



## Dialectical Materialism or Dialectics of the Human?: Marxism and Animal Liberation Movement

*Diyelektik Materyalizm mi Yoksa İnsanın Diyelektiği mi?: Marksizm ve Hayvan Özgürlüğü Hareketi*

**Yüksek Lisans Öğr. Erhan KORKMAZ**

Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Halkbilim Ana Bilim Dalı  
erhan.krkmzoglu@gmail.com

ORCID : 0000-0002-9744-6484.

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### Öz

Bu makale, Marksizm ile türçülük karşıtı mücadele arasında bir uzlaşım noktası oluşturmayı amaçlayan Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation derneğinin yayımladığı "Marksizm ve Hayvan Özgürleşmesi Üzerine 18 Tez" adlı kitabı referans alarak marksizm ve türçülük karşıtı mücadele arasındaki dayanışma ve çatışmayı "Türçülük Karşıtlığı Neden Marksist Olmalıdır?" ve "Marksizm Neden Türçülük Karşıtı Olmalıdır?" başlıklarıyla tartışmaya açmaktadır. Marksistler, türçülük karşıtlarını kapitalizmin emek sömürsüne karşı duyarsız, burjuva-yanlısı, metafizik ve ahlakçı eğilimde, idealist olarak tanımlarken, türçülük karşıtları da marksistleri eleştirdikleri kapitalizm içerisindeki bugünün endüstriyel hayvan sömürsünü tüketim ilişkileri yoluyla yeniden ürettikleri için tutarsız olarak tanımlıyorlar. 2014 yılında Almanya ve İsviçre'den hayvan özgürlüğü hareketi ve komünist sol aktivistlerin bir araya gelerek kurduğu Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation derneği ise bu çalışmada, Marksist teorinin bu tutarsızlıklarından vazgeçmeleri için hayvan sömürsünü yeniden üretecek tüketim ilişki ağı içerisinde olmamalarını ve kapitalizmin hayvanlar üzerindeki tahakkümünü de analizlerine dahil etmelerini önerirken, türçülük karşıtlarına da türçülüğün maddi oluşum koşullarını analiz etmek için tarihsel materyalist yöntemle çalışılması gerektiğini öneriyor. Bu öneriler, her ne kadar iki tarafa da hayati ödünler verdimeden bir uzlaşım noktası kurmuş gibi görünse de makalenin tartışma kısmında görüleceği üzere tartışılmaya gebe birçok nokta mevcut. Bu makale, hem bu uzlaşım zeminini Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation derneğinin eleştirilerini özetleyerek okuyucuya sunarken, hem de bu uzlaşım zeminini tartışmaya açmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Marksizm, Türçülük karşıtlığı, Hayvan özgürlüğü hareketi, Tarihsel materyalizm, İdealizm.

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### Abstract

With reference to the book “18 Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation”, published by the Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation, which aims to create a point of consensus between Marxism and the anti-speciesism struggle, this article discusses the solidarity and conflict between Marxism and the anti-speciesism movement under the titles “Why should anti-speciesism be Marxist?” and “Why should Marxism be anti-speciesist?”. While Marxists describe anti-speciesists as being insensitive to capitalism's exploitation of labor, pro-bourgeois, and idealistic with metaphysical and moralistic tendencies, anti-speciesists describe Marxists as incoherent for reproducing today's industrial animal exploitation through consumption relations within the capitalism they criticize. In 2014, the Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation, an association of animal liberation movement and communist left activists from Germany and Switzerland, suggested that for Marxists to abandon their incoherence, they should not be in a network of consumption relations that reproduce animal exploitation and should address the domination of capitalism over animals in their analysis while anti-speciesists should work with the historical materialist method to analyze the material conditions of speciesism. While these proposals seem to establish a point of compromise without making vital compromises on either side, as the discussion section of the article will show, there are many points ripe for debate. This article will both present this ground for compromise by summarizing the Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation's critique and open it up for discussion.

**Keywords:** Marxism, Anti-speciesism, Animal liberation movement, Historical materialism, Idealism.

### Introduction

Since I went vegan and got involved in the fight for animal liberation, there has been one issue on which my Marxist friends and I cannot agree: Does the fight for animal liberation encompass Marxism, or does Marxism encompass the struggle for animal liberation? This question includes answers to the questions of “which side's methods are to be used” and “which side is to be defended first”. I tell my friends, “I am a vegan fighting for animal liberation first, and then I can resort to Marxist and/or Anarchist methods, depending on the situation.” They tell me, “There is no point in the struggle for animal liberation without Marxism. You have to become a Marxist first”. You see, these discussions go on and on, and neither I can convince them nor they can convince me.

Of all the ideologies that have been imposed on people throughout history, Marxism is perhaps the one with which we have had the most conflict. According to Marxists, we are actors in the policy of pacification imposed on us by the bourgeois class and only focus on animal rights, which is seen as secondary compared to certain issues that are considered important, such as working-class rights, poverty, urban living rights. We don't march with them for the same goals on Labor Day, we don't participate in protests against strikes, or we don't take part in uprisings against parliament. These claims are based on their conclusion that we reproduce bourgeois morality. I have witnessed many of my Marxist friends claim that I am indifferent to social problems. I was surprised, because in my academic writings as well as in my everyday practices, I fight against many problems, from sexism to censorship as part of state policy. Not only me, but many of my vegan friends who fight for animal liberation are involved in feminist associations and non-governmental organizations fighting urban poverty. I do not think that the reason for these criticisms against us is that we are insensitive to social problems, the main reason for the criticisms is that we are indifferent to the methods of Marxist mindset. The main concern of Marxists is to ensure the sustainability of their ideology. I believe the main concern here is not “How can we eliminate speciesism, class inequality, the effects of capitalism together with the struggle for animal rights and Marxism”, but “How can we include animal rights activists in our working-class struggle”. In fact, most Marxists I have met approach vegans because they see it as “an opportunity to vilify capitalism”, because they all use the same argument “Capitalism is the cause of animal exploitation, so if we end capitalism, animals

will be free as well as humans”. Unfortunately, these claims by Marxists do not seem sincere to me, because those Marxists have an understanding of animal rights that is independent of individual consumption relations. Although they know the animal products they consume every day come to them through systematic speciesist domination, they do not care. Through their consumption habits, they ensure the continuity of the functioning of capitalism, which they claim is speciesist. This is a serious inconsistency and is like a defense of Marxism by a boss who oppresses their workers.

I see that a very small number of Marxists prefer a vegan life while remaining faithful to the methods of Marxism. They seem more convincing and sincere to me. My purpose in writing this article is to compare their arguments with those of the animal liberation struggle in which I am involved, and to draw attention to the points of inclusion and exclusion. Instead of referring to orthodox and/or neo-Marxist theories that have been discussed in the literature throughout history, I will refer directly to the debates I am involved in and to the book I recently read, “18 Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation”, translated into Turkish by Gizem Haspolat and Doğukan Dere in 2021. Founded in 2014 by the *Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation*<sup>1</sup>, an association of animal liberation movement and communist left activists in Germany and Switzerland, I believe this work, published in German and English in 2017 and 2018 respectively, is important in terms of pointing out the similarities and differences on both sides of the struggles for Marxism and animal liberation.

The flow of the article will be as follows: The first two sections will be titled “Why Anti-Speciesism Must Be Marxist?” and “Why Marxism Must Be Anti-Speciesist?”, following the titles of the book’s chapters “18 Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation” (2018). In the first part, I will present the arguments for why the anti-speciesism struggle needs Marxism and how it harms the struggle if it is not Marxist. In the second part, I will address the arguments for why Marxism should be anti-speciesist. In order to maintain an objective perspective to the arguments put forward in these two chapters, I will not include my own thoughts, but in the third part, “Discussion”, based on my own views, I will discuss the points that need to be opened up, why these two struggles are mutually exclusive, which covers the other, and why some of the accusations against vegans are unfounded.

### **Part I. Why Anti-Speciesism Must Be Marxist?**

According to Marxist philosopher Marco Maurizi, antispeciesism is considered a “metaphysical antispeciesism”<sup>2</sup> (Maurizi, 2005: 30). Antispeciesism focuses on how speciesism works, based on philosophical and/or moral prejudices, rather than investigating its causes - and the stages of its formation - within the material social structure. This leaves the struggle historically blind, stuck in metaphysical questions and unable to observe its dynamics in everyday life. To put it more directly, Marx's statement “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it.” in his short work *Theses On Feuerbach*

<sup>1</sup> From now on, I will use the acronym AMAL for the association.

<sup>2</sup> This is especially true of the first generation of 20th century thinkers, such as Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Richard D. Ryder and other animal rights activists.

(1969) makes sense here. The point is not to interpret the forms of speciesism, but to take concrete political steps to change them.<sup>3</sup>

In “18 Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation”, AMAL agrees with Maurizi's call for “metaphysical antispeciesism” and evaluates the anti-speciesist movement along three main lines. These are respectively: 1- bourgeois moral philosophy, 2- liberal legal criticism, 3- social-liberal post-structuralist anti-authoritarianism (AMAL, 2018: 9-11).

### **Antispeciesism in Bourgeois Moral Philosophy**

According to AMAL, bourgeois moral philosophy is represented by names such as Peter Singer, Richard Ryder, Tom Regan and Halil Sezgin. These and other figures are said to work with organizations set up to make political demands for animal rights, such as PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). These organizations seek to influence consumers, governments and private institutions through lobbying, campaigning, expert consultation and petitioning (AMAL, 2018: 10). By questioning the differences between animals and humans, they argue that these differences are not sufficient to place humans in a superior position to animals.<sup>4</sup> According to AMAL, such anti-speciesist activists, in their moral reasoning, tend to reduce the structural conditioning of capitalism to the behaviors, attitudes, and practices of individuals abstracted from these very conditions (AMAL, 2018: 11-14). While changing individual consumption habits or actions of particular institutions may provide a localized solution in the short term, they are doomed to be unsolvable from a more structural point of view. The speciesist ideologies of bourgeois society cannot afford to be overcome without a structural<sup>5</sup> and historical reading, which is why opponents of speciesism cannot be historically blind. AMAL also tells us that the more anti-speciesists within bourgeois moral philosophy engage with organizations like PETA, the more they become alienated from the internal

<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the anti-speciesism movement is accused of being idealistic. This understanding, which has persisted since Plato, is seen as the dynamic of the anti-speciesism struggle and the solution is claimed to lie in interpreting events and situations from a historical materialist perspective. Closer analysis reveals that these philosophical debates lie at the heart of the Marxist critique of the anti-speciesist movement.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Peter Singer's book “Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treats of Animals” (2005), first published in 1975 and expanded in subsequent editions - and which had a great impact in its time - discusses animal experimentation in the military, in the medical sector, and in famous laboratories conducting experimental psychological studies. He argues that these laboratory animals were often the victims of failed experiments, and that the experiments were carried out even though their methodology was wrong. He also describes how animals such as chickens, cattle and cows are subjected to traumatic conditions on animal farms. He embellishes these findings with answers to philosophical questions such as “do animals suffer?”, “why is there a distinction between humans and animals?”, “can't we do science without using animals?”. Another example is Tom Regan's “Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights” (2005), first published in 2004. In his book, Regan begins by responding to the criticisms of animal rights activists and by referring to Darwin he questions the position of humans in relation to animals and reveals the exploitation of animals in many sectors such as food, clothing and entertainment with striking examples.

<sup>5</sup> I think this debate also points to the conflict between structuralism and functionalism. Generally, in social science disciplines such as anthropology, ethnology and sociology, paradigms such as evolutionism, structuralism, structural functionalism, functionalism, historical particularism have been put forward based on the dichotomy of “structure and individual” in the manifestation of the social (Özbudun et al., 2005). While some emphasize the agency of the individual vis-à-vis society, arguing that “social institutions are shaped around the needs of the individual(s)”, others emphasize the structure into which the individual is born and place the agency of the individual in a more passive position, claiming that the individual is conditioned/constructed/exists in the face of the structure. The structural view of Marxism, in which Marxism argues that capitalism influences individuals, is in conflict with the functionalist view of anti-speciesism activists within bourgeois moral philosophy, who argue that by changing the thinking of individuals and institutions, the structure will change.

contradictions of capitalism, which is a structural problem. Institutions have to strike a balance between the conventional market and anti-speciesism to ensure their sustainability within the game of capitalism. They have to play the game according to the rules, so to speak! This traps opponents of speciesism within the bounds of bourgeois moral philosophy in moral/philosophical debates far away from real practice.

### **Antispeciesism in Liberal Legal Criticism**

Anti-speciesists who criticize liberal policies form a bridge between anti-authoritarian groups and anti-speciesists who engage in bourgeois moral philosophy. This group pursues legal reforms for animal rights and typically seeks to transform the speciesist system through reformist strategies rather than revolutionary ones. In some cases, they adopt the methods of anti-speciesists who use bourgeois moral philosophy to argue that humans are not worth more than animals, while in other cases they go so far as to identify authoritarian groups as speciesists and propose total systemic change. But in the end, the ground that is criticized here and made the center of change is the law created by liberal policies.<sup>6</sup>

In their critique of liberal law, anti-speciesists aim for internal change rather than the structural change that Marxist ideology demands. In doing so, they break the link between the capitalist economy and the bourgeois form of the state and its legal structure. More importantly, it posits the bourgeois form and its legal structure as favorable to progressive innovation relative to the capitalist economy (AMAL, 2018: 14-16). It is as if capitalism were independent of the bourgeois form/legal structure of the state. This creates a tautology: “the liberal policies of today's state are key to combating speciesism in the capitalist market”. In a way, this is similar to say: “The position of animals in the law must be protected”, but animals are mentioned in the law as property.

### **Social Liberal Post-Structuralist Anti-Authoritarianism**

Post-structuralist anti-speciesists criticize power in the same way as anti-speciesists within bourgeois moral philosophy, but they are more radical. They discuss how the animal emerges as a social identity and how this construct is constantly reproduced. They are not confined to philosophy. In the natural and social sciences, in every field, they question how the human - animal dichotomy is reproduced in favor of the human species (AMAL, 2018: 17). While anti-speciesists within bourgeois moral philosophy cite the basic capacities and/or vital functions of animals as evidence that they have equal value to humans, post-structuralist anti-speciesists go beyond this to argue that the “human - animal” distinction is itself problematic and fictional. Pointing to the dominationist dynamics of the “human - animal” distinction, they

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<sup>6</sup> The anti-speciesists evaluated under this title reminded me of the liberal feminists of the first wave in the history of the struggle for women's rights. Some areas of the liberation struggle are similar in their historical processes. While Carol J. Adams (2010) and others have convincingly argued that feminist concerns and anti-speciesist sensitivities date back even to the 17th century, the explicit and systematic theoretical alignment between feminism and animal liberation has gained significant academic visibility only in recent decades. For example, if we look at the feminist struggle, early feminists first questioned the subordinate status of women relative to men, and then, within the framework of liberal politics, advocated for rights in the public sphere such as suffrage, the right to smoke, or to walk alone at night (Donovan, 2006: 17–47). In this sense, some anti-speciesists operating within liberal legal frameworks today seem to echo this historical liberal reformist trajectory.

also criticize ambivalent binary oppositions such as “human - nature”, “male - female”, “civilization - primordiality”, “subject - object”, “mind - body”, etc., which are based on a similar aim of trying to gain power over the other. Therefore, they believe that deep-rooted problems such as racism, gender inequality<sup>7</sup> and speciesism stem from the same system and perspective.

According to AMAL, although post-structuralist anti-speciesism provides us with a powerful space for critiquing power by subjecting the political instruments of domination to criticism from all sides, it considers racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of social exclusion under the same umbrella and therefore ignores the specific values of these struggles. Although they consider most social problems under one umbrella and define this method with concepts such as Unity of Oppression, Intersectionality or Total Liberation, the history, conditions and dynamics of each ideological/political struggle are different. Moreover, post-structuralist anti-speciesists, like anti-speciesists within bourgeois moral philosophy, lack a historical materialist understanding. Labeling what things are and how they are reproduced in a discursive attitude is not the same as concretely changing things and identifying the material elements in the conditions of their formation (AMAL, 2018: 18-20). This brings us back to Marx's famous remark: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it” (Marx, 1969).

### **Anti-Speciesism in General**

In conclusion, although there are methodological differences between the opponents of speciesism on all three lines, they are similar in that they are blind to the conditions of the material formation of speciesism in history. According to AMAL, the historical materialist perspective proposed by Marxism must necessarily be included in the anti-speciesist perspective. From this standpoint, the profit-oriented system called capitalism seeks to commodify human labor as well as everything in nature and to convert it into profit for its own benefit. Although the working class are the active agents of exploitation, animals are also oppressed by the functioning of capitalism as passive agents. While this view centers capitalist dynamics, it does not deny the existence of animal exploitation prior to capitalism. Rather, it emphasizes how capitalism systematically intensifies and industrializes such forms of oppression through commodification.

Lacking a historical materialist perspective, these anti-speciesists are unable to explain these concrete phenomena in the functioning of capitalism. For example, the dominant position of humans in the human-animal constitutes the discourse of the bosses as well as the discourse of the workers in an animal farm, but employers and workers can reproduce anthropocentrism/speciesism in different ways even though the discourse is the same. While the boss of an animal farm establishes a relationship with the animals they have just brought to the farm on the basis of profit and loss, the relationship that the farm workers establish with the animals may reflect a sense of responsibility for survival. In this case, both groups of people

<sup>7</sup> Especially the studies conducted in the field of ecofeminism support the argument that in the “man - nature” distinction, men are evaluated by being placed in the category of man and women in the category of nature, and therefore, while men are attributed the characteristics of being logical/rational and cultured, women are attributed the characteristics of being emotional, uncultured/pure (Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 1990).

have anthropocentric and speciesist perspectives, but different motivations. Understanding this can lead to different ways of approaching both bosses and workers when developing methods of activism against speciesism.

The fact that the anti-speciesists have a historical materialist perspective can also be an advantage in terms of being able to look at the institutional structures we are in on a meta-scale. Marxism's historical materialist understanding is rooted in a structuralist tradition. Structuralism treats social elements not as independent of each other but as part of a whole. For example, one might think that there is a relationship between the behavior of a member of the government in parliament and the behavior of the traffic police in a city towards drivers. In our case, we need to ask whether there is a relationship between ministerial institutions related to livestock farms and tourism institutions or interests in international relations. The anthropocentrism and speciesism that permeates the whole structure may require this.

In conclusion, although there are methodological differences between the opponents of speciesism on all three lines, they are similar in that they are blind to the conditions of the material formation of speciesism in history. The historical materialist perspective proposed by Marxism must necessarily be included in the anti-speciesist perspective. The profit-oriented system called capitalism seeks to commodify human labor as well as everything in nature and to convert it into profit for its own benefit. Although the working class are the active agents of exploitation, animals are also oppressed by the functioning of capitalism as passive agents. This structural analysis, when supported by a historical materialist framework, provides a comprehensive lens for identifying the institutional reproduction of speciesism across different layers of society.

## **Part II. Why Must Marxism Be Anti-Speciesist?<sup>8</sup>**

AMAL argues that if anti-speciesism activists are to work with Marxism from a historical materialist perspective, Marxists must recognize that the oppressed and exploited classes and animals have a common enemy: the ruling class that profits from exploitation (34-35). More seriously, while the oppressed and exploited classes are the victims and subjects of exploitation, animals are seen as the object of this exploitation. This means that they are doubly exploited, firstly by being used in the market as labor, and secondly by the attempts to pacify their ontological existence. So here Marxists have to ask themselves: "Am I only going to oppose the injustice of humans to humans, or am I also going to oppose the injustice of humans to animals, not remaining in an anthropocentric and speciesist position?"

It can be suggested that up to a certain point, the consumption of animal products is essential. With a growing population, a balance must be established in terms of food policy. In this case, the solution is not to prevent the use of animal meat, milk and hides, but to prevent their use more than necessary. This claim sounds logical at first, but if we look at the industrial process based on animal consumption, we see that the amount of the emitted carbon,

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<sup>8</sup> In this section, which is shorter than the previous one, AMAL presents arguments for why Marxists should be anti-speciesists. Of the 18 theses on Marxism and animal liberation, 12 are devoted to why anti-speciesists should be Marxists, while the remaining 6 are devoted to why Marxists should be anti-speciesists. Perhaps the authors thought that "there is not much for Marxists to say".



agricultural/natural land used, and the amount of water consumed are much higher than in agricultural activities. In this case, if we leave aside the clichéd questions such as "...but if we don't eat meat, where do we get our protein from?", the answer to which has been given by many doctors, we see that animal farms are not functional through agricultural activities and plundering of nature. In other words, while capitalism destroys nature through animal farms, is it not paradoxical that Marxists consume animal products that have to be sold to sustain these farms? (AMAL, 2018: 35-37).

We can hence establish: Marxists are also driven by a moral impulse, which is essential for the decision to become politically active as well as to promote political messages. Yet they do not stop there. Rather, they realize the political and economic limitations of empathy and make the experience of suffering the starting point of a historical materialist analysis of society. From this analysis, the political necessity arises not solely from the collective experience of suffering, but from an understanding of the structural position of wage laborers in the social fabric and the potential for class struggle emerging from this position.

This is the difference between morality and moralism: revolutionary morals understand that a 'really human morality which stands above class antagonisms and above any recollection of them becomes possible only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class antagonisms but has even forgotten them in practical life (AMAL, 2018: 42-43).

Marxists suggest that an anti-capitalist struggle based on moral principles alone would be insufficient, and that an organizational struggle based on a material analysis of a concrete situation rather than trying to win through empathy or sympathy, but they miss two points. First, they misunderstand the historical materialist significance of animal suffering. Suffering here does not take place in an idealistic way, but within a historical materialist category. That is, the cause of suffering here is the capitalist system as the dominant mode of production in the modern era, which structurally reproduces animal exploitation and can only be challenged by transforming or abolishing this system. Therefore, animal suffering cannot be regarded as an abstract proposition to be discussed on philosophical grounds. The second point is that Marxists ignore the blurred distinction between moralism and morality. There is a difference between discussing things by reducing them to moral arguments and taking morality into account when changing things. Anger at the exploitation of animals throughout history and denial of their agency can motivate Marxist anti-speciesism activists as an ethical sensibility. While Marxism excludes idealistic struggle in line with its moral philosophy, it should not exclude activists from having moral values.

### Discussion and Assessment

Let me state my final conclusion here: I find AMAL's three lines of criticism of the anti-speciesists (Antispeciesism in Bourgeois Moral Philosophy, Antispeciesism in Liberal Legal Criticism and Social-Liberal Post-Structuralist Anti-Authoritarianism) controversial. Such categorizations point to an idealistic understanding of history. By categorizing people in history in this way, we obscure first what their arguments were, and then why the circumstances of their time led them to come up with those arguments. For example, I think that Peter Singer's critique of medical experimentation in bioethical debates in his work was not the result of a thought like "I think that the struggle for animal liberation will be concluded through discussions of moral philosophy", but rather the result of witnessing the speciesist cases and situations of his time. Just as the first wave of feminists in the feminist struggle saw the sexism in the legal structure they were in and sought rights within the liberal policies of the time, so



the anti-speciesism within bourgeois moral philosophy sought rights in response to the conditions of the time. This does not mean that Singer is against reading history with a historical materialist understanding, which, as far as I know, is not the case in Singer's work.<sup>9</sup> If Peter Singer had explicitly claimed in his work that the historical materialist method is invalid, then he could be accused of reproducing bourgeois moral philosophy. But these anti-speciesists (Peter Singer, Tom Regan, etc.), who I think of as the first generation, did not do this because they claimed that “the struggle for animal liberation can only be concluded by exposing what animal exploitation is and how the human-animal divide is constructed”, but because they thought that there were people at the time who did not know that animals were indeed being exploited, that they were less valuable than human beings, and that these industrial institutions were hurting animals. For in order to fight an injustice, you first have to explain what and how that injustice occurs in the present situation. Another example is the so-called liberal anti-speciesists. In the present age, many people fight for animal liberation within liberal politics. They contact local governments to organize vegan festivals, promote vegan food and support companies/brands that sell vegan products. The reason these people make these efforts is not because they think liberalism is fighting for animal liberation, but because they have to “play by the rules” to some extent in the system they are in. They also attend events such as the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC), where they promote veganism from a climate perspective. At these events, they are heavily criticized by the livestock lobbies. In this case, I don't think these activist friends would argue that “liberal policies are the key to animal struggle”; on the contrary, they are trying to expose the exploitation within the livestock industry. I do not think it is right to characterize them as “pro-bourgeois”. This tension also reminds us of the internal paradoxes within Marxism itself, where the question of whether alleviating exploitation delays or enables revolutionary consciousness remains unresolved. In both cases, the emphasis should be placed not on categorically labeling movements, but on analyzing their historically situated strategies and contradictions.

An anti-speciesist struggle inevitably makes veganism a necessary condition, as the refusal to consume animal products is one of the most immediate forms of rejecting speciesist practices. However, there is no explicit call for veganism in AMAL's book or in many other organizations that claim to advocate for environmental and animal liberation. Some Marxist-oriented anti-speciesists go so far as to argue that veganism reflects individualistic, market-oriented consumption and should therefore not be central to the struggle. While this critique draws from legitimate concerns about neoliberal co-optation of activist practices, dismissing veganism altogether undermines the movement's ethical consistency and public credibility. Without veganism as a baseline commitment, it becomes difficult to argue for a radical opposition to speciesism both at the structural and individual level. This is similar to the case of a boss who oppresses his/her workers and denies their rights, but at the same time, as a true marxist shows up at the forefront of the anti-capitalist demonstrations. There should be explicit calls for the elimination - individually and organizationally - of speciesist consumption habits in food, clothing, cosmetics and entertainment. Otherwise, if an activist is so enslaved by his or

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<sup>9</sup> You can even find Singer's affirmation of Marx in his introductory book to Marx (Singer, 2001).

her habits that she/he cannot reorganize their daily life as an individual, then their credibility in the collective struggle is open to question. The attitudes and behaviors displayed/adopted in the name of revolutionary morality include veganism within the anti-speciesist Marxist ideology. This is not only the case within Marxism and the struggle for animal liberation, but even some people who are not Marxists but claim to be anti-speciesist should not try to exclude veganism from this struggle. The refusal to consume animal products today cannot be postponed in the name of awaiting a future revolution. As much as Marxism rightfully criticizes idealist moralism, it also recognizes the dialectical formation of ethical consciousness in material conditions. The oppression of animals is not simply a byproduct of capitalism but also a reflection of anthropocentric ontologies and deeply rooted speciesist ideologies. Therefore, taking a stance against animal exploitation today is not merely a “moral” act in the liberal sense, but a historically situated ethical responsibility. This responsibility emerges from recognizing animals as oppressed subjects within the same material structures that oppress humans. The source of this morality is not abstract idealism, but a dialectical awareness that agency and ethical action are formed within and against the contradictions of existing material conditions. In this sense, veganism becomes not a moral ornament, but a political necessity for any anti-speciesist Marxist praxis.

As I stated in the introduction, it remains unclear which elements must be prioritized or incorporated when attempting to integrate Marxism and anti-speciesism. Should anti-speciesism be subsumed under Marxist theory, or should Marxism itself undergo transformation to accommodate anti-speciesist critique? According to AMAL, both sides should accept each other equally and find a compromise. On the other hand, - at the risk of being harsh, I argue that Marxism is not essential to the anti-speciesist struggle. The claim that “the dynamics of the social structure is the result of material gains throughout history and that if we want to understand a society, we have to focus on the socio-economic, i.e. material gains of that society”, even though it was formulated and developed within Marxism, does not make everyone who defends this claim a Marxist. Is it enough to have only a historical materialist perspective to be a Marxist? When some anti-speciesist activists analyze speciesism and anthropocentrism in society from a historical materialist perspective, are they becoming Marxists or are they simply adopting a method of Marxism? It is an inevitable reality that the so-called bourgeoisie has the livestock sector in its hands, but will the livestock sector disappear tomorrow if this class changes and is replaced by a working class? Let's say that a communist world becomes a reality. Who can guarantee that animal exploitation will not exist in that world? Has animal exploitation ended in societies that have achieved some degree of communism in history? For example, in the Soviet Union and Maoist China, despite their anti-capitalist foundations, state-controlled animal agriculture remained fully operational and animals continued to be treated as productive assets rather than sentient beings. These cases suggest that animal exploitation is not automatically resolved by a shift in class relations or economic systems. Therefore, imposing Marxism on the anti-speciesism movement is tantamount to saying “come and join the non-vegans”. Therefore, it is imperative that Marxist organizations adopt an anti-speciesist position. If Marxists become vegans and try to include the issue of speciesism in their agenda, then we, the anti-speciesists, will be acting on common ground with them. As someone who has been in and out of the three leading Marxist

organizations in Turkey, I have observed that the idea of speciesism is strongly reproduced among the marxist. Thus, I believe AMAL should transform Marxism by being anti-speciesist first and then having a Marxist identity, instead of being Marxist first and then anti-speciesist. Therefore, imposing Marxism on the anti-speciesist movement is tantamount to saying “come and join the non-vegans”. This position not only underestimates the independent historical formation of speciesism, which predates and transcends capitalism, but also fails to recognize that Marxist tools can be selectively applied without subscribing to Marxism as a totalizing ideology. One can adopt a historical materialist perspective to analyze the material conditions of animal exploitation without embracing the entire Marxist framework. In this sense, Marxism should not be treated as a prerequisite, but rather as one of many theoretical resources anti-speciesist activists may utilize. My proposition that anti-speciesism should come first does not imply a hierarchical supremacy, but a strategic prioritization. This is because speciesism, unlike class domination, is more deeply entrenched in the symbolic, cultural, and ontological frameworks of human societies across different epochs. In this regard, any revolutionary theory that ignores or postpones the question of animal oppression risks reproducing the very structures it seeks to abolish. Thus, if Marxism is to remain relevant in the age of ecological collapse and mass animal commodification, it must integrate anti-speciesist ethics at its core - not as an afterthought, but as a foundational critique.

This criticism is outside the scope of this article, but I feel it is necessary for this discussion. Some Marxist scholars (e.g., Saito, 2017; Torres, 2007; Sanbonmatsu, 2011) argue that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were either not speciesists or not as speciesist as often assumed. It is claimed that Marx and Engels were Darwinists, not influenced by Cartesian thought, and that they did not ignore animal labor within capitalism. They focused only on human labor, assuming that humans are animals too. They did not claim that animals do not have labor. Listening to these arguments, I have also come to the conclusion that Marx and Engels were not as speciesist as I thought they were, but I don't think that has anything to do with the issues discussed in the relationship between Marxism and the anti-speciesism movement. One may ask, would Marxists today become anti-speciesists if they learned that Marx and Engels were not speciesists? Probably not. On the contrary, would the fact that Marx and Engels were strong speciesists turn today's anti-speciesist Marxists against Marxism? Again, not likely. No, it won't. We should not miss the essence of the debate. It is more possible to be anti-speciesist today than it was in the time of Marx and Engels. This is both because the industrialized world in which we live has increased the exploitation of animals, and because it is easier to adopt a vegan form of consumption today than in centuries past. To question whether Marx and Engels were speciesists is nothing, but anachronistic. That said, it is true that in earlier historical periods, meat and animal products were consumed less frequently, often limited to wealthier classes. However, the lower scale of consumption does not necessarily reflect lower levels of speciesist ideology or practice. What has changed today is not merely the quantity of consumption, but the industrial scale and moral visibility of animal exploitation, which creates greater potential for ethical critique and alternative practices like veganism. Therefore, the anachronism I refer to lies not in judging Marx and Engels unfairly, but in assuming that their

historical context could have allowed for the same forms of anti-speciesist awareness available today.

I both agree and disagree with the concern that some anti-speciesist thinkers risk reducing complex social issues such as racism, sexism, and ecological destruction to speciesism. While this view does not represent the entire anti-speciesist movement -and may be more implicit than explicit in some cases- it reflects a theoretical tendency found in certain total liberation narratives that posit speciesism as the foundational form of oppression. My disagreement with this position lies not in denying the interconnection of struggles, but in opposing the reduction of one to the other. At the same time, I argue that speciesism plays a powerful structural role in shaping and reinforcing other forms of domination. For instance, the systematic exploitation of female-bodied animals<sup>10</sup> in the dairy and egg industries -based on reproductive capacity- parallels forms of gendered control in patriarchal societies. Similarly, colonial-era human zoos<sup>11</sup> and contemporary practices of racialized animalization suggest overlapping discursive mechanisms. These examples are not intended to deny the centrality of class struggle or capitalism, but to illustrate that speciesism operates both independently and intersectingly with these systems. The point is not to rank oppressions hierarchically but to recognize that speciesism is not a secondary or symbolic issue. It is materially embedded in the economic, cultural, and institutional structures of society. Rather than deciding whether speciesism or class is more “important,” we should acknowledge that both are essential to understanding the multifaceted nature of domination. The anti-speciesist struggle, when developed with sensitivity to class, race, and gender dynamics, can contribute to a more inclusive and systemic form of critique.

I believe that the structuralism of Marxism tends to underplay the potential agency of the individual. According to this framework, unless structural change occurs, individual efforts are considered futile or merely symbolic. However, the anti-speciesist struggle integrates both structural critique and individual action, especially through practices such as veganism. An individual who becomes vegan begins to influence supply and demand within their immediate consumption network. By spreading vegan discourse within their communities, they help generate a cultural shift, however modest. That said, I acknowledge that the relative effectiveness of such activism is largely conditioned by the capitalist framework itself. Capitalism, with its ability to commodify resistance, is precisely what allows vegan products to proliferate in response to consumer demand. This reinforces the criticism that veganism -on its own- cannot dismantle capitalism, and that anti-capitalists cannot adopt similar tactics to initiate structural change. However, rather than treating this as a flaw of anti-speciesism, I propose that it highlights the need for a hybrid approach: one that does not dismiss individual activism as bourgeois or passive, but also does not romanticize it as revolutionary in itself. While veganism may not overthrow capitalism, it can create ethical pressure points, disrupt normalized patterns of domination, and foster a consciousness that can be mobilized within larger structural

<sup>10</sup> In this regard, feminists such as Carol J. Adams (2010, 2020), Josephine Donovan (1990), Lori Gruen (1993), Greta Gaard (1997), Gary Varner (1994), Evelyn Pluhar (1994) and Lynda Birke (2007) can be studied.

<sup>11</sup> For further readings on the Human Zoo of the relevant period see: (Garland-Thomson, 1996; Mullan and Marvin, 1998; Blanchard et al., 2008; Rothfels, 2008; Patil, 2020).

struggles -including anti-capitalist ones. In this way, the relationship between individual and collective action need not be oppositional, but dialectical.

I see that AMAL accuses non-Marxist anti-speciesists of being idealists. To say that they are stuck in bourgeois moral philosophy is exactly like Marx's criticism of Hegel and Feuerbach on the basis of idealism. Hegel and Feuerbach, according to Marx, dealt with alienation on an internal and conscious level. This means ignoring the material conditions of a person's alienation. If we look at the anti-speciesists, alienation is dealt with not by the alienation of animals from themselves, their species or their nature, but through the alienation of human beings from other species than their own. So how does one experience this alienation? This is where the conflict between Marxism and post-structuralist anti-speciesism begins. Marxists see human speciesism as a crime of capitalism. However, we see that speciesism existed in pre-capitalist times. The existence of speciesism prior to capitalism can be observed in a wide range of historical societies, including ancient Greek philosophy where animals were seen as inferior due to their lack of logos, and in religious cosmologies where animals were framed as existing to serve humans. These discourses reinforced human exceptionalism long before capitalist commodification emerged. In this sense, capitalism did not invent speciesism -it inherited, intensified, and systematized it. Capitalism is not a system that creates the conditions for speciesism, at most it is the catalyst that feeds it. Then the question arises: Suppose the bourgeois class, which owns the means of production, became vegan. Wouldn't the structure called capitalism move in favor of veganism? This reflects the inherent flexibility of capitalism -it can absorb and commodify even counter-hegemonic practices like veganism, as long as they align with market logic. Thus, capitalism can coexist with certain forms of anti-speciesism on the surface level, without disrupting the deeper logics of commodification and control that sustain both human and nonhuman oppression. Leaving aside questions such as "if this had happened, that would have happened", the anti-speciesists try to understand through ideas how speciesism has developed throughout history to the present day. This attempt to understand does not lead to the claim that "nothing but ideas have the power to transform", because the most powerful observational data we can analyze throughout history are the cosmogonies of individuals and the discourses they attribute to them. AMAL reduces this analysis - at the risk of being anthropocentric - to bourgeois moral philosophy with reference to human-human relations, but this is an interspecies point that goes beyond the bourgeois. Anti-speciesist discursive analyses are criticized here not as the cause of speciesism, but as a basis for speciesist activities. For example, the claim that "everything in nature was created for human beings" has a strong theological underpinning, and the vast majority of people, whether religious or not - or even atheists - make this claim. The reason for this is not so much that this discourse is credible, but that it serves as a refuge in the public sphere. Another important point on this issue is that Marxists who are speciesists criticize anti-speciesists for only making intellectual efforts. I think the reason behind their argument is because they do not pay attention to the diversity within the struggle for animal liberation around the world. While some groups that can be described as radical, directly organize animal rescue operations, others engage in street activism. For example, in Turkey in 2024, many animal liberation activists spent months in street protests, hunger strikes and, in some cases, fights with local authorities to oppose the

culling of stray dogs. The struggle should not be seen merely as the ontological ramblings of a group of intellectuals.

While AMAL divides the anti-speciesists into three lines, it treats the Marxists as if they were a single group. However, everyone knows that Marxist groups have serious internal divisions. To take an example from Turkey, there are serious differences between the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) and the Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP), both in theory and in practice. When it comes to animals, we can see that the Workers' Party of Turkey is more sensitive, both in its reactions to the culling of stray dogs in parliament and in the attitudes of its politicians in local government. In Turkey, both those who support the Communist Party and those who support the Workers' Party call themselves Marxists. There are even definitions like socialist Marxist, anarchist Marxist. So, we have to ask: which Marxism will be anti-speciesist and how?

### Conclusion

The relationship between anti-speciesism and Marxism will improve as both sides change and transform each other. While the anti-speciesism movement criticizes Marxism's anthropocentric and speciesist political discourses embedded in “human-human” relations, Marxism criticizes the anti-speciesism movement for reproducing bourgeois ideology in a way that is passive in the struggle against capitalism and even hinders this struggle. In this case, while the anti-speciesism movement suggests Marxism to abandon speciesism and support a vegan lifestyle, Marxism proposes that the anti-speciesism movement support the struggle not only of animals but also of the disenfranchised and oppressed classes within capitalism through a historical materialist method rather than an idealist discourse analysis. As the debate between these two sides continues, critical questions such as “to what extent does capitalism reproduce speciesism?”, “will the end of speciesism end capitalist domination?”, “to what extent can we critique speciesism in the working class?” remain to be discussed.

It is a fact that just as today's animal liberation struggle is a paradigmatic break with centuries of speciesism, Marxism, with its strong organizational structure, is an ideology that has opened and closed epochs in history. I am not sure at what point these two sharp ideologies will converge. Perhaps they never will, and organizations like AMAL will continue to exist as a minority. However, as a vegan animal liberation activist, I have to say that I appreciate the current state of the animal liberation struggle, which has reached a point where it has begun to challenge and critically engage with Marxism -an ideology that, despite its fluctuating political presence, continues to exert significant influence in academic discourse, anti-capitalist movements, and structural critiques worldwide.

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