



## The Politics of Naming Feral: Anthropocentric Control and Feral Pigs in North America

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*Animal Studies and Feminism have yet to fully engage with the underexplored consequences of the presumed human authority to name animals feral. In this paper we reject reclaiming the term “feral,” instead using a Critical Animal Studies approach to politicize feral as integral to the ongoing justification of control over animals who have escaped domestication. In a case study of “feral pigs” we explore the complex lived reality that the name feral calls into being. The paper concludes with imagining futures where feral pigs are recognized as otherworldly beings, not expected to answer to their name and its associated consequences, but instead, where we, as humans, answer to them.*

*Content Warning: This paper contains descriptions of violence against nonhuman animals due to their being variously named and treated as feral, domesticated, and farmed.*

“What’s the use of their having names,’ the Gnat said, ‘if they won’t answer to them?’ ‘No use to *them*,’ said Alice; ‘but it’s useful to the people who name them, I suppose. If not, why do things have names at all?’” (Carroll 2008, 205)

Later Alice reflects, “just fancy calling everything you met ‘Alice,’ till one of them answered!

Only they wouldn’t answer at all, if they were wise” (210).

In Lewis Carroll’s famous children’s book *Through the Looking Glass* the protagonist Alice learns through conversation with a gnat and later a fawn in the wood “where things have no names” (209) that there is much at stake in being named and those who name hold power over the named. However, naming is not only about the ability to name but also about being recognized as having that ability. Whether gnats and fawns name each other is inconsequential in an anthropocentric politic wherein only humans are recognized as having the ability to name. In this paper, we consider anthropocentrism as Matthew Calarco (2015) defines it as a “set of relations and systems of power that are in the service of those who are considered by the dominant culture to be fully and properly human” (25). In this way “human-centeredness is founded simultaneously on a relation to and exclusion of animals” (26). Under anthropocentrism, the imaginative leap of wondering what and how nonhuman animals might name each other is unthinkable. Furthermore, the human authority to name, and all of its associated consequences, are taken for granted. Feral is one such name and Animal Studies and Feminism have yet to fully engage with its consequences for individuals deemed feral. Through a critical approach to naming, we recognize feral as a name that humans give other animals as part of an ongoing process of justifying and cementing control over them. The term feral



functions relationally, first juxtaposed against native wild animals, so that feral animals are considered encroaching illegitimate outsiders.<sup>1</sup> Second, while feral animals express agency in escaping domestication, being named feral gives humans the authority to bring the animals back under control. Feral can only be truly liberatory after the end of domestication. This paper will explore these themes through a Critical Animal Studies (CAS) framework. Pivotal to our arguments, CAS recognizes the value in interdisciplinary collaborative research that explicitly defines its political commitments, links theory to practice and analysis to politics, and recognizes abolitionism as part of a total liberation movement for humans, nonhumans, and the planet (Best et al. 2007; Nocella II et al. 2014; Sorenson 2014). These arguments are also relevant to other academic fields wherein feral theory is discussed because of the importance of critiquing the word feral and feral theory. In our critique, we use a case study of individuals named “feral pigs” to fully explore the complex lived reality that the name feral calls into being. The paper concludes with imagining futures where feral pigs are not expected to answer to their name and its associated consequences, but instead, where we, as humans, answer to them.

#### A Nexus of Naming, Lexicons, and Differential Treatment

Naming and having a name are neither objective representations of reality nor innocent. One possible approach to analyzing naming is thinking with the critical intention of CAS to reframe the concept of language in Animal Studies and its interdisciplinary intersections as also about naming. Our short overview of the existing scholarship on the language we use to describe other animals centres around moments that can be understood differently when called naming. Language is not always about naming, but shifting the inquiry to look for naming may reveal new qualities. In “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” Jacques Derrida (2002) already works with the concept of naming to assert that the human self-appointed authority to name all other animals is a “violent crime” that humans have given ourselves the authority to commit (392, 415). Naming other animals has resulted in the false projection of a “single indivisible line” between humans and animals, or human/animal dualism (399). It is arbitrary and inaccurate to position elephants, ants, chimpanzees, dolphins, and all other “animals” in their vast diversity on one side of a line, and position all “humans,” with our own vast diversity, on the other side of that line. Instead of an abyss between the humans and nonhumans, there is an “infinite space” between all species and individuals, who are really “an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals” (402, 409). Where we make divisions and what we name those divisions are of serious importance to Derrida. Joan Dunayer (2001) echoes Derrida’s critique of the human/animal dualism by writing that “with equal validity we could categorize all animals as giant squids and non-giant-squids” (11). Dunayer’s point has a playful seriousness; naming the dualism giant squids/non-giant-squids, instead of humans/animals or human animals/nonhuman animals, reverberates with meaning and shakes the foundation of human privilege.

We will linger with human/nonhuman animals because, as Dunayer (2001) documents in extensive detail, the tendency to divide animals along this dualism has resulted in separate lexicons for humans and nonhumans that leads to their differential treatment (2). In other words, using a specific name leads to using corresponding vocabulary and corresponding treatment. In this paper, rather than positing a cause-and-effect relationship, we frame names, lexicons, effects, and affects as wound together in a nexus of anthropocentric entitlement and power. Rather than saying the name comes first, then vocabulary, then treatment, we highlight the interrelated nature of these categories. They operate in a web and naming is just one point



in this web that we can focus on. For example, the common practice to name humans as humans is taken for granted. We typically represent dead humans with a lexicon of words such as corpse or cadaver. Linked to these words is treating dead humans respectfully. Alternatively, it is taken for granted to name animals as animals. We describe dead nonhuman animals with words like chicken breast, veal, pork, and beef. Linked to this lexicon is the treatment of eating them. Carol J. Adams (2010a) asserts that the language we use to refer to nonhuman animals replaces the idea of butchered individuals with the idea of cuisine (66). When names and words erase nonhuman animals from our human consciousness, as beef does to cows, it becomes easy to “morally abandon” them (Adams, 2010b, 304). How can we have an ethical response to someone who never registers in our consciousness? Someone disappears when they are represented as something. It is still contentious in some academic disciplines that nonhuman animals can be “someone” to begin with. Yet as Barbara Noske (1997) details in *Beyond Boundaries*, this problem stems from the object-status that has been assigned to nonhuman animals as a result of the dominant mechanistic and positivist approach to science that devalues anything “non-human (and non-male)” (49-50). To this list we would also add non-white, non-adult, non-disabled, non-upper class, and so forth. An important part of being named animal, or any Other that does not match the “human” ideal, is being described and treated as an object.

There is increasing recognition that nonhuman animals are not objects and thus the language and treatment surrounding animals needs to change. Ethologist Mark Bekoff (2007) asserts “we know that animal beings are not ‘things’ that exist for our convenience. Animals are subjective beings who have feelings and thoughts, and they deserve respect and consideration” (135-6). Furthermore, following Noske (1997), this paper contends that nonhuman animals are not objects, but instead “other worlds whose otherworldliness must not be disenchanting and cut to our size but must be respected for what [they are]” (xiii). Important to thinking of nonhuman animals as otherworldly/living in other worlds, or *umwelten* as Jakob von Uexküll would call them, they are “forever shrouded in mystery, beyond the reach of even the most sympathetic observer” (Rudy 2013, 157). In the context of this essay we interpret Kathy Rudy’s assertion to mean that humans should attempt to have a more accurate representation of who nonhuman animals are as subjective beings, but we should also remember that we will never be able to represent them in their full complexity. At stake is hiding nonhuman otherworldliness or representing and respecting it as best we can. In this article we follow the Animal Studies theme of critically analyzing language and representation, which we reframed as including naming, by exploring the word feral as applied to nonhuman animals—a name that forecloses otherworldliness and instead legitimizes and entrenches particular realities of power and violence.

### Naming Feral

The word feral is typically understood as a value-neutral descriptive term that applies to animals who have escaped domestication and have “gone wild.” Alternatively, we define feral as a name that humans have the recognized capacity to give to other animals as part of an ongoing process of justifying and cementing control over them. When applied to humans, the term feral can be considerably anthropocentric. As Noske (1997) points out, literature on feral children typically lumps them together with children reared in complete isolation and fails to respect the integrity and agency of mixed nonhuman and human animal societies (162-4). Some humans



choose to self-identify as feral, which can be seen as a liberatory practice and suggests an identity based on commonality with nonhuman Others. We worry that claiming this identity without an awareness of the complex lived realities that the name feral calls into being for Others such as feral pigs is a form of appropriation. If there is something to be reclaimed from ferality, the majority of humans are not the animals to reclaim it. Alternatively, we can show solidarity by politicizing the naming, existence, and management of feral animals as a form of anthropocentric violence justified by the relationship of feral to the terms wild and domesticated.

In Human-Animal Studies multiple scholars take up feral as a relational category that was historically defined against wild. Lynda Birke describes feral, wild, and tame as “slippery” categories (2014, 41). Marvin Gary and Susan McHugh (2014) similarly see feral as about boundaries and categories, writing the terms wild, domestic, and feral “only work in relation to each other, never as standalone concepts, nor as acultural, ahistorical, or otherwise essential conditions” (7). Adrian Franklin (2014) dates the term feral back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when it was initially used as a synonym for wild. It was not until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century that feral took on its typical contemporary meaning of referring to non-native captive or domesticated animals that have established wild populations (141-2). Franklin writes that the distinction between feral and wild “was useful for a new category of animal that was being created through the convergence of acclimatization movements and the spread of nationalism, particularly in newly colonized territories, but also in Europe” (142). Through human social and cultural change there was a new need to distinguish native wild and feral wild animals, especially when the former were considered stable, unchanging, and thus “legitimate community members having precedence over outsiders” (140). Juxtaposed against native wild animals, feral wild animals were and are still considered to be encroaching illegitimate outsiders. Ironically, the very people who claim the authority to determine who belongs and who does not in natural communities are typically humans who would not see themselves as members—the outsiders police the borders.

For Franklin, the term feral is about making and maintaining human taxonomic boundaries rather than representing how animals “naturally” are. However, that human system “is justified on natural grounds and signifies the legislative power of science” (Franklin 2014, 139). In other words, the term feral is a representation of human social order; yet to justify that order, dominant paradigms of science claim that feral is a representation of nature in disorder. Because wild is nature in order, feral animals should be controlled and managed to protect this order. In this way normative ideas about what is natural are linked to what is good and should be allowed to continue flourishing (or even helped to flourish). Our case study of feral pigs will illustrate these claims in detail. Furthermore, good and natural in this sense are deeply embedded in anthropocentric values; nonhuman animals are considered good when they do what humans want them to do or when they are useful to humans. It is when nonhuman animals escape their utility that they are seen as “bad” and “unnatural,” particularly if humans perceive them as doing some kind of non-permitted harm to humans. Central to naming animals feral is controlling them through the ritual of restoring and maintaining a human conception of social order (Franklin 2014, 139). This continual re-forging of order is enacted through manipulating, capturing, and killing feral animals—human activities that hide the constructed and anthropocentric qualities of feral.

The relational quality of feral is important considering that its juxtaposition with wild and domesticated strongly limit the agency of feral animals. Feral animals are not considered wild because they have domesticated ancestors. Domesticated animals are no longer subject to



natural selection, but produced by humans who control their “breeding” to select for and maintain certain “desirable” traits (Mayer and Lehr Brisbin 1991, 5, 267). Feral animals are therefore also considered distinct from domesticated animals because they can reproduce with whom they will outside of direct human control. However, domesticated, feral, and wild animals all produce viable offspring together and thus can all be considered members of the same species. Because they look different from each other, but retain the ability to reproduce together, arguments about the correct taxonomic nomenclature for domesticated and feral animals abound amongst taxonomists (Mayer and Lehr Brisbin 1991, 267-74). In these ways feral refers to a complex web of naming that represents particular cultural and historical conditions of biological manipulation in animal agricultural and herding societies. Such biological manipulation includes, but is not limited to, life, death, reproduction, and who or what the animals actually are (their genes, appearance, behaviour, and other traits). This is exacerbated and aided by the knowledge and power of science. The agency of feral animals is strongly limited in these contexts. Becoming feral, or escaping domestication, can be interpreted as an act of agency. However, because they are stuck between domesticated and wild, responses to feral animals include being forcibly brought back into domestication and/or being removed from wild/natural spaces. In other words, while feral animals themselves may have agency, being named or treated as feral threatens this agency because it refers to the human authority to bring feral animals back under control. The ways in which the cultural and historical conditions of biological manipulation are enacted are highly specific to context. This paper will explore and expand on some of the realities they can call into being through a case study of North American feral pigs.

#### Case Study: Human Introduction of Feral Pigs to North America

The name feral pig is meant to refer to a specific history and practice attached to particular individuals. We have chosen to think with feral pigs in North America and use Canadian data whenever possible because, as scholars studying in Toronto, we hope to link our theoretical work to what is at stake for real individual pigs local to us. Feral pigs have recently appeared in the Ontario media and are of particular interest because pigs in general are always-already thought of as associated with another name: bacon. While feral pigs themselves are distinct from factory-farmed pigs (both in their personal histories and the ways in which they are biologically manipulated), feral pigs, like all feral farmed animals, are affected by being ideologically linked to farmed members of the same species. Feral pigs in particular have been referred to as wild, semi-wild, and stray boars and swine.<sup>2</sup> Biologists John J. Mayer and I. Lehr Brisbin (1991) have studied feral pigs in North America extensively and they suggest calling all free-ranging feral, wild, and hybrid pigs, wild pigs or wild-living pigs (5). Much of Mayer’s professional life has been devoted to understanding the origins or history and morphology of wild pig populations in the United States based on when, where, and why they were introduced, and whether their ancestors were wild boars, domestic-feral pigs, or hybrid pigs. Hybrid pigs have recent ancestors who were wild boars as well as domestic-feral pigs. These distinctions are seen as significant to scientists and managers alike, despite being difficult to define and describe. Some reasons the distinctions are significant include legal problems in the control of wild pig populations by hunting them, comparing susceptibility of wild and domesticated pigs to diseases, and helping to understand the adaptations and functional roles of wild and domesticated pigs (Mayer and Lehr Brisbin 1991, 4). Notably, all of these reasons support



anthropocentric control and biological manipulation of nonhuman animals. In this paper, we are not interested in making arguments for whether our subject is necessarily more feral than wild or domesticated, but instead retain the term feral because they are treated as such (considered illegitimate outsiders who were domesticated and should be taken back into human control) and this must be taken into account. By traversing intersections of time, space, species, power, and violence, we hope that our theoretical critique of the term feral can have practical effects on local feral pigs and that thinking with feral pigs can illustrate important insights on the names feral, farmed, and domesticated.

Pigs, or individuals categorized as belonging to the species *Sus scrofa*, are found all over the world due to human introductions (Mayer and Lehr Brisban 1991, 2). *Sus scrofa* originated in Eurasia and Northwest Africa and individuals were domesticated by humans approximately 10,000 years ago (Frantz et al. 2015, 1; Giuffra et al. 2000, 1785). Members of *Sus scrofa* who have no “domestic” ancestors are referred to as Eurasian wild boars, while the name “pig” is typically used to refer to domesticated or feral individuals. In 2010, the standing global population of domesticated farmed pigs stood at 498 million (FAO 2013, 10). These pigs and an unknown number of wild boars were raised, killed, and butchered to be consumed. In addition, tens of thousands of pigs are used in scientific research each year (Speaking of Research, n.d.; USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, 2014). Arguably, every aspect of domesticated pigs’ lives is controlled by humans, including their genotype, phenotype, reproduction, eating, movement (or lack thereof), interactions, and deaths. For over 10,000 years, being identified as what humans name a pig has meant being exposed to ever further extensive forms of anthropocentric manipulation and violence. As noted previously, these forms of biological manipulation are characteristic of human treatment of domesticated and farmed animals.

Feral pigs are considered a non-native and arguably invasive species in North America; however their introduction and spread across North America has directly resulted from human manipulation. Domesticated pigs were first brought to North America in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Spanish colonists exploring Southern parts of the continent (Mayer and Lehr Brisbin 1991, 9). Feral pig populations were first established when an unknown number of pigs escaped human control, either because they were generally allowed to range freely or they were kept in insecure enclosures (7). Domesticated pigs continued to escape from farms over the centuries, leading to growing feral pig populations in multiple regions. In the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Eurasian wild boars were brought to various parts of the United States for the purposes of big game sports hunting and once again some individuals escaped and formed or joined feral pig populations (Mayer and Lehr Brisbin 1991). We see the many escapes that domesticated pigs attempted (successfully and unsuccessfully) as agential moments. The specifics of these moments, including how pigs escaped and what happened to them, are unfortunately underreported because academic and historical sources that describe the introduction of feral pigs to North America only represent pigs as existing for the purposes of sports hunting and consumption. In these narratives, the pigs’ otherworldliness has been hidden by objectification. Their being named feral largely indicates a loss of human control over them and functions as a justification to regain control. Control is always-already about the right to kill and it remains an unacknowledged tension in this history that feral pigs exist in North America, and are an invasive species, because humans brought them here to kill.

Between 1900 and 1990, feral pig populations in the United States were fairly stable, with pigs being established in 19 southern states. However, in the following decades there was a rapid increase in the overall population size and range of feral pigs with feral pigs being



reported in 44 states. Mayer (2009a, 13) and Gipson et al. (1998) assert that hunters were the primary cause of this increase because feral pigs had become popular as a big game resource for trophy hunting and eating. Wild pigs continue to be the second most popular big game animal in the United States after white tailed deer (Kaufman, Bowers, and Bowers 2004, 170). To increase hunting opportunities elsewhere, hunters caught feral pigs and released them in states where they were not previously found. Another recent source of Eurasian wild boars in the United States was the San Diego Zoo, which purchased several from Europe in 1986 (Mayer and Lehr Brisbin 1991, 70). Since the zoo did not have the resources to keep their offspring, it sold the piglets to animal dealers in the United States who in turn sold them to hunting operations from where several escaped. In addition, wild boars were imported from wild boar farms in Canada in the 1990s for hunting operations (Mayer 2009a, 13).

While no feral pig populations had been established in Canada during the initial colonization period or thereafter, in the last decade there has been growing alarm about the sighting of feral pigs in regions where they were not previously found. Based on media reports, feral pigs in Canada appear to be escapees from wild boar farms or from game hunting ranches. Wild boars were first brought to Canada from Eurasia in the 1990s to diversify agriculture (Huncar 2014; Lev 2015; Statistics Canada 2008) and at this stage there is no evidence that escaped wild boars have bred with domesticated pigs. Although all of the feral pigs in Canada are direct descendants of Eurasian wild boars who have not been domesticated per se, wild boars in Canada have been brought under reproductive control for hunting and butchering for consumption. In this sense, boars that escape these operations are typically considered feral, although they are also still referred to as wild boars. As demonstrated, humans have played the vital role in introducing feral pigs to North America and, as will be shown, the framing of pigs as objects for consumption is only exacerbated in contemporary management responses.

#### Case Study: Human Fear of Feral Pigs and Inconclusive Evidence

In academic literature, media reports, hunting websites, and government agency statements, the North American feral pig is characterized as a terrifying and all-consuming invader. This is typical of feral animals in general. Biologists regularly only understand feral animals as the cause of ecological disruption, as representatives of their ancestors, or as different from wild animals (Birke 2014, 41). Feral animals are not understood as individuals, community members, agents, and participants in symbiotic relationships. Their otherworldliness is reduced to the aforementioned categories that emerge out of human meaning. In the case of feral pigs, stories of their destructiveness are always assumed to be true. It is believed that feral pigs have an ability to survive and succeed in new environments due to their capacity to adapt to a wide range of habitats, their omnivorous diet, and their potential to have two litters of four to six piglets on average per year (Comer and Mayer 2009, 53). The reproductive potential of feral pigs is significantly overestimated by those who view them negatively. For example, nearly 50 per cent of ranchers in Texas believed that feral pigs have 12 piglets per litter (C.E. Adams et al. 2005, 1316). Furthermore, an absence of large predators in many regions where feral pigs live is also thought to contribute to their growth in population size (Seward et al. 2004). This common narrative is framed in such a way that it appears inevitable that feral pigs will experience a population explosion, resulting in these seemingly unnatural animals overwhelming farms and natural regions. There are surely links between a fear of feral pigs and the fear of Othered and “undesirable” humans reproducing and overwhelming human social systems. Feral pigs have



been held responsible for damaging agricultural crops, harming native fauna and flora, harassing and preying on farmed animals, incubating and spreading diseases and parasites, causing vehicular accidents, damaging property, and attacking humans (Bevins et al. 2014; Mayer 2009b; Seward et al. 2004). However, the evidence for such claims is far from conclusive and sometimes contradictory.

From the perspective of farmers, ranchers, and conservationists, feral pigs have a negative impact on agricultural systems and natural plant communities through consumption, rooting, digging, and trampling, which can also exacerbate exotic plant invasion (Seward et al. 2004). Some studies have shown that these effects are highly context specific and not always negative, but sometimes neutral, mixed, or positive, depending on what the desired state may be. Notably, the desired state is interpreted through normative ideas about what is natural, good, and should be allowed to flourish. As shown previously, these terms are about making and maintaining human social order. The most widespread type of “damage” caused by feral pigs is as a result of rooting in the process of finding food (Mayer 2009b, 222). This process of turning the soil over is believed to negatively modify soil chemistry and nutrient cycling. However, at least one study in the Netherlands by Groot Bruinderink and Hazebroek (1996) did not find any significant soil differences between one area which had no feral pigs for 60 years and an immediately adjacent area where rooting occurred regularly. In another example, the disturbance of soil by feral pigs increased the richness of both exotic and native plant species in northern California and significantly decreased the biomass of exotic grasses while increasing the biomass of indigenous grasses in tall patches (Cushman, Tierney, and Hinds 2004). Feral pig disturbances were found to have no significant effect on nitrogen mineralization rates or soil moisture levels in this case. Furthermore, feral pigs are blamed for large economic losses due to damaging agricultural land, but the estimated losses seem to be based on speculation rather than solid evidence. One study for example estimated a loss of \$800 million per year due to the damage of agricultural crops, but it is based both on a rough estimation of the number of feral swine in the United States (of four million individuals and no source of the number provided) and an assumption of \$200 worth of damage caused per pig annually (Pimentel, Zuniga, and Morrison 2005). The value of \$200 is not verified by study but loosely based on a personal estimate that one pig can cause \$1000 worth of damage in one night.

Feral pigs have also been linked to negative effects on native animal species such as birds and turtles. As noted previously, the human desire to manage and eliminate invasive or feral animals has historical roots in nationalist conceptions of legitimate community members versus outsiders. Furthermore, perhaps as might be expected, the threat that feral pigs actually pose to native species appears to be exaggerated. Much of the fear is that feral pigs eat smaller animals and eggs. However, at least two studies have found bobwhite quails, a ground nesting bird thought to be depredated by feral pigs, thriving in large numbers in areas with high feral pig populations; in regions where bobwhites had indeed been declining, changes in land use and urbanization were the causes (C.E. Adams et al. 2005, 1319). Feral pigs are frequently believed to eat anything dead or alive that they can catch (1319). However, approximately 88 per cent of feral pigs’ diets consist of plant matter, varying between 57-100 per cent (Ditchkoff and Mayer 2009, 106). Pigs are hardly prolific predators and their predatory effects should not be viewed in isolation from other predatory species including dogs and cats, raccoons, coyotes, and skunks to name a few (USDA 2002, 7), as well as human pressures on other animal species. Significantly, in both Canada and the United States, a primary driver of species extinctions is habitat loss (Venter et al. 2006; Wilcove et al. 1998).



Feral pigs are also considered threats to domesticated farmed animals. Farmers and ranchers have indicated that feral pigs depredate on young and newborn farmed animals, but the exact losses to the animal agricultural industry in North America are not known and much of the statistics on predation of farmed animals comes from Australia (Seward et al. 2004, 35-6). Another concern for the government, ranchers, and farmers is that feral pigs could act as a reservoir for disease which could be transmitted to domesticated pigs, thereby causing losses to the pork industry (Seward et al. 2004, 36). Some of the diseases and parasites that feral pigs harbour could also affect humans. However, there seems to be little evidence of diseases being transmitted from feral pigs to domesticated and wild animals and humans. The biggest risk factor for transmission of diseases from feral pigs to humans appears to be from humans hunting and consuming feral pigs (Irwin et al. 2009). Furthermore, it seems far more likely that pigs housed in concentrated feeding operations will develop diseases that could spread to humans and wild animals as was experienced with the H1N1 swine flu pandemic in 2009 (WHO 2010). Notably, the lives and stakes of the farmed animals who could possibly be harmed by feral pigs are absent in such arguments as they, like the feral pigs, are already objectified and seen as always already in the process of being killed for human consumption.

#### Case Study: Human Management of Feral Pigs in North America

Even though there is no conclusive evidence that feral pigs pose a risk (and even if there was, a risk for whom?), a variety of methods of controlling, managing, and eradicating feral pigs are legal because of the naming of feral pigs and the associated treatment towards those named as such. In North America, extermination methods for feral pigs include shooting with a gun or crossbow, aerial hunting, shooting at night over bait, trapping, and snaring followed by euthanasia, hunting with dogs, use of Judas pig by hunters to find feral pigs, and toxicants, which are in the process of being developed and approved in the United States (Campbell and Long 2009, 2321-4; Seward et al. 2004, 37). Electrified or meshed fences are also used to help reduce pig movement, particularly into protected areas (Seward et al. 2004). Comer and Mayer (2009) suggest specifically targeting adult female feral pigs for lethal control due to their reproductive potential, so there is also a gendered aspect to proposed management strategies (56). Organizations involved in efforts to manage or eradicate feral pigs admit that it is very difficult and generally impossible to eradicate feral pigs (Choquenot, McIlroy, and Korn 1996). Recreational hunting, a common practice in North America, has been found to be largely ineffective at eradicating feral pigs (Campbell and Long 2009, 2323). In addition, while sports hunters purport to contribute to managing the feral pig “problem,” in reality it is hunters who have encouraged the spread and proliferation of feral pigs through supplemental feeding and translocation of individuals for hunting purposes (Bevins et al. 2014, 296). Incentives to do so include not only the thrill and satisfaction of hunting pigs and eating their flesh, but also financial rewards for private landowners charging hunting fees and state-subsidized bounties received by hunters. In contradiction to the purported hazard that feral pigs pose, Comer and Mayer (2009) note that maintaining feral pig populations for hunting purposes should be a management objective (56), while C.E. Adams et al. (2005) state that feral hogs are an “underutilized economic resource” referring to the potential for property owners to sell opportunities to hunt feral pigs on their land (1320).

Ironically, despite considerable evidence denying the effectiveness of hunting for controlling the population size of feral pigs, several provinces in Canada allow and even



encourage hunting to control or eradicate feral pigs. The intensity of the response to the presence of feral pigs seems particularly problematic at a stage when very little is known about the number of feral pigs in each province and the extent and magnitude of their impact on the local environment (“Feral Wild Boar Raise Concerns among Pork Producers” 2014). The estimated number of feral pigs and the legal responses vary significantly across the different provinces in Canada and the management responses to feral pigs vary dependent on which pieces of legislation they fall under.

In Ontario, fear of feral pigs has been increasing since 2013 when six wild boars were seen in a few counties (Bostelaar 2014; Lev 2015). Prior to this, 16 wild boars had escaped a farm in 2008, but all of the escapees were killed by cars, predators, or hunters. The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) admitted that they do not know how large the feral population is, but have stated that it should be zero (Bostelaar 2014). In response to the sightings in 2013, the MNR sent a Memorandum to Residents of the United Counties of Russell and Prescott, in which they authorized landowners and hunters to kill any wild boars sighted as per Section 54(5) of the Ontario Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (1997). Under the Act (s. 1), wild boars are considered wildlife belonging “to a species that is wild by nature,” but requiring special management considerations because they are wildlife that has been transported into Ontario or “propagated from stock” that have been transported into Ontario (s. 54(1)), thereby referring to their foreign origins. The Memorandum informed residents that wild boars, also called feral swine in the letter, are considered non-native and exist for the purposes of hunting and being killed for their flesh. They also listed the purported negative impacts that wild boars have on natural ecosystems, crops, and human safety. The Memorandum attempted to invoke fear in county residents, while emphasizing the pigs’ foreignness and their consumptive value in order to justify the necessity of taking pre-emptive measures to prevent the spread of feral pigs in Ontario.

In British Columbia, feral pigs are defined in the Designation and Exemption Regulation of the Wildlife Act as “a pig of the genus *Sus* that is not in captivity or is not otherwise under a person’s control.” (1990, s. 3.2(1)) There are few restrictions on hunting feral pigs in British Columbia and since 2014 it has been legal for licensed hunters to hunt them anywhere at any time within the province using almost any method available to them including with a firearm, bow, poison, and shotgun (s. 11(3)). This regulatory freedom is possible because feral pigs are listed under Schedule C, which catalogues all species that are considered alien and/or nuisance wildlife. Species listed in Schedule C are to be managed differently from other wildlife. Here we see the intersection between being “out of control” and “alien,” two categories which are applied to feral pigs. According to British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, there are not many feral pigs in B.C., but hunting regulations for feral pigs were relaxed as a deliberate attempt to reduce their numbers before they became a problem (“Feral Pigs: B.C. Allows Hunting ‘Anywhere and at Any Time’” 2014).

In Alberta, feral pigs are not considered wildlife under the Wildlife Act (2000, s. 1(1)), but are listed as “controlled animals” in the associated Wildlife Regulation (1997, s. 4(1)). Wild boars are also listed as pests under the Pest and Nuisance Control Regulation (2001, s. 2(1)). Due to these designations, local authorities are prescribed to take measurements to control and “destroy” feral pigs in their municipalities and it is legal for landowners or lawful occupants to kill feral pigs on their own land (Agricultural Pests Act, 2000, ss. 5–6). In addition, there is a \$50 bounty per pair of ears handed into the government (Huncar, 2014). According to Huncar, at least \$45,000 has been paid out to hunters since the population control program was introduced in 2003, and by 2014 just over 800 boars had been killed.



In Saskatchewan, it is not known how many feral pigs are found outside of farms, but ranchers have been involved in “controlling” wild boars through the Moose Mountain Wild Boar Eradication Program for several years (Wilson 2013). There are no specific legal provisions for free-living wild boar or feral pigs in Saskatchewan. Wild boars are listed under The Stray Animals Regulations (1999, s. 3) as stray animals, meaning that they are animals that are no longer under control of their owner. There are fairly strict regulations regarding the killing of stray animals as specified in the Stray Animals Act. However, according to *Wild Boars in Canada*, a website dedicated to sharing information about hunting wild boars, the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment and Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities are considering changes to remove “barriers” to hunting feral wild boars (“Legal Information” n.d.).

In Manitoba wild boars are listed as restricted exotic wildlife under Schedule B (s. 1) of the Exotic Wildlife Regulation (1999) and hunting of wild boars is allowed with few restrictions (“Legal Information” n.d.). As shown in this section, the status of feral pigs as an exotic animal, or an animal that is no longer under control, is central to them acquiring special management status.

#### Case Study: Feral Pigs in Canadian Academia and the Media

Despite reports in the Canadian media about the destructive and highly invasive nature of feral pigs, no academic research on feral pigs in Canada had been published until 2014. The first peer-reviewed paper on feral wild boars in Canada was published by Brook and van Beest (2014) on the topic of distribution and the perceived risk of wild boars in Saskatchewan. Their research had as its justification and starting point the assumption that feral wild boars are a serious problem that requires urgent management. According to Brook, without significant management actions the number of wild boars in Saskatchewan will match, if not exceed, the human population in the next decade, which could result in millions of dollars of damage (Running 2015). Brook and van Beest’s 2014 findings were based on a statistical analysis of second-hand reports of sightings of feral boars in the province after they occurred. An email survey was sent to elected municipal officials of rural municipalities to ask them if they knew of feral boar observations in their community (488). If yes, they were asked to specify in what kind of habitats and when wild boars were observed. Statistical modelling techniques (resource selection probability functions) were used to predict the distribution of wild boars across the province. However, given that the input data were imprecise, collected at a coarse scale for a small sample, and very possibly inaccurate, incomplete, and biased given the data collection method, the results should be interpreted with caution. Despite these limitations, Brook presented the aforementioned findings to the Saskatchewan Pork’s Board of Directors in April 2014 and stated that “despite a somewhat coarse scale approach based on limited data, it’s clear that feral boar are widespread in rural Saskatchewan and there is ample habitat for further expansion.” Further, that “it is our opinion in the paper, that given this distribution combined with limited overall regional effort at control (provincial and national), the window for feral wild boar eradication in Saskatchewan is most likely now been missed and we are in an era of endemic feral wild boar” (Saskatchewan Pork n.d.). Subsequently, at least two more papers on wild boars in Saskatchewan have been published on the wild boar’s diurnal and nocturnal behaviour (Stolle et al. 2015) and the presence of diseases and parasites in hunted boars (McGregor et al. 2015). Besides working closely with the pork industry, Brook’s research team



has developed a relationship with hunters on their Facebook page, “Wild Hog Watch (Feral Wild Boars).” For example, researchers have used Facebook to ask hunters and trappers to report sightings of wild boars in the province and similarly, reciprocated by sharing locations of wild boars for hunting purposes. Despite a significant paucity of research on feral pigs in Canada, the feral pig has in no uncertain terms been painted as a highly invasive and destructive creature worthy of elimination. The dread of feral pigs precedes evidence of any actual negative impacts.

Lethal management actions taken in Canada seem to be based on the apprehension that feral pigs will become the out-of-control problem that they have been perceived to be in the United States and Australia. This fear is supported and propagated by the media, farmers who are concerned about agricultural losses (“Feral Wild Boar Raise Concerns among Pork Producers” 2014), conservationists who wish to preserve nature as it was at a particular time, and hunters who are enthusiastic to help “control” feral pigs and consume their flesh. Hunters are quick to offer their skills to assist in managing the feral pig “problem,” as seen in the comment section of related articles in the Global News (Pillar 2014), CBC News (“Wild Boar Populations an Unmeasured Menace in B.C.” 2015), and the Western Producer (Yates 2014) quoted below:

“WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WERE THERE IS PLACES TO HUNT THEM I LOVE WILD BORE MEAT AND SO DOSE SOME OF MY BUDDS MY PH”

“I have a number of legal firearm holders that will help with this problem. All we need is info..[sic] where, when and how. We can eradicate these pigs one shot at a time. And we will eat them and help feed others as well. Fire me a message.”

“Why not post areas where the wild boar are. I know countless hunters itching to take as many as possible.”

“Why not do what people in Texas have been doing for years hunters pay good money to kill a wild boar why not help the farmers setting up business’s with trophy hunts. It’s a huge industry down south.”

“yes they are tasty even the baby pigs taste great and they are in the class C list. all you need is a valid hunting licence.”

“I bet the little ones would be good on the spit. Boar piglet kabobs.”

“If they are tasty, open up a hunting season for them.”

Notably, in these comments hunters are quick to equate feral pigs with pork or meat which is problematic because these words imply that “there never existed a thinking, feeling individual - only, from the beginning, a slab of flesh” (Dunayer 2001, 139-40). Using these words makes killing easier. It is clear that feral pigs are not being hunted because they are a legitimate problem (and who would even define problem?), but because they are represented with a lexicon that reduces them to cuisine.

The website *Wild Boars in Canada* provides information on where to find wild boars and legal information about hunting as well as tips on how to kill them. It also fosters fears about the impending population explosion of feral pigs and thereby provides the justification for hunting. On the information page it states that, “wild boars are yet to be a huge problem in



Canada, but the problem is getting worse by the day.” The site also hosts “News” which links to the group’s Facebook posts. Posts include videos and articles about guns, shooting, hunting, and feral pigs. The articles and videos shared serve to support beliefs that feral pigs breed prolifically, decimate and destroy crops and natural vegetation, and are dangerous to humans and farmed animals. Videos glorifying feral pig hunting through the use of dramatic music and footage of guns, helicopters, and hyper-masculine militarized themes are also posted. Hunters and wildlife managers remind each other and the public of how dangerous injured and cornered feral wild pigs are, as well as mother pigs with their young: “Feral pigs are gentle unless attacked, but hunters vilify them as ‘vicious,’ ‘malicious,’ and ‘bad to the bone’” (Dunayer 2001, 57-8). The possibility that aggressive behaviours could be interpreted as justifiable attempts by pigs to save themselves and their offspring from unsolicited violence is not considered. Although pigs have been associated with many other qualities besides destructiveness and aggressiveness such as intelligence (Mendl, Held, and Byrne 2010), curiosity, socialness, playfulness, and matriarchal family groups (Masson 2003, 19–20, 37–8), the latter qualities are never mentioned in these forums; their recognition might disrupt the hunters and land managers’ narratives that serve to justify hunting and extermination efforts.

According to Brian Luke (2007), hunting and other industries that exploit nonhuman animals are legitimized through protection devices that block human sympathy for nonhuman animals. One of these devices is cover stories, or a narrative that recognizes nonhuman animals are being harmed, but because this harm is necessary it must be allowed to continue (138). Our case study confirms the typical cover stories for hunting, which are that “hunters kill animals for meat, and we need the hunting system to control population levels,” both of which are untrue (140). As noted earlier, that hunting is needed to control population is untrue because there is no reliable data on what these population levels actually are, and it even seems likely that hunting has actually increased feral pig populations. Regarding the claim that hunters kill animals for meat, an analysis of hunting magazines shows that the primary reason men hunt is for “the thrill of a challenging conquest,” male bonding, and male status (140-1): “it is not that men hunt to get meat, just the reverse, they eat the meat in order to hunt—that is, in order to gain the ex post facto legitimation for the hunt itself,” and they admit this to each other in hunter magazines (141). This was also the case on the *Wild Boars in Canada* Facebook page that glorified hyper-masculine depictions of killing feral pigs.

A holistic case study of feral pigs must also be able to account for how hunting is not simply a Western male activity. In the United States 11 per cent of hunters are women and women hunters are increasing rapidly in Canada, with as high as a 70 per cent increase in Ontario over four years. The reasons for these increases are varied and include participating in activities forbidden to women/challenging gender norms, acquiring and eating “ethical meat”, wanting to be self-sufficient, seeking a sense of adventure, excitement, and perceiving hunting as an environmentally conscious activity (Mitchell 2014; Schmitt 2013). As to be expected, there is a lack of data regarding hunters who do not fit into the male-female binary, however it would be an oversight to suggest that they do not exist. Similar to hyper-masculine depictions of hunting, female or gender-neutral arguments for hunting, including feminist accounts, obscure the “normalized violence” of the act (C.A. Adams 2007, 22). A feminist ethics which recognizes “the domination of nature, rooted in postmedieval, Western, male psychology, is the underlying cause of the mistreatment of animals as well as the exploitation of women and the environment” (Donovan 2007, 65) implies that hunting is inconsistent with feminist values (76). Stephanie Jenkins and Vasile Stănescu (2014) build on similar ecofeminist claims to assert that “feminism and queer theory are absolutely incompatible with any form of ownership, exploitation, and



consumption of animals” (81). Such arguments are complicated by Indigenous hunting, which cannot be lumped in with Luke's theory of Western blocked sympathy for nonhuman animals. Many animal rights activists in particular are cautious to discuss how their goals diverge from Indigenous peoples because they recognize that their solidarity with nonhuman animals can be interpreted in light of a colonial history as further “civilizing” missions and a form of neocolonialism (Kymlicka and Donaldson 2015, 171-2). Alternatively, animal rights activists can engage with Indigenous perspectives on hunting by recognizing that Indigenous and animal rights activists share in common a rejection of the Western instrumental approach to nonhuman animals that sees them as property (160), creating forums for dialogue that challenge the colonial privilege inherent to these spaces (176-7), and not speaking for Indigenous peoples, but prioritizing texts by Indigenous authors that make connections between Indigeneity and veganism and/or animal rights (Fisher 2011; Robinson 2013). These kinds of strategies are central to recognizing the complexity of hunting while also retaining seeing feral pigs as otherworldly individuals with their own stakes in discourse.

#### Conclusion: Imagining Alternative Futures for Feral Pigs

The name feral is particularly problematic because it has and continues to be used to justify and cement anthropocentric control over nonhuman animals and a limited number of humans. Feral animals express agency by escaping domestication, but in being considered illegitimate outsiders of the wild, the name feral is used to try to bring them back under human control. These themes are particularly poignant in our case study of feral pigs. Feral pigs were introduced by humans to North America to be killed under specific conditions. Despite the uncritical and unsubstantiated basis on which the claims that feral pigs are a “problem” rest, feral pigs in North America are legally hunted and killed. Feral pigs occupy the categorical position of unquestionable food, their bodies continuously laid over with human social constructions that repeatedly position them as objects. There is little place in Western society for imagining pigs as other than always-already on their way to becoming bacon due to this object status. The existence of feral pigs outside of the farm or lab could be the start of an empowered and liberatory narrative for pigs, but not if the term feral remains unchallenged.

The ongoing invasive manipulation and control humans exercise over feral pigs complicates the wild as a space where pigs might finally find the fullest expression of their agency. We have two key concerns about the future of feral pigs. First, if feral animals express agency in escaping domestication, and being named feral gives humans the authority to always try to bring them back under control, feral can only be truly liberatory after the end of domestication. In other words, feral pigs will be free after the abolition of the property status of all animals that ends domestication. Although our position is not synonymous with animal rights<sup>3</sup>, we recognize the importance of its advocacy “that animals should have the right not to be treated as the resources of humans and that animal exploitation should be abolished and not regulated” (Francione 2010, 29). What the end of domestication practically means requires further academic inquiry. Some scholars assert that the goal of reproductive freedom for women and disabled people should be extended to nonhuman animals (Duncan 2012, 40-1; Tyler and Adams 2006, 122). This goal is at odds with the forced sterilization common to animal sanctuaries and humane societies and as a potential practice to end domestication. Highlighting this area of emerging debate, Adam Weitzenfeld and Melanie Joy (2014) contrast those who want to abolish domestication with Kymlicka and Donaldson, who are concerned



that abolitionists are advocating for massive sexual intervention without recognizing the individuals whose liberty they will restrict (18). It is essential that the ethics pivotal to the goal and the strategy to reach it are the same, or in other words that the means should be consistent to the “ends-in-the-making” (White and Cudworth 2014, 214, 216). Second, what kind of feral pigs are possible to imagine in the wild? While the individuals we name feral pigs have the ability to survive in the wild, free from human aid and control, this is in sharp contrast to contemporary farmed pigs. Porcine Stress Syndrome is a genetic condition of factory farmed pigs, “bred into these animals as a consequence of a decade’s worth of selective breeding for large and lean muscles. The condition essentially makes pigs extremely susceptible to heart attacks if they are stressed out, which is an inevitability on industrialized pig farms” (Taylor 2014, 105). These pigs could not survive in the Canadian wilderness. As Sunaura Taylor (2014) asks, “what are our responsibilities to accommodate and support these animals who we have made disabled?<sup>4</sup> What does accommodation and access even mean for different species?” (111)

By asking about our responsibilities to pigs and other factory farmed animals Taylor (2014) politicizes the invisible human hand in the highly manipulated existence of many nonhuman animals. From this place we return to Alice’s discussion of names and our proposal that feral pigs should not be expected to answer to their name and its associated consequences. Instead, we, as humans, ought to answer to them. Part of this answering includes taking ethical responsibility for human decisions regarding nonhuman animals and our actions towards them which have caused tremendous suffering, disability, and lack of freedom. Ethical responsibility would mean acknowledging the human role in the situation of feral pigs. Humans brought pigs to North America to kill them. Naming them feral is an extension of human attempts to manage, control, manipulate, and kill pigs, now justified by claiming that they are invasive illegitimate outsiders. Furthermore, ethical responsibility would include recognizing the subjectivity and agency of feral pigs as otherworldly beings. This would include politicizing feral as a name linked to violent lexicons and treatment and then enacting an un-linking by representing them in ways that respect their otherworldliness and do not distort them down to human meaning. This representation can include a critical anthropomorphism based on empathy, careful observation, knowledge of a nonhuman animal’s biology, and attempting to shift to their point of view (Bekoff 2007, 123-5; Davis 2014, 170). To critics of anthropomorphism, Bekoff (2007) asks, “should we talk about animals as a bunch of hormones, neurons, and muscles absent of any context for what they’re doing and why?” Bekoff sees anthropomorphism as a “linguistic tool to make the thoughts and feelings of other animals accessible to humans” that is not about “inserting something human into animals,” but instead identifies “commonalities and then using human language to communicate what we observe” (2007, 123, 125). Importantly, anthropomorphism is about making nonhuman animals accessible to humans and does not rest on claims that we now “know” animals. It is possible to be critically anthropomorphic, and use this tool when appropriate, in order to retain a respect for otherworldliness. Finally, ethical responsibility includes engaging with the fact that contemporary farmed pigs cannot survive in the wild without care. We have a responsibility to give them this care after deliberately bringing them into life under these conditions. Such care can be practically enacted through creating and volunteering for vegan farmed animal sanctuaries, many of which already exist in Canada and the United States. It is only when we question who pigs are allowed to be, and imagine spaces where they will not be confined by names that legitimize human control, that we can truly respect the agency that flows from our fellow otherworldly animals.



*TT: This paper is dedicated to all the feral pigs who have at least temporarily escaped human domination and live their lives according to their own volition, as well as all the farmed pigs who will never have that opportunity. I hope this paper will shine some light on the human violence inflicted upon them. NTR: In particular, I thank Bobbie and the other pigs at Happily Ever Esther Farm Sanctuary, for being the first individuals to allow me to experience pig otherworldliness.*

## Notes

1. We recognize that invasive species are also considered encroaching and illegitimate outsiders. Although there is much overlap in the framing and treatment of feral animals and invasive species, we will not delve into the topic of invasive species specifically in this paper.

2. In one interesting example from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Charles Darwin discusses domesticated pigs that have “run wild” and are feral in Jamaica, “semi-feral” pigs of New Granada and South America, and “neglected pigs” in the Zambesi settlement in Africa (80). Darwin provided no criteria to explain why specific pigs were placed under different categories, but an implicit reading of Darwin’s work suggests distinguishing between feral, domesticated, and wild was based on physical appearance and degree of human control. In another example pigs in North America who have one parent from established feral populations and one from escaped wild boars brought to North America to hunt are referred to as hybrids (Mayer and Lehr Brisbin 1991, 5).

3. Following Cary Wolfe, we support animal rights “in abeyance, as it were, only in recognition of the underlying fact that the operative theories and procedures we now have for articulating the social and legal relation between ethics and action are inadequate—and here is the full posthumanist force of the question of the animal in this connection—inadequate for thinking about the ethics of *the question of the human as well as the nonhuman animal*. Practically speaking, we must use what we have, in the same way that one might very well want to invoke the discourse of universal human rights to prohibit the torture of human beings, even though in theoretical terms the model of universal human rights has been thoroughly dismantled as a very historically specific relic of Enlightenment modernity—and for many of the same reasons as in the foregoing critique of *animal rights*” (192).

4. Taylor (2014) asks these questions in a Disability Studies framework, which can “help us to ask who these animals are beyond their suffering. It asks us to consider how the very vulnerability and difference these animals inhabit may in fact embody new ways of knowing and being.” In an important intersectional link Taylor concludes “all animals—both those whom we human beings would call disabled and those whom we would not—are treated as inferior, devalued, and abused for many of the same basic reasons disabled people are. They are understood as incapable and different. They are, in other words, oppressed by ableism. The abled body that ableism perpetuates and privileges is always not only non-disabled but nonanimal” (113). Following these connections is pivotal to challenging anthropocentrism.



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