

## **Animal images: exploration of non-human representation in Dutch newspapers**

**Abstract:** The broad field of environmental ethics, animal welfare, animal liberation and animal rights literature indicate that all encounters between humans and animals are ethically charged. In this article I shall examine how environmental ethics, or animal welfare/rights/liberation literature translate into public media. The case study will delve into the representation of animals in the Dutch newspapers, using content analysis to provide an empirical basis for monitoring public opinion. Assuming that attitudes to animals are influenced by media coverage, the results of this case study will be brought to bear upon the discussion of representation of animals beyond specific national context.

**Keywords:** animals; content analysis; Dutch newspapers; environmental ethics

### **Introduction**

As stated by Kim Stallwood (2014), an author of books on the moral and legal rights of animals, the legal rights of animals, notwithstanding formidable challenges, are making progress in today's public discourse. A number of significant stages in development of environmental ethics can be emphasized that bare upon the present-day concerns with environment as a whole or its elements – habitats, species, or individuals within the species. An American author, scientist, and environmentalist Aldo Leopold (1949) has considered moral rights to species and to their habitats, assigning intrinsic values to as the entire biotic communities, thus developing the so-called 'land ethics'.

More restrictively, an American moral philosopher Peter Singer (1977) advocated the intrinsic value to all creatures that are able to experience pain and implied that human beings must justify their relationship with animals, avoiding needless suffering of sentient beings. In *The Case for Animal Rights*, another American philosopher Tom Regan (1983) is more selective and advocates the intrinsic value to all mammals including humans due to their supposed mental capacities that include the ability to have beliefs, memory and some kind of sense of the future. While Leopold (1949) in his so-called 'land ethics' assigned intrinsic value more holistically to species, habitats, and ecosystems, and the like, the scope of Regan's (1983) concern has a different locus of value, namely individuals of some species. Combining insights from Leopold and Singer, Holmes Rolston III (1997; 2015) argues for the intrinsic value beyond any human basis, embracing other species, ecosystems, and the biosphere. This extended view on the holders of intrinsic value is used to justify respect across species and time boundaries, as a political scientist Robyn Eckersley (1992) has emphasized.

In the broad conception, environmental ethics can be seen as being inclusive of animal rights, animal welfare and even animal liberation. While exhibiting many theoretical variations, particularly in regard to

the ‘unit’ of concern (entire ecosystems vs. species or individual animals), the broadly defined ecocentric perspective treats environment and people as part of the same whole. Notwithstanding theoretical differences between ecocentric scholars, animal liberationists, animal liberationists and environmental ethicists are on the same side sharing concerns about the entire ecosystem, and its elements: species and individuals within the species (e.g. Devall and Sessions 1985; Jamieson 1997; Kopnina 2014a; Rolston 1997; 2015). The concerns these various groups of environmental ethics scholars share range from the destruction of habitats to a dismal treatment of animals in the industrial food production system (CAFO’s), or in the medical industry (Crist 2012; Crist and Kopnina 2014).

Arguing that that all encounters between humans and animals are ethically charged (Jones 2000; Elder et al. 1998), some animal geographers argued for a radical reconceptualization of animals in the moral landscape (Matless 1994) and for including non-humans within the larger “geographical community” (Lynn 1998). But how does environmental ethic or animal welfare/rights/liberation ethic translate into public discourse? In an article tellingly titled *Animals in media: Righting the wrongs: The misrepresentation of animals continues when animals go to press*, biologist Mark Bekoff (2010) has reflected that while animals are ‘a hot topic these days but there are still problems with how they are represented in mass media’. Since the language we use to refer to animals informs our thoughts and perceptions of who they are and our thoughts and perceptions influence our actions, careful attention to animal representation in the media is warranted.

This article will explore environmental ethics theories in relation to the range of anthropocentric and ecocentric positions, and expand upon findings reported in author’s publications on environmental attitudes in The Netherlands (Kopnina 2013a; 2013b; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d). The case study will delve into the representation of animals in the Dutch media, for which the Dutch articles referring to animals published between January 2011 and December 2011 were analyzed and updated in 2015. Content analysis of newspapers is systematic, replicable technique for an empirical basis for monitoring (shifts in) public opinion (Stemler 2001). The results of the case study analysis will be examined through the framework of environmental ethics. Assuming that attitudes to animals are influenced by media coverage and that getting positive coverage can mean the difference between life and death (BBC 2007), concluding this study a number of recommendations for positive representation of animals in the media are highlighted.

### **Environmental ethics**

Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess has coined the term “deep ecology” to express the idea that nature has intrinsic value apart from its usefulness to human beings, and that all life forms should be allowed to flourish and fulfill their evolutionary destinies. Deep ecology’s proponents believe in the intrinsic value of each individual living organism, humans included, and of collectives such as species and ecosystems (Naess 1973; 1989). The deep ecologists often support ecological justice (or justice between species), as

well as – to varying degrees - sympathize with animal welfare and animal rights perspectives (Jamieson 1997). According to their critics, holders of shallow ecology perspective do not ask critical questions about the deeper causes of environmental problems in advanced industrial societies (Ophuls 1977; Devall and Sessions 1985). Ecocentric critics postulate that the environmental crisis calls for reconsideration of major political, economic and social systems as well as radical re-evaluation of human-animal relationships (Devall 1993).

By contrast, the “shallow ecology” (Naess 1973), which is more anthropocentric, focuses on environmental situation in as far as it is connected to the health and well-being of people, and object to overexploitation of environment when it concerns human beings, as in the case of pollution. According to the shallow ecology thinkers, moral consideration is exclusively confined to humans (Vincent 1992). In material terms, shallow ecology can be seen as demonstrating itself through instrumental use of environment, in a sense that nature is seen as a provision factory of cheap ‘natural resources’ or ‘ecosystem services’.

The role of animals at home and in the zoos can be seen through the anthropocentric values. For example, circus audiences are delighted to watch animals perform tricks, such as begging for food, sitting down, counting and so on: “The fair degree of anthropocentric arrogance on the human side makes us appreciate an animal’s ability to roll over on command more than its ‘natural’ talents such as a dog’s sensational sense of smell or a bird’s ability to fly” (Schunk 2011:6). On the other hand, it was also noted that zoos can play an educational role in which zoo visitors develop appreciation for animals through being in their presence (Vining 2003).

Many ecocentric thinkers view traditional cultures as supporting of non-anthropocentric worldview, arguing that the religions of indigenous cultures provide superior grounds for ecological ethics, and greater ecological wisdom (Taylor and Zimmerman 2005). Indigenous societies used to maintain the friendly animals that kept watch for predators (Serpell 1986; Ingold 1994).

Shepard (1996) argued that humans drew a distinct line between culture and nature at an early point in our history and that it is this recognition of differences between ourselves and other species that led to greater respect for animals. Yet, at present, “with the animals in our laps and our mechanized slaughterhouses”, Shepard (1993) has argued, “nature” has become much more distant. Vining (2003) reflected that this feeling of separateness ultimately led to a more sentimental attitude toward animals that is represented by increases in pet-keeping and animal welfare movements in modern industrial societies. Ogden et al (2013) has observed that within only a couple of decades, the once radical positions advocated by a diverse animal welfare movement have become mainstream. However, other authors felt that despite this newly found affection for animals, the mere scale of consumption and other use of animals by humans overrides individual cases of ‘moral progress’ in treatment of animals (e.g. Crist 2012). As stated by Stallwood (2014):

Notwithstanding significant challenges and noteworthy accomplishments, the impact to date of the modern animal rights movement on society's relationship with animals is limited. The present reliance upon a strategy emphasising personal lifestyle choice appeals only to a small minority. It is naive, even delusional, for the animal rights movement to believe that this present strategy of a moral crusade will persuade society and its representational governments to recognise legal rights for animals, including enforcement by the state with its legal apparatus.

Whatever the historical and cross-cultural perspective may be, many scholars agree that global forces of capitalism, industrialization and consumerism are affecting all communities, indigenous or not, and their attitudes to animals. Reflecting on these general trends, deep ecology calls into question the very basis of animal use for consumption and human industry, and highlights the value of non-human lives. While shallow ecology proponents may criticize violations of environmental justice in regard to unequal distribution of environmental risks and benefits among humans, concerns with ecological justice are rarely expressed, human exceptionalism is rarely criticized (Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina 2011; Kopnina 2012; Ramp and Bekoff 2015).

In shallow ecology animal death is often dismissed as nothing more than a cultural practice (such as whaling – e.g. Pountey 2011), or an annoyance (as in the case of “pests” – e.g. Thorne 1998) or economic necessity (as in the case of animals used for medical testing or consumption – e.g. Shepard 1993), or symbolic ritual (as in the case of animal sacrifice – e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1968). The extreme position in ecocentric thought is exemplified by Routney's 1982 paper 'In Defense of Cannibalism' which demonstrates the great gap between moral values assigned to the lives of humans and animals.

Eckersley (1992:33) notes that ecocentrism and anthropocentrism are “...the opposing poles of a wide spectrum of differing orientations toward nature” and there are a number of mixed values in between. Sometimes, anthropocentric and ecocentric concerns may overlap (Gough et al 2000), as in the case of climate change that can effect t both social and natural wellbeing, or in the case of preservation of rare plants that can be used for pharmaceutical industry. In other cases, since humans can do well without certain species, and be reasonably well sustained by monocultures of crops and cattle as well as synthetic medicines, the fate of species that are not directly beneficial to human welfare can be uncertain. Many species of plants and animals that are now extinct have gone unnoticed. Thus, some scholars have argued that the position of deep ecology or moral ecocentrism is *necessary* if the interests of non-humans and their habitats are to be protected. Thus, it was argued that nature advocates cannot afford to surrender to the easier argumentative route of shallow ecology (Eckersley 1992; Katz 1999; Crist and Kopnina 2014). In all their historical complexity, animals are not just surrogates for theory, but that ecological interconnectedness can provide “a greater sense of compassion for the fate of other life-forms” (Eckersley 1992:28).

### **Actor Network Theory and Multispecies ethnographies**

Actor Network Theory (ANT) argues that there is no *a priori* distinction to be made between humans and nonhumans, and that these distinctions are subject to change and negotiation (Whatmore and Thorne 1998; Healy 2007). ANT framework explores how animals and the networks in which they are embedded leave imprints on particular places, regions, and landscapes over time (Emel et al 2002). ANT approach can be illustrated by an ethnography of the contemporary international trade in kangaroo products by Lorraine Thorne (1998). Addressing the widespread popular images of “virtual” kangaroo hordes bounding across a vastly undisturbed landscape, Thorne (1998:168) pointed out that by casting kangaroos as large, abundant “pests” now repackaged to serve the lucrative project of eco-tourism, the kangaroo slaughter is thus rendered as a non-issue. Fueled by the taxonomy of abundance which feeds public acceptance of kangaroo slaughter, acceptance of animal death as unavoidable seems to be emanated in global contexts of advanced industrial economies. Criticizing the objectification of animal ‘other’, in her ethnography of the roadkill in North America, anthropologist Jane Desmond (2013) examined the numerous rhetorical strategies in public discourse that are mobilized to render invisible this enormous amount of animal carnage presented as collateral damage.

In her pioneering work involving comparative cultural analyses, economies of animal bodies, and the cultural specificities of human-animal relations, Donna Haraway (2003, 2007) announced the “species turn” in her own discipline of anthropology. This turn takes “species” as a grounding concept for articulating biological difference and similarity between humans and animals. Haraway’s (2007) moral vision encompasses all animals, from ‘designer’ pets to trained therapy dogs, all of which are bonded in “significant otherness.” In Haraway’s words, “If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism, then we know that becoming is always becoming with—in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake” (2007:244). Haraway furthermore suggests that animals are not just good to think with (they are not here just ‘good to think with’ as a well-known American anthropologist Lévi-Strauss 1968 has formulated it), but also good to live with. Animals are social beings after all to be treated as integral parts of human society, at least from a multispecies point of view.

The ANT framework, however, with its focus on social construction and metaphors of place, is devoid of the engaged element and does not go far enough in exposing power imbalances in representation of animals. In part influenced by ANT, multispecies ethnography (ME) has emerged at the intersection of three interdisciplinary strands of inquiry: environmental studies, science and technology studies as well as animal studies (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010). ME recognizes species turn as well as what Ogden et al (2013) characterize as “animal turn”, which they see as compelling many of us to consider animals as “subjects with rights,” a social movement that has reshaped the ways we think about animal cruelty and our daily practices of consumption. ME recognized relations emerging from nonhierarchical alliances, and intermingling as well as interconnectivity of all species (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010:546). Multispecies ethnography was linked to broader currents within academia, including in the biosciences, philosophy, political ecology, and animal welfare activism (Ogden et al 2013).

Yet, neither multispecies ethnography, nor insights from the ‘species turn’ or ‘animal turn’ were used for content analysis of public media. We shall now return to the question posed in the introduction: how does environmental ethic or animal welfare/rights/liberation ethic translate into public discourse

### **Case study: Content analysis of Dutch newspapers**

The case study reported in this article expands on the study presenting newspaper content analysis conducted in 2011 and reported in the earlier article (Kopnina 2014b). The author has also conducted an update study in 2015. Five newspapers were selected for the content analysis, including four subscription newspapers (NRC/NRC Next, Het Parool, De Volkskrant, De Telegraaf), and one free newspaper, Metro. In 2015 all five newspapers were also available online. The newspaper topics involving animals, animal-related organizations, or human-animal relationships were examined by using the broad categories of keywords (e.g. animals, environment, nature) or concrete terms (species’ names, or organizations/institutions concerned with species or animals). The organizations concerned were either particularly targeted at animal welfare, animal rights, or broader environment and habitat protection agencies. Governmental organizations and environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGO’s) such as Party for the Animals<sup>1</sup>; Milieudefensie or Dutch Friends of the Earth (<http://www.milieudefensie.nl/english>), Faunabescherming or Fauna Protection (<http://www.faunabescherming.nl/>) and the Dutch branch of World Wide Fund for Nature (<http://www.wnf.nl/>).

Word frequency counts were used to identify words of potential interest. Consequently, a Key Word in Context (KWIC) search was used to test for the consistency of usage of words. Qualitative research software NUD\*IST was used to pull up the sentence in which that word was used so that the word could be seen in specific context. The main topics were clustered into the topic categories, or a group of words with similar meaning or connotations (Weber 1990:37). Newspapers surveyed in 2015 involved internet search using the same keywords used in 2011.

### **Topics in 2011 and 2015**

Short explanations of each topic discussed in April 2011 are provided below in alphabetical order, with updated information available at the time of writing (April –May 2015). These topic explanations are followed by frequency distribution table:


- Animal Ambulance (Dierenambulance) AA: was established in 1978 by a volunteer and grew into a large volunteer organization in the nineteen eighties, becoming Central Animal Rescue Foundation in 1980. In 2011 the organization was still largely volunteer-based, having over 100 staff ranging from veterinarians to police and administrative workers, and works together with subsidizing agencies and animal welfare NGO’s. The animal ambulance provides first aid to injured and sick animals transporting them to the nearest veterinarian or clinic. At the


time of writing this article, Dierenambulance has edited a magazine detailing its work: <http://www.dierenambulance.nl/magazine/Boekje-Winter-2015.pdf>. Newspapers mostly discussed the role of veterinarians, including humorous opinion articles (e.g. NRC 2011a); as well as double standards in spending time and money on pets' welfare and yet eating other animals (Van Hintum (De Volkskrant) 2011). At the time of writing this article, Metro (2015a) reported that because of the high costs of veterinary clinics, pets are often left to die.

- Animal Defense (Dierenbescherming) AD: The Animal defense with nearly 200,000 followers (members, donors and volunteers) is the largest organization in the Netherlands that represents the interests of all animals: pets, farm animals, wildlife and laboratory animals. One of the topics that came up often was AD's campaign to protect geese from being shot (e.g. NRC 2011b) or the case against an artist Katinka Simonse who tortured or killed animals for her expositions (e.g. De Volkskrant 2011a). At the time of writing, Dierenbescherming had prohibition of wild circus animals on its agenda (e.g. De Volkskrant 2015a).
- Animal Medical care (Dierenkliniek) AM: Clinics and veterinarians providing medical care to animals nation-wide through local offices. AM is a broad subject category that included reported medical incidents, as well as attitudes involving animal welfare (e.g. Metro 2011a). At the time of writing, De Telegraaf had an online Dierenkliniek column (<http://www.mijndierenkliniek.nl/algemene-informatie/mijn-dierenkliniek-in-de-telegraaf/>)
- Animal Police (Dierenpolitie) AP: Also known as animal cops, AP is a special department of the Dutch police to fight animal abuse, to render assistance and to prevent animal sufferings. The animal cops were officially certified on December 2, 2011 by the Security and Justice minister establishing a new department within the Dutch Police Corps. In 2011, this institution involved 500-strong animal police force. At the time of writing, the continuity of Dierenpolitie was uncertain (Het Parool 2015a; Metro 2015b).
- Animal Welfare (Dierenwelzijn) AW: Animal welfare refers to the physical and psychological well-being of animals. The term animal welfare can also mean human concern for animal welfare or a position in a debate on animal ethics and animal rights. This was a general topic discussed in some Dutch media publications, with a number of specific subjects, including 'seal kindergarden' or zeehondencreche. Particular attention was paid to financing as well as questions of logistics of volunteering the working with orphaned baby seals (e. g. Het Parool 2011a; Schreuder (NRC) 2011; De Telegraaf 2011a); and accidental death of seal on the road (e. g. De Volkskrant 2011b). Some newspapers also reported on seal hunt in Canada (e.g. Metro 2011b; De Telegraaf 2011b). **[Insert image Seals]**. In 2014, the public online opinion platform has published an article by Ruud Tombrock, of World Animal Protection organization, reflecting that economic wellbeing in The Netherlands seems to consistently win

over animal welfare concerns (Tombrock 2014). Anti Dierproeven Coalitie (ADC) (<http://www.stopdierproeven.org/nl>), or anti –animal- testing coalition, has voiced their concerns about medical testing on animals, particularly in the case of induced heart attacks used on Labrador dogs in the research hospital in Maastricht, which was reported in De Telegraaf (2014) and Metro (2014, 2015c).

- Biological/organic/free-range meat BM: Biological/organic meat (sometimes designated as ‘natural’ meat) refers to different ways in which animals are kept and meat is produced, manufactured and handled. Organic (in Dutch, ‘biologisch vlees’) is normally defined as such by certifying bodies. Natural meat generally refers to food items that are not altered chemically or synthesized in any form. Organic meat distinguishes itself from free-range because animals are given organically grown food, which is grown without pesticides or fertilizers. Free-range and organic animals are less exposed to antibiotics than those in factory farming, and no growth hormones are used. The animals are allowed to come out in runs or in the pasture. That they can move more noticeable in the flesh; better blood circulation and firmer. In addition, the young animals stay longer with their mother. Certifying bodies such as Milieukeur varkensvlees (for pigs), Demeter (often combined with EKO-certificate), PROduCERT (for free-range, both pigs and beef), Label Rouge en Loué (EKO-) or Skal (organic, for chicken), as well as various supermarket labels (<http://www.knsnet.nl/pages/663>). Most newspapers surveyed discussed whether biological/organic/free-range meat was healthier for consumption, and in some cases whether indeed it had a positive effect of animal welfare. Het Parool (2011b, 2011c) reported in a number of articles on the growing market in organic meat. At the time of writing this article, newspapers were discussing the results of research Wakker Dier (‘Awake Animal’ organization that is concerned with animal welfare) about the possibility of phasing out cheap meat (De Telegraaf 2015a).
- Controlling ‘wild’ populations CW: Means and regulations to control or exterminate wild animals (deer, Canada geese, etc.) population. In 2011 one of the largest subjects was wild geese. In 2011 nature and conservation organizations, as well as environmental management organizations Natuurmonumenten, Staatsbosbeheer, de Vogelbescherming, De21Landschappen en Landschapsbeheer Nederland, have concluded in report titled Ganzen-8 that there are too many wild geese in The Netherlands and they have to be shot. De Telegraaf (2011c) reported on the ‘plague’ of geese in Den Helder and a measure involving covering geese eggs with oil so that the shell does not allow oxygen penetration and goselings do not hatch. De Volkskrant (2011c) reported on ‘innovative methods’ to address ‘problems with geese’ through employment of dogs by farmers and hunters. De Volkskrant (2011d) also reported on how hunters have concerns about their ‘image’ as they were supposed to shoot 100.000 geese

during the tourist season in Friesland. Other wild animals whose populations needed to be ‘controlled’ or ‘managed’ were deer and horses , especially in a nature reservoir Oostvaardersplassen in which the animals were shot to prevent slow death of starvation (NRC 2011d; Het Parool 2011e). The issue involved a well-intentioned rewilding initiative (<http://www.rewildingeuropa.com/tag/oostvaardersplassen/>) when non-native grazers were introduced on a small piece of conservation land without connection to other land where they could migrate and without natural enemies. 1093 animals died in the winter of 2009-2010 of starvation and 793 animals died in 2011 (e.g. Het Parool 2011f). Despite popularity of the nature film De Nieuwe Wildernis (<http://hollanddefilm.nl/de-nieuwe-wildernis>) about this area, there was some protest platforms against the ‘rewilding’ method in Oostvaardersplassen (<https://www.facebook.com/antiovp>). Some media has commented how starvation was part of a natural process (e.g. NRC 2010), with many discussions of whether shooting animals was a more humane solution than letting them starve. Similar issues are recorded in other small protected areas where herbivores were placed, e.g. Kennemerduinen and De Veluwe. The ‘management’ of herbivores continues in 2015 (e.g. Metro 2015e; De Volkskrant 2015b).

- Public hygiene and animals PH: All matters related to public hygiene and animals. This item was related to CW but normally involved smaller animals. ‘Pests’ included insects in the hospitals (e.g. NRC 2011c) and rats (e.g. Het Parool 2011d). In 2015, pigeons (e.g. Het Parool 2015a) and sea gulls (e.g. Metro 2011c) were also identified as sources of urban irritation.
- Pets and their owners PO<sup>1</sup>: Topics related to pets and their owners, often related to topics listed above. Some articles on specific types of pets (most commonly, cats and dogs), others on particular type of issues such as pet obesity (e.g. Zoebel (NRC) 2011), or general positive effects of pet-keeping (e.g. Metro 2011c). In 2015, the additional topics were new pets allowed to be kept (NRC 2015a), as well as inappropriateness of some animals such as raccoons as pets (De Telegraaf 2015b), pets used in medical testing (e.g. De Telegraaf 2015c).
- Road kill RK: Animals that have been killed by vehicles. In 1998, De Volkskrant reported that it is estimated that between 5 to 10 millions animals die on the roads. These include mammals, amphibians, birds and insects,  (De Volkskrant 1998). Remarkably, aside from a previously mentioned seal (De Volkskrant 2011b), there were practically no articles on the subject 2011. In 2015, a few incidents of killed seals were reported (e.g. NRC

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<sup>1</sup> This category was found to overlap too much with categories AA, AM, AD and AW and was excluded from final analysis.

2015b; De Telegraaf 2015d). De Telegraaf (2015e) also reported roadkill of wolves in Germany.

- Animal Ritualized Slaughter (Kosher/Halal) RS: The ritual slaughter (RS) of animals was the largest topic discussed by newspapers in 2011. The ritual slaughter is normally practiced by Muslims and Jews and normally involves the use of sharp knife to slit the animal's throat causing the loss of consciousness and draining the blood (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/shechitah.html>; <http://www.al-islam.org/islamic-laws-ayatullah-ali-al-husayni-al-sistani/slaughtering-and-hunting-animals>). In most cases, the animals are not stunned (offered anesthetic) prior to slaughter. The controversy arose particularly out of concern of the Party for the Animals or PvdD (Partij voor de Dieren<sup>2</sup>) proposed a ban on ritual slaughtering of animals for consumption, which was backed by a majority of the parties who are favoring a ban on the ritual slaughtering (<https://www.partijvoordedieren.nl/standpunt/onverdoofd-ritueel-slachten>). Some articles in the newspapers examined reflected on the moral questions on inflicting pain on sentient beings on the one hand, and cultural sensitivities (particularly for Muslim and Jewish practitioners of RS) on the other hand. About 2 million animals are ritually slaughtered in The Netherlands each year. Many articles commenting on RS used derogatory terms in representing the debate as marginal rather than a 'real' or 'serious' issues, such as political instability, economic uncertainty, and questions associated with employment, energy, and migration policy. The majority of published articles reflected on proceedings around the case, with the Party for Animals being the most vocal opponent in the case (e.g. Metro 2011e; NRC 2011e; Het Parool 2011g; De Telegraaf 2011d; Timmermans (De Volkskrant) 2011). The articles included frequent remarks on how for the first time the Muslims and the Jews were united in their protest, and implications of the debate for political parties (e.g. Soeters (De Volkskrant) 2011). While the case has continued throughout the years, with attempts to stop anaesthetized ritual slaughter being blocked and then re-appealed in different courts, and PvdD has not given up the fight (<https://www.partijvoordedieren.nl/kamerinitiatieven/initiatiefwet-onverdoofd-ritueel-slachten>), little publicity on the subject was found during the time of writing.

Other, less discussed topics that appeared in the newspapers in 2011 included animal rights activism, discussed particularly in negative light, discussing the protest actions and arrests of 'radicals' from groups like Ongehoord [Unheard] (<http://www.ongehoord.info/>) and unorganized activists (e.g. Het Parool 2011g; De Volkskrant 2011d). Little of it was mentioned in 2015, aside from the mention of PvdD protester being assaulted by the farmer during the action at the farm (Metro 2015f).

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<sup>2</sup> PvdD had two seats out of over one hundred total seats in government in 2011

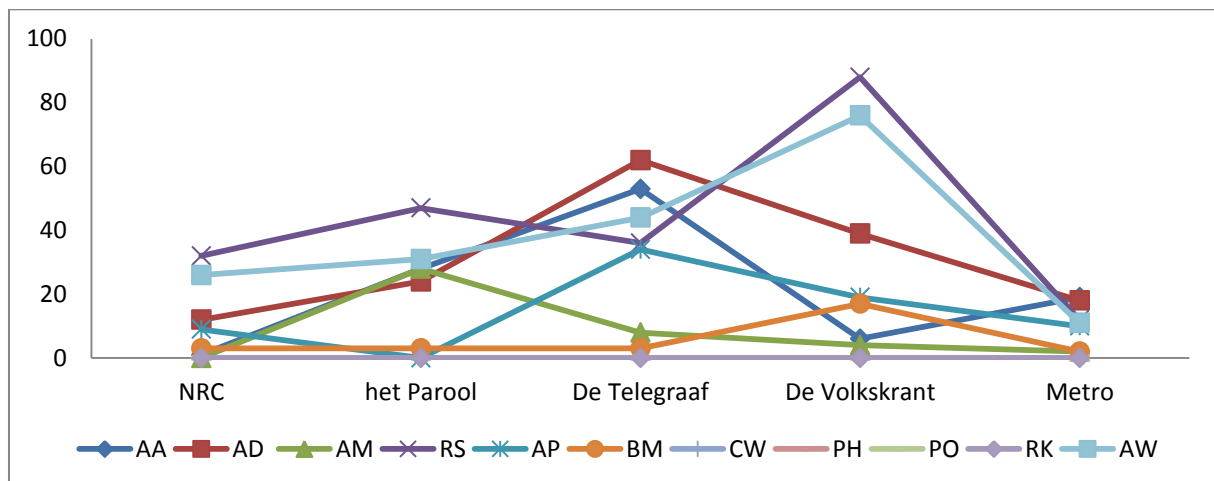
Another subject involved zoos, with a number of ‘trivia’ facts reported about animals in Dutch zoos, as well as a number of stories of ‘ending the suffering’ of sick or injured zoo animals such as a monkey (De Volkskrant 2011e) and an elephant (Het Parool 2011i). The issue that has not been discussed by the sampled newspapers (but was discussed by other sources) was the euthanasia of healthy ‘excess’ animals in Dutch zoos (<http://eoswetenschap.eu/artikel/euthanasie-op-overtolligedieren-ook-bij-ons>). In 2004, for example, De Volkskrant has reported the euthanasia of healthy baboons in the Amersfoort zoo. The case involved 15 male baboons that were considered ‘excessive’ (Volkskrant 2004). At the time of writing, De Volkskrant had a special section on international and domestic zoo ‘news’ (<http://www.volkskrant.nl/alle-nieuws-over-dierentuinen/>) but not mention of euthanasia.

The topic frequency is represented in Table 1 below. Table 2 identifies topics per newspaper.

**Table 1. Topics per newspaper 2011**

	<b>NRC</b>	<b>Het Parool</b>	<b>De Telegraaf</b>	<b>De Volkskrant</b>	<b>Metro</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>AA</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>AD</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>AM</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>RS</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>AP</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>BM</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>CW</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>PH</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>PO</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>RK</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>AW</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>188</b>

**Table 2. Topics per newspaper**



## Reflection

While it is hard – if not impossible – to generalize about ethics considering a vast body of media addressing environmental, nature, and particularly animals, as well as broad variety of angles, positions, perspectives, and opinions involved, some general points can be made. One such general observation is that the discussion of animals in Dutch newspapers is not limited to The Netherlands, and while local interest topics are discussed, many discussions are either geographically (e.g. roadkill in Germany), or thematically (ritual slaughter of animals, as this concerns multi-ethnic communities) cross territorial or cultural boundaries. The more geographically ‘removed’ subjects are linked back to the Dutch reality through articles that discuss animal welfare, animal rights, and ethical considerations in relation to animals. More ‘local’ subjects (e.g. Oostvaardersplassen or Veluwe, that Dutch commuters can see easily from the window of the passing train with the large herbivores roaming the grassy territory), or semi-mobile subjects (e.g. migratory birds, such as geese) also often bring in more general media reflections on subjects ranging from rewilding to hunting.

Another observation is that the subjects most discussed are the ones most directly connected to people’s experience with animals, or cases in which political, emotional, or ethical issues are involved (for example, BM, because meat production also touches on health concerns as well as raises ethical questions; or RS, because ritual slaughter involves religious and political considerations). Since most of the media articles examined domestic or farm animals, rather than wildlife, they can be seen both as expressions of ecocentric (since animal welfare extends beyond human well-being) and anthropocentric (since pets and farm animals are used for human purposes) concerns. What is more surprising is that some newspapers seem to pay more attention to these experiences than others. For example, NRC and NRC Next seem to be generally less involved with animal topics than Metro, Het Parool, or De Telegraaf, unless it concerns a high-profile political case.

The surprising lack of attention to the issue of the roadkill (RK) - also observed in North America (Desmond 2013), or the very scale of animal consumption and objectification – reflected upon by Crist (2012) and Haraway (2003, 2007) leads to a more general reflection on theoretical framing of animal victimhood, especially in the context of public perception as revealed through media. While a number of ethical frameworks could help in outlining the struggles between humans and animals to create their “places,” livelihoods, the case study representation fails to notice is the overtly anthropocentric, instrumental, extractive, and at times violent nature of human and animal interaction. Some of the issues associated with CAFO’s, political marginalization of the Party for the Animals (PvdD), instances of slaughter of ‘urban pests’ such as geese, do find their way into the media and by implication, public perception, reflecting on the growing concern with animals in media and beyond. A systematic and ethically consistent way of looking at nature or animals, and human relationship to species or individuals within species, however, is presently not in evidence.

Employment of environmental ethics in exploring human and animal relations in this case also leads me to reflect that the overarching ‘grand theory’ of Leopold’s (1949) Land ethics or Rolston’s (1997; 2015) ecocentrism seems hardly applicable to a more particularistic interest given to animals in the media. Recalling that while Leopold assigned intrinsic value to larger units, that could be collectively termed ‘land’, ‘environment’, or ‘nature’, the scope of Regan’s concern was individuals of some species. Regan’s concern with some animals and less with others seems reflective of the media’s (and by extension, it is possible to hypothesize, public) concern with, for instance, Labradors used for medical experiments over, for example, rats. It appears that overall conception of the ‘big picture’, of animals as part of biotic communities, as part of the ‘whole’ escapes public attention.

Recalling the Actor Network Theory (ANT), which argues that there is no *a priori* distinction to be made between humans and nonhumans, related to the content analysis of the media articles, it appears that the distinction between humans and animals is in fact is made very clearly. While the scope of this article does not allow for detailed analysis of a social aspect of ethics in the Dutch media, it is safe to say that while the issues of social equality and justice appear to be taken for granted in the public discourse, equality and justice between humans and other animals is hardly discussed. Even in the context of discussion of humans helping animals (animal ambulance, animal clinics, animal police, animal welfare), the human mastery over animal fate is often taken for granted. The *coup de grâce* in relation to sick animals in zoos, presented as a merciful stroke putting a fatally wounded animal out of misery (and thus possibly economizing on veterinary costs) seemed to be normative in descriptions of zoo animals. ‘Euthenesia’ of healthy zoo animals or instances of roadkill were hardly discussed. Such treatment of animals indeed resembles what Schunk (2011) meant by “anthropocentric arrogance”.

In a similar fashion, multispecies ethnography (ME) discussed in the introduction, considering animals as “subjects with rights,” and supposedly reshaping the ways we think about animal cruelty and our daily practices of consumption (Ogden et al 2013) seems to find little reflection in the media articles. Broadly stated, while concerned with the fate of individual animals, much of the Dutch media coverage examined here seems to be blind to systematic human exceptionalism. Animals are also often linked to social, economic, religious, or political agendas.

There is rich literature on the evolution of public morality in regard to humanity as a whole and groups within the society, which lies outside the scope of this article, but it would be safe to make a general observation that *social* concerns are widely reflected in the Dutch media. This a historically and culturally unprecedented shift in recognition of the grievances of the previously discriminated minorities, as well as rights and entitlements of all individuals, signals hope that one day a similar consideration can be made in the case of all earth’s citizens, within and beyond media. As Stallwood (2004) has stated, it will be society that will determine if animals deserve rights and not the animal rights movement. Acceptance of the land ethics (Leopold 1949) or the moral significance of all species (Singer 1977; Rolston 1997; 2015) or even some animals (Regan 1983) might be a long way in coming, but judging from the media analysis in The Netherlands, the promise of progress in public perceptions is already present.

## **Conclusions**

As stated by Stallwood (2014), the animal rights movement is making progress in public opinion and public policy. However, at present it fails generally to decrease the number of animals consumed; persuade people to go vegan; convince governments to pass meaningful legislation; and challenge fundamentally society’s attitudes toward animals. Moral and legal rights for animals are currently beyond the reach of the present animal rights movement, public perception as witnessed by the media. In a more negative interpretation, strategies in public discourse are mobilized to render morally invisible the animals that are being consumed as food in a highly mechanized and efficient process of production; ‘removed’ as urban pests or killed in road accidents. To recall Bekoff’s (2010) reflection on animals in the media, it is remarkable that given the enormous amount of press animals are receiving “we should expect that these who write about animals represent them as the beings who they are, not as who we want them to be or as objects to be used for our own ends. Nonhuman animals deserve better”.

More optimistically, the context analysis testifies to continuing public interest in animals, ranging from animal welfare to more complex relationships including politics, morality and religion in connection to nonhumans. One can hope, that just as the perception of humanity as a whole, with

associated idea of human rights, human dignity, and respect for people of all creeds have led to non-discrimination legislation in most world countries, the same ethical inclusion could one day happen in the case of animals. The shift in public perception – at least in some countries, and in ideal, if not entirely in practice, has led to making racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination publically unacceptable – and in fact made this a matter of taken for granted public morality very much reflected in the Dutch media.

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<sup>i</sup> PvdD manifesto states: ‘After two centuries of animal protection it is high time that far-reaching restrictions are imposed on the use of animals. All too frequently animals are still regarded as objects, which are always subordinate to human interests and may also be used for all those interests. Even if it takes place in a sustainable fashion, the exploitation of animals and their biotope has unavoidably negative consequences for the animals and almost always ends with their demise. Each kind of interaction with and use of animals should, therefore, be continually subject to a careful weighing-up of the gravity of human interests and the consequences for the animal. The moral justification for compromising their welfare decreases as human interests become less imperative and the consequences for the animal more damaging....With this approach, the use of animals for non-essential human interests can be reduced and precluded altogether. It is evident that this applies to the production of fur, circuses, bull-fighting, angling and other animal-unfriendly forms of entertainment that involve animals. Religious and cultural traditions that compromise animal welfare should also be modernised in this regard. Indeed, traditions are not unchangeable phenomena, but may be adapted over the course of time in relation to new attitudes and moral norms as they have always have been in the past....There should also always be an ethical assessment of the different interests of humans and animals with respect to the use of laboratory animals and animals bred for human consumption. Due attention should also be devoted to the use of alternatives to animal testing and animal produce in this regard. The development and application of these alternatives can, therefore, also be regarded as an ethical necessity for humankind (<http://www.partyfortheanimals.info/content/view/303>).