

**INVASIONS: ‘OTHERING’ AND THE SOCIAL CONTROL OF  
MIGRANTS, CATS, AND KUDZU IN ATLANTA, GA**

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# **INVASIONS: ‘OTHERING’ AND THE SOCIAL CONTROL OF MIGRANTS, CATS, AND KUDZU IN ATLANTA, GA**

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## SUMMARY

Invasion metaphors are today commonly used to describe immigrants, refugees, non-human animal and plant species, viruses, and even ideas. Despite the varied and widespread use of invasion narratives within and between species, mainstream research has underrepresented potential connections and relationships between such narratives. In order to better understand the role of invasion metaphors, this dissertation draws on fields such as critical animal studies (CAS), ecofeminism, and Chicana feminism while focusing on three case studies exploring the application of invasion metaphors to immigrants, feral cats, and kudzu in Atlanta, GA and surrounding communities. In the first case, I examine several competing narratives related to migration. In the second case, I explore the ambivalent ways deployed to manage and control feral cats. In the third case, I examine the history of the kudzu vine which covers millions of acres of land in the United States. I reveal the changing meanings U.S. scientific or “expert” claims makers have applied to this oft maligned vine. I conclude the dissertation by putting the cases into conversation with one another. The methods of analysis used in this dissertation are narrative and discourse analysis. The data analyzed included a wide range of representations collected from sources including interviews, corporate media, independent media, social media, academic literature, and websites. My analysis suggests invasion metaphors coarticulate to reproduce the inferiority and material exploitation of numerous “others” including migrants, nonhuman animals, plants, and all of “nature.” Further, the dissertation highlights the interconnected roles the state, market, science, and technology play in the social control of people, animals, and “nature” more

generally. These findings not only shed additional light on such conditions, but perhaps more importantly point to Indigenous and feminist ways of thinking to help readers imagine other possibilities.



# CHAPTER 1. INVASIONS

## 1.1 Invasions

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the English concept of an invasion originated based on Latin words such as *invasio* and *invadere*. The verb *invadere* referred to a military penetration, assault, or attack on a territory by an enemy army. The related English words of invasion and invaders were initially used primarily to similarly describe the incursion of an army for purposes of conquest or plunder. In other words, invasions were, through the 15<sup>th</sup> century, mostly understood as politically organized forms of aggression whereby a military force of one sovereign entity entered a geographic space claimed by another entity with the intent to exploit or conquer the latter.

The rise of various iterations of humanism as the dominant way of thinking during the Enlightenment played a critical role in the successful emergence of the modern nation-state system. During this time, “Man” replaced God as the center of political thinking. Across Europe, nation-states began to declare their sovereignty from the Holy Roman Empire. These new states claimed sovereign power over their defined territories and populations. Citizenship endowed certain political subjects with newly defined rights and responsibilities. In many cases, large swaths of populations were denied these rights due to their class, gender, or race.

The rise of the nation-state system created ever more clearly demarcated borders that came to divide the world up into populations and territories that could potentially be more easily ordered, managed, and controlled. As these populations often came to identify themselves with these newly created nations, nationalism fueled a gradual

broadening of the ways in which the notion of invasion came to be understood. As early as the nineteenth century, the language of invasions came to describe the migration of a variety of human groups as they came to peacefully move across national borders. For example, in 1873, The San Francisco Chronicle published a notice titled “THE CHINESE INVASION” in reference to Chinese immigrants arriving in California (Zimmer 2019). Later that year Henry Josiah West, in a book with a similar alarming title, wrote that “the Chinese in California are the advance guard of numberless legions that will, if no check is applied, one day overthrow the present Republic of the United States (Zimmer 2019:1). As in this case, invasion tropes came to frequently construct one’s native country and native people as if their very existence were in grave danger. The current example appeared in the wake of a growing anti-Chinese immigration movement that soon led to the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which banned an entire national group from entering the United States (Zimmer 2019:1). In the coming decades, as immigrants from Japan, Korea, India, and eventually Mexico arrived in the United States, they too were targeted with similar invasion tropes (Zimmer 2019:1).

By the twentieth century, invasion metaphors expanded their reach even further as plants and animals also increasingly came to be defined as invasive. Humanism continued to dominate thinking in the West and the human-animal divide that had previously been understood as due to a divinely proclaimed Great Chain of Being began to be justified in new ways. The reasonable minds of the Enlightenment had proposed that it was the human ability to think rationally that separated man from beast. Over the coming centuries, Western philosophers and thinkers justified human superiority for many reasons including the ability to think, feel, laugh, speak and cry that they claimed

animals did not possess. The assumption of human superiority became an essential ingredient in the expanding discourse of invasions that brought countless non-human species under its purview.

In part, the rise of “invasive species” discourse owed to new and changing forms of nationalism that increasingly emphasized the value of “native” flora and fauna around the globe (Bunyak 2019; Franklin 2006; Dunlap 1997; Stubbs 2001). Unless sanctioned by national governments, the supposedly unauthorized but otherwise peaceful movement of many humans, animals, and plants increasingly came to be described using narratives of invasion. In this context, border crossers of all shapes, sizes, and species are now greeted with hostility as powerful national interests and institutions take extreme steps to manage and control their borders, ecologies, political subjects, and territories (Bunyak 2019).

The spreading discourse of invasions made it seem as if nations are under constant threat of an incursion by foreign people, non-native plants, and invasive animals. Such metaphors of invasion created a bifurcation between an innocent, civil, native “self” and a dangerous, aggressive, animalized “other.” The invasive “other” threatens not only the stability of national borders, but also the lives and bodies of native citizens and nature. The character of the “native” or the “self”, then, must be protected from the threat of the invasive “other.” Citizens came under constant risk of being attacked and threatened by dangerous immigrants. Their bodies faced risks of being invaded by parasites or viruses. Their culture came under threat as alien “others” endangered their ways of life, native crops, and traditional environments. In response to these and other threats to the native, the invasive foreigner needed to be fought off, repelled, and defeated

at all costs. As put into practice, invasion narratives called forth risk and precarity for the people, plants, and animals that came to be classified as outsiders, foreigners, or aliens.

*Invasions* examines three cases of invasion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century United States including cases focused on migrants, feral cats, and kudzu. *Invasions* illustrates the unique forms of social control that are legitimized and implemented by institutions such as the state, market, and science in each of these distinct cases. *Invasions* additionally demonstrates that racial and gender categories shape and are shaped by the formation of species categories in each of these cases. In part, this is because *Invasions* suggests the exploitations and abuses of these maligned invasive others—whether they be people, plants, or animals—are frequently interrelated. In particular, these invasive “others” share the troubling position of being frequently described and treated as if they are “less than human.” Moreover, *Invasions* finally argues that the configurations of self and other in each of these cases reinforce existing hierarchies that privilege white, Western, men and prop up the ongoing exploitation of groups such as people of color, women, animals, plants, and all of “nature.”

*Invasions* broadly draws on a variety of theoretical traditions including critical animal studies (CAS) perspectives to examine the connections shared between species through these metaphors of invasion. *Invasions* offers an interrogation of taken for granted understandings of what it means to be human, animal, plant, non-human, or less than human. In addition to denaturalizing categories including those of human and non-human, CAS perspectives illustrate that the stigma and abuse of people who are compared to animals relies on an assumption that actual non-human animals are undeserving of care, respect, and compassion (Khazaal and Almiron 2021). In other

words, CAS scholars often suggest that if animals were treated with respect and compassion, the comparison of people to non-human animals would be unable to produce the types of violent discursive effects generated in a social world teeming with anthropocentrism (Khazaal and Almiron 2021). The very existence of CAS and other theoretical movements that shape *Invasions* additionally implies that the metaphors of invasion that are the topic of this dissertation are not totalizing or unchallenged.

## **1.2 Selection of the Cases**

As discussed, *Invasions* focuses on migrants, feral cats, and kudzu. At first glance, the cases selected for this dissertation may seem to have little in common. Yet, each of these groups—migrants, feral cats, and kudzu—have been frequently described as invasive threats to nations, states, communities, ecosystems and landscapes. The dissertation cases were selected because, in part, of the similar ways each of these groups are frequently labelled as dangerous and invasive in contemporary narratives. Additionally, the choice to examine the construction of people, plants, and animals as invasive opens opportunities for unique insights into how these discourses of invasion are translated and coarticulated as they cross species lines. In other words, selecting cases that cross species lines creates the potential to garner novel understandings related to social control and “othering.” Ultimately, one goal of the dissertation is to deepen and broaden the scholarly literature related to social control and these cases were chosen to help achieve such an ambitious exercise.

In the first case, I analyze immigration discourse in the United States, with an additional emphasis on the cities of Clarkston and Atlanta, Georgia. The case of U.S. immigration discourse has recently received more attention from mass media and

political leaders than any other case where invasion metaphors are commonly used. The case is important to include not only because of the prominence of narratives of invasion in immigration discourse but also to illustrate how metaphors of invasion are used explicitly against people. Since as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, metaphors of invasion were mobilized against immigrant groups such as the Chinese. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, narratives of an invasion of Mexican and Latin American people increasingly rose to fever pitch perhaps culminating with the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president in 2016. Over these decades, many immigrants have faced mass deportations, labor exploitation, illegal detainment and imprisonment, and a variety of other horrific forms of abuse and exploitation. In this case, I examine this growing and widespread anti-immigrant movement by focusing on the use of invasion metaphors and dehumanization tactics as they are represented by the mass media and national political leaders.

In the context of a federal war aimed at stopping this perceived invasion, states, municipalities, and local groups have at times fought back to protect the rights and freedoms of immigrants. In this context, although this chapter focuses on the national level, it also considers the cities of Clarkston and Atlanta, GA. Clarkston has become known as the “Ellis Island of The South” because of decades of refugee resettlement within its borders. As will be discussed, Clarkston was selected because of its popular construction as a beacon of multiculturalism and Atlanta also has served as an important location where many groups have fought for the causes of civil and human rights. In relation to migration, Atlanta is a part of an ongoing “welcoming cities movement that has formed a growing network of municipalities across the United States that are

encouraging efforts for warmer receptivity and more efficient immigrant integration” (McDaniel, Rodriguez, and Wang, 2019:1142). The portrayal of Atlanta as a “welcoming city” offers an opportunity to examine counternarratives to a discourse of invasions. Clarkston’s history of resettling refugees also makes the location an ideal place to look for counternarratives that contrast with those of the anti-immigration movement.

In the second case, *Invasions* turns to examine the use of invasion metaphors against a non-human animal. In particular, the second case focuses on feral cats, members of a species some scientists consider to be one of the world’s 100 worst “invasive species” (Lowe 2000). The case of feral cats is important to consider because so many animals of the same species live as beloved companion animals in the safe confines of human homes. Yet, feral cats are frequently subjected to horrible abuse and mass culling due to their status as an invasive species. In this case, I consider efforts to manage and control feral cat populations focusing on the work of scientists as well as cat rescue organizations in Atlanta, Georgia. Although non-lethal methods of feral cat control have become the norm in many communities in the U.S., such approaches will not be left unanalyzed and unchallenged as they can still often reinforce existing interspecies power relationships.

In the third and final case, *Invasions* untangles the treatment of the kudzu vine, another one of the world’s 100 worst invasive species according to The Global Invasive Species Program (Lowe 2000). As an addition to the cases that explored people and animals as “invasives,” the selection of kudzu as a case serves to demonstrate how such metaphors also have the potential to harm plants and perhaps all of “nature.” Kudzu,

additionally, is the most infamous plant in the South, and perhaps all of the United States. In this case, I examine the different meanings that have been assigned to kudzu in Atlanta, Georgia and throughout the southern United States since the vine was brought to the U.S. in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. I also consider the related ways southerners have attempted to manage, control, and kill the vine over this long history. In total, *Invasions* demonstrates that these three cases are not as separate as they might first appear. In particular, I argue that the concepts of race, gender, and species shape one another as they are all continually performed within discourses of invasion. The State, market, and science are among the powerful institutions that are shown to enforce the social control of invasives. Invasion metaphors further benefit the interests of particular groups of people—principally white, wealthy, Western, men—because these metaphors contribute to the ongoing formation of existing racial and species hierarchies. In short, metaphors of invasion, whether they are primarily targeted at people, animals, or plants, often simultaneously work in ways that harm racialized “others,” women, animals, plants, and all of nature.

### **1.3 Location and Level of Analysis**

The dissertation focuses on the nation known as the United States in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century with a specific emphasis on the city of Atlanta, GA. The lives of migrants, feral cats, and kudzu, however, are all impacted by the local, regional and national contexts whereby they are frequently constructed as invaders. As such, *Invasions* at times examines such discourses of invasion as they are represented locally, while at other times focusing on regional and national levels of analysis. With this in mind, the Atlanta metropolitan area was chosen as a location to examine how broader discourses of



invasion play out on the ground. Atlanta does not, to be clear, serve as the sole center of analysis in *Invasions*, but rather as a geographic location that needs to be situated in relation to discourses of invasion that articulate to much broader regional, national, and international geographies. As will be discussed, Atlanta is an often self-proclaimed city too busy to hate, but this dissertation demonstrates that despite such aspirations, the city does not exist in isolation from racist and anthropocentric political, economic and historical institutions and influences. In addition to Atlanta's unique history as an alleged city too busy to hate, cats and kudzu have had a large historical presence in the city of Atlanta and migration to the city has rapidly increased in recent decades making the location a suitable local signpost for this broader study.

#### **1.4 Methods**

In many Indigenous knowledge systems, stories are known to shape the material possibilities for the flourishing of humans, animals, plants and sustainable worlds. Nancy Kimmerer points out “the stories we choose shape our behaviors and have adaptive consequences” (2013:30). With this in mind, storytelling can play a key role in shaping the material possibilities both for the destruction of ecologies and extinction of species or for the flourishing of plants, animals, humans, and sustainable worlds. The ways we think and the stories we tell and hear shape the world. Language is indeed powerful. Stories, however, do not become dominant outside of the influence of the political and economic context in which they exist. With this in mind, *Invasions* examines both dominant narratives and marginalized voices using discourse analysis and narrative analysis. Institutions such as the state, market, mass media and science play a key role in the production of dominant discourses. With such dynamics in mind, *Invasions* seeks to

understand how metaphors of invasion have come to shape the social control of migrants, feral cats, and kudzu in the United States. As a result, I spend significant energy analyzing representations of invasions as they are spread widely through corporate (mass) media, independent media, social media, scientific journals, and other popular widely shared, influential sources. *Invasions* examines how these stories of invasion materialize in such forms as racist institutions and xenophobic political subjects.

The dissertation, further, seeks to understand the stories not being told or shared about these maligned “others.” Thus, in addition to examining the mainstream sources identified above, chapter 5 of *Invasions* centers Indigenous and other underrepresented ways of thinking and begins to give due credit to the many voices silenced and erased by histories of colonialism and imperialism. Despite the erasure of such knowledge systems, these perspectives offer alternative ways of thinking and relating to one another, non-human animals, and all of nature. It is not merely an issue of giving credit to these underrepresented stories. I suggest these stories that rebel against dominant cultural assumptions may offer hopeful alternatives to a present situation in which people, animals, and “nature” are enslaved to demands that include profit and nationalism. The procedures for data collection and analysis are discussed in much further detail in each substantive chapter as they pertain to the specific cases.

### **1.5 The City Too Busy to Hate: Atlanta, Georgia**

In 2019, Atlanta, Georgia Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms suggested that the newly formed “One Atlanta” “Mayor’s Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion,” is charged with building “a bridge towards greater inclusiveness across the entire city” (Latimore 2018:2). The notion of “One Atlanta” seems to synergize with a city that since the civil

rights movement has often been referred to as both “The City Too Busy to Hate” and the “Cradle of the Civil Rights Movement” (Myrick-Harris 2006). In the 1960’s, Mayors William Hartsfield and Ivan Allen are credited with driving the popularity of the phrase “The City Too Busy to Hate” as they deployed this slogan to dismiss or obscure the realities of racism and racial inequalities in Atlanta while constructing a city constantly striving toward progress (Kruse 2013). In October 2017, then Councilwoman Keisha Lance Bottoms, a candidate in the mayoral race at the time, also emphasized that Atlanta’s core value remains that “we are the city too busy to hate” (Bluestein 2017:1) and such proclamations align with Atlanta’s self-portrayal as a welcoming city.

On July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Bottoms testified before a U.S. Senate Special Committee on Climate Crisis to discuss the progress made in Atlanta as well as the challenges the city faces due to climate change. Bottoms touted Atlanta as the “cradle of the civil rights movement,” a city that is now “the 10<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the United States” and home to “the third largest collection of Fortune 500 companies in the country” (Senate Special Committee on the Climate Crisis 2019:1). Bottoms, however, struck a more somber tone as she turned to address the consequences of climate change for Atlanta. She noted that “while everyone is being impacted by climate change, the sad reality is that our most vulnerable residents are most susceptible to harm” (Senate Special Committee on the Climate Crisis 2019:3). She noted that the poor and people of color are more likely to face pollution, displacement, and rising income inequalities resulting from climate change. She declared, “our mission to create an affordable, resilient and equitable city for everyone—what we call One Atlanta—depends on our capacity to pump the brakes on climate change” (Senate Special Committee on the Climate Crisis 2019:2).

### *1.5.1 Anthropocentrism*

Anthropocentrism is a worldview that assumes that humans are the most important, or only, beings entitled to moral and political consideration.

Anthropocentrism is pervasive in each of the cases examined in this dissertation. In her testimony, Mayor Bottoms frames climate change as a threat to “everyone” and especially the most “vulnerable humans” (Senate Special Committee on the Climate Crisis 2019:3). In her testimony, she suggests rising temperatures create public health concerns such as increased numbers of heat-related deaths and mosquito born illnesses. She also suggests Atlantans will have to deal with more droughts, food shortages, and climate refugees. Further, she suggests Georgians are at an increased risk of wildfires. In mapping a solution to these complex issues, she states, “we believe that the key to our success is to prioritize the equal right of every resident to affordable energy, a clean environment and a healthy future” (Senate Special Committee on the Climate Crisis 2019:6).

Although climate change is an issue that affects all of the Earth’s ecosystems and species, Bottom’s framing of climate change remains anthropocentric in this instance as she almost exclusively stresses “human” interests and concerns as the primary reason to address the problem. Anthropocentric ways of thinking assume “humans” sit atop a hierarchy of Earth’s lives and forms—humans thus are the most politically and ethically important beings and are frequently entitled to use other beings for their own benefit. With these dynamics in mind, it is important to note that environmental activists and scholars increasingly agree that anthropocentrism is actually a major force in creating

climate change, species extinctions, and ecological collapse—some of the very problems Bottoms purports to want to fix.

In this context, *Invasions* reveals the important, almost omnipresent, role anthropocentrism plays in dominant contemporary configurations of self and other, citizen and non-citizen, human and non-human. With this pervasiveness of anthropocentrism in mind, *Invasions* suggests that although anthropocentrism predominantly constructs humans as more important, powerful, and exceptional than other lives and forms, philosophies grounded in such worldviews also come with their own risks and consequences even for humans. Ecofeminist writer and activist Greta Gaard, for instance, suggests that not only does anthropocentrism fuel violence against non-humans, but such views actually fail to protect human beings from suffering and exploitation as well (2011). In other words, in order to truly be a city or society that can adequately address both environmental destruction and social inequality, the current tendency to resort to anthropocentrism in politics, economics, and ethics most likely must be upended.

### **1.6 How Anthropocentrism Fails to Protect Humans**

Gaard (2011) stresses the connections between the suffering and oppression of women and other marginalized human groups and the destruction and abuse of animals, plants and entire ecosystems. In liberal humanism, Gaard explains, human reason separates “man” from lesser beings such as non-human animals. In this and similar anthropocentric systems of thought that are defined by their assumption that humans are superior to nonhumans, a dichotomy is created between humans and nature/animals. In the fantasy of liberal humanism, human reason and rationality justify humanity’s efforts

to control and exploit animals, plants, and all of “nature.” Yet, in constructing a position of “animality” as a binary and inferior opposite of “humanity,” this hierarchical way of thinking can contribute to the “othering” of not only actual non-human animals and nature but also women, people of color, migrants, refugees, and other oppressed groups. So, for instance, when Brian Kemp, who became the Governor of Georgia in 2019, suggested in a campaign ad that he has a “big truck” “to round up criminal illegals,” it is partly migrants and non-citizens construction as less than fully human that makes it possible to “round” them “up” like animals (King 2018:2). It is critical to note that such representations play a role in the formation of not only of racial categories and corresponding racialized power dynamics but also species categories.

The “othering” of human groups, in this and similar cases, is made possible by the existence of a category of animality that has often been used to label the “others” of Western white men as inferior and legitimize the control and domination of multiple oppressed groups, including actual non-human animals (Gaard 2011). Gaard (2011) and Plumwood (1993) suggest that the conceptual and material linkages or associations of women, people of color, nature, and animals to “animality” reinforce the inferiority of each of these identity categories as well as shore up the alleged superiority of a rational white male citizen subject (Gaard 2011). In this way, the seemingly separate injustices of white nationalism, ecological destruction, and animal abuse are all legitimized and fueled by power dynamics that shape and are shaped by a hierarchical system of categories.

Scholars such as Donna Haraway, Colleen Boggs, and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa have deployed a posthumanist analytic as they move to extend ethical consideration and subject status to non-human lives and forms, destabilize common sense understandings of

the categories of human and animal, and reject human exceptionalism (Haraway 2008; Boggs 2013; Puig 2017). Boggs suggests that anthropocentric thought systems ultimately fail to “protect human beings from abjection” but actually enable “abuse by creating a position of animality that is structurally opposed to humanity” (2013:42). For Boggs, animality, a position of otherness, somewhat ironically “collapses distinctions between humans and animals” because human beings can inhabit the “structural position” of animality (Boggs 2013:49). Animalization refers to a social process that inscribes bodies with animality by marking them as dangerous, foreign, or inferior based on denying them characteristics such as civility, health, rationality or cleanliness that are typically associated with the abstract figure of a responsible “human” citizen.

In dominant Western stories, humans possess characteristics such as civility, rationality, morality, intelligence, language, humor, empathy, responsibility and intentionality whereas animals are thought of as dangerous, unruly, wild, dirty, and instinctual. These imagined qualities of humans and animals represent the related positions of humanity and animality. In anthropocentric frameworks, nonhuman animals (and animalized humans) are assumed to lack capacities such as “speech, reason, morality, emotion, clothing, shelter, mourning, lying, lying about lying, gifting, laughing, crying” as well as refused full political and ethical consideration (Collard 2013:40)<sup>1</sup>. In short, these representations assume a natural universal hierarchy that makes those that are classified as “human” superior in ability and importance to all other species, anyone marked as less than human, and all of “nature.”

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<sup>1</sup> Despite these assumptions, research demonstrates nonhuman animals ability to solve problems, share material culture, experience emotions, and communicate using non-human languages (See Shew 2016, for example).

The overgeneralized sign of “the animal,” as Donna Haraway notes, is “a humanist abstraction, a universal, an empty, a misplaced concreteness issue, but it’s worse than that. It’s stripped of all particularity and reality and most of all, from my view, stripped of relationality” (Schneider 2005:140). In using such an overly abstracted category, all that is not “human” becomes collected under the singular sign of the “animal” (Chen 2012). The sign of the “animal” exists merely as an abstract, generalized marker of that which is not “human” and in anthropocentric and humanist worldviews the result is that animals, as well as all that which is nonhuman or less than human, are situated below their human masters on what Mel Chen describe as “animacy hierarchies” which share some similarity to what historically has been thought of as a great chain of being. With these dynamics in mind, the posthumanist lens thus demands the study of the processes that shape what it means to be a “human” or an “animal.” Mel Chen, drawing on queer of color and posthumanist theory, reveals the highly racialized, gendered, and sexualized meaning making processes that disproportionately include white heterosexual able-bodied men within the privileged category of “human” (2012). It turns out that the notion of “human” is a rather flimsy and malleable idea that has widely been used as a tool for the domination of colonized people and all of “nature.”

Chen’s *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* is among the recent texts to seriously confront the collision of animals and animality with categories of human difference such as race, sexuality, class and able-bodiedness. As Chen illustrates, animality is frequently associated with particular human groups such as women, people of color, homosexuals, and the disabled in ways that suggest these “others” of white western able-bodied males exist at a lower point on what Chen describes as “animacy



hierarchies.” Chen’s polyvalent notion of animacy hierarchies not only refers to the situated ranking of bodies based on their perceived animateness or inanimateness but also their perceived abilities to think and feel, affect and be affected, and whether they matter politically or ethically. In other words, individuals and groups may rise and fall on an such hierarchies based on their presumed or ascribed levels of cleanliness, civility, dangerousness, rationality, productivity, belonging, nativity, agency, empathy, ability, and so on. Whereas white able-bodied men might frequently find themselves at the top of U.S. based hierarchies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a mosquito, kudzu plant, stone, feral cat, or undocumented migrant might be ranked further toward the bottom. As has been discussed, however, CAS scholars point out that these common forms of dehumanization, animalization, and hierarchization are only possible in their current form precisely because animals are viewed as underserving of ethical and political consideration. If animals were treated with care, compassion, and respect, then the meanings of such hierarchies would change or perhaps such efforts to hierarchize would be in some cases impossible to imagine at all. With such possibilities in mind, Chen and others insist that what it means to be “human” and “animal” is not in any way static or unchangeable.

Although hegemonic hierarchies are not uncontested, the prevailing constructions of animacy hierarchies often rely on both narratives of invasion as well as nationalistic notions of who and what counts as a native or a foreigner. In these nationalist frameworks, the “foreigner” is typically ranked as inferior in dominant hierarchies whereas “natives” are preferred and privileged. In fact, Mayor Bottom’s only mention of the consequences of climate change for nonhuman lives in her testimony makes just such an appeal. She notes that “Atlanta has already lost 14% of its native tree species and

rising temperatures will continue to damage our tree canopy” (U.S. Senate Special Committee 2019:2). Not only does she draw on an idea of native-ness to suggest that certain trees are more valuable than others, but she also describes the tree canopy using the language of “our” signifying that the trees essentially belong to the human residents of Atlanta. *Invasions*, in alignment with recent work in fields such as CAS and posthumanism, argues that both nativism and anthropocentrism are not only harmful to the environment, but also to human groups such as migrants, people of color, and women (Haraway 2016; Puig 2017).

Despite frequent ambivalences and contestations, *Invasions* argues the dominant versions of animacy hierarchies devalue certain people, plants, animals, and ways of knowing in relation to an imagined white man of reason and related Euro-centric epistemologies. As anxieties over the health of the global environment and climate crisis circulate with increasing desperation, the intersectional approach in “*Invasions*” shows how anthropocentric worldviews and struggles over who and what counts as “human” and “animal” articulate to existing racial hierarchies and projects of social control that serve the interests of profit and nationalism at the expense of the environment.

Importantly, however, Juanita Sundberg (2014) and Christina Holmes (2016) are among those that point out that recent work under labels such as posthumanism and ecofeminism often also erases the histories of Indigenous peoples that have conceptualized non-binary ways of thinking and considered the ethical and political importance, agency, and subject status of non-human lives and forms for generations. With this in mind, the dissertation engages with scholarship that draws on these erased thought systems including works by Gloria Anzaldúa (1981, 1987, 2002), Robin Wall

Kimmerer (2013), and Joy Harjo (2015) to imagine alternatives to the metaphors of invasion and corresponding logics of anthropocentrism, nationalism, and profit mobilized by powerful social institutions such as the State, mass media, and science to control and dominate people of color, migrants, and all of “nature.” In particular, Chapter 5 provides a prolonged engagement with thought systems and ways of living that are largely or completely absent in the mainstream narratives studied in chapters 2 through 4.

### **1.7 Outline of *Invasions***

The first substantive chapter titled “*Invasive People: Migrants, Animality, and Neglected Intersectionalities*,” contrasts two seemingly contradictory narratives related to migration to the United States. On the one hand, white nationalists label migrants as ‘less than human’ and even compare refugees and immigrants to “animals.” On the other hand, liberal multiculturalists suggest migrants add value to the nation and emphasize a shared sense of ‘humanness’ as the roux that binds an “American” gumbo together. By using discourse analysis to examine hundreds of media reports and government documents, this case study argues that although seemingly contradictory, both of these narratives leave prevailing racial hierarchies and modes of oppression primarily intact, in part, because such hierarchies are reinforced by other, largely unquestioned, ranking systems that are constructed between humans and animals, humanity and animality, and nature and culture.

The chapter examines the frequent treatment of non-citizens and migrants as “less than human” through the interactions between the State and mass media, especially focusing on the narratives of lawmakers and law enforcers. In an analysis of corporate (mass) media, independent media, social media, and government documents, I examine

how narratives of invasion construct migrants, women, and animals as inferior to an imagined white male citizen-subject through associations between these allegedly inferior groups. For instance, migrants are often described as “invasive aliens” and “animals” by political leaders, media figures, and law enforcers. Additionally, state policies put migrants at risk of experiences such as prolonged detention, deportation, and poverty. At the same time, law enforcers participate in a culture that suggests migrants are “less than human” as they abuse detainees and prisoners physically, emotionally, and sexually. Chapter 2 goes on to show how such dominant hierarchies and institutions devalue and impact not only the lives of migrants but also devalue women, people of color, animals, and all of “nature.”

As a foil for such narratives of invasion, I consider the cases of Clarkston and Atlanta, Georgia. In particular, I discuss the prominence of narratives of multicultural inclusion that construct Clarkston as a symbol of the benefits of diversity and immigration. I discuss the fantastical nature of such claims of multiculturalism and their relation to the continued inequalities facing migrants, refugees, and people of color living in Clarkston. I also consider organizations such as the Georgia Alliance for Human Rights (GLAHR), an Atlanta based organization working on behalf of migrants. In a national context where white nationalism and racism has been institutionalized in the form of detention centers and deportation raids that target people of color, Chapter 2 suggests that on the ground efforts to support and protect migrants in the Atlanta area are constrained by broader social and political forces. Importantly, one primary method of resistance to anti-immigrant white nationalism used locally involves the assertion that migrants are indeed “humans.” Although efforts to ensure migrants are included in the

category of “human” are sometimes politically successful, the chapter discusses the problematic ways these approaches reinforce the very categories of difference used to dominate and control animals, nature, and migrants themselves. Both white nationalists and liberal humanists mobilize anthropocentrism in their efforts to call forth their different visions for the future of the American nation and both narratives contribute to the ongoing formation of existing racial and species hierarchies.

Chapter 3 of my dissertation, *“Invasive Animals: Feral Cats, Population Control, and The Kitten Industrial Complex,”* explores the ambivalent ways scientists and communities seek to manage and control feral cats. Although millions of pet owners treat members of the same species as part of their families, feral cats have been labelled as one of the one hundred worst invasive species in the world (Lowe 2000). As a result, scientists, communities, and entire governments have taken it upon themselves to manage and control feline populations. In Atlanta, tens of thousands of cats were euthanized annually prior to the takeover of Fulton County Animal Services by the Lifeline Animal Project, an organization that promotes a “no-kill agenda.” In the debates around how to deal with these “invasive” animals, cats ranking on dominant human-animal hierarchies is under constant negotiation.

Chapter 3 compares the stories of conservation scientists that support euthanasia with those that support the non-lethal method of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). Both narratives are shown to be problematically anthropocentric as they construct ontological hierarchies between humans and feral cats. The pet industry greatly supports TNR, I argue, because the TNR approach reinforces the types of meanings pet-care companies rely on to generate profits. So, while TNR narratives are shown to be anthropocentric,

the pet industry is shown to rationally fund TNR programs fueling the successful spread of TNR as a management strategy and, ultimately, more corporate bioprofits. The chapter shows that the success of TNR is not due to any moral or empirical superiority, but rather the result of social processes that construct cats as animals deserving of welfare (although cats are still most often considered inferior to humans who must be constructed as superior to justify efforts to exert control) and through the funding of the pet industry—an industry that relies on such a construction for profit. In frequent appeals to the authority of science, TNR narratives additionally create an epistemological hierarchy that privileges traditional notions of rationality and devalues practices of care required in on the ground TNR work. Since care work has historically been a burden carried disproportionately by women, I argue this epistemological hierarchy serves to define care work, femininity, and women as inferior to a presumed white man of “reason.”

Chapter 4 of my dissertation, titled *“Invasive Plants: Menacing Weed or Economic Resource?”* reveals the changing meanings U.S. scientific experts, journalists, and other claims-makers have applied to the oft maligned vine known as kudzu. Kudzu is a fast-growing leafy vine that blankets millions of acres across the United States. Today, kudzu shares with domestic cats the ominous label of being ranked as one of the world’s 100 worst “invasive species” (Lowe 2000). In the U.S. South during the twentieth century, kudzu has been differently constructed as a “miracle vine,” “invasive species,” and “economic resource” by scientists and these different constructions of kudzu illustrate the slipperiness and contingency of the meanings attached to plants, animals, and nature. Further, these differing meanings call forth particular relationships that humans share with kudzu in Atlanta and throughout the U.S. South. Chapter 4

further examines 21<sup>st</sup> century constructions of kudzu and finds two dominant portrayals of the vine within recent news reports and scientific articles. The most popular ways kudzu continues to be portrayed are as an invasive species and an economic resource—and I suggest both portrayals are anthropocentric and reinforce logics such as nationalism and profit.

In the concluding chapter, *Invasive Imaginaries and Rebellious Knowledges*, I revisit the cases of migrants, feral cats, and kudzu. The chapter appropriates the notion of an invasive to consider how we can use existing knowledges to infiltrate and transform the destructive tendencies of invasion metaphors in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. I return to the cases of migrants, feral cats, and kudzu while looking at the perspectives of Native American women, feminist and Black TNR caretakers, and Chicana/ecofeminist scholars. In addition to analyzing the writings of these groups, I interview a Native American woman and a Black TNR caretaker regarding their transformative work with kudzu and feral cats respectively<sup>2</sup>. In contrast to the violence of mainstream metaphors of invasion, I show how these individuals and groups imagine and practice more reciprocal, sustainable ways for humans to relate to their ecological surroundings. By considering the interplay of race, gender, and species in these distinct cases, my dissertation demonstrates the interrelated ways certain human groups, animals, and all of “nature” are “othered” and dominated through discourses of anthropocentrism and nationalism. Despite such power dynamics, *Invasions* ultimately suggests the possibility of infiltrating and transforming these destructive orders seeking to control racial, sexual, and ecological borders.

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<sup>2</sup> Upon contacting the IRB to detail the use of this interview data, I was instructed that the use of this data did not require IRB review because the data had been made public.

Whereas Mayor Bottoms concerns over climate change, mentioned earlier in this introduction, remain tied to an anthropocentric focus on the consequences facing humans, *Invasions* ends by making a turn away from anthropocentric thought by considering thought systems that recognize the intrinsic value of all lives and forms, the agency of animals, plants, and all of nature, and calling into question taken for granted notions of what it means to be “human” and “animal.” The City of Atlanta’s website now suggests, “In the turbulent 60s, Atlanta was ‘the city too busy to hate.’ And today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Atlanta is the ‘city not too busy to care’” (City of Atlanta 2019:n.p.). Atlanta may sometimes strive to be a city too busy to hate, but it doesn’t do so in circumstances of its own choosing.

The cases that follow examine instances of both hate and care directed at migrants, cats, and kudzu in Atlanta, the South, and throughout the United States. The three cases that make up *Invasions* demonstrate some of the potential dangers of anthropocentrism for not only animals and the environment, but also for human groups. Despite the construction of the human as the pinnacle of evolution and enlightenment in dominant metaphors of invasion, many social groups fail to benefit from humanity’s purported role as master of the earth. Many groups have little say in the prevailing systems of classification and hierarchization that are often controlled by those in power.



## CHAPTER 2. INVASIVE PEOPLE: MIGRANTS, ANIMALITY, AND NEGLECTED INTERSECTIONALITIES

*We cannot allow all of these people to **invade** our Country. When somebody comes in, we must immediately, with no Judges or Court Cases, bring them back from where they came.*

- Donald Trump, June 2018, Tweet referring to migrants seeking entry into the United States. (as quoted in: Rogers and Stolberg 2018:A1)

In 2018, Georgia State Senator Michael Williams rolled into Clarkston, Georgia in a school bus refashioned for his campaign to become the next governor of the state. On the sides of his bus, a seal resembling that of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security read “Michael Williams Deportation Bus” alongside the words “fill this bus with illegals” (Kauffman 2018). The back of the bus was painted to say “Danger! Murderers, rapists, kidnappers, child molesters, and others on board” (Kauffman 2018). The bus was met by hundreds of protesters who chanted “No hate! No fear! Immigrants are welcome here” (Tatum 2018). The arrival of an openly bigoted white supremacist’s “deportation bus” in Clarkston was particularly important since the city itself has gained national attention as a symbol of multiculturalism because of the large numbers of refugees that have resettled there since the 1980’s. Indeed, Clarkston has widely come to be known as the “most diverse square mile in America” and the “Ellis Island of the South” (Kennedy 2019).

In the 1980’s, Clarkston, a small Georgian city of around 13,000 people located just east of Atlanta, began to transform into a destination for refugees from around the world. As the percentage of Clarkston’s population identified as white declined from over 90% in 1980 to around 10% in 2015, refugees from Cambodia, Sudan, Afghanistan,

Uganda, Syria, Somalia, and many other war torn countries moved in so that by 2015, more than half of Clarkston's population was not born in the United States (Hyde, Allen, and Dhongde 2019). These trends in Clarkston reflected changing demographics across the U.S. South as immigrants increasingly landed in "new destination states" such as Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee during the 1990's and 2000's (Terrazas, 2011). The arrival of the deportation bus demonstrates that despite its reputation as a beacon of the benefits of multiculturalism, Clarkston is not immune to the increasingly vitriolic anti-immigrant movements taking place across the United States.

The current animosity toward migrants and refugees has been preceded by anti-immigrant hostility directed at groups such as "'Indians,' French speakers, Roman Catholics, Irish, southern European, eastern European, Asian, and Third World immigrants" (Shapiro 1997:1). In addition, the U.S. government's history of hostility directed at Mexican and Latin American migrants dates back at least to the 1930's (Shapiro 1997). Each of these groups at one point or another "have been constructed as threats to valued models of personhood and to images of a unified national society and culture" (Shapiro 1997:1). In this chapter, I demonstrate how metaphors of invasion legitimize the ongoing exploitation and domination of migrants by animalizing them as "invasive outsiders" in contrast to an imagined native who belongs, as Donald Trump puts it, in "our Country" (quoted in Rogers and Stolberg 2018). The recent caging of migrant children, family separations, mass deportations, and surging anti-immigrant white supremacy are not novel or surprising events, but processes that have been shaped by an historical construction of migrants as invasives, infesters, aliens, vermin, and animals (Shapiro 1997; Epps and Furman 2016; Shapiro 2018).

In a 2018 speech in California, for example, then President Donald Trump exemplified the recent mobilization of such language when he described so called “illegal immigrants” as not “people” but “animals” (2018b). In response to backlash, Trump and his surrogates defended his comments by suggesting he was referring to members of the “MS-13 gang,” but Trump’s comments reflect his vehement disdain towards all non-white migrants coming to the United States. For instance, in 2019, The New York Times reported that Trump’s reelection campaign had used the notion of an invasion to describe immigration in over 2,000 Facebook ads by October 2019 (Kaplan 2019). USA Today further reported that Trump used words like “alien,” “criminal,” “animal,” “predator,” “killer,” and “invasion” over 500 times at his rallies since 2017 to describe migrants (Fritze 2019). According to the report, he used the word “animal” at least 34 times (Fritze 2019).

Trump’s recent rhetoric reflects a trend whereby over the second half of the twentieth century, migrations have been increasingly described as problematic invasions that threaten not only U.S. culture, but also the safety and wellbeing of the country’s citizens. Additionally, metaphors of invasion are integral in the ongoing racialized narration of a nation in which white people are imagined as natives and must be protected from dangerous non-white outsiders. Moreover, white “native” people are further constructed as legitimately entitled to exploit, abuse, and control not only migrant humans, but all that is constructed as inferior within such discourses of invasion. In this chapter, I suggest such metaphors often simultaneously legitimize the abuse and exploitation of not only migrants but also women, non-citizens, racial minorities, actual non-human animals, and all of “nature.”

I specifically examine the frequent references to animals and animality in the context of contemporary migration focusing on two seemingly incompatible narratives. I examine invasion narratives that seek to exclude migrants from the United States and, secondly, multicultural narratives that seek to include migrants in the United States. On one hand, leaders such as Donald Trump label immigrants as “animals” in order to legitimize their mistreatment and abuse. On the other hand, liberal humanists, such as many white people who praise Clarkston as a multicultural oasis, claim migrants deserve to be treated “like humans” in an effort to ensure migrants are treated with equity, dignity, and respect. As will also be discussed, migrants themselves come to assert their humanness. These humanist narratives are deeply embedded within a framework of liberal multiculturalism that is contested by some refugees and migrants because such narratives obfuscate the ongoing power dynamics that prop up white supremacy. Indeed, at least some migrants recognize that despite the veneer of equality in the tropes of multiculturalism, migrants and refugees do not always share in the benefits of liberalism’s promise of equity and freedom. Within the discourse of invasions, furthermore, both the narratives of exclusion and inclusion reinforce anthropocentrism and therefore give support to some of the very logics that enable the ongoing domination of migrants, animals, and all of nature.

Organizationally, I begin the chapter by briefly discussing the long history of anti-immigrant nationalism in the United States paying particular attention to how such forms of nationalism have actively “dehumanized” or “animalized” migrants. I then explain how an ecofeminist view suggests the exploitation of women, people of color, and oppressed human groups such as migrants is presently linked to the exploitation of

animals and all of “nature.” I also discuss two common ways migrants have been compared to non-human animals as identified by Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson (2021). Then, I outline the methods of data collection and analysis before I extend the work of Matsuoka and Sorenson through a discussion of the two aforementioned narratives of exclusion and inclusion. Although immigration discourse does not always “dehumanize” immigrants, the analysis that follows shows that the hegemonic notion of threatening immigrant invasions is dominated by a logic that assumes “humans” are the only beings that deserve political, ethical, and moral consideration. I then suggest efforts to escape the discourse of an immigration invasion can be aided by dismantling an underlying anthropocentrism that works against not only animals, but also migrants and people of color.

## **2.1 The Historical Animalizing of Migrants**

A robust body of literature has documented the ways immigrants and refugees have been persistently “othered” and “dehumanized” since well before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Flores 2003; Cunningham-Parmeter 2011; Holling 2011; García 2018; Heuman and González 2018; Utych 2018). As invasion metaphors describing migrants as threatening rose to prominence in U.S. immigration discourse alongside changing migration patterns during the twentieth century, migrants have increasingly been constructed as aliens, invaders, parasites, floods, natural disasters, epidemics, pollutants, and animals by U.S. lawmakers, courts, mass media, and many citizens (Spurr 1994; Cisneros 2008; Cunningham-Parmeter 2011; Gemignani and Hernandez-Albujar 2015). In contrast to these popular associations of invasive migrants with nonhuman

animals, humanists, including many sociologists, have condemned such associations as “dehumanizing” of migrants.

As widely used in existing scholarship on migration narratives, dehumanization refers to a process whereby certain “others” are denied “full humanness” and are seen as “less than human” (Esses, Medianu and Lawson 2013:522). In using the language of dehumanization, Utych suggests anti-immigrant narratives deny “out-groups traits that are uniquely human—things such as the ability to reason, think critically, or feel emotions—that are typically thought of as what separates human beings from other living organisms” (2018:441). Otto Santa Ana suggests the conflation of immigrants with animals “belittles immigrants as it separates non-citizens and citizens, since it assigns them a less-than-human standing” (1999:216). For Ashley Shapiro, dehumanization makes migrants “disposable, threatening, and categorically excludable” (2018:133). As they are constructed as disposable, the “othering” of migrants excludes them physically through detention and deportation, socially because of labels and stereotypes, and civically as they are denied the rights of full citizens (Epps and Furman 2016:3; Shapiro 2018).

As Matsuoka and Sorenson point out, however, these critics often only go “halfway” in their critiques of such comparisons. Matsuoka and Sorenson suggest scholarship in this mold too often reinforces the inferiority of actual non-human animals because it reconstructs the human as more deserving of care, compassion, and respect. In their attachment to tropes of rights, citizenship, and binary thinking, anthropocentric humanists prop up human-centered thought systems that fuel the suffering, domination and oppression of many peoples, actual nonhuman animals, and other lives and forms. As

I will discuss, ecofeminists have argued that there are direct links between the exploitation and domination of women and people of color with nonhuman animals and “nature.” Claire Kim, a political scientist, suggests anthropocentrist scholars, many of whom claim allegiance to a doctrine of intersectionality, perform a type of racial reductionism by focusing on racial hierarchies while ignoring other hierarchical relationships such as human over nonhuman. Kim writes, “racial... meanings are denaturalized and deconstructed but species meanings—what it means to be human, what it means to be animal—are naturalized once again” (2015:12). As will be discussed, “species meanings” are an integral part of how discourses of immigrant invasion construct natives and outsiders as well as hierarchies of race, species, gender, and citizenship.

As Kim (2015) points out, her critique of anthropocentrism is not calling to replace a focus on race or gender with a focus on species nor to suggest one or the other form of domination is always and everywhere more important. Instead, the point is to elaborate the nuanced ways categories including those of race, sex, species, and citizenship coarticulate in a given time and place to shape hierarchically arranged systems of classification that produce political and moral meanings and the embodied precarity and risk experienced by many human and nonhuman animals. Kim explains, “humans do differ” from other animals “but it is human classification that has read momentous political and moral meaning into these differences” and placed humans and other animals into “discontinuous, unequal categories of beings, and bestowed upon the former the right to dominate the latter. It is human classification that insists that humans stand alone, apart from and above all other ‘animals’” (2015:16). Ecofeminism, in particular, has

frequently focused on revealing the connections between concepts such as gender, race, sex, and species in an effort to understand the co-articulating ways power works to manage, control, and exploit so many different groups.

## **2.2 Inferiority by Association: Ecofeminism, Migration, and Animality**

Franciose d'Euabonne is credited with creating the term “ecofeminism” and she celebrated a “woman-nature connection” in the 1970’s, leading to persistent critiques of ecofeminism as “essentialist” (Holmes 2016:4). Early ecofeminists were criticized for centering the perspectives of white middle-class women as well as for assuming such “essentialist” connections between women and “nature” (Gaard 2011). Although such critiques caused some feminist to call for abandoning the term ecofeminism altogether, recent work by Greta Gaard and Val Plumwood responds to the concerns of black and third world feminists in order to redefine ecofeminism as a tool to examine the co-articulating ways that women, people of color, nonhuman animals, “nature,” and many “Others” are oppressed and controlled (Plumwood 1993, 2006; Gaard 2011; Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 2018).

Gaard points out that in humanistic ways of thinking, ““the claim for the superiority of the self is based on the difference between self and other, as manifested in the full humanity and reason that the self has but the other supposedly lacks” (1997:138-139). Plumwood and Gaard emphasize that nonhuman animals are not the only beings that come to be animalized and defined as lacking “full humanity.” In dominant Western narratives, humans are thought of as civilized, rational, ethical, intelligent and purposeful whereas animals are thought of as dangerous, unruly, wild, dirty, and instinctual. These imagined qualities of humans and animals represent the related positions of humanity and



animality. For ecofeminists, the conceptual and material associations connecting women, people of color, nature, and animals to “animality” reinforce the inferiority of each of these identity categories as well as shore up the superiority of the mythical liberal subject that has historically been constructed as a white man of reason (Gaard 2011). In short, the rather flimsy and taffy-like category we call human has long been used to serve the interests of wealthy, Western, white, men. In the current case, an ecofeminist perspective demonstrates how both migrants and non-human animals can simultaneously be constructed as inferior to an imagined “native” citizen subject through associations between the two marginalized groups. Moreover, an ecofeminist analysis requires an ongoing intersectional reading of racial, sexual, and other statuses in the below analysis of contemporary migration narratives.

### **2.3 Tropes of Accusation and Tropes of Victimization**

In a forthcoming volume *Like an Animal: Refugees, Animals, and Multiculturalism*, Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson draw on critical animal studies (CAS) perspectives in their analysis of how race and animality coarticulate in migration narratives. They discuss two “common tropes” about nonhuman animals that they identify in an examination of U.S. and European immigration narratives (2021). The first trope they discuss involves an “accusation” whereby a human or group of humans is described as if they are “like animals.” Matsuoka and Sorenson discuss how tropes of accusation are “deployed as tool(s) of discursive power” in immigration narratives to “sustain domination over others and render (immigrants) mistreatment acceptable” (2021:10-11). As the ecofeminist perspective already discussed explains, these “tropes of

accusation” demean both the immigrants and animals that are associated with one another.

In the second type of trope Matsuoka and Sorenson discuss, humans lodge a complaint by claiming to be “treated like another type of animal.” Matsuoka and Sorenson call this a “complaint/resistance trope.” As Matsuoka and Sorenson note, “complaint/resistance tropes” are made by migrants or on behalf of migrants to suggest a victim has “been abused and received treatment that is inappropriate for their status as humans” (2021:16). Drawing on a CAS perspective, the authors write:

If animals were treated with compassion and respect, this expression of complaint/resistance could not work. This shows that the complaint/resistance trope is another part of the discourse of human domination, in which we readily accept and maintain this unquestioned discursive practice. While we may deplore the brutal treatment that people have suffered in these situations, their complaint nevertheless reinforces the very hierarchy that served to legitimize their own oppression and victimization of other animals. (2021:17)

In short, Matsuoka and Sorenson suggest “complaint/resistance tropes” shore up the very types of discursive power that they attempt to resist and challenge. Complaint/resistance tropes, then, only go halfway in addressing the discursive violence performed in tropes of accusation—the racism is condemned, but the anthropocentrism is reinforced. I will next discuss the methods used to collect and analyze the data for this chapter before turning to an analysis of the narratives of exclusion and inclusion related to immigration.

## 2.4 Methods

The method used in this chapter is narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a contested method and is resultingly used differently depending on the practitioner. The style of narrative analysis used here draws heavily on the work of Donna Haraway. Haraway uses the approach as an interpretive method to investigate and theorize the relationship between the imaginary and real, material and discursive, stories and practices (Haraway 1994). As used in *Invasions*, the method is meant to examine such relationships between language and practice and reveal and question power relations within the material-discursive order. Additionally, the current analysis seeks to reveal some of the types of relationalities and subjectivities made possible or probable within particular narrative formations. I began the analysis by collecting suitable data to examine immigration narratives in the United States (Waitt 2005). Narrative analysis allowed these data to be analyzed using theoretical frameworks such as CAS and, consequently, provided a situated perspective from which to read and understand the data.

I simultaneously collected and analyzed data throughout the research project. Narrative analysis allows for reflexivity as theory and method are co-produced. The chapter sought to include data that represented the migration narratives of U.S. lawmakers, law enforcers, and corporate media because of the combined power these entities have in shaping both the ways migrants are treated by the U.S. government as well the popular discourse related to migration. In this regard, the initial data collected included articles published in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. I searched each of these publications using title searches for the words “immigration,”

“immigrants,” and “migration.” I used a location filter to exclude articles discussing immigration outside of the context of the United States. I collected all articles published from January 2018 to December 2019. The number of articles initially collected included 232 from *The New York Times* and 263 from the *Washington Post*.

In addition, the project sought to include the stories being told by independent media, which includes media that operates outside of the explicit control of corporate or governmental organizations. With this in mind, data collection included articles published in *The Intercept* and *Mother Jones*. The independent sources were only searchable using keyword searches. I therefore searched both *The Intercept* and *Mother Jones* using the keyword search “immigrant invasion.” The search produced 114 results from *Mother Jones* and 87 results from *The Intercept*. All documents were imported into Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software.

As initial coding and analysis began, emerging themes suggested avenues for further data collection. Based on the content of the original sources, I accessed other sources that specifically focused on invasion metaphors or migrant’s animality via links in the online articles at *Mother Jones* and *The Intercept*. Additionally, I accessed social media accounts, documents, and news reports that were referenced within articles found during the initial search and these included sources released in years prior to 2018. These additional steps resulted in an additional 18 documents that included news articles, government documents, and other written reports being included in the analysis.

Finally, I chose to include an analysis of the City of Clarkston, Georgia in the project. The decision to include a case study of Clarkston provided an opportunity for a greater diversity of narratives than were found in the original data because of Clarkston’s

position as a well-known symbol of the benefits of multiculturalism. I collected 34 articles and 9 video reports from local, regional, and national sources by conducting internet searches for news related to “Clarkston.” Additionally, I analyzed the websites of several non-profit organizations that serve immigrant and refugee communities in Atlanta and Clarkston. Atlanta’s role as part of the welcoming city movement suggested this would create the potential of illuminating more counternarratives within the data. Since many of these organizations actively work on the ground to improve the lives of migrants, I expected that including their response to a national discourse of an immigrant invasion would potentially offer alternative narratives to those found in sources such as the *New York Times*.

The data was then read intertextually to examine the construction of and resistance to a discourse of immigrant invasion. The ecofeminist lens encouraged an examination of the relationships between the production of race, sex, and species within these narratives of immigrant invasions. In particular, I used the ecofeminist lens to examine the linked ways migrants and non-human animals were positioned as inferior to presumably white U.S. citizens. As the analysis proceeded, I decided to build on Matsuoka and Sorenson’s forthcoming discussion of tropes of accusation and tropes of resistance. In the current project, tropes of accusation were by far given the most attention by the media, although the media analyzed here typically deployed a critical frame in covering such tropes. I found fewer examples of tropes of complaint/resistance (migrants or advocates claiming victim status by suggesting they were “treated like an animal”). I will first discuss the narratives of exclusion that are exemplified by the use of invasion metaphors to describe migration—tropes of accusation were very common in

such narratives. Tropes of complaint/resistance are more common in the multicultural narratives of inclusion that I will discuss subsequently, but unlike the form of these tropes discussed by Matsuoka and Sorenson, humanists and migrants were more likely to assert their “humanness” than to complain of being treated “like an animal.” I further discuss the relationship of both of these competing narratives to existing systems of racial injustice.

## **2.5 Invasions and Migrants’ Animality: Narratives of Exclusion**

In August 2019, *The New York Times* reported that Fox News referenced an immigrant invasion in over 300 broadcasts in the most recent year (Peters, Grynbaum, Collins, Harris and Taylor). *Mother Jones* further reported that “a fear of an ‘invasion’ of people of color has also been a longtime Republican talking point that has gained prominence during the Trump administration” (Rosenberg 2019). Although Trump is routinely given credit for driving these types of talking points into the mainstream, it is important to remember that the U.S. government has a long history of racist policies including the deportation of almost 1.1 million people in one year as far back as 1954 as part of a government program known as Operation Wetback (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2015). Nonetheless, The *Mother Jones* report gave examples of many U.S. representatives recently using the language of invasion in reference to immigration. *Mother Jones* found the language of an immigrant invasion used in the Twitter accounts of Steve King (R-Iowa), Louie Gohmert (R-Texas), Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.), Paul Gosar (R-Ariz), Mo Brooks (R-Ala.), Andy Briggs (R-Ariz), Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Duncan Hunter (R-Calif), John Rose (R-Tenn), and Ron Wright (R-Texas) (Rosenberg 2019). This increasing use of invasion metaphors to describe immigration is

a strategy that seeks to draw highly racialized boundaries between those that belong in the United States and those that should be excluded.

Invasion narratives and tropes of accusation continue to be used explicitly to call forth draconian anti-immigration policies such as using military strategies to stop and deter migration at the country's southern border. According to *Mother Jones*, for instance, Representative Walter Jones (R-N.C.) on April 4<sup>th</sup> 2018 tweeted his support for "the president's decision to work with border state governors to deploy troops to the Mexican border and protect our country against the dangerous invasion of illegal immigrants" (Rosenberg 2019). Jones again uses the phrase "our country" which implies that this country belongs to an imagined "native" self, but this imagined native ironically does not refer to the millions of people who lived on North American lands prior to their destruction by European colonizers. Instead, the native here is imagined as appearing and behaving as if white, rational, and Western.

Representatives Jones, Paul Gosar, and Mo Brooks all used the language of an invasion to legitimize military intervention at the border. Gosar, in support of one of Trump's infamous policy proposals, also called for the construction of a wall on the border. Of course, President Donald Trump has discussed immigration in terms of invasion since he began his successful rise to presidential power. In the context of an invasion, tropes that accuse migrants of being like animals are increasingly normalized to construct migrants as invasive outsiders and legitimize policies such as those that limit migrants' ability to enter the country. Over his term as president, for instance, Trump gradually reduced the number of refugees from the 90,000 a year entering the country under the Barack Obama administration to 18,000 in 2020, the lowest level since the

Refugee Act of 1980 was first passed. I will next discuss the tropes of accusation that are widely used within these narratives of exclusion.

### *2.5.1 Accusation Trope: Migrants are Dangerous*

Tropes of accusation involve claims that migrants are more “like animals” than U.S. citizens who are imagined appearing and behaving based on expectations of whiteness and related Western philosophies. Tropes of accusation can take many forms that are interrelated and interconnected. In one of the most popular forms of accusation, migrants are described as dangerous, violent, and threatening. Trump, for instance, has deployed this type of accusation in speeches such as his 2018 talk to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). Trump said of migrants, “These are animals. They cut people. They cut them. They cut them up in little pieces and they want them to suffer. And we take them into our country because our immigration laws are so bad. And when we catch them—its called catch-and-release—we have to, by law, catch them and then release them. And I can’t get the Democrats—and nobody has been able to for years—to approve common sense measures that, when we catch these animal-killers, we can lock them up and throw away the keys” (2018a). It is clear that these comparisons are meant to lead to extremist solutions including, as Trump suggests in this example, locking migrants up indefinitely. The phrase catch-and-release is a phrase presumably borrowed from the “sport” of fishing and thus serves to denigrate both migrants and actual nonhuman animals. Like tropes of accusation, these types of phrasings construct migrants as inferior through comparisons and allusions to animals and animality, but these phrasings also implicitly reinforce the notion that nonhuman animals are inferior and undeserving of compassion and respect.



Trump, as a candidate for president and then as the nation's chief law enforcement officer and eventually in his position as former President, has often recited a poem called "The Snake", originally written by Oscar Brown Jr., throughout his rise to presidential power. Before he orates the lyrics, Trump tells his audience that they should "think of this in terms of immigration" (2018a). He then tells the story of a woman finding a dying snake on a walk—the kind-hearted woman provides the snake food, shelter, and the heat of a fire. In return, the venomous animal strikes and kills the woman, saying "you knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in" (2018a). This particular trope of accusation combines a potent mix of sexism, racism, and anthropocentrism and simultaneously reinforces the inferiority of women, people of color and nonhuman animals in relation to an imagined white U.S. citizen that rationally wants to stop dangerous immigrants from coming into the country.

Unpacking Trump's use of the poem, an ecofeminist reading suggests that all brown migrants and asylum seekers are animalized as poisonous, deadly threats to the nation. Actual non-human animals are also constructed as inferior as the symbol of the snake is represented as an "other" that is dangerous, wild, and less than human. The association of the two "othered" groups, those of migrants and nonhuman animals, reinforces their mutual subordination in relation to an imagined white patriotic citizen. The poem additionally associates women with nature since after all it is a "silly" woman that is irrational enough to care for the animal other. Val Plumwood discusses the association of women with nature and emotion and men with culture and reason writing, "modern anthropocentrism treats any difference from humanity as inferior which leads to the subordination of all parties who are seen as part of" or closer to "nature" (2006:504).

The inferior silly women and the snake are both constructed as closer to nature than the imagined rational citizen that is encouraged to be reasonable enough to control women, animals, and immigration.

In relation to a need to control the border to protect the nation, Trump's use of the poem further feminizes anyone that suggests welcoming migrants into the nation as a "silly woman" therefore justifying Trump's increasingly masculine, militaristic and aggressive approach to border policy and migration (Heuman and González 2018). The story ends when the violent aggressive "other" strikes and kills the caring women, in this case constructing all migrants as a violent and deadly threat. In speaking to his audience, Trump constructs himself and his followers as "tough" rational citizen subjects that desperately need to act to prevent migrants from "invading" a nation at risk of being feminized by policies based on compassion for non-whites, non-humans, and non-citizens. In other words, he further humanizes an imagined white male citizen in relation to the animalized brown immigrant "other" and anyone silly enough to have compassion. In this worldview, Trump's hostile border policies are presented as the only reasonable option for his followers and responsible citizens.

The language used by Trump is not at all new. In 2015, the Texas Agricultural Commissioner, Sid Miller, for instance, turned to social media to compare an image of refugees to one of rattlesnakes, writing "Can you tell me which of these rattlers won't bite you? Sure some of them won't, but tell me which ones so we can bring them into the house" (Malewitz 2015). In January 2019, Donald Trump Jr. compared migrants to zoo animals, when he turned to Instagram to support his father's proposed border wall, writing "You know why you can enjoy a day at the zoo? Because walls work" (Durando

2019). Not only do these comparisons of migrants to animals legitimize the institutionalized mistreatment of migrants, they reinforce hegemonic anthropocentric sensibilities that enable the use and abuse of actual non-human animals. For instance, organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) compellingly suggest that non-human animals should themselves not be caged in zoos for purposes of human entertainment (2020).

In the broader system of human domination, however, the construction of animals as inferior, dangerous, and underserving of care enables the abuse of nonhumans on a perhaps incomprehensible global scale—animals continue to be systematically used to serve human interests including as sources of food, labor, companionship, entertainment, and profit (Bunyak 2019a). Moreover, the conditions whereby animals serve these roles are often grotesque because nonhumans are so often denied compassion, care, and respect (Bunyak 2019b). Without any need to act compassionately towards nonhumans, animals, like many migrants, are frequently used with only one goal in mind: maximizing the benefits provided to their “human” masters.

In constructing migrants as “animal-killers” and “murderous savages” (Trump, 2018a), white nationalists reinforce a system of domination targeted at non-white migrants and refugees. Tropes of accusation legitimize the ongoing institutionalized violence inflicted upon migrants in the form of prolonged detention, deportation, assault, rape, and murder. In December 2017, one border patrol agent sent a text message describing migrants as “mindless murdering savages” and “disgusting subhuman shit” just days before striking an undocumented Guatemalan man with a government issued truck (Elfrink 2019). In another instance, Philadelphia Police Officer Christian Fenico, in

a post about refugees, wrote “Let them starve to death. I hate every last one of them” (Hoerner and Tulskey 2019). The City of Philadelphia has paid at least \$115,000 to settle two cases in which Fenico has been accused of unprovoked and excessive force (Hoerner and Tulskey 2019). These cases illustrate that vitriolic rhetoric is often directly related to physical violence against subordinated groups. In the wake of potentially catastrophic ecological change around the globe, these devaluations of everything non-human fuel the abuse of migrants and serve to further accelerate the domination, exploitation, and destruction of non-human animals and nature for purposes such as profit and consumption.

In tropes of accusation, racism, violence, and the murder of migrants is constructed as necessary and rational. As many of these examples demonstrate, invasion metaphors and tropes of accusation produce violent racist and white nationalist subjects that believe they are acting heroically to protect the nation. Such narratives furthermore legitimize and justify ever more violent racist institutions that target black and brown people and put them at risk of ending up deported, locked in cages, detained indefinitely, abused, or even killed. Tropes of accusation furthermore devalue actual nonhuman lives and legitimize their current abuse on a systematic scale. Tropes of accusation, however, are not without resistance. Indeed, as part of the discourse of immigrant invasions, many liberal humanists appeal specifically to migrants’ humanity in attempts to include migrants in a multicultural circle of beings that deserve to be treated with care and compassion.

## **2.6 Multiculturalism and Migrants’ Humanity: Narratives of Inclusion**

Ted Terry was first elected mayor of Clarkston in 2013 at 30 years old and took up the task of branding Clarkston as a multicultural oasis and a symbol of what is possible when America lives up to its ideals as an immigrant nation (King 2019). He often points out that more than 60 languages and 150 ethnic groups are represented in the approximately single square mile that constitutes the city (Clark 2020). After two terms as mayor, Terry expressed his personal connection to Clarkston saying “having the opportunity to experience the things that I've experienced just as a resident and citizen of Clarkston and in running for mayor and being re-elected and representing the most ethnically diverse square mile in America has... opened me up to so many more ways of thinking and possibilities than I ever could have imagined and I think that's true of everyone who interacts and lives or works in Clarkston. You can get exposed to people and ideas and cultures and religions and languages and traditions and food and music that, if you just stuck to your daily routine in your daily pattern of life, you never would have imagined” (King 2019). He added, “Clarkston is truly the melting pot of multicultural America. Clarkston is at once a reminder of what America's past can create and a beacon for a future that it has not yet attained” (King 2019). Terry is a progressive Democrat in the South and his passionate belief in the benefits of multiculturalism is here also connected to the personal pleasures he derives from living in such a diverse city.

Terry’s efforts to grab the spotlight quickly paid off as CNN released several stories glorifying Clarkston as an exemplar of the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism. Christopher Dawson, writing for CNN, introduced the world to Kitt and Bill Murray who founded Refuge Coffee back in 2013 (2019). According to CNN and the Murrays, the business plan was to create “a coffee place operated by refugees for

refugees. And then the rest of the town showed up” (Dawson 2019). Refuge Coffee offers a year of full-time training, a living wage, and English classes to refugee employees. Ahmad Alzoukani, an employee and refugee from Syria, described his employer as “like a mother who provides you help and care for a year to get you on your feet” (Dawson 2019). Alzoukani continues, “I’m so grateful for this country and I’m still willing to work hard” and CNN reported he now works with “new employees to help them also achieve their American dreams” (Dawson 2019). Terry even espoused his multicultural ideals on *Netflix’s Queer Eye: More than a Makeover* in a 2018 episode titled “Make Ted Great Again”.

Despite its status as an official “Welcoming City,” Clarkston is not immune to the types of “dehumanizing” anti-immigrant vitriol exemplified by President Donald Trump. Immigrants, such as Alex Tsegaye, noted that such dynamics make “you feel unsecured a little bit... You don’t know what’s going to happen, even though I’m a citizen” (Kauffman 2018). In the face of these types of “othering” narratives, liberal political leaders, news organizations, and activists continually appeal to the notion that immigrants are “human” and deserve to be treated as such. Unlike tropes of complaint/resistance which rely on a claim of being treated “like an animal,” tropes of inclusion rely on asserting migrants’ humanness.

## **2.7 Tropes of Inclusion**

Ted Terry, for instance, suggested in reaction to Trump’s vitriolic language that when you “connect with someone on a *human* level, all of your prejudices and narrow-mindedness falls away, and you actually see people for their *humanity*” (King 2019). He added, “today *human* interactions are happening despite Donald Trump” (King 2019). In

such an ethical framework, it is the perceived “humanness” of a subject or an intersubjective experience that makes lives worthy of respect, care, protection, or value. In Clarkston, migrants and refugees also assert their own humanness in the face of perceived dehumanization. For instance, Luay Sami, a former refugee and resident of Clarkston, notes that non-refugee people sometimes take a touristy and dehumanizing approach in their interactions with refugees noting “OK, they are refugees, but they are *human*, too. They are people. Sometimes, people walk in and say they want to see refugees. You’re not walking into a zoo and looking for refugees” (Shah 2020). In another case, Haikal, an immigrant from Afghanistan who eventually became a U.S. citizen and works with a resettlement organization called New American Pathways, said “America is the land of opportunity, a country that knows the worth of being a *human*, that knows the rights of being a *human*... I will be able to take care of my family in America” (Stump, 2018). In Haikal’s case, he seems to associate America itself with ideas such as “human” rights and “human” worth. Indeed, liberalism’s notions of human equity and freedom pervade the U.S. opposition’s approach to countering narratives of exclusion and invasion.

In December 2018, for example, Democratic Representative Hank Johnson of Georgia, asked then Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielson in an oversight hearing if she viewed “‘illegal aliens’ to be human or subhuman?” (Johnson 2018). In response to the recent death of a child migrant at the U.S. border, Johnson baited Nielson because Nielson’s boss, President Trump, had been recently under fire for comparing migrants to animals. Johnson’s exchange with Nielson is an example of what I term a trope of inclusion. In this exchange, Johnson is appealing to migrants’ status as

“humans” to demand that they are treated with some level of compassion and respect. Tropes of inclusion do not always focus explicitly on animals or animality, but rather they aspire to recognize the humanity of oppressed groups and demand that such groups are treated “humanely” with care and respect. Whereas the tropes of complaint/resistance identified by Matsuoka and Sorenson (2021) involve claims of being treated “like an animal,” tropes of inclusion more often involve an aspiration to be treated “like a human.” Despite the possibility of an absence of an explicit reference to animals or animality, these tropes create a dichotomy that implies that to be “subhuman” or “nonhuman” is to be inferior and perhaps undeserving of compassionate treatment or proper care.

As reported in *Mother Jones*, forty Democratic senators made a similar appeal in early 2018 when they signed a letter to Trump addressing a policy that allowed migrant children to be forcibly separated from their parents. The letter stated, “We ask that your Administration rescind this unethical, ineffective, and inhumane policy” (Lanard 2018). Tropes of inclusion imply that migrants should be granted the same rights and ethical consideration that are presumed to be a privilege of everyone included in the “human” species. In addition to reinforcing the hierarchical dichotomy between human and all that is not human, humanists that use these tropes of inclusion nearly always cling to the binaries of citizen/non-citizen that undoubtedly play a less obvious but absolutely crucial role in structuring insider/outsider, self/other, or us/them relationships as evidenced by a long history of bipartisan efforts to secure the nations “borders.” In other words, tropes of inclusion fail because they leave many of the binaries and hierarchies used to order, rank, and control people intact. In the current analysis, although the media outlets



examined portray a debate between anti-immigrant nationalists and humanists, the different participants in the debate all operate according to a shared set of rules and assumptions that include shared logics of anthropocentrism and Westphalian sovereignty.

In 2018, Rachel Hatzipanagos, an editor at *The Washington Post*, made a similar appeal to include migrants as ethical and political subjects writing, “the tactic of dehumanizing the ‘enemy’ is not one invented by [the Trump administration]. Historically, it has been perfected through movements powered by hate and bigotry... But fixing our broken immigration system won’t come by demonizing immigrants, ripping apart families and detaining children. It will come by remembering that immigrants *son humanos*. They’re human” (n.p.). As has been discussed, CAS scholars point out how such tropes rely on a human-animal or human-nonhuman hierarchy by suggesting migrants (or other human groups) should not be treated like animals. In this case, the recognition of migrant’s dehumanization only partially uncovers the intersecting oppressions facing migrants and non-human animals—it fails to recognize that the comparison of humans to animals is only an insult because of the assumption that animals are culturally constructed as inferior, expendable, dangerous and unworthy of respect or care.

### *2.7.1 The Effectiveness of Narratives of Inclusion*

Despite such shortcomings, narratives of rights and tropes of inclusion are both popular and at times effective in expanding protections for victimized groups. In the last 18 years, the Latinx population has more than doubled in the state of Georgia in large part due to migration. The Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights (GLAHR) has been based out of Atlanta since the organization was established in 2001. As part of

GLAHR's mission, the organization "educates, organizes, and trains the Latino community in Georgia to promote their civil and human rights" (2020). As migration to Atlanta and Georgia has increased, GLAHR has made a profound impact in the lives of Latinx migrants in Atlanta and throughout Georgia serving over 11,000 individuals and organizing 45 community events in 2019 alone (GLAHR 2020).

Over nearly 20 years, GLAHR has worked on behalf of migrants. They have recently worked to limit local law enforcement cooperation with federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers and campaigned against laws that allow local law enforcement officers to act as immigration agents. They seek to pressure companies such as Amazon to stop supporting ICE deportation and detention efforts as part of the "#NoTechforICE" campaign. In response to ICE raids, GLAHR created a team of "ICE chasers" that "patrol parts of the state early in the morning for any ICE activity" and inform local community members about their constitutional rights. All of these efforts connect to GLAHR's work to create "a culture of resistance in local communities" (2020). As pointed out on the organization's website, GLAHR works to resist "racial discrimination, economic injustice, and state inflicted violence" while constructing a narrative of human rights and civic engagement (2020).

GLAHR also seeks to increase civic engagement by cultivating "a culture of voting among the Latino community" (2020). GLAHR hosts weekly meetings where "members engage in discussions and political education about issues that affect and impact our community from draconian anti-immigration policies and laws, community self-defense, strategies to fight against injustice and raising political consciousness..."

(2020). By a lot of measures, GLAHR models resistance to the powerful nationalist institutions that seek to control and dominate migrants, non-citizens, and people of color.

At times, the organization fights to change the system through civic engagement and community organizing with aims such as ending deportations. At other times, GLAHR uses the rules of the very system they seek to change in efforts to protect people's civil rights. For instance, one of the objectives of the "ICE FREE ZONE" campaign is to "instruct and empower the Latino community about our constitutional rights to know how to protect yourself and how to protect your family, your home, and your neighborhood" (2020). Thus, GLAHR has an ambivalent relationship to broader political forces such as the federal government as it both seeks to change the system and use that same system to protect migrant's lives. Undoubtedly, the human rights based approaches of GLAHR have improved the lives of their constituents. In fact, human rights narratives offer an effective approach to challenging the exploitation and oppression that is encouraged within a discourse of invasions. GLAHR, however, ultimately leaves the sovereignty of the nation-state largely unquestioned. Despite all the success achieved by GLAHR, as its' very name suggests, the work they undertake also remains grounded in a notion of "human rights" that leaves the category of the human as understood by humanists unchallenged. Further, despite the important work GLAHR undertakes, they do not advocate for migrants in conditions of their own choosing. The work they do is constrained by the powerful state and corporate institutions that are so often deeply structured by a discourse of invasion.

### *2.7.2 Bipartisanship in Response to an Invasion: The Limits of Tropes of Inclusion*

Although Republicans and conservative media such as *Fox News* seem to be the most likely to compare migrants to animals using tropes of accusation, the historic rise to prominence of a discourse of invasions has produced a largely bipartisan effort to implement anti-immigration policies. For instance, Congress recently passed a bipartisan \$4.59 billion supplemental spending bill by an 84 to 8 vote in the Senate and a 305 to 102 vote in the house that was quickly signed into law by Donald Trump (Hirschfeld Davis and Cochrane 2019). Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the first-term self-identified Democratic Socialist who voted against the measure, pointed out that the funds were being directed to agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Health and Human Services, and the Pentagon that are widely accused of neglecting, abusing, and dehumanizing migrants and asylum seekers.

Supporters of the bill suggest the money will be used to improve the treatment of migrants, but Ocasio-Cortez asked, “How do you justify throwing \$5 billion at the people who are torturing children?” (Katz 2019). In her view, these agencies “prioritize and incentivize dehumanizing behavior” and she suggests at least some members of the Democratic Party had acknowledged that the bill “throws more money at all the wrong places to dehumanize more people and reward bad behavior” (Katz 2019). Progressive representatives such as Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Ayanna Pressley joined AOC in voting against the bill. Omar pointed out the lack of restrictions regarding the ways funds could be used saying “We’ve sent money that we don’t know if it’s going to continue to be used to put proper beds, to buy toothpaste, to assist these children in any kind of way and their families” (Parkinson 2019). Hank Johnson, the Georgian Democrat who had

appealed to migrant's humanity in his questioning of the Homeland Security Secretary, voted in support of the bill alongside many other Democrats.

Despite the resistance from some self-proclaimed progressive Democrats, the bill in question is only one example of longstanding bipartisan support for problematic and xenophobic immigration policy. In his 1995 State of the Union Address, then President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, declared "All Americans... are rightly disturbed by the large numbers of illegal aliens entering our country. The jobs they hold might otherwise be held by citizens or legal immigrants. The public service they use impose burdens on our taxpayers. That's why our administration has moved aggressively to secure our borders more by hiring a record number of new border guards, by deporting twice as many criminal aliens as ever before, by cracking down on illegal hiring, by barring welfare benefits to illegal aliens" (1995). In labelling immigrants as illegal, alien, burdensome, and criminal, Clinton's rhetoric shares much in common with the tropes of accusation often attributed to Republicans.

Although Clinton bragged about his administrations focus on deportations in the 1995 SOTU, his record of deporting migrants' pales in comparison to the next Democratic president. From 2008 to 2016, Barack Obama's Democratic administration waged a brutal campaign of deportations and oversaw the abuse of migrant children and asylum seekers being held in custody directly by DHS and by government contractors (Golash-Boza 2015). The deportations continued under the Trump administration and as more and more migrants were being locked up than ever, *Mother Jones* reported in 2018 that many Democrats had been accepting extensive financial support from for profit private prison corporations (Pauly 2018). In immigration debates, Democrats publicly

feign that Republicans are racist xenophobes, but Democrats have frequently partnered with Republicans and even led efforts to reduce and deter immigration into the United States.

Although many Democrats are implicated in this history of violently and abusively treating migrants, some Democrats and leftists do appeal to recognize the humanity of migrants and asylum seekers so as to expand the circle of people that deserve ethical consideration to include some of the children in cages, refugee border-crossers, and undocumented workers toiling in low paying jobs. The reason, in part, such tropes of inclusion ultimately are limited in their effectiveness is that these humanists do not challenge many of the assumptions that undergird narratives of an invasion. For instance, without exception, articles in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Mother Jones*, and *The Intercept* used a critical frame in their discussions of tropes of accusation. Journalists writing for these organizations, in other words, frequently condemned tropes of accusation and critiqued them as unjust and dangerous. Despite such widespread journalistic framing, these media sources often forego offering much in terms of an alternative to treating migration as an invasion.

The most frequent alternative comes in the form of tropes of inclusion. Yet, these aspirations of inclusivity still rely on anthropocentric assumptions and a human-animal binary. As ecofeminist have pointed out, the oppression and domination of migrants or other oppressed groups is linked to the oppression and domination of animals and “nature.” Matsuoka and Sorenson (2021) also make an exaggerated version of this argument claiming anthropocentrism is “fundamental” to many other oppressions:

The use of animals as a trope, using animal metaphors to denigrate other humans, requires no explanation in the process of devaluing them and making them powerless, as the metaphor functions so effectively within oppressive structures such as imperialism, colonialism and racism because of its link to another, more fundamental oppressive system, that of human-animal relationships. (117)

Without claiming that anthropocentrism is always and everywhere the most important and fundamental form of oppression, I suggest it is irrefutable that the human-animal construct is integral in producing the types of racist, nationalistic, and violent responses to migrations discussed in this chapter and dominant in the contemporary largely bi-partisan discourse of an invasion of migrants.

### *2.7.3 Tropes of Inclusion and The Pleasures of Multiculturalism*

Despite these dynamics at the federal level, the fantasy of multiculturalism pervades the liberal imagination as evidenced in the case of Clarkston—liberals, many of them white, find great pleasure in romanticizing multiculturalism as it exists or as it might someday exist. Clarkston, as it is portrayed nationally on CNN or Netflix, is evidence of this emotional and intellectual attachment to the ideal of multiculturalism. Some refugees and citizens, however, are skeptical of Clarkston's aforementioned brand as multicultural paradise—Luay Sami, Doris Mukungu, and Reggie Erawoc, according to reporter Khushbu Shah, “acknowledge it is trendy right now to be an inclusive, welcoming refugee-friendly town near the relatively liberal oasis of Atlanta. But, they all asked, who is it benefiting exactly? It makes the hundreds of people who volunteer feel good, they acknowledge” (2020). In his story of Clarkston, Shah notes “a pair of friends,

both immigrants, sit at a local coffee shop one weekend across the street from Refuge Coffee Co. They both roll their eyes at the red-and-black truck, saying it is not authentic, and its American owner who opened the shop in recent years profits from the refugee-friendly identity. By contrast, immigrants and refugees have been selling their coffees for years, without the PR and fanfare Refuge received for setting up in town and employing refugees” (2020).

Such skepticism is perhaps well-founded in a city with a poverty rate of over 30 percent and the rate climbs to 50 percent for foreign born residents (Kennedy 2019). Moreover, one-third of Clarkston’s population is uninsured, with many more likely underinsured (Kennedy 2019). Ted Terry, the Murray’s, and many other white people have attracted attention and profited off Clarkston’s status as a multicultural community. As the aforementioned refugees noticed, many white people, living in their often white communities, feel good when they hear stories such as one published in the AJC on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018 that stated: “When the citizens of Clarkston gather for the July Fourth party on Wednesday, holding their sparklers and celebrating the quintessential American holiday, they won’t be Bhutanese or Ethiopian or Sudanese. They will be Georgians celebrating a country that has given their lives hope. ‘Let’s be one nation, one America, living under one great flag,’” one immigrant said (Stump 2018). The optimism and hope for unity of this anonymous immigrant undoubtedly makes liberals feel good. It constructs America as an oasis of multiculturalism and as the telos of liberalism’s pursuit of equity and freedom for all people. It is also fantastical. As with all things good in the United States the pleasures of multiculturalism and ideals of inclusion are enjoyed disproportionately by white people.



Whites, most of whom long ago fled this cities borders, return to Clarkston as tourists to sample cuisine, see the refugee communities, and feel good about “America.” Even better, they consume the benefits of multiculturalism from the comforts of the suburban couch watching CNN or Netflix or reading the New York Times. For those truly passionate about experiencing their fantasy of multiculturalism, they may even choose to live in town. In an episode of Hometown Georgia produced by Georgia Public Broadcasting, for instance, Clarkston resident Chuck Reece noted he has a “clearer picture of what the immigrant south looks like living here in the most diverse place in the state.” He mused about his relocation to Clarkston saying “I just want to live in a place that makes me feel like I’m experiencing what the south is becoming, instead of what it used to be... I often think of the culture of the south these days as a Gumbo that when new people are coming in and they throw their new flavors in the pot and it winds up tasting even better if you bother to taste it” (2019). These white liberals smile as refugees obediently celebrate their newfound freedoms, even if these same refugees recognize the vast inequalities that exist in the United States. The way in which such liberals experience multiculturalism might indeed taste like a good gumbo. They undoubtedly do aspire to some future time when everyone will embrace the benefits of multiculturalism as they have experienced it. Whites, however, enjoy and experience this diversity from a distance, whether spatial, economic, or simply at their place atop the country’s racial hierarchy. Refugees and immigrants are more likely to live in poverty, work in the poor conditions and go without health insurance at the same time as they are expected to quickly adapt to U.S. life and culture. Indeed, the discourse of multiculturalism and tropes of welcoming cities too often play out on the ground in ways that put migrants into

the unenviable position to perform the cheap labor and care work that enables the lifestyles and abundance experienced by the more affluent members of their communities.

## **2.8 Anthropocentrism and Neglected Intersectionalities**

Both narratives of invasion and multicultural inclusion reproduce many of the existing borders and inequalities that exist in the United States. Although animals and animality figure prominently in the discourse of immigrant invasion, the roles of animals, animality, and species has not been adequately accounted for in many existing intersectional analyses. In the logics of liberal democracy and western humanism, nations are populated by rational citizens that have historically been human. The state, as practiced in recent centuries, thus relies on a distinction between human and non-human. Moreover, sovereign nations make claims of power over geographic territories. Nation-states also claim power over not only the rational citizens that legitimize their rule, but also all of the nonhuman lives and forms within a territory. In this context, non-citizens, plants, animals, and all other non-human lives and forms are generally ranked and treated as inferior to citizens. It thus becomes possible to draw associations between different “inferior” groups to reconstruct them as less than human and enable their abuse, domination, and, in some cases, extermination. Indeed, the above analysis suggests that in the U.S. the abuse of non-humans and non-citizens is institutionalized as well as a common practice in the everyday lives of many citizens. Moreover, human rights advocates and multiculturalists often appeal to taken for granted notions of the “human” as well as leave the state’s claimed borders and cultural assumptions largely unchallenged—thereby propping up some of the very tools being used to divide and

oppress migrants, people of color, women, and all of nature. In the current case, the state and mass media are integral in perpetuating a discourse of invasions and animality.

As CAS scholars have pointed out, the comparison of humans with non-human animals would not have such harmful implications if non-human animals were treated with care, respect, and compassion. Although useful at times in calling out the mistreatment of some humans, the notions of dehumanization and human rights, as most often used, are problematic because they rely on and reinforce dangerous species hierarchies and systems of power and almost always simultaneously fail to critique the pervasiveness of anthropocentrism. The concept of species has been too often neglected in efforts to understand the intersecting ways discursive power produces violence towards groups such as migrants. The concept of race does not cohere absent the role of species categorizations. In other words, species categories and the related notion of “animality” are important in producing what are imagined to be racial differences. And, the concept of species can also not be understood absent the role of race in producing our understanding of species difference. Put simply, racial, sexual, citizenship, and species categories co-articulate as they undergo continuous formation. Although these types of intersectionalities have been frequently neglected, CAS scholars and ecofeminists are among those that are beginning to upend the anthropocentrism that pervades mainstream conversations about race, gender, and citizenship.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how discourses of immigrant invasions and multicultural inclusion ascribes animality and humanity to groups of people based on their race, nationality and status as migrants. In the accounts studied here, tropes of accusation suggest that migrants are dangerous and violent. It is clear that tropes of

accusation often construct an imagined self that is a vulnerable white American citizen and threatening racialized “others” that include migrants, refugees, women and actual nonhuman animals. In echoing a sensibility that was commonplace in many Indigenous ways of thinking, Karen Barad (2007) points out that the boundary making practices that distinguish “human” from less than human produce crucial materializing effects within systems of power. As categories of race, sexuality, gender, and species are co-constructed and hierarchized, patriotic white men are conceptualized as belonging at the top of the ladder and law enforcement officials are constructed as having a moral duty to deter immigration by any means necessary including the practices of caging children, family separations, and use of lethal force in questionable circumstances. Such associations of whiteness with humanness can be traced further back through histories of imperialism, colonialism, and enlightenment. The related glorification of Western logics and versions of rationality, citizenship, and modernity have always seemed to privilege white men of reason. It turns out that race and species have a long history of co-articulation.

As has been discussed, both tropes of accusation and tropes of inclusion reinforce categories of citizenship and nationality in a largely bipartisan program of anti-immigrant nationalism. Tropes of inclusion, like the more explicitly racist tropes of accusation, are also tainted by their own attachment to whiteness, Westphalian sovereignty, nationalism, and anthropocentrism. They are liberal fantasies that demand the subordination and obedience of the “other,” even if that other is brought partially into the category of the “human.” The categories used to divide and oppress are maintained in both narratives: race, gender, nationality, and humanity.

Michel Foucault described this characteristic of discourse through the notion of reverse discourse (Foucault, 1990). Reverse discourses despite their potential as tools of resistance to dominant discourses, operate upon many of the same fundamental assumptions of such dominant discourses. As an example of such a reverse discourse, the rights and inclusion narratives of GLAHR have contributed to improvements in the lives of migrants. In another case discussed in this chapter, migrants that have demanded entry into the category of the “human” play a role in challenging trope of invasion and animality. Reverse discourses, then, provide opportunities to improve the lives and material conditions of oppressed groups. In the case of rights discourse and tropes of inclusion, however, I argue these reverse discourses ultimately prop up prevailing power structures in ways that also fuel the very power differentials they ultimately challenge. Migrants, people of color, women, animals, and all of nature are among those that continue to be constructed as inferior in current hierarchical systems.

The discourse of invasions constructs migrants as objects. They are, like animals, thus exploitable, controllable, and even often killable. The discourse of invasions produces more prisons, ICE raids, and racist xenophobes. It legitimizes animal abuse, the commodification of “nature,” and the destruction of our ecosystems. Although the reverse discourses of multiculturalism and human rights work to resist the extreme cruelties encouraged by invasion narratives, these reverse discourses fail to challenge the fundamental concepts on which invasion discourses rely. New stories and new acts of resistance are necessary in the face of such anthropocentrism, racism, name-calling and violence. We need stories that tear down these hierarchies and allow for healing.

*With awe and wonder, you look around, recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all*

*beings--somos todos un paiz. Love swells in your body... linking you to everyone/everything—the aboriginals in Australia, the crows in the forest, the vast Pacific Ocean. You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This conocimiento motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean--to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing. Te entregas a tu promesa to help your various cultures create new paradigms, new narratives.*

—Gloria Anzaldúa, “now let us shift...”

## CHAPTER 3. INVASIVE ANIMALS: FERAL CATS, POPULATION CONTROL, AND THE KITTEN INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Snip it and tip it  
Snip it and tip it  
I'm pulling up with that Mackerel  
You know I got that trap  
I'm a get that kitty  
And I'm a bring it right back...  
If you see em with no tip  
Then you'll see em in my trap

—“*All day I dream about spaying*” performed by *The TrapKing* and the *Cat Man of West Oakland*

### 3.1 Introduction

In April 2016, Sterling Davis, also known as the TrapKing of Atlanta, teamed up with the Cat Man of West Oakland to release a music video titled “All day I dream about spaying” (Adidas) as part of their mutual promotion of Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR), a method aimed at controlling feral cat populations. TNR, which involves sterilization and the release of cats back into their colony, is an alternative to Trap-Euthanize (TE) approaches to feral cat “overpopulation.” The increasing use of TNR as a method of control is, in part, a result of public opinion and cat activists’ success in promoting the strategy as the most effective and ethical option to ensure the welfare of feral cats. Peter Wolf, a cat advocate, and Joan Schaffner, a law professor, note the high level of public support for TNR and the broader no-kill movement when pointing out that TNR has become more widely adopted in communities across the United States in recent years (2018). Wolf and Schaffner point out that even the harshest critics of TNR recognize that

“cat advocates are winning the war of... public opinion” (2018:3, quoting Marra and Santella 2016).

In TNR programs, cats are trapped, sterilized by a veterinarian, permanently identified as sterilized through the removal of the tip of one ear, most often vaccinated, and most healthy cats are then released back to the original trapping location (Robertson 2008). After cats are returned to the location where they were trapped, TNR advocates recommend that human “caretakers” feed cats daily and monitor feline well-being (Thompson 2012). In some instances, cats in TNR “colonies” may be regularly trapped for vaccinations and medical treatment, and unhealthy cats may be removed from colonies and euthanized. Kittens or strays that are trapped and able to be socialized to human companions are put up for adoption. TNR proponents share goals of controlling or reducing feral cat populations and argue that TNR is a scientifically viable approach to managing what is perceived as a problem of feline “overpopulation” (Thompson 2012).

In most cases, TNR proponents concede that feral cat overpopulation is a problem that humans need to address. For instance, the website of TrapKing Humane Cat solutions, founded by Davis, suggests “all over the world, feral/stray cats overpopulating and spreading disease has been a major issue” (TrapKing 2020). Alley Cat Allies, a leading promoter of TNR nationally, suggests that for more than a century, “the American shelter and animal control system has been relying on catching and killing outdoor cats to control their population” (2020). In this context, a myriad of nonprofit organizations came to promote TNR across the country. In Atlanta, The Kudzu Cat Alliance, for instance, has a “primary mission” to “stabilize community cat populations” through TNR (2020). The existence of such organizations relies, in part, on the idea that



cats have “overpopulated” ecosystems and communities—and so these organizations exist to attempt to manage these excess lives. With these dynamics in mind, TNR proponents oppose TE programs and suggest that TNR is the only viable alternative to lethal methods of control. As the TrapKing website suggests, “the only effective and humane way to handle feral/stray cat population issues is through TNR. TNR is the only humane alternative to euthanasia” (TrapKing 2020).

In Atlanta, the popularity of TNR is additionally evidenced by the success of LifeLine Animal Project in taking over management of both Fulton and DeKalb County Animal Services in 2013 while promoting the pursuit of a “no-kill” agenda in “Catlanta” (2020). Lifeline provides support for TNR including educating caretakers about colony management and providing low cost spay and neuter services. According to Lifeline, lifesaving rates, or the number of cats not euthanized, increased in both shelters from 39% in Fulton and 61% in DeKalb in 2013 to 85% or more each month in 2019 (2020). Despite the seeming success of TNR in gaining public support and decreasing euthanasia rates, TNR remains highly controversial.

Some conservation biologists, for instance, frequently suggest cats are an “invasive species” that threaten endangered and rare wildlife (Winter 2004; Longcore, Rich, and Sullivan 2008). The perception of cats as a threatening invasive, they say, is supported by scientific studies that demonstrate cats kill billions of “native” birds and small mammals every year (Loss et al. 2013). In addition to cats’ negative effects on native species, they construct cats as vectors of disease and a public nuisance. In this context, these eradication activists argue that cats must be removed from the landscape at any cost. Eradication activists appeal to the authority of scientific studies to argue that

TNR fails to reduce or eliminate feral cat populations—claiming that eradication is the only effective means to manage and control feline animality.

In this chapter, I examine these competing approaches to the management of feral cat populations. I begin by discussing my methods of data collection before providing a brief history of human-cat relations. Specifically, I discuss the liminal social position of cats which is important to consider in the context of the management and control of their lives and bodies by humans. Then, I discuss the assumptions, claims, and evidence that exists in relation to the management and control of feral cats. Within the scientific literature TE supporters stigmatize cats using narratives of invasion as they describe cats as dangerous alien invasive predators. Scientists who support mass culling construct humans as rationally able to address this threat through rigorous scientific approaches to feral cat management using TE. Moreover, the elimination of cat lives is actually a responsibility for rational *ecological citizens* who undertake the task of culling cats in pursuit of the greater ecological good. In contrast, TNR scientists' narratives focus on overpopulation rather than invasion, but despite their tempered language they frequently appeal to constructions of the human as rationally able to control and manage a valued feline subject that deserves “humane” treatment. In these instances, TNR proponents shore up an anthropocentric conception of humans as rational, superior beings and cats, unlike humans, are frequently not considered as “rational” or as “moral agents” and are therefore positioned at a lower point on what Mel Chen describes as an “animacy hierarchy” (2012).

In addition to the scientific literature, I also analyze the websites of numerous cat rescue organizations in Atlanta, Georgia. The organizations almost universally support

TNR as an alternative to euthanasia. I conclude the chapter by considering how the pet industry has come to invest heavily in TNR programs and organizations. As the situation in Atlanta demonstrates, feral cat management is funded by both taxpayer money and donations directed to the many non-profit organizations that focus attention on animal welfare. The pet industry, including the multi-billion-dollar companies Petco and PetSmart, has recently been funneling money into TNR related programming—and I will discuss the underlying logics of these trends. I will argue that TNR and the construction of cats as deserving of life, care, and welfare, in the eyes of the pet industry, is currently a preferable, and more profitable, approach to feral cat control than TE. TNR narratives demonstrate a variety of possible configurations of human-feline relationalities and, at present, TNR in practice is intricately intertwined with a desire for bio-profit that serves the interests of large corporations at the expense of taxpayers, consumers, and, perhaps, cats themselves. As a result of these dynamics, the *Kitten Industrial Complex*, a network of pet care and pet health companies, ethical and behavioral norms, TNR non-profits, and legal regulations, has emerged to optimize both human and cat lives according to a set of behavioral, aesthetic, health, and ethical dictates. I offer a final brief discussion of how anthropocentrism in the narratives of feral cat invasions illustrates that concepts such as gender, race, and species are in constant interaction and formation.

### **3.2 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

Although TNR is becoming increasingly popular on the ground in communities such as Atlanta, scientific consensus regarding whether TNR or TE is a more effective option is far from achieved. In order to include differing perspectives on feral cat management, I collected peer-reviewed articles published in these journals: *Biological*

*Invasions, Conservation Biology, and the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.* I focused on articles published since 2008 in order to focus on recent debates. I began collecting data by conducting title searches for \*feral cat management\*, \*trap neuter return\*, and \*invasive cats.\* I collected five articles from *Biological Invasions*, three articles in *Conservation Biology*, two articles in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* using only the first two search terms for the final journal because the search for \*invasive cats\* returned a large number (n = 841) of results that focused on invasive surgeries. I performed the same searches in journals including *Biological Conservation, Nature Conservation* and *Journal of Applied Ecology* which did not produce any search results. The initial journals were selected for searching due to their specific focus on issues of invasive species and their prominence within the respective fields. As I analyzed the articles from the initial search including the references cited in these articles, I included 25 additional articles and reports that were cited and directly related to feral cat management based on my interpretation. The additional articles were included to ensure as comprehensive a range of scientific narratives as possible were represented. In total, I collected a total of 35 peer reviewed articles and imported them into Atlas.ti qualitative coding software for analysis.

With the goal of also understanding how feral cat management is playing out in local communities, I analyzed the websites of organizations focused on this issue in Atlanta, Georgia. The organizations were Lifeline Animal Project, Community Cats, Meow or Never, Paws and Whiskers, Best Friends Animal Society, furkids Animal Rescue and Shelters, Kudzu Cat Alliance and Trapking Humane Cat Solutions. In total, then, I analyzed the websites of eight cat rescue organizations. I also interviewed Sterling

Davis, the TrapKing, regarding his experience practicing TNR. Website and interview data were coded and organized using Microsoft Excel.

I analyzed all data using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is an interpretive method that can be used to reveal and contest power relations constructed within a particular set of texts (Foucault 1995). In this case, the method is used to examine the assumptions, norms, rules, and relationships created within the examined texts. Specifically, the approach is used to examine the construction of a multispecies biopolitics that exist within the competing TE and TNR narratives. As used by Foucault, the method used in this study additionally seeks to uncover the types of subjects and relationalities that are made possible and eventually “materially constituted” within particular discursive formations (2003:28). Discourse analysis starts by collecting a suitable set of texts to evaluate. Data collection and analysis as conducted in this study were simultaneous and ongoing.

As the analysis progressed, many themes and examples of social control emerged and it became clear that despite the robust scholarly attention given to TNR programs, tools from the field of sociology could tell a new and important story about the social control of cats in the United States. Based on analysis of all of these sources, I uncovered apparent discursive linkages among cat rescue organizations and for-profit pet care and health companies. Therefore, I also included the websites of corporations including PetSmart and Petco in the analysis. I continued coding and organizing the data until, ultimately, the discourse analysis revealed some of the ways biopower is constructed within TE and TNR narratives and highlighted the ways the pet industry has shaped and

has been shaped by the successful rise of TNR as the dominant means of controlling free-living cats in the U.S.

### **3.3 A Brief History of Feline Liminality**

Archaeologists suggest cats began a commensal relationship with humans up to 12,000 years ago in the Middle East alongside of the development of agricultural societies in the Fertile Crescent (Driscoll, Macdonald, and O'Brien 2009; Faure and Kitchener 2009). The storage of excess grains is said to have attracted mice and rodents, which in turn drew middle eastern wildcats more closely to human villages. The relationship is often represented as mutually beneficial because cats seemingly benefited from abundant food sources and humans benefited from the control of grain-eating rodents in what has been described as “one of the more successful ‘biological experiments’ ever undertaken” (Driscoll et al. 2007:522).

Considering thousands of years of “evolution,” Driscoll, Macdonald, and O'Brien suggest the most “notable adaption is the cat’s overwhelming tolerance of people” which “has made cats the delightful and flourishing profiteers in our homes that they are” (2009:9977). At first glance many cats do ‘profiteer’ within human homes, but on closer inspection human-feline relations continue to be fraught with contradictions, contestations, and ambivalences. Alongside Driscoll’s optimistic evolutionary tale of furry pets living in safe health-promoting confines of contemporary middle-class homes, Jody Berland writes “no animal in history has been so routinely murdered, tortured or massacred as the domestic cat” (2008:434). As will be discussed, feral cats today are indeed liminal creatures and although they are of the same “species” as house cats, they frequently defy the meanings humans attach to companion cats.

Feline liminality is worth exploring in a little more detail. In the twentieth century, technological advances such as refrigeration and the invention of kitty litter are said to have laid the groundwork for a recent parade of cats into the confines of human homes in the second half of the century (Robins 2016). In a 2012 survey, 62% of pet owners in the United States reported that they considered their pet to be a family member (AVMA 2012). The pet industry is booming worldwide—for example, consumers spent a whopping 69.51 billion U.S. dollars in the United States in 2017, 4.6 billion Euros in the U.K. in 2016, an estimated 8 billion Australian dollars annually in Australia, and nearly 1 billion New Zealand dollars in New Zealand each year (American Pet Products Association; New Zealand Companion Animal Council). In this context, the human home has come to be defined as the appropriate space for cats to live and human “owners” have become “responsibilized” for feline wellbeing and health (Bunyak 2019). Feral cats, however, challenge these roles and meanings.

Including some of the approximately 90 million pet cats in the United States, perhaps up to 157 million cats freely roam U.S. streets, forests, swamps, and farms (Jessup 2004; Dauphiné and Cooper 2009). Although many humans have come to pamper their indoor companions, in the United States, three million dogs and cats continued to be euthanized each year in shelters as of 2017, and poor health and behavioral problems are common causes of abandonment, re-homing and euthanasia (Weiss, Gramann, Spain, & Slater 2015; The Humane Society of the United States 2017). Feral cats, like their indoor likenesses, garner ambivalent reactions from humans. They are at times loved, cared for, admired, comforted, adopted, and fed and at other times hated, tortured, and killed. Within the TNR debate, feral cats are commonly constructed

as an overpopulated mass of “excess” lives that must be managed, controlled, or even eradicated.

### *3.3.1 Feral Cat Management*

Clare Palmer suggests there are three categories of reasons put forth to justify the control of feral and outdoor cats: 1) cats are a nuisance in communities and are vectors of disease; 2) feral cat welfare is poor due to risk of disease and trauma; and 3) cats are predators and kill other animals. Palmer suggests the most important of these factors among wildlife conservationists is the role of cats in killing “wildlife” (2014). For instance, Dauphiné and Cooper write, “studies from around the world show that cats kill large numbers of wildlife, including a range of bird species” (2009: 2; see also: Dickman 1996; Lepczyk, Mertig and Liu 2004; Calver et al. 2007). In many cases, proponents of feral cat control suggest all three of these reasons are important justifications for euthanasia, TNR, or other methods of “management.”

Palmer notes that “the management of feral cats is highly controversial. Ownerless cats can be regarded as messy pests, threats to public health, profligate hunters of already vulnerable wildlife, integrated members of novel ecosystems, intelligent and sentient independent actors or abandoned and suffering victims of human neglect. Each of these interpretations of ownerless cats prioritizes certain values and disvalues—such as avoiding suffering or species protection—over others. These different value priorities affect not only how ownerless cats are perceived but also what practices are proposed to manage them” (2014:148). Although these assumptions vary and further demonstrate feline liminality, TNR proponents most often share a common belief that feral cat populations should be controlled or managed by humans for one or more of the reasons



identified by Palmer—I thus will argue that anthropocentrism is a similarity often shared among both eradication activists and cat loving TNR advocates alike.

### **3.4 Narratives of Invasion and Trap Euthanize (TE)**

*Eradication activists*, a label I use to describe citizen-activists but also many professional scientists, largely consider cats to be a threatening, alien, invasive species. Eradication scientists frequently cite the domestic cat's appearance on the Invasive Species Specialist Group's list of 100 of the worst invasive species to support their arguments that favor the mass culling of free-living cats (Lowe et al. 2000; Winter 2004; Longcore, Rich, and Sullivan 2008; Dauphiné and Cooper 2009). Dauphiné and Cooper explain these claims writing "because [cats] form a domestic species distinct from their wild ancestral species, domestic cats are considered to be an exotic, or non-native, species in all environments in which they occur" (2009:2). Here, domestic cats are constructed as unnatural in all spaces—there is no "environment" where they are not "exotic"—except perhaps inside of human homes.

Dauphiné and Cooper continue, "because of their ability to overwhelm existing native species and natural ecosystems processes in environments in which they have been introduced, domestic cats are moreover classified as invasive species" (2009:2). Not only are cats "exotic" and "non-native" in the eyes of eradication activists, they are also "invasive." The rhetoric of "invasions" implies that there is a threatening outsider that must be stopped at all costs. Eradication activists, as will be demonstrated, conduct their science and activism according to the logics of nativism and anthropocentric control—for proponents of euthanasia, the responsibilities of what I call *ecological citizenship* mean

that humans are obligated to eradicate cats from the environment for the greater good of the ecosystem.

Linda Winter exemplifies this form of ecological citizenship writing “conservationists and wildlife biologists in the United States are concerned about domestic cat predation on native wildlife because *Felis catus* is not native to North America, occurs here in large concentrated numbers, and kills common as well as rare species (2004:1370). In emphasizing feline predation, these constructions also portray feline “animality” and move these beings into a lower position on established “animacy hierarchies” (Chen 2012). Dauphiné and Cooper write, “cats have contributed to declines and extinctions of birds worldwide and may be the single biggest cause of global bird extinctions after habitat destruction” (2009:1). In agreement with these perspectives, Marra and Santella call to “remove [cats]—once and for all—from the landscape” by “any means necessary” (2016:152-153).

In a recent article in *Conservation Biology*, Loss and Marra compare TNR supporters to the corporate titans that manufactured doubt about issues such as “DDT, cigarette smoking, and climate change” (2018:265). They write “free-ranging cats unquestionably threaten humans as hosts of zoonotic disease, threaten biodiversity by causing tremendous wildlife mortality, have contributed to at least 63 extinctions, and negatively affect vertebrate populations globally” (2018:265; see also: Loss et al. 2013; Doherty et al. 2016; Loss and Marra 2017). Loss and Marra label a collection of cat welfare advocates, non-profits, and scientists as “merchants of doubt,” and compare their efforts to the work of Phillip Morris or Exxon in casting doubt on the science of tobacco use and climate change respectively. The authors passionately make such dramatic

comparisons because they operate on a set of anthropocentric and nativist assumptions that deny feral cats a possibility of belonging in any ecosystem on Earth—cats are always and everywhere invasive, alien, and a threat to humans and native wildlife. Indeed, it is actually morally reprehensible and intellectually irresponsible in these scientists eyes to not seek to destroy and eliminate feral cats entirely.

At the core of these eradication activists' argument is the suggestion that cats kill "native" wildlife at high enough rates to threaten biodiversity through species extinctions at both local and global levels. For instance, Dauphiné and Cooper write that "scientific estimates" "place domestic cat predation among the most important anthropogenic causes of bird mortality in the United States" (2009:2). Loss and colleagues, in a study published in the prestigious journal *Nature Communications* and frequently cited by eradication activists, suggested that cats are responsible for killing 6.9 to 20.7 billion small mammals each year in the United States alone (2013). The authors used a computer model to produce estimates of cat predation and eventually attributed 1.3 to 4.0 billion annual bird mortalities to domestic cats. In a critique of this study, however, Joan Schaffner and Peter Wolf argue, "estimates available at the time" of Loss and colleagues analysis, "set the total number of landbirds in all of North America at about 4.7 billion. In other words, the authors were claiming that free-roaming cats in the U.S. alone are responsible for killing up to 85% of North America's birds each year. Common sense tells us this is demonstrably false; if it were true, there would simply be no birds" (2016:2). As will be discussed further, there is little scientific consensus related to feral cat predation and the efficacy of TNR—although scientists and activists on different sides

of the debate commonly appeal to the authority of scientific knowledge to justify their points of view.

For example, Loss, Will, Longcore, and Marra responded to criticism of their widely read 2013 study by writing, “whereas scientific debate is characterized by reasoned dialectic, healthy skepticism, and constructive consideration of differing interpretations and perspectives, misinformation campaigns use approaches such as ad hominem attacks, strawman arguments, appeals to emotion, and diversionary tactics to make untruthful and disingenuous assertions and to propagate information that directly contradicts substantial scientific consensus” (2018:3386). The authors suggest in *Biological Invasions* that the U.S. bird population reaches perhaps 10 billion in the pre-breeding season and 20 billion in the fall season thereby making their earlier predation estimates seemingly more feasible. They defend the 2013 paper on cat predation writing that the paper was “well-received in scientific circles, having been cited > 320 times as of July 2018 according to Google Scholar, with no instances of negative criticism” (3386). They conclude by declaring that there is a “scientific consensus” that cats “unquestionably threaten humans” and “threaten biodiversity by causing tremendous wildlife mortality” (2018:265).

In refuting the efficacy of TNR, eradication activists suggest that there is “no evidence that highly managed TNR colonies reduce feral cat populations” (Cove et al. 2018:334; see also: Longcore et al. 2009). Loss and colleagues, for instance, go on to suggest that one of the biggest sources of misinformation is that “cat advocates exaggerate TNR’s ability to reduce cat populations” (2018:3386). Loss and Marra write “there is no rigorous scientific evidence that TNR is widely effective at reducing cat

populations” (2018:265). Scientists in the eradication camp frequently cite the aforementioned and controversial Loss et al. (2013) study to suggest cats exert strong negative impacts on wildlife, including birds (Cove et al. 2018). These scientists also suggest cats have contributed to dozens of species extinctions (See for instance: Winter 2004; Longcore, Rich and Sullivan 2008; Medina et al. 2011; Cove et al. 2018).

Winter, a supporter of eradication in public parks, beaches, and other areas managed for wildlife, notes that anthropogenic drivers of bird mortality such as “habitat loss and fragmentation, pesticides, pollution, window strikes, and collisions with communication towers” are indeed partially to blame for declining bird populations (2004:1369). However, she goes on to argue “as remaining wildlife habitat becomes fragmented and isolated by human development, domestic cat predation on native birds, especially rare and endangered species, has become an important factor in bird mortality that cannot be ignored” (2004:1369). She also takes the position that TNR is not a “scientifically defensible” solution to free-roaming cat overpopulation (2004:1375). Thus, for proponents of culling, eradication is the only rational, responsible solution to solving the problem of feral cat overpopulation.

Based on assumptions that feral cats are a non-native species, these eradication activists appeal to nativism, scientific authority, and an anthropocentric worldview that constructs humans as able to rationally control and manage ecosystems. In a thorough review of debates over the efficacy of TNR in controlling feral cat populations, Clare Palmer suggests that “TNR can be effective” in terms of reducing the number of cats in uncontrolled cat colonies—TNRs effectiveness, however, varies depending on context and factors such as feline immigration, ongoing sterilization, and the adopting out of

socialized cats. Palmer suggests that eradication activists actually “aim to eliminate free-roaming cat predation on wildlife... from this perspective, only Trap-Euthanize (or another form of elimination) is effective” (2014:155). Based on a desire for complete elimination, they reject TNR and promote the complete eradication of feral cats using TE or other lethal methods such as poisoning.

If we, at least temporally, set aside the accuracy of the truth claims generated by eradication activists, we can move to productively examine the ways eradication activists construct cats as exotic, alien, threatening predators to suggest that TNR is not enough and that cats must be eradicated entirely from ecosystems. Clare Palmer suggests that eradication activists often base their advocacy for killing cats on the premise that “species,” such as birds, have a moral status or some kind of social or “intrinsic value” (2014). Eradication activists construct humans as ecological citizens that have a responsibility to protect these native “species” by controlling and managing cats, birds, and entire ecosystems. In this way of thinking, the eradication activist, and all humans, are constructed as able to rationally and objectively manage “nature.”

In critiquing this way of thinking, Banu Subramaniam, a plant biologist, describes nature “as a concept, an idea, and a place that is co-produced through the interaction and entanglements of various organisms, histories, and geographies” (2014:96). In deploying this definition, Subramaniam rejects descriptions of “native” and “invasive” species as historically and culturally arbitrary, especially in a world with “profound human-induced movements of flora and fauna” (2014:138). She aptly states, “whether we like it or not we are defining nature through our actions” (2014:141). Subramaniam goes on to suggest that “the invasive species ‘war’ reflects our continued ambivalence about

immigration” and nationalist ideologies (2014:120). She suggests “the battle against exotic and alien” flora and fauna maps onto broader anxieties about “economic, social, political, and cultural changes” (2014:121). She continues:

The categories of native and foreign are not useful. Instead let us focus on ecological traits that cause change we find undesirable and on the causes of these changes that we should be actually worried about—destruction of habitats, erosion of diversity, soil erosion, overdevelopment, monocultures, high input agriculture, pollution of air and water. And above all let us be clear that our choices are “human made” whether for economics, aesthetics, or enhancement of particular ecological characteristics like biodiversity, harmony, and species richness that humans have deemed important. (2014:141)

If Subramaniam’s line of reasoning is applied in the case of eradication activists, it suggests these activists have a particular type of nature that they intend to protect, preserve, or go back to. In their eyes, cats have no place in nature. Moreover, eradication scientists cling to an idea that humans, through their unique powers or rational thinking, have the ability to protect and create a romanticized version of nature through the use of reason, logic and applied science. Despite appeals to scientific consensus and authority, in the TNR debate within conservation biology, claims regarding cats’ roles in predation and spreading disease as well as the efficacy of TNR in reducing feline populations are all highly controversial and contested. These appeals to the authority of science are reminiscent of similar appeals used to justify historical projects of imperialism, colonialism, modernization, and enlightenment—projects that have long privileged

whiteness and Western worldviews. As I will discuss next, cat advocates make similar appeals to science and cling to a form of anthropocentrism that, although possibly less insidious than the nativist ecological citizenship demanded by eradication activists, nonetheless also frequently constructs cats as “less than human.”

### **3.5 Narratives of Overpopulation and Trap, Neuter, and Release (TNR)**

Danielle Busch, program coordinator at the Hall County Animal Shelter in Georgia, suggested in 2019 that a recently implemented TNR program “can help control the pet population while simultaneously decreasing the number of non-live outcomes at the shelter” (WGCL). Many non-profits and cat activists suggest that science provides evidence that TNR is an effective strategy for reducing and managing feral cat populations. Alley Cat Allies, for instance, suggests that TNR “works” (2020). Alley Cat Allies suggests science backs up these claims as their website states “scientific studies and communities with TNR programs are proof that TNR reduces and stabilizes populations of community cats” (2020). These proponents of TNR cite peer reviewed studies that demonstrate the success of TNR in reducing feral cat populations and increasing feline welfare (for example: Kreisler, Cornell, and Levy 2019; Schmidt et al. 2009; Miller et al. 2014; Scott, Levy, and Crawford 2002).

In this context, Lifeline Animal project declares TNR “is the ONLY effective method to reduce unwanted animals” (2020). TrapKing Sterling Davis suggests that TNR if “done correctly” means “cats are less aggressive as the colony stays small so food isn’t as scarce and there isn’t a need to fight over mates if nobody is reproducing!!!” (2002). As discussed above, eradication activists such as Loss and Marra have labeled these cat advocates as “merchants of doubt” and equated TNR promotion with the denial



of climate change or the harms of cigarette smoking. Lynn and colleagues, however, contest these appeals to scientific consensus writing in *Conservation Biology*, that “there are good conservation and public health reasons and evidence to be skeptical that free-ranging cats constitute a disaster for biodiversity and human health in all circumstances” (2019:769). They go on to contest Loss and Marra’s claims and point to a lack of scientific consensus surrounding the cat as danger narrative writing of:

notable downward revisions of wild cat numbers in Australia (Legge et al. 2017; Doherty et al. 2019); low number of species that are threatened or endangered by free-ranging cats on mainlands (Doherty et al. 2016); potential disconnects between lethal population management and conservation best practices and outcomes (Littin et al. 2004; Doherty et al. 2019); distractions from larger threats to biodiversity, such as habitat loss (Ferreira et al. 2011)... unsatisfactory and counter-productive outcomes to the removal of cats and their predators in some disturbed island and mainland ecosystems (Rayner et al. 2007; Fulton 2018); reappraisals of the positive roles non-native species may play in disturbed or novel ecosystems (Wallach et al. 2010; Schlaepfer 2018), bickering over a useful but not miracle tool like TNR (Longcore et al. 2009; Spehar & Wolf 2017)... (771)

TNR supporters and sympathizers thus similarly point to science in their efforts to advocate for their preferred method of feral cat control. They frequently construct humans as responsible for controlling feral cats and their ecosystems and suggest science and rationality as the most effective means to achieve control. In this alternative cat-

friendly form of ecological citizenship, humans are responsible for not only controlling cat populations, but also for the ethical and respectful treatment of the cats themselves

In their recent article, William Lynn and an interdisciplinary group of environmentalists, conservationists, and anthropologists note that, despite the authoritarian tone of eradication proponents, in contrast to a scientific consensus, scientists have frequently questioned the cats as dangerous narrative (2019). In concluding their article, they quote from the consensus statement from a 2012 conference titled *The Outdoor Cat: Science and Policy from a Global Perspective*: “it is important to develop a scientifically... well founded consensus on how to manage conflicts with outdoor cats” (HSUS 2013 as quoted in Lynn et al 2019:774). The authors point to extensive “scientific evidence” to contest the cat as threat narrative. For instance, empirical studies have demonstrated “unsatisfactory and counter-productive outcomes to the removal of cats and their predators in some disturbed island and mainland ecosystems” (771; Rayner et al. 2007; Wallach et al. 2010; Fulton 2018). Although these authors recognize the need for “researchers to develop better evidence and theoretical examination,” they also recognize that ethical and moral concerns are not separable from scientific practice. They conclude by arguing against any feral cat management programs that cause harm and suffering to cats because of the vast uncertainties in the scientific literature as they caution “against a moral panic over cats” (2019:773).

### *3.5.1 The Biopolitics of TNR*

In contrast to TE narratives, TNR narratives produce a biopolitical configuration that expects humans to both rationally control cat populations and ethically care for individual cats and colonies. Alley Cat Allies, a leading international cat-rescue

organization, claims “TNR improves the lives of cats, addresses community concerns, reduces complaints about cats, and stops the breeding cycles” (2020). TNR organizations construct cats’ lives as worth improving and argue that free-living cats are deserving of safety and protection. Alley Cat Allies, the organization suggests, works to “protect and improve cats’ lives” (2020). The Lifeline Animal Project similarly has a stated goal of ending the “euthanasia of healthy and treatable pets” (2020). In these cases, TNR work thus is viewed as a preferred alternative to a system that has relied on disposing or erasing the unwanted lives of cats and kittens—instead cats are constructed as deserving of welfare, protection, and an improved life. According to TNR supporters, the approach, if implemented correctly, both improves the lives of cats and reduces free-roaming cat populations.

In such biopolitical configurations, humans are constructed as responsible for making sure free-roaming cats are treated humanely and protected. Lifeline Animal Project, for instance, recommends numerous safety procedures to be deployed when trapping cats. Cat rescuers should “make sure the trap is clean after each new cat has been trapped” to prevent the spread of disease (Lifeline Animal Project 2020). Best Friends Animal Society suggests planning the timing of trapping carefully because “you want the cat to be in the trap a minimum amount of time before surgery, so trapping the night before is usually the best approach” (2020). Best Friends adds that cats should not be trapped in the “heat of the day without adequate protection” (2020). Additionally, Best Friends instructs rescuers to “never leave traps unattended in an unprotected area because animals are vulnerable after being trapped” (2020).

After trapping, according to Lifeline, the trap should be covered with a towel to “calm the frightened cat and lessen its risk of injury, and prevent the spread of any disease between cats at the clinic” (2020). Best Friends Animal Society adds that a recently trapped cat may “thrash some, but resist the urge to release him—and remember that you are doing this for his benefit” (2020). Best Friends instructs that cats must be held in a “safe, enclosed location” until they are taken to the clinic for their surgery. As these examples illustrate, TNR organizations construct cat rescuers as playing a vital role in protecting the well-being and lives of free-roaming cats. Cat rescuers are “responsibilized” to ensure the safety and wellbeing of these cats throughout the TNR process. Human rescuers, both volunteers and professionals, according to such logics are able to improve their ethical standing by providing cats a safe TNR experience. To describe the power dynamics in another way, the exertion of extensive physical control by rescuers over these non-human animals is further framed as legitimate because rescuers are “doing the right thing.” It is in this context that such organizations legitimize the social control of cats, whom are then subject to trapping and sterilization “for their own benefit.”

Best Friends suggests rescuers “make arrangements in advance” for spaying or neutering and vaccinating the cats (2020). Lifeline also recommends cat rescuers keep cats for 24 hours after surgery, but suggests cats “are very resilient and they will recover better if released quickly” (2020). Best Friends adds that “if a cat does not seem to be recovering well, consider having him or her re-checked by a vet before releasing” (2020). Then, cats should be released back to the same place where it was trapped. Rescuers should, according to Best Friends Animal Society, “make sure the spot for release does

not encourage the cat to run toward danger” (2020). Lifeline advises rescuers to “keep leaving food and water out” (2020). As these procedures demonstrate, cat rescuers are expected to perform substantial labor for the benefit of cats and such work continues once a cat is returned to their original territory.

As discussed, it is standard TNR practice that after cats have been safely trapped and treated, they are returned to their community. At this point, human caretakers are critical to the successful management of the TNR colony. Paws and Whiskers, an organization that assists abandoned and free-living cats and their caretakers in the Metro Atlanta area, suggests the caretaker plays a role in providing regular food to TNR colonies, identifying injuries or illnesses and ensuring transport to veterinary services, and managing conflicts with neighborhood residents (2020). As the organizations’ website puts it, the responsible caretaker ensures a “healthier and safer life than if [the cats] are left on their own” (2020). Moreover, the caretaker “who watches for new cats will also help sustain the gradual reduction in the colony’s size over time through attrition” (2020). Caretakers, just as rescuers, work to optimize the lives of cats and, in so doing, act out the ethical prescriptions of TNR organizations. The ethical work of TNR is imperative in a context described by Peter Wolf and Joan Shaffner who suggest that Americans’ “interest in the humane treatment of companion animals extends beyond the 94.2 million cats with whom... Americans share their homes to the millions of community cats with whom we share our neighborhoods” (2019:2).

As TNR scripts construct care workers as moral and responsible ecological citizens, TNR narratives also construct docile cats that behave according to the health, aesthetic, and reproductive desires of human interests. After all, it is human societies that

decide, for one reason or another, that feline reproduction is a social and ecological problem. Human communities decide that the shrieks of fighting cats are not aesthetically acceptable and that feline reproduction is a threat to ecosystems. TNR organizations purport to address such issues. For example, Lifeline Animal Project suggests spaying and neutering reduces “fighting and howling by 88%, urine spray and smell by 87%, and the overall risk of cats spreading diseases” (2020). Additionally, human groups are dictating that cats should be fed certain foods by caretakers rather than hunt for their own prey. Cats are constructed as better off when they are cared for by humans—a narrative that, as well be discussed, maps onto a construction of human-cat relationships that would seem to serve the interests of the pet industry. As Lifeline suggests, TNR stabilizes the population so that “cats will naturally have more space, shelter, and food, and fewer risks of disease... cats living in colonies tend to gain weight and live healthier lives” (2020). The human is constructed as a superior, ethical, intelligent being capable of making sure cats’ lives are improved in such ways through continual monitoring of and interventions into colonies.

TNR organizations suggest cats deserve such protection and safety because they are sentient, intrinsically valuable individuals. For instance, Alley Cat Allies declares, “we value the intrinsic dignity and worth of each cat and acknowledge their history and place in the natural landscape. We value the relationship between people, the earth, and all animals and acknowledge that the inherent interests of all sentient beings must be given equal consideration” (2020). Wolf and Schaffner admit the success of TNR is, at least partly, driven by “a recognition of the intrinsic value of cats... and the legitimacy of compassion in shaping our moral obligation to them” (2018:3). Thus, to promote their

cause, TNR activists and advocates meld both their belief in the scientific efficacy of TNR as a management strategy with their moral and ethical views of cats as intrinsically valuable, sentient beings.

In such configurations of biopolitics, cats' lives are optimized and enhanced according to the reproductive, aesthetic, and behavioral dictates set by human scientists, organizations, and communities. Moreover, however, human caretakers are responsabilized to provide care, companionship, and safety for feline colonies. In so doing, however, human caretakers and stewards also optimize themselves. According to the logics of TNR, caretaking is the way rescuers and caregivers come to act ethically. Alley Cat Allies, moreover, suggests a “proven relationship between violence toward animals and violence toward people” exists and that “cruelty to animals is unacceptable and cannot be ignored for the sake of the animals and our fellow man” (2020). In such a discourse, the trapping, sterilizing, and social control of TNR colonies appears as rational and ethical because it not only benefits cats, but even all of humanity.

Within the discourse of TNR organizations, then, it is both rational and responsible—indeed obligatory and ethical—for human rescuers and caretakers to socially control feline bodies through acts such as trapping, sterilization, feeding, vaccinating, monitoring and medicating. Alley Cat Allies organization suggests, “cats need us to protect them from cruelty” (2020). Humans are constructed as the agents of social control capable of acting rationally and ethically. Cats, on the other hand, are potential victims that need protection. Cats are “animals” that shriek, howl, fight, reproduce, and urinate uncontrollably without the benevolent interventions provided by their human caretakers. TNR is much more than an approach to managing cat

populations, it is a discourse of multispecies biopolitics that optimizes both humans and cats according to set of ethical, normative, and behavioral dictates and rules.

### **3.6 The Economics of TNR**

Both eradication advocates and TNR proponents also make competing appeals to the financial impact of feral cat management to support their positions. In Atlanta, The LifeLine Animal Project suggests the taxpayer cost to trap and euthanize the 25,000 cats that arrive in Atlanta's shelters each year is \$3.5 million annually. Lifeline suggests taxpayers save \$2 million because of TNR. According to Alley Cat Allies, "taxpayer money that funds shelters and animal control agencies is wasted on an endless cycle of trapping and killing. Increasingly, the public believes that the money spent on killing could and should be re-allocated to programs that help animals." Best Friends Animal Society, a proponent of TNR, commissioned a 2010 economic impact study that suggested that TNR could save over \$8 billion to control U.S. based feral cat populations in comparison to the eradication approach of catching and euthanizing (Nolen 2010). The study, funded by PetSmart Charities, estimated TNR control to cost \$7 billion and TE control to cost nearly \$16 billion.

In contrast, opponents of TNR, such as Linda Winter, discredit TNR by pointing to costly examples such as a case where "after 3 years of legalized TNR and \$100,000 of taxpayer funds to help pay for it in Brevard County [FL], the free-roaming cat population had grown so out of control that a Feral Cat Advisory Committee was formed to make recommendations on how to solve the problem" (2004:1373). Longcore and colleagues similarly point to cases that conclude TNR is "a waste of time, energy, and money" (Natoli et al. 2006 as quoted in Longcore, 2008:891). Eradication activists additionally



argue that cost-savings estimates fail to consider the environmental damage, predation, and public health risks caused by TNR colonies. For instance, David Jessup notes “if you attach even a few dollars in value to the wildlife killed and consider the costs of trying to recover sensitive species, environmental cleanup, and human health impacts associated with outdoor feral cats, any hypothetical savings disappear and TNR becomes more expensive” (Nolen 2010:2). Interestingly, critics did not point out that the care work performed by colony managers and volunteers seems not to be factored into the costs of TNR control programs—that is, caretakers are most often uncompensated for the significant labor required to manage TNR colonies.

Although there is a debate over the most cost-effective way to approach feral cat populations, everyone agrees that managing feral cat populations generates a large financial cost, and thus, the potential for corporations and other organizations to generate revenue, profit and other financial rewards. Meow or Never, an Atlanta non-profit that helps stray and feral kittens through humane TNR, estimates the cost of a community cat’s spay/neuter surgery as \$40, a basic exam with a veterinarian for a litter of kittens at \$75, and a kitten’s spay/neuter surgery, vaccinations, microchip, dewormer, and combo test at \$125. Alley Cat Allies and Lifeline Animal Project, both classified as 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations for tax purposes, each generated over \$10 million in gross receipts in recent years. Taxpayers and charitable donors shoulder the costs of managing the lives of these feral cats that are deemed as “excess” through narratives of invasion and overpopulation.

### *3.6.1 The Kitten Industrial Complex*

The Kitten Industrial Complex, an arrangement of ethical and moral principles, pet care and pet product companies, cat rescue and shelter organizations, and social and economic rules, transforms the excess and valueless lives of free-roaming cats into capitalist commodities and living sources of profit. Whereas prior scholarly literature has focused on the potential ethical benefits of TNR over TE, a sociological lens can demonstrate how the interests of capital and the pet industry are important to consider in the case of the increasing use of TNR to manage and control free-living cat populations throughout the United States. As will be discussed, TNR receives generous support from the emerging Kitten Industrial Complex.

In 2015, The Petco Foundation, the namesake of Petco Animal Supplies Inc., made the largest donation in the organizations history by investing \$1.5 million in Atlanta's Lifeline Animal Project, a key proponent of TNR in Atlanta. The Petco Foundation has contributed \$250 million to "lifesaving animal welfare work" since being founded in 1999 (2020). Petco Animal Supplies Inc. is one of the 100 largest private, for profit companies in the U.S. with over 25,000 employees and annual sales upwards of \$4.2 billion in 2018. Petco sells a proverbial cornucopia of pet products and services including food, kennels and carriers, toys, bowls, feeders, apparel, skin care services, dog training, grooming, vaccinations, pet photography, pet insurance, and online pet first aid services.

PetSmart, another private company with a whopping \$7 billion in annual revenues, supports TNR through PetSmart Charities. According to PetSmart Charities, TNR "is currently the most humane and effective method known for reducing and managing free-roaming cat populations... At PetSmart Charities, we have funded and

collaborated on numerous TNR projects which have dramatically lowered intake, euthanasia and the cats' numbers. Freed from the flood of kittens and cats, shelters are able to improve conditions in their facilities, benefiting all the animals in their care" (2020). As these examples illustrate the pet industry has stepped in to support the spread of TNR and claimed their role in improving the lives of cats.

The industry's support of TNR is logical in a variety of ways. TNR generates pet industry profits directly as excess kittens are funneled into adoption programs as part of the TNR approach. Both Petco and PetSmart, for instance, profit in several ways from robust adoption programs offered in their nearly 4,000 combined retail stores. The cost of supporting TNR is far offset by the billions and billions of dollars of revenue generated when consumers adopt pets from their stores. It is not the adoptions that are particularly profitable, but the expectation that owners will spend lavishly to optimize and pamper their new indoor pets for years to come (Bunyak 2019). At the beginning of this cycle, free-roaming cat lives are given no value according to the logics of capital and profit, but TNR can make their lives valuable by turning them into a commodity and a living source of profit because not all cats are returned to their colonies in TNR. Kittens are often "saved" and then adopted out to new "families" or "owners." As a variety of new meanings are attached to cat lives as pets, owners are further responsabilized to spend money for the benefit of their pet and family members are emotionally attached in ways that fuel pet industry profits.

In the TE approaches supported by some conservation scientists, complete eradication theoretically eliminates this reserve of "excess lives" that is so valuable to the pet industry. In contrast, TNR provides an ongoing funnel of adoptable kittens into

shelters and pet stores. The true dividends of TNR for the pet industry, however, may be that the approach constructs feline lives as worth improving, optimizing, and treating ethically. Proponents of euthanasia rely on narratives of cats as invasive, destructive, uncontrollable wild animals. Such narratives are irreconcilable with the marketing of the cat as a friendly, furry, loveable housemate.

The pet industry is heavily invested in a particular construction of the human-cat relationship that in many ways synergizes with the discourse of TNR. In petkeeping narratives, cats are constructed as family members, loved ones, and furry children while owners or keepers are responsabilized for their care, feeding, wellbeing, and optimization. The industry serves to profit when pet owners view their cats as deserving of careful management, control, and optimization. Just as rescuers and caretakers provide safety and wellbeing to free-roaming cats, pet owners are responsible for ensuring their indoor companions are safe, well fed, and healthy. The construction of TNR as an ethical and humane way to improve cats' lives serves to benefit the pet industry more than TE approaches that may undermine the popular construction of cats as deserving of care. In such a situation, the pet industry makes the life-saving work of TNR organizations more visible through financial support, advertising, and in-store adoptions of rescued animals. As a result of such efforts, consumers are widely able to see and even make kittens live, even as millions of cats continue to die behind the scenes. Both TNR and pet industry narratives construct cats as deserving of care, while at the same time relying on such a construction for their very existence and success.

Donations are a critical part of TNR programs and their corresponding biopolitical configurations. Best Friends Animal Society offers a litany of gifting options

for donors including one-time donations, monthly contributions, vehicle donation, stock donation, giving with Amazon, and many more. Donations are constructed as an important way for people to express their own ethical practices and compassion for animals. Alley Cat Allies claims that by donating, “you’ll be helping protect and improve cats’ lives” (2020). TNR organizations existence relies on rescuers, caretakers, adopters, donors, and even taxpayers taking ethical action to improve and optimize the well-being of free-roaming cats. As has been discussed, the labor and action of these ethical cat people further contributes to the needs of the pet industry as cats are framed as sentient balls of fur that should be cared for, and controlled, by human stewards.

The Kitten Industrial Complex therefore includes a tangled arrangement of pet products companies, spay and neuter clinics, cat rescue organizations, and government rules and regulations. The entire complex relies on the idea that cats are made to be docile and cooperate with their human masters. Cats, regardless of if they live in a suburban home or on the street, are carefully monitored and controlled. The system is propped up through a narrative that suggests humans behave ethically by controlling and optimizing free-roaming and pet cats in distinct ways. Without the buy in and actions of an army of rescuers, caretakers, donors, and adopters the work of TNR organizations would be impossible. But, these care workers contributions are encouraged because they are framed as an ethical duty and a responsibility. Pet care and pet products companies, of the for-profit variety, benefit from such ethical frameworks that eventually encourage owners to pamper and optimize their pets primarily through the consumption of goods and services. The excess worthless lives and bodies of free-roaming street cats are

eventually turned into living, breathing, profit generating commodities under the auspices of the Kitten Industrial Complex.

Cats, however, do not always cooperate with the dictates of the Kitten Industrial Complex or TNR organizations. Pet cats, for instance, can escape, or refuse to snuggle. Free roaming cats can put up a fight with cat rescuers—Atlanta’s TrapKing Sterling Davis, for instance, shared a harrowing story of a feral cat escaping in his rescue van while he was driving down the highway. The Kitten Industrial Complex is not a totalizing discourse in any regard—as has been noted, many citizens, scientists, and even societies refute the assumption that every living cat should be controlled, protected, and optimized. Despite such ambivalences, the Kitten Industrial Complex ultimately thrives the more it is able to make the lives of rescued kittens, docile community cats, and cute pets visible, while ignoring and silencing the mass of continued feline lives that fail to cooperate or are simply not required for purposes of profit. Euthanasia and mass culling continue to be an important part of managing feline populations, The Kitten Industrial Complex simply often hides it.

While a complete tracing of the historical emergence and coalescing of the values, norms, finances, care work, laws, and infrastructures that make up this iteration of the Kitten Industrial Complex is beyond the scope of the current analysis, TNR appears to have played a critical discursive role in its emergence by constructing a set of values and norms that are similar to those that fuel ever increasing pet industry profits. It is such values that have enabled the interests of the pet industry to synergize with the interests of cat rescue organizations. In the 1990’s, TNR came to be used in some U.S. towns, but it was not until 2008 that Jacksonville, FL became the first major city to embrace TNR as a

principal part of its approach to managing cat populations (Alley Cat Allies 2020). The Petco Foundation began operating in 1999 and would soon thereafter begin funding TNR work. In the case of Atlanta, the success the Lifeline Animal Project has achieved, with funding from the pet industry, in reducing euthanasia has occurred primarily since 2013 (2020). Such examples suggest a relatively recent fusing together of the interests of cat rescue organizations with those of the pet care and health industries.

In summary, the emergence of this Kitten Industrial Complex has effectively made cats' lives increasingly worth optimizing, protecting, and saving by further solidifying a discourse that "responsibilizes" rescuers, care workers, donors, and adopters to do their part to help control and manage cats. In this decentralized configuration of biopower, the spread of such norms and values produces responsibilized humans and docile cats with increasing pervasiveness. In other words, the Kitten Industrial Complex has become increasingly effective in achieving the social control of not only the well behaved cats themselves, but also the responsible cat loving humans that work, spend, donate, volunteer, monitor, and live based on norms that further fuel the financial success and very existence of both the for-profit pet industry and cat rescue organizations.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Both eradication activists and cat advocates appeal to notions of anthropocentric control and the authority of science to support their points of view—although the different sides of these debates approach TNR with different assumptions and goals. The proponents resort to discourses of nativism and invasion in an effort to justify the mass culling of feral cats. In TNR narratives of overpopulation, in contrast, feral cats are defined as a mass of "excess lives" that should be ethically managed and controlled, and

the pet-industry derives as much bio-profit as possible as these excess lives are turned into capitalist commodities and living sources of profit. The pet industry provides large levels of financial support to research and organizations that promote the efficacy and humanity of TNR based population management. Ultimately, however, the pet industry is a financial beneficiary of the widespread success of TNR. The few cats that are adopted out of TNR colonies may “profiteer” in human homes, but this opportunity may leave cats even more rigidly under the control of their human “owners” and come with the sacrifice of certain activities that cats may find pleasurable and desirable (i.e. reproduction, hunting, roaming).

In the context of the Kitten Industrial Complex, the pet industry and dominant narratives of cats as furry friends are maintained through TNR and a notion that “every animal—owned or unowned—deserves to be protected and safe...” (Alley Cat Allies, 2019). “Overpopulation” is made profitable in this bio-financial system that relies heavily on taxpayer subsidies, care workers, donors, and non-profit organizations to funnel kittens into the homes of adoring consumers. In such a state of affairs, animal welfare organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) question whether TNR does indeed promote animal welfare by stating “We believe that although altering feral cats prevents the suffering of future generations, it does little to improve the quality of life for the cats who are left outdoors and that allowing feral cats to continue their daily struggle for survival in a hostile environment is not usually a humane option” (2019). Thus, PETA constructs TNR as most often not a humane option and various eradication activists justify TE management using similar arguments. Within the context of such ongoing debates, on pet industry balance sheets, bio-profits



significantly outweigh all of the externalized costs that burden taxpayers, cats, and responsabilized consumers.

In chapter 2 of *Invasions*, I argued that the control and exploitation of migrants intersects with the control and exploitation of nonhuman animals. In the current chapter, feral cat management remains largely structured by a hegemonic notion that “humans” can and should seek to control the lives and bodies of free-living cats in one way or another. The debates in this chapter once again demonstrate the pervasiveness of anthropocentrism in narratives of invasion, and such anthropocentrism is dangerous not only to feral cats, but to human groups as well. In part, this is the case because certain human groups are situated lower on what Chen calls “animacy hierarchies.” As discussed in earlier chapters, women, people of color, and migrants are among those that have historically been marked as “less than fully human.”

In fact, TNR narratives articulate to and reinforce complex histories whereby care work and femininity have been systematically devalued. For instance, the care work of TNR practitioners is noticeably devalued when the cost of such work is not included in cost comparisons between TE and TNR. In an interview, additionally, Sterling Davis reported to me in 2020 that he was currently living out of his van to save money so he can help more cats. In the case of feral cat management, it is also important to note that epistemological appeals to science and rationality by proponents of both TNR and TE reinforce traditional epistemological hierarchies that value science and reason over such care work and empathy. TE scientists, most dramatically, appeal to notions of “nativity” to obscure their own ethical biases thereby often attempting to appear to be completely objective and scientific—thus reinforcing the aforementioned historical biases that privilege Western versions of rationality that have justified projects of colonialism and imperialism for centuries. As these epistemological hierarchies continue to be implicated

in racialized systems of oppression, it is also important to note that TE and TNR narratives are routinely gendered as women have historically been responsible for the types of care work that are devalued within these narratives. The complexities of TNR narratives again demonstrate that the cultural concepts of gender, race, and species including the stereotypes and statuses associated with these very categories are in constant interaction and constant formation, even when such categories and statuses seem to temporarily disassociate from one another within scientific and cultural representation.

## **CHAPTER 4.     INVASIVE PLANTS: SHOULD KUDZU BE KILLED OR USED?**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Kudzu is a fast-growing vine that covers millions of acres of land across the U.S. South. In the warmer seasons, the vine and its vivid green leaves blanket meadows, hillsides, telephone poles and trees in states like Georgia, Tennessee, and South Carolina. In the winter, although the leaves die and turn brown, kudzu still dominates roadside views if you drive along many southern highways. Kudzu was not always so abundant in the United States, and although the massive patches of vines are considered aesthetically pleasing by some, the kudzu vine just like the domestic cat has come to be described as one of the one hundred worst “invasive species” in the world by some scientists (Lowe 2000). Homeowners often use herbicides and mowers in a struggle to keep the vine out of their yards. Governments spend millions to try to control and eradicate this oft-hated vine.

In the context of such an invasion, on July 25<sup>th</sup> 1999, Bo Emerson deployed militaristic language to describe kudzu as a “green monster” in the Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) writing of the infamous plant as: “an unstoppable force of nature that strangles forests, obliterates farms, swallows houses and cars, shorts out power lines and reduces diverse woodlands to an impenetrable monoculture of matted vines, kudzu is, just the same, as much a part of Dixie as iced tea and red clay” (1999:2). Indeed, since the mid twentieth century, kudzu has commonly been thought of as a menacing invasive species in the South. Consequently, chemical companies reap profits and conservation biologists build careers as a human war on the vine is waged.

Despite widespread demonization of kudzu, only two months prior to the portrayal of kudzu as a green monstrosity, the AJC published an article profiling one of Georgia’s most prominent kudzu advocates, Diane Hoots. Hoots, perhaps the most well-known proponent of

kudzu's usefulness in crafts and cooking, coauthored the book *101+ uses for kudzu* along with her son Matthew (Kent 1999). In recent years, Hoots and other kudzu advocates have constructed kudzu as a natural resource, a useful object that might be profitable and serve human interests. Published only months apart in the most prominent newspaper in Atlanta, Georgia, these two articles attribute contradictory meanings to the kudzu plant with the former describing the vine as a threatening menace and the latter describing the plants as a useful resource.

Drawing attention to these contradictions, Diane Hoots and Juanitta Baldwin illustrate the ambivalent relationships humans share with this vine in the title of their 1996 book, *Kudzu: The Vine to Love or Hate*. Hoots and Baldwin are not alone in recognizing the ambivalent and changing meanings humans have attached to kudzu. Derek Alderman, professor of geography at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville, for instance, suggests kudzu is a “vine for postmodern times in that it resists being characterized in terms of a single, universal role or status. Rather, the plant is multi-positional, embodying and reflecting the wide range of differences and interests that exist within society about nature” (1998:167). Kathleen Lowney and Joel Best, a pair of renowned sociologists, additionally highlight the changing claims scientists made regarding the plant during the twentieth century as experts shifted from describing the plant as a “miracle vine” to an “invasive species” (1998).

As suggested by the work of these authors, kudzu has garnered ample attention from scholars, scientists, reporters and the general public since the woody vine arrived in the United States in the late 1800s. In part, the attention the plant receives is driven by sheer physical presence: by 1997, some estimates suggested the plant covered up to seven million acres of land in the southeast U.S. (Coblentz). In addition to the plant's presence in southern landscapes, however, artists, activists, and southern citizens increasingly have embraced kudzu as an important part of southern culture (Hoots and Baldwin 1996; Alderman 2015). The purpose of the current chapter is to explore some of the contradictions, assumptions, and politics of the differing ways kudzu is constructed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while paying attention to the historical

contexts that shaped contemporary stories about the plant. In part, this involves exploring the complex historical emergence of two of the more prominent, and seemingly contradictory, constructions of kudzu: that of threatening menace and useful resource.

With these goals in mind, I begin the chapter by reviewing and discussing the history of the kudzu vine in the United States while focusing on the changing meanings people have given to this fast-growing plant. I then explain the process of data collection and analysis for this chapter before I analyze the distinctions and similarities among two prominent early 21<sup>st</sup> century tales about kudzu: kudzu as dangerous invasive and kudzu as economic resource. I particularly focus on the ways these seemingly contradictory narratives privilege the interests of Western “humans” through the construction of kudzu, as a potential stand in for all of nature, as subordinate and as an object to be controlled and managed by humans. Further, both narratives frequently prioritize and fuel capitalistic demands for profit maximization and economic notions of efficiency. Although these two stories seemingly offer quite different ways of living with, or eradicating, the vine, I suggest they share more in common than meets the eye.

#### **4.2 The Arrival of Kudzu and Rise of a Miracle Vine**

Over fifty years before scientists and southerners launched a war on kudzu, the vine arrived in the United States as early as 1876 when the plant was showcased at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition (Winberry and Jones 1973). For the next few decades, kudzu, which produces bright reddish-purple and yellow flowers, was used for beautification and ornamental purposes as the plant was found particularly useful for shading porches. In this context, southerners came to benignly call kudzu “the porch vine” (Hoots and Baldwin 1996). As early as the turn of the twentieth century, Charles and Lillie Pleas were experimenting with kudzu as pasturage on their Florida farm (Hoots and Baldwin 1996). After experiencing personal success with a bountiful crop of kudzu, the Pleas reportedly began to market the “miracle vine” through a mail order business (Hoots and Baldwin 1996). The business was quickly investigated as a fraud but vindicated after an investigator arrived at their nursery in Florida and observed kudzu

growing as vivaciously as advertised. Since their boosterism of the plant foreshadowed a widespread embrace of kudzu in the South, Diane Hoots and Juanita Baldwin describe the Pleas as “the first kudzu zealots” (1996:16).

Kudzu, also known by scientists as *Pueraria montana*, is a climbing perennial leguminous vine (Winberry and Jones 1973). Kudzu’s central tap root can reportedly measure over 6 feet in length and weigh in at over 400 pounds (Alderman 2004). The vine’s woody brown stems can grow up to lengths of over 60 feet. Kudzu has trifoliate leaves that fix atmospheric nitrogen, supplying up to 95% of leaf nitrogen to the plant in poor soils and the symbiotic nitrogen fixing bacteria in kudzu’s root system increase soil fertility (Bell and Wilson 1989; Forseth and Innis 2004). Kudzu is most successful in surviving in areas with annual rainfall of at least 40 inches, a long growing season, and mild winter.

In the United States, the plant produces relatively little seed but rather reproduces and spreads primarily through a form of cloning. The vine establishes new root crowns, or new tap roots, at points along the stems. In the U.S. South, kudzu begins its growing season in the spring and by the time summer ends the twining vines produce a ground cover two to four feet thick (Winberry and Jones 1973:63). Flowers up to an inch in diameter with a reddish-purple color bloom from July through October before the plant loses its green leaves in winter, leaving a “tangle of woody stems and a mat of brown leaves until the following April” (Winberry and Jones 1973:63). Kudzu topiaries, vivid and green, are visible across the U.S. South throughout the growing season.

As farmers such as the Pleas began to exploit the plant for pasturage over a century ago, the biological properties of kudzu shaped the ways these zealots started to widely construct a “miracle vine” in the first half of the twentieth century. Around 1910, kudzu began to be used more widely for agricultural purposes such as pasturage. Kathleen Lowney and Joel Best suggest that around 1917, applied scientists began to enthusiastically embrace kudzu as a boon for Southern agriculture. Researchers at the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station at Auburn, for

instance, investigated the potential usefulness of the plant on southern farms. Historians suggest that southern soils at the time were depleted from a long history of cotton production and overuse (Winberry and Jones 1973). Boosters began to suggest that kudzu was not only useful as a grazing crop but also able to repair damaged southern soils due to both its usefulness preventing erosion as a ground cover and ability to fix nitrogen into soils thereby increasing soil fertility and productivity (Alderman 2004). By 1935, the Soil Conservation Service (S.C.S.) began recommending kudzu for erosion control (Winberry and Jones 1973).

According to historical accounts by authors including John Winberry and David Jones (1973), Derek Alderman (1998, 2004, 2015), Diane Hoots and Juanitta Baldwin (1996), Kathleen Lowney and Joel Best (1998) and Kurt Kinbacher (2000), kudzu widely metamorphized from a “porch vine” to a “miracle vine” in the first half of the twentieth century, but some farmers remained wary of the plant throughout the vine’s seemingly inevitable rise to prominence. In 1902, for example, David Fairchild, a USDA employee, wrote about his difficulties in eradicating kudzu he planted on his Washington DC property (Hoots and Baldwin 1996). Fairchild spoke and wrote about his concerns over kudzu, but his warnings did not appear in print until 1938. As early as 1917, a published article did give kudzu an ambivalent review claiming, “the optimistic tone [that] has been adopted by a number of Southern seed dealers in their advertising matter, [shows] some lack of restraint and a resulting tendency to exaggerate the possible advantages of the crop and minimize its probable... disadvantages” (Dacy 1917:100-101; Lowney and Best 1998). Farmers worried about difficulties in controlling and managing the rapidly growing vine. By the 1930’s, agricultural experts noted that “one of the chief reasons why kudzu has not been grown more generally, was the prevailing idea that this crop was a dangerous pest” (Bailey and Mayton, 1931:9-10; Lowney and Best 1998). As these examples illustrate, the meanings attributed to kudzu have not only changed with the passing of years, but also were always contested, contradictory, and controversial throughout the twentieth century.

While many southern farmers were skeptical of kudzu, the S.C.S. and scientific experts worked diligently and enthusiastically to entice farmers to plant the vine. As Lowney and Best point out, scientific experts in the 1930s and 1940s “not only criticized less-educated farmers for worrying about kudzu, but they presented extensive experimental results illustrating the beneficial roles kudzu could play in Southern agriculture: building soil, replenishing nitrogen, producing moisture-retaining mulch, solving erosion problems, offering protection from silting, stabilizing gullies and banks, and producing higher hay yields” (1998:100). The U.S. government chipped in to support efforts to increase plantings by offering assistance payments of up to \$8 per acre of planted kudzu (Winberry and Jones 1973; Lowney and Best 1998). Eventually, the combined efforts of scientists and the USDA were successful in establishing kudzu within southern ecologies. By the mid-1940’s, half a million acres of kudzu had reportedly been planted and in 1946 kudzu perhaps blanketed up to 3 million acres of southern landscapes (McKee and Stephens 1943; Chapman 2016). The original kudzu zealots, the Pleas, were unable to get a government contract to sell the vine but nonetheless their nursery benefited “from the kudzu planting frenzy” that began with the S.C.S. selection of kudzu as the plant “to save the South” (Hoots and Baldwin 1996:19).

At the time of kudzu’s peak as a miracle vine, Channing Cope, a Georgian farmer, profited from his boosterism of the plant in his frequent columns in the AJC where he served as farm editor. In one instance, Cope declared, “Kudzu isn’t a vine, merely. Kudzu is the Lord’s indulgent gift to Georgians” (1948:5) while elsewhere noting that kudzu is “the best moisture holder, the best land-builder; the quickest soil-maker; and the best insurance against summer and fall drought” (quoted in Lowney and Best 1998:101). Cope capitalized on kudzu’s agricultural benefits at Yellow River Farm, the 700 acres of land he owned and the location where he often broadcasted his daily radio program frequently touting the benefits of kudzu. He reportedly often made the claim that “cotton isn’t king in the South anymore. Kudzu is king!” He thus became known as the “Kudzu King,” and Cope is further credited with founding the Kudzu Club of



America, an organization that had a membership of 20,000 by 1943 (Hoots and Baldwin 1996; Alderman 2004). Cope's social status and financial success improved based on his promotion of the vine—he received a Georgia Conservation Man of the Year award and his book *Front Porch Farmer* sold more than 80,000 copies (Alderman 2004).

In his advocacy, Cope recognized that scientists “are not salesmen and they make no effort to ‘sell’ the reader on certain agricultural ideas” (Cope 1948a:22) in contrast to his own enthusiastic ways of encouraging his followers to embrace and plant kudzu. His salesmanship is worth exploring in a bit more detail due to his potential deviation from traditional scientific descriptions that typically objectify kudzu and “nature.” In *Front Porch Farmer*, Cope writes, “Ours is a hungry world and everything on the farm needs feeding, even the land itself... If we will feed the land; it will feed us...” (1949:14). Cope's comments, at first glance, emphasize a certain connectedness between the people and the land that seems to share a sensibility of reciprocity between “humans” and “nature.” Yet, Cope immediately explains that the reason for the need to feed the land is based on pure anthropocentric utilitarianism when he continues “our immediate and constant concern is to make the land productive” for the benefit of humankind (1949:14).

In contrast to ways of thinking that emphasize the intrinsic value of plants, animals and land—as Joy Harjo writes “the land is a being who remembers everything”—Cope's concerns with “healing” (1948b:17) the land revolve around the desire to restore the land to some imagined state of past health for the ultimate benefit and economic profit of the southern farmer. For instance, Cope noted that “we are face to face with the task of holding, restoring, and putting to work a larger part of the farm which has been washed away. Kudzu is our number one aid in this job” (1949:26). Ultimately, Cope constructs kudzu and nature as objects to be manipulated and controlled by farmers for purposes of productivity and profit. As will be discussed, scientists and cultural commentators came to construct even more extreme bifurcations between humans and nature during the second half of the twentieth century.

### 4.3 The Story of a Plant Eating the South

By the mid 1950's, Cope's fame waned as quickly as did enthusiasm for his beloved kudzu. In earlier decades, kudzu thrived in the southern climate while arguably requiring little attention from farmers all while replenishing depleted soils (Winberry and Jones 1973). As a miracle vine, boosters believed kudzu's supernatural powers were a gift to humans from "God" and the vine was a valuable resource to be used for the profit of the southern farmer. In the 1950s, so the story goes, southern farming shifted to feed crops such as coastal Bermuda and bahia grass that required considerable fertilizer and attention. The vine continued to propagate, and landowners increasingly reported difficulties managing and removing unwanted kudzu (Kinbacher 2000). In the face of criticism, earlier boosters such as Charles Pleas reportedly "clung to the belief that only those who managed kudzu poorly experienced problems" (Hoots and Baldwin 1996:19). Yet, most experts began to claim that the vine was a dangerous, uncontrollable threat to farms, forests, and financial profit.

The interests of the Georgian timber industry, for instance, became a primary concern of foresters and forest scientists. Indeed, Lowney and Best suggest foresters of the period acted as "expert claimsmakers" as they began to construct the plant as a threatening menace after mid-century. At the Southern Weed Conference in 1960, for instance, E.V. Brender, an influential forest scientist, declared, "Where honeysuckle and kudzu are free to grow, establishment of tree seedlings, either pine or hardwoods, is seriously inhibited... Kudzu can smother trees 80 feet tall... For kudzu, complete eradication is necessary, since a single surviving plant will soon cover the ground and wrap up the tallest tree" (1960:187, 190-191). In the 1970s, the USDA publicly reversed course from its earlier promotion of the plant and officially classified kudzu as a "weed." In fifty years, in the eyes of experts, kudzu rose to the status of miracle vine before being redefined as a pest and weed deserving of eradication. A scientific war on kudzu was born.

In the aftermath, kudzu became widely narrated as a scourge in the second half of the twentieth century. Kudzu, in other words, was inscribed with "plant stigma." Although plant

stigma is a common way to describe plant cells that are receptive to pollen, I introduce the sociological notion of *plant stigma* in a new way to refer to social stigma that marks plants as dangerous, abhorrent, and invasive. Kudzu became increasingly stigmatized as scientists and southerners became “disenchanted” with the vine. For instance, a Georgian named Elmer Paulk wrote a letter to the editor of *Crops and Soils* in 1955 to inquire “about weed killers that will kill kudzu vines” (Lowney and Best:102). In 1963, James Dickey published a poem titled “Kudzu” in the *New Yorker* describing the species as “green, mindless, unkillable ghosts.” One legacy of the scientific war on Kudzu that commenced in the 1950’s is the ongoing frequent construction of kudzu as an “alien invader,” a “plant thug,” and a “southern curse” (Eskridge and Alderman 2010). Eskridge and Alderman wrote of kudzu in 2010, “perhaps no other exotic species has been more demonized than kudzu” (2010:112).

During the second half of the century, in academic and cultural texts, kudzu was described as a destructive, unpredictable, voracious, dangerous intruder that infests, invades, dominates and destroys southern landscapes, forests, and ecologies (Eskridge and Alderman 2010). As the plant gained notoriety as a threatening menace, forest scientists such as James Miller built decades long careers attempting to eradicate kudzu while working for the USDA Forest Service. In 1983, Miller and Boyd Edwards wrote that kudzu that “every root crown on an area must be killed or all control efforts will be nullified within a short time... Essentially, kudzu control must mean kudzu eradication” (1983:167). He notes that the use of herbicides to control kudzu is effective but requires “at least one broadcast application and a follow-up spot application, while many will require perhaps up to four or more treatments” (1983:167). As these examples illustrate, stories of threatening invasions call forth militaristic assaults on plants and nature—whether kudzu is a danger is not of central importance as humans attempt to return to an imagined version of nature that is pristine and innocent as well as ordered and controlled.

In this context, kudzu became a particular boon for chemical companies. Dow Chemical Company recognized the potential for profit from the use of chemicals to destroy kudzu—in

1963, they donated chemicals to researchers in a study that found that said herbicides were “not a practical method of kudzu eradication... but will serve to control kudzu in areas where systematic spraying is a part of an annual weed control program” (Davis and Funderburk 1963:63). The results were ideal for chemical manufacturers and distributors—kudzu required frequent and repeated applications of their expensive products. Ragan and Massey, located in Ponchatoula, Louisiana, is a leader in the agricultural chemical industry. The company’s website describes kudzu “smothering and choking everything... including native species, wild spaces and even structures” (2020). Ragan and Massey manufactures Brushtox™, a concentrated herbicide, to destroy kudzu noting that “it may take repeat applications, and even a couple seasons, to get this noxious weed completely under control. Continue to treat the area and you will eventually be rewarded with a kudzu-free pasture, field or garden” (2020). Brushtox™ is available for purchase from a variety of common retailers including Atlanta headquartered Fortune 50 company Home Depot.

The USDA declared kudzu a “noxious weed” in 1997, making it illegal to transport the plant across state lines (Coffman 2007). In 1999, *Time Magazine* listed the introduction of kudzu to the United States as one of the hundred worst ideas of the century in the company of DDT, sailing the Exxon Valdez into Prince William Sound, asbestos and hydrogen-filled blimps (August et al. 1999). Ironically, in the first half of the twentieth century, *Time* articles often told “the world” that kudzu was an “agricultural miracle” but as Hoots and Baldwin point out, during this earlier period *Time* “did not print any of the significant number of stories about the many problems kudzu growth was causing” (1996:19).

#### **4.4 Kudzu in Postmodern Times**

Although kudzu was widely maligned throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, Lowney and Best suggest Kudzu was redefined by many experts again in the mid-1980s as scientists began to express an attitude of “tempered enthusiasm” regarding the plant. In recent decades, Lowney and Best argue, scientists have begun to consider kudzu as not only an

occasional nuisance but also a potential resource. Since the 1980s, for instance, kudzu research focused on using the plant as an ingredient in blood pressure medications, a cure for hangovers, and a source of food for human and nonhuman animals. Kudzu has also garnered renewed interest as a raw material for paper production, a renewable energy source, and as a mulch or compost (Lowney and Best 1998). At the same time, the notion of kudzu as a dangerous threat to southern ecosystems and landscapes remained popular among conservationists, landowners, and lawmakers (Eskridge and Alderman 2010; Alderman 2015). These contrasting views of kudzu reflect a long history of ambivalent and changing attitudes towards the plant.

Kudzu's "tangled" history as a miracle and a menace have solidified the importance of the plant in southern geographies and cultures (Kinbacher 2000). By 1997, the plant was estimated to cover up to seven million acres of land in the southeast (Coblentz). Derek Alderman suggests that "kudzu's social status has included not only ecological invader but also cultural icon, expanding across the media landscape in a way that transcends its physical or botanical existence" (2015:34). In recent years, kudzu's roots in southern economies and cultures continue to flourish. Yet, kudzu's presence continues to produce a large cost for some actors such as power companies—utility providers are estimated to spend up to \$1.5 million per year on managing the vine (Simberloff 2011). As has been discussed, kudzu is unable to be contained or defined by any single universal narrative, role, or status. In some circles, the vine continues to be defined as a threatening invasive menace. For others, the vine has the potential to be a useful economic and cultural resource for southerners.

#### **4.5 Kudzu as Economic Resource in Postmodern Times**

At the end of the twentieth century, kudzu gained renewed interest from papermakers, farmers, craftspeople, and chefs. A 1985 article in *Crops and Soils* suggests, for instance, that kudzu, "can be made into a very high quality paper... its foliage makes a good mulch or compost... kudzu has about half the heat value of coal and a low sulfur content, which means that one potential use could be to burn it with coal in powerplants for cheaper energy and less

pollution. With its rapid growth, it is certainly a renewable energy source” (Lowney and Best 1998:105). In a 1990 article in *The Journal of Plant Nutrition*, Lynd and Ansman suggest kudzu has been “greatly underutilized for pasturage” (1990:863). And, at the Fullsteam Brewery in Durham, North Carolina, brewers experimented with kudzu as an ingredient in beer in an effort to create a “distinctly southern beer” (Chen 2009; Alderman 2015).

The recent use of kudzu for purposes such as food, art, or textiles is not at all novel. Kudzu’s material properties have made the plant a useful resource for humans for thousands of years. In many historical and contemporary contexts, kudzu’s biology has made the plant extremely useful to human beings. Archaeologists have found records of kudzu being used to make textiles as long ago as 6,000 years (Li, Dong, Albright and Guo 2011). During the Zhou dynasty, in modern China, kudzu flowers were cooked and served as vegetables (Li, Dong, Albright and Guo 2011). Kudzu root was regularly used in Chinese diets by 540 CE and the plant was already widely cultivated. Indeed, kudzu’s stems and roots have both long been considered highly nutritious for both human and many nonhuman animals and are rich in flavonoids, isoflavonoids, and isoflavone (Wu, Yang and Simon 2011). For over a thousand years, kudzu has additionally been used for a variety of medicinal purposes in China and today the plant has gained importance in Western medicine. Today, kudzu starch remains widely popular in both China and Japan and is used in products such as bread, noodles, ice cream, drinks, and jelly (Li, Dong, Albright and Guo 2011). In fact, Li, Dong, Albright and Guo suggest that human harvests for purposes of food, fiber and medicine have historically been the primary control mechanism keeping kudzu in check in East Asia. In other words, these authors suggest the success of the vine in the U.S. South may not be due to any alleged lack of “natural” predators since it is humans that have been the primary consumer of the vine in East Asia for thousands of years through harvesting “Kuzu.”

Thousands of years later, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, many claimsmakers in the U.S. have built on this history to argue for the possibility of taking advantage of the biological properties of

the leguminous plant to serve human interests as well as the logics of profit and capital. For instance, in the preface to their aforementioned book, *Kudzu: The Vine to Love or Hate*, Diane Hoots and Juanitta Baldwin declare a need for “a capitalist to create something that uses lots of kudzu and turn this maligned vine into a valuable asset” (1996). The Economic Development Committee of Calhoun County, Georgia offered a \$700 prize as part of the “Kudzu Creative Product Competition” in 1993 with a goal of “finding a use for their most abundant natural resource” (Associated Press News Nov 18, 1993). By the 1980’s, as Lowney and Best suggest, many scientists also began to express “tempered enthusiasm” regarding the plant. In these constructions, kudzu remains a part of “nature” that should be controlled by “humans” in ways that turn the plant directly into a profit able to serve the needs of capitalists. Here, it is the usefulness of the plant itself rather than the notion of the plant as an invasive “environmental other” that generates a potential profit. In these constructions, the plant, almost always, lacks intrinsic value, but is made valuable through human action.

#### **4.6 Methods**

With the goal of understanding some of the dominant ways kudzu is understood and treated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Southern U.S. I first collected all publications from the Atlanta Journal Constitution with the word “kudzu” in the title from 2000 to 2018 which produced 55 search results. The Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) is the major daily newspaper circulated in Atlanta, GA which is one of the largest metropolitan areas in the Southern U.S. In 2012, the AJC had a circulation of nearly a quarter million. The AJC has additionally had a long historic connection with kudzu as Channing Cope wrote frequent articles about the vine for the paper over seventy years ago. In order to include the voices of contemporary scientists, I also collected all journal articles published between 2000 and 2018 in the *American Journal of Plant Sciences*, *Biological Invasions*, *Plant Ecology*, and *Weed Science* that contained “kudzu” in the title. The search produced 4 articles published in the *American Journal of Plant Sciences*, 4 articles in *Biological Invasions*, 1 article in *Plant Ecology*, and 3 articles in *Weed Science*. Data collection

and analysis were ongoing and simultaneous throughout the research process. As a result, additional data were collected as themes emerged. As themes emerged, I eventually collected a wide range of texts related to kudzu published in other southern newspapers, books, and websites. Additional documents primarily included texts produced by Georgian writers and sources as well as representations of kudzu in scholarly and academic texts. I analyzed the data using narrative analysis<sup>3</sup>. Since the texts examined are open to many possible interpretations and unanalyzed texts not included in the analysis may reveal alternative representations, my analysis is only one “of many possible stories to tell” about the kudzu vine (Skoglund & Redmalm 2016:10).

#### **4.7 Kudzu in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Narratives of War**

In recent narratives of invasion and threat, scientists, policymakers and journalists frequently undertake the popular strategy of deploying metaphors of war to eradicate what Eskridge and Alderman refer to as an “environmental other” (Eskridge and Alderman 2010). In 2005, for instance, Steve Brown, then mayor of Peachtree City, GA, described kudzu as “a noxious weed that’s growing beyond belief” (Duffy 2005a:1). Kudzu, in the current case, is inscribed with both a supernatural ability to spread and the deadly talent of strangling native trees and plants. In this context, Tom Corbett, then the public works director for the city, claimed he had “his marching orders” to deal with the kudzu problem. In considering the alleged threat of kudzu and the challenges he faced in confronting the vine, Corbett said “there is, of course, napalm and a Chinook helicopter” (Duffy 2005b:3). The reference to napalm calls forth violent recollections of U.S. military aggression in places such as Korea and Vietnam and reflects a notion that the existence of kudzu necessitates a war-like program of destruction and eradication. In constructing a war-like state of exception, these types of narratives suggest the “environmental other” must be eradicated by any available means.

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the methodology that is used here.



For Eskridge and Alderman, these threat narratives reflect “a larger paradigm of humankind’s need for security and control... anything that threatens humans’ sense of safety or jeopardizes their grasp of control must be quickly subordinated. This paradigm can be seen in a variety of instances, from the way ecologists talk about exotics to the way the U.S. is dealing with immigration” (2010:125). In such cases, the actual effects and actions of the “other” are disregarded as all efforts are directed at controlling, or killing, the unwanted invader. In invasive species narratives, threatening outsiders must be cleansed from nativist “imaginative geographies” to protect innocent native species (Jerolmack 2008). Janet Lembke, for example, uses nativist language in her book *Despicable Species* writing, “throughout the South, kudzu creeps with stealthy swiftness over brush piles and fences. It climbs trees and telephone poles and casts its soft but heavy net over thickets and hedgerows. It enshrouds abandoned houses, tumbledown tobacco barns, rusted appliances, and junked cars. It sneaks into gardens and plowed fields. Displacing innocent native vegetation, it twines, curls, shoots upward and outward with relentless green insistence. In its wake, power outages occur, and trains have been derailed” (2001:130). In the AJC, similar nativist narratives of invasion and infestation were the most frequent way kudzu was represented.

Kevin Duffy, for instance, reporting on the aforementioned presence of kudzu in Peachtree City also deployed nativist language writing “an estimated 40 acres of Peachtree City’s green space, or about 0.5 percent of its total acreage, is infested with kudzu—the dogged weed that makes its unwelcome comeback this time of year. Kudzu... grows a foot a day when the weather’s warm, so it doesn’t take long to smother thousands of acres. Trees encased in kudzu die from lack of light, and native species are crowded out” (2005a:1). One consequence of such narratives, whether constructed by scientists or cultural commentators, is that these nativist assumptions lead to an often single-minded approach to so called invasive species. They must be destroyed at any cost.

In the case of kudzu, the costs of control and eradication are high. Although methods of control and eradication have long been studied, developed and deployed against kudzu, they are costly and take a long time to be effective. Peachtree City estimated that using chemical and mowing may cost up to \$387,000 a year to address the kudzu “infestation” in their small community of about 35 thousand people alone. In the suburban Atlanta City of Decatur, Trees Atlanta was paid \$146,000 in 2008 by city to clear a measly 10-acre wooded section of a cemetery, largely through the use of herbicides (Hunt 2008). Additionally, the city of Atlanta employed a full-time police officer to deal with kudzu related complaints in the 1990s (WAGA TV 1995; Lowney and Best 1998). By 2001, the USDA estimated that \$6 million was spent on kudzu control efforts annually and the overall economic cost of the vine has been estimated to be up to \$500 million (Becker 2001; Forseth and Innis 2004).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, scientists continue to note that chemical control is “potentially expensive” and “the plants ability to root from stem nodes... may require chemical application for up to 10 years...” (Guertin, Denight, Gebhart, and Nelson 2008:8). Despite the potential cost and unknown ecological consequences of intensive herbicide use, scientists continue to develop chemical means of eradication while appealing to the notion of kudzu as a dangerous invasive species. Berisford, Bush and Taylor, for instance, noted in 2006 that “kudzu is an exotic vine that threatens forests in the southeastern United States. It can climb, overtop, and subsequently kill new seedlings or mature trees” (2006:391). In establishing kudzu as a threat, they legitimize their research related to the effects of chemical control of kudzu on surrounding ecosystems and plants. Although the herbicides, donated by E.I. duPont de Nemours & Co. and Dow AgroSciences, used in the USDA funded study failed to eradicate kudzu, some herbicides leaked into soils and persisted at levels that are toxic to many other plant species including tobacco, tomato, and potato (Berisford, Bush, and Taylor 2006). As the wealth of research related to chemical eradication suggests, herbicides became and remain a popular weapon in the war on kudzu.

On a global scale, the U.S. EPA estimated the pesticide industry to be valued at \$56 billion in 2012. The Center For Responsive Politics reports that the chemical manufacturing industry spent at least \$50 million annually each year from 2010 to 2018 and Dow DuPont alone spent over \$11 million in 2018 lobbying the U.S. government in pursuit of policies friendly to the chemical industry. Agribusiness, including companies such as Monsanto, spend additional tens of millions of dollars in lobbying efforts annually. In a reflection of Dow's long relationship to kudzu control and eradication efforts, Corteva™ Agriscience—a subsidiary of Dow DuPont—currently manufactures Transline®, an herbicide that “controls” broadleaf weeds and woody legumes including kudzu. Dow openly acknowledges that the active ingredient in Transline®, clopyralid, is dangerous to humans and animals and can seep or leach through soils and contaminate groundwater. Lobbying for industry friendly policies is costly but the international conglomerate Dow DuPont alone sold over \$60 billion of products and services in 2018. In a war like state of exception, threat narratives make the widespread application of these herbicides seem rational almost 60 years after the publication of Rachel Carson's ominous warnings regarding the consequences of indiscriminate use of pesticides in *Silent Spring*.

With the high costs and potential dangers of chemical control, goats and sheep are playing an important role in the eradication industrial complex and are frequently described as an environmentally friendly way to “attack” kudzu (Duffy 2005a). The AJC reported on the use of sheep and goats to control kudzu by a variety of local municipalities, businesses, and homeowners as well as on the campus of the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta (Stevens 2015; Griffin 2016). Goats and sheep are marketed as a more environmentally friendly way of dealing with out of control kudzu. Vicki Griffin, for example, suggests “goatscaping is a gentler, greener way to tame out-of-control invasive plants. It's also much more relaxing and fun to watch than a weed-whacking, high decibel landscaping crew... goats provide a lower-cost and environmentally friendly method of clearing lots of unwanted plant growth” (2016:1). War metaphors remain ever-present in such narratives. For example, in Tallahassee, Florida, a 60

animal unit dubbed S.W.A.T., Sheep With A Task, were used to “blitzkrieg” unwanted kudzu (Duffy 2005a). Here, the desire to control the “environmental other” is cloaked in green recitals of stewardship tropes.

In Atlanta, local businesses are beginning to profit from the demand for kudzu munching livestock. Michael Swanson, owner of Get Your Goat Rentals, a company based in Atlanta, had 140 goats in his arsenal by 2016. The AJC reported on his success, noting that his herd is regularly booked out months in advance (Griffin 2016). As part of a promotion by Head and Shoulders, Get Your Goat Rentals, was featured in a 30 second advertisement during the 2019 Super Bowl. The average 30 second ad cost around \$5 million (Habersham 2019). The war on kudzu, then, seems to be generating new streams of profit and spectacle that seemingly benefit both local companies and distant capitalists.

On August 13 2016, Dan Chapman suggested in The Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) that “kudzu, the nightmare weed that gobbled the South” was “disappearing” (2016:1). Chapman argues that scientists, corporations, and government organizations have gained “the upper hand on the slinky, creepy green vine” through the combined techniques such as mowing, herbicides, grazing and controlled burns (2016:1). Human efforts to manage, control, and eradicate kudzu have been lent an assist from the likes of goats and even insects such as the recently introduced “kudzu bug” that voraciously munches on the vine’s leaves. Since at least the 1950’s, kudzu has widely been described as a nightmarish menace and a threatening invasive alien “other” as humans have waged war on the vine. Although Chapman seems to suggest that experts have gained an upper hand in this war, he ultimately notes that scientists do not expect “kudzu’s eradication any time soon” (2016:3). Indeed, a recent article in the *American Journal of Plant Sciences* recites the nativist war inducing tropes of kudzu as “an exotic invasive weed... that is difficult to control... one of the most harmful non-indigenous plants in the U.S.” (Hoagland et al. 2016:2377).

#### **4.8 Kudzu in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Narratives of Economic Resource**

Although the threat narratives discussed above remain popular and dominant, the AJC has in recent years frequently reported on the benefits of kudzu as an economic resource. In a recent report, for instance, Christopher Hassoitis notes that kudzu “leaves, roots, flowers, and vine tips” are edible (2018:1). Raleigh Saperstein, a senior horticulturist at the Atlanta Botanical Garden, notes that “despite its reputation as an omnipresent nuisance, U.S. Forest Service research has shown that kudzu... only occupies one-tenth of 1 percent of the South’s 200 million acres of forest... Making kudzu edible may be a way to demythologize and destigmatize the plant” (Hassoitis 2018:1). In this context, the AJC recently published recipes for kudzu cocktails, casseroles, soups, chicken, quiche, and lemonade (AJC Weblog 2018).

The usefulness of kudzu has actually been a popular topic of AJC writers for decades. In the 1990s, for instance, Celestine Sibley optimistically wrote that kudzu “will come full circle in the Southeast, since it was first perceived as desirable, then as a nuisance” (1995:1). In reporting on a Georgian artist’s use of the vine in Christmas decorations in 1998, May Lee wrote, “Kudzu. The name rings ominously. Thinking of it this time of year always reminded me less of the spirit of peace and joy than of the grinch that spreads misery” (1998:1). Yet, Lee notes that the plant can, indeed, “be as beautiful” as it is “invasive.” In a way, these representations reflect a sort of “tempered enthusiasm” that Lowney and Best found within scientific circles in the final decades of the twentieth century. AJC publications that praise kudzu’s utility almost always also discuss the vine as an unwanted “environmental other” that nonetheless may be turned into something useful through human ingenuity. In many of these cases, then, constructions of the vine’s utility do not escape the logics of control, nativism, and profit that are predominant in threat narratives. For instance, May Lee describes Dorothy Greason’s work collecting “the evil weed” and turning “it into symbols of the season, including trees and wreaths and baskets” (1998:1). Greason’s work includes an “imposing” “10 foot tall spiral tree made of kudzu” that is displayed in a friend’s home and decorated in “different colors each season” (1998:1). In such cases, kudzu is still framed as “evil” but nonetheless is rendered useful and temporarily harmless by human ingenuity.

The kudzu as resource narratives frequently appeal to desires to control “nature.” As Edith Edwards, the owner of Kudzu Konnection, a business profiled in a 2000 report in the AJC, put it, “lots of things are a nuisance, you just have to take control” (The Atlanta Journal Constitution 2000:1). At the 400-acre Kudzu Konnection Farm, kudzu is grown and weaved into baskets, cooked into “countless recipes,” baled for animal feed, and made into a hair conditioner, medicines, and furniture. The company website notes “kudzu is very high in protein, doesn’t take fertilizer or herbicide to grow, is beneficial to human and animal health, and has a myriad of uses.” Once again, people are framed as capable of controlling a “nuisance” in ways that make the vine “beneficial” and useful. In other words, the kudzu as resource narrative exists within a broader discourse of invasion—although individuals at times make use of this vine and find it beneficial, they do so in a context whereby scientists and governments have defined kudzu as an evil, invasive, out of control monster.

The kudzu as “natural resource” approach occurs in a context where kudzu has become a main ingredient in most blood pressure medications and is frequently touted as useful in treating hangovers and alcoholism (Shurtleff and Aoyagi 1985; Hintz 1993; USA Today November 1 1993:1A). In 2005, Bill Hendrick, writing in the AJC, noted that studies at Harvard seemed to validate 1,600 years of using kudzu for alcoholism and hangovers in China. He noted that “research suggests that kudzu compounds called isoflavones are key to treating intoxication. Heavy drinkers who took pills made from chemicals in kudzu seemed to lose their urge to order a second or third drink or, at the very least, extended the time between ordering additional drinks” (2005:1). Kudzu is not only gaining renewed interest as a medicine, but also has a variety of other purposes in the contemporary South. In 1999, Peter Kent wrote in the AJC that an “analysis of the roots and leaves show the perennial to be nutritional, according to James Duke of the U.S.D.A. Raw root, especially in the winter, is a significant source of energy-producing carbohydrates and health-giving trace minerals. Cooked leaves contain calcium and vitamins, as well as more dietary fiber than bran flakes” (1999:1).

Artists, activists, and southern citizens also increasingly are embracing kudzu as an important part of southern culture (Alderman 2015). Justin Holt and Zev Friedman hosted Kudzu Camp in March 2017 in Sylva, North Carolina as part of the School of Integrated Learning (SOIL). Holt suggested we should approach kudzu in a way that asks “What does the plant have to teach us?” (Lunsford 2017:1). For Holt, “we have a lot to learn about how people can possibly make a profit on making kudzu root starch commercially available” (Lunsford 2017:1). Although Holt’s respectful notion that plant’s might teach humans something undermines some dominant logics, his quick appeal to the logics of profit and economy do serve to discursively reinforce the needs of capital. While the plant itself may not be profitable on a commercial scale in the United States currently, its name is now widely used by businesspeople to “assert the southern-ness of their name and market identity” in efforts to woo customers (Alderman 2015:36).

Alderman writes that kudzu has “become a widely recognized symbol of the South and people represent and associate with the vine as if it were native to the region rather than an exotic invader” (2015:32). For Alderman, as kudzu is widely redefined as “intrinsically southern,” kudzu is transforming from an alien to a native plant. Alderman found 42 kudzu-named companies and 9 streets named after the vine in Georgia alone (2015). Kudzu Fabrics, headquartered in the Atlanta suburb of Roswell, Georgia, generated an annual revenue of \$22 million and employed 221 people by 2015 (Alderman). Across at least 62 industries, Alderman suggests “kudzu is seen and defined in positive rather than negative terms... kudzu as business identifier also perhaps speaks to the commercial benefit that these companies see being associated with a widely recognized part of the southern culture and heritage, reflecting the great extent to which the vine’s meaning has been appropriated...” (2015:49).

Although kudzu plants are not being taken up on a commercial scale, many people have been illustrating the ways that humans might develop more positive and perhaps symbiotic, relationships with kudzu. In 1995, Diane Hoots of Warner Robins, Georgia organized a kudzu art

exhibit at the Middle Georgia College. Kudzu festivals and balls showcase kudzu based arts, crafts, and food across the South (Hoots and Baldwin 1996). In 2009, Helena Oliviero reported on the popular use of kudzu by Bhutanese refugees as a way of making money by turning the vine into baskets. She writes of the refugees, “They saw a purpose, even opportunity and beauty in the vine everyone else loves to hate” (2009:1). Oliviero notes that many of the refugees were used to working and weaving with bamboo, “which has a similar course texture to the kudzu here” (2009:2). Deploying the skills developed before migrating, one refugee noted of the basket making business “if we can make \$200 in a month, it can really help pay the rent” (Oliviero 2009:1).

#### **4.9 Killing, Controlling, and Other Possibilities**

A report in the AJC in 1991 captured the contradictory ways humans live alongside kudzu. As plans developed for the construction of Atlanta’s Jimmy Carter Presidential Parkway, debate developed over the potential displacement of a group of homeless people living in a kudzu patch. The report described the homeless community: “In huts amid honeysuckle and kudzu, where knives and forks hang from vines in the open-air kitchen and a sawed-off stump suffices for a dining table, a small colony of homeless people stands at the crossroad. Theirs is one in-town neighborhood whose residents are paying the price of progress... Most of the colony’s residents feel safer hidden in the kudzu, where they are out of sight of the police” (Durcanin 1991:A1). As millions were being spent to destroy and eradicate the vine, some of the most vulnerable members of Atlanta found refuge within patches of kudzu. It seems that kudzu’s abilities in this case translated the patch of vines into a temporary, shady shelter for its human residents. In a maze of commercial development, suburban sprawl, climate change, species loss, pollution, homelessness, and constant change, kudzu has come to have many meanings and purposes throughout the South.

Most often, however, in newspapers such as the AJC and academic fields such as conservation science, kudzu continues to be constructed as an unwanted menacing environmental



other. Of the 33 publications in the AJC since 2000 that demonized kudzu, only 3 expressed any ambivalence about the plant. In contrast, each of the publications in the same newspaper that emphasized the benefits of kudzu as a useful resource, in one way or another, also emphasized kudzu's invasiveness. The dominance of the discourse of invasion fuels both the militaristic and profitable chemical war on the vine as well as the cultural circulation of representations of kudzu in both academic and popular circles. Moreover, even the instances in the AJC where kudzu was primarily framed as an economic resource frequently still appealed to the logics of human exceptionalism, control, and profit that are similarly taken up by those that say kudzu is an alien invasive.

#### **4.10 The Spread of Kudzu as Metaphor**

Kudzu's popularity and fame have driven the vine's spread throughout southern imaginations and culture. In metaphors that draw on the construction of kudzu as an invasive threatening menace, the plant, for example, is often used to negatively critique the spread of vitriolic forms of racism. For instance, in part confronting claims that U.S. society had moved beyond its racist past, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Victor Ray stress the persistence of racism after the election of Barack Obama writing that "nooses" continue "sprouting like fertilized kudzu across the U.S." as they point to "a less than 'transcendent' racial climate" (2009:177). In 1983, Alice Walker wrote, "Racism is like that local creeping kudzu vine that swallows whole forests and abandoned houses, if you don't keep pulling up the roots it will grow back faster than you can destroy it" (1983:165). In another example, Catherine Cole and Tracy Davis suggest blackface minstrelsy is like kudzu in that they both spring "up seemingly at will" and have "voracious" appetites. They write "like the kudzu vine (an imported plant now invasive throughout the American South) blackface minstrelsy in North America is persistent, destructive, and seemingly ineradicable. Cut the branch from the vine and kudzu—like blackface minstrelsy—can sprout up anew... verdant and damaging in equal measure, such a growth can neither be eradicated nor ignored" (2013:8). Although these metaphors rightly condemn racism

in the United States, they also reinforce the assumptions of invasive species threat narratives. In other words, in addition to condemning racism, they also metaphorically reconstruct kudzu as an “environmental other” in ways similar to the methods racists and sexists use to construct minorities and women as “others.”

In contrast, The Kudzu Project is a guerrilla knitting network originating in Charlottesville, Virginia following several prominent and violent white supremacist marches in 2017 (The Kudzu Project 2019). In this project, kudzu is physically utilized in an effort to confront and resist racism in the South. The project writes of kudzu “virtually anything that is not tended will be engulfed by this fast-growing vine. And just as kudzu obscures what lies beneath, the statues valorizing Confederate generals hide a more sinister intention to intimidate and oppress African Americans... Because kudzu grows only on those things that have passed out of use and are no longer relevant, its presence on Confederate statues invites us to ponder whether they serve an actual purpose today. Or are they relics of a bygone era that we could abandon for the sake of unity and justice for all?” With an aim to remove or resist the monuments that celebrate racist confederates and blanket the South, the leaders of this project suggest planting “kudzu around them” allowing “it to grow over and eventually obscure them” (The Kudzu Project 2019). For the leaders of this project, “statues erected to valorize Confederate soldiers” “intimidate” African Americans and “belong to the racist past” (The Kudzu Project 2019). The Kudzu Project is not alone in utilizing kudzu to confront human oppressions.

In turning kudzu into a resource to advocate for queer people, Aaron McIntosh’s art explores the intersections of identity, sexuality, desire, material culture, queer theory and critical craft theory. In 2013, McIntosh recalls realizing that “weeds” “are a pretty potent metaphor for how I think a lot of queer people are viewed” (McIntosh 2019). By 2017, he exhibited the results of the years long project that emerged from this metaphor with the title *Invasive Queer Kudzu*. McIntosh says of his project: “Invasive, a project for Southern queers and their allies, subverts the negative characterization of invasive species and uses queer kudzu as a demonstrative tool of

visibility, strength and tenacity in the face of presumed ‘unwantedness’” (McIntosh 2019). The collection of stories gathered in the project are brought together in quilted leaves and sewn into vines to form a “phenomenal and undeniable mass of queerness” (McIntosh 2019). In cafes and workshops across the South, McIntosh shared stories with queer people. McIntosh and his queer co-conspirators encapsulated their stories on fabric kudzu leaves that were combined with a mass of other leaves. For McIntosh, “invasive kudzu—much like homophobia—taps into our fears of complete otherness” (McIntosh 2019). Ultimately, the project invaded exhibits and southern cultures in a celebration of “the loathsome kudzu vine alongside Southern queerness of all flavors” (McIntosh 2019).

As these examples illustrate, kudzu can be taken up both materially and symbolically in ways that draw on and reinforce widely circulating stories of kudzu as a threat or that repurpose kudzu as part of what might be thought of as a multi-species social movement. Although most of the kudzu as “resource” representations examined in the AJC and scientific journals remain closely to logics of control, profit, and human autonomy, McIntosh’s project in particular begins to break down the boundaries between human and nonhuman “other.” In this way, McIntosh leads us away from dominant Western hierarchies and logics and begins the process of imagining other ways of being and relating that are obscured or hidden in both threat narratives and resource narratives. I will turn to such invasive imaginaries and rebellious knowledges in a search for alternatives to the discourses of invasive people, plants, and animals that have so far been examined in this dissertation. In turning to such alternatives, I aim to escape the false dichotomies that exist within discourses of invasion. We do not have to understand kudzu, for instance, in terms of either the logics of war or the logics of profit.

## CHAPTER 5.     INVASIVE KNOWLEDGES AND REBELLIOUS IMAGINARIES

*Invasions* has explored three cases of “othering” including that of migrants, feral cats, and kudzu focusing on Atlanta and surrounding communities. By risking being accused of comparing the “othering” of migrants to that of actual “non-humans,” *Invasions* seeks to spark new ways to see and imagine the interrelated and coarticulating ways social control is enacted within and between species. In reading these cases together, it seems uncontroversial to suggest that invasion narratives and animal representations are commonly mobilized across species lines in projects of social control. Not only does each case demonstrate the danger of threat narratives, but each also illustrates limits and potential shortcomings of competing inclusion narratives.

*Invasions* additionally asks the reader to go further and imagine the broader implications and relationships that shape and are shaped by these narratives. For instance, the exploitation of living beings due to the profit logic of capitalism are woven through the tangled webs that connect these three cases of invasion. In the case of migrants, organizations such as the GLAHR raise and spend money to advocate on behalf of immigrants at the same time as billions of dollars are funneled into the systems of incarceration, policing, and control that are blamed for some of the most brutal experiences border crossers encounter. The lives and bodies of feral cats, kudzu, and migrants each support a corresponding political economy of social control that generates financial investment, profit, and lasting infrastructure that solidifies further iterations of similar “othering” narratives.

For instance, one common argument put forth by pro-immigrant advocates claims immigrants are willing to take jobs that “Americans” will not. This argument only further demonstrates the reach of the logic of profit across both threat narratives and inclusion narratives

as well as across each of these cases. Despite Atlanta's status as a "welcoming city" and Clarkston's reputation as a multicultural oasis, migrants often are forced to work in low paying jobs and denied full political participation in their communities. Indeed, the welcoming city movement and the often righteous tropes of liberal multiculturalism observed in *Invasions* likely contribute to attracting migrants to their communities in order to provide the cheap labor and care work necessary to support the lives and lifestyles of more affluent community members. Corporations are eager to take advantage of the cheap labor of migrants or the profitable work of caging their bodies on behalf of the government just as they are enthusiastic to reap bio-profits from the lives and bodies of actual non-humans such as the spayed and neutered cats or threatening kudzu vine discussed earlier.

In the case of migrants and kudzu, state and corporate actors seize on narratives of invasion as money is funneled into efforts to control and even eliminate these unwanted "others" from "native" spaces. The private prison, security, and biotech industries are only a few of the industries that profit off of this state of affairs. In contrast, the success of TNR narratives illustrates that narratives of invasion do not always focus on eradication. In the case of cats, the pet industry, TNR organizations, and Kitten Industrial Complex thrive because cats are constructed as deserving of some level of care. The ambivalent ways invasion narratives are mobilized in the interest of capital demonstrates the adaptability and flexibility of prevailing power arrangements within a predominantly capitalist economy. In one way, this demonstrates the tremendous influence of capitalist logics within as they play out at local levels in these three cases. In another way, this shows that the material-discursive world around us is not fixed and eternal. Instead, these social contexts are ripe with opportunities for change.

The notion of an invasion is now commonly deployed by states, scientists, communities, lawmakers, and corporations to mark unwanted people, plants, and animals as threatening, inferior, and exploitable. Often, invasive "others" are inscribed with animality and thought of as less than fully human. On the one hand, invasion narratives are not without resistance. On the

other hand, the mainstream resistance to these nationalistic and nativist tropes promulgated through institutions such as the mass media frequently falls into a similar trap of anthropocentrism. The anthropocentrism that pervades resistance narratives thereby reinforces cultural hierarchies such as those between human and animal as well as citizen and non-citizen that ultimately co-articulate with other cultural concepts including race, gender, and nationality. White supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism are often uninterrupted, if not upheld, by such narrow forms of resistance to dominant modes of oppression.

In each of the cases discussed here, invasion metaphors and the inadequate resistance to them translates to a material reality whereby a specific variety of the “human,” dubbed by Sylvia Wynter as “Man,” constructs themselves as legitimately entitled to dominate and control groups of people, plants, and animals for their own benefit. Liberal humanism, as scholars such as Wynter note, constructs a particular notion of the human and produces a system of inclusion and exclusion that constructs the “human” as “Man” in contrast to the “inferior other” as “animal/nature” (Wynter 2003). The opposition between the signs of “Man” and of animal/nature continue to be deployed to dominate the nonhuman world as well as to oppress racialized and sexualized “Others” of Western white “Man” (Anzaldúa 1987; Haraway 1991; Gaard 1997; Wynter 2003). With these dynamics in mind, *Invasions* builds on important work being undertaken in fields such as CAS, Chicana Feminism, and ecofeminism. By bringing together the disparate but interconnected ideas within such fields as well as ideas from sociology and the biological sciences, this dissertation contributes new interdisciplinary understandings of the ways in which invasion metaphors are playing out on the ground in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the rest of this chapter, I return to each case to rebelliously imagine worlds seemingly impossible within discourses of invasion and the related liberal humanist tropes that struggle halfheartedly and ineffectively to break free of dominant understandings of what it means to be human and animal, native and foreigner, self and other. My hope is that these knowledges may invade our consciousness and our discourses so as to upend the anthropocentric and nationalistic

worldviews that divide up the world so as to exploit people, animals, and all of “nature” in pursuit of our capitalist overlords’ goals of endless profit and unimaginable power.

### **5.1 Making Peace with Kudzu Through Indigenous Knowledges**

Despite the plant’s status as an invasive species, not everyone shares contempt for kudzu. In an interview in her kudzu bale barn in Walhalla, South Carolina, Nancy Basket, a Cherokee basketmaker, educator, storyteller and artist, told me she has been working with kudzu since 1989. She told me of her early failures weaving the woody vine into baskets saying “I cut some down and I fashioned them into a basket and a few days later they fell apart.” Basket said she was determined to “get to know” kudzu and so returned to the kudzu patch to “apologize” and admit to kudzu that she was new to the area as she had recently moved to South Carolina from up north. She elsewhere wrote of this experience, “We Cherokee people believe that everything has a spirit and should be respected. I gave the plants a gift of tobacco and said I would stay in the field until they told me how they wanted to be used. After a while I received the definite impression that kudzu vines wanted to be used for paper” (Hoots and Baldwin 2006:44). In this recollection, Basket conceptualizes a complex relationship with the kudzu vine in which she respects the plant and patiently tries to understand kudzu’s own intrinsic value, purpose and desire. Moreover, she repeatedly leaves open the possibility of kudzu possessing agency. For instance, she says of her first meetings with kudzu that “I found kudzu or kudzu found me.” Since these initial interactions with kudzu, Basket, her family, and friends have used kudzu to make paper, perfumes, quilts, baskets as well as an ingredient in salads, pasta, candy, jams, and teas.

Basket says that kudzu “wants to be very friendly and have you use it. And growing twelve inches every day, you can sit on the porch and watch it growing half an inch an hour. So, it’s trying to get your attention... Kudzu is my friend and it was crying like a voice in the wilderness saying somebody please listen to me, we can be used for everything” (Savage 2008). She has presented workshops sharing her knowledge of kudzu and basketry at the University of

South Carolina, Furman, Columbia College, and Clemson University as well as at Powwows and Primitive Skills gatherings. Her work has been displayed in numerous museums, she has appeared on a variety of educational television programming, and she created cattail leaf mats, bark baskets and corn husk masks featured in *The Last of the Mohicans*, a major motion picture directed by Michael Mann and starring Daniel Day-Lewis (Basket 2019). Since 1989, Basket has made a living off of her efforts to, as she describes them, “change folks opinions about kudzu from a maligned and laughed at weed into a new and inexhaustible source of tree-free paper” (Basket 2019).

Basket once explained in an interview, “kudzu wasn’t Indigenous in the beginning, but it’s here now so we need to know how to use it” (Savage 2008). She speaks of a need for humans to “understand our place in the world. And it’s not on the top of a ladder or on the food chain, we’re just standing in the same circle together. And, when you have that kind of respect... you give back to receive more. It’s not like you’re doing it because you want something. You’re doing it because it’s the right way of living” (Savage 2008). Basket’s words are structured by an ethics and politics of respect for and reciprocity with the non-human world—she extends ethical and political consideration beyond the realm of the human to include even one of the most stigmatized plants in the history of the Southern United States. The Cherokee, as well as the Mvskoke/Creek Nation, were among the Indigenous peoples that lived in many of the areas of the U.S. South where the kudzu vine now is estimated to occupy millions of acres of land.

In recent centuries, colonialism, boarding schools, and racism fueled the erasure and silencing of Indigenous ways of thinking in attempts to impose Western cosmologies and ontologies onto Native people and the land. For Joy Harjo, the first Native American Poet Laureate, the consequences of such efforts include both genocide and ecological destruction (2015). Joy Harjo writes of the radical interconnectedness of humans with the land drawing on Creek ways of thinking:



We become in harmony with each other. Our worlds are utterly interdependent.

All of our decisions matter, not just to seven generations and more of human descendants, but to the seven or more plant descendants and animal descendants.

We make sacrifices to take care of each other. To understand each other is profound beyond human worlds (2015:55).

And, it should be added, profound beyond human words. Basket and Harjo draw on their respective Indigenous ways of thinking and living that tell stories of humans as interdependent and interconnected with the earth and even kudzu. For these authors, plants and animals are not mere objects to be used or controlled by humans but rather “friends,” “helpers,” allies, “people,” and “lovers.” In such ways of thinking, people are encouraged to treat the nonhuman world with respect, care, and compassion rather than as a collection of resources or threats to be controlled or used for profit.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robert Wall Kimmerer, an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation and esteemed professor of biology, draws on both scientific and Indigenous ways of thinking in her work. She also suggests reciprocity is not only important to conceptualize but also to practice after centuries of Western exploitation and domination of nature, animals, and all of matter. In times of immense ecological destruction wrought by humans, Basket, Harjo and Kimmerer consider “nature” not as a resource, but as a gift. As Harjo asks, “How much more oil can be drained, without replacement, without reciprocity?” (2015:32). Indigenous storytellers recognize that the words and representations humans use to think about plants, animals, and all of nature shape not only the ways humans relate to the earth but also the nonhuman lives and forms that exist alongside humans in this world.

For Kimmerer, “nature” is not “property” that is separate from humans. Instead, she points out:

We are all bound by a covenant of reciprocity: plant breath for animal breath,  
winter and summer, predator and prey, grass and fire, night and day, living and

dying. Water knows this, clouds know this. Soil and rocks know they are dancing in a continuous giveaway of making, unmaking, and making again the earth (2013:383).

In this way of thinking, “the well being of one is linked to the well-being of all. Wealth... is measured by having enough to give away. Hoarding the gift, we become constipated with wealth, bloated with possessions, too heavy to join the dance” (2013:381). Nancy Basket said to me in an interview that we should “work with something... not fight against everything. Let’s do something to make the earth better.” Kimmerer, Basket and Harjo each imagine worlds based on reciprocity, connecting, and healing in resistance to Western desires for control, autonomy, resource extraction and endless profit. As the earth suffers the wrath of centuries of domination by Western logics and categories, Indigenous ways of thinking erased during this period of cultural and ecological imperialism offer possibilities of creating new narratives and new worlds for the flourishing of people, land, water, animals, and yes, maybe even kudzu.

## **5.2 The Subversion of Anthropocentrism through Trap, Neuter, and Release**

Carol Thompson, a professor and animal studies scholar at Texas Christian University, makes sense of her participation in TNR on a college campus by considering the ways the practice subverts and undermines traditional human-animal and nature-culture hierarchies. She suggests TNR caretakers extend “the locus of care of non-human animals into the workplace” thereby “bringing non-human animals into the moral landscape of the campus and treating campus workplaces as ecologically integrated urban environments where feral cats and other animals are legitimate and appropriate co-residents” (Thompson 2012:78). The labor of caretakers, for Thompson, constructs “non-human animals in ways that emphasize their subjectivity and agency and recognizes animal life as valuable in itself. [Caretakers] possess complex and practical views of animals in the workplace taking into account kinships between species, and differences and interdependencies between humans and other animals” (2012:81).

Thompson suggests TNR work potentially subverts normative frameworks that view animals as property to be owned or controlled by individuals, traditional beliefs that deny animals a capacity for agency, and a political economy that continues to approach nature and non-human animals as objects to be exploited for profit. She argues that TNR work “presses for the re-storying of ‘animal’ subjectivity, which has been denied by humans in their constructions of the social and natural worlds” (Thompson 2012:102). Thompson’s perspective illustrates that in many cases both humans and cats resist anthropocentric logics of control and human specialness. For instance, she tells tales of “interspecies jealousy” and “self-fulfilling” prophecies where TNR caretakers on a university campus come “to prefer cats to some of their human co-workers” in contexts where their caretaking is frequently defined as deviant and they are accused of “caring more about cats than people” (Thompson 2012:101).

Cats, additionally, constantly escape and subvert the human stories and meanings that attempt to control and contain their bodies. Thompson notes that:

The notion of being born into ‘the wild’ in descriptions of feral cats disguises the fact that such ‘wild’ areas are typically found in human built, planned, managed and tamed environments, and it stigmatizes any cats who are not themselves tamed and under the control of human masters. Thus, it appears that the problematic status of feral cats is rooted in their existence outside of their assumed proper place and apart from human control... They are outlaws commonly seen as needing to be displaced, managed or re-placed in very intentional ways by humans (2012:84).

Feral cats very existence, then, subverts and resists the logics of control and domination that pervade the way in which many people talk about the need to address feral cat overpopulation. As Thompson says of these cats, “they are infeasible, but they persist” (2012:102).

Carol Thompson suggests TNR often subverts the “the late industrial model of appropriation and ownership and the concomitant view of land and non-human animals as

property” and therefore TNR “places cats and their caretakers in the role of trespasser” (2012:102). She writes of cats in TNR colonies, “for the cats their homes are often designated as off-limits to them. They are not ‘owned’ so they make no sense in the logics of human habitat. They are infeasible, but they persist” (Thompson 2012:102). As Thompson points out, in the United States, the very existence of feral cats outside of the confines of human homes (increasingly defined as the only acceptable habitat for the species) continuously undermines contemporary logics of anthropocentric control and views of animal bodies as property. In this way of thinking, the human-animal relationship in TNR may easily be imagined more as a relationship of co-conspirators working to upend the political and economic assumptions that structure the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Thus, on the ground, caretakers might draw on their work to at least imagine a world in which animals are granted subject status, respect, and consideration. In fact, on the ground, individual cats may in some ways escape the logics of commodification and ownership so important to capitalism and the Kitten Industrial Complex.

Sterling Davis additionally reported to me that his work in TNR is also a direct attempt at subverting other social hierarchies. For instance he reported that his TNR work was a tool to fight against “hypermasculinity” in general because he thinks a lot of people associate taking care of cats with femininity. Davis has appropriated the language of TrapKing, which he says in Black communities historically referred to a very powerful street boss tied to nefarious activities such as drug dealing, extortion, and gambling. Davis attaches a new meaning to the notion of being a TrapKing (or he is quick to also say TrapQueen) as he seeks to make TNR cool—noting that in addition to challenging the notion that “men shouldn’t fool around with cats” that he, as a Black man, is also taking on the huge lack of racial diversity in cat rescue. In this context, Davis wrote a children’s book about TNR. In addition to “All Day I Dream About Spaying,” he’s written more raps about TNR including one called “Chasing Tail.” Although his website claims TNR is the only humane alternative to euthanasia, in an interview, Davis mentioned to me that he tells people that he is open to alternatives to TNR assuming the alternatives are more respectful

and compassionate towards free-living cats. As he told me about his thoughts, Davis acknowledged he struggles with the power that humans have over cats even in TNR programs—noting though that he has come to the conclusion that in the current circumstances he passionately believes TNR is the best approach to care for free-living cats. Right now, he says, the only other option is euthanasia.

### **5.3 Migration and Chicana/ecofeminist Possibilities**

Gloria Anzaldúa, the influential Chicana feminist philosopher and activist, stresses the need for ways of thinking that fall outside of the rational, secular, humanist discourse pervasive in the West and especially in the academy (1987; 2002). In contrast to anthropocentric ways of thinking, AnaLouise Keating points out that Gloria Anzaldúa conceptualizes “the interrelatedness of all forms of life” as she resists “the binary-oppositional frameworks we generally use in identity formation and social change” (2008a:60). In contrast to thinking of “man” as separate and autonomous from “woman,” “animals,” and all of nature, Anzaldúa writes “the binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing” as “the changeability of racial gender, sexual, and other categories” renders “conventional labelings obsolete” (2002:541). As a “third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings,” Anzaldúa discusses negotiating these culturally imposed categories and labelings as she writes of herself as “a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world. The man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds... Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me” (1981:228). Anzaldúa’s personal narratives illustrate a capacity for life to escape and spill outside of traditional cultural categories, especially in the “borderlands” (1987). She questions the usefulness and limits of categories and rejects the white supremacy enacted through a historical mixture of rational humanism and colonialism. In working in the borderlands, Anzaldúa combines and transforms languages, cultures, and traditions to produce new ways of thinking and living out of the different histories and worlds she embodies.

In addition to pointing out the ways lives and forms escape and spill outside of traditional cultural categories, Anzaldúa's thinking challenges human exceptionalism by considering the intrinsic and embodied value of non-human beings. She writes, for instance, that "spirit exists in everything... the divine, is in everything... It's in the tree, the swamp, the sea..." (quoted in Keating 2008a:60). Anzaldúa's stories are born, in part, out of a desire for more livable, inclusive, sustainable worlds. In many Indigenous knowledge systems, stories are known to shape the material possibilities for the flourishing of humans, animals, plants and sustainable worlds. In other words, the stories societies tell, or alternatively, the stories that are ignored or erased, radically impact material life and social worlds. Drawing on Indigenous traditions and her life in the borderlands, Anzaldúa tells stories that offer alternatives to the traditions of anthropocentrism and nationalism.

Each of the cases discussed in *Invasions* focuses on groups that are doing the dangerous work of border-crossing. The migrants, cats, and kudzu discussed earlier consequently find their lives and bodies exist within the borderlands. These borderlands are spaces that are not comprehensible based on the dominant narratives that rely on clearly demarcated categories and geographic norms. By crossing these geographical borders and normative categories, these border crossers cause trouble for dominant narratives. They help break them down. They create opportunities to not only imagine a different and potential more livable world, but more importantly they force a creation of something new. They create a moment of possibility that under certain conditions might be grasped to call forth a more livable future. As such, border crossers are most often viewed as threatening by those that have a vested interest in dominant narratives such as anthropocentrism and nationalism.

Anzaldúa rejects nationalism of all forms when she declares "I'm a citizen of the universe. People talk about being proud to be American, Mexican, or Indian. We have grown beyond that. We are specks in this cosmic ocean..." (quoted in Keating 2008a:61). She regrets that "we let color, class, and gender separate us from those who would be kindred spirits" as "the

walls grow higher, the gulfs between us wider, the silences more profound” (Anzaldúa 1981:229). Anzaldúa uses the concept of *nos/otras* with a slash to represent the bridge used to bring together self and others as well as possible in troubling historical contexts. She describes the concept, “The Spanish word *nosotras* means ‘us.’ In theorizing insider/outsider I write the word with a slash between *nos* (us) and *otras* (others). Today the division between the majority of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is still intact... But the future belongs to those who cultivate cultural sensitivities to differences and... carry us into a *nosotras* position” (quoted in Keating 2008b:108). Similarly, Keating points out that Anzaldúa “offers an alternative to binary self/other constellations, a philosophy and praxis enabling us to acknowledge, bridge, and sometimes transform the distances between self and other” (2008b:7). Anzaldúa provides one vision for an imagined world where we practice building bridges, relationships, and kin while fostering difference through respect—a world not yet realized and not possible if we cling to the old hierarchies such as humanity/animality, male/female, and culture/nature.

Anzaldúa suggests such transformation can occur simultaneously at the level of the self and of society writing that “traveling *El Mundo Zordo* path is the path of a two way movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society” (1981:232). In order to achieve such a transformation of self and society, Anzaldúa argues for a need to “shift attention from your customary point of view (the ego) to that of *la naguala*” which is a view that “arouses the awareness that beneath individual separateness lies a deeper interrelatedness” (2002:569). She adds, “when you include the complexity of feeling two or more ways about a person/issue, when you empathize and try to see her circumstances from her position, you accommodate the other’s perspective... to shift toward a less defensive, more inclusive identity” (2002:569). In leaving the comforts of our customary point of view or subject position, we may be able to shift our own perspectives through interaction with others and the world around us, especially if we are intentional about

reflecting on the positions of those around us. In doing such uncomfortable work, we not only change ourselves but also the world we are interacting with.

Felicity Amaya Schaeffer suggests that to alter widespread “destruction and violence against the earth, humans, and all life forms,” we must “slow down and listen to the spirit-beings all around us...” and become “utterly otherwise” (2018:1008). With this in mind, Schaeffer writes:

When Anzaldúa notes that a gust of wind can remind us of ancient knowledges, she draws from Mayan cosmology that acknowledges the multiple presences that inhabit the land we stand on, pulling our sense of relationality toward the multidimensional beings and space/times of the past-present-future that can be felt in one moment and in one place. We commune with nature-animal-object beings as metaphor but even more so to the extent that our very being and shape alchemically changes as we change the forces and matter all around us, in constant motion (2018:1006).

As with many other Indigenous philosophies that recognize the interrelationships between storytelling and material “reality,” Schaeffer and Anzaldúa encourage living and communing with other humans, animals, and all of nature according to principles of relationality, respect, and reciprocity.

In rejecting both nationalism and anthropocentrism, such “Chicana/ecofeminist” perspectives emphasize that humans, and the U.S. government, do not possess legitimate authority to own lands or construct borders (Bunyak 2021). Instead, nature, animals, plant, and lands are conceptualized as having their own intrinsic purpose and embodied value. As Joy Harjo, the first American Indian Poet Laureate, writes “Everyone comes into the world with a job to do—I don’t mean working for a company, a corporation—we were all given gifts to share, even the animals, even the plants, minerals, clouds... all beings” (2015:126). In this way of thinking, difference is not approached through hierarchies and attempts to force “others” into



traditional roles and categories but rather in recognition that all humans share a responsibility to provide gifts with a diversity of other beings, both human and nonhuman.

Anzaldúa imagines a practice of coalition building in such a respectful, inclusive world:

We are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit we are a threat. Not all of us have the same oppressions, but we empathize and identify with each other's oppressions. We do not have the same ideology, nor do we derive similar solutions. Some of us are leftists, some of us practitioners of magic. Some of us are both. But these different affinities are not opposed to each other. In *El Mundo Zurdo* I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet (1981:233).

Anzaldúa, consequently, advocates for all those seeking to have their differing ways of thinking-being recognized and respected while critiquing binary hierarchical systems of categorization that continually rank human and nonhuman animals in reference to an apex defined as a white, male, hominoid, rational political citizen. We do not have to appeal to Western notions of the “human” to be able to foster and care for difference in our shared multispecies worlds—as Anzaldúa instructs, we can transform what it means to be human by using the knowledges we inherit from our past, the tools we have in the present, and our visions of the future.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Race, gender, and species are constructs that are in constant interaction and formation. These concepts are in many ways inseparable, even when they are representationally disarticulated from one another, because they are historically entangled. For instance, the seemingly hegemonic meanings attached to categories such as “human” and “animal” frequently erase and silence Indigenous ways of thinking which consider the agency and subjectivity of many lives and forms

therefore enacting a form of highly racialized epistemic and epistemological violence (Spivak 1988). These dominant understandings of what it means to be human and animal themselves are implicated in the formation of racial domination and racial hierarchies. In part, this is due to the historical associations that have occurred between categories such as animals, people of color, and Indigenous Peoples during ongoing projects of colonialization, imperialism, and racial formation. *Invasions* suggests the struggle over who and what counts as human and animal or native and invasive has produced institutions designed to abuse, exploit, and sometimes destroy many people, plants, animals, and all of “nature” for the benefit of “Man,” specifically *Homo economicus*.

The state and financially powerful corporations play a large role in determining insider-outsider relations not only at the geographic borders demarcating the boundaries between countries, but also in local communities and regions. They shape the meanings of such categories of human, animal, citizen, alien, native, and invasive to suit the needs of the powerful. They fund research and support initiatives. They make laws and build infrastructures. They spread narratives and market their ideas. In borrowing the language of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, state and corporate actors try to “manufacture consent” for their abuse and exploitation of migrants and nature (1988). In sum, the dominant meanings attached to concepts such as citizen, non-citizen, human, animal, and invader are overdetermined by state and corporate institutions and influence. And, in this context, corporations extract ever more bio-profit through the management and control of migrants, feral cats, kudzu, and other invaders as the state increasingly works to control all the lives and forms under its sovereign control. Despite their powerful interests, discourses of invasion are not possible without the acceptance and reinforcement of their logics by large swaths of the governed population. With this in mind, it is the naturalization of both anthropocentrism and nationalism as normal and common sense that is required for the insidious treatment of so many people and animals. Invasion narratives and

resistance narratives, although seemingly at odds with one another, both can play a key role in propping up these naturalized, normalized, dominant self/other constellations.

#### *5.4.1 Invasions*

Invasions are highly racialized in each of the cases examined in this dissertation even when the categories of race and species are temporally disassociated representationally. White nationalism is explicit in the rhetoric of anti-immigrant blowhards and it is embedded in the state institutions designed to detain and deport black and brown bodies. Yet, white nationalism is perhaps even more insidious when Indigenous ways of thinking and living are simply erased and ignored in scientific constructions of kudzu. Such an erasure enacts a highly racialized form of epistemic violence, and, according to many environmentalists, negates some of the ways of thinking that are most compatible with a world capable of sustaining a diversity of life in the future.

The narratives of invasion examined here are gendered as well. Women are sexualized as objects by nationalist law enforcers. The fear invoked by notions of invasions makes the possibility of caring for migrants, cats, or kudzu seem incomprehensible—further devaluing and trivializing the importance of care as well as the many women who historically and presently have shared a disproportionate responsibility for conducting such care work. TNR narratives, for instance, ignore the care work performed by volunteers when estimating the cost of such methods of feral cat control. With these racialized and gendered dynamics in mind, I suggest these discourses are disproportionately harmful to the lives of people of color and women.

Moreover, the metaphor of war fosters attachments to a mission to control territories, people, and ecosystems. As the logics of invasion are naturalized, a state of exception legitimizes the torturing and eradication of the invader. Empathy, care, and respect for the invader are incomprehensible. The nation or the community must attack the invader with all available methods, financial resources and weaponry. In the context of narratives that privilege whiteness, rationality, humanness, and citizenship, it is women, people of color, non-citizens, animals, and

all of nature bear the weight of these attacks. Invasion narratives construct a nation or territory in need of protection, a political subject responsible for acting in accordance with such goals, and dangerous “others” that must be controlled, expelled, or even destroyed.

#### *5.4.2 Resistance*

Many resistance narratives show that invasion tropes are not totalizing. Although some resistance tropes accept the premise of an “invasion,” the resistance narratives frequently challenge the racialized or gendered aspects of such tropes. Human rights advocates, for instance, reject the explicitly white nationalist positions of hardcore anti-immigrant groups. Resistance narratives suggest there are more ethical ways to treat these “outsiders.” Despite these moves, resistance narratives often reinforce many of the same logics and hierarchies that are central to invasion narratives especially those of the sovereign nation and human exceptionalism. As CAS scholars have pointed out, human exceptionalism as practiced in the West relies on an abstract understanding of animals as irrational, wild, uncivilized, and unclean. At the extremes, such frameworks suggest animals are undeserving of ethical and political consideration. If, in contrast, animals were respected as intelligent and treated with compassion, then comparing a human to an animal would carry a different meaning and would lack the same discursive weight.

Yet, the resistance frequently seeks to bring in a few more beings into the privileged category of human thereby expanding the number of people that are granted civil or human rights. Although such approaches are effective to a limit, much like liberal humanist discourses that attach to the state more broadly, they leave many taken for granted hierarchies in place such as human-animal, nature-culture, and even citizen-alien. *Invasions* demonstrates that such conflicts over who and what counts as human and animal intersect with the ways in which race and gender are understood and practiced. The notion of species, thus, should be seen as central to notions of intersectionality, which are often quite vacuous as they are so often deployed without consideration of anthropocentrism and nationalism.

Moreover, TNR proponents and many critics of kudzu suggest invasive plants or animals might be managed or controlled with more financial efficiency and scientific rationality—reinforcing the primacy of the all mighty dollar and epistemically privileging Western thought systems. Overall, the narratives that have come to represent the resistance to metaphors of invasion do not go far enough to challenge notions of citizenship and national claims over territories. They appeal to Western notions of rationality. In short, resistance narratives frequently share many similar assumptions with invasion narratives including anthropocentrism. Because they operate within and as a part of the discourse of invasion, resistance narratives often prop up many of the same logics used to “other” non-citizens, non-humans, women, and people of color. Resistance is no longer enough, rebellion from the underlying projects of anthropocentrism, nationalism, racialization, and colonialism is necessary.

#### *5.4.3 Possibilities*

*Invasions* suggests that the ways people think and act in relation to their social environments are contingent and constantly at stake. Although powerful corporations and governments overdetermine the meanings people assign to categories such as human, animal, migrant, plant, cat, kudzu, these meanings are changeable. In short, The Georgia Alliance for Human Rights, The TrapKing, and Kudzu Kabin Designs do not, as discussed throughout *Invasions*, work towards their goals in circumstances of their own choosing. Instead, people like Nancy Basket, Sterling Davis, and Gloria Anzaldúa create narratives that rebel against the dogma of the discourses of invasion. The knowledges they offer are structured around different sets of assumptions. And, people like Nancy Basket and Sterling Davis all have put these ways of thinking into action as they go about their days caring for beings such as kudzu and cats. Moreover, the types of narratives these individuals exemplify are already structuring the ways many people live in the perilous years of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the prior chapter, *Invasions* has centered some of these ways of living and thinking that have been excluded from taken for granted systems of ranking and classifying humans, animals,

nature, citizens, and non-citizens. Indeed, these types of thinking were censored and silenced in the accounts of the mainstream media and scientific journals that were analyzed in earlier chapters of this dissertation. The work of people such as Nancy Basket, Joy Harjo, Gloria Anzaldúa and Robin Wall Kimmerer upends the traditional hierarchies and the logics of profit and nation that I found pervasive in mainstream sources. And, Indigenous people around the world are unsurprisingly leading the way in efforts to prevent the environmental and ecological catastrophes brought on by capitalism and nationalism. They are organizing, thinking, and living in ways to confront these perilous political-economic systems of domination.

In Australia, for instance, the federal government is widely funding invasive species wars on a number of species, including feral cats (Bunyak 2019). Yet, just as Nancy Basket noted of the kudzu vine in the Southern United States, Aborigines have embraced feral cats as belonging in a “natural world” that “does not exist as a separable world, beyond and different from the human world” (Franklin 2006:167). Adrian Franklin writes of Aboriginal peoples, “they do not deal in absolute categories, classifications, boundaries pure and impure but in the messiness of life itself, in the complex way real life confounds the possibility of such a neat and ordered world” (2006:167). Although some animals were once strangers “to the country,” Aboriginal people are able to think and live in a way that allows them to belong in the “country” and now even consider cats as “native animals” (Franklin 2006:173). As this example suggests, the figure of the invader and the logics of anthropocentrism, profit, and security are powerful forces not just in the United States but around the world. Yet, there are many alternative ways of relating out there too, and they provide hope for livable, caring futures. Lives and relationships, in these frequently erased narratives, are filled with meaning beyond the simple logics of profit, nationalism, and security.

Joy Harjo writes, “the quantum physicists have it right; they are beginning to think like Indians: everything is connected dynamically at an intimate level. When you remember this, then the current wobble of the earth makes sense. How much more oil can be drained, without

replacement, without reciprocity?" (2015:32). The logics of reciprocity and replacement require different ways of living in the world than the logics of profit, security, and extraction. Such reciprocity, replacement, and caring are vital to the thinking of many of the voices still widely ignored in mainstream conversations despite these voices now being even more widely accessible because of the internet. If we care about diversity, sustainability, and equality, we must do more than resist. We must learn to tell new stories about our differences, similarities, and interdependence.

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