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Nonhuman Empires

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Abstract: “Nonhuman Empires” contributes to a critique of anthropocentrism in the field of imperial history. It reveals the variety of ways in which the historical trajectories of nonhuman animals and empires intersected, and informed one another. Beyond merely rehabilitating nonhuman themes in conversations about imperial history, it provides a platform for rethinking both nonhumans and empires as they are envisioned conventionally in the historiography. This introductory article begins by situating this special section as a conversation between science studies, and animal studies, on the one hand, and the historiography of empires, on the other. It then proceeds to suggest ways to re-conceptualize agency, subjects, nonhumans, and empire by combining certain shared concerns of subaltern studies and actor-network theory. The paper ends by emphasizing the need to integrate postcolonial critiques with emerging scholarship about the posthuman.

This themed section explores a variety of ways in which the historical trajectories of nonhumans and empires intersected, and informed one another in the early-modern and modern worlds. It takes as its particular subject of inquiry the animals in imperial contexts—from horses in Mughal art; to dogs in the changing urban landscapes of Ottoman Cairo; sheep as raw materials in British New Zealand; and antelopes as objects of conservation in decolonising Uganda—as a platform for more extensive thematic and methodological discussion to explore the co-constitution of humans and nonhumans, to critique anthropocentrism and environmental determinism in existing scholarship, to disaggregate both nonhumans as well as empires as categories of analysis, and to interrogate essentialist notions of agency, species, and the event predominant in disciplinary history.

Nonhumans are not invisible, of course: they have been variously associated with significant episodes in the careers of enduring and expansive political regimes. Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s classic *The Autumn of the Patriarch* begins with the scene of the arrival of “successive waves” of vultures as the unmistakable signal of the death of a seemingly unending dictatorial reign. The profanation of the presidential palace caused by these vultures and other “parasitic animals” who had converted the deceased ruler’s body into an object of carnal feast, as well as the chaos initiated by unruly trespassing cows marked the ultimate irrevocable blow to the legitimacy of a deeply entrenched political order.¹ The Mahabharata, whose narrative locus is the city of Hastinapura, the “City of Elephants”, revealingly describes a dog as a persisting companion of the Pandavas in their final journey, once the exhaustive narratives about war, politics and kingdom had been concluded.² In more prosaic historiographical accounts, like William Clarence-Smith’s work with regard to infantry horses in the Ottoman Empire, dearth in the supply of nonhumans feature as a technical factor behind the military decline of

¹ Marquez, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, 3-5

² See for example Deb Roy, *Sarama and her Children*, 68

established empires.³ Nonhumans were not just a part of the drama of decline; they were also related integrally with the sustenance of imperial formations. Nonhumans carried material and metaphorical significance for humans on both sides of the imperial divide. In a rare and yet significant invocation of the nonhuman in his work, Ranajit Guha, the founding editor of *Subaltern Studies*, reads George Orwell's description "during the dying days of Empire", of "shooting an elephant" while on duty as a police officer in the interiors of Burma, as a broader expression of persisting European anxieties about living in uncanny isolation in the recalcitrant depths of colonial South Asia, and their potential bestialization.⁴

These varied indications of nonhuman presence provide the opportunity to address questions about nonhuman agency that neither privileges an anthropocentric or a zoo-centric conception of history.⁵ Rather, they offer ways to narrate the co-constitution of imperial structures, human action, and nonhuman animals over the past few centuries, by drawing on some powerful recent work in science studies, an interdisciplinary formation which invokes nonhuman objects and creatures most consistently as a central problem of inquiry to nuance simplistic notions of agency and existence. The essays in this section thus illuminate the productive engagement between science studies and the historiography of imperialism, and in particular between the posthumanist impulses of actor-network theory, and the political attention of subaltern studies to question the foundations of imperial power, Eurocentrism and the subject-agent. Taken together these perspectives can situate early modern and modern empires as occasions in which species identities as well as human/nonhuman distinctions were delineated, rigidified, and blurred.

While the contributions to this themed section assert the reciprocal dynamics between empires and nonhumans, they reject illusions about an analytically "flat" world characterized necessarily by happy intermingling and egalitarian dialogues. Rather they map the ways in which these intersecting and co-constitutive histories generated enduring regimes of violence, extraction and inequality.

The Essays

Each of the essays included here suggests that the "maintenance and repair" of nonhumans was an incessant preoccupation of disparate imperial powers.⁶ By so doing, they follow recent work that attempts to rethink the nonhuman without engaging in the kind of scientism evident in standard environmental histories of empire.⁷ Our contributors argue that nonhumans deepened the biopolitical foundations of empires, which were often characterised by what Alan Mikhail calls "anthrozoological states".

³ Clarence-Smith, "Animal Power as a Factor in Ottoman Military Decline, 1683-1918",

⁴ Guha, "Not at Home in Empire", 488

⁵ Lewis, "Swarm Intelligence", 224

⁶ For repair and maintenance see, Latour, "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics?" 459

⁷ This emerging body of work, which simultaneously critiques scientific determinism and anthropocentrism, and anticipates some of the concerns of this section include Mukharji, "The 'Cholera Cloud' in the Nineteenth Century 'British World'"; Raffles, "Towards A Critical Natural History", 374-378; Anderson, *The Collectors of Lost Souls*; Shamir, *Current Flow*

This was reflected in an obsession with intra-species classification of nonhumans, which was in turn linked to what Nicole Shukin has described as “zoopolitical” efforts to intervene in the life and death of nonhuman members and subjects.⁸ This involved not just the protection of nonhuman lives through legislation as in the case of dogs in Ottoman Cairo. Empires were invested in innovating new forms of lives by experimenting with forms of reproduction. These ranged from efforts to immortalise living horses through artistic portrayals in Mughal India, to machine-induced crossbreeding of sheep known as “freezers” in colonial New Zealand.

If the cultivation of animal life was a preoccupation of imperial regimes, so too was their death.⁹ In Mehmet ‘Ali’s Cairo, dogs that refused to internalise the status of domesticated subjects were collectively liable to poisoning or could be imprisoned in a ship and drowned; sheep awaiting to become commodities in late nineteenth-century colonial New Zealand were crossbred, raised, reared, fattened, butchered and dressed precisely to suit the technologies of mechanical refrigeration; in post-World War II Uganda the production of an antelope “population” as a potential subject of conservation was predicated upon extensive cultures of biological culling; and horses that were decorated objects of miniature painting in Mughal India often formed the frontline on the battlefield.

In his essay, Jagjeet Lally addresses the significance of living horses as well as portraits of men-on-horses to the Mughal political system. These paintings, Lally argues, were politically charged artefacts in themselves, which were designed to convey the supremacy of the “nimbate” Mughal sovereign. The reproduction of horses through these paintings as aestheticized organisms continued to dominate the artistic cultures among political elites across Northern India during the later Mughals, and was appropriated by the Mughal successor-states and the English East India Company. These paintings of men on horseback performed various symbolic and material functions: reinforcing hierarchies between Mughal royalty, nobility and regional powers; often linked to the assertion of political legitimacy by a regional potentate; when commissioned by an outsider to the ruling classes these emerged as a marker of insubordination and resistance to authority; exchanged as ritual gifts to strike alliances between regional rulers. Lally argues that over several centuries these paintings came to constitute a quest for cultural consolidation, competition and exchange between contending political regimes within the subcontinent, and beyond.

In his contribution to this collection, Mikhail situates dogs in the course of two centuries ending in the 1800s as “integral actors in the urban fabric of Ottoman Cairo”, a “city full of dogs”. Dogs were subjects of exalted religious, allegorical, and legal discourses, performed various spectacular roles in wars, hunts, and medicine, protected their owners, and consumed urban wastes in the everyday. This was related to the wider character of the contemporary Ottoman Empire, which, as Mikhail has argued elsewhere was built

⁸ For “zoopolitics” see Shukin, *Animal Capital*, 9-11

⁹ It might be plausible to conceptualise these nonhuman animals as among the necropolitical subjects of imperial regimes. Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, 26-29

upon an “animal energy regime”.¹⁰ The metamorphosis of the dog in nineteenth-century Ottoman Cairo from being valued members to being redundant burden was connected to the modernising reforms initiated by the Mehmet ‘Ali’ government. The practices of urban reconstruction, modernisation, sanitisation, and cleansing in Mehmet ‘Ali’s Cairo were to a great extent, Mikhail argues, founded upon the reinvention of the canine body as a site of disease, waste, crowd, noise, and eradication.

Rebecca Woods shifts focus to the imperial meat trade to examine the re-emergence of sheep in British New Zealand in late nineteenth century as an embodiment of the intimate relationships between metropolitan consumption and colonial raw material. Sheep – as livestock- were appropriated as part of a network of lively capital that both connected and maintained the antipodal distance between New Zealand’s pastoral economy and metropolitan dinner tables in England. This was enabled by, as Woods shows, the recasting of sheep as a “malleable” animal, suited to bridging the technologies of mechanical reproduction and mechanical refrigeration. The meat mostly circulating in contemporary England was thus a carnal manifestation of an imperial commodity fetish, which made both the labour and object of butchery invisible to metropolitan consumers. The sheep that grazed the fields in New Zealand allowed an industrial appetite and a compassionate *humanitarian* public in the metropole, indifferent to the details of extractive violence outsourced elsewhere, to thrive simultaneously. The sheep in distant New Zealand were not just related to the sustenance of imperial taste, compassion and consumption in England but, as Woods argues, also informed British national gastronomic hypochondria over concerns of fraud, nutrition and dead imports.

Etienne Benson retells the history of decolonisation in Western Uganda in the 1950s and 60s from the perspective of antelopes. Decolonisation did not mean the end of imperial rule for the antelopes, but rather the potential and eventual end of British rule exposed them to various world historical processes. Indeed, antelopes in Uganda were at the centre of a series of negotiations between British officials and American biologists; wildlife managers and African pastoralists; biologists, ecologists, anthropologists and primatologists; and the industries of development, tourism, meat and conservation. These interchanges were pivotal in shaping the histories of antelopes as well as of decolonisation in Uganda. Antelopes bear witness to the transition of Uganda into a constituent of an US dominated world in the mid twentieth-century. During the ascendancy of United Nations at the height of the Cold War, they figured as an example of pristine African nature, which Fulbright-funded American conservation biologists determined to protect from inexperienced African governments. Antelopes in Uganda were entangled in the colonisation of pastoral and agricultural land under the excuse of restoring land for wildlife preservation. Such models, argues Benson, when replicated elsewhere in South Asia or Central America had serious implications for massively displaced refugee populations and ethnic and religious minorities in the post-colonial world.

These articles also indicate the ways in which nonhuman animals were integral to imperial conflicts and conceptualisations about territory. While Lally recalls the

¹⁰ Mikhail, “Unleashing the Beast”, 325

centrality of horses in Mughal visions of acquiring, expanding and consolidating territory, Mikhail hints at a hidden history of interspecies conflicts between humans and dogs over a shared urban space in nineteenth-century Ottoman Cairo. Studies on conserving antelopes in decolonising Uganda, as Benson argues, acted as the link between biological and sociological theorisations about territoriality. At the same time, these nonhumans (and anecdotes associated with them) transgressed the territorial frontiers of expansive empires. Dogs of Cairo were talked about and compared in Syria, India or North China. Portrait of Mughal horses circulated beyond imperial and provincial libraries into South-east Asia, Central Asia and some even made their way to Europe. Specific breeds of sheep from New Zealand were exported outside the immediate limits of the British Empire into South America, Russia, and Japan. Nonhuman histories reconfirm that these empires were obsessed with defining and transcending territorial limits.

“Becoming with” Nonhumans¹¹

The essays in this section thus suggest a number of theoretical and methodological models for addressing the co-constitution of the human/non-human interface. The argument about co-constitution appears most insistently in the works of Donna Haraway, for example, who has focused on interspecies “constitutive encounterings,” to argue that the worlds of nonhumans and humans “become with” one another.¹² She has explored different ways in which the careers of humans and various nonhumans are interwoven, and they come into being as distinct species in relation to each other. This interrogation of “human exceptionalism”¹³, suggests Haraway, necessitates the writing of “looping, braided stories”¹⁴ involving the human and nonhuman. In exploring these questions Bruno Latour’s work presents a sustained polemic against conventional social theory. Latour remains agnostic about the ways in which metanarratives as well as their critiques are conceptualised in current academic practice. These, according to him, tend to reinforce the anthropocentric foundations of modernity.¹⁵ Latour lamented in 2005 that “... the more radical thinkers want to attract attention to humans in the margins and at the periphery, the less they speak of objects...”¹⁶ Latour’s refusal to participate in academic “critiques” in their current forms, and his insistence on “description” rather than “explanation”, have given actor-network theory (most frequently associated with Latour) and postcolonial historiographical projects (such as subaltern studies) the appearance of radically different political enterprises.¹⁷

Actor-network theory, claims Latour, does not survive on the “empty claim that objects do things ‘instead’ of human actors”.¹⁸ Instead, it complicates the subject-object

¹¹ For “becoming with” see Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 3, 4, 23-27

¹² For “becoming with” see Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 3, 4, 23-27. For “constitutive encounterings” see 161-165.

¹³ *Ibid*, 46

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 163

¹⁵ Mallavarapu and Prasad, “Facts, Fetishes and the Parliament of Things”

¹⁶ Latour, *Reassembling*, 73.

¹⁷ Latour, *Reassembling*, 136-137

¹⁸ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling*, 72.

dichotomy by denying any human or nonhuman the exclusive monopoly of appearing as the “prime mover of actions” by themselves. Rather, Latour describes agency as the property of collectives, imbroglis, assemblages, entanglements, associations, and enmeshes of subjects-objects, human-nonhumans.¹⁹ In de-centring and redistributing the autonomous agent, Latour’s works have emerged as one of the crucial sites, which expose intersectional as well as inseparable enmeshes between humans and nonhumans/ -subjects and objects. Other sites where such transgressions of the dichotomies between human and nonhumans are revealed, and with which actor-network theory has been in immediate conversation, include the sociology of sciences,²⁰ perspectivist anthropology,²¹ assemblage theory,²² and post-Marxist feminism.²³ Like Latour, Haraway’s description of an actor as a “cumbersome” “material-semiotic” entity results from her refusal to reduce the notion of “being” itself to that of an “essentialized” and “fetishized perfect subject” or object.²⁴ Science studies scholars share among themselves an urge to rethink “existence”, whether human or nonhuman, in terms of an “historical succession of quasi-objects, quasi-subjects...”²⁵

Thus while rejecting anthropocentrism most prominently and unambiguously, science studies scholars like Latour and Haraway deny, at the same time, the existence of an uncontaminated purely material world of nonhuman objects and creatures.²⁶ Such a challenge undertaken by them to problematize simultaneously the categories of the "human" and the "material" has inspired a new criticality in the histories of materials and materialities.²⁷ Like other science studies scholars Latour and Haraway have argued that the imbrication of nonhumans in various actions can be shown to be both simultaneously constructed and real,²⁸ and in the process they have revealed awareness of the processes through which nonhumans emerge and are sustained in historically specific situations.²⁹ And yet, they have admonished social constructivists for reifying the “social” or the

¹⁹ See for instance, Latour, “A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans”, in *Pandora’s Hope*, 174- 193.

²⁰ Pickering, “The Mangle of Practice”, 559, 567, 576

²¹ de Castro, “Exchanging Perspectives”, 471

²² Deleuze and Guattari, “Rhizome”

²³ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 149-176

²⁴ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”, 179, 185

²⁵ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 136-138

²⁶ Although aspects of Marx’s own writings (particularly on machines, labour, commodities and capital) inspire interrogation of the conceptual boundaries between human and nonhuman, subsequent Marxist elaborations of historical materialism have been more concerned with developing a polemic against fatalistic, idealist and transcendental notions of history rather than an overt critique of anthropocentrism.

²⁷ Bennett and Joyce (ed.), *Material Powers*; Braun and Whatmore (ed.), *Political Matter*; Joyce, “What is the Social in Social History?”; van Binsbergen, “Commodification: Things, Agency, and Identities”; Chatterjee, Guha-Thakurta and Kar (eds.), *New Cultural Histories of India* [page numbers to be double checked.]

²⁸ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 88-93, 44-73; Latour, “The Promises of Constructivism”; Hacking, *Social Construction of What?*, 1-34; Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”, 175-176, 183-185; Sismondo, “Some Social Constructions”, 516, 519-22; Kirsch and Mitchell, “The Nature of Things”, 697-702. Also see Nicole Shukin on “rendering” in *Animal Capital*, 20-27.

²⁹ For the dynamics between histories of science, social constructivism and science studies see Golinsky, *Making Natural Knowledge*, 1-45; Daston, “Science Studies and the History of Science”

“human” or the historical context itself as preordained and omnipotent.³⁰ The science studies perspective therefore inspires historians to question the perceived autonomy of the domains of matter, the human, and the social/political context, and to comment on how these intricately overlapping worlds were intimately enmeshed and mutually co-constituted.³¹ Prevalent conversations between science studies, animal studies, and other fields in the humanities and social sciences in recent years have already begun to reveal how nonhumans, on the one hand, and various categories of mainstream cultural and political history (like capital, democracy, enlightenment, romanticism), on the other, overlapped and shaped one another.³² Each essay in this section builds upon these prevailing insights to analyse the intertwined historical trajectories of empires, humans, and nonhuman animals.

Nonhuman Subaltern

As we have seen though nonhuman animals indelibly informed imperial history, their subalternity was manifested simultaneously in at least three distinct ways: they were victims of imperial violence; they were products of imperial regimes of subjectification; and they have usually been marginalised in imperial historiography.³³ The evocation of the subaltern calls up the critique of imperial metanarratives of progress and improvement, as well as elite history-writing associated with the Subaltern Studies collective,³⁴ and poses, for the essays included here, the question whether histories of nonhumans in imperial Europe were different from histories of nonhumans in the colonies. Or, to rephrase Shula Marks’ question: What was colonial about colonial nonhumans?³⁵

It should be recalled that in consecutive essays published in the mid 1980s, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critiqued the figure of the autonomous subaltern subject that had featured in the existing volumes of subaltern studies. Rather than defining the subject as a continuous, homogenous, sovereign, determining, and wilful agent, Spivak reversed the predictable chronology of action by redefining the subaltern subject itself as an effect.³⁶ Refusing to specify the subject as a coherent, solitary, and singular figure, she claimed

³⁰ For a distinction between constructivism and social constructivism see, Latour, *Reassembling*, 91. Ian Hacking elaborates on six different kinds of constructivism in *Social Construction of What?* 19-21. Distinction between social constructivism and constructivism has also been indicated in Sismondo, “Some Social Constructions”, 515-553. See also, Golisnky, *Making Natural Knowledge*, 13-46.

³¹ Trentmann, “Materiality in the Future of History”, 297-300; Pickering, “The Mangle of Practice”, 559, 567, 576; Kirsch and Mitchell, “The Nature of Things”, 688

³² Shukin, *Animal Capital*; Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital*; Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*; Schaffer, “Enlightened Automata”; Tresch, *The Romantic Machine*. For a collection of essays that brings together political theory and science studies, and explores the “entwined” trajectories of nonhumans and politics see Braun and Whatmore (ed.), *Political Matter*

³³ Ferrari and Dahnhardt (eds.), *Charming Beauties and Frightful Beasts*. The blurb of this recently edited volume invokes the word “subaltern” to claim that animals in post-colonial contexts such as South Asia are subjected to twofold epistemic violence, marginalised within both the scholarly fields of animal studies, with emphases predominantly on nonhumans in Europe and North America, and South Asian studies, which continues to retain an essentially anthropocentric orientation.

³⁴ Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism”, 1485

³⁵ Marks, “What is Colonial about Colonial medicine?”

³⁶ Spivak, “Deconstructing Historiography”, 12

that it was instead an effect produced by diverse relationships between disparate constituents of “an immense discontinuous network”. “That which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network (“text” in the general sense) of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on... different knottings and configurations of these strands determined by heterogeneous determinations, which are themselves dependent upon myriad circumstances, produce the effect of an operating subject”.³⁷ Therefore the tendency to situate the subject at the origin of an action, argued Spivak, resulted from “the substitution of an effect for a cause”.³⁸ Spivak’s critique inspired subaltern studies scholars to “write deconstructive histories of subjecthood”.³⁹ The group contributed to the wider project of de-centring the sovereign subject by situating it as an effect of discourse and power.⁴⁰ This anti-humanist impulse led to a critique of the prejudices of Eurocentrism and gender, which were built into the Enlightenment figure of Man.⁴¹ Yet, subaltern studies scholars have for long resisted the temptation to extend this critique into a full-fledged interrogation of anthropocentrism.

It might be worthwhile to think about the missed conversation between subaltern studies and actor-network theory, since both challenge the notion of a monolithic subject-agent, albeit differently.⁴² They owe this overlapping inclination to their shared indebtedness to the anti-humanist critique of the autonomous sovereign subject.⁴³ This, in part, has led both these genres to expose the limits of different disciplinary traditions.⁴⁴

For instance Bruno Latour adds considerable nuance to conceptions of agency and the acting subject. He destabilizes received understandings of agency by questioning the rigid binaries of absolute action and complete inaction. Instead, he acknowledges a range of “shades between full causality and sheer inexistence”.⁴⁵ Like the property of being an agent, Latour provocatively suggests elsewhere, existence itself is not an “all or nothing property”.⁴⁶ Rather than sensationalizing existence through the alternatives of complete presence or absence, Latour explores possibilities of “existing somewhat, having a little reality”.⁴⁷ To a certain extent reminiscent of Spivak’s comments on the production of a “subject-effect”, Latour refuses to identify “entity” as well as “phenomena” in terms of a specific pre-existing subject or object. He defines an entity as “an exploration... an

³⁷ Spivak, *Ibid*, p. 13

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ Chakrabarty, “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change”, 4

⁴⁰ Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism”, 1480-81,88; Chakrabarty, “Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography”, 24-25; Chatterjee, “Reflections on ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?: Subaltern Studies after Spivak’”, 83

⁴¹ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 272, 274, 278, 279; see Morris, “Introduction”, 4-5.

⁴² Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 283-286; O’Hanlon, “Recovering the Subject”, 191, 196, 199, 208-209

⁴³ Spivak, “Deconstructing Historiography”, 10 Also see, Pearse, “Author”, 113

⁴⁴ For Latour’s take on sociology see *Reassembling*, 1-13. The subaltern critique of historical reasoning can take different forms. See for example, Chakrabarty, “Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts”. Also, Spivak, “Deconstructing Historiography”, 16

⁴⁵ Latour, *Reassembling*, 72.

⁴⁶ Latour, “On the Partial Existence of Existing and Nonexisting Objects”, 256

⁴⁷ Latour, “On the Partial Existence”, 253

experience in what holds with whom, in who holds with whom, in what holds with what, in who holds with what...⁴⁸ In an earlier essay, drawing upon examples from his ethnography of working among French scientists researching soil in the Amazon, Latour argued that phenomena (being researched in that particular case) cannot be equated with particular moments, things or humans, but rather phenomena was “constructed” and circulated “within a network... of researchers, samples, graphics, specimens, maps, reports, and funding requests”.⁴⁹

Attention simultaneously to the Latourian ascription of agency to heterogeneous networks of human and nonhuman mediators, as well as Spivak’s deconstruction of the subject as an effect produced by diverse “knottings and configurations”, might extend the histories of horses, dogs, sheep and antelopes included here, in relatively unfamiliar directions. Essays in this section do not celebrate them as straightforward and self-contained nonhuman actors. Rather, they deconstruct the constellation of material and social interface that produced these animals as agents and subaltern subjects at specific moments in history.

Nonhuman Empires

At present there are at least three broad models for understanding imperial structures, which coexist at different levels of historiographical analysis. Empires are most frequently understood as enduring, expansive, overarching, and almost omnipotent structures, connected to the figure of a sovereign, represented most conspicuously by an emperor and the army. Conventional histories of imperial interconnections, new imperial histories, and political thought nuance this model and yet often tend to operate within it.⁵⁰ At the same time, there is increasing scepticism about the need to uphold the centrality ascribed to empires in world history. It has been suggested that exclusive focus on empires conceals alternative notions of temporality and epoch, (based, for instance, on deep histories of geology),⁵¹ overemphasises European agency in the making of the modern world while overlooking indigenous histories,⁵² imposes a repetitive formulaic pattern on historical pasts while also inhibiting an understanding of the specificities of the post-colonial period.⁵³ Sensitive to these admonishments, various methodological commentaries continue to retain “empire” as a category of analysis, while contesting the image of empires as overarching causal entities. Instead these commentaries have variously “localised” empires by arguing that they were intimately immanent and minutely dispersed enterprises.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Latour, “On the Partial Existence”, 258

⁴⁹ Latour, “Circulating Reference”, in *Pandora’s Hope*, 76 and 71

⁵⁰ For an insightful analysis of different approaches see for example Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*

⁵¹ Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”

⁵² Raj, “Beyond Postcolonialism... and Postpositivism”

⁵³ Kowal, Radin and Reardon, “Indigenous Body Parts, Mutating Temporalities, and the Half-lives of Postcolonial Technoscience”, 470; Phalkey, “Introduction to Focus on Science, History and Modern India”

⁵⁴ For example Anderson, “Introduction: Postcolonial Technoscience”, 652; Wade Chambers and Gillespie, “Locality in the History of Science”.

The third position speaks quite closely to Latour's call for "localising the global"; a move through which he argues that supposedly expansive "global" networks presumed in master-narratives and "all-terrain entities", like Empire and Capitalism, can be shown to have been 'local' at all constituent points.⁵⁵ In the process he proposes an analytical topography, which "collapses scale such that the politics of the "global" are evident in the intimate (and the strategy holds in the reverse)".⁵⁶ Together with this, and weary of reifying the "local" itself, Latour suggests that "localising the global" master-narratives should be followed by a necessary second step, which he calls "redistributing the local." The first move inspires us to relocate horses, dogs, sheep and antelopes as "local" nodes/constituents of the immanent imperial apparatus, apart from being its victims and products. The second step enables the recognition of networks of human and nonhumans (that in turn shaped and sustained these animals) as intrinsic components of the imperial world. We might consider the manner in which each of the essays illuminates the social and material interlocking of life: through nomadic pastoralists, landscapes, fortresses, mounted rulers, marching guards, equestrian treatises, farriery manuals, stud-farms, imperial studios, stables, loose leaf pictures, and miniature manuscripts (Lally); Maliki legal scholars, moral parables, orientalist travel literature, military dog keepers, aetiologies, policemen, trash mounds, vessels, feeding bins, poisoned meat, watering troughs, canine saliva, and sanitary officials (Mikhail); novels, newspapers, parliamentary select committee reports, pastoralists, English working class, cross-breeders, breeding machines, slaughterhouses, frozen carcasses, refrigerated railcars, steam ships, edible meat, and dinner plates (Woods); **or** the Fulbright programme, British game wardens, American biologists, anthropologists, primatologists, elephants, hippopotamuses, Toro game reserve, Gorillas, Chimpanzees, observation platforms, tranquilizing darts and drugs, arms and ammunitions, plastic collars and identifying tags, and motion films, African hunter gatherers, and pastoralists that are implicit in Benson's essay. What they reveal is a multiplicity of human and nonhuman "mediators" that brings the historian, to invoke Steven Connor, "right into the middle of", or "into the thick of", empire. "Mediators are not static betweennesses; rather, they are go-betweenes, in movement. Or rather, in the absence of a void in which to move, they *are themselves* movement".⁵⁷

The recognition of empires as technopolitical,⁵⁸ materialdiscursive,⁵⁹ and naturalcultural⁶⁰ domains is one way to begin questioning the anthropocentrism in imperial historiography, while resisting the temptations of environmental or scientific determinism, or a turn exclusively to the non-human as such. Therefore the conversation between science studies and postcolonial historiography of empires reveals three different kinds of relationships between nonhumans and empires. First, it raises questions about the historical agency of nonhumans in imperial pasts. Going beyond both anthropocentric as well as scientifically deterministic notions of straightforward agency, the following

⁵⁵ Latour, *Reassembling*, 5, 137, 172,190, 242, 252

⁵⁶ Raffles, "Towards a Critical Natural History", 377-378

⁵⁷ Connor, "Michel Serres's Milieux"

⁵⁸ Mitchell, "Can the Mosquito Speak?" in *Rule of Experts*, 42-43

⁵⁹ Raffles, "Towards a Critical Natural History", 377

⁶⁰ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 25, 47, 62

essays explore the ways in which the historical trajectories of nonhumans and empires shaped one another. Nonhumans were implicated in informing imperial biopolitics, sovereignty, territoriality, alliances, urban landscapes, consumption, compassion and conservation. And yet, these nonhumans should be recognised as subalterns, who were not just disposable victims of imperial violence, or products of imperial regimes of subjectification; they were often marginalised in imperial historiography. Ultimately, building on the lessons of science studies and subaltern studies, one might disaggregate both empires and nonhumans into socio-material networks, or “enmeshes” to interrogate widespread scientific determinism, anthropocentrism, and essentialist notions of species, agency and event prevalent in disciplinary history.

The questioning of the exceptional human-subject by science studies and animal studies scholars like Latour, Haraway, Michel Serres, and Cary Wolfe among others, have paved the way in recent years for what is known as the posthumanist turn.⁶¹ Inspired by the proliferation of human/nonhuman hybrids as well as interspecies creatures in contemporary technoscience, posthumanist scholars contest anthropocentrism as well as the stability ascribed to human-nonhuman distinctions.⁶² In so doing, posthumanism needs to remain grounded on a broader analytical, geographical as well as temporal frame to be sensitive to the political processes through which the binary of human/nonhuman was reconsolidated and policed. , Sujit Sivasundaram’s “Afterword” turns to these issues with specific focus on the location of material objects and animals in imperial scientific imagination of race. He situates the histories of war, racial knowledge, and identity politics in the colonial and postcolonial worlds as significant episodes in which the distinctions between human subjects and nonhuman objects were invoked as well as selectively blurred. The simultaneous operation of the processes of anthropomorphism and dehumanisation, he argues, were embedded in the wider histories of empires, capitalism and biopower.⁶³ From the histories of early modern and modern empires assembled in this themed section, readers are about to encounter various hybrid, boundary-objects that cut across stable frontiers of categorisation: Brahmin horses, mechanically reproduced sheep, “Gandhi-like-wolf-children”, “Half-man, half-beast”, humane Gorillas, “Tamil Tigers”, and an “adopted orphan baby” orang-utan. These posthuman forms were imbricated within violent histories of empires, colonialism, ethnicity, race and nation. At the same time, empires occasioned not just the transgression of fixed species identities. I have indicated in this introduction that empires were implicated in the classification, reproduction, sustenance and killing of horses, dogs, sheep and antelopes, and in the process also contributed to the consolidation of individual species as collective zoopolitical subjects. Therefore histories of colonialism and empire can deepen the foundations of posthumanist thinking by revealing the enduring political,

⁶¹ Simon, “Toward a Critique of Posthuman Futures”; Anderson, “White Natures”; O’Hara, “Neither Gods nor Monsters, An Untimely Critique of the ‘Post/Human’ Imagination.” For a critique of the current uses of the word posthuman see C. Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010)

⁶² Livingston and Puar, “Interspecies”

⁶³ On anthropomorphism see Daston and Mitman (ed.), *Thinking with Animals*; Rees, “Anthropomorphism, Anthropocentrism, and Anecdote”.

ideological and material processes within which species identities as well as human/nonhuman distinctions were delineated, stabilised, policed and got blurred. On the other hand, posthumanist questioning of anthropocentrism encourages an extension of the existing critiques of empire and agency. Thus postcolonial and posthumanist scholarship need to be seen as complementary projects, which should engage in more sustained conversations than they have so far.

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