

# Power and Othering

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I thank Christina Fredengren for this productive discussion of how to theorize relations between humans and other animals, which raises a number of important issues. In recent years we have seen the advent of various approaches – multispecies ethnography/archaeology, posthumanism, entanglement, actor-network theory, flat ontologies, symmetrical archaeology, and others – that seek to decenter humans in their interactions with other entities. As Fredengren points out, this is easier said than done, and often when we attempt to put humans and other animals on the same plane, humans remain implicitly centered. We still mostly consider other species only in relation to their interactions with humans, and it concerns me that the more implicit the centering of humans, the less we acknowledge the power relations that Fredengren insists we must confront. I am heartened to see considerations of power being brought to bear on these ‘flat’ approaches (e.g. Fowles 2016; Grossman & Paulette 2020; Van Dyke 2021). The relations among entities that we study must include power relations; acknowledging animal agency does not mean that they are equal partners in most situations. Leaving power out of the analysis always benefits the powerful.

Fredengren’s critique of categorical thinking is well taken, although this, too, is difficult to abandon completely (how can we think without categories?), as seen in the keynote itself, where taxonomic categories such as sheep or Pitted Ware Culture are deployed. In the end we need to recognize that categories always impose somewhat arbitrary boundaries but give us a place to start – and make phenomena that challenge or cross those boundaries particularly striking. There has always been a particular ambiguity in the conjunction of the terms ‘human’ and ‘animal’. Humans, of

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course, are animals, but the two terms are often opposed, thereby implicitly removing humans from nature. There have been assorted attempts at different terminologies to solve this problem. I agree with Fredengren that ‘humans and non-human animals’ is not the best solution, as it retains the binary distinction. However, I think the issue here is not so much separating humans, as we can also separate cats or ravens from the mass of animal taxa when focusing on them, but rather the lumping of all other taxa in a shared non-humanity that renders humans a uniquely separate species. ‘More-than-human’ does not seem to me much of an improvement in this respect. Why not humans/cats/ravens and other animals (or other species, other mammals, other vertebrates, other entities as appropriate)? That is, it seems preferable to include humans in these groupings, rather than to find alternative ways to oppose humans and other beings. While Fredengren sees categorization as a way of othering, it is also a way of dealing with the world, and only becomes othering when categories are opposed to the self.

Fredengren and others’ emphasis on the non-integrity of human (cat, raven...) bodies in light of our dawning understanding of microbiomes leads me to ponder the significance of scale in bodily matters. For the members of my microbiome, I am the habitat for their ecology – and of course the influences, alterations, and dependencies go both ways. At a mammalian scale, we experience ourselves as autonomous creatures interacting with and influencing each other and our landscape. At a planetary scale, we are Gaia’s microbiome. So perhaps, as with other archaeological matters, there are different questions appropriate to these scales, and the challenge is to link them.

I find Fredengren’s discussion of killability particularly productive, and not only for sacrifice. For instance, for many people today, if an entity is regarded as a person, it is not killable; but in other ontologies this may not be the case (Nadasdy 2007; Willerslev 2007). In my own work, I have given much thought to the changing relations of cattle and humans as herding began in the Neolithic Near East (Russell in press). Wild cattle (aurochs) carried a strong symbolic power, particularly in central Anatolia (Twiss & Russell 2009). As in the Scandinavian bog sacrifices, there are many parallels in the treatment and placement of human and animal bodies in houses at Çatalhöyük (Russell et al. 2009). I have argued that the residents of Çatalhöyük and other central Anatolians considered aurochs to be their kin and essential to the continuation of human society. I suggest this is the reason that central Anatolians resisted the adoption of domestic cattle (although they herded sheep and goats) for several hundred years; already herded to the east when Çatalhöyük was founded, domestic cattle skip over central Anatolia and actually reach western Anatolia first (Arbuckle et al. 2014). It may have been unthinkable to own and control cattle. Eventually,

as part of a complex of apparently rather contentious social changes, domestic cattle were adopted on a small scale in the later periods of Çatalhöyük and at other contemporary central Anatolian sites. This was clearly an important change in the lives of both cattle and humans. However, both wild and domestic cattle were killable, and arguably domestic cattle were somewhat less so given the need to protect the breeding stock and their value as property. But domestic cattle were not treated as persons, or at least not as powerful persons on a par with humans. And, of course, their movements and breeding were constrained, and some of their milk was stolen (Pitter et al. 2013). So although killability is one kind of othering, there are other forms of othering and of violence.

Were there any animals that were not killable for the humans at Çatalhöyük? Fredengren's foregrounding of killability sent me back to the evidence for interactions with leopards. Leopards were also power animals in the Near Eastern Neolithic and especially in central Anatolia. Eating or bringing their bodies into the settlement at Çatalhöyük seems to have been strongly tabooed throughout the occupation. Of more than a million bones recorded, only one is from a leopard, and that is a pierced claw in a human burial – the kind of special treatment of a selected body part that indicates a total taboo (Politis & Saunders 2002). However, leopard depictions in the earlier levels are only of living animals (Mellaart 1964, 1966), while depictions from the periods when domestic cattle are herded are mostly of skins, or of humans interacting with and perhaps controlling leopards (Russell & Meece 2006), and the claw is also from these levels. I am not sure how or if the cattle and leopards are related, but the renegotiation of relations between humans and other animals (and also among humans) of this time seems to have made leopards killable.

I look forward to exploring further these questions of othering and killability across species lines (Neolithic dogs are another interesting case), and to considering circumstances that modulate them within species as Fredengren suggests. She has given us a lot to think with.

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