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## Constructing terrorists: propaganda about animal rights

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## ARTICLE

### Constructing terrorists: propaganda about animal rights

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Confusion and misrepresentation plague discourse on ‘terrorism’. The term is misapplied to actions far removed from violent mass-casualty attacks or peacetime equivalents of war crimes. This article examines how the term is misapplied to non-violent actions of animal rights groups to undermine opposition to animal exploitation industries.

**Keywords:** animal rights; eco-terrorism; green scare; propaganda

#### Introduction

Discourse on ‘terrorism’ is plagued by confusion and misrepresentation. Definitions number in the hundreds. The United Nations’ Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d.) notes Schmid’s proposal that terrorism be defined as the peacetime equivalent of a war crime, but adopts his definition as the academic consensus:

Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought. (Schmid 1988)

Although accounting for most violence, state terrorism is widely presented as justified, while opponents are the forces of disorder and, thus, are illegitimate (Primoratz 2002). Double standards exist with powerful states doing as they please (Chomsky 1988, 2001, 2008). Insurgents are the terrorists or freedom fighters according to whose interests they serve; for example, the United States endorsed, mobilised, financed, and armed militant groups abroad, including some they now target in their ‘war on terror’. The term ‘terrorism’ provides a means to stigmatise and delegitimise the actions of enemies. Typically, terrorism is associated with deadly attacks on civilians, such as the 2001 al-Qaeda attacks in the United States, the 2002 bombing in Bali, the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo gas attack on the Tokyo subway, and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Guelke (2008, p. 22)

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enumerates mass-casualty figures in a list of ‘Twenty most lethal terrorist events since 1960’, and Chalecki (2001, p. 3) notes: ‘Today the word “terrorism” brings to mind hijacked airliners, the World Trade Center, and the violent death of unsuspecting people’. While emphasising terrorism’s communicative aspect, Schmid (2005, p. 138) cites murderous violence as its ‘central idea: “Kill one [to] frighten ten thousand”’.

However, the term is increasingly misapplied to various other actions far removed from violent mass-casualty attacks or anything resembling peacetime equivalents of war crimes. It is too distorted to be applied to actions we ostensibly consider ethical and praiseworthy, such as efforts to prevent cruelty and suffering including non-violent actions of animal advocates. This ever-broadening expansion of ‘terrorism’ is encouraged in propaganda campaigns by corporations that profit from the abuses their opponents decry. This article examines how the term is misapplied to animal rights groups to undermine opposition to animal exploitation industries.

### Framing and propaganda

Discourse analyses on terrorism usefully employ theories of framing (Kavoori and Fraley 2006, Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008). Media do not simply report events but selectively frame them to construct tacit definitions, interpretations, and moral evaluations of problems and suggest solutions (see Gitlin 1980, Entman 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 2003, Johnson-Cartee 2004). Frames socially construct reality by imposing meaning on actions, events, and issues and organise them within familiar categories and narratives. Following familiar patterns, media select and emphasise certain facts and downplay others; their presentation of issues therefore shapes public perceptions and views of appropriate responses. Norris *et al.* (2003, p. 11) find it a ‘puzzle’ why certain frames are used instead of others, but Herman and Chomsky (1988) solve that puzzle. Their propaganda model identifies filters that exclude or marginalise certain information and sources. Mainstream media are large corporations owned by wealthy individuals or other corporations and generally serve the interests of dominant classes. A general pro-capitalist filter operates. Particular sponsors, who purchase advertising, want to maintain a ‘buying mood’ among audiences and their financial power limits content. While information from establishment sources is readily used, information from dissident groups is not. Rightwing experts and producers of ‘flak’ have regular space in newspaper columns and radio and television talk shows; dissidents do not. These filters narrow the range of acceptable information, limiting what can become news. The result is that information is framed within the context of elite interests.

Herman (2003) answers various criticisms of the model; Goeddertz and Kraidy (2003, p. 90) find it ‘helpful in our analysis’, Klaehn (2002, p. 173) considers it ‘forceful and convincing’, and Sparks (2007, pp. 68–69) describes it as ‘a model of clarity. . . one of the best available attempts to provide a robust analytic framework’ of mass media, with ‘testable hypotheses’ and finds ‘no falsifications of its main hypotheses’. Similar approaches are taken by Artz and Kamalipour (2005), Dinan and Miller (2007), Kamalipour and Snow (2004), Miller (2004), and Rutherford (2000). Patrick and Thrall (2008, p. 95) identify the propaganda model as part of a ‘hegemonic’ approach that ‘has dominated political communication literature on war and the media for over a generation’, although they believe that ‘classical propaganda theory’ is more applicable to the analysis of Bush administration propaganda. Herman and Chomsky focus on US foreign policy and its links to class inequalities and corporate power. Analysts, using this model, generally investigate similar concerns (see Klaehn 2005, Edwards and Cromwell 2006, DiMaggio

2007). However, it illuminates other issues too including coverage of animal advocacy (broadly, ‘animal rights’). Increasingly, corporate media coverage places animal advocacy within a terrorism frame and within a ‘discourse of fear’ (Altheide 2002).

### Methodology

Using the Factiva database, which monitors major international newspapers, a corpus was assembled combining the keywords ‘animal rights’ for all dates with other relevant terms: ‘terror’ yielded 53 articles, ‘terrorism’ 217, and ‘terrorists’ 445. (Adding associated terms provided a larger sample: ‘attack’ yielded 42, ‘fanatic’ 83, ‘fanatics’ 442, ‘extremism’ 576, and ‘extremists’ 3552. In contrast, neutral or positive terms yielded fewer articles: ‘ethics’ yielded 7, ‘compassionate’ 5, and ‘ethical’ 4, while a variety of other positive terms yielded 0). A simple Google search on ‘animal rights terrorism’ yielded an original 856,000 citations, which includes repetitions, irrelevancies, and seemingly endless blogs, but also hundreds more articles from mainstream media along with reports and analyses from industry lobby groups, scientific publications, and government documents.

Reviewing these articles, I investigate how filters and frames select certain aspects of reality and make them more significant in media texts so as to define, interpret, and evaluate problems in particular ways and to suggest certain solutions. Framing is accomplished through placement and devices, such as headlines, subheadings, sidebars, captions, quotes, and repetitions, but ‘even a single unillustrated appearance of a notion in an obscure part of the text can be highly salient, if it comports with the existing schemata in a receiver’s belief systems’ (Entman 1993a, pp. 52–53).

While frames select and emphasise certain aspects of reality described, they

simultaneously direct attention away from other aspects. Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omissions of potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations, and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding the audience. (Entman 1993a, p. 54)

As Entman does with 1990 Gulf War coverage, I show that critiques suggesting remedies outside those provided by the frame are considered unacceptable discourse and not considered newsworthy by conventional journalistic standards. Analyzing media reports, I show the operation of the terrorism frame, examine what is emphasised or excluded, and discuss how lobby groups for animal exploitation industries shape discourse about animal rights.

### Extremists

Media use the term so consistently as to make all animal rights supporters ‘extremists’ ready to employ violence to achieve their ends. Yet, the ends seem commendable: preventing animal suffering. The ‘violence’ frame, used so extensively in denouncing activists, excludes the fact that animal exploitation industries are responsible for violence on a massive scale: intensive breeding, warehousing, and killing of animals in factory farms and slaughterhouses under appalling conditions and horrifying torture in vivisection laboratories. These violent practices are normalised, accepted as industry standards, and legally permitted. Just as powerful states engage in actions deemed terrorist when committed by others, so do we accept the most hideous atrocities when the victims are animals; it is simply prejudice to denounce violence only when it affects humans.

Yet, even within such narrow definitions, most activists are violent. Activists use various strategies including vegetarian advocacy, humane education, boycotts, media campaigns, protests, undercover investigations of factory farms, slaughterhouses and laboratories, and open rescues in which activists do not conceal their identities while removing animals from horrifying conditions. Typically, demonstrations are peaceful. For example, Toronto animal rights organisation Wild at Heart and Earth Kids, a group of children concerned about the environment, organised an anti-rodeo event described on Animal Voices (2006a) radio and on their website as a ‘friendly family-type protest’ in which those who did not wish to see animals abused for entertainment could dress in Western costumes and ‘have lots of fun’. Other groups target institutional animal abusers by telephone, letters, and home demonstrations. Doubtlessly intimidating, these do not meet accepted definitions of terrorism. Arson and bombings have been attributed to the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and in 2006 Donald Currie pleaded guilty to arson and planting explosives at the home of a director of a courier business associated with Huntingdon Life Sciences, Britain’s largest vivisection company. These are acts of political violence intended to intimidate, but can be distinguished from terrorism since they are not intended as mass-killings or random-killings of civilians to create fear in whole communities (Guelke 2008). Although only a few activists condone violence, the terrorist label is applied indiscriminately to all.

Studies of animal advocacy dismiss violence as a distinctly minor aspect. For example, Ryder’s (2000) study of advocacy in Britain only mentions the ALF in a few lines of one paragraph. Munro (2001), analysing activism in Australia, the UK, and the United States, mentions the ALF only briefly. Francione’s (1996, p. 24) study of the animal rights movement does not discuss violence at all and gives little attention to the ALF’s illegal activities, noting ‘in most cases, these activities involved removing animals or information from laboratories’. In their edited volume on the ethics of animal liberation, Donovan and Adams (1996) do not even include an entry for the ALF in their index.

While media and industry emphasise activists’ violence, theorists of animal advocacy reject it. For example, in *Animal Liberation*, widely regarded as a foundational text, Singer (2002, p. xix) rejects violence considering it a ‘tragic mistake’, and emphasises ethical commitments and the non-violent principles of Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Adams (2004) opposes home demonstrations. Francione (2007) and Hall (2006) advocate a non-violent abolitionist movement organised around veganism. Accepting violence under certain circumstances (such as defending the innocent) but urging non-violent alternatives, Regan (2004, p. 191) considers violence ‘wrong’ and detrimental to animal rights. Prominent activists reject violence. Freeman Wicklund of Eco-Animal Allies and Compassionate Action for Animals and other advocacy organisations, founder of *No Compromise* magazine, and former ALF media spokesperson advises non-violence, as do Merritt Clifton, Director of the Animal Rights Network and Editor of *Animal People* magazine, and Kim Stallwood, who worked with Compassion in World Farming, the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) before becoming editor of *Animals Agenda*. Nevertheless, ‘animal rights violence’ remains the near-exclusive focus of discourse produced by media, corporate lobbyists, and police.

### Exclusion and ridicule

Typically, media coverage of animal rights excludes serious discussion on important issues. Concern for animals is a persistent, albeit marginalised, tradition of Western

thought, rooted in Classical philosophy, and, historically, animal advocacy has been intertwined with struggles to improve human lives. By the nineteenth century, social activists campaigned not only for human welfare but also for the rights of animals. In the twentieth century, philosophers made compelling arguments for better treatment of animals drawing analogies with struggles against racism and sexism. Many universities now offer animal rights courses and historian Kete (2004) calls animal rights the ‘most central philosophical issue of our time’.

Nevertheless, corporate media trivialise and ridicule animal rights. Media do cover PETA’s ‘attention-grabbing’ tactics such as ‘I’d Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur’ advertisements, the ‘Holocaust on Your Plate’ campaign which drew analogies between factory farming and the Nazis’ industrial killing of Jews, and the use of celebrities to promote vegetarianism and animal welfare. While PETA’s tactics attract coverage, stories often depict activists as offensive or silly and ridicule their views. Interviewing Ingrid Newkirk for the *Guardian*, made Younge (2006) ‘want to pull out a stack of baby-back ribs and wolf them down, and then wipe my sticky, saucy fingers all over her desk’. Reports increasingly use the terrorism frame. For example, the *New York Post* (Marsh 2001) called PETA activists ‘zealots’ and ‘terrorists’ for targeting designer Karl Lagerfeld at the Council of Fashion Designers of America Awards with a tofu-cream pie for his use of fur. The headline emphasised terrorism while ridiculing activists who missed Lagerfeld and hit another designer: ‘Bad-Shot Tofu Terrorists Eat Humble Pie’.

While newspaper ‘Lifestyle’ sections provide animal-product recipes and restaurant reviews tout meat (e.g., ‘Carnivores, Rev Up Your Engines’ (Mintz, 2008)), vegetarians are depicted as kooks or worse, as in the widespread attention given to ‘bad-boy chef’ Anthony Bourdain’s opinions: the *Philadelphia Weekley* (Valocchi 2007) subheaded ‘Philly vegetarians are terrorist scum, says Bourdain’ and reported his view that ‘These people . . . are the worst kind of terrorists. And they must be stopped’. The *Sunday Star Times* (Smithies 2007) quoted his declaration: ‘Vegetarians, and their Hezbollah-like splinter faction, the vegans . . . are the enemy of everything good and decent in the human spirit . . .’. Compassion for animals is dismissed as foolish sentimentalism or misanthropy. Vegetarianism is depicted as outlandish and linked to social protest generally. Fox News (Mailkin 2003) warns of ‘Terrorists with Tofu Breath’:

They are bomb-throwing Birkenstock brats. Wolves in hemp clothing. Enemies of scientific progress. Inveterate haters of humanity. They are environmental extremists and animal rights zealots. They are running loose. And they are endangering us all.

Terrorist rhetoric is not limited to such ‘humorous’ stories or to ‘conservative’ media such as Fox but also operate within ‘mainstream’ media too. For example, in the *Washington Times* and the *Japan Times*, Bandow (2005a, 2005b), senior fellow at the Cato Institute, compared Ingrid Newkirk and PETA to Al-Qaeda. Similarly, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2008) headlined ‘AWI Labels PETA “Terrorists”’, using the term three times in a short article that quotes the Australian Wool Institute’s marketing director and a wool agent (but no PETA representative), who denounce PETA’s European campaign to boycott Australian mulesed wool. Australia’s Agriculture Minister Warren Truss also linked PETA with terrorism (Truss 2004).

The propaganda model explains exclusion, ridicule, and the utility of a terrorism frame in reporting animal rights. Capitalism *is* animal exploitation and industries such as agribusiness, biotechnology, food, clothing, and pharmaceuticals are major advertisers in media; they do not wish to sponsor a forum for criticism of their operations and products.

Thus, institutional structures of corporate media establish a frame that excludes anything other than an instrumental view of animals. Specific abuses, such as the ‘smoking beagles’ experiments in 1970s Britain, are occasionally condemned, even using information from activists’ undercover work (including illegal entries), but animals’ status as property and their institutionalised use remains unchallenged. Serious presentations of animal rights are excluded. As the propaganda model predicts, activists’ views receive little attention: they not only threaten profits of specific corporations that exploit animals, they also reject basic premises of a system that treats animals as units of industrial processing and as property.

### Animal rights terrorists

Animal exploitation industries, public relations companies and lobbyists, and corporate media emphasise violence by activists describing them as terrorists and extremists. Actual financial impact is difficult to assess, since all parties have interests in exaggerating it: activists hope to show significant impact, animal exploitation industries prefer to collect higher insurance payments and show they are besieged, media need dramatic stories, and police must justify higher budgets. Nevertheless, industries perceive significant threats, even from slight improvements in conditions for animals; industry publications regularly decry victories by animal welfare groups. Animal advocacy’s most dangerous aspect, however, is its potential to change consciousness and obstruct profitable business-as-usual operations. Therefore, animal exploitation industries find it imperative to exaggerate the dangers from activists and to present them as terrorists.

The 9/11 attacks provided a pretext for government crackdowns on dissent and provided new rhetoric to demonise animal advocates. For example, in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Journo 2003) pro-capitalist Ayn Rand Institute’s Elan Journo warned of ‘The Mounting Threat of Homegrown Terrorism’ and, comparing them to Islamist terrorists, demanded that activists ‘must be stopped by the force of government, now’. *The Telegraph* (2006) calls the ALF ‘the al-Qaeda of the animal rights lobby’. In *The Guardian*, Ash (2006) expresses pride in Oxford demonstrators denouncing ‘animal rights terrorists’ and repeatedly links the latter with Islamist extremists and the ‘creeping tyranny’ of the ‘frightened nanny state’. Similarly, warning in the *Sunday Times* ‘War on terror ignores mullahs of animal rights’, Gerard (2006) praises:

brave Oxonians marching . . . to support a new medical research lab targeted by animal rights terrorists. About time. Just as we cowed to Islamic fundamentalism, we cowed to animal fundamentalism. But the war on terror must be waged not only in shady mosques but under dreaming spires.

Imaginary links to 9/11 and to Islamist terrorists are repeatedly invoked. Reporting on ‘Animal Rights Extremists Convicted’ for the National Cattleman’s Beef Association, Lobo (2006), repeatedly compares the ALF to Al-Qaeda and calls website-based support for imprisoned animal advocates ‘Martyrdom for activists’. Lobo, formerly editor of *Feed Management* magazine, is now Communications Director of the Animal Agriculture Alliance (AAA), which ‘promotes the interests of some of the largest corporations and trade associations in the business of animal livestock, animal drugs, genetically engineered foods and crops’ (Center for Media and Democracy n.d.A); AAA Chairman, Charlie Arnot heads his own PR firm CMA Consulting and was ‘involved in the food industry’s PR campaign against author Eric Schlosser and his books “Fast Food Nation” and “Chew On This”’ (Center for Media and Democracy n.d.B). The rightwing, anti-environmentalist

American Policy Center (DeWeese 2001) thinks it ‘highly possible’ that the ALF (‘the terrorist arm of PeTA’) is collaborating with Islamist groups:

There is ample reason to suspect that eco-terrorists could have direct ties and are working in concert with foreign terrorists. First, both forces are made up of radical activists who have expressed immense hatred for American industry and its capitalist society. Both operate underground. Both are structured along the same lines, using secret cells and communication networks. Both are determined to destroy America’s way of life.

More importantly, there is precedent for such cooperation. First, it is well documented that international terrorists – from the Islamic Jihad to the Irish Republican Army to a variety of violent cells in Europe and Japan – communicate, even offering cooperation with each other. It is not unreasonable that such enemies of America would see great opportunity in working with the dedicated revolutionaries in the environmental terrorist movement that are able to travel freely inside our borders as American citizens.

Corporate media and industry lobbyists consistently portray activists as violent terrorists motivated by bizarre beliefs to overthrow capitalism. The terrorism frame diverts attention from serious consideration of important issues raised by activists.

### ‘Flak’ and corporate lobbyists

Media ignore activists who join non-violent rallies and do not use sensationalist tactics. However, those who promote animal exploitation get very different treatment. For example, declaring ‘Animal rights extremists face backlash’, the *Boston Globe* (Semuels 2006) reported that Laurie Pycroft:

a 16-year-old high school dropout and self-proclaimed geek . . . who lives near Oxford, was walking by an animal rights protest when he and a friend decided to march near the protesters with makeshift signs reading, ‘Support Progress. Build the Oxford Lab’. A handful of Oxford students heard about Pycroft’s actions and joined with him to form Pro-Test, a group that supports testing on animals.

The *Globe* was not alone in reporting Pycroft’s ‘march . . . with makeshift signs’: his actions were hailed in major English newspapers (*Telegraph*, *Times*, *Observer*, *Guardian*) as well as the *New York Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, a television documentary and thousands of citations on Internet blogs and websites. *The Telegraph* (2006) applauded the ‘16-year-old schoolboy[’s] . . . courage . . . to take on the ALF bullies’, claiming this ‘should shame banks such as the Royal Bank of Scotland, Charles Schwab and the Dresdner Bank. They pulled their investments from [vivisection] companies such as Huntingdon Life Sciences the moment the ALF told them to’.

When depictions of activists are insufficiently critical, ‘flak’ is produced to condemn offenders. For example, *Pharma Business Week*, *International Business Times*, *Market-watch* and similar publications reproduced a media release from Japan’s whaling-industry front group, the Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR, 2008) headlined ‘ICR: Animal Planet Collaborated with Ecoterrorists’. Minoru Morimoto, ICR’s Director General calls Sea Shepherd Conservation Society an ‘ecoterrorist’ group for its efforts to stop the killing of whales and denounces Animal Planet’s television series ‘Whale Wars’ ‘for inciting this increased violence and aiding and abetting an international criminal organization’.

Animal exploitation industries also police media criticism of their activities. For example, after Oprah Winfrey discussed mad cow disease with former rancher Howard Lyman in 1996, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association withdrew \$600,000 dollars in



advertising from the television network and sued Winfrey and Lyman under ‘food disparagement’ laws created in Texas (Center for Media and Democracy n.d.C). As the Dairy Coalition, the same groups involved in passing those laws pursued another case in Florida. Monsanto corporation tried to conceal human health dangers associated with its genetically engineered recombinant bovine growth hormone, marketed as Posilac: reporters Jane Akre and Steve Wilson were ordered to rewrite their stories to show Posilac in a positive light and fired for refusing to do so (Center for Media and Democracy n.d.D).

As concern for animals gained support, animal exploitation industries created public relations units to combat recognition that other animals are not simply objects or units of production but sentient beings with their own interests. The Center for Consumer Freedom (CCF) lobbies on behalf of the alcohol, restaurant, and tobacco industries that fund it and targets organisations such as PETA and the Humane Society of the United States. The CCF denounces animal advocacy ‘terrorism’, even where it is difficult to find. Attempting to demonise United Poultry Concerns, which promotes the welfare of birds, the worst behaviour the CCF (n.d.) could detect was a protest at a *foie gras* ‘seminar’ by the Wine Tasting Association of Washington, DC. Association chief Mark Phillips described his ordeal: ‘They placed a large 4 ft tall stuffed animal duck on my lawn two nights ago with a metal pipe shoved down its throat and a can of corn open next to it’. Testifying to the US Senate Judiciary Committee, Blum (2005), Senior Vice-President of Yum! Brands called PETA an ‘animal worshipping cult’ and denounced their ‘corporate terrorism’ against Kentucky Fried Chicken. PETA’s ‘terrorist’ actions included writing letters, distributing leaflets, marching with ‘banners and slogans that were less than flattering’, dressing in chicken costumes and having an activist dressed as Santa Claus leave a bag of coal on the CEO’s doorstep.

Some lobby groups have a broad focus promoting animal exploitation in various industries. For example, the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA) is composed of ‘business, agricultural, scientific, and recreational interests’ (NAIA n.d.A). Claiming to ‘support and protect animals’, it endorses all forms of exploitation including use of animals for ‘meat, eggs and dairy products and . . . [for] leather, wool, furs, and myriad items derived from animal byproducts’, vivisection, hunting, fishing, breeding animals for pets, mutilations such as ear-cropping, tail-docking, declawing of cats, ‘debarking’ of dogs, ‘performance events’ such as rodeos, dog sled racing, horse racing, greyhound racing, and weight-pulling contests. It opposes legislation regulating animal exploitation but promoted the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) and lists terrorist crimes, including the abovementioned tofu-cream-pie-toss at Karl Lagerfeld. The NAIA brands any illegal action with any relationship to animals as animal rights terrorism; for example, in a 2007 article the NAIA (n.d B) reports ‘a dozen cows have been gunned down’ in Iowa and notes that ‘investigators don’t know if there is an organized group behind these and other actions’ but includes this in a list entitled ‘Animal rights and environmental extremists use intimidation and violence to achieve their ends’, despite the fact that activists try to help animals rather than ‘gun[. . . them] down’.

Other groups promote specific forms of exploitation. For example, the Research Defense Society (RDS) promotes vivisection and depicts activists as violent criminals threatening human health. Its website offers ‘background briefings’ to journalists, ‘help with . . . research’ and vivisectionists to provide interviews and opinion columns, services media utilise. For example, a *Guardian* (Festing, 2008) article ‘Monkey Business’ is subheaded: ‘Animal rights campaigners ignore basic facts: well-regulated research using animals improves humans’ lives’. The subheading states this as fact, although it is the opinion of Simon Festing, only identified as RDS director in the online version by clicking

on his name. Festing is a regular contributor to the *Guardian* and is quoted frequently by reporters. Similarly, the Foundation for Biomedical Research (FBR) operates a website criticising activists and encourages journalists to promote vivisection, bestowing awards and paying thousands of dollars for satisfactory stories. The FBR (2006) alleges hundreds of illegal incidents although details are absent.

Reproducing RDS and FBR assertions that vivisection is always undertaken for noble ends, media consistently and incorrectly juxtapose concern for animals with lack of concern for humans. They seldom discuss alternatives such as autopsies, clinical studies, computer models, epidemiological studies, *in vitro* studies, tissue and cell culture work, artificial human skin for burn research, and so on, ignoring information from anti-vivisection organisations. The pro-vivisection frame excludes critical arguments that much research is redundant, repeating experiments done by others with slight modifications, or used to produce 'me, too' copies of existing drugs so companies can sell their versions under different names. Much replication occurs because corporations hide results for commercial reasons. Others promote testing because animals themselves are profitable commodities. Large animals cost thousands of dollars and even smaller specially produced, genetically modified animals are very expensive. Millions of animals are used as research tools, produced and sold by corporations for impressive profits. The FBR claims: 'It is intellectually dishonest to support medical research while embracing the animal rights movement' (FBR 2007), despite the fact that activists claim they are not opposed to science but to bad science that assumes data from animals can be extrapolated to humans. Yet, even where animals are genetically similar to humans, as with chimpanzees, and the purpose is serious, as with HIV/AIDS research, animal testing has been a failure. Dr. Gill Langley, a neurochemist and scientific advisor to the British government, to the European Commission and to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, examined problems of extrapolating to humans from data derived from primates, presumptively the best animal models. Langley (2006) notes 'highly significant differences between the species in terms of genetics, molecular biology, pharmacology, physiology, absorption, distribution, metabolism and excretion and in reactions to drugs and chemicals' and concludes that although some predictions can be made they can only be confirmed by human trials.

To portray activists as terrorists, lobby group such as the Fur Commission USA list 'Animal Extremist/EcoTerror Crimes'. However, the Fur Commission USA (2007) provides no substantiating documentation or evidence, simply indicating 'ALF suspected' or stating that 'ALF' or 'Earth Liberation Front (ELF)' were spray-painted at these locations. Their website includes links to 'other chronologies of animal extremist/ecoterror crimes' compiled by lobby groups, such as the FBR, NAIA, and the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise, all providing few details. Assuming that such undocumented incidents actually happened, it is possible that some were committed by individuals who endorsed animal rights. However, it is equally possible they were not.

Media readily attribute crimes to activists without proof. For example, *Outdoor Life* (1994) speculated, without evidence, that activists had killed hunters, despite high annual tolls of hunters shooting each other in the woods. Also unconcerned with evidence, *The Mirror* (Gilfeather 2001) warned 'Animal rights terrorists could be behind the foot and mouth crisis', noting:

Ministry of Agriculture investigators were probing the idea that activists planted the disease in an attempt to discredit farming practices. They believe terrorists could have copied the twisted scheme from the James Bond thriller *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in which evil Blofeld threatens to contaminate the world with the foot and mouth virus. A Ministry source admitted last night: 'It is too early to rule out the possibility that terrorists are behind this'.

The *Boston Globe* (Ballou 2006) suggested activists had set fire to a Cambridge pet store where 'No more exploitation of animals' was spray-painted. Although the *Globe* later reported that the store's manager had set the fire, it concluded: 'The store's owner . . . wondered why animal rights activists would burn pets to death. "Is that kind of death better than exploitation?" she asked' (Ballou and Mishra 2006). Thus, although none were involved, the story asks 'why animal rights activists would burn pets to death'.

Concern for animals is itself considered motivation for crime. For example, reports on the assassination of rightwing Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn by Volkert van der Graaf consistently identified the latter as a vegan and animal advocate, although Fortuyn apparently expressed no strong views on animal issues and van der Graaf's advocacy had nothing to do with his decision to kill him. Apparently, van der Graaf thought murdering Fortuyn would protect Muslims from growing discrimination; trial reports also mentioned van der Graaf's mental problems. Nevertheless, *The Scotsman* (2002) reported: 'Fortuyn may have been killed over animal rights'. *Guardian Unlimited* (2002) headlined its story: 'Fortuyn suspect "is animal rights activist"' and *The Telegraph* noted: 'Mr Fortuyn's relatives wore fur coats in the high-security court to show scorn for the animal rights zealot' (Evans-Pritchard and Clements 2003).

Media reported animal rights as motivation for bombings in the UK in 2007. BBC News (2007) said police found 'strong links between the first three letter bombs received and animal rights activists' because the names of two activists were found on envelopes containing unexploded bombs. One was Barry Horne, who had been imprisoned for planting bombs but had died during a 2001 hunger strike to protest vivisection. Imaginary animal rights connections evaporated when Miles Cooper, a primary school caretaker with no involvement in animal advocacy, was arrested.

Most actions described as 'violence' are cases of property damage. Some are just illegal entries. Typically, damage is minimal, consisting of broken locks; often no damage at all is involved but animals are rescued from captivity, pain, and death. Although most illegal actions by activists are non-violent and motivated by compassion, media emphasise violence, and corporations demand severe punishment. Industry, lobbyists, media, and police present not just specific actions but the ideology of animal rights itself as violent terrorism. However, most activists are non-violent, advocating legal dissent and protest. Most illegal activities involve releasing animals or documenting abuse in laboratories and factory farms.

Terrorism's main characteristic is the deliberate intent to kill humans. In contrast, even when activists have committed illegal activities and property destruction, they have ensured no humans were harmed. (In one rare case, Brian Cass, Managing Director of Huntingdon Life Sciences, was assaulted in 2001 by David Blenkinsop, who received a three-and-a-half year prison sentence.) ALF guidelines mandate non-violence and 'all necessary precautions against harming any animal, human and non-human' (ALF n.d.). Despite media emphasis on 'terrorism', no ALF actions have caused human fatalities suggesting that as 'terrorists' these individuals are spectacularly ineffective. Certainly, explosives and arson present potential danger to innocent passersby or firefighters who may be harmed unintentionally. (Baker [2001] cites one case from 1990 in which a bystander was injured when a bomb exploded beneath Bristol University psychologist Patrick Max Headley's car; although police blamed the ALF, no one claimed responsibility and ALF founder Ronnie Lee denied ALF involvement.) Nevertheless, determination to avoid harm certainly conflicts with deliberate murder as the 'central idea' of terrorism, as outlined above.

## Provocateurs

When emphasising violence, media ignore police use of provocateurs, although it is a well-known tactic. For example, one case in which an activist did participate in plans to harm someone was actually instigated by undercover agents hired by the ‘victim’ in a plot to portray activists as violent and dangerous. In 1988, Connecticut activist Fran Trutt was charged with attempted murder after trying to place a bomb near a parking spot used by Leon Hirsch, CEO of US Surgical Corporation, the producer of biomedical tools. The corporation was criticised for needless abuse to maintain sales of surgical staples:

The company used dogs (over one thousand a year) in training salespeople who demonstrated the use of the product to surgeons. The animals were destroyed after each session, and the corporation’s supplier, Quaker Kennels, had been cited for repeated violations of the Animal Welfare Act. Activists insisted there were other, better ways to demonstrate the product and that the training sessions with dogs were just a slick marketing ploy. (Rudacille 2000, p. 151)

Rudacille describes Trutt as a ‘near recluse’ with personal problems who was incited to violence by Mary Lou Sapone, one of several undercover agents hired by Hirsch to infiltrate animal rights groups and prod them to commit illegal activities. Sapone approached numerous activists, all of whom rejected her incitements. John Williams, Trutt’s attorney, said months before the bomb was planted:

the entire situation was reviewed at a meeting that included representatives of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Connecticut States Attorney’s office, the security director of US Surgical and at least one representative of Perceptions International . . . and the topic of the meeting was Fran Trutt. (Berlet 1991)

Williams stated:

agents of Perceptions International, working for US Surgical but posing as Trutt’s friends . . . suggested the bombing, paid for the purchase of the pipe bomb, and drove her to the US Surgical parking lot. When Trutt had second thoughts while on her way to the parking lot, she called a trusted friend, and was encouraged to proceed – that ‘friend’, too, was a private undercover agent from Perceptions International. (Berlet 1991)

A more recent case of entrapment is that of Eric McDavid, sentenced in May 2008 to nearly 20 years as an eco-terrorist conspiring to damage US government facilities. An FBI informant, ‘Anna’, was paid \$750,000 to implicate McDavid, Zachary Jensen, and Lauren Weiner (both of whom testified against McDavid in exchange for reduced sentences). Anna provided money, encouragement, and bomb-making instructions and materials while continually urging the reluctant conspirators to stick to their plans. Anna previously worked as a provocateur in the 2005 protests against the Organization of American States summit in Miami, recruiting students to block traffic so they would be arrested (Todd 2008).

In other cases, police officers simply lie or invent evidence. For example, in May 2007 charges against 14 activists who protested the Oxford Animal Lab were dropped when defence lawyers presented evidence that Thames Valley Police accidentally taped themselves plotting to manufacture evidence and ‘wage a dirty war’ (*Weekly Schnews* 2007).

When considering media emphasis on animal rights terrorists, it should be noted that alarms are circulated by the very organisations that profit from situations of increased fear by providing ‘intelligence’ and ‘security’. Individuals create careers by

presenting themselves as ‘experts’ on actions that can be defined as terrorism, even where no casualties or even property damage are involved. For example, in 2004, *The Times*’s ‘defence editor’ Michael Evans announced: ‘Animal rights extremists now pose one of the most serious threats to Britain’s economy because of rising intimidation of individual companies’. This assessment was based on a report from Aegis Defence Services, a private security company started by Tim Spicer, former CEO of Sandline International, notorious for mercenary operations in Sierra Leone and Papua New Guinea; Aegis itself obtained one of the Pentagon’s biggest security contracts in Iraq. Reproducing Aegis’s prediction that ‘animal rights extremism was going to become a growing threat to the British economy over the next 12 months’, Evans (2004) quoted former City banker Dominic Armstrong, director of research and intelligence for Aegis: ‘I suppose a terrorist attack in London might cause damage worth £16 billion, but with animal rights extremism we’re talking about potentially losing £16 billion of investment every year’, and noted the report’s assertion of ‘fascinating parallels between the economic agenda of al-Qaeda and animal rights extremist networks’. The ‘parallels’ remained unexplained: the important task was to link the name al-Qaeda with animal rights. The Fur Council of Canada employed the same technique to oppose improved anti-cruelty legislation (Sorenson 2003, pp. 394–395). No links exist between al-Qaeda and animal protectionists, but industry and media create them in order to demonise the latter.

Animal exploiters have direct interests in vilifying activists and while corporate websites and media warn about ‘violent’ attacks, efforts to portray activists as terrorists are not limited to discursive means. For example, Hunt Saboteurs Association (n.d.) website notes that in 1990, British hunt supporter John Newberry-Street claimed that hunt-saboteurs placed a nail-bomb under his Land Rover. Investigation revealed he had planted it himself to discredit activists. The same website includes descriptions and photographs of violence against activists by hunt supporters and hired thugs. Another example of illegal actions against activists comes from the Movement Support Network at New York’s Center for Constitutional Rights, which described hundreds of suspicious incidents including break-ins where files are searched but expensive equipment left untouched: ‘Suspicious point to an *ad-hoc* alliance of FBI agents and informants, other government investigators, far right vigilantes, and private security sleuths who trade information and justify their actions in the name of national security and fighting terrorism’ (Berlet 1991).

### Violence against activists

In contrast to representation of activists as violent terrorists, they are more commonly targets of violence. Many have been attacked and several have been killed. For example, the Hunt Saboteurs Association website documents assaults, extending over several decades including beatings, deliberate attempts to run down protestors with vehicles and horses, and death threats. When activists are killed, their deaths are described as accidents. For example, when hunt saboteur Mike Hill was killed by a truck driven by huntsman Allan Summersgill in 1991, Summersgill was not charged. When Jill Phipps was crushed under a livestock transporter loading veal calves at Baginton airport in 1995, police suggested she slipped or ‘deliberately’ fell under the vehicle (Honigsbaum 2005). Another case is that of 15-year-old Tom Worby killed by foxhunter Tony Ball, who drove his vehicle into a crowd of protestors in 1993, but was not charged. Other activists are said to have committed suicide in police custody. State police have killed activists in sabotage operations, as in the 1985 bombing of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in New Zealand, which killed photographer Fernando Pereira. Although two French agents, Alain Mafart

and Dominique Prieur, served brief sentences for manslaughter and arson, they were quickly released, given medals and thereafter they resumed their careers as heroes. Violence committed against animal and environmental activists far outweighs any actions by them (Helvarg 2004).

Environmentalists have been threatened, had their homes and offices burglarised and destroyed, been victims of arsons and bombings, had their children and families threatened, and several have been murdered. Helvarg (2004) says supporters of animal exploitation often invent violent actions by activists, citing fabrications by Kathleen Marquardt, founder of anti-animal group Putting People First (later merged with rightwing groups Putting Liberty First and then the American Policy Center). Helvarg notes the FBI readily joins industry in campaigns against 'ecoterror' but shows little interest in investigating crimes against activists or protecting them. A clear double standard exists despite the fact that acts committed against activists correspond more to the FBI's definition of terrorism than any they have committed themselves.

### **Cracking down on 'terrorists'**

Even when 'terrorism' is not invoked, the state protects industry with disproportionately harsh sentences. One example is the case of Wegmans' Egg Farm in Woolcott, New York. Activists from Rochester-based Compassionate Consumers entered Wegmans' Egg Farm three times during 2004. They filmed their rescue of 11 sick or dying hens (removed to a sanctuary) and released this as a DVD entitled 'Wegmans' Cruelty', indicating atrocious conditions there, with birds trapped in the wire of their cages or in manure pits, unable to obtain food or water. Wegmans' insisted on charging Adam Durand for 10 offences including felony burglary, criminal trespassing, and larceny. Although Durand had no criminal record and a jury acquitted him of all but the trespassing charges, Judge Dennis Kehoe imposed an unusually harsh sentence: six months in jail, \$1500 in fines, a year's probation and 100 hours community service. Durand's lawyers expressed surprise at such a sentence for a 'low-level offense'. Kehoe wrote a lengthy sentencing statement that closely matched statements submitted to the court by Wegmans' lawyer, stated his wish to order 'Wegmans' Cruelty' destroyed and expressed disappointment that he could find no legal justification for doing so. Dismissing arguments that Durand was exposing cruelty, Kehoe criticised him for not using legal means, even though Compassionate Consumers had tried to do so. Interviewed on 'Animal Voices' (2006b) radio, Compassionate Consumers' Ryan Merkley said they approached Wegmans requesting an inspection; Wegmans refused, citing 'biosafety' concerns. Merkley described Wegmans' 'farm' as a football field-sized shed in which hens are tightly crammed into stacked cages, those on the bottom exposed to faecal matter dropping from above, barely able to move and prevented from performing normal functions, forced to endure the 'overpowering stench' of ammonia-saturated air and decaying corpses, subjected to forced moulting and painful debeaking and deprived of food and water in the final period of their terrible lives. Compassionate Consumers' website (n.d.) compiles statements of scientific experts and veterinarians substantiating claims that 'standard practices in the egg industry cause unnecessary animal suffering'.

Stigmatising activists as terrorists allows further repression. Comparing activists to Al-Qaeda bombers, animal exploitation industries encourage police repression. Police themselves exaggerate threats to secure their own funding. For example, Britain's National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit (NETCU) justified its formation by the need to combat animal rights terrorism ('We support the business and academic sectors,

providing a centralised source of information, advice, guidance and liaison on strategies to withstand domestic extremist attacks' [NETCU n.d.]); facing sharply declining activism following repression legitimised by the Serious Organized Crime and Police Act, which essentially prohibits protests at vivisection laboratories, police needed new threats. Public outcry forced the *Observer* (Pritchard 2008) to withdraw a story concerning NETCU's investigation of Earth First!; citing the eco-movement's statement that reducing the human population by four-fifths would protect the planet, NETCU warned, without evidence: a "lone maverick" eco-extremist may attempt a terrorist attack aimed at killing large numbers of Britons'.

Testifying to the US Congress, Jarboe (2002), head of the FBI's Counter-Terrorism Division called the ALF and ELF 'a serious terrorist threat' comparable to international terrorism. FBI Deputy Assistant Director Lewis (2005) told a US Senate Committee: 'One of today's most serious domestic terrorism threats come from special interest extremist movements such as the . . . ALF, the Earth Liberation Front . . . , and Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign'. Senator James Inhofe, Chairman of the Environment and Public Works, endorsed such claims and labelled the activists as dangerous terrorists. This propaganda was instrumental in the 2006 passage of the AETA, designed to criminalise any 'interfer[ence] with operations of an animal enterprise', (despite the fact that state and federal laws already protected those industries).

Post-9/11 rhetoric of 'war on terror' provided the rationale for the 2001 and 2006 PATRIOT Acts, which created the federal crime of 'domestic terrorism', and the 2006 Military Commissions Act. Corporations eagerly seized the rhetoric of terrorism as a tool against activists and promoted legislation inflating non-violent actions that interfere with profits of animal exploitation industries into 'terrorism'. In 2006, the US Department of Homeland Security called animal activists a top terrorist threat and the AETA extended the 1992 Animal Enterprises Protection Act (AEPA), imposing harsher penalties for a wider range of activities. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), National Lawyers' Guild, New York City Bar Association, and others protested that the legislation's broad terms would criminalise actions such as boycotts, demonstrations, leaflet campaigns, and undercover investigations as terrorism and deter whistleblowers from exposing cruelty by animal exploitation industries because such actions would cause economic damage or loss. Essentially, the legislation undermines advocacy on behalf of animals. Under the AETA's forerunner, the AEPA, charges of animal enterprise terrorism were brought against activists who exposed Huntingdon Life Sciences. Activists received heavy sentences for organising demonstrations and operating a website featuring vivisectionists' names and addresses. The AETA seemed tailor-made for industries eager to brand critics 'terrorists' and to marginalise dissent by making critics fearful that even peaceful, legal activism would land them in prison for 'interfer[ing] with' those industries. The power of 'terrorism' rhetoric makes it a useful mechanism of repression against those who challenge corporate power and profits.

Since the animal rights movement is marginalised and even many otherwise progressive groups do not support it, targeting it provided a convenient mechanism by which to introduce repressive legislation. Among such is H.R. 1955 – The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007, approved by the US House of Representatives and sent to the Senate Homeland Security Subcommittee as S.1959. The Act mandated a 'National Commission on the prevention of violent radicalization and ideologically based violence' and a university-based 'Center for Excellence' to investigate 'causes of violent radicalization, homegrown terrorism and ideologically-based violence'. Homegrown terrorism is defined as 'use, planned use, or threatened use, of force or violence by a

group or individual born, raised, or based and operating' in the United States for 'political or social objectives'. Noting that the Act concerns 'planned' or 'threatened' actions, Ohio Congressman and former presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich labelled it the 'Thought Police' bill (Lee 2007). The Center for Constitutional Rights called it 'criminalization of protest' suggesting that actions such as Rosa Parks' 1955 violation of Alabama's segregationist laws could be considered 'terrorism' under the proposed Act. Muslims and Arabs feared 'preventive detention' similar to internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II. However, animal activists have been among the principal targets and animal exploitation industries and their PR flaks who promoted the AETA worked to link animal advocacy with terrorism.

Distracting resources from more serious threats, the AETA labels animal advocates 'terrorists', denying them normal legal protection. Perceiving a Green Scare comparable to the 1950s Red Scare, many fear the Act's broad language will transform other types of dissent and civil disobedience into 'terrorism'. This will have a chilling effect on free speech and on legitimate investigations of animal exploitation industries. Under 'enhanced sentencing' provisions for actions labelled terrorism, penalties for crimes that would normally carry relatively short sentences are harsher. Courts are willing to impose them, demonstrated by the case of the SHAC 7, activists engaged in the SHAC campaign against Huntingdon Life Sciences. Simply for operating a website encouraging protests, activists received lengthy prison sentences.

Propaganda campaigns against activists are reminiscent of the 1950s Red Scare. Based on FBI files obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, the ACLU (2005) said 'the FBI is using counterterrorism resources to monitor and infiltrate domestic political organizations that criticize business interests and government policies, despite a lack of evidence that the groups are engaging in or supporting violent action'. Describing efforts to portray legal activities of groups, such as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Greenpeace and PETA as 'domestic terrorism', the ACLU said the FBI was attempting to expand this term to include individuals and organisations engaged in lawful demonstrations and civil disobedience. Citing terrorism, the FBI conducted

ongoing surveillance of PETA-related meetings and activities, including a 'Vegan Community Project' event at the University of Indiana during which the group distributed vegetarian starter kits to students and faculty, an animal rights conference in Washington, DC that was open to the public, and a planned protest of Cindy Crawford's decision to become a llama fur spokesperson.

Arresting animal activists provides easily achieved victories in the ostensible War on Terror. However, ACLU staff attorney Ben Wizner advised the FBI to investigate 'real terrorists' rather than policing ideas: 'Americans shouldn't have to fear that by protesting the treatment of animals or participating in non-violent civil disobedience, they will be branded as "eco-terrorists" in FBI records'. The ACLU found

aggressive attempts by the FBI to link PETA, Greenpeace and other mainstream organizations to activists associated with the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) or Earth Liberation Front (ELF) . . . PETA, in particular, is repeatedly and falsely singled out as a 'front' for militant organizations although in at least one document released today the FBI appears to acknowledge that it has no evidence to back up such assertions.

Just as 'narco-terrorism' was used to sell the War on Drugs and justify increased militarisation and policing and programs such as the Pentagon's Threat And Local



Observation Notice investigated Quakers and peace activists, the invented fears of ‘animal rights terrorism’ serves to expand state power, erode civil rights, criminalise dissent and justify intensified surveillance. Repression of activists in the United States and UK provides a model for repression elsewhere. For example, in 2008 Austrian police raided offices and homes of activists associated with Verein Gegen Tierfabriken (Association Against Animal Factories), using Section 278a of the Criminal Code, which concerns organised crime, to charge activists as members of a vast conspiracy, despite lack of evidence and Amnesty International’s identification of a string of human rights violations by the Austrian government. In the service of private profits, states use the culture of fear to brand dissidents as ‘terrorists’ and repress opposition.

## Conclusion

In summary, images and realities of animal activism are rather different. Actual violence of animal exploitation is ignored while actions to rescue animals are portrayed as terrorism. In contrast to images promoted by the mainstream media and industry, most activists are non-violent; prominent intellectuals and theorists consistently condemn violence as morally wrong and strategically counterproductive; activists are more often victims rather than perpetrators of violence; acts attributed to activists are disclaimed by them; and among the very rare cases of violence are the ones instigated and engineered by undercover agents hired by animal exploitation industries working in collusion with the state. Animal rights activism does not correspond to usual understandings of ‘terrorism’. Nevertheless, animal exploitation industries, corporate lobbyists, and public relations agencies, corporate media, and police misrepresent activists’ goals and tactics to stigmatise them as terrorists who endanger Western civilisation. Such distortions helped create legislation that has serious implications for expression of dissent. Construction of animal protectionists as terrorists is both a symptom of, and a contributing factor to, a culture of fear. Such constructions distract attention both from the proper study of terrorism and from serious consideration of the ‘most central philosophical issue of our time’.

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