special issue

Symposium: Colonial Legacies, Racist Discrimination: Belgo-Japanese Dialogues

Chikako Mori, Fuminori Minamikawa, Ryuta Itagaki, Hiroshi Yasui

Introduction

Chikako Mori

Fifty-five years after the entry into force of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, despite the enactment of domestic anti-discrimination legislation by its state parties, racism persists in diverse forms at both the individual and collective levels. In light of this situation, an international symposium, "Colonial Legacies, Racist Discrimination: Belgo-Japanese Dialogues," was held on January 28–29, 2025, at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in Belgium. The symposium was co-organized by the Global Mediterranean Program of the Research Center for Intersectionality and Multiculturalism in Complex Cities (MICCS), Doshisha University, and the HERICOL project (Projet de recherche ARC-Advanced sur les héritages coloniaux en Belgique - Advanced Research on the Colonial Legacies in Belgium) at ULB. It was conceived as a platform for academic dialogue bridging Europe and Japan in order to examine contemporary forms of racism and the enduring legacies of colonialism from comparative and transregional perspectives.

The symposium also functioned as an interim report of the MICCS Mediterranean Project and emerged from the international research exchanges that the project has fostered in recent years. In particular, the invitation of one of the organizers, Abdellali Hajjat, to Doshisha University in April 2025 as part of the project—where discussions were deepened on the contemporary dimensions of colonialism in Belgium—served as a crucial point of departure for this initiative. Furthermore, the realization of the symposium was directly facilitated by the fact that another organizer, Chikako Mori, began an overseas research stay at ULB in September 2025 and was hosted by Hajjat's research group. We would therefore like to express our sincere gratitude to Abdellali Hajjat,

to the Université libre de Bruxelles, and to the HERICOL project, of which he is co-director, for their generous collaboration and support.

Over the course of two days, the symposium addressed two closely related themes. The first day focused on anti-Asian racism, which has become the subject of intense debate, particularly since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. What forms does anti-Asian racism take? In what ways does it resemble or differ from the racism experienced by other racialized groups? To what extent is it shaped by colonial histories and imaginaries? These guiding questions structured the theoretical and empirical discussions.

In the morning session, chaired by Sasha Newell (ULB), Fuminori Minamikawa (Doshisha University) examined the intersections of race, meritocracy, and diasporic conservatism among Asian Americans through a case study of anti-affirmative action campaigns during the Trump era. Rika Lee (Chuo University) then traced the historical trajectory of Korean women in Japan, highlighting how gender and colonialism have been systematically erased or marginalized in dominant narratives of racism.

The afternoon session, chaired by Chikako Mori (Doshisha University), shifted attention to institutional and discursive dimensions. Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot (ULB) analyzed the categorization, hierarchization, and unequal treatment of Asians within EU mobility policies, revealing the structural mechanisms embedded in regulatory frameworks. Veronica B. Reyes (ULB) explored how people of Asian descent may identify with "whiteness," drawing on discourses of aversion toward Asians to illuminate the complex processes of racialization and subject formation.

The second day turned to the broader question of colonial legacies in contemporary societies. To what extent do colonial histories continue to shape our institutions, public spaces, and even academic knowledge production? What initiatives are being undertaken to confront or challenge these legacies, and what kinds of reactions do they provoke?

Ryuta Itagaki (Doshisha University) addressed the issue of repatriating colonial-era human remains held in Japanese university collections, interrogating the boundary between "the human" and anthropos from a critical theoretical perspective. Hiroshi Yasui (Doshisha University) offered a critical analysis of vegan nationalism and Israel's ongoing "War on Terror," examining how the human/animal binary is mobilized within contemporary political discourse.

In the afternoon session, chaired by Keisuke Kikuchi (Doshisha University), Marti Luntumbue (ULB) discussed the ways in which Belgian foreign policy between 1990 and 2002 sought to distance itself from the colonial past, focusing on the case of the Lumumba Commission. Jean Illi (ULB) examined debates surrounding

the bust of Emile Storms in Ixelles, analyzing how (de)colonial issues become visible and contested within public space.

The symposium brought together faculty members and early-career researchers from ULB, as well as undergraduate and graduate students who share an interest in the contemporary impact of colonialism. The sessions were marked by lively and engaged discussions, with dynamic exchanges between speakers and participants that moved productively between theoretical reflection and empirical analysis. In this sense, the symposium functioned not only as an academic forum but also as a space for intergenerational and transregional dialogue.

By juxtaposing the historical experiences of Europe and Japan, the symposium deepened both theoretical and empirical understandings of contemporary racism and colonial legacies. It also laid important groundwork for future collaborative research and sustained dialogue across national and disciplinary boundaries.

As part of the current record of the symposium, we publish here the contributions of three MICCS members—Fuminori Minamikawa, Ryuta Itagaki, and Hiroshi Yasui. A more comprehensive account of the symposium proceedings will be made available separately at a later date.

Race, Meritocracy, and Diasporic Conservatism among Asian Americans: Anti-Affirmative Action Campaigns in the Age of Trump

Fuminori Minamikawa

1. Introduction

In the 2024 U.S. presidential election, Asian Americans, along with Hispanics, played a notable role in the surprising yet narrow victory of former president Donald Trump. Exit polls indicate that both Latino and Asian American voters increased their support for Trump. Although the majority of non-white minority voters supported the Democratic candidate, Kamala Harris, Trump's vote share increased 14 percentage points among Latinos and 6 points among Asians (Latino: from 32% in 2020 to 46% in 2024; Asian: from 34% to 40%). These shifts were critical to Trump's narrow victory. According to the 2024 American Electorate Voter Poll, Filipino and Chinese Americans were among the Asian American groups most likely to vote for Trump.

As James Zarasadiaz, a political commentator, points out in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Asian American electorates have shifted further right" and "it has been brewing for years." Interestingly, the growth of Asian American conservatism has coincided with a period of increasing discrimination against Asian Americans. In early 2020, Donald Trump used the term "China Virus" to blame the Chinese government's handling of COVID-19 and Asian immigrants whom he claimed had brought the virus to the United States. The Trump administration thus contributed to the heightened vulnerability and suffering of many Asian Americans during this period. Despite this context, however, Asian Americans were more likely to support Trump and conservative candidates in the 2024 election than they were before. How, then, can we understand the rise of Asian American conservatism amid escalating anti-Asian hate and violence?

In considering this conservative turn among Asian Americans, the interpretative frame through which anti-Asian hate is understood becomes critically important. In both social media and mainstream media in the United States, a powerful narrative emerged that portrayed anti-Asian violence as a form of interracial conflict, particularly as an Asian-Black conflict.

Asian-Black conflict has a long history in interracial relations in the United States. For example, in the aftermath of the wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans, Black Americans and Japanese Americans were often at odds over housing and employment opportunities on the West Coast. Perhaps the most widely cited example is the conflict between Korean Americans and Black Americans during the 1992 Los Angeles uprising.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some media outlets framed anti-Asian hate as the latest

instance of Asian-Black conflict. Although the majority of perpetrators of anti-Asian hate crimes were White, incidents in which Black individuals attacked Asian victims were more likely to go viral on social media. Their selective representations created a powerful impression that anti-Asian hate was primarily a conflict between minority groups.

The debate over affirmative action represents a recent and salient example of Asian-Black conflict. Some Asian Americans view themselves as victims of affirmative action policies that benefit Black and Hispanic students in higher education. Others interpret affirmative action as a form of anti-Asian discriminations that excludes Asians from elite education. By contrast, Black activists regard affirmative action as an essential instrument for promoting racial equality; from this perspective, opposing affirmative action constitutes a backlash against the civil rights of disadvantaged minorities. As a result, the affirmative action debate has become a key site of Asian-Black conflicts.

This presentation examines the debate over affirmative action to explore how some Asian Americans have become aligned with a conservative racial agenda during a period marked by anti-Asian violence. In 2023, a landmark Supreme Court decision ruled that affirmative action in college admissions was unconstitutional. Students for Fair Admission (SFFA) sued Harvard College, alleging that its affirmative action

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Affirmative Action Ruling Could Reshape College Admissions

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Supreme Court Strikes Down Race-Based Programs at 2 Universities

- The 6-3 ruling to reject programs at Harvard and the University of North Carolina disavowed race as a factor in achieving educational diversity.
- The move is expected to lower the number of Black and Latino students at elite campuses.

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With the ruling, the court's conservative supermajority continued to redefine key aspects of American life.
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Washington, D.C. Rival demonstrators outside the Supreme Court.

Kenny Holston/The New York Times

Chief Justice John Roberts

The Harvard and U.N.C. admissions programs cannot be reconciled with the guarantees of the Equal Protection Clause. Both programs lack sufficiently focused and measurable objectives warranting the use of race,

Justice Sonia Sotomayor

Today, this Court stands in the way and rolls back decades of precedent and momentous progress. It holds that race can no longer be used in a limited way in college admissions to achieve such critical benefits. In so holding, the Court cements a superficial rule of colorblindness as a constitutional principle in an endemically segregated society where race has always mattered and continues to matter. The Court subverts the constitutional guarantee of equal protection by further entrenching racial inequality in education, the very foundation of our democratic government and pluralistic society.

Read highlights from the affirmative action opinion and dissents.
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Congressional Democrats denounced and Republicans celebrated the ruling on affirmative action.

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These are the key cases the Supreme Court has yet to decide this term.

Figure 1: The cover page of the online edition of *The New York Times* on June 29, 2023
(captured by the author, June 30, 2023)

policies discriminated against Asian American applicants. A symbolic representation of this ruling appeared on the cover of the *The New York Times* website on June 29, 2023 (Figure 1). The image depicting a Black woman loudly protesting toward an Asian woman, framed the case as a clash between Black and Asian activists. As such, the affirmative action debate has often been treated as a representative example of Asian-Black conflict.

Numerous reports have also pointed out that SFFA was founded by a White legal activist, Edward Blum. He is widely known for his role in anti-affirmative action and anti-civil rights litigations in the 2010s and has been characterized by critics as a white supremacist. Critics have argued that SFFA functioned as an organization through which a white supremacist advanced a racist agenda by mobilizing Asian Americans. Although SFFA prominently featured images of Asian applicants struggling with college admissions, the organization itself was led by a white activist.

While this white supremacist background is critically important, it raises another question: why have some Asian Americans so actively engaged in anti-affirmative action campaigns? One explanation draws on Angela Dillard's concept of "multicultural conservatives," framing these Asian Americans as assimilationist minority leaders who have played significant roles in promoting color-blindness and a post-racial vision of society. Another perspective, however, emphasizes the immigrant backgrounds of those activists. Many prominent anti-affirmative action leaders are Chinese Americans, and their mobilization is shaped less by an assimilationist orientation than by a "China First" framework. From this standpoint, perceptions of "unfair" treatment in college admissions are shaped by immigrants through transnational comparisons.

This research argues that Asian American conservative leaders are neither assimilationists nor immigrant nationalists. While they maintain strong emotional attachments to their homeland, they and their families simultaneously pursue professional advancement in the United States. To capture this distinctive configuration, this presentation introduces the concept of "diasporic conservatism" to characterize this particular mode of participation in conservative politics in the United States. This framework raises several key questions: How can we understand their distinctive form of engagement with conservative agendas in the United States? How do they interpret their roles in anti-affirmative action activism amid ongoing anti-Asian violence and racism? And in what ways does diasporic conservatism intersect with—and potentially reproduce—contemporary forms of racism in the United States?

2. Overview of the SFFA Case

As background to this case, Asian Americans are often characterized as a highly successful minority group. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, the annual real median household income of Asian Americans exceeded $120,000 in 2024—approximately twice that of Black households. Educational attainment among Asian Americans has also been notably high: in 2015, 55% of Asian American adults held bachelor's degrees or higher. Reflecting these patterns of socioeconomic success, Asian Americans were largely removed from affirmative action programs in college admissions during the 1980s.

The SFFA filed the lawsuit in 2014, arguing that the race-conscious admissions systems at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina (UNC) constituted "intentional racial discrimination." Since the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated the use of racial quotas (a *hard* version of affirmative action) in college admissions in 1978, most major universities have adopted a *soft* version of affirmative action. This approach allowed race to be considered as one factor among many in pursuit of student body diversity. Harvard and UNC implemented this soft version of affirmative action. Applicants were permitted to disclose their race on application forms, and admissions committees could consider race alongside other factors, including high school grades, standardized test scores, extracurricular activities, geographical origin, family backgrounds, and socioeconomic status.

SFFA argued that Asian American applicants were systematically disadvantaged in order to keep their enrolment share at elite universities lower than it would otherwise be. The organization characterized this practice as "racial balancing," alleging that admissions offices sought to maintain relatively stable enrolment proportions across racial groups. Despite a substantial increase of Asian applicants and their strong performance on standardized tests such as the SAT, the proportion of Asian students enrolled at these institutions remained relatively constant at approximately 20-25%. SFFA contended that this apparent "balance" was the result of intentional discrimination against Asian applicants, with race functioning as a decisive factor in admission decisions. On this basis, SFFA claimed that the admissions practices violated the Civil Rights Act.

SFFA also launched a media campaign highlighting the experiences of Asian American applicants who were rejected by elite colleges. One frequently cited example was Michael Wang, a Chinese American young man who became a representative figure in these narratives. He graduated from a highly ranked high school with outstanding grades, top standardized test scores, and extensive extracurricular achievement, yet he was denied admission to Ivy

League universities. Wang interpreted this outcome as evidence that affirmative action functioned as a mechanism that excluded Asian applicants like himself on the basis of race.

Harvard University rejected this argument, maintaining that the consideration of race in admissions was a constitutionally permissible means of achieving a "diverse student body." According to Harvard, race was evaluated in the same holistic manner as other admissions factors. Race-conscious admissions policies designed to promote diversity had been deemed constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, most notably in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2016). Relying on these precedents, both the U.S. District Court in Boston and the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in favor of Harvard.

However, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed these lower-court decisions and ruled that race-conscious admissions policies in Harvard and UNC were unconstitutional. President Trump named three conservative judges during his first term, and conservatives comprised a dominant majority of the Supreme Court justices. The conservative majority invalidated even the *soft* version of affirmative action in higher education. Although this outcome was driven by the broader conservative transformation of the Supreme Court, Asian Americans were nevertheless positioned as symbolic victims of race-conscious admissions policies. Following the ruling, mainstream media widely circulated images and narratives that framed the decision—and the broader affirmative action debate—as an instance of Asian-Black conflict.

3. Asian Americans "Against" Affirmative Action

Accordingly, Asian Americans came to play a symbolic and, in some respects, decisive role in the SFFA case. This raises a critical question: who are the Asian Americans engaged in anti-affirmative action campaigns?

The earliest debates over affirmative action involving Asian Americans emerged in the 1980s. During this period, UC Berkeley professor Ling-chi Wang observed that Asian American enrollment had declined even as the number of Asian American applicants increased. Wang and grassroots Asian American community activists called on the University of California to investigate why Asian American student enrollment had suddenly dropped and then plateaued. A subsequent task force concluded that internal admissions practices disproportionately excluded Asian American applicants. The UC chancellor acknowledged these findings and issued a public apology to the Asian American community. In the aftermath, the UC System revised its admissions policies in an effort to promote campus diversity.

Ling-chi Wang emphasized a clear distinc-

tion between anti-Asian bias in admissions and the legitimacy of affirmative action. He was one of the strongest advocates of affirmative action for people of color. Wang was also a founder of Chinese for Affirmative Action (established in 1969), a civil rights organization that has long defended the purpose and necessity of affirmative action in university admissions.

By the 2010s, a different pattern of Asian American involvement in debates over affirmative action had emerged. Some Asian American groups became highly active in anti-affirmative action campaigns. Like activists in the 1980s, they protested what was perceived as anti-Asian discrimination in admissions. However, unlike their predecessors, their criticism was directed primarily at affirmative action policies benefiting disadvantaged minority groups.

The Asian American Coalition for Education (AACE) was established as an umbrella organization linking various Asian American groups with the explicit goal of abolishing affirmative action and supporting SFFA's litigation. Its prominent members were primarily first-generation immigrant entrepreneurs and professionals, most of whom were from China. In 2016, AACE also filed its own discrimination complaint with the U.S. federal government, calling for the abolition of affirmative action in the admissions processes of Ivy League institutions: Yale, Brown, and Dartmouth. 130 Asian American organizations joined in protesting what they described as "low admission rates for Asian Americans" at Ivy League colleges.

Asian Americans who led AACE member organizations had strong personal stakes in college admissions for their children. Many of these leaders had come to the United States in the 1990s as highly skilled migrant workers or international students. They possessed high levels of educational attainment and were strongly motivated to secure elite educational opportunities for their children in the United States. For example, AACE president, Yukong Mike Zhao, stated that his son had been "a victim of discrimination." He claimed that affirmative action allowed Black and Latino students to displace his son at elite institutions. Zhao rejected the characterization that he was merely a "tool" of Edward Blum or other white supremacists, instead emphasizing his own proactive and autonomous engagement in anti-affirmative action advocacy.

In various media accounts, Yukong Zhao has appeared as one of the leading figures of the "Chinese American right" during the 2010s. Chinese American activists such as Zhao became highly visible in conservative movements in metropolitan areas and emerged as ardent supporters of Donald Trump. A notable discursive strategy employed by Chinese American right-wing activists was their comparison of contemporary U.S. society with China under the old socialist regime. According to an inter-

view reported in *The New York Times*, one Chinese American conservative activist argued that the social welfare system “encourages laziness and punishes hard-working people.” These activists tended to favor neoliberal reforms that dismantle welfare programs and call for stricter measures targeting the poor and criminalized populations.

AACE’s anti-affirmative action framework shared these neoliberal attitudes with the emerging Chinese American right. In its complaints challenging affirmative action, AACE argued that such policies undermine American meritocracy. Meritocracy is a core value upon which anti-affirmative action activists frequently rely. From this perspective, the American social system should evaluate individuals on the basis of merit rather than race, gender, and other social ascriptions. AACE further contended that meritocracy is an essential mechanism for achieving both racial equality and economic prosperity in American society. In contrast, affirmative action was described as “severe discrimination by the Ivy League colleges” that created “shadow and distrust in many Asian American’s mind.”

While praising American meritocracy, AACE also underlined the importance of the cultural values attributed to Asian immigrants. According to this view, a strong work ethic, diligence, and pro-education family values enabled Asian American families to “climb out of poverty” and significantly improve their living standards. However, AACE leaders argued that elite universities excluded many Asian applicants who embodied and preserved these cultural values.

AACE’s framework interpreted Asian American educational success as the product of a combination of American meritocracy and what it described as traditional Asian cultural values. From this perspective, affirmative action was seen as disrupting this successful combination. What is analytically significant is that Chinese American right-wing activists also compared contemporary American welfare policies, including affirmative action, to China’s former socialist system. Anti-affirmative action activists argued that the socialist Chinese state denied the legitimacy of the merit-based systems in order to engineer social equality through state intervention.

AACE leaders and figures within the Chinese American right share the view that market liberalization and competition have contributed to China’s growing affluence since the 1990s. Many benefitted from this economic transformation and subsequently immigrated to the United States in search of greater opportunities. However, when encountering affirmative action policies in the United States, these Chinese American leaders often drew parallels between such policies and their memories of state intervention under China’s former socialist regime. For example, AACE president Yukong Mike Zhao stated, “We Chinese believe in equal op-

portunities. They [he means "American liberals"] pursue equal outcomes. This is like in [the] Mao era, you received the same pay whether you worked hard or not." From this perspective, opposition to affirmative action was rooted not only in domestic U.S. political debates but also in a diasporic imagination that connected life in liberal America to recollections of social governance in China.

4. The Frame of Interracial Conflict and Challenges

While Asian American anti-affirmative action leaders situate their positions between the thinking of the United States and China, their campaigns are embedded within the interracial conflict of the United States. In advancing their anti-affirmative action arguments, these Asian American leaders frequently invoke other minority groups. In many cases, these leaders portrayed Asian American youth as "superior" students in comparison with their Black and Latino peers. They argue that unqualified Black and Latino students are granted access to elite schools at the expense of more qualified Asian students. Such narratives frequently appear as evidence of the irrationality and unfairness of affirmative action. This discourse, in turn, imposes the notion that Blacks and Latino students are generally unqualified for higher education.

When Michael Wang, a prominent Chinese student in anti-affirmative action campaigns, mentioned his failure to gain admission to elite universities, he described his Latino and African American classmates as "less impressive." In another news article in *The New York Times*, a Chinese American entrepreneur in Silicon Valley suggested that beneficiaries of affirmative action would become lazy because the policy conveyed the message that "you don't need to work hard." Such discourses routinely racialize Black and Latino students as "less impressive" and lazy "beneficiaries." From this perspective, the affirmative action debate is framed as a conflict between "hardworking" Asians and "lazy" Blacks and Latinos.

The New York Times cover image published on the day of SFFA ruling symbolized the affirmative action debates as an "Asian-Black" conflict. As a result of this frame, combined with the representation of SFFA leader Edward Blum as a white supremacist, Asian American anti-affirmative action campaigns were characterized as an anti-Black and racist movement.

This interracial conflict frame also appeared in other Asian American conservative movements. For example, Asian American groups mobilized against sanctuary city policies that protected the human rights of undocumented immigrants. Activists criticized local governments for supporting undocumented immigrants, who were often portrayed as predominantly Latino, while positioning themselves as a

law-abiding immigrant group. Another case concerns opposition to plans to relocate a homeless shelter near New York's Chinatown. Activists argued that the shelter would increase crime in their neighborhood and claimed that "putting a shelter there would be a racist act" against the Chinese American community. In these narratives, homeless people were frequently racialized as Black and Latino. Thus, the frame of interracial conflict functioned as a foundation for conservative or neoliberal views emphasizing colorblindness, law-abidingness, and self-help.

More recently, Asian American conservatives have articulated a distinctive view of anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a letter sent by the AACE to the U.S. Attorney General in 2021, AACE expressed a conservative interpretation of both Black Lives Matter activism and anti-Asian hate. AACE argued that anti-Asian hate was a product of "toxic identity politics" promoted by the "American left," which, in their view, fostered hostility toward Asian Americans because of their perceived success. They also claimed that the "defund the police" movement advocated by Black Lives Matter activists led to the release of criminals from prisons and thereby contributed to the rise in anti-Asian hate. AACE called for a "law and order" approach to addressing anti-Asian hate and advocated stronger policing. Even in discussions of anti-Asian violence, the frame of interracial conflict continued to structure their worldview.

Interestingly, AACE also appropriated key terms from Black Lives Matter activism. The organization described affirmative action as "systemic racism" against Asian children, repurposing a concept that BLM activists have used to highlight the structural dimensions of racism in the United States. In this way, AACE selectively mobilized discourses drawn from BLM and anti-BLM positions to advocate its claims during the pandemic.

However, conservatives such as AACE do not represent the majority of the Asian American population. Many Asian Americans have challenged this interracial conflict frame and instead emphasize their solidarity with other disadvantaged minorities. Survey data indicate that a majority of Asian Americans support affirmative action for Black and Latino communities, even though Asian Americans are not the primary beneficiaries of these policies. Moreover, many Asian American civil rights organizations have a long history of supporting affirmative action. For example, Chinese for Affirmative Action is one of the oldest and most active organizations advocating for Asian American civil rights. It has organized rallies to demonstrate solidarity with disadvantaged minorities and has rejected media discourses that portray the SFFA as representative of Asian Americans. Polling data further suggest that Asian Americans have consistently been strong supporters of affirmative

action. According to the Asian American Voter Surveys, approximately 70% of Asian Americans support affirmative action in 2022. Chinese Americans have also shown strong support, with the notable exception of 2016, when the SFFA and AACE were particularly active in the affirmative action debate.

Liberal Asian American politicians have also communicated their position to the broader public. The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) is a group of Asian American members of Congress, most of whom belong to the Democratic Party. In the "Position Paper" responding to anti-affirmative action litigation in August 2015, CAPAC called for greater "transparency" in admission processes in order to prevent anti-Asian discrimination, which has a long history in elite universities. At the same time, CAPAC expressed support for Harvard College's approach to building a diverse student body. CAPAC also highlighted diversity and inequality within Asian Pacific American communities, noting that some Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders continue to experience low incomes, lower educational attainment, and residential segregation. In addition, CAPAC criticized so-called "legacy admissions," which confer significant advantages to white applicants.

The reactions to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling of *SFFA v. Harvard* in 2023 also demonstrate the stark contrast between Asian American conservatives and liberals. Mike Yokong Zhao of AACE praised the decision as a victory and celebrated what he described as the vindication of meritocracy. He stated that the ruling "will abolish the only remaining race-based law, advancing America toward a color-blind society." Chinese for Affirmative Action, by contrast, expressed frustration and disappointment with the ruling, warning that it would "have devastating consequences for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian American students for generations to come." Such divisions within Asian American communities remain a serious concern.

5. Conclusion: Anti-Asian Hate and Asian American Conservatives

How do we understand the anti-AA movement from the viewpoint of Asian Americans? One important background consideration is the long history of discrimination against Asians in college admissions. Even though Asian Americans are praised as model representatives of a successful minority, admission officers have usually underestimated their qualifications. Therefore, whether you are for or against affirmative action, the issue of this underestimation of Asians needs to be seriously addressed.

Additionally, "diasporic conservativism" is a relatively new issue in a long history of affirmative action debate. Minority conservatives who

oppose affirmative action have often been characterized as assimilationist within U.S. racial politics. I highlight how the diasporic imagination helps new Asian immigrants to construct political positions opposing civil rights reform policies. Among new Chinese immigrant professionals, memories and discourses of a pre-Open Door China play a significant role in shaping critiques of affirmative action. Those diasporic conservatives often interpret affirmative action as a form of "social engineering" aimed at producing "equal outcomes." This diasporic mode of criticism bears important similarities to the ideological accusations directed at communist governments by Vietnamese American and Cuban American conservative groups. Therefore, diasporic conservatism is not limited to Chinese Americans. Rather, it constitutes a broader analytical lens for understanding contemporary minority conservatism in U.S. politics.

Diasporic conservatism is also embedded in the context of global competition for educational advantage. Its proponents often position themselves as neoliberal competitors within a global hierarchy of higher education. Consequently, they tend to show limited engagement with the historical origin of affirmative action and its roots in struggles for civil rights and racial equality. Meritocracy functions as their central normative value, and they endorse a vision of U.S. society as colorblind one fundamentally based on individual merit. This combination of ideological criticism of homeland and strategic engagement with the global educational market constitutes a defining feature of diasporic conservatism. In this respect, it differs markedly from the conservatism of Trump supporters with working-class backgrounds.

Therefore, diasporic conservatism will have two important impacts on U.S. racial relations. First, diasporic conservatism will constitute a bloc to support Trumpism in Asian America. It has increased and extended its influence on U.S. politics. The 2024 Presidential Election showed us that a certain part of Asian Americans is becoming conservative because of their diasporic characters. Second, the way Asian diasporic conservatives are portrayed reminds me of stereotypical images of Asian Americans: Asians as "forever foreigners," inhuman "dragon mothers," and "cold-blooded racists." Those stereotypical representations further reinforce anti-Asian sentiments and incite violence against Asians.

Anti-affirmative action discourse spreads biased and stereotypical interpretation of Blacks and Latinos, having real, damaging consequences for them. It also reproduces stereotypical images of "Asians" or "Chinese" and increases anti-Asian hate. In these two ways, the victimization of Asians in America often strengthens white supremacy and deepens U.S. systemic racism.

Beyond Humanitas and Anthropos

On the Repatriation of Colonial Human Remains in Japanese University Collections

Ryuta Itagaki

Colonial Legacies in Academia

On December 4, 2018, five Ryūkyūans filed a lawsuit with the Kyoto District Court, demanding that Kyoto University return 26 sets of human remains that are currently stored in the university's museum. All of these remains were taken from a burial cave called Mumujana in Nakijin Village, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan, by biological anthropologists from Kyoto Imperial University in the 1920s and 1930s. The Mumujana grave was a cemetery that enshrined the former Ryūkyū royal families and local leaders. To this day, it is a site of worship that the people of Okinawa visit on pilgrimages. Not only did the five Ryūkyūans seek the return of the remains by Kyoto University to the original Mumujana grave, but they also clearly stated in their petition that the essential purpose of the lawsuit was to challenge "the colonialism of academic knowledge" (Matsushima and Kimura eds. 2019; Matsushima and Yamauchi eds. 2020).

Kyoto University denied the request and has not returned the Ryūkyū remains to this day. The university argued that the remains had been collected with the permission of the Okinawa Prefectural Government and the police; therefore, the act did not constitute grave robbing. The university further asserted that the ritual succession of the Mumujana grave had long since ceased and that the plaintiff would have to prove that they had ownership of the remains in question before they could be returned. The plaintiffs considered that Kyoto University's arrogant attitude was the product of "colonialism of academic knowledge" resulting from discrimination against the Ryūkyū people, which had its origins in the history of Japan's colonization of the Ryūkyū Kingdom since the 19th century.

I became involved in this lawsuit as a cultural anthropologist. I have been conducting historical anthropological research on modern and contemporary Korea. Let me explain why I, who am not an expert on Ryūkyū or Okinawa, decided to participate in this lawsuit. Since the 1980s, when books such as *Writing Culture* and *Anthropology as a Cultural Critique* were published (Clifford and Marcus eds. 1986; Marcus and Fischer eds. 1986), cultural anthropology has become increasingly critical of the relationship between anthropology and colonialism and of power structures in ethnographic research. When I began studying cultural anthropology at a Japanese university in the 1990s, this kind of postcolonial critique of anthropology was at its height. This intellectual climate motivated my decision to pursue historical anthropological re-

search, focusing on Korean society under Japanese rule, from the perspective of critical analyses of colonialism.

Alongside my main research, I have often visited the Amami Islands with my colleagues specializing in colonial studies. The Amami Islands, located between the Okinawa Islands and Kyushu Island, were historically a region that was both on the periphery of the Ryūkyū Kingdom and on the periphery of the Satsuma domain of Kyushu. Inspired by the lawsuit for the return of the remains of the Ryūkyū people, some individuals in the Amami Islands also began a campaign to demand the return of the Amami remains held by Kyoto University. As a historical anthropologist with a background in the critique of colonialism, I decided to contribute to this movement by using my position as a professor at a university in Kyoto to investigate the remains of those from Amami, an area that had not yet been fully explored. In the course of my research, I discovered that the majority of the Ryūkyūan and Amami remains had been collected in 1933 by the same anthropologist, Sōetsu Miyake. However, in the lawsuit against Kyoto University, both the plaintiff and the defendant continued to mistakenly believe that the Ryūkyūan remains had been collected by another anthropologist named Takeo Kanazeki. Kanazeki did collect human remains in Ryūkyū in 1929, but he later transferred them to Taipei Imperial University in Taiwan. Therefore, the Ryukyuan remains at Kyoto University are those collected by Miyake. I pointed this out to the plaintiffs and their legal team, who accepted my argument. The plaintiffs' legal team subsequently asked me to submit my research to the court as an expert opinion, and I agreed. Consequently, I became involved in the trial and initiated a comprehensive investigation of the collection of human remains by the physical anthropologists at Kyoto Imperial University (Itagaki 2020a; 2020b).

In the following presentation, I will talk about what I found out during the course of this investigation focusing on the Ryūkyū remains held by Kyoto University. Before I begin, I would like to address a crucial terminology issue. In the Japanese language, there are two distinct terms for human remains: "ikotsu" and "jinkotsu." In this presentation, I will translate them as "human remains" and "human bones," respectively. The term "human remains" is frequently employed by the bereaved families and is commonly used by those involved in the repatriation movement. In contrast, "human bones" is more commonly used by biological anthropologists, as it carries a stronger connotation of being utilized as research material. In my presentation, I will not use a single term throughout but will use "human remains" when emphasizing the context of the repatriation movement and "human bones" when explaining the context of anthropology in a critical manner.

The anthropological gaze towards "human bones" stems from the classical European concepts of the dichotomy between *humanitas* and *anthropos*, as articulated by the critical intellectual historians Osamu Nishitani (2006) and Naoki Sakai (2010). In simple terms, *humanitas* refers to people with a Western modern "humanity," while *anthropos* refers to "the Rest" of people. This shows an imbalance between *humanitas*, which observes, classifies, and produces "universal" knowledge, and *anthropos*, which is observed, catalogued, and provides the raw material for knowledge production. In the 19th century, German anthropologists represented themselves as "cultural peoples (Kulturvölker)" and the colonized peoples as "natural peoples (Naturvölker)" while collecting human bones (Zimmerman 2001: 150). If I were to sum up the demands of the lawsuit for the repatriation of the Ryūkyūan people's remains in a single phrase, it would be "Restore the Ryūkyū remains that have been treated as human bones to their original state as human remains." This project, however, is not intended to promote the inclusion of people in *humanitas*. Instead, it is a world-historical project aimed at dismantling colonialism, which has created a dichotomy between *humanitas* and *anthropos*. In this regard, I will first elucidate the colonial characteristics of the Kyoto School of Anthropology and subsequently address the matter of the contemporary legacy of colonialism.

Anthropological Research on Human Bones and Colonial Double Standards

In the domain of anthropology in modern Japan, the study of human bones was undertaken by medical scientists who had studied abroad at universities in German-speaking regions such as Berlin, Freiburg, and Strasbourg (Terada 1975; Sakano 2005). Of these, I will focus on Kenji Kiyono, who established, for a time, an academic base for the study of biological anthropology and the pursuit of related research within the Department of Pathology at Kyoto Imperial University's Faculty of Medicine, and his student Sōetsu Miyake. For Japanese biological anthropologists, the central interest in research, then and now, has been the theory of the origins of the Japanese people. Kiyono, who switched from pathology to anthropology in 1919, had systematized his own theory of the origins of the Japanese people, known as the Kiyono Theory, by the late 1920s. In summary, the Kiyono Theory posits that during the Stone Age within the Japanese archipelago, a distinct "race" existed, which he designated as the "Japanese Stone Age People." This "race" is believed to have inhabited the region extending from present-day northern Hokkaido to southern Okinawa. They are also considered to be the progenitor of the modern Japanese, Ainu, and Ryūkyūan peoples, who are believed to be offshoots of this original "race" that have interbred

with various other ethnic groups. To prove his theory, Kiyono and his students undertook a comprehensive collection, measurement, and analysis of human bones from various regions throughout Japan. The research began with the collection of human bones from ancient shell middens in Japan's metropole, which comprises the central land area of Honshū, Kyūshū, and Shikoku, followed by the collection of Ainu bones from the northern islands of Hokkaido and Sakhalin. In the 1930s, the collection expanded to include bones from Ryūkyū and Amami in the south. The number of bodies forming the "Kiyono Collection" of human bones held by Kyoto Imperial University reached nearly 1,400.

The Kyoto School of Anthropology, like its European counterparts in the field of biological anthropology, regarded its own discipline, otherwise referred to as "race science" (Rassenkunde), as a branch of the natural sciences. This position was taken in contrast to the cultural science of ethnology. They referred to Rudolf Martin's 1914 textbook, *Textbook of Anthropology in Systematic Order*, as a research manual and conducted measurements and analysis of human bones in accordance with the procedures outlined in that book (Martin 1914). The academic characteristics of the Kyoto School included its pioneering adoption of inferential statistics in Japan. This endeavor, fueled by their aspiration to establish anthropology as a rigorous natural science, led to the collection of large quantities of human bones from diverse geographical locations. They first postulated the existence of a specific "racial group." Next, in order to make meaningful statistical inferences, it was necessary to collect samples that would be representative of the population. Given the inherent differences in the skeletal structures of males and females, it was necessary to collect a sufficient number of samples from both sexes. Furthermore, if human bones were collected from only one cemetery, the physical characteristics unique to the region or the kinship might be emphasized. Consequently, it was deemed preferable for them to collect human bones from different cemeteries in various regions. Moreover, if they were to strictly follow the research manual, they would have to take the measurements in a laboratory equipped with the necessary instruments, as there are over a thousand measurement points on each human body.

This is the scientific background behind the large-scale removal of human bones by anthropologists. The more they wanted to make anthropology an objective, empirical natural science, the more they had to collect human bones from as many places as possible to avoid sampling bias. They were not motivated by any "wicked" ideas; rather, their "pure" scientific thinking led them to collect as many human bones as possible from graves across the region.

Then, did they collect human bones from graves throughout Japan in the same way as they did in Ryūkyū? The answer is no.

Kenji Kiyono classified his collection into four categories: (1) 708 Japanese Stone Age human bones, (2) 84 human bones from ancient Japanese tombs and caves, (3) 409 human bones from "special regions" in Japan, and (4) 183 ancient human bones from foreign countries (Kiyono 1949: 105-106, 115-123). Human bones from the regions stretching from Honshu to Kyushu Island, in other words, human bones excavated from Japan's metropole, are all classified as either Category 1 or Category 2. A significant proportion of the Category 1 bones were excavated from ancient shell middens. Human bones are excavated from shell mounds not because they were once cemeteries, but because the calcium content of the shells has enabled the bones to remain stable. Consequently, the locations where the bones of the first category were excavated were not traditional burial sites.

Conversely, ancient tombs and caves in the second category have been regarded as grave sites, despite their age. According to the Japanese Criminal Code, individuals engaging in the excavation of tombs or the acquisition of human remains are subject to punishment, both in the past and in the present. Some of these ancient tombs and caves have been the object of religious belief by the local communities. Consequently, in the cases of the second category, the Kiyono Laboratory had to adopt a "passive" approach, awaiting "accidental" excavations to occur. This is why only 84 cases of human bones were collected in the second category.

So, what are the human bones in the third category? This category includes regions such as Hokkaido, South Sakhalin, Ryūkyū, Amami, Korea, and Taiwan. Since the fourth category refers to foreign countries, the third category refers to regions that were not metropoles within the Japanese Empire, that is to say, colonies. Within the legal framework of the time, Korea, Taiwan, and South Sakhalin were designated as "overseas territories (*gaichi*)," while Ryūkyū, Amami, and Hokkaido were classified as part of the "home islands (*naichi*)," the same as the main island of Honshu. Consequently, Kiyono could not simply call the whole of this third category "overseas territories" in accordance with legal classifications. However, these regions were also areas that should be clearly distinguished from the metropole, and Kiyono probably named them as "special regions" with this intention. "Special regions" essentially served as a euphemistic rephrasing of "colony."

Did they also collect human bones in Ryūkyū and Amami in a "passive" and "accidental" manner? No, that is not the case. In December of 1933, Sōetsu Miyake of the Kiyono Laboratory conducted research in the southern islands. In Amami, he amassed a collection of over 80 sets of bones within a span of 10 days, and in

Okinawa, he collected more than 70 sets in a mere 7 days. One reason for this is that he collected bones from cemeteries where human remains were stored in caves, cliffs, or jars, rather than in Japanese-style cemeteries. In such traditional cemeteries in the southern islands, the bones were often exposed, making them more accessible. However, this was not the sole rationale. Miyake asserted that "the quickest way to easily collect a large quantity [of human bones] is to explore the ancient cemeteries of Okinawa" (Miyake 1934). The terms "quickest," "easily," and "large quantity" show his perspective on the collection of human bones, which stands in stark contrast to the notions of "passive" and "accidental."

Additionally, the human bones in this third category were not that old, as they were generally referred to as being from the "historical period." At the time, there was no established method for estimating the age of bones from the southern islands, and Kiyono said that there were almost none from before the Edo period, that is, from before the 17th century. This observation stands in stark contrast to the bones collected in the metropole, which were indisputably ancient.

The completely different attitudes toward human remains in the metropole and the colony are what I call the colonial double standard. It can be said that this is equivalent to the different attitudes toward "cultural peoples" and "natural peoples" of 19th-century German anthropologists. If we look at the collection of human remains by Takeo Kanazeki, who transferred from Kyoto Imperial University to Taipei Imperial University in 1936, the difference in attitude of anthropologists in colonies becomes even clearer. For instance, the human remains of the Atayal, an indigenous ethnic group in Taiwan, were collected in 1936, the year Kanazeki was appointed to Taipei Imperial University, from the burial site of victims of the Wushe (or Musha) Incident, an anti-Japanese uprising that took place in 1930 and 1931. Kanazeki also exhumed the body of a man who had been carefully buried in a cemetery of the Li ethnic minority on Hainan Island, which had just been occupied by the Japanese military in 1939, and brought it back to Taipei Imperial University in 1941, with the flesh and other soft parts still attached. Such an act would never have been possible in the Japanese metropole.

If an ordinary person engaged in the same actions, they would have been arrested for violating the criminal code. Whether it was Kanazeki or Miyake, they had connections with influential people in the public and private sectors, including the governor, prior to their departure for excavation sites. It was only because they had the prestige of the Imperial University and were protected by the network of power of the Japanese Empire that they were able to ignore the feelings of the local people, social norms, and even legal

norms in their collection of human bones in colonies and occupied territories. In this way, the colonial double standard was established with the support of imperial power. In other words, anthropologists were only able to sustain their "purely scientific" research ethos because of the colonial racism which was so firmly entrenched, creating the conditions that enabled them to do so. Ironically, however, the Japanese anthropologists engaged in this research were considered by their European counterparts to be the people from "the Rest" of the world. Buntaro Adachi, who went to study in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, became aware of the racial hierarchy there, developing a racial complex that prompted him to formulate his own theory in order to refute the idea that Europeans were the most advanced race. Kenji Kiyono also gave a lecture criticizing the idea that there is a distinction between "higher" and "lower" races (Terada 1975; Kiyono 1927). In other words, they tried to relativize the white-centric racial science of the West. However, this relativization was only possible along the axis of "white" versus "non-white." The concepts of race and racism that had been cultivated in the modern history of Europe and the United States made it difficult to see the racism that had developed among the "non-white" people within the Japanese Empire. This lack of self-awareness of racism became the soil in which the colonial double standard was generated.

Colonialism Inherited in the Present

Based upon my explanation, it may seem that the department of the Imperial University in which anthropological studies and research took place possessed great power. However, the foundation of the discipline was actually quite fragile. The academic base of anthropological teaching and research at Kyoto Imperial University effectively collapsed at the end of the 1930s. In 1938, it was discovered that Kenji Kiyono had "collected" more than 1,360 sutras and invaluable documents from ancient temples in Kyoto without permission, and he was arrested and charged with theft, leading him to resign from the university. His collecting habit escalated to the point where he even stole temple treasures without permission. The Kiyono incident prompted his assistant, Sōetsu Miyake, to depart from Kyoto University as well. Miyake expressed his sentiments upon his departure, stating, "I am sad and worried that I am leaving […] without having yet begun research on the ancient human bones I have collected in Okinawa and the Amami Islands" (Miyake 1934). Thus, the vast Kiyono Collection was left neglected in the Faculty of Medicine.

In 1962, the Department of Biological Anthropology was established within the Faculty of Science at Kyoto University under the leadership of Kinjirō Imanishi, marking the revival of the Kyoto School of Anthropology. Under

the direction of the professor of the department, around 1970, graduate students loaded the "Kiyono Collection" from the Faculty of Medicine onto a handcart and transported it to the Faculty of Science. However, even in that laboratory, only one paper that made use of the Ryūkyūan skeletons was published. After that, as research on human bones declined, almost no one used the Kiyono Collection in the 1990s. Therefore, when the Kyoto University Museum was built in 2001, most of the collection was transferred to its storage facility. The remains of the Ryūkyūans were effectively abandoned twice.

However, as new analysis technologies have developed, such as the development of methods for extracting DNA from ancient human bones, researchers have come to attribute new academic values to human bones, especially since the beginning of the 21st century. While cutting-edge technologies have rapidly been imported into Japan, the decolonization trend of repatriating human remains from former colonies and indigenous communities has not yet permeated the field of biological anthropology, contrasting with the progress seen in the field of cultural anthropology.

Nevertheless, the Japanese government has established a specialized system for the repatriation of Ainu human remains currently held by academic institutions. This was due to political circumstances. In 2008, the G8 Summit was held at Lake Tōya in Hokkaido. The year before, in 2007, the United Nations General Assembly had just adopted a resolution on the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In fact, until then, the Japanese government had not explicitly acknowledged the Ainu as an indigenous people. It was a disgrace that the host country of the G8 summit did not recognize the rights of its indigenous people. Therefore, in 2008, the Japanese Diet hastily passed a resolution recognizing the Ainu people as an indigenous people. In accordance with the relevant articles of the UN Declaration, the Japanese government had established a system, albeit an inadequate one, for the repatriation of Ainu human remains held by universities to Upopoy, a newly established memorial facility in Hokkaido, or to their respective communities of origin. However, there is no system for repatriating the human remains of other ethnic groups or regions, including Ryūkyū, Taiwan, or Korea. This suggests that the government's approach to repatriation is not driven by a genuine commitment to address historical injustices but rather by a desire to align with global trends without undergoing a thorough examination of the historical and cultural implications of colonialism.

These failings were revealed in the Ryūkyūan trial. In response to the trial, the Anthropological Society of Nippon, an academic society for biological anthropologists, submitted a request to Kyoto University, asserting that the universi-

ty should not comply with the request for the return of the human bones. The Society claimed that the bones possess "scientific value" and should continue to be managed as "research materials" by the university. Forgetting that Kyoto University had neglected the remains of the Ryūkyū people twice in history, they argued that they should be allowed to continue using the human bones because technological development had made them scientifically valuable again. These contemporary arguments put forth by anthropologists serve as a vivid illustration of the ongoing colonialism of knowledge that has persisted since the 19th century.

Unfortunately, the legal proceedings concluded in 2023 with a decision unfavorable to the Ryūkyūan people. The Osaka High Court determined that the plaintiffs lacked the legal entitlement to demand the repatriation of the human remains, based on the concept of modern property rights. In other words, the court stated that the human remains are exclusively owned by a specific person who is the designated successor chosen to preside over ancestor rituals, and that even if the remains are subject to communal rituals, the judicial system lacks the authority to order their return to the Mumujana grave.

However, the judges of the High Court added an important postscript to their decision. First, the judges rejected the request of the Anthropological Society of Nippon, saying that there was "no reason to attach importance" to it. In other words, they said that the academic value of the human remains did not outweigh the value of the remains as objects of ancestral rites and beliefs for community members. Therefore, the judges recommended that the parties concerned should seek a solution through discussion. To date, Kyoto University has continued to ignore this recommendation.

The High Court judges also criticized the anthropologists at Kyoto Imperial University for not having a "critical awareness" of the issue. In other words, they questioned the colonial perception of scholars who could "easily" remove human remains. At the same time, this is also a critique of the fact that contemporary scholars and university organizations still do not have a "critical awareness" of the issue. In fact, an anthropologist at Kyoto University, who also served as president of the Anthropological Society of Nippon, stated in an interview for a 2022 television documentary that the purpose of researching "human bones" is "to satisfy human intellectual curiosity." [1] Such comments are completely devoid of any awareness of the power relations that are behind this "pure" scientific spirit, and of what is being excluded from it.

Most notably, recognizing that "the repatriation of human remains is becoming a global trend," the judges clearly stated that "human remains are not just objects. We believe that hu-

man remains have the right to rest in peace in their homeland." What rights do the human remains themselves have? Of course, the judges did not make these statements as a strictly legal argument, but that does not mean we should take them as simple rhetoric. Rather, this statement should be seen as a fundamental critique of colonial power, which freely distributes rights, divides beings into human and non-human, endows one side with culture and agency, and objectifies the other side as something to be observed and analyzed.

Modern colonialism has left many negative legacies around the world. Unfortunately, most of these problems cannot be undone. However, the issue of human remains is a rare topic in that it is one of the few problems caused by colonialism that can be restored, though not perfectly, to something close to its original state. I believe that in order to achieve a belated decolonization of academia, universities should voluntarily investigate the truth and return the human remains based on their own reflections, without waiting for government orders or policies.

Finally, although not directly related to the issue of the return of human remains, I would like to conclude my presentation with an example related to the decolonization of universities that gives us hope. On February 16th of 2025, this year, Doshisha University decided to award an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, to the Korean poet Yun Dong-ju. This is the first time that Doshisha University has awarded an honorary degree to a deceased person. Yun Dong-ju died 80 years ago, on February 16, 1945, in a prison. Born in Manchuria, he wrote poems in Korean while studying in Seoul, Tokyo and Kyoto. In 1943, when he was a student at Doshisha University, he was arrested by the police on suspicion of violating the Peace Preservation Law for promoting Korean culture for the independence of Korea. His poems were saved by friends and relatives, and after a collection of his poems was published in Seoul in 1948, he became known as Korea's national poet.

In 1995, 50 years after Japan's defeat, Korea's liberation, and the death of Yun Dong-ju, a monument to his poetry was erected on the campus of Doshisha University through the efforts of Korean students residing in Japan. This year, 80 years after the death of Yun Dong-ju, Doshisha University has decided to award him an honorary doctorate as a reflection of the fact that the university was unable to protect the poet, who later became so beloved, and handed him over to the police. Viewing the monument and honorary degree as a testament to the university's commitment to decolonizing academia, I hope to continue working to correct historical injustices.

Addendum This paper is based on a presentation I gave at a conference that was held in Brussels from January 28 to 29, 2025. Since then, there have been further developments with regard to the issue of the human remains discussed here. In May 2025, Kyoto University "returned" the Ryūkyūan remains to Nakijin Village, where the Mumujana grave is located. To be precise, Kyoto University "transferred" the remains to the Nakijin Village Board of Education on the condition that they not be buried in the grave, without offering any reflection or apology. I criticized this in a Kyoto Shimbun newspaper article on May 29, 2025, stating that it signified the manner in which Kyoto University and the anthropologists associated with it continue to treat the Ryūkyūan ethnic group's human remains as "human bones" for research purposes. In November 2025, Kyoto University published a catalogue of the Ryūkyūan and Amami-origin human remains in its possession on its website, along with the requirements and procedures for returning them to their places of origin. Once again, I commented in the newspaper article that this approach still has major problems, such as the absence of an option to return the human remains to graves and the university's decision to negotiate only with local governments while ignoring private organizations (Kyoto Shimbun, November 11, 2025). Colonialism in academia is still a problem today.

Endnote

1 "Hone wa dareno mono ka," MBS, *Eizō 22*, aired on November 27, 2022.

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Mobilizing the Human/Animal Binaries: A Critical Analysis of Vegan Nationalism and Israel's Ongoing 'War on Terror'

Hiroshi YASUI

I'm Hiroshi Yasui from Doshisha University. Following yesterday's session, I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to continue discussing colonialism in this symposium. Today, I'd like to talk about the topic "Mobilizing the Human/Animal Binaries: A Critical Analysis of Vegan Nationalism and Israel's Ongoing 'War on Terror.'" As the title suggests, my research mainly focuses on Israel.

The current situation in Israel and Gaza has been widely covered in the news recently. However, the content I'll be discussing today is based on my doctoral thesis, which I completed before the large-scale Israeli attacks on Gaza began in 2023. While my research does not directly address the recent events, it is deeply connected to the current circumstances. This is because the conditions we're seeing now are rooted in Israel's long-standing occupation of Palestinian land. Even before 2023, Israel had been a key subject in colonial studies, particularly settler colonial studies. In today's talk, I'll focus on how concepts of animality, the human-animal boundary, and the growing animal rights movement in Israel are tied to its colonial practices.

In recent years, Israel has seen a rise in its animal rights movement, exemplified by a 2015 Tel Aviv demonstration with over 10,000 participants. This growing attention is mirrored in the promotion of the city as a vegan hub. In 2015, an official YouTube video titled *Tel Aviv: The Vegan Capital of the World* showcased local vegan chefs. The city's global vegan reputation was further solidified in a 2017 article appearing in *The Independent* that reinforced Tel Aviv's image as a vegan destination, an image amplified by Israeli media.

The Israeli government has promoted Israel as the "vegan capital of the world," using videos to highlight the progress relative to veganism and animal rights taking place in Israel. However, this strategy has faced criticism. Legal scholar Eyal Gross coined the term "veganwashing" in 2013, blending "vegan" with "whitewashing," to describe Israel's use of animal rights advocacy to deflect attention from its occupation and human rights abuses. This echoes the concept of "pinkwashing," where Israel promotes its LGBTQ+ rights record to obscure similar issues.

Despite advances in animal rights, we can see that the claim of human superiority over animals and the dehumanization of people also persist in Israel. In October 2023, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant referred to Palestinians as "human animals," underscoring the complex intersections of war, nationalism, and colonialism. This raises a critical question: How can advancements in animal rights coexist with

the dehumanization of people in colonialism and nationalism? This contradiction is central to my doctoral research.

In critical animal studies, scholars like Erica Weiss and Esther Alloun explore the intersection of animal rights and colonialism in Israel. Weiss notes a shift in Israeli animal rights activism from solidarity with Palestinians in the 1990s to right-wing nationalism post-2000. Right-wing figures, like animal rights advocate Tal Gilboa and Netanyahu's family, illustrate this shift. I analyze this change through concepts like pinkwashing and homonationalism, exploring how progressive causes can be co-opted for nationalist agendas. These frameworks inform my research on how Israel uses animal rights to promote a positive image while masking deeper injustices.

Jasbir Puar's 2007 concept of homonationalism describes a form of nationalism emerging post-9/11, particularly in the U.S., that uses selective tolerance toward LGBTQ+ individuals to contrast with and demonize societies, particularly Muslim ones, as intolerant. In the context of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the U.S. framed itself as a defender of LGBTQ+ rights, portraying Islamic societies as homophobic and misogynistic, which justified military interventions as both matters of national security and moral duty.

Puar's homonationalism concept has five key features:

1. Inclusion over Exclusion: U.S. society, especially under Bush, began to frame itself as inclusive of LGBTQ+ individuals, signaling national progress.
2. Neoliberal Multiculturalism: Inclusion is presented as virtuous but shaped by neoliberal market dynamics.
3. Primacy of Heteronormativity: LGBTQ+ inclusion is confined within heteronormative frameworks, as seen in same-sex marriage and the repeal of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*.
4. Contrast with "Islamic Societies": The U.S. uses cultural shifts to contrast itself with homophobic and misogynistic Islamic societies, justifying military actions.
5. Justification through Exceptionalism: U.S. tolerance toward LGBTQ+ individuals is framed as a marker of American exceptionalism, positioning the U.S. as liberators of oppressed LGBTQ+ individuals and women worldwide.

Puar argues that this "LGBT-friendly" nationalism reinforces heteronormative hierarchies and does not lead to true equality or liberation but rather serves nationalist goals.

While homonationalism originated in the U.S., its rise in liberal nationalism with anti-Islamic sentiment is a global phenomenon. For example, in the Netherlands, LGBTQ+ tolerance becomes a litmus test for immigrants, with

gay rights seen as a marker of modernity, contrasted with "pre-modern" Islamic values. This dynamic fuels exclusionary nationalism and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Puar's framework of homonationalism is also relevant to Israel, where pinkwashing—promoting LGBTQ+ rights to mask state violence—reinforces nationalist agendas by contrasting Israel's "gay-friendly" image with its regional neighbors, particularly Palestine.

The political dynamics surrounding non-normative bodies, like those of LGBTQ+ individuals, are not confined to sexuality alone. Similar political movements are also observed in other areas of non-normative bodily politics. For example, Nicole Markotić and Robert McRuer explore how disability politics intersects with nationalism, coining the term *crip nationalism* to describe how nationalism incorporates disability rights. Similarly, Sara Farris uses the concept of *femonationalism* to analyze how the rise of feminism in Western countries is linked to the exclusion of migrants, particularly through the lens of gender. In other words, Puar's framework of *homonationalism* offers important insights not only into the politics of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), but also into broader leftist movements and the politics surrounding non-normative bodies. These movements, while advocating for rights, may align with hegemonic, militaristic systems that use war and nationalism to enforce dominance. Puar herself discusses this in her 2017 work, *The Right to Maim*, where she critiques the link between liberal discourse on disability rights and the violent practices of war and colonialism, particularly in Israel. She argues that while disability rights are promoted within liberal frameworks, they are simultaneously linked to the "maiming" and subjugation of bodies in colonial contexts.

In critical animal studies, the concept of *animal nationalism* emerged, inspired by homonationalism. Jacqueline Dalziell and Dinesh Wadiwel introduced it in 2016 to analyze animal rights politics in Australia, particularly after a 2011 exposé revealed the abuse of cattle exported to Indonesia. The debate over banning live animal exports centered on halal slaughter practices, which critics framed as barbaric. Dalziell and Wadiwel coined the term *animal nationalism*, contrasting Australia, seen as "civilized," with Islamic societies viewed as "uncivilized" and "barbaric," reflecting racialized politics in animal rights.

This concept has since been applied globally, including in Israel, where animal rights reinforce national identity and superiority. However, the framework has limitations, notably overlooking veganism's role in animal rights and the complexities of human-animal boundaries. This necessitates refinement, especially in Israel's context. Key questions arise in examining the intersection of veganism with nationalism:

- How does veganism shape national narratives and identity politics?
- What has happened to leftist solidarity in animal rights and nationalism?
- How are hierarchical human/animal binaries maintained, especially in wartime?
- What roles do meat-eating and plant-based diets play in shaping human-animal boundaries in nationalist discourses?

These questions guide the exploration of animal rights, nationalism, and socio-political dynamics.

Israel's animal rights movement has evolved significantly since the 1980s, transitioning from grassroots efforts to formalized activism. Key organizations were founded during this period, including the Israeli Society Against Animal Experiments in 1983 and Let the Animals Live in 1986. The movement remained largely grassroots until the 1990s, driven by local activists addressing animal welfare. In the 1990s and 2000s, Israel's animal rights movement expanded with the founding of organizations like Anonymous for Animal Rights in 1994, which became a major player. A key legal development occurred in 1994 with the enactment of two Animal Cruelty Prevention Laws, strengthening animal protections. Further reforms followed in the 2000s, including bans on animal use in circuses (2001) and foie gras production (2008), reflecting the growing influence of animal rights in Israeli policy. The 2010s saw the rise of Israel's "Vegan Revolution," catalyzed by Gary Yourofsky's 2010 speech, *The Best Speech You'll Ever Hear*. His speech, along with the expanding vegan and animal rights movements, garnered significant attention and led to the formation of organizations advocating for veganism and animal liberation, shifting public consciousness and policy around animal rights.

In the 2010s and beyond, Israeli animal rights politics can be framed as "vegan nationalism," with key features:

1. Veganism as a Lifestyle: Veganism is promoted as a modern lifestyle, co-opted to avoid critiques of meat consumption while promoting technology and national interests.
2. Moral Superiority: Vegans are framed as symbols of moral and ethical superiority, guardians of non-human animals.
3. Selective Inclusion: While not the ideal citizens with strong, carnivorous bodies, vegans are selectively incorporated into national systems like the military due to their perceived benefits.
4. Contextualizing Veganism in the War on Terror: Veganism's moral superiority is contrasted with the "barbarism" of terrorism, positioning Israel as a defender of moral values.
5. The Replaying of Human/Non-Human An-

imal Binaries in Justifying War: "Barbaric" terrorists are framed as being less than human, similarly to non-human animals, and thus excluded from rights protection.

I would now like to go through these five points in more detail. I will start with the neoliberal co-option of veganism. In the 1980s, Israel shifted from a socialist to a neoliberal economy driven by Labor Zionism's focus on collective production, welfare, and labor organizations. By the 1990s, neoliberal policies emerged, particularly under Mayor Ron Huldai's leadership in Tel Aviv from 1998. His vision positioned the city as a global hub for industries like finance, technology, and biotech. Key pillars of his 2005 "Vision for the City" included transforming Tel Aviv into an economic and cultural powerhouse, creating an inclusive and responsive government, and developing a vibrant urban environment. This shift helped attract international investments and solidified Tel Aviv's neoliberal trajectory.

Tel Aviv has become a significant vegan hub in Israel. A 2014 national survey showed that 4.7% of Israelis identify as vegan, with Tel Aviv's vegan population at 10.9%, which is much higher than in cities like Jerusalem (6.2%) and Haifa (6.9%). This demonstrates Tel Aviv's unique role in Israel's growing veganism. As defined by the Vegan Society, veganism originally refers to a boycott of animal exploitation——particularly a rejection of meat and other animal-derived products——as a form of consumer activism aimed at protecting animal rights. However, as I will show later, in Tel Aviv, certain aspects of veganism are selectively emphasized, while others are systematically erased.

While Tel Aviv promotes plant-based diets, its focus is on environmental sustainability rather than directly advocating for animal rights. The city encourages dietary shifts for health and environmental reasons without making veganism a formal requirement. In the 2010s, Tel Aviv launched the DigiTel Program to become a "smart city" focused on innovation and sustainability. This initiative integrated digital technologies into public services and aligned its growth with the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), advocating for sustainable food practices. Eitan Ben Ami, Director of the Environment and Sustainability Authority, highlights Tel Aviv's positive but cautious approach to plant-based diets. He acknowledges a shift toward healthier food, driven by Mediterranean diet principles, and emphasizes the city's expanding food scene with vegan restaurants. Tel Aviv's participation in global initiatives, like the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, underlines its commitment to sustainable food practices and promoting plant-based nutrition for environmental and public health goals.

This approach can also be seen in city council

discussions. In a 2017 city council discussion, Omer Shalev raised the idea of formalizing Tel Aviv's support for veganism, especially in tourism, given the city's recognition as the "world's vegan capital." He asked whether the municipality could give veganism a clear label in its 2018 plans.

> "My question is about the recent awareness around environmental issues, animal welfare, and human health, under the clear label of 'veganism.' In the 2018 plans, is there room for this kind of declarative approach at both the municipal and national levels? And what about in the tourism sector? There have been international publications from significant organizations saying that we're the world's vegan capital, surpassing even some major cities in this regard. So, my question is whether there are any concrete plans? I also saw mentions in the data booklet, but it's all in more general terms without giving veganism a clear label. Is there space for this? Are there any plans to give this kind of declarative approach a place?"

In response, Eitan Ben Ami emphasized that the city does not enforce veganism but encourages healthier alternatives. He cited the example of offering baked doughnuts instead of fried ones during Hanukkah, reflecting the city's approach to providing options rather than mandates.

> "Not at the moment... We offer alternatives——for example, during Hanukkah, we don't say 'don't eat doughnuts.' Instead, we suggest, and people have already accepted, healthier alternatives: baked doughnuts instead of fried ones. We'll always suggest something better... But I don't think it's the city's place to tell residents 'you have to be vegan' or 'you have to eat gluten-free or not.' Our role is to present options, to encourage."

Ben Ami's response illustrates Tel Aviv's focus on raising awareness about the ecological footprint of meat consumption without imposing dietary restrictions.

In summary, Tel Aviv's approach to veganism is framed as an environmental issue, promoting plant-based diets for health and sustainability. While ethical concerns about animal rights are not explicitly addressed, the city's growing recognition of veganism is evident. By aligning veganism with environmental goals, Tel Aviv supports global sustainability efforts without enforcing strict dietary mandates.

As animal rights are increasingly backgrounded in Tel Aviv's municipal governance and veganism is depoliticized, this form of veganism is no longer articulated as a boycott of animal exploitation. Instead, it is reattached to

Tel Aviv's high-tech startup industry and framed as part of the city's growth-oriented innovation economy. This logic is most clearly embodied by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Through highly publicized events such as his cultured-meat tasting at Aleph Farms, Netanyahu links veganism and alternative proteins to Tel Aviv's startup ecosystem and Israel's image as a "Start-Up Nation," mobilizing veganism as a tool of economic promotion and national branding rather than as a political or ethical challenge to existing power relations.

Since the 2010s, there's been a push to view veganism as a "non-political" movement, separate from broader political agendas. Omri Paz, a key figure in this shift, promotes veganism as a personal choice. He critiques earlier animal rights activism, which involved confrontational protests, and instead advocates for a more accessible, positive approach.

> "In 2012, we didn't have almost any options for vegan cheese, or vegan meat patties, or you know any (other) supplements of vegan options... what I had to do was to make veganism more accessible... I opened a Facebook page and website... and told businesses if you have this (certain) amount of vegan options, and you become vegan friendly, and (you'll) get this amazing vegan friendly certificate."

Paz reflects on the shift in activism, from radical groups like 269 to a focus on food consumption and vegan-friendly businesses. He highlights a change in social media, where, from 2015, the conversation centered more on vegan restaurants and recipes.

> "From 2012 to 2015, most of the activism was traditional, but around 2015, vegans shifted to acting more as food consumers... you started seeing vegan groups talking about food and recipes. While the vegan population didn't grow significantly from 2015 to 2020, plant-based consumption surged. Many flexitarians embraced plant-based products, marking a shift toward mainstreaming veganism. This shift is seen as an important step as the market expands beyond vegans to a wider audience."

Paz's consumer-driven approach encourages greater participation in veganism by engaging with businesses and promoting more vegan options. A notable example of this was the 2019 Vegan Fest, the largest vegan event in Israel, which showcased innovative products and emphasized Israel's growing position as a "Vegan Capital."

Therefore, the rise of veganism in Tel Aviv since the 2010s can be summarized in two key points:

1. Veganism as a Personal Choice: Veganism in Tel Aviv has been reframed as an individual dietary decision, rather than a political movement, a shift noted by researchers like Weiss (2016) and Alloun (2018, 2020).
2. Economic Growth: Veganism is increasingly tied to Tel Aviv's growing economy, particularly in the startup and tech sectors, presenting it as both a lifestyle and an economic opportunity. This shift aligns veganism with neoliberal values, transforming it from activism to a consumer trend.

What happens when veganism is promoted within the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)? In 2015, an IDF soldier stated, "I believe that the reforms regarding veganism in the IDF are a step toward a more ethical military." Similarly, activist Tal Gilboa posted on Israel's Independence Day:

> "And for the glory of the State of Israel! It is the most vegan country in the world, and the IDF is the most (not only ethical but also) vegan military in the world!"

This framing of the IDF as a vegan military strengthens Israel's claim to moral superiority and its role as a protector of Western values in the Middle East.

In 2017, President Reuven Rivlin presented a letter of appreciation to Asa Keisar, an advocate for veganism in Judaism. Rivlin emphasized the ethical and religious dimensions of veganism:

> "Sharing the message with people as you do as a grassroots movement is complex and multilayered... your references to our biblical sources... are undoubtedly significant steps in the direction of the awaited and desired change."

Rivlin framed veganism as not just a moral imperative but a Jewish imperative, reinforcing Israel's role as a "light among the nations" in moral leadership, particularly on animal welfare.

The IDF's promotion of veganism is also reflected in its social media, where it shares materials explaining how veganism is practiced within the military, and how vegans can serve in the IDF.

When Israeli government institutions promote veganism, there is often little mention of animal rights. In the IDF's public relations campaigns, veganism is highlighted without directly addressing animal rights or the military's role in reducing animal harm. Instead, the focus is on offering vegan meals and non-leather products, positioning the IDF as progressive while avoiding a commitment to systemic changes regarding animal rights. The promotional materi-

als, like those featuring a hamster, emphasize "innocent" animals, avoiding any mention of animals used in military contexts, creating an abstract image of ethical responsibility. This framing shifts the focus from animal rights to how vegans can serve in the military, presenting veganism as a vehicle for a progressive image while downplaying the issue of animal rights.

Another noteworthy aspect is how vegans are framed as embodying "weaker" bodies in the binary opposition of meat-eaters versus non-meat-eaters. Articles about new IDF recruits highlight how it is possible to practice veganism while serving in the military. These articles feature sections titled "Vegan Meals," which explain:

> "Vegan soldiers are entitled to receive vegan meals at the military base where they serve. Additionally, at lunch, they are entitled to a portion of protein."

The specific emphasis on "protein" in these materials is particularly significant. From a nutritional standpoint, the primary nutrient deficiency often associated with vegan diets is not protein but rather essential vitamins such as B12. Nonetheless, the focus on protein reflects its importance in building and maintaining the muscles of soldiers' bodies. At the same time, it implicitly counters the stereotype that vegans are physically weaker and lack adequate protein to sustain a robust body.

As Shira Hertzanu has pointed out, institutions like the military, where discipline and physical strength are paramount, have traditionally considered meat consumption essential for forming a "healthy" body. The IDF's emphasis on protein in its promotional material stems from the significance of protein in constructing "healthy" bodies, especially for soldiers. This concern highlights the IDF's anxiety that vegan bodies may deviate from Zionism's ideal image of the strong, masculine Jewish soldier. The IDF's specific mention of protein deficiency reflects broader cultural assumptions that vegans, compared to meat-eaters, are traditionally perceived as possessing weaker, more fragile bodies. Within this framework, vegan soldiers may not align with the idealized Zionist image of a healthy, meat-eating Jewish body but are nevertheless incorporated as an exception, symbolizing Israel's cultural superiority. This positioning casts vegans as "weaker" individuals who, despite deviating from traditional ideals, are inclusively accommodated due to the state's purported progressiveness.

This narrative, which emphasizes the need for physical health and strength, also appears in interviews with vegan soldiers, such as the one with Corporal Weinberg of the IDF:

> "The thought of how to manage during wartime troubles many vegan soldiers. Will

they be able to stick to their agenda at all costs, and does the value of defending the country take precedence over the morality of not consuming animals? Corporal Weinberg struggles with this question a lot. 'I don't know what it will be like to be vegan in the middle of a military operation or a war. Whether it will be in a house we enter where all the food they provide will be animal-based, or if it will be combat rations packed with as much tuna as possible. That's where the real challenge will be——not now, when they're taking such good care of me. That's when I'll have to be much stronger.' During wartime, he hopes to bring with him as much satisfying and compact food as possible, like chia and flax, to sustain himself, but he will choose to go hungry only to a certain extent."

As Weinberg points out, even as a vegan, there is an expectation to maintain a body as strong as a meat-eating soldier's——essentially, to meet the physical standards of a "meat eater." His statement makes it clear that his struggle as a vegan is not regarded as unique or exceptional; rather, it highlights the fact that vegan soldiers are expected to serve the country in the same way as their meat-eating counterparts, without special accommodations. This expectation of physical strength is emphasized in Weinberg's comments, where he asserts that soldiers must be in "good health" and "must be strong" to carry out their duties.

Jasbir Puar's concept of "homonationalism" offers a useful lens here. Puar argues that the inclusion of minorities, such as women and LGBTQ+, does not necessarily dismantle the dominant systems of patriarchy and heteronormativity; instead, these minorities are often incorporated as exceptions to maintain the hegemonic structures. Similarly, in the IDF, there is an unspoken hierarchy between the masculine identity tied to meat-eating and the alternative identity of veganism. The IDF's approach to vegan soldiers——where the emphasis is on ensuring they maintain the same physical health as their meat-eating counterparts——reveals that the military does not aim to dismantle the boundaries between meat-eating and non-meat-eating soldiers. Instead, it ensures that non-normative bodies, such as those of vegan soldiers, can be included in military service, but only as long as they adhere to the same physical standards as those who consume meat. Thus, while the IDF acknowledges the possibility of vegan soldiers serving, this does not signal an intention to erase the existing boundaries between human/animal and meat-eating/non-meat-eating. Rather, it demonstrates a logic in which the inclusion of vegan soldiers occurs while still preserving these hegemonic boundaries.

Claims of ethical superiority articulated through Israeli veganism are inseparable from

the War on Terror and rely on the production of clearly imagined and racialized Others. This dynamic becomes particularly visible in moments of military conflict and state violence. In 2018, the IDF posted a video on Twitter criticizing Hamas for launching kites and balloons carrying flammable materials over the security fence into Israel, which allegedly resulted in the burning of thousands of animals. According to the IDF, approximately 7,400 acres of land were destroyed, including habitats of birds and reptiles. Accompanying the video, the IDF used the phrase *"No animal deserves this"* to condemn Hamas's actions. The military further called on international animal rights organizations, such as PETA, to denounce Hamas for killing animals. Through this rhetoric, the IDF positioned itself as a defender of animal rights and ecological life, contrasting its purported ethical stance with the alleged cruelty of Hamas. Animal suffering thus became a moral register through which the IDF articulated its legitimacy, reinforcing Israel's claim to ethical superiority within the framework of the War on Terror.

However, even within this framework of vegan nationalism, a deeply anthropocentric and speciesist logic characteristic of traditional nationalism remains firmly intact—one that recognizes some lives as fully human while casting designated enemies as less than human, often likened to animals. This logic is clearly reflected in a 2019 statement by Yair Netanyahu, the son of the Israeli Prime Minister. He argued that while "bad people," such as terrorists, deserve to die, animals——including cows, goats, and chickens——are innocent and should not be harmed. This distinction exemplifies a broader nationalist discourse in which animals are framed as innocent, apolitical victims deserving moral protection, while Palestinians are frequently labeled as "terrorists" and excluded from moral consideration altogether.

Such statements align with a particular configuration of vegan nationalism, in which compassion for non-human animals coexists with, and even facilitates, the dehumanization of certain human populations——most notably Palestinians. Within this discourse, animals function as moral referents that help produce an ethical self-image for the nation, while racialized human Others are rendered killable, disposable, or subhuman.

In their formulation of animal nationalism, Dalziell and Wadiwel famously describe the logic as *"a white man saving a white animal from a brown man."* However, as we have seen, in the context of Israeli vegan nationalism, articulated within the War on Terror, the crucial shift does not concern who is being saved, but who the animal is being saved from. In this framework, the figure positioned as the enemy is no longer fully recognized as human. Rather than a "brown man," the threat is increasingly imagined as a non-human, animalized fig-

ure——named as a terrorist. If we are to adapt Dalziell and Wadiwel's formulation to this context, vegan nationalism can thus be described as "a white man saving a white animal from a brown animal, designated as a terrorist." This reformulation captures a fundamental ideological transformation. It reveals how, within Israeli vegan nationalism, the enemy is not merely racialized but actively dehumanized. Those associated with terrorism——most often Palestinians——are not framed as human adversaries, but as animalized threats. In this schema, animal protection does not disrupt nationalist violence; instead, it operates alongside a logic that strips the enemy of humanity altogether.

In Israel, vegans are increasingly accommodated within state institutions, most visibly the IDF. Yet this accommodation operates less as a commitment to animal rights than as a mode of national self-fashioning. Military public relations foreground vegan meals, non-leather equipment, and the ease with which vegans can "serve like anyone else," projecting an image of institutional progressiveness while eliding any reckoning with animals harmed by, or mobilized within, military infrastructures. Visual materials often center "innocent" companion or charismatic animals and rely on abstract ethical language, thereby shifting attention away from structural animal exploitation and toward the exemplary vegan subject who demonstrates the army's inclusivity. In short, the focus moves from animals themselves to the serviceability of vegans, turning veganism into a resource for image management rather than a lever for structural change.

It is precisely for this reason that I propose the term vegan nationalism, rather than animal nationalism. Vegan nationalism names a configuration in which vegans come to *represent* and *speak for* non-human animals, while the animals themselves are increasingly backgrounded. Vegans thus become the primary figures through which ethical legitimacy is performed, and animal politics are refracted through the subjectivity, visibility, and respectability of vegan citizens.

At the same time, this inclusion is strictly conditional. Vegans are accepted only insofar as they embody the same discipline, physical strength, and loyalty expected of the ideal Zionist citizen or soldier. In Israeli military discourse, repeated emphasis on "protein" for vegan soldiers is revealing. This emphasis is less about precise nutritional science than about producing a particular image: demonstrating that vegan soldiers, like their meat-eating counterparts, can be equally healthy, strong, and combat-ready. Interviews with rank-and-file vegans featured on the IDF's official platforms further underscore this expectation of parity. They describe anticipated wartime scenarios in which rations, logistics, and operational demands may test their commitments, yet they reaffirm the

obligation to remain "strong," to meet identical standards, and to prioritize defense imperatives.

This is where the limits of animal nationalism as a theoretical framework become apparent. While animal nationalism illuminates how animal protection can be mobilized for nationalist ends, it remains insufficiently attentive to the question of who is biopolitically included and who is authorized to become a nationalist subject within animal politics. In practice, it is not animals who are incorporated into the nation, but vegans——human subjects who are recognized as legitimate representatives of animals.

In the politics of animality, vegans therefore play a crucial mediating role. They function as proxy subjects who translate animal suffering into nationally legible forms, while simultaneously conforming to dominant norms of citizenship, productivity, and loyalty. The human–animal boundary in this context is not singular or stable; it is layered, overlapping, and continuously negotiated through bodies, diets, and institutional demands. Ignoring these multiple and intersecting boundaries risks obscuring how animal politics are rerouted through human subjects and how biopolitical inclusion is selectively distributed——not to animals, but to particular kinds of humans who can stand in for them.

In conclusion, the mainstreaming of animal rights in Israel since 2010 has been closely tied to the rise of right-wing politics, which I term "Vegan Nationalism." This phenomenon is not just about the protection of animals, but rather how veganism has been co-opted to serve national economic and technological interests. It positions Israel as morally superior, with vegans symbolizing the state's commitment to protecting non-human animals. However, this inclusion is selective——vegans are incorporated into national systems like the military, yet they are not necessarily seen as ideal citizens with the physical strength traditionally valued in the state.

At the same time, animal rights are framed within the broader context of the War on Terror, where the moral and ethical superiority of Israel is sharply contrasted with the barbarism attributed to its enemies. Terrorists are dehumanized, often compared to non-human animals, which justifies their exclusion from rights protections and reinforces the binaries of human and non-human animals. This narrative helps to legitimize Israel's military actions and its stance in the ongoing conflict, underlining how animal rights discourse can be strategically mobilized within a nationalist and war-driven context.

In this talk, I have critiqued animal nationalism and analyzed it through the concept of vegan nationalism. The framework of animal nationalism outlines how the politics surrounding animal rights become entwined with narratives that assert the superiority of a specific nation.

However, what animal nationalism does not sufficiently address——at least in the case of Israel——is the significance of vegans and veganism. Homonationalism mobilizes certain individuals, such as gay and lesbian people, into nationalism by advocating for LGBT rights and promoting LGBT-friendly values. However, this cannot simply be applied to animal politics. Even if one claims to be friendly to animals or kind to them, animals themselves cannot become nationalists.

This is where the figure of the vegan becomes crucial. Vegans represent a high standard of commitment to animal rights and, at the same time, participate in nationalism as an important "minority." By focusing on vegans, we can see how the boundaries between animals and humans overlap in multiple ways and unfold in complex dynamics——something that the concept of animal nationalism alone has not considered. I want to emphasize that, just as homonationalism is complicit with heteronormative nationalism, as Jasbir Puar argued, vegan nationalism is similarly complicit with traditional speciesist and anthropocentric nationalism. This complicity is clearly illustrated in the statement made by former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on October 9, 2023, when he declared, "We are fighting human animals." This statement reenacts the hegemonic binary opposition between humans and animals, particularly in the context of war.