Seeking sanctuary: Creating a new utopia on a donkey farm

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Abstract

A recent uptick in international trade in donkey hides has sparked intense concern among social activists. Several campaigns have been launched in attempts to protect donkeys and to ensure their well-being in response to what various groups have labelled a "crisis". As a result, donkeys have increasingly been given homes in animal sanctuaries that focus specifically on the rescue and rehabilitation of farm animals. This article explores the ways in which the people who run one such sanctuary in Pretoria, South Africa, try to create order through praxis. We argue that the sanctuary can be understood as an attempt by its directors, managers, and volunteers to create a model of what they consider the ideal order of humans' relationships with animals. Central to this argument are discussions around interlocutors' beliefs about veganism, animal rights, their focus on animals as individuals, and the historical context of donkeys in South Africa. Data were collected by way of ethnographic observation over an eighteen-month period, as well as through interviews and analysis of textual sources.

Keywords: donkeys, cosmology, social order, veganism, morality, human-animal relationships, anthrozoology

Introduction

Donkeys as a species have populated and continue to populate our stories in a variety of ways: as friends and companions, as humble creatures people pity or revere, as fools people mock, or as their master's saving grace. In an important sense, *Equus asinus* has helped and continues to help humans make sense of and write their own (hi)stories. Recently, sections of the mainstream media in South Africa and other countries have begun to highlight a "crisis" facing donkeys (Leithead, 2017). The animals have also started trending on social media platforms, where mostly white middle-class individuals try to raise money or support initiatives to protect them or simply lament their predicament. The perceived threat to donkeys' existence/well-being comes mainly from poaching and the illicit trade in donkey hides primarily for use in a traditional Chinese remedy, ejiao.[1] In this way, donkeys have come to act as a metaphor for expressing collective anxieties and ideas around what the good and just society might look like.

This article is based on an ethnographic account of an organisation that has made it its mission to respond to what it regards as the crisis of survival for donkeys in South Africa.[2] Suffice it to say here that Raine's Farm Sanctuary,[3] where fieldwork was conducted between October 2018 and June 2019,[4] is located on the outskirts of Pretoria and focuses on the rescue, rehabilitation, and provision of a permanent home for farm animals perceived to have outlasted their usefulness. It also caters for animals rescued from abuse and neglect and

others that have escaped their confinement or were found by chance. Donkeys, many of whom have been rescued from the hide trade, constitute a large proportion of the resident animal population at Raine's. The people involved with Raine's are deeply concerned with the welfare of these donkeys and their status in the country.

Raine's Farm Sanctuary is a registered public benefit organisation (PBO) and non-profit organisation (NPO). The sanctuary was inspired by, and founded in the name of, the late Raine Liesch by his family. An architect and property developer by trade, Liesch had been vegetarian for most of his life and later became vegan. Spearheaded by one of Raine's daughters, the family used money Liesch had left in his will to build infrastructure for the animals on the farm and to cover their initial running costs.[5]

The humans at the sanctuary fit into four broad categories, based on their positions and the division of labour at the sanctuary. The groups are the board, the managers, the labourers (or grooms) and the volunteers. In many ways, the sanctuary is a female-dominated space. The managers and some key members of the board of directors are women. So too are many of the volunteers and visitors. Most are white South African women, with a mix of Afrikaans and English being spoken. However, all the grooms are black men. Their home languages are isiZulu and Setswana. The managers and owners belong to the middle classes and the board members to the upper-middle classes and higher. Most of the visitors and volunteers are also middle and upper-middle class. The grooms are from the working classes. These classifications differ broadly depending on the context and the person assessing them. In this case, we relied on the ways in which interlocutors identify themselves and others around them.

The sanctuary takes care of animals conventionally classified as 'farm' animals. There are animals of various species, but donkeys are present in the greatest numbers. There are seven donkeys at the sanctuary, three jennies and four jacks. Individuals sometimes bring in animals that they had found or 'rescued', while other rescues are transferred from welfare organisations such as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). But the sanctuary itself does not have the authority to seize any animals.

The sanctuary collects money from visitors in the form of donations, sales of branded merchandise and vegan products, as well as tickets to events. The board and managers use these moneys to cover running expenses that include the payment of staff, the purchase of animal feed, and costs related to maintenance and building new infrastructure.

In the pages that follow, we analyse the ways in which the people involved with Raine's create order through their practices, social interactions, and through the organization of the sanctuary. We argue that they attempt to make the natural world more culturally and socially acceptable through these actions. In doing so, they both express and reify their cosmology by trying to create a utopian microcosm that represents their ideals. The sanctuary therefore represents a model of their worldview. To substantiate this argument, we discuss the basis of their social order, the status of the individual actors, and how they try to create order through rules and spatial representation.

The basis of Raine's cosmology and social order

In his study of social life in a village in South Africa's Transkei, Heinz Kuckertz (1990, p. 113-18) argued that homesteads in Caguba were symbolic of people's cosmology, which he

defined as a "system of thought explaining the world, its origins and structure, and its ultimate principles". Homesteads represented sites at and through which order was constituted from the ground up. The homestead therefore stood central to understanding Caguban society. To paraphrase Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 5), it formed an integral part of the "webs of significance" people spun around themselves. According to Kuckertz (1990, p. 273):

> Social life and social order are created through the actions and interactions of individuals. Thus, individuality appears again in the very symbolizing of universality. How is this possible? The answer is that the homestead, as an ideal spatial organization, is a symbolic representation of the world and its order, in which the living and the dead, kinspeople and non-kinspeople, seniors and juniors, men and women share.

A main argument in this article is that Raine's, much like Kuckertz's homestead, constituted a "symbolic representation of the world and its order" that allowed interlocutors to act upon the world in an agentive manner. Interlocutors' primary concern was the welfare of animals. They believed animals to be persons who should be treated as such and accorded equal status with all other persons. These people felt it their moral imperative to attempt to protect donkeys' and other animals' welfare. They did so primarily through the creation of a small-scale representation of the world as they thought it should be.

Interlocutors' beliefs about the nature of animals and their relationships with humans formed a pivotal point in their worldview. It was the primary motivation for their change to veganism, and influenced their relationships, diets and behaviour. It also played a significant

part in shaping their ideas around morality. Their convictions hold some resemblance to a few of the commandments set down by the group in *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945, p. 21): "Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend … No animal shall kill any other animal. All animals are equal." However, some animals were more equal than others. In the context of the sanctuary, the board of directors held the most overall authority. They could decide whether to take in an animal or not, how money was spent, and when to appoint new grooms, among other things. Below them were the managers who were granted almost as much power by proxy. Due to their proximity to the sanctuary, it was more practical to let them handle most of the daily decisions. The different types of volunteers and grooms were subject to their authority and decisions, both in terms of their roles as grooms and what constituted acceptable behaviour at the sanctuary. It is a complex task placing the animals in this hierarchy. The number one rule at Raine's was that the welfare of the animals came first. Nicole even insisted that "if five people show up at the gate today and say they would each pay R5000 (around U$350) to pet Echo, but he was not up to it that day, we would say no way". The animals displayed a degree of agency and did shape the sanctuary through their interactions with others and their environment. But their actions were nonetheless constrained by their caretakers and the same environment that the humans had built. However, they were held in higher regard than all the other actors who were involved with the sanctuary and held the greatest symbolic and material significance. Without them, there would be no sanctuary.

In early conversations we speculated that interlocutors' motivations might be linked to issues of citizenship. As primarily white middle-class individuals, we anticipated that involvement with the sanctuary provided a way to reassert and justify their presence and welfare in the country. Our thinking was influenced by Suzuki's (2017, p. 13) argument that wildlife production and protection in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland province were "inextricable

from ideas about race, identity and difference". She found that "people made continual references to nature based on the assumption that the ability to manage the environment was constitutive of whiteness itself" and that nature was used physically and metaphorically to establish belonging. A similar argument had previously been made by Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) regarding reactions to the 'alien' flora in the Western Cape following a series of devastating bush fires. However, the evidence gathered during fieldwork did not overtly support such an argument. This is not to say issues of race did not have an impact on the situation (longer-term research might reveal more in this regard). Interlocutors' roles were divided along lines of race, class and gender. The volunteers and managers were mostly white middle-class women while the grooms were black working-class men. But these differences were never explicitly discussed, mentioned, or even alluded to during research. Both during fieldwork and data analysis, it became clear that interlocutors' activism pointed to their cosmology and specifically to their veganism. The question that mattered most was: are you vegan or not? This is not to suggest that interlocutors were free from other forms of bias and social prejudice, but rather that at Raine's attempts were made to push these to the side. What distinguished one person from another most significantly was whether they adhered to the patterns of eating, behaviour, and beliefs that people at the sanctuary referred to as veganism.[6]

This pattern repeated itself over the course of fieldwork and could be observed in the ways vegan interlocutors treated guests, volunteers, and grooms who did not follow vegan lifestyles. Behind their backs, people who consumed animal products were called 'ignorant', 'cruel', 'inhumane', 'dangerous', 'bad' and even 'murderers'. They simply did not fit into the ideal social order. Typically, so-called 'meat-eaters' were treated with a sense of mistrust (when handling eggs, for example). What is more, nonvegan volunteers who did not display

the appropriate level of affection to animals were micromanaged while vegan volunteers were given free rein to move around the animals and the sanctuary. The more someone treated animals as though they were persons, the higher that individual's standing at Raine's. Here the dominant prejudice was against nonvegans.[7]

Clearly, not everyone at the sanctuary held uniform views regarding veganism, donkeys and other animals, but there were some commonly shared understandings. Or at least, there were shared sets of behaviour and conduct. Some of the grooms, volunteers, and guests might have eaten meat in their own time. However, at the sanctuary they were expected to treat animals with a certain level of respect. Humans were only welcome if they did not mistreat animals, did not speak of them as commodities, did not discuss eating them or members of their species, and outwardly cared for their well-being. These social canons were rarely breached. Through the sanctuary, interlocutors attempted to influence the dominant culture by shaping and conditioning social and material lived experiences.

Social order in disorder

Each day at the sanctuary is rung in with a cacophony. The grooms arrive at the barn at around 05:30, winter or summer, and put the show on the road by preparing the sanctuary for the day. When they open the doors, they are greeted by grunts and squeals and braying, as each animal tries to make their voice heard in eager anticipation of food. It is deafening. Animals are fed and watered by grooms who rush around doling food out as quickly as possible to prevent their charges from getting too rowdy. Soon after, a manager arrives to give out orders. This typically involves the rather complicated task of deciding which animals will go where for the day. The decision is influenced by a range of factors, such as which

donkey is being picked on by the others and which chicken has not stretched their legs in a while. Daily life at the sanctuary runs according to a strict routine, which is mapped out on a roster on the barn wall. There are some differences from day to day, most often due to animals falling ill and needing extra attention, but the grooms and managers try to stick to the general flow of things. According to the managers, the routine helps the animals feel secure. While each animal eats its fill, the grooms go to inspect the outdoor pens to make sure they are ready, whereafter the animals are corralled one by one. It appears chaotic at first, but over time patterns and order in the 'disorder' become apparent. All the animals know more or less where to go and what to do, although early morning escapes are common.

When all the animals are settled, grooms go about cleaning the stables. They then proceed with all the other tasks of the day like moving food and supplies while the animals are usually free to roam their pens, eat and interact with one another. Volunteers are usually told to wash and brush the animals; a task which is far less laborious but does involve some chasing. The managers check up on all the animals several times throughout the day and just 'hang out' with them. The rest of their time is split between delegating tasks, taking care of sick animals, organizing the café, arranging events and so on. By three o'clock, the grooms begin preparing to bring the animals in again. Their water troughs and feed bags or troughs are filled again. The doors in the barn are opened one at a time to let specific occupants in. There is a wood-carved nameplate for each resident on their stable door. The pigs usually come in first and so they are the first to take up the chorus. As the groups of animals enter, the din rises. And once again the pigs and donkeys seem to be competing to see who is the loudest. The donkeys and horses each have a dedicated groom. They are their main handlers and take care of their individual needs. They brush them down and check their hooves. And at least twice a week the donkeys receive a similar treatment before they are all settled in for

the night. This takes at least an hour and usually closer to two. The managers and grooms then finish off any tasks that are left before checking the animals one last time and closing the barn for the day. This is repeated day after day, every day of the year, even on weekends and public holidays. Keeping the sanctuary running is a full-time job which keeps the grooms on their feet from dawn to dusk.

Viewed from the perspective of practice and symbolic anthropology, it can be argued that the social interactions that comprise the process of the sanctuary's "constitution and its existence over a limited period of time" (Kuckertz 1990, p. 21) allowed for the enactment and re-enactment of basic cosmological concepts. Through cooperation, interlocutors made the sanctuary into a place that represents their worldview. By agreeing among themselves that the interests of the animals came first, by deferring to the authority of the managers and board, and by adhering to the schedule and following the rules, the volunteers and grooms contributed to the creation of an 'ideal' social order.

Overton and Hamilakis (2014) argue that the consumption and use of animals are more than just economic strategies for survival and existence. Instead, they serve as processes that reaffirm and rework the relationships connecting humans, animals, activities and places within the landscape. Interlocutors' inner and outer worlds were tied together by the ideology of veganism and thus by the act of eating or not eating, and more broadly by their real or imagined relationships with the donkeys and the other animals at the sanctuary. As such, the identities of actors at the sanctuary were constructed by their interactions and connections with one another.

Although there were disagreements at the sanctuary, these were uncommon/infrequent. A shared/common understanding of the sanctuary's mission provided a frame of reference that shaped a field of possible choices in which actors made decisions. Not all the actors agreed on everything, but the sanctuary was organized in such a way that differences of opinion were often minimized or hidden from plain view by order of those in authority such as the board of directors and managers. For instance, workers and volunteers were asked not to bring any animal products onto the premises. When grooms did so, they ate behind the walls of their living compound. Unity at the sanctuary was thus the result of agreements between individuals even though this was not necessarily on an equal footing, as the managers could dictate much of the volunteers' and grooms' behaviour. The play could not take place if the actors did not play their respective parts. The donkeys had to be agreeable, smart, relatively obedient yet interesting. Moreover, the humans had to be benevolent, moral and just.

The language employed at Raine's made for critical distinctions. Animals were, for example, confined to "pens" and "stables", never to "cages". One morning, two of the managers, Nicole and Kayleigh, were searching for a temporary way to contain a particularly aggressive rooster, who had been injured by another rooster in a recent conflict, while he healed. They found a metal cage in a storage room and compared its merits with those of a wooden alternative. The metal container seemed like the better option because a chicken could fit through the gaps in the wooden container. As a result, Kayleigh exclaimed: "I know, but I just do not like it, it's a cage. I hate that word!" Nicole responded, "Yes I know, but the other one is too. I guess it's just made of wood." These minor distinctions often made for big differences. Significantly, labourers were called "grooms". The term puts an emphasis on caretaking and serving and denotes the keeping of animals by elites for recreational purposes,

not explicitly for work or producing food. The use of this word also places emphasis on the relatively subservient role of the grooms in relation to managers and the animals at the sanctuary. A similar strategy is evident in the language used to discuss the "industry" versus their own endeavours. In fact, the use of the word "groom" helped to further distance the sanctuary from the "industry" as it served to mask the capitalistic connotations of the word "labourer". In their view, the "industry" was based on exploiting animals in the name of profits, wages and greed. With a certain lingo, they therefore further distinguished themselves as being markedly different from the industry.

Despite efforts to demarcate the sanctuary through language and rules that governed (inter)actions within its boundaries, Raine's was not an island entirely of itself. The sanctuary was embedded in a web of interactions with the outside world. Although it seemingly operated independently, Raine's could not exist without such ties, because financial support from outsiders (including contributions from meat-eaters) kept the sanctuary afloat. The sanctuary's café was usually full over weekends and there was a steady flow of visitors. To attract visitors and donor support, Raine's offered "kisses and cuddles" with "fluffy bums" like India (one of the donkeys). Events were also held during which animals 'drew' raffle tickets by picking buckets of carrots to eat from. The guests (meat-eaters, vegetarians and vegans alike) were clearly amused and, in a way, enchanted by these displays.[8] According to Morris (1999, p. 204), older people are especially likely to support efforts aimed at the preservation and conservation of such animals, because they are "about to become personally extinct and so employ rare animals as symbols of [their] own impending doom." This seems to hold true at Raine's, where older guests made substantial contributions. Visitors to the sanctuary were also labelled "heroes" if they donated towards Raine's conservation and

preservation efforts, and thus made to feel as though they were good people who contributed to a good cause – a morally appealing image (see: Fusari, 2017).

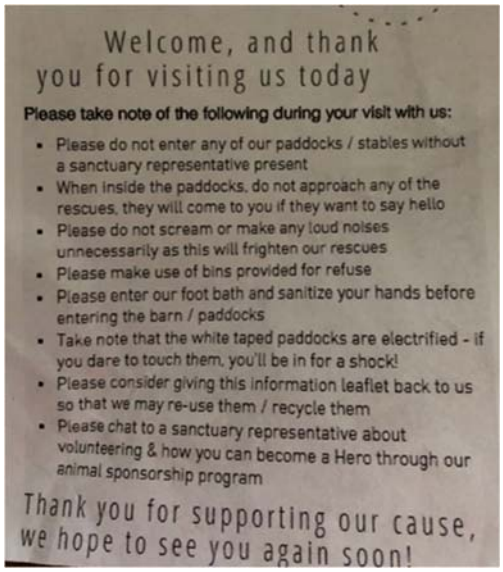
Raine's owed its existence to a particular set of social interactions, the nature of which allowed for the reification of the idealised worldview of the people involved with the sanctuary. This revolved around specific ideas about humans' relationship with animals and the consumption of animals, and was (re)enacted through cooperation, agreement, adherence to rules and schedules and through the employment of a shared language/lingo. Yet Raine's was not entirely disconnected from the outside world against which it was defined. This interconnection was most evident in economics. The sanctuary was reliant on paying customers and on outside donations for its survival. Interactions with the outside world were therefore tailored to make a necessary income and to attract visitors to Raine's to its cause.

Sticking to the rules

Interactions at Raine's allowed for the expression of an idealised social order. The layout of the sanctuary and the rules/regulations that guided the behaviour of individuals on the premises similarly reified interlocutors' sense of order through practice/s. Order was established and maintained through several different measures, including rules that governed people's behaviour, electric wires, other types of fencing, access control and the organisation of the pens.

At the outset of fieldwork, rules were verbally communicated to guests during announcements at events or when greeting visitors to the sanctuary. But as the number of visitors increased, rules were formalised and printed on pamphlets which were distributed to

visitors upon arrival at the sanctuary. These written documents held more authoritative weight than their verbal counterparts. Figure 1 below shows one version of Raine's rules.



Welcome, and thank you for visiting us today

Please take note of the following during your visit with us:

- Please do not enter any of our paddocks / stables without a sanctuary representative present
- When inside the paddocks, do not approach any of the rescues, they will come to you if they want to say hello
- Please do not scream or make any loud noises unnecessarily as this will frighten our rescues
- Please make use of bins provided for refuse
- Please enter our foot bath and sanitize your hands before entering the barn / paddocks
- Take note that the white taped paddocks are electrified - if you dare to touch them, you'll be in for a shock!
- Please consider giving this information leaflet back to us so that we may re-use them / recycle them
- Please chat to a sanctuary representative about volunteering & how you can become a Hero through our animal sponsorship program

Thank you for supporting our cause, we hope to see you again soon!

Figure 1: Rule leaflet, Raine's Farm sanctuary, 2018

Some of these rules were also written into grooms' contracts. Other guidelines were not formalised in this way, such as requests that visitors not bring any animal products onto the grounds. However, these seemed to be adhered to just as strictly and guidelines were rarely breached. Raine's rules reflect several key themes. They are those of the personhood and agency of animals, animal welfare, cleanliness, purity and pollution, and maintaining order.

A rule that had great impact was that no more animals would be admitted than could be cared for to the same degree as those housed at the sanctuary at any point in time. By the end of fieldwork, the board and managers felt that the sanctuary had reached full capacity. Financially, Raine's barely broke even, and they did not want to have to lessen the level of care they could afford to provide to each animal. Exceptions were only made when animals had no other place to go and would not drain the sanctuary's resources too much, such as the

adoption of a pair of rabbits. However, Nicole stressed that limited financial resources were not the only motivation. Another factor, according to her, was that each animal could not be given the amount of attention it 'deserved' if Raine's accepted too many animals. Her concern over time as a resource was as much about time spent on regular caretaking activities as it was about more 'social' endeavours like simply spending time with animals, talking with them and petting them.

Vegans are frequently confronted with questions about what they expect to happen to farm animals if they were no longer used in the production of food and other products. If they are no longer bred for 'harvest', these species would most probably die out as the animals would likely not be able to survive on their own (Levy, 2018). At Raine's, managers and volunteers agreed that no species of farm animal should increase in numbers, neither at the sanctuary nor on a global level, and that species should rather die out than continue an "unnatural and cruel existence." They believed that animals in the "industry" have little to no quality of life and that their biology has been altered so as to reduce their lifespans considerably. These animals are "bred to die" and slaughtered at an unusually young age. For example, chickens have a natural life span of about ten years, but modern broilers are killed at around six weeks, and most commercial breeds have genetic vulnerabilities that mean that they are unlikely to survive much longer even if given a chance (Leroy & Praet, 2017, p. 72). As such, the ways in which animals die, their age at death and the reasons for their dying serve as an important measure of animals' well-being at Raine's. At Raine's deaths are treated as qualitatively different. Each animal's passing is grieved and marked with an informal funeral as well as being announced on the sanctuary's social media. Interlocutors viewed being brought to life only to die in the "industry" as the worst way to go. The managers and volunteers believed that this is not a life worth living.

This viewpoint affected the regulation of individual animals at the sanctuary. All animals that could be, were sterilized. Some arrived at the sanctuary already sterilized, but the rest were operated on soon after arrival. Animals that could not be sterilized, such as chickens, were separated according to sex. In the case of donkeys, sterilization apparently rendered them more docile. Gallion (2010), for example, notes that jacks (intact male donkeys) are "hormonal time bombs" that can be "deadly and dangerous" animals when they are attracted to a jenny or perceive a threat. Sterilization expresses the absolute power humans wield over animals. Moreover, it is a clear contradiction of interlocutors' insistence that donkeys' lives must be natural for them to be happy. Rules regarding the sterilization of animals at Raine's, then, seem to have constituted a way to make the natural culturally acceptable and to make the situation more comfortable for the humans involved.

Spatial representation

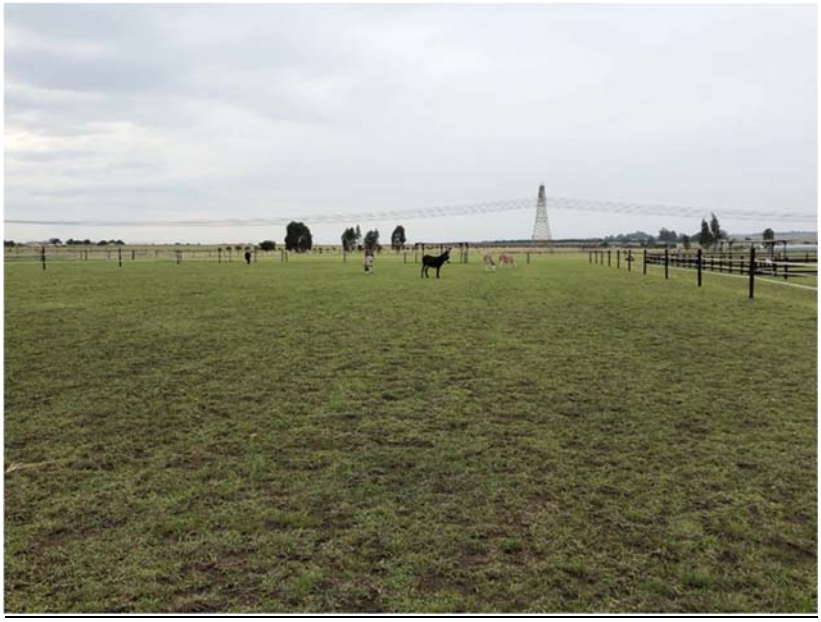


Figure 2: The spacious donkey pen. Raine's Farm Sanctuary, 2019. Copyright Anna James.

Many rules at Raine's pertained to the way people shaped the environment to reflect their cosmology. Kuckertz (1990) argues that order was similarly constructed and represented in Caguba through the observance of rules in daily life and through rituals. Morris (2000, p. 43) agrees that "cultural representations are embedded in the practical constitution of everyday life, both social and material". A great deal of Raine's rules applied to the physical layout of the sanctuary and to how people interacted with and moved through it. In this way, interlocutors' cosmology was constantly reified and reinforced. The sanctuary acted as a 'homestead' for its animal residents and, in many ways, for the people involved. Interlocutors' conceptions of veganism extended to the physical environment; concerned as they were with creating an "animal-friendly" environment that offers safety (see Figure 2 above). This means that they needed to keep the animals protected from potential threats from the outside whether these were real or imagined.

The use of the word 'sanctuary' to describe the institution is significant. Initially, the word was used in religious settings to refer to a sacred place where people could find protection and immunity from persecution (Fusari, 2017, p. 149). From the nineteenth century, however, it was increasingly used to describe wildlife conservation sites. Fusari (2017) suggests that the term is often used by organizations such as zoos to legitimatise captivity now that the practice is often seen as ethically problematic. She notes that animals in welfare-based and non-profit sanctuaries often enjoy much more freedom than those kept in zoos, while the intentions underlying their confinement in sanctuaries are also different. But "different intentions do not ensure different effects, and the principal differences between zoos and sanctuaries may not be obvious or meaningful to casual visitors, especially young children" (Fusari, 2017, p. 150).

The key point here is that the animals at Raine's were still being kept in confinement even if they did have more space than zoo animals. The managers used the layout of the sanctuary to further impose their ideas of order on the world. This was achieved using electric fencing, pens, gates and so forth that restricted and controlled much of the animals' movement. Many scholars have recognized that institutions where animals are kept, such as zoos, "have hidden roots in the exercises of human power and domination over nature" (Holtorf, 2000, p. 205). A quote from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, a political allegory that says as much about humans as it does about our relationships with animals, gets to the heart of the matter: "besides, in those days they had been slaves, and now they were free, and that made all the difference, as Squealer did not fail to point out" (Orwell, 1945, p. 94). Squealer makes this statement in the story after the animals on the farm had overthrown their human overlords but were now faced by the tyrannical rule of the pigs and arguably worse conditions. The pigs had gained this position largely through their literacy. Although the conditions at Raine's were almost certainly an improvement for the animals, they are by no means free of all rules and restrictions or from dependence on humans. It was the intentions that seemed to matter for interlocutors at Raine's. In other words, the moral imperative separated them from a petting zoo.

The managers usually did not allow the animals to roam freely. They were either kept in indoor stables or outdoor pens. However, there was one regular exception. Each week, the managers chose one animal, or a group of animals, that could roam freely on a weekday when there were no visitors around. This was done to give them the chance to get more exercise both mentally and physically and was also motivated by the excitement this seemed to elicit from the animals who could now explore the grounds freely. Once again, freedom was only

permitted if its expression resonated with established codes of behaviour as the managers understood them.

The creation of order in the environment was not limited to its physical layout. Within the microcosm of the sanctuary itself, the managers and board were very concerned with cleanliness. Replacing bedding in the stables in the barn was, for example, one of the main tasks of employees and volunteers. Their concern with cleaning extended to the bodies of the animals as well. Significant effort and time were spent grooming the animals. This peaked the day before an event or a weekend when visitors were expected. It can be argued that this is a central part of maintaining the welfare of animals in any type of confined environment. However, there is more to it than this. Significantly, it is another way in which interlocutors go about making the natural more socially and culturally acceptable. It represents a way of making the sanctuary comfortable not only for the animals but for human visitors too. Interestingly, many visitors commented on social media and in-person on the cleanliness of the environment. The focus on cleaning and hygiene can even be seen by looking at the list of common tasks for volunteers as listed on the sanctuary's website. But even more significantly, this is another attempt to define the sanctuary in opposition to "the industry" which is a place that interlocutors saw as both physically and morally 'dirty.'

Many interlocutors' views on veganism were related to notions of purity and pollution. These notions were also present in the rules, specifically those pertaining to the sanitization of visitors' hands and feet before entering the sanctuary. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment (Douglas, 1966, p. 2). In this case, one key reason why dirt offended was because it came from the outside world. Volunteers at Raine's were told to get used to getting

dirty if they wanted to spend time at the sanctuary. For example, volunteers and managers often ate with soiled hands. But this is acceptable if the dirt came from within the boundaries of the sanctuary. Problems arose when it was brought in from outside. In this case, chemicals were used to sanitize and prevent potential contagion. As Douglas (1966, p. 41) argues, dirt and uncleanness constitute "matter out of place".

Interlocutors viewed the sanctuary as an island of morality in a sea of immoral and unethical conduct (such as meat-eating). They did not want potentially dangerous outside influences, both physically in the form of potential germs and symbolically in the form of ideas and practices, to cross the boundaries of the sanctuary and pollute it. Douglas (1996, p. 3-4) argues the following regarding the imposition of notions of purity and pollution by authority figures:

> The ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors. These dangers are as much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness … The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus, we find that certain moral values are upheld, and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion, as when the glance or touch of an adulterer is held to bring illness to his neighbours or his children.

These types of ideas can help impose order on the messiness of life. Managers' insistence that visitors sanitize and clean their hands was perhaps one way in which they attempted to force outsiders 'into good citizenship'.

Interlocutors continuously insisted that it is critical that animals could express their inner nature. In fact, Nicole made it clear during an interview that it does not help if you provide everything else that animals needed to be "happy and healthy" but didn't "allow them to have natural behaviour". Many people agree on this point that a good or happy life for an animal rests in being able to express its essential 'pigness' or 'wolfness' or 'chickenness' (Pollan, 2002; Mason 2005). Importantly, interlocutors tried to create an environment where the donkeys could express their essential 'donkeyness', but only the aspects that were deemed acceptable in a vegan worldview. Interlocutors envisioned nature as a physical place, a type of environment, as well as an ideal. As a material place, it is linked to their ideas around the type of environment to which the donkeys and other animals are most suited and as such something to be created and preserved. The fact that farm animals are not always seen as part of nature in the same way as wild animals, complicated this process. Farm animals have been changed by their connection with humans.[9] Therefore, it is difficult to say what exactly would be natural. But the managers and volunteers often spoke about nature in the romantic sense: as a longed-for existence that is free from the vices of a modern and industrial life. As a wider movement, animal protectionists are often motivated by romantic sentiments about an idealized natural world (Pearson, 2011, p. 7). In this sense, efforts to protect donkeys suggest a desire to move closer to a more natural, if somewhat romanticized, way of life. Some scholars and authors have likened vegan conceptions of the world to a utopia – an imagined society that possesses nearly perfect characteristics and is nigh-on impossible to create. In many ways, Raine's could be said to resemble the "'Edenic myth complex' so often presented by conservation projects" (Neumann, 1998, cited in Suzuki, 2017, p. 16).

Domesticated species like donkeys largely rely on human assistance for their survival. Although there are scattered feral communities of donkeys in Botswana and countries in

South America, their populations are constantly under threat; in some cases due to lack of access to care and resources and in others because people regard them as a pest to be exterminated. In one way then, "to think of domestication as a form of enslavement or even exploitation is to misconstrue the whole relationship, to project a human idea of power onto what is, in fact, an instance of mutualism between species" (Pollan, 2007, p. 320). Fieldwork at Raine's revealed the extent to which donkeys and other animals benefit from the care they receive even though their lives are not exactly natural. It has been suggested that a vegan model for the world "can only thrive in a place where people have lost contact with the natural world, where animals no longer pose any threat to us – a very recent development, and our mastery seems unchallenged" (Pollan, 2007, p. 325). Interlocutors themselves sometimes struggled to reconcile the 'facts' of nature with their ideals. When asked what type of future she would want to create through her activism, Nicole replied:

> Total animal liberation. I'm not impractical about it, we have already messed so much up but that is my dream. If they could be completely free and do what they want and go where they want and everyone living in harmony. Ideally, they won't even eat each other. But we have already fucked things up so much.

This may account for the fact that so many vegan sanctuaries house/shelter only herbivorous and, specifically, farm animals. Most seem to find it easier to associate with herbivores, especially those considered exploited by humans in artificial circumstances.

Raine's defines itself in opposition to the "industry", which it considered the epitome of exploitation. The farm could hardly look any more different than industrial feedlots. A volunteer once painted this picture: "You must compare us with Karan beef's feedlots. If you

fly over there, the place is just covered with pens with thousands upon thousands of cattle that are crowded in on top of each other. And there isn't even a tree in sight for some shelter, so they all have a permanent sunburn." Interlocutors therefore attempted to create a material environment that is kinder to and more comfortable for animals. These efforts represent a significant way in which they tried to create order in what they regarded as a chaotic world.

Yet despite efforts to create and sustain order, the sanctuary was in constant flux. Animals could die and new residents could be brought in over the course of only a few days. Or one could arrive at the sanctuary to find that a donkey, who had been fine two days before, had become lame and was now under constant observation. Interlocutors constantly tried to adapt to events unfolding in front of them. This impacted on the layout and physical environment of the sanctuary. Every day brought with it a new organization of pens and the animals in them, as evidenced by figures of maps drawn at regular intervals during fieldwork. One day could be punctuated by fending off an angry rooster with a bushel of spinach or by evading an unruly Nguni cow. What one would find at the sanctuary was always a surprise.

This flux represents attempts to maintain the status quo on a long-term basis and efforts to keep animals "happy and healthy". For instance, when one of the female donkeys went into heat, Nicole or Kayleigh made sure that males and female were kept apart to avoid any "unnecessary upset". On another occasion the cocks were split into two groups and separate pens because they had grown hostile towards each other. Managers constantly tried to address disruptions and imbalances (caused in the main by illness, aggression or concerns over space). Life at the sanctuary never stood still and efforts to create order from chaos were therefore never-ending.

An attempt at a model society

Kuckertz (1990) showed that residents of Caguba strove to create a model of their ideal cosmology and social order through the construction and maintenance of homesteads. This model/image did not show the world as it was, but rather as people wished it to be, and represented an opportunity to shape the world around them to suit the ideal. The first few months of fieldwork at Raine's created a similar impression. Interlocutors, it seemed, tried to create a model of a utopian ideal. Unlike other animal welfare, protection or activist organisations, Raine's was not involved in any outreaches (not even on a small scale). Very little money, effort or time was expended in any attempts to directly effect change in the outside world. All energy was focused on making the sanctuary a model of the ideal where individual donkeys could be representatives of their species.

> Nicole: We aren't here to save all the animals. The animals here are ambassadors. Echo is an ambassador for the donkeys like Mr T is for the dairy cows. We want people to form a personal connection with the animals. So, if they visit here once and they drive away and one day they go through the Free State and they see somebody hitting a donkey they would say "but perhaps he is just like Delta, perhaps all he wants is to give you hugs".

Raine's website tells potential visitors and donors: "Your generous contribution enables us to cultivate a better world for us all", and continues, "we wish we were able to house every farmed[10] animal out there, but the reality is that we just do not have the means." They therefore hope that people will see the model and realize that it points to a better way of doing things.

For interlocutors, the creation of a model went hand in hand with educating the public. Education was a central aspect of the way in which they attempt to effect social change. A principle employed at Raine's, and the wider world of animal protection and conservation, was that learning about animals will lead to a greater regard for them. The concept stands central to approaches that undergird many conservation efforts in South Africa. An early figure in conservation, Sue Hart, argued that "knowledge would quickly lead to love and care for them [animals]" (Beinart, 2001, p. 212). The owner of Freedom Farm Sanctuary similarly believes that "knowledge is power, and therefore we are all privileged and obligated to make our choices out of a thorough examination that will bring new insights – even those that may change us – but these are still better than those relying on convenient and offensive habits of denial" (Freedom Farm Sanctuary, 2019).

At Raine's, vegan volunteers and managers were almost obsessive about exposing and relaying the 'truth' at the centre of their cosmology. They were also concerned with what they considered 'lies' generally believed by nonvegans. Kayleigh, for example, once responded to a visitor who tried to associate the animals with meat by claiming that such an assertion was not only offensive, but it was also "inaccurate." Through a reification of their cosmology writ small, the people who work at Raine's attempted to show visitors that there are different and more appropriate ways of relating to and living with donkeys. This is reflected in the emphasis they placed on arranging school visits to the sanctuary. It is, however, unclear how many visitors experienced a change of heart after visiting the sanctuary. Evidence seems to indicate that visits to zoos are not always "educational in the sense that visitors actually know more about animals after their visit" (Holtorf, 2000, p. 203). However, interlocutors often told stories of people who had gone vegan after one visit to the

sanctuary or who at least had said they had done so. We could not corroborate these stories, but encountered a few people on tours and at events arranged by the sanctuary who reported that they found the information they received impactful. However, none of them declared that they would go vegan. This did not matter to interlocutors, for whom the "truth" was so glaring that they believed anyone who accepted it would have to stop eating animal products. Therefore, the only reason some resisted was denial. To quote Kayleigh again: "a lot of us know but refuse to believe it." Interlocutors never questioned the validity of their cosmology and firmly believed they could teach people to see things the correct way. Their way was the only way.

Conclusion

Perceptions of donkeys have changed dramatically since their domestication. From being highly valued and elite animals in ancient Egypt (Mitchell, 2018, p. 103-107) to being devalued as stubborn and foolish beasts of burden who stand in the way of modernisation, to now being hailed as the worthy underdog, their identities have been in constant flux. Donkeys arrived in South Africa in 1656 (Swart, 2010, p. 20) when Jan Van Riebeeck imported several of the animals from Cape Verde (Swart, 2010, p. 20). By this time, they had largely been replaced as the animal of choice by their equine cousins and their reputation was far less favourable than it once was. Horses had already arrived in 1653 and were firmly established as the preferred mode of transport (Swart, 2010, p. 21). As people considered donkeys to be lowly pack animals, they were not the favoured animals for the white colonials and were mostly owned and used by indigenous populations in rural areas (Swart, 2010; Mitchell, 2018). Together with the humans who shared their lives, their welfare was often uncertain, and they often fell victim to state intervention[11] and, in more recent times, commercial

interests. To this day they are mostly owned by poor and marginalised individuals. Donkeys are still mostly owned by people in disadvantaged communities. They grant their owners a degree of autonomy by facilitating their mobility and transporting them and their possessions. And in many ways, these animals still "share the same burdens and hardships as their human owners" (Geiger & Hovorka, 2015, p. 13, 15).

But donkeys' vulnerability has only recently become a public concern as fears grow about an escalating trade in donkey skins; ostensibly by criminal organisations for export to China.[12] These fears are a contributing factor in increases in donkey-related activism among white middle-class individuals and even the formation of welfare organisations such as Raine's Farm Sanctuary.

It is currently legal in South Africa to trade and export donkey meat and hides, provided the animals are slaughtered at a registered equine abattoir (Meat Safety Act 40 (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2000)) of which there are only three in the country. Additionally, the number of hides that may be exported is restricted to 7300 a year. However, this trade primarily seems to circumvent these channels. In one single case earlier this year, the SA Police Service seized 2921 donkey hides valued at R4 381 500 (around U$306 596), which were destined for China (NSPCA, 2013). The trade negatively impacts animals and humans alike. Communities reliant on donkeys for their livelihoods may lose the capacity to produce through their choice to sell their donkeys, whilst others lose their income overnight through theft of their donkeys. Despite thefts and numerous animal welfare breaches being reported, few suspects who are allegedly involved in the trade of donkey skins have been investigated. There is an evident lack of concern at regional and national levels for the welfare of donkeys and the families and the communities whom they support. Their

marginalisation leaves these communities prone to unethical trading practices, theft and extreme market pricing (The Donkey Sanctuary, 2017).

The trade in donkey hides is seen by many activists as the most significant crisis that has ever faced these animals. As such, the current status of donkeys in South Africa plays a major role in the way interlocutors view and treat the animals at Raine's Farm Sanctuary. You cannot help but notice that the people who voice concerns about the "crisis" facing donkeys are not the ones whose livelihoods depend on these animals. And they most often had no tangible connections to members of this species before their experiences at the sanctuary. For them rescuing farm animals and following a vegan lifestyle is a way to validate themselves and to cement a place for themselves as morally upright individuals. And as white middle-class women who live in a city, their actions speak of a longing for a deeper personal connection with animals and nature.

It is society and the social hierarchy as it pertains to the place of animals that interlocutors take fault with. Raine's represents a sector of society that hold that the way we approach both animals and food needs to change. The microcosm of Raine's is their attempt to create a world where donkeys are people with more rights, more dignity, and better stories. Through this sanctuary, interlocutors are trying to create order. The managers and board want to establish Raine's as a model that represents their worldview and ideal social order. Instead of trying to change the lives of donkeys as a species directly, they are trying to create the perfect lives for a few individual donkeys and use this example to influence people to view the donkeys as unique and valuable persons who need to be treated as such. The animals hold a place of central importance in interlocutors' cosmology, and they often elevated the animals' needs above those of humans, including their own and those of the grooms at the

sanctuary. To this end, people at the sanctuary emphasize whenever possible that the donkeys are persons. To create order is to create boundaries, to keep what they consider to be morally and physically impure out of the sanctuary. As vegans, they believe themselves to be living 'truthfully' and making themselves better people. They are the 'cool kids'.

By caring for the animals at Raine's, interlocutors are trying to carve out a new identity for themselves as moral and thoughtful individuals who could enter into a relationship with donkeys as named individuals instead of the typical relationship between consumer and product. "If we can move past the trope of the human exploitation of animals, we see that they can mean more to us than dinner," Argent (2013, p. 141) suggests. For people at Raine's, donkeys are fully-fledged persons with whom they can connect on a social and emotional level. It is, therefore, immoral to harm them or treat them as lesser than any other person. They do not see the animals as objects but as subjects. They relate to the donkeys as Charlie, Delta, Echo, Juliet, India and Tango. The individual donkeys are ambassadors of an 'underappreciated species' that form part of the unfortunate category of the overlooked and mistreated farm animals. They are the underdogs facing a crisis. Their treatment and slaughter through illegal practices are for interlocutors symptomatic of a societal problem where people had dehumanised animals and deluded themselves about the true nature of the world.

Notes

1. Ejiao is made by boiling donkey skins to extract the gelatine. This ingredient is used in various medicines to purportedly improve blood circulation and increase libido, as

a treatment for gynaecological diseases, and as an anti-ageing remedy (Li et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2010).

2. The study was approved by the University of Pretoria's Humanities Faculty Ethics Committee.
3. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the sanctuary and of interlocutors.
4. When the ethnographic present is used, it refers to this period.
5. Raine's was modelled on the Freedom Farm Sanctuary in Israel, where veganism has become so popular that Tel Aviv is sometimes hailed as the vegan capital of the world (Phull, 2017; Burshtein, 2019).
6. We do not mean to suggest that conversations about race and citizenship were absent or unimportant at Raine's, as this seems unlikely in a country with a past such as South Africa's. Indeed, it is not impossible that sanctuaries can serve as spaces where ideas no longer acceptable in the post-apartheid dispensation might find "temporary protection from the law or the exercise of sovereign authority" (Boswell, 2017, pp. 115-6). However, our data led us in a different direction, which is to say towards an examination of a sanctuary as an ethical space "at the frontier of interspecies justice" (Scotton, 2017, p. 99). Moreover, it pointed towards the ways in which sanctuaries might help people imagine "new forms of social life" (Scotton, 2017, p. 100) and how sanctuaries can function as "heterotopias, counter-sites to the political-economic arenas of animal use that spatially manifest an ethical critique of such use by enacting different ways of living ethically with animals" (Abrell, 2017, p. 5), that "engage in the work of building new futures now" (Abrell, 2019, p. 111).
7. Another caveat is necessary at this point. According to Hylton White (2011, p. 104), in "South Africa and elsewhere" the sense that "ways of treating animals distinguish

the humanity of different ways of organizing human life" "informs a whole array of racist assertions that gradations of humanity express themselves in more or less humane regard for animals." What is more, it can be argued that there is a disavowal of past injustices in "addressing one form of oppression but simultaneously, intentionally or not, not acknowledging and dissociating from other kinds of oppression and, by doing that, contributing to reproducing social patterns that injure other groups" (Cordeiro-Rodrigues, 2020, pp. 4-5). The expression of prejudice against nonvegans in the context of a farm sanctuary may therefore very well be construed as a form of racist practice. However, the data we had collected could not substantiate such a claim. Rather, it suggested that people at Raine's held beliefs about veganism that were consistent with aspects of their cosmology, especially facets concerned with people's proper relationships to animals, and that they attempted to reify this cosmology, and thereby to create order, through the creation of a small-scale model thereof in the form of a farm sanctuary.

8. Morris (1999) suggests that there exists an almost direct correlation between an animal's popularity and its anthropomorphic features.
9. The domestication process often results in morphological changes in the animals involved. For example, archaeologists have found changes in donkeys skeletal remains that are consistent with them having carried heavy loads (Mitchell, 2018, p. 33).
10. The phrase "farmed animals" is often used by vegans and animal activists to emphasize that the identity of these species as farm animals is not inherent, but is rather a product of humans exploiting and using them.
11. One significant example of this, is what has been called the Donkey Massacre of Bophutswana (Jacobs, 2001). In 1983, the Apartheid government declared that

security forces in the area needed to cull donkeys owned by locals to free up resources for large scale cattle farming.

12. Recent years have seen the emergence of large-scale global trading in donkey skins, with estimates of a minimum of 1.8 million being traded per year – the destination of most of these products in China (The Donkey Sanctuary, 2017: 6).

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