UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE MATERIALITY OF DISABILITY IN *ANIMAL'S PEOPLE*

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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THE MATERIALITY OF DISABILITY IN *ANIMAL'S PEOPLE*

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

Metaphors are useful tools for understanding large, complicated issues, but they are inherently limiting. Particularly in a disability context, the application of metaphor relegates the material differences of a disabled body to a symbol which serves as a stand-in for a larger social movement outside of the immediacy of the disabled experience. The materiality of disability then, or the real-world consequences of disability as opposed to the metaphorical implications, must be considered as visceral a component impacting the individual disabled body. In postcolonial discourse, little has been done through the frame of disability, and while many postcolonial novels deal with disabled characters, they are often used as a metaphor. In the emergent novel, *Animal's People*, the protagonist, Animal, enacts agency in an alternative, but not incomplete way. He claims the identity "animal" as a liberatory act, exerting agency in an intimate, but distinctly disabled manner. Studying how others view Animal, his physical disabilities, mental faculties, and subsequent death sequence reveals how he enacts agency.

Keywords: *Animal's People*; Disability; Postcolonial; animality; picaro; Indra Sinha; Sunaura Taylor; Mel Chen.

Disability is a complex series of experiences that is part physical difference, part societally imposed deviancy, part claimed identity and part identities that emerge through activism. One is not just disabled with a diagnosis, but processes like racism, homophobia, and sexism are also mechanisms for promoting ableism (Goodley). The resulting experience manifests as a material difference from the "norm". In a postcolonial sphere disabled experiences are easily essentialized into a singular, abject life because disability is often presented as a metaphor. However, Indra Sinha's postcolonial novel *Animal's People* presents a situation that emphasizes the materiality and complexity of a disabled life that is viewed as animalized. Effectively, when theorists ignore Animal's (the eponymous protagonist of the novel) material differences in favor of a metaphor, he is no longer a character with his own life experiences, but a symbol pointing to a larger social movement outside of the immediacy of his interaction with the world. This limited view ignores how Animal demonstrates agency within his own narrative, thereby reclaiming his identity. By applying a disability lens to a postcolonial narrative, I recenter Animal's resistance of the current discourses for a fuller understanding of how disabled materiality offers new insights into the postcolonial conversation.

The roots of disability theory stems from two frameworks working in tandem with each other. The medical and a social model of disability, while in conversation with cultural debates, are also incomplete when they do not consider disability as having a prescribed and presumed identity (Siebers 4). Dan Goodley, author of *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, states that disability is not independent of age, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and gender, and posits the question of what it means to be "human" in a dominantly ableist culture (44). Robert McRuer borrows from queer theory and argues that like compulsory heterosexuality, there is a compulsion for able-bodiedness, privileging the "whole", or the

presumed wholeness of a body over one perceived as incomplete. This desire functions under the guise of choice, hiding a social system with no actual choice but to appear able (McRuer 303). In *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness*, Fiona Campbell argues that in compulsively passing, "there is a failure to ask about difference, to imagine human be-ingness differently" (4). Finally, one of the pillar theories within the knowledge-field was proposed by disability theorists David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder who, in their book *The Narrative Prosthesis*, argue that 19th-century disability can be understood through the lens of a prosthesis or, the idea that disability is something which needs fixing, and that the narrative itself provides various avenues to identify and then correct, erase, or eradicate disability in a text. These are important insights about the representation of disability in literature; however, they have rarely been taken up in the realm of postcolonial criticism.

Postcolonial literature is full of metaphorized disabled bodies. For instance, in Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*, a Senegalese novel, the protagonist El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye, a corrupt, wealthy businessman upholding the neocolonial structures, is cursed with impotence. His impotency is ultimately revealed to be caused by the disabled and impoverished people El Hadji walks passed everyday, but their narrative presence is a metaphor for the forgotten African traditions. Furthermore, their limited presence in the novel is typified by El Hadji dismissing them as an unclean plague striking him. Julie Van Dam uses *Xala* to put pressure on the cold shoulder postcolonial readings have given to disability. She argues that the disabled bodies are swept under the rug, highlighting the need for disability visibility in an otherwise "hygiaesthetic" environment focused on the "fit" and the "clean."

Similarly, in their 2010 co-edited journal Clare Barker and Stuart Murray critique the limits of both disability theory and postcolonial theory methodologies. They try to insert

disability into the postcolonial field without using Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis and read disability as something that has a material quality about it. More recently, Barker published *Exceptional Children: Metaphor and Materiality* examining the postcolonial framework as one full of disabled children, with audiences relating the children's individual strife to that of their nation. But, in connecting the children with the nation, like connecting the novel with the nation, such criticism, Baker argues, ignores the material dimensions in the experiences of disabled characters. In turn, postcolonial literature makes them exceptional — figures that lie outside the realm of "able" experiences, but through their exceptionality, reveal facets of the norm.

There is precedent for pushback on the theoretical reliance of metaphors in the decolonial movement. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that the move towards decolonization can have no approximation, and the metaphors utilized only serves to reinforce the settler colonial tropes. This means, that in order to recenter disability we need more tools than simply metaphor. Mel Chen provides us the avenue for breaking away from an overreliance on metaphorical disability. She points to a fragile division between inanimate and animacy[1] which works to blur the space between the living and dead, language and creation, and thought and being. Working off Achille Mbembe's concept of the "living dead" in "Necropolitics" Chen scrutinizes the intersection of animacy in words, animals and humans to reimagine what it means to have agency when the "usual" markers of human-ness are blurred by disability.

Although *Animal's People* is an emergent novel within disability, post-colonial, and ecocritical disciplines, critical research on the novel has been far and few between. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, ecocritic Rob Nixon examines Animal's

[1] Mel Chen's defines "animacy" as an agency that includes awareness, mobility, and liveness without a human body necessarily present. Using animacy as opposed to "life" or "liveliness" helps us theorize current tensions around the production of "humanness" by creating a theoretical structure that problematizes binary systems of difference like in life/death, and human/animal.

environment as a mode for reflecting upon the impact of slow violence on an "environmental picaresque". Ultimately, Nixon purposes that Animal is a new kind of picaro, one who embodies all the violences inflicted on the land via the American "Kampani". Heather Snell's article titled "Assessing the Limitations of Laughter in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*" suggests that laughter is a coping mechanism against the western gaze. In this essay, Snell argues that Animal transforms himself into an object of humorous consumption to complicate the relationship between the reader's foreign gaze and himself.

Unlike the other critics, Pablo Mukherjee examines Animal's non-human identification in a serious manner but reads it ultimately as a means to create "a particularly postcolonial form of resistance…[enabling] its victims to leave behind their monadic selves and reach for a collective consciousness" (227-28). Mukherjee is more focused on resisting and reshaping toxic forms of postcolonial ideologies than the implication of disability in an ecology. Similarly, Andrew Mahlstedt starts his interpretation of Animal as a disabled individual and contends that Animal's insistence on calling the audience his "eyes" creates a place for the audience to recognize the biological injustices on Animal's terms. But, Mahlstedt only uses Animal insofar as he can represent the larger problem of "invisibility" in the global South. Consequently, he does not focus on Animal's lived experience. Across the board, none of the critics focus on the materiality of Animal's physical disabilities and mental faculties as a means of understanding Animal. Instead, Animal's disabilities are largely ignored, except as a metaphor for greater suffering.

Animal's People is a reimagining of the 1984 gas disaster in Bhopal, India that poisoned more than six hundred thousand people. On December 2, 1984, The Union Carbide pesticide plant released several tons of poisonous gas into the environment, exposing at least 600,000 people to the toxic materials. Approximately 3,800 to 16,000 people died that night as a result of

the accident. Now, over three decades later, the environment and people are still being impacted by the poisoning because it was never properly cleaned up and recent reports suggest hazardous waste is still present in the ground (A. Taylor). The ecological and environmental damages afflicted onto the real Indian landscape mirrors the ways the inhabitants of the fictional city of Khaufpur (city of fear) are slowly being poisoned and violated by the neocolonial powers.

At the heart of Sinha's novel is Animal, a young adult detailing his animalized life on a series of tapes. Due to a chemical explosion in his infancy, Animal was left with extensive physical disabilities like his twisted back, leaving him unable to stand upright like a human. This difference gives him a physically different outlook on the world than his fellow Khaufpur residents and focuses his perception on the visceral. It is this altered level that the visiting journalist, who is taping his testimony, is so interested in, and gives Animal tapes on which he can share his story. As Animal describes the contemporary issues around him, it is clear that he is not the only one affected by the explosion. Some, like Animal, have been physically altered, like the young girls who have three periods a month. Others are neurologically altered, like Ma Franci, his surrogate parent, who after the accident is unable to speak any language outside her native French. Further, Animal's mental faculties may have also been affected, as he reports to read other people's thoughts and hears voices which others cannot.

Meanwhile, Zafar, an impassioned advocate trying to save Khaufpur, and Nisha, Animal's close friend, are seeking restitution from the Company for the various ailments afflicting the people and the environment. Elli, a visiting American doctor is investigating the depths of the poisoning and is horrified by the "deformities" she sees there. She befriends Animal and offers to help him finance a trip to America where he could get a procedure done which would fix his back. However, by the end of the novel, Animal has undergone a

transformation. In a new accident, Animal dies and experiences another world where he can interact and observe more entities who blur the line between human and animal. When Animal returns to the land of the living, he is no longer invincible, and no longer wants to embrace the typical human form. Ultimately, he rejects Elli's offer to have his operation, spending the money to help Zafar's advocacy, now reveling in being the only Animal there is.

Unlike Barker's theses on the "exceptional" child, Animal is unique, but not extraordinary. He freely admits that there are "none like him" (Sinha 366), but he is not idealized. Instead, he presents an alternative mode for existing, outside of a typical animal/human divide, but not directly oppositional to it. He does not speak towards any greater state of his nation but claims his individual animality. Although, the more long-term effects of the Company's accident are omnipresent throughout the text, Animal's physical otherness and mental faculties are necessary in understanding how he counters the typical designation of animal as being submissive, passive, and ultimately sub-human (Chang 170). Animal is none of those things because he actively enacts agency within his own narrative. Despite how others view him, he actively chooses to engage in the narrative, tell his story in his own words, and subvert expectations between poverty and pleasure, animality and humanity, and his uncommon consciousness in a traumatized environment.

My attempt at understanding Animal has four distinct parts. First, I will explore how others, like the Journalist, Elli, and Zafar treat Animal in the novel. Examining how Animal operates within the text will illustrate what Khaufpur's people identify as "normal" while also establishing the alternative modes of existing Animal creates. Second, I will focus on the materiality of Animal's physical disabilities. I am interested in unpacking both the material impact of how his back, posture, and senses affect his daily experiences with the world, and how

he pushes at the borderline between Animal and human. Building off Sunaura Taylor's *Beasts of Burden,* I will argue that the distinctions between animality and disability begin dissolving with Animal. Situating Animal within Taylor's blurred definitions will help shed light on Animal's interest in being read as an animal because he is upsetting the presumption of him being an abject being. In reality nothing is abject about him. Third, I will dissect the ways in which his mental faculties are described and his linguistic fluency. Here, I will look at his language and speech skills as well as dive into an analysis of his auditory hallucinations. Finally, I will tackle Animal's death scene. Since he resists the idea of the environmental picaro with no social bonding, examining Animal's experience before and after his death will shed light on the disillusionment of connections with others around him.

I: Perspectives towards Animal:

Mel Chen's chapter "Words" in *Animacies* argues that the same words which cause "de-animation (by way of objectification)" (23) can provide the opportunity for reanimation (30). When *Animal's People* begins, Animal proclaims: "I used to be human once" (Sinha 1). Here, Animal is effectively speaking his identity into existence, despite many people in the text who assume he is a passive bystander in his own life due to his disabilities. Animal is not passive, not even in the creation of his own identity. He deliberately claims his identity as animal resisting the notion that animality is inherently inferior to humanity. His identity also rejects the "norm" of what it means to be human, seeing himself as the equal to his supporting cast, including his mother figure Ma Franci, and his closest companion, Jara, a stray dog. However, Animal's identity is constantly being undermined by the characters around him. Instead of reaffirming the animalized identity he has cobbled for himself, he becomes objectified, infantilized, and

marveled at as a symptom of larger cultural decay. But Animal claims the identity of "animal", blurring the line between disability and animality.

The first character to objectify Animal is introduced early in the text — the Australian journalist who Animal assumes is named Phuoc Tuy. Tuy comes to the city of Khaufpur looking for "inspirational" stories to share with a Western audience as he intends to compile them and sell a book. Animal tells us that he talks of "rights, laws, justice" (Sinha 3) indicating that at least the journalist thinks he is pursuing Animal in good faith. To some degree, he seems committed to presenting an 'authentic' voice, insisting that he wants Animal's story "in his words only" (Sinha 9). This implies that he values not only what Animal has to say about himself and the effects of the factory explosion, but also how he characterizes his experience.

Except Tuy does not understand Hindi, the primary language Animal supposedly speaks in the text. The lack of communication, among other factors, prompts Animal to condemn this journalist for coming because no matter what Animal says, Tuy is "so fucking sure [Animal] was talking about that night. [Tuy] was hoping the gibberish sounds coming from [his] mouth were the horrible stories [Tuy had] come to hear" (Sinha 5). His thirst for a story — not just any story, but a tragedy that conforms with his preconceived notions of poverty, pain, and mourning — illustrates how irrelevant Animal's voice is to him. The journalist is looking at Animal not to understand him, but to capitalize on the pity he sees in Animal. The aesthetic of a starving, wretched, child talking about their own misfortune compels Tuy to pursue Animal, to add him to the collection of other stories of pain and suffering that sustains his stereotype of the Indian body.

However, the second Animal meets Tuy, Animal is disgusted by the way he is being stared at, unnerved by the intrusive (literal) Western gaze. To Tuy, Animal is already occupying the status of "living dead", waiting to be consumed. Animal tells us:

> Such a look on your face when he brought you here, as you pushed aside the plastic sheet, bent your back through the gap in the wall. With what greed you looked about this place. I could feel your hunger. You'd devour everything. I watched you taking it in, the floor of earth, rough stone walls, dry dungcakes stacked near the hearth… When you saw me, your eyes lit up. Of course, you tried to hid it. Instantly you became all solemn. Your namaste had that tone I've come to know, a hushed respects as if you were speaking a prayer, like you were in the presence of the lord of death. (Sinha 4)

The flash of Tuy's eyes and feigned respect shows that he is looking for an object he can repackage and market to his Western audience, and he sees that in Animal. When Tuy first steps into Animal's hiding spot, he consumes Animal like a commodity. Animal can feel the Western eyes eating at him, can hear the empty namaste, can see the greed growing on Tuy's face. It never occurs to Tuy that Animal's conditions might be emblematic of choice. It doesn't occur to Tuy that Animal has chosen to stack the "dung dungcakes" near the hearth. Rather, the facade of solemn concern for Animal's voice or life is, as Animal points out, a tactic for manipulation.

Tuy acts as if he were looking to show a portrait of the life of Khaufpur, when really, he is fascinated with Animal, as a zombie of the world Khaufpur used to be before the accident. Tuy has no regard of who Animal actually is or the animalized identity he reclaims. He is seeking to promote Animal as a *man* to be pitied — not an *animal* who needs to be listened to. The stories about Animal's struggle are designed to make him a profit, and regardless of any good intentions, Tuy is ultimately interested in self-gain.

It is clear that Tuy's actions aren't unique in his projection onto Animal. Animal is no stranger to journalists coming to Khaufpur and searching for inspiration porn. He tells the audience directly that "[Tuy was] like all the others, come to suck [their] stories from [them], so

strangers in far-off countries can marvel there's so much pain in the world. Like Vultures are your journaliss… [he has] turned [us] into storytellers, but always the same story," (Sinha 5). Animal is under no delusions the way that his disaster is portrayed in the West, and how they add to the public's perceptions. The fetishization of Animal's story and body push at the audience's discomfort because the public and the journalist do not hear Animal. Rather, they want to make themselves feel pleasure and relief that they are not in his situation, not suffering his pain, and that the story being told is familiar, never complicated or a result of their action or inaction.

Objectification is not Animal's only problem. Others in the narrative deny his animality through infantilization, treating his identity like a child playing a game. Ma Franci is the first example of this phenomena. Ma Franci, Animal's surrogate mother figure, is a nun serving at an orphanage designed to help the children who survived the initial chemical explosion that caused Animal's deviancy. Like Animal, Ma Franci is disabled, and is unable to speak any language but her native French, despite previously being fluent in others. On the first page, she states, "So sweet you were, a naughty little angel. You'd stand up on tiptoe, Animal my son, and hunt in the cupboard for food." (Sinha 1). Through the veil of nostalgia and under the guise of maternal motivations, Ma Franci talks about a 19-21-year-old Animal like a child who has yet to grow up. She emphasizes his ability to (at around 3 or 4) walk around on two feet, unlike now. Her words invoke a psychoanalytic sense of development that idealizes his ability to "be" human as a state of childhood that he can no longer perform.

Her privileging of ability is shown later in the novel when Animal says she, "would talk, proud as if she were my real mother, of how I used to enjoy swimming in the lakes behind the Kampani's factory. You'd dive right in, your arms and your legs stretched out in a line" (Sinha 14). Again, Ma Franci prioritizes how Animal used to move, placing pride on the times when he

passed as an abled child. No mention of pride is mentioned of him when he is animalized. Neither is there any mention of his broken back. Similarly, her focus on his ability to stretch out his legs — a task which is made nearly impossible due to his physical posture — sends the message that his animalized form is lesser than the child she first cared for. Unlike the journalist who sees animal like an abject object who can be bought and sold, Ma Franci's language suggest that his four-legged view of the world is not as real as the toddler searching for food in an empty cupboard.

Originally from France, Ma Franci is an outsider to Khaufpur, like Tuy. She too projects a negative vision on to the landscape and consequently Animal. While yes, the disaster of "that fucking night" did leave lasting damage to Khaufpur, the way she characterizes it is in apocalyptic terms. She describes the city as having "felt the fist of god, the apokalis had begun, [and] her place was with its suffering people" (Sinha 37). The catastrophic world she describes is an environment where everyone is struggling to survive, subject to poverty and suffering. Due to his animalized identity, this perspective also applies to Animal, reducing him to a suffering thing, and not an individual capable of making his own choices. Her desire to "travail c'est dans le royaume des pauvres" (Sinha 40) or "work in the kingdom of the poor", infantilizes the city's space, projecting an image of people unable to take care of themselves and needing to be saved by outside help.

Nisha, a college-aged girl who Animal has a crush on, also infantilizes him. Unlike Ma Franci who has a more nostalgic gaze on Animal, she directly undermines the performance of his identity which she considers a childish game. She is constantly accusing him of being a spoilt child because in her mind, "it's time to grow up" (Sinha 38) and Animal, by proxy of not being human-enough has yet to grow up. Ma Franci's actions are tinged with nostalgia and is more

concerned with how a toddler Animal used to be more human, whereas, Nisha's constant berating forcefully denies Animal his identity. By directly attacking Animal, like a misbehaving child, she asserts that his experience as an animal is less developed as her own identity as a woman and reinforces the idea that to be animalized is to be a child. For Nisha, it is as though that one cannot be both responsible (or adult) and animal. Particularly because Animal claims to love Nisha, her work to belittle and criticize his identity effectively disempowers Animal to claim that his experience as an Animal. She assumes that his stature and mentality is something he should simply grow out of and join her at a privileged, human, status.

Elli, an American doctor who befriends Animal, is another character who projects fantasies onto Animal. Although she treats him kindly throughout the novel, she does refer to him as "the strange, half-mad boy who goes on all fours, and believes he's an animal" (Sinha 322) when talking to her ex-husband about the suffering in Khaufpur. Her characterization of him systematically devalues his identity as Animal. From an American perspective, Elli comes into the conversation similar to Tuy because she too is predisposed to seeing struggle and poverty as the default mindset of individuals in Khaufpur. Although Elli and Animal are friendly by the book's resolution, she never takes his identity seriously, and like Ma Franci, urges him to think of himself as human. At best, it could be said that she tries to diagnose him, citing the poisoned air, water, and environment as causing him to become delusional. Her commentary that he is a "half-mad boy" places him squarely in a anthropocentric frame, denying him his claim to animality and dismissing his actions as being formed through exposure to toxic materials, and not, as Animal would claim, through his own experiences and as a consequence of his literal worldview. Her claim also assumes that he thinks that he is an animal, rather than in fact having the experience of a stray dog.

Elli further damages Animal's image by urging him to get experimental back surgery to "cure" his disability. Like Mitchell and Snyder's thesis in *Narrative Prosthesis,* Elli's insistence on curing Animal works to erase his disability as well as his animalized identity. For a while, Animal is encouraged by the prospect of going to the specialists and walking upright but is disillusioned once he recognizes that he values his claim to Animal, ending the story with "I am Animal fierce and free / in all the world there are none like me" (Sinha 366). Elli's efforts to cure him however, would "raise" him to the stature of human in her eyes. This is not what Animal wants. He already exercises the self-authority that she associates with humanity while not being human. Where she sees him as lesser, Animal thrives in an alternative manner that is not necessarily counter to her understanding of the human body and self.

Of all the characters which filter Animal's identity, Zafar is the one who refuses Animal his animality the most. Like Nisha, he associates Animal's actions with an unwillingness or inability to take responsibility for himself. He likes Animal but is unconvinced of the animalized identity Animal insists upon. He treats being an animal with avoiding responsibility. For Zafar, it it's everyone's duty to resist the Company's lawyers and stand and fight for an end to the ecological destruction. Although a radical leader, he maintains that Animal is a human being who is worthy of avenging for his accident. But as I have iterated Animal refuses the human identity. He refuses to be defined by how others act in a situation when he has such a radically different standpoint from the rest of the onlookers. Zafar demands that Animal "rise up" as if to say that his identity is not enough to be an animal, and that the animal identity is lesser than that of the human one.

II: Animal's Physical Materiality

At least twice in the novel Animal tells Zafar that being, "trapped in an animal body is hell, if you dream of being human" (Sinha 210). Animal clearly has no problem claiming the animal identity, and though for a while Elli's insistence that he get corrective surgery is tempting, he never holds the image of humanity over his animalized image. While Mel Chen's work with animacy lets us question what it means to have "humanness" and use words to "make live", Sunaura Taylor's *Beast of Burden,* shows the blurry line between human and animal at work. In her book, Taylor talks about how disability, when projected onto states of animality, is almost always negatively coded (S. Taylor 15). She argues that we, humans, derive a sense of domination over animals by comparing ourselves to their ability to mimic our traits. Animals are "beneath" the human because they do not have language, rationality, or opposable thumbs. As a child Taylor saw this implicit bias at work when other children, unable to identify with her physical disability[2], started name-calling. She recounts how she was told she walked like a monkey, had hands like lobsters, and ate like a dog (S. Taylor 103), these insults clearly meant to degrade her life experience.

She notes that the desire to reclaim one's humanity, particularly when one has been made to feel less than or removed is a valid demand, but not a singular one. For her, claiming the identity of animal through her disability becomes "a way of challenging the violence of animalization and of speciesism—of recognizing that animal liberation is entangled with our own" (S. Taylor 110). In other words, the stereotype of animals as lesser, or passive, or abject, begin to break apart when the comparison to disabled bodies is no longer an insult, but as a

[2] Sunaura Taylor was born with Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita (AMC), a condition where the body's joints are fused together, preventing them from contracting and flexing their muscles (Kowalczyk and Feluś). As a result, Taylor's limb mobility is limited, and uses a wheelchair. Her experience with AMC has led her to claim "animal" as an identity, leading animality to be the focus of her advocacy and art (Taylor 115).

reclamation. Taylor writes, that she feels animal in her embodiment and that her animality is "a way of claiming the dignity in the way [her] body and other non-normative and vulnerable bodies move, look, and experience the world around them. It is a claiming of [her] animalized parts and movements, an assertion that [her] animality is integral to [her] humanity" (115). Taylor's non-normative behaviors due to her disability breaks the idea that animality must mean passivity.

Animal was born the day of the Chemical explosion and left orphaned by the accident. Initially, the orphanage thought that despite losing his family Animal had escaped the chemical accident unscathed and would be able to grow up in Khaufpur unharmed. It is not until Animal is six that he contracts a fever causing fiery pains to shoot across his neck and shoulders, morphing his body into our four-legged protagonist. After the pains started, his back started turning "like a hairpin, the highest part of [him]was [his] arse" (Sinha 15). Animal's fever subsided and was awoke in a new body, different from the boy who Ma Franci had cared for who could live an abled life with his fellow orphans. He awoke as an animal.

His movements on four legs are cumbersome. He had to learn to walk on his hands, letting his legs atrophy. The "upper half of [his] body is like a bodybuilder's. [He] walks, also runs, by throwing [his] weight onto [his] hands hauling [his] feet forward in a kind of hop." (Sinha 15). His movement is not the same as his peers. He cannot jump or dance or bike; his body limits his overall movement hindering his ability to participate in a world constantly above him. His development changes the way he interacts with the world. Instead of using his arms to reach out and hold his necessities, he swings his body around, limiting his field of vision and forcing him to rely more heavily on his auditory and olfactory senses than that of the other children. Although he admits he gains considerable speed moving in this fashion, his unusual

configuration also puts significant pressure on his ability to climb and move because he neither had the flexibility nor the ability to extend himself past a certain point.

It is this metamorphosis into the four-footed entity talking to us that earns him the nickname Animal. However, it changes into an identity that he claims and by the end of the novel desires above all else. The act of "claiming Animal" gives Animal agency in his novel, the same way Taylor's *Beast of Burden*, shows how she reclaimed agency through her activism and her affirmative identification with animals. Animal's identity as "animal" disrupts the reader's understanding of what it means to be human. While initially the title of "animal" was thrust upon him as a means to degrade or belittle (Sinha 8) like Taylor, he embraces this identity and rejects the notion that he needs to revert back to a human identity, or a human "form". He doesn't fit into the prescribed passivity of animality that Mel Chen, Sunaura Taylor, and Kathryn Chang, identify as animal stereotypes. It is jarring both to us the reading audience, and the Khaufpur people because it disrupts the animal/human divide.

The recurring theme of eyes is important in *Animal's People.* In Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he associates crawling age children who are learning more about movement, control, and have a focus on the anal zone (47) with animal-like states while "matured" humans, in contrast, are upright and control their sexual impulses. The primary difference between these two states is that adults rely more on their eyes to interpret the world whereas the infant relies more on their hands and ears. He describes it as the sense furthest removed from the erogenous zones and is the one they have the most control over (65). For Animal, who has no other option but to be four-legged, he would be seen as beneath that of a fully realized adult. He does not rely on the human's "noblest" sense —their eyes —to tell his story, instead he also employs his nose, mouth, and hands to navigate the world.

The appearance of eyes in *Animal's People*, is interesting because while they are not associated with his eyes, the separation is tangible throughout the novel. The first instance of this is when Animal meets Tuy. He says that that Tuy was "sitting there, gazing at me in a ghurr-ghurr kind of way, as if your eyes were buttons and mine were buttonholes" (Sinha 4). The Western gaze becomes a tool placed onto Animal, and less a tool he utilizes for himself. This is further seen in Animal's choice to call the tapes, the audience he is dictating his life to, "eyes". Mahlstedt posits it's to allow the Western audience a voyeuristic window into his life, but I wager that it works to further separate him from the human identity and have the human "other" be clearly delineated from him.

Then, the "eyes" reappear when Animal critiques the human outlook. He announces that "the world of humans is meant to be viewed from eye level. Your eyes." (Sinha 2). It clear that the world of Khaufpur is not designed for animals, but only the abled human experience. He describes how his posture prevents him from seeing the same horizon as the humans around him. If a human were to raise their head, they would not find their noses near another man's crotch like Animal does when he lifts his head. In essence, it does not matter that Animal is physically unable to straighten his back, simply because he cannot raise his posture to that of a human, he cannot experience the world as Freud's matured, "well adjusted" adult would.

Additionally, Animal's social life is physically connected to his appearance. His eyes, like ours, allow him to engage with the world and interact with people but they are not where we would call eye-level. Instead of being able to talk to people "eye-to-eye", he is unable to engage with some of the social expectation that people like Zafar ask of him. If he lifts up his head to talk to someone, he is "staring into someone's crotch. Whole nother world it's, below the waist. Believe me, I know which one hasn't washed his balls, I can smell pissy gussets and shitty

backsides" (Sinha 15). Animal fosters malignant feelings between himself and the people around him. Where the "event" left him socially alone and unable to move within the social network, his physical otherness invites onlookers and gawkers who, like journalists from the past, want to not know Animal, but know how he became altered so that they can feel better about themselves.

This could lead the audience to assume that Animal's life is an abject one, if he cannot demonstrate a recognizably "human" form of agency. Except, Animal is anything but abject. He says as much when talking to Farouq, the clever right-hand man of Zafar, because he knows that "it really irritates [Farouq] that I choose to be an animal not human, it's like grit in his eye" (Sinha 87). He knows that his presence and existence is unusual, and alternative to the normative human experience. His reclamation of the identity shows him enacting agency in the very act of disrupting the human/animal border.

In this way, Animal is not interested in anyone's pity or presumed guilt for his posture. While he knows that if he were to raise his head he would be "staring into someone's crotch", he chooses to partake in the marvel of the grotesque and the taboo. Like Bahktin's idea of the carnival and carnivalesque[3], Animal is intimately aware of the bodily functions of strangers catching smells and sounds that do not reach the heights of "normal" humans. For example, Animal tells the journalist that he can tell who has recently urinated, and whose body odor has not reached human noses because these smells are constantly in his face. His animalized form frees him from the restrictions his peers would have without the apathy of the carnival. He can come and go throughout Khaufpur as he pleases without any care or concern about their standing

[3] In Bahktin's concept of the carnival, anything can happen, the social hierarchy is dismantled, and normative expectations are flipped on their head. He does not present the carnival as a performance per se because there is no differentiation between the performers and the audience, which allows for this free exchange of ideas, behaviors, and outlook on life. This space is meant to facilitate an alternative experience to the norm, but not necessarily an adversarial approach. Here, the body is open, a collection of exaggerated growing parts that does not coalesce into an individual body.

or their familiarity. Upon meeting Tuy, Animal's instinct is to belittle his notes, speaking nonsense to mock Tuy's assumptions about Animal's abilities. While not looking for pity, and knowing how Westerners consume his story, Animal is unperturbed by the journalist's presence in his hiding spot. Animal's body removes him from the any static place in Khaufpur, removing the social hierarchy others in the city are compelled to conform to.

Animal, regardless of how most people view him, uses his body in any way he sees fit. Where the journalist sees starvation and Nisha sees pity, Animal sees an opportunity to pick and choose when he eats. He claims that in times of extreme hunger he would tear off pieces of his skin and eat them for sustenance. Though now, food is plentiful and accessible to him, he eats his feet for pleasure (Sinha 13). His choice to consume the dried, dead skin subverts many of the expectations that are forced onto him. Like being the grit in Farouq's eye, this shows that Animal is exerting his will, even if it is not the same kind as Zafar who is protesting the Company.

Again, Animal has no time for pleasantries. When Chunaram, a greedy local shopkeeper, translates Animal's first tape, it is shown that his seemingly erratic breaks into song, coupled with a preference for the vulgar are not accepted norms. Chunaram is furious with Animal, having told the journalist that Animal is singing "I may be just a twisted runt/ but I can sniff your mother's cunt" (Sinha 5). It is at this point that Chunaram tells Tuy Animal's mental faculties are the cause for the singing, hiding Animal's choices behind an ableist veil. But Animal is unafraid to disrupt the Journalist's expectations by singing the song with profane imagery of female sexual organs instead of the somber death song Tuy wants to believe Animal is singing. By virtue of being a creature who straddles the line between human and animal, nothing is sacred to Animal because he doesn't have to follow the same code that the normate humans do.

But Animal doesn't let the audience forget for a second that his life is altered. Whenever the journalist is present in the story, Animal is always there, criticizing the hypocrisy of being offered "kindnesses" that he doesn't need by people who pity him. The narrative does not forget nor forgive the grotesque pleasure that the people who gaze at him places onto Animal. He readily critiques the fetishized pleasure Tuy and his people are projecting onto Khaufpur and does not want to settle for being commodified. Despite Tuy's impulse to mediate Animal's experience, Animal's control over his surroundings and his body demands the reader's attention particularly because Phuc Tuy would take his voice, his identity, and his genuine struggle and prescribe a narrative to him if given the chance. Animal's disdain for the journalist is a further critique on the neocolonial system that indulges in the fetishization of his body and the aesthetics of the language surrounding him.

Animal's age also plays a role in how he exhibits disability. Although he cannot remember a time where he could walk on two feet, the fact of the matter is that he did, at one point, belong to a group. Again, Animal takes control of this narrative and resists pity. He proudly tells the audience that, "no one leans down and tenderly reassures the turd lying in the dust, 'You still resemble the kebab you once were…'" (Sinha 1). Like in the beginning when he spoke his identity into existence, the comparison between his experience with that of excrement shows the lack of nostalgia he has for his previous identity because it does not represent how he views himself. He refuses to dwell on the memory of who he used to be before becoming Animal because being an animal is not less than being human. He tells Zafar later in the text that "to be trapped in an animal body is hell, if you dream of being human." (Sinha 210). Based both on the fervor with which he speaks his animal identity into existence, and his distaste for being compared to human, it is safe to say he does not dream of becoming human.

His actions come with consequences, though not of his own making, that sculpt his understanding of the world. Although he is animalized, Animal's condition comes with conditions of its own. He cannot stand up straight without painful consequences. In conveying this experience, his real material disabilities compound and he is unable to move within the confines of his embodied self. His head must be cocked at an angle to talk, his body contorted to facilitate his awkward body motions of "abled" activities, and his neck throbs with pain almost constantly. His physical limitations prevent him from expressing himself and being autonomous within the normative population of Khaufpur.

III: Animal's Faculties:

Animal's physical disabilities are not the only way he is disabled. His back and his posture are accompanied by auditory hallucinations with some ocular hallucinations towards the end of the plot. However, they are not the only disabled faculty. His voice also functions as a maker of disability. He spends the first two tapes explaining himself, his identity, and how he came to start using the tapes. Consequently, each has different implications for the material impact of his disabilities. Unlike his posture, Animal does not speak his hallucinations into existence. In fact, he doesn't know what they are. He tells his "eyes" that, "since [he] was small [he] could hear people's thoughts even when their lips were shut, plus [he'd] get en passant comments from all types of things, animals, birds, trees, rocks giving the time of day" (Sinha 8). Although he can interpret these hallucinations, he cannot adapt to them in the same way he could his physical otherness.

Another major difference between his physical disabilities and his faculties is how he initially presents them to the world. Where he has no choice but to be physically other due to his

back, he goes to great lengths to conceal these voices from others. Once, he told Ma Franci and she is so worried she says, “soit un fléau soit une bénédiction (curse or blessing)” and takes him to the doctor. He takes this seriously because he doesn’t know many people with mental disabilities. He defers to Ma Franci’s expertise because “she should know [her] own brain’s full of warring angels and demons” (Sinha 8). He then carries with him the feeling of anxiety about having the voices known about in a way that is antithetical to his physical otherness. He stops sharing that he hears them —except from Elli who as a doctor uses it to pathologize him. This is in stark contrast to his acceptance of his physical otherness.

There are two kinds of hallucinations Animal experiences, the first is more telepathic, and smooth. He characterizes them as “slow like honey melting in the sun, Elli and I saw a locust spread scarlet wings in the Nutcracker, it was crooning “I’m so gorgeous” (Sinha 8). These hallucinations allow him apparent insight into other people’s minds. When he’s mocking Tuy for reading him as desolate and empty, he claims he could feel the inside of Tuy’s mind like rats scrambling and that hearing them was like “hearing the voices in [his] own head” (Sinha 4). The imagery shows how viscerally connected Animal feels to these voices. While we do not know if these are indeed the journalist’s thoughts, the feeling and observations Animal makes demonstrates that at least for Animal, they are real. The voices accompany Animal without making anything tangible, but they can encourage him to make judgements about others.

These kinds of hallucinations also serve as Animal’s informants. They tell him the individual's inner thoughts, acting as a kind of protective mechanisms against betrayals and as an avenue for imposing resistance to the oppositional gaze within the story. By having selectively free access to other’s thoughts, he uses them as tools for critique when telling his story. Here is an example. The reason for Tuy’s confusion in the early passage is because while Animal is

conveying the inner thoughts, he's also laughing at the ridiculous extremes Tuy's mind jumps to. Animal states that Tuy wondered:

> "why has [Animal] stopped talking, queer as a winged snake is he, leant against the wall with such a look on his face, would be handsome if he weren't so sullen, what a chest he has, deep as a wrestler's, how does it spring from those twisted haunches to which are pawled legs like hanks of rope, oh god, his ribcage is heaving as if at any moment he may vomit, maybe he is ill, [Animal] what is your problem, alas, my wordless enquiries cause his convulsions to grow worse, I think he may be going to have a fit, what will I do if he dies, oh dear, my further anxious attempts to communicate, with twisting "wherefore" hand motions and raising of eyebrows, seem to cause violent shudders, bugger's lips are writhing in some kind of agony, should a doctor be called, where can one find a doctor in this place, where the hell am I anyway, what the fuck am I doing here?" (Sinha 4-5)

Tuy's admiration fetishizes Animal's body and demonstrates an odd fascination with his body as a deformed other, instead of an alternative other. Characterizing Animal as a deformed body presents his bodily expression as different to and consequently lesser than the able-bodied human performance. However, seeing Animal as an alternative embodiment of being-ness recognizes that Animal has a different bodily structure, but does not demean or devalue him, nor conflict with the normative human performance. The assumption that Animal is "sullen", in this moment is undercut because what Tuy takes for convulsions is actually Animal's laughter. Instead of being the picture of near-death, Animal is lively in this moment, actively choosing to let Tuy think he is already dead and resigned to gawkers when he is not. He's manipulating the stereotype for his own pleasure, using his hallucinations as the means for executing his goals. This interaction also correlates with Taylor's earlier assertions that disability, particularly disability in animals is always translated as being negative, and often dangerous, when in reality there could be more affirmative dimensions to it (S. Taylor 15)[4].

[4] In Taylor's chapter "Animal Crips", a fox with arthrogryposis, one of the disabilities Taylor herself was born with, has been shot, reportedly as a mercy killing because the local resident believed the fox was sick and therefore suffering. However, upon closer inspection, researchers noted that the animal has a full stomach and normal muscle mass at the time of the shooting, indicating that the disabilities had not precluded the fox from successfully

The second type of hallucinations are more omnipotent, erratic, and harsh. He characterizes them "like fireworks cracking the nearby air… inside me, if I listen carefully, I'll hear them arguing, or talking nonsense. Once I was looking at Nisha, this voice says, the hair pours off her head like history. What the fuck does that mean? I don't know" (Sinha 8). Animal treats these voices as omnipotent, and as entities that can loudly cause commotions within his head. On occasion, these voices will tell him what to do or say until he acts on it, leading to Ma Franci's worry. On one such occasion she marches him into the large hospital, demanding to be seen. To complicate things, these hallucinations are not as omniscient as he thinks they are. When he first spots Elli with her ex-husband, a Company lawyer, he thinks she is betraying him, selling Khaufpur and Zafar down the river. He runs away, reporting back to the town and telling as many people that this is true. However, before the story's climax Elli reveals her real plan, how she was trying to appeal to her ex-husband's ethical sense and stop the Company from robbing the Khaufpur people of the opportunity in court.

Then there is Aliya. As Tape three begins, Animal describes a young girl, maybe eight years old, calling Animal to play with her. She's orphaned, living with her grandparents, and enjoys treating Animal like a misbehaved child, despite being her senior. However, she doesn't exist, not any more. Separate from the other hallucinations, she has an optical component and functions differently from the disembodied auditory hallucinations in that she's based on a real child who died the night of the second accident. When he says that he's going, "mad. I'm filled with sadness because Aliya is not really out there. Her voice is not real, it's like people say, just another voice in my head," (Sinha 21) he's referring to his intense memories and hallucinations

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maintaining a high standard of life. But why then did the resident shoot the animal in the first place? Pity. Taylor argues they could not conceptualize an animal with disabilities as thriving and would be "better off dead" than disabled. Only associating disability with suffering or as a contagious disease fuels the fantasy that disabled lives are intrinsically negative when they have more affirmative dimensions to them. (S. Taylor 15)

of her, calling him beyond the grave. While he dismisses her presence as “just another voice” her mannerisms seem to be anything but normal. Her presence has “rules” so to speak, tying her to a centralized background only appearing when Animal is mourning, or feeling nostalgic for his dead friends. Unlike the other voices she doesn’t appear randomly, coming when Animal seems to need comfort the most.

Separate from the hallucinations, one material consequence of walking on all-fours is that his disabilities prevent him from writing down his own story, creating the need for him to use the tapes like the ones Tuy provides him. This does not mean that Animal is illiterate though. In fact, Animal is quite the polyglot. He is shown to have mastery over some degree of Hindi, English, and French, which he uses to his advantage. When Tuy first comes into Animal’s home, Animal says that Chunaram has paid him not to reveal he knows English so that Chunaram can get paid an extra surcharge of which Animal gets a small share.

The frame of the book does put tension in this aspect of the novel. The Editor’s Note informs the audience that the Hindi Animal speaks has been translated word for word into English, and that only the French has been corrected “for ease of comprehension” (Sinha i.). This seems counter to Tuy’s in-text promise to present Animal’s authentic voice and colors some our ability to evaluate Animal’s mental faculties. As a multilingual speaker, Animal should be able to choose which words are relevant and the particular order he chooses, adds to the nuance and expression of his ideas. For example, Gloria Anzaldua is able to reclaim her expression of the self by choosing to switch between Spanish and English at will in her book *Borderlands*. Although she elects to use perfect Spanish and perfect English in both instances, that choice to translate and jump back and forth is an empowering move that Animal probably possesses, but the translator/editor denies. The translator’s choice of correcting his grammar subjugates his

choices and limit the myriad of expression Animal could choose from. French is particularly dependent on article choice to interpret meaning. Animal's choice to or not to include an article could literally mean the difference between flinging an insult and addressing Ma Franci, his caregiver.

However, having a platform for his animalized expression of self is necessary for his defiance. While the nuances are gone, Animal freely criticizes the world around him. For example, during their first interview he openly mocks Tuy's constant attempts to interpret Animal's tone and tenor, parsing the animal from the stereotype. It's also not fully censoring Animal's voice because in the same interview the song Tuy is analyzing is about sexually explicit material, while the journalist can only imagine it to be about suffering. Animal chides Tuy by musing "You scribbled something in your book. Let me guess. 'Animal chanted a poem, probably a traditional song of mourning, just now he was crazy with grief'" (Sinha 6). Animal is showing an awareness of the journalist's imperialist blinders, preventing him from understanding that there are a plethora of emotions and experiences that Animal could care about because everything must filter through the perception of trauma Tuy places onto him.

Animal doesn't let the audience forget for a second that the lives of Khaufpuris are forever changed because of the Western factory explosion. Whenever the journalist is present in the story, Animal's actions are always there, criticizing the hypocrisy of being offered "kindness" that he wouldn't need if the Company had never been built at all. The narrative does not forget nor forgive the grotesque pleasure that the (neo)colonizer places onto Animal and critiques the fetishized pleasure Tuy and his people are projecting onto Khaupur. Moreover, Animal does not want to settle for being commodified and resists Tuy's impulse to mediate his experience. His desire for control over his surroundings and his body demands the reader's

attention particularly because Phuc Tuy is taking his voice, his identity, and his genuine struggle and prescribing a narrative to him. Animal's disdain for the journalist is a further critique on the neocolonial system that indulges in the fetishization of his body and the aesthetics of the language surrounding him.

IV. Animal's Death:

The climax of the story fails to "complete" Animal's role as an environmental picaro, showing resistance to the title. At the height of tension, when the Company is going to be confronted, there is a riot going on at the factory. Zafar and Farouq are dead, Ma Franci and Jara walked into the fiery haze, and Animal having been rejected by Nisha, wants nothing more than to die. He believes that he deserves to die, having lost everyone he cares about. Animal tries to follow Ma Franci and Jara, but the tape ends suddenly. Isolated, and alone, Animal, who had been considering taking Elli's offer of becoming human, begins his full rejection of the "human" identity.

Before his death, Animal is pursued by Elli to get "corrective" surgery for his back. Elli's assumes that Animal needs her mercy to be "whole" and that it would cure his suffering. His bodily acceptance and alternative examples of agency as animal do not cross her mind. That does not mean he's never doubted his identity. When Ma Franci takes him to get his voices checked, he takes the opportunity to ask if he can have an operation done on his legs to gain a human form so he can fall in love and have the sexual interactions he craves. But by being disabled, he feels he is denied these experiences. McRuer's commentary on compulsory able-bodiedness also works to explain the pressure Animal is under. McRuer notes that queer bodies and disabled

bodies are often conflated to keep the heterosexual hegemony from panicking. He characterizes the disabled/queer conflation by stating:

> the most successful heterosexual subject is the one whose sexuality is not compromised by disability; the most successful able-bodied subject is the one whose ability is not compromised by queerness … [so that] people with disabilities are often understood as somehow queer, while queers are often understood as somehow disabled (305).

However, Animal never acknowledges the desire to have a humanized identity, rather he wants to be seen as whole, animalized identity, and maintain agency over his sexuality that he feels he is denied. He only asks for the procedure because he does not see the possibility of someone with a human feminine identity sleeping with him. This is only reaffirmed by the people around him. For example, when he complains to Nisha that no woman could love his disabled form, she responds that "It's not what's outside that matters, inside you is a beautiful man" (Sinha 47). Except, Animal does not want to be a man, he says as much on the next line, but her assertion shows that she can only conceptualize his sexuality as viable only through perceived wholeness, alienating him from his claimed identity.

His death is comprised of many different, seemingly disconnected moments. First, he's rushed to the hospital on a stretcher, convinced that he's dying, and praying that he would die when he demands they drop him at the forest line. Suddenly, a Datura plant is talking to him, taunting him for being alone, inciting the fiery feeling that's consuming him. At nightfall, he's told by the Datura, that his wish has been granted, and the he is "free", they are 'letting' him die.

Then, a lizard comes which Animal catches easily. The Lizard speaks (an unknown power of animals besides Animal thus far) and begs for his life. When Animal makes eye-contact, despite starving, he lets the lizard go, because it looks pathetic, like it's lost hope. But it was a trick, for when the lizard leaves, he says, "'A broken rib may mend,' says the lizard, 'but your nature you can never change. You are human, if you were an animal you would have eaten

me'" (Sinha 346). His words seek to delegitimize Animal's identity. The lizard criticizes his pity, telling him that he is not good enough for his reclamation of "animal", because he does not have the behavior of a "true" animal. When Animal is left to starve, having squandered his "good fortune" in finding the lizard, he becomes more defiant, more dedicated to proving his animality.

Once he dies, he is forced to walk past several projections of his friends which he must reject in order to fully realize his animality. In the distance he hears Zafar's voice when suddenly he feels immortal, able to walk through flames and into paradise (Sinha 352). While in paradise, he sees drawings of several different animals, that look like they were done by a small child. Some, of these creatures are easily identifiable, elephants and rhinos and lions color the stones. But then, there are "small figures on two legs, except some have horns some have tails they are neither men nor animals, or else they are both" (Sinha 352-353). These figures show the blurred line between animality and humanity that Animal walks, the liminal space that he occupies without the limitations of human ego or societal restrictions. He finds the place where his claimed identity of animality is not questioned and he can exist as is, without the pressure to conform to a normative human experience.

But, his time in paradise is temporary, and once he makes it to the other side, he is reborn. His invincibility is removed, and he is mortal again but, back in the realm of the living, he is disillusioned with the human idealized form. Having witnessed several human-animal hybrids in death, he sees no way for those around him to replicate or maintain the idealized forms. He notes upon seeing the drawings of humanoid figures that he had found "the deep time when there was no difference between anything when separation did not exist when all things were together, one and whole before humans set themselves apart and became clever and made cities and kampanis and factories" (Sinha 353). Here, he has grown dissatisfied by the social

order that creates the human/animal binary and is unwilling to make the "choice" to become one or the other because to him there is no separation between the two.

I said at the beginning of this paper that Animal's death, taken literally, resists the environmental picaro. While he goes through the motions, when he awakes, he is still his animalized self, and he still has no social bonding dictating his place in society. Although after his resurrection he receives a letter informing him that money has been found to pay for his back surgery providing him the means to "fix" his back, he looks around Khaufpur and sees that the poisoned landscape is not miraculously cleaned, Ma Franci is not back from the dead, and were he to go through with it he would be left, "an upright human, like one of millions, and not even a healthy one at that" (Sinha 366). So, he doesn't go through with it. He uses the money to help Zafar, and free Anjali, a prostitute he had previously had sex with, from jail.

The archetype of the picaro, best articulated in *Lazarillo de Tormes*, has two distinct outcomes: you find your place in the social ladder, or you die trying. In its later reworking in the bildungsroman, they can become like Jane Eyre, from *Jane Eyre* and Tom Jones from *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, who are both orphans who miraculously find benefactors who makes them independently wealthy, thus successfully rising through the ranks and securing their place in the aristocracy. Or they become Jude Fawley from *Jude the Obscure* and Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*, whose attempts to social climb result in death and destruction. Animal does neither of these things, and instead, the narrative leaves us, the audience, with neither a corpse nor cure. He has no desire to "raise" his status to that of a human, using his found wealth to help others, nor is he permanently dead. He maintains the ability to continue his carnivalesque relationship with all those around him, moving between and through social hierarchies at will. He is then afforded a freedom that Jane Eyre and Tom Jones no longer have access to by the end

of their stories because their newfound responsibilities keep them locked in a stationary position. Jane Eyre must care for a disabled Rochester and be the good wife, while Tom Jones must oversee his newly inherited land and two small children.

Animal, on the other hand, looks around and deducts that were he to use his money for the intended purpose, to "rise" to the stature of human, he wouldn't be free. For Animal, his body is not confining, he can jump, climb, live, successfully without the aid of a humanoid posture and, having been disillusioned as to the necessity of being only human, he rejects the operation. When he has the opportunity to commit to the social structure he hesitates and recognizes that committing himself to the human form will not suddenly improve his life, but rather detract from his animalized identity that he's come to embrace. When he rejects the money, he asks his "eyes" how they would have responded to Elli's pleas for a cure. How did he respond? He sang, "I am animal fierce and free / in all the world is none like me" (Sinha 366) reiterating his motivations for refusing the operation. He is claiming his animalized identity, and, having been already disillusioned with the human other, is free to have his singularly unique existence. He brings his initial claim of "I used to be human once" (Sinha 1) to fruition, showing his individuality but not through any extraordinary means. Animal emerges free from the pressure to perform human-ness.

Animal is proud about being unique. Although he does think about going through with a specialist that Elli suggests because his disability prevents him from being a part of a community larger than himself. His realization that he wants to be himself causes him to refuse the "cure" to his animality. He was hopeful that he could no longer have back pain, but also that his body is not a broken one because his morphology is already "whole". When he rejects his prospective cure, he realizes that taking it removes his experiences out of his hand. If he needs a cure, then

Animal will “also have to agree that I’m wrong-shaped and abnormal. But let me be a quatre pattes animal, four-footed and free, then I am whole, my own proper shape, just a different kind of animal” (Sinha 207-208). And, Animal refuses to see himself as anything but equal to those around him. Animal accepts and reaffirms his disabled experience and identity because altering his experience would make him less of himself, and unable to adapt to new ways of knowing himself.

This is also true about his mental faculties. In the earlier section I noted how he had rushed to stay in the closet as it were, refusing to disclose he heard voices, except to Ma Franci and Elli. However, after his death, he accepts these voices as an innate part of his animal identity. In the beginning of the tape, when he is still introducing himself, he is post-death, retelling the story of how he “died”. This Animal tells the audience that “To deny what you do see and believe in things you don’t, that you could call crazy. Some believe in god whom they’ve never seen, who never says hello. In each other’s dreams we are all fucking fishguts. It’s better I speak these things to the tape” (Sinha 12). This is post-death Animal speaking. He is no longer pressured to hide his true nature, and, it seems in the quote, that he condemns the human need to hide such a thing and demonize the variable difference of hearing and seeing voices others do not see or hear.

V. Conclusion:

Animal’s life is admittedly easy to read as a metaphor. The most prominent features of Animal are his animality and everything from his name to how he walks on all fours shapes the reader’s perspective of humanity through the metaphor of an animalized human. Additionally, animality has been associated with the disabled other, especially the intellectually disabled

including mental illness or neuro-atypical behavior (S. Taylor 106). In being unable to walk upright and functionally unable to write out his narrative, Animal's story easily transfers into a metaphor for an oppressed people who are similarly unable to tell their own narratives. Animal himself can be easily recruited as a glyph to translate these modes of existing which are similar to, but also separate from, non-Western and non-human experiences. However, there is a material aspect to his disabled experience and the methodological limitations of a metaphor becomes an inadequate avenue for understanding his materiality. It is apparent that while Animal can represent the suffering of his nation, he is also intimately aware of his relationship with his body and those around him, in a way that no metaphor can properly demonstrate.

Animal's story demonstrates how disability can have no approximation because the metaphors utilized only serve to reinforce the dangerous tropes of disability. Taylor's *Beast of Burden* points to the limiting conceptualization of disability, particularly in animalized identities, as being intrinsically dangerous, contagious, or rooted in suffering. While yes, Animal's back does hurt, preventing him from standing upright, and he does not have the flexibility or dexterity of his human companions, he is not suffering or starving as a result of his disabilities. Instead, he is disenfranchised by the constant devaluing of the "animal" identity he has claimed for himself. He is not interested in anyone's pity or approval, and despite how others project onto him, he is not an abject object. Through Chen's notions of animacies which reconceptualize the question of human and nonhuman agency, we can put pressure on what it means to use agency, widening the threshold for resistance to a non-normative state. Animal may not extend a typical kind of agency directly resisting the social order, but in speaking his identity into existence, in reveling in his own identity, in partaking in the carnivalesque, in continuing to be Animal, the one and only, he presents an alternative mode for existing, different from, but not necessarily

oppositional to the normative human. Instead of the metaphor, Animal, read literally with his materiality acknowledged, breaks apart the essentialized parts of disabled characters reimagining the simplification, no matter how strategic, of abject personhood.

Also, in resisting the environmental picaro title that Nixon proposes, Animal's experiences can be taken seriously in a way that critics so far have not done. Animal provides the perfect catalyst for understanding disability in postcolonial discourse because he does not surrender his identity, his freedom, nor his desires in the name of social hierarchy. He freely critiques the imperial powers that caused his disabilities, but he does not deny himself an animalized identity or commit himself to the human/animal dichotomy, creating something new out of an abrasive environment. Similarly, he does not commit himself to a social hierarchy, freely floating between classes, races, and species with relative ease. Read literally, his thoughts and experiences are not shaded as positive or negative, but alternative to the ableist, anthropocentric model.

Animal is unique, though not extraordinary. He is not sanitized, cured, (permanently) killed, nor forgotten in his own narrative. He does not need nor want a prosthesis to "fix" everything others say is wrong with him nor does he need to be "cleaned" in some "hygiaesthetic" environment. It would only slow him down. Animal, at the heart of this novel, wants to be taken seriously, and have his animalized identity reaffirmed as a valid expression of the self, without needing to be coddled, patronized, or dismissed. He is not interested in being a heroic symbol, being held above others as some idealized body, nor is he interested in being useful to anyone but himself. Animal shows remarkable growth in his story, transforming from needing outward validation for his identity, to self-affirming his experiences as valid. He ends

the novel on his own terms, where he is neither the mouthpiece for Zafar's activism, nor transformed into the idealized human, nor is he dead. He is simply Animal, fierce and free.

Animal exists in the intersection of disability and postcolonialism. He recenters our understanding of both in the visceral, material life that he lives as a consequence of the neocolonial Company. He really cannot raise his head to stare you in the eyes, he really cannot straighten his corkscrew back, and he really cannot stop his auditory hallucinations from screaming so loud sometimes he can barely think. But, each of these deviances from the norm are a part of Animal. Forcing him to conform to a metaphor denies him his full identity, restricts his ability to come and go as he pleases, and ultimately, diminishes the various forms of agency he demonstrates throughout the narrative.

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