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**DEFINING HUMAN-HORSE RELATIONSHIPS: A MULTISPECIES ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN AN EQUESTRIAN CLUB\***

İnsan-At İlişkilerini Tanımlamak: Bir Binicilik Kulübünde Çoktürlü Etnografik Bir Çalışma

Erhan KORKMAZ\*

**ABSTRACT**

In this study, I critically examined conventional ethnographic approaches that have, since the 19th century, overlooked the agency of non-human animals, using ethnographic field data I gathered in an equestrian club. At the same time, while exploring the possibilities of conducting a multispecies ethnography, I traced anthropocentrism through the spatial arrangements and language-based classifications humans apply to horses. This research emerged as part of my one-year undergraduate thesis project. I spent approximately five to six months actively in the field, during which I conducted participant observation, interacted with around 70 individuals within the club environment, and carried out 18 in-depth interviews. The entire process was conducted with the approval of the relevant ethics committee. In the field, I evaluated human actions and discourses as data, while also striving to include the interactions of horses with the space, with humans, and with their own kind. Throughout the research process, I also questioned how my own existence as a human might affect the study, how far the boundaries of reflexivity could be expanded, and whether being human might create barriers in a multispecies ethnographic study. Through the observations presented at the end of this study, I aimed to offer a critical perspective on earlier ethnographic works and contribute to the development of a more sensitive reflexivity against anthropocentrism in future research.

**Keywords:** Multispecies ethnography, ethnography, anthropocentrism, human-animal studies, horse

**ÖZ**

Bu çalışmada, insanlarla insan-olmayan hayvanların ilişkilerine dair 19. yüzyıldan beri süregelen ve insan-olmayanların failliklerinin göz ardı edildiği konvansiyonel etnografik yaklaşımları, bir at binicilik kulübünde gerçekleştirilmiş etnografik saha verileri üzerinden eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla inceledim. Aynı zamanda, çalışmada çoktürlü bir etnografi yapmanın olanaklarını sorgularken, insanların atlara yönelik mekânsal düzenlemeleri ve dil temelli tanımlamalarına dayanan insanmerkezliliğin de izini sürdüm. Bu araştırma, bir yıllık lisans bitirme projem kapsamında şekillendi. Sahada aktif olarak yaklaşık beş-altı ay boyunca bulundum; bu süreçte katılımlı gözlem yaptım, kulüp ortamında yaklaşık 50 kişiyle etkileşim kurarak nitel veri topladım ve 9 kişiyle derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirdim. Tüm

\* This article was produced from the author's undergraduate thesis, and the field research of the study was carried out with the approval of the Ankara University Rectorate, Ethics Committee, dated 21.11.2022 and numbered 20/256.

\* Master Student. Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Folklore Department, Ankara/Türkiye. E-mail: erhan.krkmzoglu@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-9744-6484.

süreci ilgili etik kurul onayıyla yürüttüm. Binicilik kulübünde, insanların eylemlerini ve söylemlerini veri olarak değerlendirirken, atların mekânla, insanlarla ve kendi türleriyle olan etkileşimleri de bu verilerin bir parçası olarak ele almaya gayret ettim. Araştırma sürecinde, araştırmacı olarak insan türüne mensup olmamın çalışmayı nasıl etkileyebileceği, düşünumselliğin sınırlarının ne kadar genişletilebileceği ve insan olmanın çokturlu etnografik bir çalışmada bariyerler yaratıp yaratmayacağı da sorgulamalarım arasındadır. Böylece, bu çalışmanın sonunda ortaya konan gözlem sonuçlarımla, önceki saha araştırmalarına yönelik eleştirel bir yaklaşım getirmeyi ve ileride yapılacak araştırmalarda insanmerkezli tutumlara karşı daha hassas bir refleksivitenin geliştirilmesine katkı sunmayı hedefledim.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Çokturlu etnografi, etnografi, insanmerkezlilik, insan-hayvan çalışmaları, at

## Introduction

It all started about four years ago when I decided to go vegan. While taking ethnology-based courses in folklore and elective courses in social anthropology from the Department of Anthropology, I began to notice something with the new sensitivity that my veganism brought. When I examined fieldwork reports from the 19th century, when the first -systematic- empirical studies in the social sciences began, I remember feeling something missing in the way researchers constructed relationships. Relationships were constructed from a human-centred point of view, and the position of non-human animals was excluded from the social and cultural sphere in terms of agency. I noticed that non-human animals were portrayed as creatures driven by environmental conditions in general and shaped by human actions in particular. No objection to this. Given that I had just entered the academic field and my intellectual background was very inadequate, I suggested to myself that ‘maybe non-human animals do not really have agency, they do not have the social and cultural background that humans have’. Despite my lack of confidence in myself, there was an obvious reality. My own professors and the social researchers whose fieldwork reports seemed to accept the proposition that ‘non-human animals do not have agency’ as a given, without questioning it.

In the second year of my undergraduate degree, I began a minor in philosophy department. I realized that while evolutionism, historical particularism, functionalism, and structuralism are theoretical approaches discussed specifically in ethnology, the fundamental issues these theories address—such as the nature of human society, cultural evolution, and the structure of human experience—have been debated within philosophy for centuries. These debates have evolved cumulatively over time, influencing and intersecting with the development of these ethnological theories. Putting my ethnological knowledge to a philosophical ground helped me to untie the knot in my mind regarding the agency of non-human animals. I noticed that this human-centred attitude to ethnographic fieldwork, which has been going on since the 19th century, dates back much earlier and, more importantly, that this

attitude encompasses not only ethnologists but also almost all scientific researchers. I felt like I was sinking deeper and deeper into this bottomless pit. Questioning the agency of non-human animals in their relationship with humans raised questions about the whatness of humans and non-human animals: How does the human define the non-human? How do they position themselves in their relationship with the non-human, and what is the place of the other in this positioning? How do humans' position towards the non-human and their expression of the other appear in scientific fields? These and many other important questions open up for discussion the issue of anthropocentrism and speciesism in the field of ethnology in particular and in many other scientific fields in general.

As an ethnologist, my involvement in philosophical debates made me realise another important point. Compared to earlier periods, especially the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when ethnology first emerged as a formal discipline, increasing specialisation in scientific fields has contributed to a growing separation between ethnologists and philosophers. This specialisation has led each discipline to focus more narrowly on its own methods and subjects, limiting interdisciplinary dialogue. In the context of studying non-human animals, this separation results in philosophers often engaging in abstract theorising without the benefit of empirical field data, while ethnologists may overlook the philosophical dimensions of human-animal relationships, leading to a repetitive cycle where each discipline struggles to innovate beyond its established boundaries. While collecting data from the field, a researcher who embarks on fieldwork seeks to reveal their reflexivity in the context of their specific socio-cultural position, without questioning how being human as a species affects the field and the data of study. On the other hand, while philosophers who engage in inquiries into the nature of human and non-human beings often focus on conceptual analysis, they may not incorporate the empirical information collected from the field. This creates a gap between theory and practice. Although it is understandable that each discipline has its own focus and limitations, I argue that fostering interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophers and ethnologists could help bridge this gap. By combining philosophical depth with empirical richness, such collaboration could overcome the traditional separation between theory and practice, enriching both fields. Fortunately, during my undergraduate degree, I began to question the extent to which such a distinction between philosophical inquiry and ethnological/empirical findings is valid. While collecting data in the field, I paid attention to act with the rigour of a good ethnologist, and while attempting to analyse the data I collected within certain theoretical frameworks, I also tried to be a rigorous philosopher. This dual commitment placed me in a space that was not fully autoethnographic, but one that resonated with its spirit. Rather than treating theory and field as separate domains, I found myself increasingly entangled in the intersection between personal experience and

methodological rigor—positioning myself as both a subject and an analyst of the inquiry.

While questioning the position of humans and non-human animals throughout my studies, I began to investigate the paths taken by ethnologists with the same sensitivity and concern as mine. I realised that the field of Critical Animal Studies (CAS)<sup>1</sup>, which is very new in Turkey, is gaining popularity in the world<sup>2</sup>. More importantly, the field of multispecies ethnography, which emerged at the beginning of the 21st century with the definition of S. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich, filled the gap I felt in my undergraduate years in the way fieldworkers formulate relationships. How does a human field researcher interact when encountering other species in the field? Is an interspecies ethnographic study possible and, if so, in what methodological direction? Kirksey and Helmreich argue that the blindness of contemporary humans to non-human animals through immersion in their own species is the result of the creation of the dualism of ‘nature and culture’ and that it lies in the positioning of non-human animals as outside culture - and with little to no impact on culture compared to humans - while humans see themselves as the only value inherent in culture (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). However, some researchers have strongly argued that the distinction between nature and culture that Kirksey and Helmreich refer to does not exist in all societies in history and that this understanding is not universal. One example of such research is the work of anthropologist Philip Descola in the Amazon, northern Canada and Siberia. Studies show that some human communities, such as the AÇuar and Makunas, have direct relationships with non-human animals in their relationships with the environment, in accordance with their cosmogony. Based on the understanding that every living thing in nature has a soul<sup>3</sup>, it is assumed that there is a balance

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<sup>1</sup> Critical Animal Studies (CAS) is an interdisciplinary field that aims to examine human-animal relationships beyond traditional anthropocentric perspectives. Emerging in the early 2000s, CAS focuses on issues of justice, rights, and interspecies equality, advocating against the exploitation of animals. Researchers in CAS adopt an activist stance, seeking to address social justice concerns by promoting fair and ethical relationships between human and non-human beings. For further reading on CAS, see works such as *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: From the Margins to the Centre* by Nik Taylor and Richard Twine (2014), *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* by Margo De-Mello (2012), and *Critical Terms for Animal Studies* edited by Lori Gruen (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Although multispecies ethnography is still very new in Turkey, I am aware of and appreciative of the important contributions made by researchers working in this context. In particular, the works of Dişli (2022, 2023), Burgan (2017, 2023), and Bozok (2024) stand out for their exploration of human–nonhuman relationalities through a multispecies lens. Beyond these examples, numerous other valuable scholars from different disciplines have developed critical approaches to speciesism in recent years. Rather than risking omission by naming only a few, I prefer not to list individual names. Nevertheless, I greatly admire the growing critical academic stance against speciesism in Turkey over the past decade and believe that this momentum will continue to strengthen.

<sup>3</sup> Not all societies or cultures share an animistic perspective that assumes spirits or souls in natural entities. Different cultural groups have unique ways of classifying living and non-living beings, as well as varying beliefs about the existence and nature of spirits. Therefore, the view that nature possesses

between spirits, and it is thought that the human hunter should act within a certain framework of respect, even when hunting a non-human animal. In order not to frighten or anger the spirits of nature, the hunter pays certain prices, with an aim to underline the necessity of the hunting process. The hunter leaves a part of the hunted prey to nature or protects the principle of reciprocity by hosting a creature in nature in their home or village for a while (Descola, 2013: 7-53). Considering today's industrial livestock production, how much has changed in terms of the relationship with the object of consumption?<sup>4</sup> Another anthropologist, Tim Ingold, in a book chapter he wrote in 1996 entitled 'Hunting and Gathering as Ways of Perceiving the Environment' (Ellen and Fukui, 2020: 117-157), referring to Colin Turnbull's fieldwork with the Mbuti Pygmies in the Ituri Forest and Nurit Bird-David's fieldwork in the Tamil Nadu Forest in South India, reveals the fallacies of hunting and gathering, which are constructed in a Western-centred way through the distinction between nature and culture. He explains that hunting and gathering is understood by many scientists as a struggle of human nature, whereas humans are not a separate entity from nature, as communities with a hunter-gatherer past have established a relationship based on kinship terminology with the environment in which they hunt and gather. Spirits in nature and humans are related, and this kinship relationship is based on reciprocity.

I needed to test in the field whether an interspecies ethnography could be carried out to break the nature-culture dualism, similar to the nature-culture dualism that humans place between non-human animals. For this reason, my undergraduate thesis involved a year of ethnographic fieldwork in an equestrian club in Ankara, where I observed the relationship between horses and humans. I have to admit that my work did not go as I would have wished. There were many reasons for this. The first reason was my ignorance of the subject. My literature reading before going to the field was scattered and therefore, I did not have a clear idea in my mind about the methodology. My dear supervisor tried to support me as much as she could. Both she and I worked with the excitement and inexperience of meeting this field for the first time. She was the best person for me to work with in Turkey in general and in Ankara in particular. She did not make any radical attempts to damage the originality of the questions in my mind, nor did she claim that such a study could not be carried out, disregarding my ethical sensitivity to the subject. Secondly, the Maraş earthquake of 6 February 2023 occurred during the period of my fieldwork. My nuclear family has been living in Muğla for many years, but -as a Hatayan- I was negatively affected by the fact that the city where I spent my

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spirits, while present in some societies, should not be considered universally applicable. However, in this example, the researcher specifically refers to an animistic context.

<sup>4</sup> This comparison is not intended as a romanticised praise of traditional worldviews or as an endorsement of a Rousseauian "noble savage" ideal. Rather, it serves as a historical comparison, aiming to contextualise changes in human-animal relationships over time without idealising past practices.



childhood, and my relatives were exposed to difficult conditions. I travelled to the earthquake zone and tried to help the people there as much as I could. You would agree with me that in such disaster situations, people cannot think of anything but their basic needs. For this reason, the time I spent in the field was very limited, and I was not able to completely concentrate on synthesising and theorising the data in the final months of my study. Nevertheless, I am writing this article because I believe that how a study is conducted is as important as how it is not conducted. Under what conditions was it not possible to enter the field, at what points did the relations with agents in the field jeopardise the study, and what are the vortexes in which one may fall -which can lead to changing the subject of the study-...? I think such questions develop the interlocutor as much as 'successful' fieldwork.

In this study, I have tried to understand what kind of relationships people in the equestrian club have with horses through linguistic expressions/verbal definitions<sup>5</sup>, the organisation of the space and expectations. Meanwhile, I have tried to understand the relationships of horses to people through the same points, their physical expressions, although not linguistic/verbal, what kind of reactions they have to the organisation of the space and - keeping in mind that I have a human perspective - what kind of expectations they might have from people. Before moving on to these thematic discussions, the following Methodology section briefly explains how the data were collected and analysed. After that, the article is divided into four chapters<sup>6</sup>. In the first section, I discuss the linguistic/verbal and bodily expressions of both people in the equestrian club towards horses and horses towards people. In the second section, I discuss how the space in the equestrian club is organised, how the places are allocated to people and horses and how the space affects the relationships. In the third section, I discuss the expectations that people in the equestrian club have of horses and those horses have of people. Finally, in the fourth section, I discuss how I am positioned in the field as a researcher and how this positioning affects the fieldwork process.

### **An Attempt to Identify Horses through Expressive Apparatus: The Duality of Language and Culture**

Our expressions towards others are usually realised through language. Although writing initially reached only a limited audience, its gradual spread over

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<sup>5</sup> I should point out here that when I say, "linguistic expressions", I am referring to a conventional point of view, on the assumption that language is a phenomenon inherent only in human beings. Although this assumption is perceived as an anthropocentric attitude in the case of language, I have not come across any arguments from researchers who claim otherwise. Therefore, for now, I will assume that this assumption is valid.

<sup>6</sup> I am aware that each of the four themes could have been a full paper on its own. Due to the temporal and structural limitations of this research, I tried to cover as much as possible, while staying grounded in what was directly accessible through fieldwork. Each of these themes -language, space, interspecies expectation, and researcher positioning- holds the potential for deeper exploration in future studies. If academic life permits, I would be glad to return to them with expanded theoretical and empirical scope.

time has strengthened the relationship between human beings and language, especially as it became more accessible with the advent of modernity and the printing press. The transition from oral to written culture has transformed human consciousness into a language-centred intellectual structure (Ong, 2014: 97-139). So much so that language is seen as a structure that mediates both the human species, in accordance with universal values, and individuals, in accordance with socio-cultural differences specific to communities; to put it more simply, language is "...both a social product and a compulsory set of compromises adopted by society in order for this ability to be used by individuals." (Saussure, 1998: 38). The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's approach to language as a structure has allowed the human species to be considered as constitutive agents within this structure as a result of their language-based actions and behaviours. Similarly, the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, based on the fact that language is a social phenomenon, states that cultural elements are structured like language<sup>7</sup> (Levi-Strauss, 2012: 89-105). Each cultural element, like the speech [parole], simultaneously enters fields of meaning. When cultural elements are analysed, it becomes apparent that there is an underlying structure like language [langue]. Therefore, Levi-Strauss tries to trace the underlying cultural structure by following the mythological narratives of the communities in his field studies. For example, Levi-Strauss, who believes that kinship relations carry strong representations of the cultural structure, claims that kinship is the basis of kinship [within the structure] by saying that women have exchange value through the exchange of women in marriages and that the incest taboo is one of the elements that regulate this exchange (2012: 80-81). The claim that language is a value inherent in culture, and culture is a value inherent in human beings, reveals the claim that linguistic and cultural elements can only be formed in accordance with human agency. Since our expressions towards the other are generally realised through language, it is suggested that the acts of making an expression, of responding to something, can only find their counterpart in the cultural context through human agency.

Researchers representing classical ethnography, including Claude Levi-Strauss, Bronis law Malinowski, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, E.E. Evans- Pritchard, Franz Boas, Raymond Firth and Margaret Mead, even if they did not directly question the immanence of language in human beings, treated linguistic elements and

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<sup>7</sup> If we go into detail, we see roughly two distinctions in Saussure's and later Levi-Strauss's understanding of language: language (langue) and speech (parole) (Saussure, 1998: 44-45; Levi-Strauss, 2012: 300-302). Whereas language is a historical system structured vertically and horizontally in terms of syntax and morphology, parole refers to a field that is built on the ground of language in a synchronic, contextual way. For example, the sentence "I will come home tonight" corresponds to a set of grammatical rules. What the speaker of this sentence wants to express and the value they attach first to each word and then to the meaning that appears from the sentence as a whole, emerges in a synchronic context. It is claimed that the speaker of the sentence cannot - if they are speaking - have recourse to an expression outside the grammatical structure.

the cultural structure built upon them as an element immanent to human beings and did not include non-human animals as agents in the culture they studied. Therefore, we cannot find non-human animals in social practices built on culture. Bronislaw Malinowski, for example, mentions pigs in his field reports from the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski, 1992: 155-161). The reproduction of pigs differs based on gender roles. The natives claim that female pigs reproduce on their own because the testicles of male pigs are removed at birth. The claim of self-reproduction here can be explained by the understanding of birth and death in the cosmogonies of the natives of Trobriand Island. Before every birth, both humans and animals, the spirit of the being to be born is carried by other spirits in nature and brought into the body. In this process, which can also be regarded as an animistic approach, the birthing creature plays the role of the carrier rather than the creator of the creature it gives birth to. Although the similarity between pigs and humans in terms of the definition of reproduction suggests a kind of equality between species, we see that the foundations of this belief arise from the values inherent in humans. In a cosmogony in which humans are seen as the dominant species, pigs only share certain characteristics with humans.<sup>8</sup> This leads us to the question of how non-human animals are defined in the context of the duality of language and culture.

During my fieldwork at the equestrian club, I paid attention to the attempts of different groups of people to identify horses. The first groups of people I contacted were the grooms and trainers. Then, I had the opportunity to observe three different groups of people: those who came to the equestrian club for lessons, day visitors for recreational purposes and those preparing for competitions. Each group had a different relationship with horses. The grooms were the most interested of these groups. Their job description included taking the horses to the arena for riding, taking them back to their places, giving them food and water, combing and washing them when necessary. In addition, two grooms I knew from the equestrian club also lived there. This confirms that they took care of the horses even during the night and took immediate action to prevent any risks. The grooms' work with the horses gives them more opportunity to get to know them than other groups. When I first came to the club, groom T. (M, 30) told me about the habits of the horses we came across. For example, one day, pointing to a horse named Safir, he said, "Look, this horse is cautious, she does not always let you ride her. For example, she gets grumpy when it is too hot, she tries her rider. We talk to her

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<sup>8</sup> Another issue that can be discussed in this regard is the perspective of some animist and polytheistic communities on non-human animals. In certain cases, these communities may demonstrate less anthropocentric or speciesist attitudes towards non-human animals compared to common monotheistic beliefs; however, this does not imply a complete absence of distinctions or classifications among species. Different cultural systems often develop ways of categorising living and non-living beings. For further reading on religious perspectives towards animals, see the book *Kutsal ve Hayvan: Dinlerin Hayvanlara Bakışı* (2020), edited by Süleyman Turan.



beforehand and calm her down by taking her for a ride or two in an idle way, so that her moodiness is reduced". Pinkey, another horse, was described as more docile than Safir. Another characteristic of Pinkey was her speed. She was said to be the fastest horse there. Even groom T. (M, 30) often emphasised that Pinkey was not appreciated as she deserved saying "I think this horse should have been in the races, she is wasted here". We observe that the names given to horses and the qualities attributed to them are used in reference to human-human relations. Describing horses with adjectives such as grumpy, irritable, docile, friendly, introverted, extroverted also points to where grooms position horses in the relationship they establish with them. The conditions under which a horse becomes grumpy or docile can be understood through the reactions of humans exposed to similar conditions. For example, groom T. 's (M, 30) claim that Safir becomes grumpy in hot weather is based on the assertion that "horses, like humans, do not like hot weather and can become grumpy". However, many questions remain unanswered, such as what kind of climate Safir grew up in, up to what temperature her skin can stay cool, and whether her grumpiness is due to some other meaning she attributes to the heat rather than the heat itself. Asking such questions and exploring Safir's relationship with the heat and the reasons why it makes her grumpy can bring us and Safir closer together in a specific sense, rather than anthropocentrically thinking through assumptions without the need for such questions. The fact that groom T. (M, 30) and groom R.'s (M, 55) relationship with horses at this distance is, on the one hand, a necessary imposition of space as a trading area. We will discuss this in the next section, but suffice it to say that for grooms, the priority in their relationships with horses is to fulfil the responsibilities assigned to them, and since these responsibilities take up a lot of time, it becomes even more difficult to develop an alternative way of relating to horses that involves additional effort. Groom R. (M, 55) once mentioned that a horse that died in his care had caused him economic loss. Horses, grumpy or not, have a commodity value and are subject to a definition based on that value.

Trainers interact less with horses than grooms. There are many reasons for this. I have noticed that trainers do not live in the equestrian club like grooms, most of them leave at 17:00 when their shift ends. Each trainer has their own private students. These students are formed either as a result of individual meetings and agreements between the trainers and those who come to the club, or as a result of the club's authorised persons directing the programme to the appropriate trainers. Therefore, the days and times of the week when each coach would train were pre-determined. Some days, they did not come to the club, sometimes they arrived at 10:00 and left at 14:00 in the afternoon. This working pattern weakened the relationship between the horses and the trainers. The trainers only got information from the grooms, such as which horse was ill, which horse was moody today, etc. Another reason for the weakness of the relationship with the horses compared to

the grooms was that the trainers had to communicate with their students and their students' relatives at the same time as communicating with the grooms about the horses. As I mentioned earlier, the groups that come to ride are diverse. Those who had ridden before and came to improve their level did not need much contact with their trainers, while those who were learning to ride for the first time were in close and constant contact with their trainers. Not only the students but also their families wanted to talk to their trainers.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the trainers spend most of their time in contact with their students and their families. Moreover, one of the trainers, S. (F, 28), was not only a horse trainer but also a paid teacher in a private classroom for economic reasons. Once she told me, "Would you believe it, I leave here and I don't stop, I go straight to the classroom. Some days I give private lessons; I'm always in a hurry...". The other trainer I am in contact with E. is only interested in training horses. Her relationship with the horses and the organisation she was involved in was stronger than that of trainer S. (F, 28), and I think this was partly because she was not involved in additional jobs.<sup>10</sup>

The trainers' attempts to describe the horses were like those of the grooms. Both Trainer S. (F, 28) and Trainer E. (F, 33) described Safir as grumpy and Pinkey as docile for similar reasons as the grooms, but as the trainers, unlike the grooms, had also got to know the horses by riding them, they also gave information that could answer questions such as, 'which horse has a good attitude towards its rider' and 'how to behave with which horse while riding'. On one occasion, trainer S. (F, 28), pointing to a jet black majestic horse called Demir, said, "I think this horse has

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<sup>9</sup> As can be seen, no significant differences were observed in relation to the age groups of the students. According to my observations, there are no notable differences in human-animal relationships or student-trainer interactions between primary and secondary school age ranges. As the primary focus of this research is on human-animal relationships and interactions with trainers, specific details regarding age groups fall outside the scope of this study.

<sup>10</sup> This observation also raises the question: In some cases, does the human-animal relationship improve as economic conditions improve? As theorists like Marco Maurizi and Dinesh Wadiwel have discussed, the relationship between Marxism and animal liberation suggests that material conditions significantly shape social and ethical relations with non-human animals. Maurizi, in *Beyond Nature* (2017), argues that capitalism is intrinsically tied to speciesism and that animal liberation requires a transformation of economic structures. Similarly, Wadiwel, in *The War Against Animals* (2015), conceptualises human-animal relations as structured by systemic violence and economic interests, framing animal exploitation as a form of warfare maintained by capitalist structures. These perspectives suggest that economic hardship often limits the capacity for ethical reflection on non-human life, as immediate survival needs take precedence. A friend of mine travelled to Central and South Africa for several months this year (2024). She did vegan activism there, explaining veganism to people. When she came back, she told me that very little is known about animal liberation there because people still have great difficulty in accessing even basic livelihoods, so they do not have the opportunity to think about these issues. Similarly, trainer S.'s (F,28) economic concerns can be seen as a barrier to establishing a deeper connection with the horses under his care, as financial pressures may prevent him from engaging with animals beyond the practical requirements of his role. For further reading on Marxism and the animal liberation movement, see *Eighteen Theses on Marxism and Animal Liberation* (2018), published by the Alliance for Marxism and Animal Liberation.

gone through some very traumatic processes when he was young, and when you are on him, you have to pull hard on the halter during the turns and if necessary, you have to kick him a bit on the arse with your foot. Otherwise, he will never do what you ask. He is not a human lover. When he came here, we tried very hard to restrain and tame him." When I asked what kind of trauma the horse had experienced to distance itself from the people there, she said, "There are very unsuccessful or unthoughtful horse breeders. Those who use violence from birth, those who lock the horse up for a long time to tame it... There can be different kinds of people."<sup>11</sup> The fact that the horses are brought to the club from horse farms raises the question of where the horses have been bred and, as a result, what kind of training they have received. For instance, trainer E. (F, 33) once said, "Of course, it is important where the horses come from, you cannot just bring them in. If the horse is traumatised, it will kill the person on it. Look, we put dozens of people on horses here every day. Imagine if there were horses like that, what would happen to us...", she interpreted the reaction of some horses to the situation as "they are behaving like that because they are traumatised". This shows us that the criterion for the distinction between 'being healthy or unhealthy' for horses is defined as 'being useful or useless to humans or 'being obedient or unobedient'. The fact that the horse named Demir sometimes reacts to his rider suggests that he is unhealthy. I once turned to trainer S. (F, 28) and asked, "What if this fellow, Demir, is not traumatised, but just irritated by the presence of someone on top of him and reacts like this?" After a few seconds of silence, trainer S. (F, 28) said, "What else can they do? It is their nature. You must ride on their backs."

The groups of people who come to the equestrian club for different purposes vary in their relationship with horses. For example, people who have ridden before or know how to ride horses interact less with horses than people who have just learnt to ride. This is because they have previously interacted with and dominated some horses and thus claim to recognise them. One of the people who knew how to ride replied to a question I asked about the horse he was riding, "Is this horse, I just started riding this horse, there is no problem at the moment, it is very harmonious". When I spoke to someone who was new to riding, he told me, "I think the horse is scared or too excited because it seems to be shaking... I try not to hurt him too much when I pull the halter. I have the feeling that he could throw me on top of him at any moment". Encountering horses for the first time is a very interesting experience as it explores the boundaries of a different species, but as the time spent

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<sup>11</sup> This issue is beyond the scope of this research, but conducting an ethnographic study on horse breeding on a horse farm would provide powerful answers to questions such as what kind of training horses undergo under what conditions and what is the role of anthropocentrism and speciesism in their relationships with humans. The knowledge of trainer S. on this subject is weak due to her formal education at the university and the fact that she has worked in equestrian clubs rather than on a horse farm, so the knowledge of "in which situations a horse is traumatised" is one of the weak points of this study and I think it is necessary to study the human - horse relationship in the future.

with horses increases and different horses are recognised, the conventional understanding begins to dominate people's view of horses. Therefore, while people who know how to ride horses have strong similarities in their relationships with horses, it is noteworthy that for those riding horses for the first time, the relationships are built on a more personal and mutual basis involving two agents. I once heard a person who had just learnt to ride say to his trainer, "Is it okay if I don't kick the horse's belly with my foot? His belly might hurt". In a one-to-one relationship with a horse, the fact that the horse gets excited, angry or frustrated, feels pain and, more importantly, can react to these moods can mean that the horse's agency is accepted and recognised by humans. As I have observed with most of those who know how to ride horses, horses are defined under a general category, according to fixed definitions. For example, someone who is riding a horse for the first time can tell the difference between Safir and Pinky faster and more accurately than someone who has ridden a variety of horses before. The reason for this is that someone who has encountered another species for the first time tries to infer their knowledge of that species from the moods and actions of the other species. I think that after a certain point, our understanding of other species blinds us to the understanding that 'every living being within each species may have individual characteristics' because the socio-cultural structure we are in places humans in a dominant position vis-à-vis other species, while compressing other species into a single categorical species definition. Even if a person who has just learnt to ride a horse experiences important insights in the initial processes, these are mediated by this understanding over time.

There are children among those who come to ride. The relationships that the children establish with the horses are generally in line with the distinction I mentioned above between those who come to ride for the first time and those who have ridden before, but I have observed that the children interact with the horses more than the adults. One day, a group of 20 deaf children between the ages of 7-10 came to ride for the first time. Under the supervision of the two trainers, the children were put on the horses and took turns. Some of them asked the trainers: "Why do horses have tails?", "Don't horses have shoes?", "What language do horses speak?", "Doesn't my back hurt when I ride a horse?". The trainer gave the following answers to these questions respectively: "Horses have tails because of their nature", "They are not like us, they have iron shoes, look...", "They do not speak, they neigh", "No, it does not hurt, we are lighter than them" It was surprising that the children's questions were directly related to the visible and included philosophical inquiries such as "What language do horses speak?" because I have never heard such questions in adults who came to ride for the first time. The questions about horses having tails, not having shoes, having a different language or no language at all, and having a sore back show that children compare themselves to horses. One of the most effective ways of getting to know someone is to focus on the

differences between them and you. It is through these differences that you come closer to knowing yourself. This is what the children are doing here. The differences between the horses and themselves stand out immediately. The effort to seek answers by pursuing this awareness can also show the desire to get to know the horses. So, can we interpret the difference between a child riding a horse for the first time and an adult as the presence of the desire to know in children and the absence of it in adults? Children's questions point to differences between species as well as questioning similarities. For example, questions such as 'Don't horses have back pain?' and 'What language do they speak?' seek to mirror human characteristics such as back pain and spoken language in horses. Although adult riders claim that this similarity does not exist, I have observed children, as if they believe otherwise, anxiously trying to prevent the back of the horse they are riding from hurting. Some said "Is that enough? Let him rest a bit", they defended the horse. Others tried to talk to the horses, attempting to understand what they mean when they neigh.

The descriptions of most people in the equestrian club, based on their relationships with horses, are in many ways uniform and reductionist, as if there were only one category of horse. Of course, it can be said that the different descriptions of horses named Pinky, Demir and Safir by grooms and trainers falsify this categorical reductionism. At first glance, we might think that each horse is handled differently by the people in the equestrian club, but the fact that a horse is aggressive, nervous, docile, etc. suggests a description of their reactions to a single event or situation rather than a characteristic feature of that horse. For example, would you define the character of a human friend based on their reaction to a single event or situation, or would you opt for a definition based on their reactions to many different events and situations over many different periods of time? Horses are defined on the basis of their reactions to people riding them in manoeuvres. However, the relationship that horses have with other horses, the relationship that they establish with space and the relationship that they have with people when no one is on their back is not taken into account. This situation shows us that horses are valued on the basis of their usefulness to humans. The most functional feature of a horse in the equestrian club in relation to people is that it puts some people on its back. Attitude and behaviour are more important in this process than in other processes, so a horse's being grumpy with someone on its back overrides its docility at all other times and causes it to be defined as a "grumpy horse".

Another issue worth discussing in the definition of horses is the consideration of language and culture as a whole and as a value inherent to human beings. As can be seen, the terms used in the definitions terms taken from human-human relationships. Horses, defined with characteristics such as irritability, docility and anger, cannot go beyond being a creature that "gets angry as if it were human", "gets angry as if it were human", "behaves docile as if it were human", because



language is assumed to be a projection of culture. However, a state of anger can manifest itself with a specific expression in any species. For example, the anger and rage of a horse can be understood not based on its resemblance to a set of behaviours similar to those of humans, but on the idea that they have a different set of behaviours. Even before that, it is possible to discuss whether horse anger itself is itself, that is, the state of being angry at something or someone, is itself present in horses. I think the definition of these emotional states in these forms is the result of anthropocentric thinking, and that the set of attitudes and behaviours specific to horses can be defined in the linguistic dimension with new sets of concepts that do not refer to human beings.

### **Organization of the Equestrian Club as a Space and Its Effects on Relationships**

One of the most important elements that influences the way we relate to each other in our daily lives is space. Spatial formations are considered necessary for the reproduction of a social ideology, as ideologies cannot speak for themselves if they cannot - in a specific way - create a space (Lefebvre, 2014: 82-83). For instance, Henri Lefebvre argues that to establish socialism, power relations in space must be deciphered and socialist ideology must be constructed both at the urban scale and in the organisation of private space (2014). To give another example, historian Stephen Vider discusses the queering of houses, which he sees as a gateway from the private to the public sphere, through the politics of space (Vider, 2021). Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert discuss the position of non-human animals in spatial formations through the concepts<sup>12</sup> of “Animal Spaces” and “Beastly Places” (Philo, Wilbert; 2000). From many different aspects, we see that spatial formations are mediated by different ideologies and structure the agents within them. In addition, this relationship suggests not only a structuring attempt from space to people, but also a structuring situation from people to spaces. This requires us to address the discourses of the people “inside” in spatial studies and to analyse the relationship they establish with the space they inhabit in line with these discourses.<sup>13</sup>

I had the opportunity to observe how the equestrian club as a space affects the relationship between people and horses. As well as riding, the club offers tennis and yoga classes. That is why, when you enter the main gate of the club, you are

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<sup>12</sup> I first learned the concepts from Ezgi Burgan Kıyak's Ph.D. thesis titled “Meadow and Cottage: Interspecies Gendered Encounters in Plateau Geography”, which was conducted between 2017 and 2022. Furthermore, this study is one of the first examples of interspecies ethnography in Turkey.

<sup>13</sup> For discussions on how urban space in Turkey is ideologically shaped in ways that marginalize or control nonhuman lives, see Sezai Ozan Zeybek's analysis of street dogs and urban waste in “*İstanbul'un Yüttukları ve kustukları: Köpekler ve Nesneler Üzerinden İstanbul Tahlili*” (2014), as well as multiple articles in the edited volume *Şehir ve Hayvan* (Alkan, 2020). The volume includes interdisciplinary contributions that examine species relations, urban regulation, and spatial hierarchies from different critical perspectives. These and similar works point to an emerging body of research in Turkey that critically engages with human-nonhuman spatial entanglements within both everyday life and policy frameworks.

welcomed by buildings with different functions. In the centre of the club is a large restaurant. Just behind it are tennis courts, both indoor and outdoor. You see that a green area is reserved for yoga training. People who come here in summer and winter learn not only riding but also tennis and yoga. At the same time, the restaurant in the centre of the club takes bookings for special day celebrations. Although the large signboard on the main gate writes 'equestrian club', there is more than one economic element to the club. Such an endeavour is perhaps a necessity in today's conditions. The economic crisis in Turkey, which has been increasing since 2017-2018, may have prompted commercial organisations such as equestrian clubs to create alternative sources of economic income. In my interview with security K., he once told me: "I know there was tennis before, but 5-6 years ago they started to offer additional activities like yoga and pilates".

Although the equestrian club organises various events, its main business is horse riding. More than 60% of the distribution within the venue is dedicated to riding. There are a total of 3 manoeuvring areas, one of which is open; a closed area with about 20 pockets where the horses are groomed and kept in; an open waiting area with about 20 boxes where the horses are be ridden in the manoeuvring areas during the day are kept for a while, an open area with about 10 boxes where the horses known as ponies are kept, and a small open manoeuvring area for them; an area of about 25 boxes at the back of the club where ponies and other horses sleep at night, and finally an electric circle area where horses that do not run that day are routinely run.

The horses are systematically moved around the room. When I asked trainer E. (F, 33) why the horses were constantly being moved, forced to run in circles by an electric mechanism coming from behind, he replied: "The horses have to run regularly, otherwise they get sick". When I asked why the horses would get sick, instead of getting a satisfactory answer, I got the short answer that it was their nature. At the club, you can see that some horses are routinely moved around the club. One reason for this is that the areas where the horses are kept are very cramped and the horses are immobilised. The areas where the horse is kept do not even allow the horse to turn around 360 degrees. As a result, horses that have not been out and about for a while show angry behaviours and attitudes such as constant neighing, kicking the doors and walls of the area where they are kept and biting people who come in.

The relationship that horses establish with people is realised in accordance with peoples' desires to meet horses. We witness a one-way and voluntary relationship. The grooms, trainers or other groups of people in the club only interact with the horses if they are willing to ride on their backs or prepare them for riding. Otherwise, the horses are kept at the back of the club, out of sight of people who are new to the club. When I arrived there, I noticed that the horses got grumpy because of my presence there. However, I observed that the same horses were

unresponsive to me when they were kept near the centre of the training. I think the areas at the back have been adopted by the horses as their private areas. When I arrived there, they reacted as if there was an attack on their private areas, but it should be noted that the claim that horses have private areas within the club is highly controversial. The reason for this is that the places defined as the private space of horses are also organised by human will. Another reason may be that horses do not have the opportunity to develop an understanding of 'private space' from infancy to adulthood. Defining a place as a private space means that the person who defines it has a knowledge of 'what is private'. For example, there are differences in the understanding of public and private space between a child with many siblings who does not have a private room and carries out their routine tasks in the living room of the house, and a child with no siblings or a single sibling who has had their own private room since infancy. Here, I believe that horses who have been kept mostly alone since infancy and have not experienced private space within public space, who have been subjected to spatial positioning/restriction not by choice but by necessity, do not have private space, or at least they may not have an understanding of private space as we understand it. Their comfort may be to access the opportunity to experience themselves more in a peripheral area, away from people.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between horses is also restricted by space. The areas where each horse is placed for a short time or overnight belong only to them. The horses do not meet each other, but they can make eye contact and have vocal access to each other. The horses want to be together; this form of isolation is the most significant effect of the space on the horses. When I approached some of the horses, I noticed that they became curious and stamped their feet at my arrival. I interpreted this to mean that they saw me to relieve the boredom of being alone. Although such an assumption leads to an anthropocentric practice of thinking by pointing to a characteristic of myself as a human species, namely 'boredom', what I was doing was drawing attention to similarities and differences by comparing the other with myself, just like children do when they first encounter horses.

### **Reading the Expectations of Horses and Humans**

The discourses we produce about non-human animals lead to a kind of crisis of representation. It is an absolute tautology for humans, who are only one of

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<sup>14</sup> In this paragraph, I refer to horses' positions using examples that could be interpreted as anthropocentric by drawing on human-to-human relationships, which might seem to blur their unique existence as beings. The points I raise here could easily be misunderstood in this way; however, my intention is to illustrate different affective states that horses might experience by offering relatable examples from our own experiences. This approach aims to help us better understand that horses, like us, may exhibit varied attitudes and responses to situations, highlighting their agency. My purpose is not to anthropomorphize horses or to imply that concepts such as public/private spheres, infancy/adulthood, or family exist in the same way for them as they do for us.

millions of different species in nature, to make assumptions about the relationships they establish with other animal species, both their own and other species, and more importantly, to feed their argument by making an omission through the relationship of humans to humans, rather than through the dynamics of the relationships of the species they assume. The species called humans has created a distinct species category of non-human animals into which it throws everything except themselves. Whatever is deemed inappropriate for human beings, whatever undermines the virtue of being human, and whatever needs to be appropriated by the other to put humans in a dominant position, is dumped on non-human animals. In fact, even the definition of 'non-human animals' is generally not preferred because it contains the claim that "human being is also an animal"; instead, "animal" is used, and since the late 20th century and especially throughout the 21st century, many thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida in his work *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), have tried to overcome this categorical reductionism in language. Derrida argues that the term "animal" is problematic because it homogenises a vast array of living beings under a single category, thereby erasing the distinct identities and experiences of different species. By using a single term to refer to all non-human creatures, language perpetuates a binary distinction that places humans above all other forms of life, reinforcing anthropocentrism and speciesism. Derrida's critique highlights how language shapes and limits our ethical relationships with other species, as it reduces diverse forms of life to a monolithic, subordinate category.<sup>15</sup>

In line with these discourses, we produce about non-human animals, we make assumptions about what they expect from us, humans. I observed that not only did the people in the equestrian club have expectations of the horses, but that expressed that the horses also had some expectations from them (i.e. humans) and the people in the equestrian club had various assumptions about what those expectations might be. I also observed that I, as a researcher, had certain expectations of horses, which would undoubtedly place me in an arrogant position if I thought I was independent of the people I was researching in terms of conventional attitudes and behaviours towards horses. In the equestrian club, it was the trainers who made the clearest assumptions about what horses expected from people. This may be because they had to have had both practical and theoretical knowledge of horses. Intellectually the most senior people in the club, the trainers define themselves by 'having horses pegged', so to speak. Trainer S. (F, 28) once said: "Horses are moody in their own space. Since they can sleep standing up, you should make a noise

<sup>15</sup> Although in the first title of this article I take a critical approach to the fact that language is treated as a direct reflection of culture and as an intrinsic value of human beings, I cannot ignore the fact that language can provide powerful data on the culture. To give a well-known example, feminist researchers have been fighting hard against sexism in language for years. Thinkers who are critical of speciesism in human beings have also fought hard against speciesism in language. For example, calling someone by species names such as 'donkey', 'jackal', 'dog' as an insult also points to a reductionist approach to these species.

before you go to them. They don't want you to just walk up to them. As a reaction, they may neigh and try to kick you." He said that horses are expected not to appear suddenly when they approach people, but to make small noises to announce their arrival. Trainer S. (F, 28) also talked about the eating habits of the horses: "If you throw your food in front of them, if you don't put it down politely, they will smell it and not eat it as a reaction to you. Even when you give them their water, you should leave it in a respectful way.". He explained that horses expect respect and if this is not met, they react with a form of resistance. Trainers also give information about the expectations of horses while they are teaching their students. For example, while giving information to a student between the ages of 7 and 10, trainer E. (F, 33) said: "The horse wants to feel that you are on its back, you should touch the horse's belly with your feet. When you turn to the right or left, you have to lean in that direction like one body" and mentions the horse's expectation of the person on its back. I noticed that children who had not ridden horses before were less sure about the horses' expectations of humans, and that they were aware that horses may have different expectations of events and situations from humans because they are a different species. They try to find out whether horses have an expectation of not being ridden on their backs by asking questions such as "Do horses like to be ridden on their backs?". If horses have an expectation of not being ridden on their backs, they may express anger towards those who ride on their backs. This expectation reading in children leads to more fundamental questioning than in adults. Whereas we see an adult rider carrying clear information about what the horse expects of him, we see a child questioning this and trying to infer the answer by asking "Do horses like to be ridden on their backs?" rather than asking directly "Does the horse get angry when I ride on its back?". What advantage can this type of question have in understanding the expectations of horses? The question "Does a horse resent being ridden on its back?" contains many hidden propositions such as "A horse is a creature that can be ridden on its back", "A horse is a creature that people ride on its back", "A horse is a creature that can react to being ridden on its back". Therefore, by not assuming these hidden propositions and making simple propositions, by going as far as possible to the basics, there is more chance of recognising the other species. For example, the question "Do horses like to be ridden on their backs?" also questions the proposition "A horse is a creature that can be ridden on its back". Perhaps, by clarifying the question a bit like 'What kind of relationship does the horse establish with its back' might be more appropriate. This question also questions the act of 'riding'. However, I still believe that the questions asked by the children can reveal stronger predictions about what horses can expect from humans.

The question of what kind of expectations people in the club have about horses is the most critical part of this chapter, because throughout the research I have seen that every area, from the organisation of space to the construction of status in



relationships, is built on human expectations of horses. This is to such an extent that even the expectations of horses from humans are assumed in line with the expectations of humans from horses. For example, when I once asked groom R. (M, 55) "Do the horses like this food? Maybe they expect something else?" he replied, "This is the favourite food of the horses, they are ecstatic when they see this". It is not difficult to guess whether the food given to horses is preferred because horses like it so much or because it is less costly for people to access this food than other meals. This suggests that the expectation of horses from humans is based on the expectation of humans from horses, and I don't think anyone in the equestrian club would question the proposition that "Horses like the food they are eating right now and that is why they prefer it" by asking questions such as "What do horses like to eat?", "What do horses that live free in nature like to eat?", "Wouldn't it be better to offer horses a variety of food and choose the ones they like among them?".

### **My Position as Researcher**

Going into the field I had some preconceptions about my expectations of horses and their expectations of me. My assumption that the agency of horses was not seen by the people in the equestrian club made me think that I would be able to see the agency of horses and that horses would provide me with strong observational data about themselves - in the desire to be understood. My expectation of the horses was that they would provide me with as much data about themselves as possible: How did they react to events and situations? How did they communicate with each other, how did they approach people? When I went out into the field, I was disappointed by the indifference of the horses to my presence. I realised that I had been unrealistic in my expectations and that I might have misjudged my positioning. I even had to admit that as a researcher I was lagging the trainers and grooms in terms of observing horses and obtaining data, and that in some ways they were better able to communicate with horses than I was. Throughout my fieldwork - due to my ethical sensitivity -I did not ride on the back of any horse, although I was offered to ride many times. The fact that I rejected such a form of engagement may have affected my relationship with the people and horses at the club, but the fact remains that I did not empathise with what the trainers and those who came to ride said about "riding on horseback".

My experiences in the field were more difficult than I thought it would be. This was because, as a researcher, I was an ethical activist. I thought that the horses in the club existed for the benefit of the people there, that their agency was not seen, and that if the processes I observed were left to the will of the horses, they would not want to be there. This thought led me to distance myself from the people there and to be negatively critical of their actions. Perhaps if this had not been my first fieldwork and if I had more experience in human-horse relationships, I might have been able to go through the process with less difficulty, but my position was similar

to that of an anti-war photojournalist caught in the middle of a hot war.<sup>16</sup> The saddle on the horses' backs, the rider's foot tapping on the horse's belly, the horses being kept in enclosed areas before and after the training grounds, and the anticipation of the horses being "put down" in case of possible injury were all traumatising. Under these circumstances, I often asked myself: Was I not an ideal researcher? Were these sensitivities detrimental to my fieldwork? Would a researcher with "fewer sensitivities" have been more productive in my place? Was it my assumption that there is anthropocentrism and speciesism in the relationship between humans and horses, or perhaps there is no such understanding?... In this respect, I conducted a research process accompanied by many inquiries. I have no interest in my readers seeing me as biased or unbiased, but it is obvious that I do not fall into the category of the "ideal researcher" according to some researchers who refer to the neutrality of the researcher.

While this research was initially oriented toward observing how horses relate to both humans and other horses, the field experience revealed significant limitations in my ability to fully access equine subjectivity. As a result, the study evolved into a reflexive ethnographic investigation, focusing more on how humans define, categorize, and interact with horses. Rather than claiming to have captured the horses' own perspectives, I aimed to trace the human-centered frameworks within which horses are engaged, interpreted, and, at times, silenced. In this sense, the study contributes to multispecies ethnographic discourse not by providing direct insight into nonhuman agency, but by exposing the structural and affective barriers that prevent such insights.

### **Conclusion**

In this study on the relationships between humans and horses in an equestrian club, I began by questioning anthropocentricity and speciesism in approaches to human-animal relationships and the ways in which humans attempt or fail to relate horses to humans. I discussed the ways in which horses are defined by the people in the club, how the spatial arrangement affects the relationship between people and horses, and how my position as a researcher in the field affects an interspecies ethnographic study. It is shown that relationships with horses, a different species, are constructed with the expectation that humans place themselves in a species-dominant position and that the purpose of horses' existence is to benefit humans.

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<sup>16</sup> I came to realize only after completing this article that my way of narrating the field and grappling with my ethical discomfort shares important resonances with autoethnographic approaches. Although I did not set out to write this study as an autoethnography, my positioning -as a researcher emotionally invested in the politics of speciesism- inevitably shaped how I perceived and processed the field. Autoethnography, as discussed by Ellis and Bochner (2000), encourages the researcher to embrace personal experience as a legitimate source of insight. In retrospect, I believe that the tensions I experienced - between activism and academic detachment, empathy and analysis- could be more fully explored through this lens in future work.

With the ethnographic methodology employed in the study, I aimed to explore how horses are defined and perceived among humans within the specific context of an equestrian club, focusing on interviews and observations with trainers, riders, and grooms. At the same time, by testing the methodology of the classical ethnographic understanding of “human-human” relationships in the “human-horse” relationship, I tried to expand the boundaries of ethnography and show that a position towards the other can be taken with a less anthropocentric and speciesist perspective. My position as a researcher was not neutral in asserting the agency of horses in humans and horse relationships in spite of humans, and my bias gives a voice to future generations of researchers who undertake similar research and argue differently on issues of agency in the human-horse relationship. As an ethnographer, my ethical stance against disregarding the agency of the other has similar sensitivities to those of social scientists who argue for Eurocentrism against racism in history and/or for the liberation of black peoples. Just as the centuries-old system of slavery based on racism did not end in one fell swoop, I believe that this system based on speciesism will not end as a result of this study, but at least my position vis-à-vis researchers of future centuries is clear.

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