,” explains a 1997 report on Nike’s and Reebok’s Chinese shoe factories. (212)

This being the dominant trend in the clothing industry, it is no wonder that sheep ranchers laugh at the notion of earning a profit from their wool. The ones purchasing materials in the garment industry are not about to concern themselves with the warp and weft of wool, the sheep-matter made strong and lustrous from mountain bluebells and from the sacks of salts and trace minerals hauled up the mountain by herder and horse. The fleece of a sheep is one more cumbersome bodily detail, like the brown hands in the *maquiladora* affixing zipper after zipper, distracting HQ from its real work of designing the billboard depicting hale and hearty Aryans connecting with Nature and their family by wearing the latest ‘activewear.’ It’s not only unimportant whether this wool comes from Utah or Australia—it’s unimportant whether it’s wool at all, or some material conjured up out of petroleum byproducts: whatever demands the smallest scrape of the budget will suffice. The sheep is not the *valuable* part of the product—and neither is the worker. Hawkers and consumers alike show themselves as profoundly, militantly antimaterialistic, peddling ideals of the Good Life instead.

In additional to the out-sourcing woes facing industry, the agricultural realm witnesses a trend toward multilayered subcontracting that achieves the same result, the same divestiture of responsibility. Its efficacy can be seen in the 2002 court case which found labor contractor Ramiro Ramos guilty of using slave labor in the orange groves of

Florida. One of the main tactics of the defense was to show that instead of finding Ramos guilty, the blame should be accorded to the large citrus growers that actually own the fields, pay the employees, and make routine inspections to ensure that all is going according to orders. The defense team thus called to the stand representatives of the corporations who have control of the entire growing process in the attempt to show that if anyone was enslaved, he or she was a *company* slave. But when clarifying whether the workers were employed by the corporation, they got this exchange with the HR rep at one of Florida's largest citrus distributors:

A: We don't employ those people.

Q: Technically you don't, but they are in your groves all day picking fruit?

A: Yes.

Q: They are on your property picking fruit from your tree?

A: That's correct.

Q: They are loading oranges into containers that are shipped to companies that process fruit based on your contractor?

A: That's correct.

Q: So it is your fruit, it is your worker, too, isn't he?

A: No, he is not my worker.

Q: Because there's a piece of paper that says he is provided by a contractor? That's it, right?

A: Our relationship is with the contractor to provide workers. (Bowe 70).

John Bowe, covering this trial, explains the finagling required to produce such a situation: the corporation writes a check for the farmhand, but these funds first pass through an account under the name of the labor contractor—which account the contractor is neither legally permitted nor technically capable of accessing. The result: a person can be hired to do your work for your money on your property, but still not be 'your' employee. Thus you are not responsible for how such a person is abused in the process. The situation is redolent of the work in the slaughterhouse: when the killing is divided into several steps, no one need be responsible for death. This is why Wendell Berry

worries of the technophilic and massive “farms of the future,” “Very few people, more likely none of them, will own those farms” (74).

I return to the battered corpse of Earl in “Brokeback Mountain” and the non-fictional lynched body of the African-American Reverend Isaac Simmons. There have always been reasons for the powerful to stop certain people from being owners, and there is a kind of claim-staking that is resistance. But as Wendell Berry and neo-pastoralist Joel Salatin would both insist, such assertions of ownership and corresponding responsibility must cover the whole farm—including the wild sources of farm fertility. The inability to extend ownership beyond the obviously commodifiable has devastated the landscapes of many sheep cultures. In many societies which historically kept sheep, the archeological record suggests that forests were cleared to provide more grazing for these animals, and this loss of biodiversity then ensured that residents became evermore dependent on sheep for their calories and materials, as habitat disappeared for wild animals and useful plants. Sheep scholar M. L. Ryder blames some of the world’s worst desertification in the ancient and modern world on the hungry jaws of domesticated sheep (51, 61). When your once-fertile land is desert, the only option is to conquer a new patch of ground which has not yet been ruined by ruminant jaws, and start the cycle anew. If, however, one’s ‘product’—and one’s property—is a flourishing, reproducing ecosystem, such rampant overgrazing becomes unthinkable. As Wendell Berry puts it: “An enduring agriculture must never cease to consider and respect and preserve wildness. [. . .] if the farm is to last and remain in health, the wilderness must survive within the farm. That is what agricultural fertility *is*” (130). Likewise, Joel Salatin has reforested sixty acres of his pastoral farm to improve fertility and provide habitat for birds—“nature’s insecticide”

(Salatin 2). Vandana Shiva notes how, for women's subsistence agriculture, "the food system has always included the forest and animal systems in its processes" (96).

In the language with which Berry and Salatin speak of their farms, a further peculiarity of this form of property becomes apparent. My earlier investigation of the historical violence between Natives and invaders—through the bodies of livestock—led to the recognition that property (such as a sheep) was simply a symbol of a relationship between people (in those cases a genocidal relationship). However, neo-agrarians and neo-pastoralists push property beyond the human-to-human social role. 'Ownership' on these farms begins to describe a relation of trust, care, and in some cases even co-education between a human and a forest, or a ewe, or even a tractor. Salatin explains one of the principles of his farm—"Individuality"—in this way: "Plants and animals should be provided a habitat that allows them to express their physiological distinctiveness. Respecting and honoring the pigness of the pig is a foundation for societal health" (Polyface Inc). As relationship of property reorients itself toward the 'object,' the 'object' takes on social characteristics—becomes a part of the society whose health must be considered. In a sense, this is a grounded, materialist refetishization of the commodity, a recognition that there is a kind of value (and even agency) inhering in an object that is independent of any human production or consumption.

But if ecosystems and animals are to be 'owned' in this way, we still face the question of *who* does the owning. Born during the Cold War, I was trained to recognize only two classes of owners: private individuals and the state. The destructive capacity of grazing animals spurs our discourse of the "tragedy of the commons," and resulting calls for either complete privatization of all resources, or centralized, state-enforced limits on

everything from the amount of sheep in the Uintah Mountains, to parts per million of carbon in the atmosphere, to (in Garret Hardin's original essay) the amount of children born to Third World women. In Utah, the result is often vitriolic opposition between sheep ranchers who want autonomy with the land where they've run sheep for generations, and those who push government limits on this capitalist enterprise out of fear of deforestation, erosion, and wildlife endangerment.

Though I am fiercely dedicated, down to my bones, to Utah's wild lands and wildlife, the State's historic sheep-handling gives me reason to pause. The quest for conservation of the desert against sheep led to New-Deal Era livestock reductions on the Navajo Nation—a systematic killing of half of the people's sheep, mostly of the hardy Navajo-Churro breed and other “unimproved” heritage breeds (Wood et al. 11). More recent reductions have tried to replace the slaughtered sheep with adequate monetary compensation—with the justification that sheep-work was bringing in very little money, anyway. Subsistence production of sheep was supposed to be replaced in the long term with wages or welfare, in a process which replaces animals with money as the source of life. We watch anew as the State accords to its tender (money) mythical proportions, positing that money “creates ever more money which then becomes the basis of life, security for life and the hope for progress, emancipation, culture and the ‘good life’” (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 17). In this mindset, held by most residents of industrialized nations, “*He/she who has no money, cannot live*” (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 17, emphasis in original). As Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen sum up, in this standard view of industrialized societies “economy gives life, while mothers and commons destroy it” (162). Trading sheep for cash is simple philanthropy.

And yet the Navajo people, deeply familiar with the ways pastoral subsistence allows survival through troubles as widespread as attempted genocide, forced relocation, and market bubbles, responded overwhelmingly negatively to this attempt to ‘modernize’ their economy. For such people, animals which feed a family or reinforce social bonds in gift-giving ceremonies form a real living currency, holding immense value even without bringing in any cash. One Navajo woman living in southeast Utah recalls being taught by her mother:

learn to take care of the sheep, for it will be your mother and father and support you. Its meat you will use as food; its wool you will use in many different ways. If you are willing to learn how to card, spin, and weave with your hands, you will have all that you need and want. If you are careless, you will be begging for handouts from other people . . . Your wealth will not diminish and die, for this is the ‘life of life’ and ‘strength of life,’ It is the ‘life of life’ because these animals are alive. (McPherson 106)

As one Navajo woman put it “Sheep is life. Who can live if their life is taken away?” (Wood et al. 66). In the same report on livestock reduction, one man expressed “We are experiencing homesickness, loss of our livestock, and most importantly, our way of teaching responsibilities to our children,” while another explained “With the sheep gone, there is nothing to pray for. Most everything we believe in is gone” (66). Some went so far as to call livestock reduction an “economic form” of the Long Walk, white men subjecting them again to “defeat, degradation, and removal from their traditional life” (McPherson 102). In general, those subjected to livestock reduction believe their lives have been made worse and are pessimistic about the future (Wood et al. 71). Such is to be expected from a culture which still frequently views subsistence production, rather than a wage, as the source of life. The authors of the report conclude, rather lamely, “the

fact that [Navajo] participation was limited to being informed of decisions in which they had no part tended, it appears, to heighten their sense of uncertainty” (67).

The work of Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen explores why our efforts at exerting national or global control over the “commons” so frequently succeeds only in abusing those who are already marginalized, for the benefit of wealthy, white urbanites. They assert that it is absurd to speak of a “global commons,” because a commons is always the property of a geographically-bounded community that takes responsibility for it. Studying actually-existing commons (as opposed to Hardin’s thought-experiment), they conclude that “Wherever commons have existed over time, they were [and are] protected, cared for, used, regulated by a distinct local community of people for whom these commons constituted the basis of their livelihood” (152). What this means in the case of sheep on the Navajo Nation—or in the Uinta mountains—is that better environmental care would come out of active labor toward educating, empowering, and organizing a community to make their own decisions about the long-term use of their land, rather than relying upon the sort of federal coercion that nearly extinguished America’s oldest sheep breed and drove First Nation people even deeper into poverty.

For many food activists, this renewed perception of ‘ownership’ leads to the creation and empowerment of ‘peasant’ communities—bioregionally-bounded groups of people who own their land in common and use it for their own subsistence. They take guidance from groups as varied as the Zapatistas of Chiapas, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) of Brazil, and the Eco-Villages of North America and Europe. Such a step builds out of a community-centered view that has no home in either of the two dominant utopias concocted by urban intellectuals—capitalism and

socialism. As Walden Bello, sociologist and executive director of Focus on the Global South, explains:

In classical socialism, peasants were viewed as relics of an obsolete mode of production and designated for transformation into a rural working class producing on collective farms owned and managed by the state. In the different varieties of capitalist ideology, efficiency in agricultural production could only be brought about with the radical reduction of the numbers of peasants and the substitution of labour by machines. In both visions, the peasant had no future. (3)

Of course, within these two ideologies, peasants also have no role in addressing global problems. Rather, in response to current environmental and social tragedies, capitalists promise that individual consumption of ‘green’ products can stave off the ecological nightmare capitalism itself has created, while socialists encourage voting and lobbying (or, perhaps, violent revolution) to empower new politicians who can wield state power to save us from ourselves. We accordingly keep buying CFLs and protesting outside of the White House, trying to ignore the recurring sense of our own powerlessness.

Meanwhile, peasant communities all over the world carry out the hard work of fostering just and sustainable futures, using the power of markets and governments as they see fit, but without ideological dedication to either. Many create fair-trade products or push elected officials for wide-spread agrarian reform. In fact, *La Vía Campesina*, which brings together 148 peasant communities from sixty-nine countries on every arable continent, has made a dramatic appearance at every global economic and political summit, pushing for the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Group of Eight to negotiate with actual peasants. However, when states and international economic forces fail to listen, such self-sustaining groups are perhaps the last remaining force capable of “a delegitimization [of markets, governments, or international trade agreements] that stems from disengagement—a strategy first articulated by Gandhi

almost a century ago” (Desmarais 21). Their skills—both in producing their own necessities and in building communities which are networked across the globe—allow such groups to "build concrete alternatives in the here and now," rather than waiting for the powerful (Desmarais 24). By supporting peasant communities—and by learning from them the skills necessary to keep our own communities alive and healthy without State welfare or global markets—food activists push communities to be responsible for their own subsistence—to ‘own’ it—and thereby to gain significant power sources.

More responsible forms of ownership can take many different forms, each dependent on the human and more-than-human ecology of a community. But it’s clear that each case must be tied to a new (or at least, new to us suburbanites) way of thinking about work. And also, when we start asking about what real ownership of the animals would mean, we see that it is tied as well to a new way of thinking through domestication.

Work

Resisters to systems of every-day cruelty have reasons to be antiwork. Let’s be frank: the largest employer is bound to be an empire, and the job with the greatest security is likely that of an unindicted Eichmann. I have known neo-agrarians to spend years without any job one could tout on a résumé—just as I’ve known them to shoplift entire drip-irrigation systems from big box stores.

And yet all of this lazy behavior is motivated by a serious, at times almost puritanical, dedication to work. Weary of their lot as consumers, with the sneaking suspicion that they no longer produce anything of worth—labor being merely a monkey’s

trick of pushing the right lever to receive dinner from the higher authorities—food activists are turning to work as redemption. Wendell Berry explains the “direct connections between living and eating, eating and working, working and loving,” whereby “one works with the body to feed the body. The work, if it is knowledgeable, makes for excellent food. And it makes one hungry. The work thus makes eating both nourishing and joyful, not consumptive, and keeps the eater from getting fat and weak. This is health, wholeness, a source of delight” (138). On the other hand, “if we make the growing of food a drudgery, which is what ‘agribusiness’ does make of it, then we also make a drudgery of eating and of living” (138). His words are redolent of Tolstoy, who called on the wealthy classes to “acknowledge that labor is not a curse, but the glad business of life” (253). According to Tolstoy, the “madmen” who deliberately adopt manual, agricultural labor will not only become healthier, but attain access to a higher moral plane and a clearer conscience, becoming cognizant that our only ‘property’ is our own body’s capacity (253-254). This sort of language, obsessed with the redemptive qualities of work on the land, is as familiar to me as Brigham Young’s injunction to “make the desert blossom as a rose,” except this time it’s blossoming as a drought-tolerant Jerusalem artichoke, as a nitrogen-fixing pea shrub, as a flock of wiry Navajo-Churros.

When Brad Kessler wrote *Goat Song*, a beautiful memoir of his work with dairy goats, Bill McKibben’s supportive blurb on the back of the book jacket spoke of Kessler “learning how to do something real and important and useful and beautiful [. . .] in an age when all the glitzy nonsense that has preoccupied us for years is turning to dust in our hands.” This word “real” returns again and again to the mouths of food activists to

describe the work and lives they want. Even I can't help but say it, though I am dedicated to the idea that all work is equally *real* and equally material—some workers merely take better accounting of the material moved. But by granting some kind of ontological priority to labor with *livestock* which is absent in the stock *market*—by parsing out labor according to its importance, only accepting as ‘real’ that which produces a whole and healthy life, community, and ecosystem—food activists rejuvenate a rotted-out work-ethic. Real work follows the path of “the shortest, simplest way between the earth, the hands and the mouth,” as nonviolent activist Lanza del Vasto put it (qtd. in Berry 96). On the other hand, work that is detached from the earth and bodies becomes a kind of antiwork. Subcomandante Marcos, spokesperson for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, worries: "Today, speculation is the principal source of enrichment, and at the same time the best demonstration of the atrophy of our capacity to work. Work is no longer necessary in order to produce wealth; now all that is needed is speculation" (Marcos 117). And as for all of that ‘unreal’ work—well, its disappearance would likely be a “net gain for humanity” (Graeber *Fragments* 80).

This parsing means that the work ethic of neo-pastoralists and neo-agrarians cannot be easily assimilated into Weberesque capitalism, the kind of socialization projects which present actual production as at best entry-level employment, which one hopes to quickly overcome. All of the ‘successful’ who climb the economic ladder are, in this viewpoint, shamefully running *away* from work, finding ways for others to do the ‘real’ work for them. When the category of ‘real’ work is tied to the soil, modern capitalists show themselves to be eerily similar to the *ancien regime* in their disdain to ever stoop to such lows. Such a renewed work-ethic also leads to a renewed solidarity

for those workers who have been feeding us all along, in the face of this aristocratic disdain. In response to statements that we would all starve if we quit our wage-labor and tried to be peasants, Mies and Bennholdt Thomsen pointedly ask: “How did this alienation between people and their work develop to the point that the most lifeless thing of all, money, is seen as the source of life and our own life-producing subsistence work is seen as the source of death?” (17).

Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen write that a cultures’ way of working “not only marks but is the way in which a society relates to nature” (173). ‘Real’ work, then, on and through the land and species which are truly ‘owned,’ leads to a holistic labor, one which takes responsibility for all parts of a task. This is positive power—resisting the assembly-line trend wherein workers can believe they are doing nothing deserving of power or pay because they are only doing an unskilled slice of a task. However, it is also presents its own burdens: as opposed to modern slaughterhouses, where divisions ensure that no one bears the guilt of ‘killing’ an animal, killers of sheep in a neo-pastoral economy must take responsibility for death. This may very well mean that, like many traditional pastoral societies, sheep-killing would of necessity be a rare occurrence, cradled deep in propitiating ceremony. Further, laborers—even those needed only for brief stints like harvest—must be treated as community members, with a share of ownership in the final product.

In ascribing primal value to subsistence labor, we move beyond the Marxist notion of labor-value modeled off of (male, head-of-household) industrial work to revalue the kind of labor often carried out by females (or which is feminized once males leave the household). Included in subsistence labor is the production of people—the

creation, care, nurture, and socialization of community members, which feminists point out has been left out of Marxist theories of value (Graeber *Theory of Value* 68). But even after this crucial amendment, there is one final inadequacy which becomes apparent in the realm of sheep-work, where not only is one's 'product' largely raised by the plants of a mountain and by an animal's own good sense, but much of what is clearly 'work' is carried out by dogs and horses. When humans are working their hardest we describe them as working like an ox, a horse, a donkey, a dog. We not only learned from our first sheepish commodities the metaphor of money reproducing itself: we also learned that money can *work for you*, like a beast of burden. What sheep-work finally pushes us to ask is: how do we speak about and account for nonhuman work carried out by the animals we own?

Working Property

So let's talk about real laziness and theft.

Michel Serres, prodding out primal forms of coercion and rule in human societies, meditates on the human penchant to be a parasite on other species, living off of their labor. "What does man give," Serres asks, "to the cow, to the tree, to the steer, who give him milk, warmth, shelter, work, and food? What does he give? Death" (5). In addition to eating the undeserved muscle of others, "we get under these animals' skin as well, in their plumage or in their hide" (10). The well-dressed man shows only "the clean carcass of his host. Of the soft parasite you can see only the clean-shaven face and the hands, sometimes without their kid gloves" (10). The penchant for humans to parasitize the strength and labor of others of their own species is simply an extension of this ungrateful

abuse of other kinds. At base, the ultimate thieves, the ultimate lag-about, the ultimate ingrates—are *Homo sapiens*.

The standard logic of domestication posits the domestic animal as “one that has been bred in captivity for purposes of economic profit to a human community that maintains local control over its breeding, organization or territory, and food supply” (Clutton-Brock 32). The sheep is an object we dominate, control, exploit. Following this definition, the domesticated animal is either a soon-slaughtered meat-unit or, at best (as pets), “unfree fashion accessories in a boundless commodity culture” and “living engines for churning out unconditional love—affectional slaves, in short” (Haraway 206). Failure to consider the ewe’s subjectivity results in systems of obvious cruelty—take mass, mechanized slaughter, for instance, which occurs daily with scarcely anyone raising the question of how much life we need or deserve to destroy. If a lamb’s pain is insufficient proof of a required change, we can point to the kind of ecological and social problems tied directly to our treatment of livestock as unconscious objects—meat product maximization results in massive carbon emissions, soil erosion, deforestation, desertification, and the exploitation of laborers closest to the animal bodies, whether in the hills or on the kill floor, down to the nauseating smell hovering over homes neighboring rendering plants. Under these conditions, the philosophical grounding of domestication is, fundamentally, “the attempt to bring free dimensions under control for self-serving purposes” (Zerzan *Running* 70). Domestication thus gnaws away each form of human or animal liberty.

Subsequently, a line of thinking seeks liberation in the end of domestication. In a radical zine currently circulating through anarchist communities, an author (or authors)

under the name of Screaming Wolf demands that the conscientious use any means necessary to stop animal exploitation, asserting “humans have no right to interfere with other creatures as they try to fulfill their needs, just as we expect to be free to fulfill our own” (Wolf 9). Philosopher John Zerzan draws out the ties between domestication and other ills, positing that “in domesticating animals and plants man necessarily domesticated himself,” making us a society fixated on numbers, language, calendars, and the “Cartesian split” between inner and outer reality, creating a culture where work is distinct from life, and where male violence toward women is common (“Agriculture 247, *Running* 5). All of this concludes in an alienation deeper than Marx imagined, where we are fundamentally “estranged from our own experiences, dislodged from a natural mode of being” (*Running* 78). (The ironically named) Paul Shephard argues that domestication of other kinds dulled the wildness out of us, which was our beauty and strength: “to be in a community with crops is to feel like a crop, to have the edges dulled,” he argued. “As Konrad Lorenz observed of sheep and domestic rabbits, they are not only dull but mean” (171-172). In describing why men are drawn by wild bighorn sheep, a wildlife biologist points to such men’s nostalgia for “the life they had before they enslaved themselves by enslaving animals” (Brown 199).

Many of these critiques point to the ineradicable problem of domestication’s backlash: objects counter-objectify; when you coerce an animal you yourself become an unfree body. We attempted to transcend the world by defining ourselves in opposition to the beasts we most despise, but as Bataille warns, “even the ideal carries within itself something of the deformities of which it is the exasperated antithesis” (66). We clarify our hierarchies—make human life sacred and livestock life eminently disposable—only

to find that all our “work of purification,” in Latour’s terms, breeds the “proliferation of hybrids” (14). And thus, for all the labor put into the humanist project, violence toward humans shows no sign of an end—rather, we have reason to conclude that a culture of speciesist cruelty actually abets human-on-human violence. The language of war and genocide need merely allow for brief taxonomic slippages: a group ceases to be properly human, becomes animal, and thereby deserves holocaust. In the documentary *Winter Soldier*, Vietnam war vets confess, over and over: “it wasn’t like they were humans. [. . .] When you shot someone you didn’t think you were shooting a human”; “they tell you that the people over there aren’t really people”; “we learned that a Dink was less than a person”; “you look at them as animals.”

And yet the anarcho-primitivists who bring these very real problems to our attention then create their own hierarchical chains, glorifying wild animals and humans and despising the domestic as mean and stupid. Neo-pastoralists, on the other hand, are in a position to assert that just as a culture where “you’re an animal” is an insult is likely to already be a violent culture, lacking actually curiosity or care for the lives of others, a culture that can create an epithet out of the word “sheep” is one with such an ossified ontology and fear over opening oneself to the possibilities of other beings, that it never discovers the complexity and intelligence of actual sheep. In short, human societies embody precisely what they claim to despise in other species, wild or tame. Their derision is born of a failure to pay close attention to vulnerable others, and to respond. Screaming Wolf has many good reasons to assert that we must cease “interfering” with animals, just as we refrain from interfering with other humans, and yet, it is clear that this interference is happening all the time—that we exist only in interferences—both with

humans and with other species. These moments of symbiosis might be unnecessarily cruel, but we cannot thereby hope to utterly eradicate them. We become what we are in cooperation and conjunction with others. As Haraway explains, “the partners do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with” (17). Alphonso Lingis clarifies that this “becoming with” requires not only our human family, but also thousands of species of anaerobic bacteria, macrophages in our bloodstream, rice, wheat, and corn fields and vegetable patches, other mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish (“Animal Body” 166). Even the strictest vegan interferes with animal lives; they are the pollinators and the fertilizers, they are ground under tractor wheels and poisoned by pesticides. Their forest is burned down for the sake of one more soybean field: their spawning grounds are damned to water it.

Caught in the interferences of humans and animals, of the domestic and the wild, the neo-pastoralist tries to take responsibility for the meddling which makes us. Yes, we domesticated ourselves in domesticating others: not only do creatures like dogs, sheep, and cats exhibit neoteny (the juvenalization of features that results from domestication, where adults retain more of their adolescent traits and qualities), but our own physiology is neotenized—we are flat-faced, small-toothed, milk-lapping, hairless baby apes (Gould 361). Together we and our closest beasts have extended a puppyish dependency on each other, as well as other childish traits such as playfulness, curiosity, and the ability to learn new things rapidly (for how human neoteny correlates with advanced mental development, see Gould 401-402). But the truly adult response to this trajectory (rather than trying to reverse ourselves out of language, ceremony, and domestication) is to recognize that our heritage of cybernetic interferences can only be addressed with an

ethical system far more complex than the isolationist ‘do no harm’ policy of (some) anarcho-primitivists.

The work of neo-pastoralists, with the potential for making conceptual and material changes to ‘property’ and ‘work,’ has obvious ramifications on our co-domestics, our laboring property. This is why Donna Haraway suspects “we might nurture responsibility with and for other animals better by plumbing the category of labor more than the category of rights, with its inevitable preoccupation with similarity, analogy, calculation, and honorary membership in the expanded abstraction of the Human” (73). A rethinking of work which revalorizes subsistence labor restricts our attempts to glorify ourselves above animal bodies, bringing us back to the realm of matter, bodies, and necessity, rather than allowing us to believe we have transcended such tawdry, animal materials through thought, language, or art. We can celebrate even in our most ‘domesticated’ accomplishments a wild and earthy base. Further, a ‘re-fetishization’ of a commodity like a ewe presents a challenge to our control-lust: a ewe is granted a subjective life, pains, desires—even opinions (Despret “Sheep”)—which we must incorporate within our care.

A co-working sheep, with preferences and complex social interactions, is a creature that demands our openness and our response. By keeping herself open to sheep-possibilities, primatologist Thelma Rowell and her daughter observed social interactions so complex—such as long-term individual relationships, affiliative reassurance behavior, third-party intervention in conflicts between pairs, and whole-group interactions in the forms of “huddles”—that they rival anything witnessed among nonhuman primates (Rowell and Rowell 229, 230). A sheep-keeping woman in Benjamin, Utah described to

me similar observations of intelligence and personality among her flock, which is composed of a variety of heirloom breeds. Haraway, reviewing Rowell's work, sees in it the practice of "the virtue of worldly politeness," pushing us to ask "the question of the collective in relation to both sheep and people: Do we prefer living with predictable sheep or with sheep that surprise us and that add to our definitions of what 'being social' means?" (34, 35). The fact that Rowell's work shocked the sheep-science world leads Haraway to conclude that perhaps "in the context of the ranching and farming practices that led to today's global agribusiness, maybe those 'domestic' ovine eating machines are rarely asked an interesting question" (34).

In a remarkable essay, anthropologist and philosopher Vinciane Despret introduced the concept of "anthropo-zoo-genesis" as a way of speaking about this respectful, responsive method of becoming-with domesticated animals. Rather than simply becoming a sheep or expecting to turn sheep into woolly humans, the good pastoralist becomes a "sheep-with-human," her sheep becoming "human-with-sheep"—none of us properly anthropocentric nor ovis-centric, complexly muddled by co-becomings (see "The Body" 131). In contrast to anthropo-zoo-genesis, the isolated being is what Despret terms the "auto-maton"—the self-mover, the objective gazer that "is moved by itself, and only by itself, that is, the one who will not be moved, put into motion by others. In sum, it is the one who will not be affected, and therefore who will not affect, his object of study: an indifferent autonomous experimenter collecting indifferent data" ("The Body" 118).

The movement from meat-machines to anthropo-zoo-genesis is not one that can be achieved by an intelligentsia at their laptops—it must be played out by real pastoralists

in bodily contact with real animals (and, additionally, with real farmers with their plants—thus the permaculturalists’ emphasis on co-evolution [see Jacke and Toensmeier 440]). And though a culture deep-rooted in coercion and exploitation pushes us to invent posthumanist neologisms like anthro-zoo-genesis to explain an ethic of complex co-becoming with other species, neo-pastoralists may very well describe their thoughts and movements by tracing back the founding movements of pastoralism. After all, sheep are the beasts most capable of holding one hoof in posthumanism and another in prehistory. Pastoralist Bill Kessler’s description of our ancient interactions with other species posits the historical depth of our openness to animals like sheep:

Homo sapiens evolved as a species thinking, hunting, watching, and eating ungulates: bison and horses, ibex, aurochs, and deer. Our big brains, our wolf-pack sociability, our gamesmanship evolved in concert with hunting large hoofed animals. Our earliest representational art—paintings from the Paleolithic era found in caves from Spain to Africa, Australia to India—shows a singular obsession with herbivores. Animals were humans’ first intellectual and aesthetic preoccupation. They figured among our first gods and goddesses. We drew them and dreamed them, sang them and ate them; and our passion for hoofed beings only deepened once we herded instead of hunted them. (58)

Having a “passion” for hoofed beings includes retaining a crucial *passivity*—an ability to be acted upon by our animal others, to be put to movement, to be affected. The cultures that domesticated sheep were the ones that previously ran with wild sheep, that survived only by tracing the race of sheep bodies across the soil—that were literally moved by sheep. Thus sheep-work retains the passivity of all work, the being-done-unto quality: only it is the co-working animals who work on us, rather than a *patrón*.

When the premier scholar of domesticated sheep, M. L. Ryder, is pushed to pinpoint the first steps of sheep-domestication, he cites ethnographies in Brazil and New Guinea which describe women suckling young wild animals, positing that “the mothering

instinct of women,” played the pioneering role in domestication, even if this hypothesis is “too bestial for consideration by modern archaeologists” (26). Further, many anthropologists assert that animals weren’t domesticated for their bare economic use-value.¹⁰ Bulliet explains that when animals first entered the human domicile:

no one knew that ox-drawn plows, horse-drawn chariots, pinstriped wool suits, frozen yogurt, and Kentucky Fried Chicken were looming in the distant future. What they did know was that omens could be read in the flight of birds, that shamans could communicate through animals with the unseen world, that killing animals involved the hunter with their spirits, that animal combat made an awesome spectacle, and that every sort of human experience or thought could be recounted in the form of stories about animals. (136-137)

We worry that animals are desacralized and objectified as they enter our mundane economies, but this is only because the work itself is desacralized and disparaged, within a hierarchy where the powerful flee the feel of soil and the smell of animals. The lamb at the women’s breast, the lamb who will later be milked to make cheese, is acting out the milky liquidities between disparate beings, promising a way of work rooted in care, ownership rooted in responsibility, and the co-creation of astonishing reciprocities.

Last Word

Esteban took care of sheep as a boy in one of the small villages outside of Huancayo. He says it was nothing like his work in Utah, where he moves thousands of sheep. What he had as a boy was just a small flock, maybe fifteen or twenty at any given time. In that situation, he tells me, the sheep are utterly different. For one thing, those

¹⁰ This is in radical opposition to modern, industrial ‘domestication,’ such as that undertaken with Balaev’s silver foxes in Russia, where animals are kept in small cages and subjected to standardized docility-tests. Those foxes who fail are killed for fur; those who pass are allowed to breed before their slaughter, producing a next generation that will be even easier for the fur industry to handle. We have taken the two-way tug of the process of domestication and attempted to de-passion it. The fox does not change us: we learn nothing from her when we bring her into the human domicile in this way. In our attempt to not be moved by the animal other, we make ourselves nightmarishly cold ‘automatons.’

were sheep who weren't afraid of you, who liked to be touched—you could even ride them if you were very little. He and another little boy would play on the hill and get their two flocks mixed, but could separate them in the evening with just a call, instead of needing to chase them around. But beyond this, he says such sheep are more “faithful” to each other. The sheep here will flee from any dog, but Esteban described his little crew in Peru forming a shoulder-to-shoulder gang to face off an intruder.

We have lost the strength of smallness, herded as we are into industrialized cities, flooded with global markets. We have lost faith with each other, and so betray each other with each prisoner's dilemma global capitalism hands us. We have played our part in an economic experiment akin to what the psychologist Harry Harlow forced on those baby macaque monkeys who were given food without a soft body to cling to, and thus starved to death in the presence of milk (Harlow 675). Global capital's most crucial trade secret is that we related primates have never been weaned of this ache for relationship with our meal. Advertisements tell us a box of stuffing can bring three generations together for Sunday dinner, low-calorie beer can get you laid, organic yogurt brings you back to the farm as a friend of happy cows rooted down into God's green earth.

In stubborn resistance to such myths and the entire 'civilizing' program of multinational agribusiness corporations which seek to control our food supply, neo-pastoralists and neo-agrarians recultivate a seditious smallness, the smallness of topsoil organisms, of saved seeds, of back-yard grown garlic, of heirloom sheep breeds and microbatches of cheese. Though we feel the appeal of high ideals like Justice, we know we can work out only mundane, bodily reciprocity, the smallness of actual, personal, caring relationships in the face of grand and abstract global supply lines. We timidly start

rubbing shoulders, dreaming of what it would feel like to hold a line together instead of turning tail, to stamp a hoof at the dogs.

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It is no exaggeration to call water the "liquid gold" of the West, and the burgeoning human demands on this scarce resource make it imperative to understand and properly manage the wetlands and riverine areas of the Intermountain West. This book offers land managers, biologists, and research scientists a state-of-the-art survey of the ecology and management practices of wetland and riparian areas in the Intermountain West. Twelve articles examine such diverse issues as laws and regulations affecting these habitats, the unique physiographic features of the region, the importance of food and dining in the Roman Empire reflect both the variety of foodstuffs available through the expanded trade networks of the Roman Empire and the traditions of conviviality from ancient Rome's earliest times, inherited in part from the Greeks and Etruscans. In contrast to the Greek symposium, which was primarily a drinking party, the equivalent social institution of the Roman convivium (dinner party) was focused on food. Banqueting played a major role in Rome's communal religion. Maintaining the In general, all of West Africa's sizable kingdoms and empires either collapsed or were reduced when Europeans took direct control of the region in the late 19th century. Prior to that, Europeans mostly traded with local entities, and that trade gave rise to strong empires such as the Songhai, Benin, Ashanti, Oyo, Kaabu and others. Most of these empires profited from the slave trade, and its decline threw them into a gradual decay until the French and British created colonies and reduced them to vassal rulers. Prior to the rise of European dominance and the resultant slave trade, the large em.