



February 2023

Entangled Liberation Struggles Contribution to GTI Forum [Solidarity with Animals](#)

David Nibert

The thoughtful and important [essay](#) by Eileen Crist highlights the global crises causally linked to the exploitation of other animals while laying bare the socially created ideology that continues to promote an oppressive world. The natural affinity humans have with other animals noted by Crist was profoundly overshadowed more than 10,000 years ago in Eurasia with the capture, confinement, and ruthless exploitation of other animals for material gain. The oppression of other animals as instruments of war, laborers, rations, and other resources both enabled and promoted widespread warfare and violence while leading to the development and transmission of deadly zoonotic disease. In particular, the necessary pursuit of grasslands and fresh water by militaristic nomadic pastoralists brought continual warfare, genocide, systems of enslavement, and the oppression of women. This violent transformation in human existence and the resulting entangled oppression of humans and other animals was buttressed by early forms of state power and legitimated through the creation of perverse ideologies that afflict the world to this day, including speciesism, racism, sexism, and classism—nefarious notions grounded in religious doctrine.

This violent and oppressive social system was exported to much of the rest of the world through European colonization. These genocidal invasions were driven in no small part by the continued acquisition of lands for ranching, and they were made possible by the ongoing oppression of other animals as instruments of war and by the deadly introduction of smallpox and related zoonotic diseases. The wealth created by such violence—including the rapacious slaughter of countless birds and water-dwelling beings, the deplorable trafficking in the skin and hair of beavers and similar other animals, and the horrific transatlantic trafficking in enslaved peoples who were sustained on the salted flesh of cows and pigs—led to the morphing of the long-established militaristic and violent command economies to a more nuanced version of the

same—capitalism. While capitalist elites ravished the world through colonization, the system also promoted appalling exploitation of the masses of people within capitalist nations.

Destructive wars among powerful capitalist nations that have plagued the planet in recent history have been supplemented by regional wars, deadly coups, assassinations, and related campaigns undertaken to smother movements for economic justice and democracy throughout the world. Much of the land stolen from indigenous people everywhere continues to be used in the production of goods derived from tens of billions of other animals whose diabolical treatment is linked—as discussed by Crist—to the most serious problems confronting the planet.

And like its previous manifestation, capitalism is driven by greed and is reliant on the violence inherent in elite control of state power. And speciesism, racism, sexism, classism, and related ideologies flourish under the capitalist system by continuing to justify oppression while also fostering social divisions that divert many from the true source of their deprivation, insecurity, and alienation. As Crist notes, the institutionalized systems of oppression of other animals are pervasive, and this oppression is deeply entangled with world hunger, vital resource depletion, desertification, pollution, chronic disease, deadly pandemics, and the climate crisis.

Further, under capitalism the human species's potential for love and connectedness is largely eclipsed by the struggle for daily subsistence. From the existence of staggering inequality, “right to work” states, and monumental levels of student debt in the United States—to the oppressive, deprivation-producing global arrangements dictated by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization—Genghis Khan would be impressed. Economic elites' control of the state, the mass media, and educational institutions—coupled with their successful cooptation of key religious organizations—serves to keep the masses in more affluent countries “dazed and confused” and preoccupied with funding the basic needs of their families.

While the ideological impediments to change well-noted by Crist require continued examination and deconstruction, so, too, do challenges to the entangled oppression of humans and other animals require a widespread interrogation of the capitalist system. The enduring contributions of the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and the numerous scholar-activists influenced

by their work, informs much transitional scholarship and activism today. Notably, while Critical Animal Studies scholar/activists work to challenge all forms of entangled oppression driven today by neoliberalism and avarice, most advocates for other animals largely challenge the ideological basis of oppression and promote tepid reforms while largely overlooking the historical political-economic basis of the horrors they denounce. As noted by Crist and numerous scholars and activists, all forms of oppression are deeply connected. No single form can be effectively addressed if others are allowed to continue. A movement for justice for other animals is self-defeating if the systemic and profitable promotion of their torment produced by capitalism escapes recognition and opposition.

And so long as the interests of other animals who inhabit the planet are marginalized and unwisely dismissed by the academy and progressives, the economic, political, and ideological basis of their oppression will continue to uphold patriarchy, ruthless exploitation of the world's human population, violence, warfare, and environmental destruction. Activists of all stripes everywhere must mount a united challenge against the destructive forces of capitalism and strive for the transition to a world system that promotes justice for all the inhabitants of the planet. That transition will require the reversal of all forms of oppression of other animals set in motion over 10,000 years ago—an essential requirement for the restoration of humans' natural kinship and respect for all and the creation of a just and sustainable world.

About the Author



David Nibert is Professor of Sociology at Wittenberg University, where he teaches courses on *Animals & Society* and *Global Injustice*. His books include *Animal Rights/Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation* and *Animal Oppression and Human Violence: Domestration, Capitalism and Global Conflict* and the editor of *Animal Oppression and Capitalism*, Volumes One and Two. He co-organized the section on Animals and Society of the American Sociological Association. He holds a PhD in sociology from Ohio State University.

About the Publication

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Cite as David Nibert, “Entangled Liberation Struggles,” contribution to GTI Forum “Solidarity with Animals,” *Great Transition Initiative* (February 2023), <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/solidarity-animals-nibert>.

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