

Terrorism As Cannibalism

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Year 2001 will be etched in our memory as a year in which the vicious cycle of violence was unleashed worldwide. Of the Taliban bombing the two thousand year old images of peace, the Buddhas of Bamiyan.

Of terrorists blowing up the W.T.C. on September 11, and attempting to blow up the Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir on October 1, and the Indian Parliament on December 13. Of a global alliance bombing out what remained of Afghanistan after two decades of super power rivalry, and civil war. Of Pakistan and India threatening to go to war as 2001 gave way to 2002.

Why is violence engulfing us so rapidly, so totally? Why has violence become the dominant feature of the human species across cultures. Could the violence characterising human societies in the new millenium be linked with violent structures and institutions we have created to reduce society to markets and humans to consumers?

Animals of any species tend to become violent when they are treated with violent methods.

Pigs love to root in the fields, wallow in the mud, grunt to each other. However when denied this freedom in factory farms where they are confined in over crowded, steel barred crates or multiple stacked cages known as battery cages, pigs become bored, stressed and anxious. They start gnawing cages, picking on each other, biting each other's tails and ears and resorting to what agribusiness industry has called "cannibalism". (Ref. Michael Fox, Old MacDonalds Factory Farm)

Pigs are not cannibals. When they start to display cannibalism, the normal question industry should be asking is why are pigs behaving abnormally. The organic movement and animal liberation movement has raised the question and found the answer in the violent methods of factory farming. In humane farming pigs have been liberated and allowed to roam and roll in the mud. Stopping violence against animals is the best way to stop their violent behavior.

Industry has a different solution to "cannibalism" induced by the concentration camp conditions of factory farms. Operators of pig factories chop off the tails of week old piglets without any anaesthetics to prevent other pigs from chewing them off. They also remove eight teeth with wire cutters. Male piglets have their testicles cut off to reduce their aggression in crowded areas.

While removing tails and teeth is the solution offered to violent behavior in pigs, chicken in factory farms are debeaked, and cattle are dehorned.

Beaks are the most important feature of chicken. When roaming in the open, a chicken needs its beak for eating, pecking, preening, cleaning, grooming. When confined in battery cages, chicken start to attack each other with their beaks. According to industry, chickens are debeaked to protect them from one another. A day old chick's beak is pressed against a red hot metal blade at 800°C. Often it injures the tongue.

Chicken injured during debeaking die of starvation. What industry is blind to is that it is not chicken's beak that is the cause of violent, abnormal and cannibalistic behavior among chicken, but the overcrowded, unnatural conditions of their living in cages. Free-range chicken do not kill each other with their beaks. They find worms and food for their own nourishment.

The horns of the cow are its most distinctive feature. We adorn them with bells and decorations. At Muttu Pongal, the horns of cattle are decorated with flowers and balloons. In organic agriculture cow horns are used to increase the potency of compost. But in factory farming, cattle are dehorned because they attack each other under conditions of confinement.

The problem, clearly, is the factory cage -- not the teeth and tails of pigs, the beaks of chicken, the horns of cattle. It is the cage that needs removing, not the tail, or beak or horn. When animals are denied their basic freedoms to function as a species, when they are held captive and confined, they turn to "cannibalism".

Humans are animals. As a species we too have basic needs -- for meaning and identity, for community and security, for food and water, for freedom.

Could terrorism be the human equivalent of the abnormal behavior of "cannibalism" in animals exhibit under factory conditions?

Humans are of course, not being confined to iron cages (though in the U.S, in Australia, a large percentage of blacks and aborigines are behind bars). Human society is being caged and controlled through complex laws and policies, through violent economic and political structures which are enclosing of their spaces -- spiritual, ecological, political and economic.

Humans are experiencing their religious spaces enclosed when militaries occupy sacred lands as in the Mid East. Humans are experiencing enclosure through occupation as in Palestine. The children in affluent America are also experiencing a closing of their lives, and are turning to mindless violence as in the case of shooting at St. Columines. And across the world, ecological, economic and political spaces are being enclosed through privatisation, liberalisation and globalisation.

These multiple processes are breeding new insecurities, new anxieties, new stresses. Cultural security, economic security, ecological security, political security are all being rapidly eroded.

Could the violence being unleashed by humans against humans be similar to the violence pigs, chicken and cattle express when denied their freedom to roll in the mud, peck for worms, and roam outside the confines of animal factories?

Could the coercive imposition of a consumer culture worldwide, with its concomitant destruction of values, cultural diversity, livelihoods, and the environment be the invisible cages against which people are rebelling, some violently, most non-violently.

Could the "war against terrorism" be equivalent to the detoothing, debeaking, dehorning of pigs chickens and cattle by agribusiness industry because they are turning violent when kept under violent conditions? Could the lasting solution to violence induced by the violence of captivity and enslavement for humans be the same as that for other animals -- giving them back their space for spiritual freedom, ecological freedom, for psychological freedom and for economic freedom.

The cages that humans are feeling tapped in are the new enclosures which are robbing communities of their cultural spaces and identities, and their ecological and economic spaces for survival. Globalisation is the overarching name for this enclosure.

Greed and appropriation of other people's share of the planet's precious resources are at the root of conflicts, and the root of terrorism. When President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that the goal of the global war on terrorism is for the defense of the American and European "way of life", they are declaring a war against the planet-its oil, its water, its biodiversity.

A way of life for the 20 percent of the earth's people who use 80 percent of the planet's resources will dispossess 80 percent of its people of their just share of resources and eventually destroy the planet. We cannot survive as a species if greed is privileged and protected and the economics of the greedy set the rules for how we live and die.

If the past enclosures have already precipitated so much violence, what will be the human costs of new enclosures being carved out for privatisation of living resources and water resources, the very basis of our species survival. Intellectual property laws and water privatisation are new invisible cages trapping humanity.

Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) laws are denying farmers the basic freedom of saving and exchanging seed. They are, in effect, enclosing the genetic commons, creating new scarcities in a biologically rich world, transforming fundamental freedoms into criminal acts punishable with fines and jail sentences.

Water privatisation policies are enclosing the water commons, transforming water into a commodity to be bought and sold for profit, creating water scarcity in a water abundant world.

Percy Schmeiser, a Canadian farmer had been using his own seeds for the past fifty years. His Canola seed was genetically polluted with Monsanto's GM Canola through wind and pollination. Instead of Percy being paid compensation in accordance with the polluter pay principle, the courts fined Percy on the basis of Monsanto's IPR case which argued that since the genes were Monsanto's property their being found in Percy's field made him a thief irrespective of how they came to be there.

The violator becomes the violated, the violated becomes the violator in the perverse world of patents on genes, seeds and living material. Such perverse laws are transforming agriculture into police states and farmers into criminals. They are the invisible cages which are holding humans captive to market processes and corporate rule.

The Privatisation of water is another threat to human freedom.

Perhaps the most famous tale of corporate greed over water is the story of Cochabamba, Bolivia. In this semi-desert region, water is scarce and precious. In 1999, the World Bank recommended privatization of Cochabamba's municipal water supply company (SEMAPA) through a concession to International Water, a subsidiary of Bechtel. On October 1999, the Drinking Water and Sanitation Law was passed, ending government subsidies and allowing privatization.

In a city where the minimum wage is less than \$100 a month, water bills reached \$20 a month, nearly the cost of feeding a family of five for two weeks. In January 2000, a citizens' alliance called La Coordinación de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (The Coalition in Defence of Water and Life) was formed.

The alliance shut down the city for four days through mass mobilization. Within a month, millions of Bolivians marched to Cochabamba, held a general strike, and stopped all transportation. At the gathering, the protesters issued the Cochabamba Declaration, calling for the protection of universal water rights.

The government promised to reverse the price hike but never did. In February 2000, La Coordinadora organized a peaceful march demanding the repeal of the Drinking Water and Sanitation Law, the annulment of ordinances allowing privatization, the termination of the water contract, and the participation of citizens in drafting a water resource law.

The citizen's demands, which drove a stake through the heart of corporate interests, were violently rejected. Coordinadora's fundamental critique was directed at the negation of water as a community property. Protesters used slogans like 'Water is God's Gift and Not A Merchandise' and 'Water is Life'.

In April 2000, the government tried to silence the water protests through market law. Activists were arrested, protesters killed, and the media censored. Finally on April 10, 2000, the people won. Aguas del Tunari and Bechtel left Bolivia and the government was forced to revoke its hated water privatization legislation.

The water company Servicio Municipal del Agua Potable Alcantarillado (SEMAPA) and its debts were handed over to the workers and the people. In the summer of 2000, La Coordinadora organized public hearings to establish democratic planning and management. The people have taken on the challenge to establish a water democracy, but the water dictators are trying their best to subvert the process. Bechtel is suing Bolivia, and the Bolivian government is harassing and threatening activists of La Coordinadora.

By reclaiming water from corporations and the market, the citizens of Bolivia have illustrated that privatization is not inevitable and that corporate takeover of vital resources can be prevented by people's democratic will.

The resource hunger of a corporate driven consumer culture is attempting to enslave and control every plant, every seed, every drop of water.

The suicides of farmers are one aspect of violence engendered by a violent world order based on markets, profits, consumerism. Suicide bombers are another aspect. One is directed towards the 'self'. The other is directed towards the 'other'. And in a fragmenting and disintegrating world, where everyone feels caged, everyone has potential to become the dangerous 'other'. Like animals in factory cages, we are attacking ourselves or each other.

Animals have the animal liberation movement to speak for them and set them free when the industry which has held them captive under violent conditions perpetrates further violence to deal with the cannibalism that captivity is causing.

What is needed is an animal liberation movement for humans -- a movement sensitive to the captivity of consumer culture and global markets, a movement compassionate enough to sense the deep violations humanity is experiencing, a movement that recognises that it is not the teeth of pigs, beaks of birds, horns of cows that need to be removed, but the cages.

The multicoloured, diversity based movement against the structural violence of global markets and the consumer culture has elements that could grow to liberate the human spirit from the degradations and deprivations of corporate globalisation. Reclaiming our freedoms and spaces from the new enclosures is as essential to us as it is to other animals.

Animals were not designed to live imprisoned in cages. Humans were not designed to live imprisoned in markets, or live wasted and disposable if they cannot be consumers in the global market.

Our deepening dehumanisation is at the roots of growing violence. Reclaiming our humanity in inclusive, compassionate way is the first step to peace.

Peace will not be created through weapons and wars, bombs and barbarism. Violence will not be contained by spreading it. Violence has become a luxury the human species cannot afford if we are to survive. Non-violence has become a survival imperative.

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