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Denial: A Sociological Theory

Christina Nadler
The Graduate Center, City University of New York

DENIAL: A SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the

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of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Denial: A Sociological Theory

by

Christina Nadler

Advisor: Lynn Chancer

This dissertation develops a theory of sociological denial through an investigation of contested

social problems. I begin by reviewing the literature on denial, both sociological and

psychological, in order to situate the project and exemplify the relevance and need for a

sociological theory of denial. Then, through examining three scales of the social, I account for

multiple layers of the social structure and denial's place in each. These scales are the sites at

which denial happens: geographic, cognitive, and unconscious. I explore five contested social

problems through varied paradigms that allow me to analyze each scale of the structural. I thus

look at settler colonialism, Israeli apartheid, mass incarceration, industrialized animal slaughter,

and environmental destruction, each through a sociospatial, sociomental, and psychosocial

paradigm. I then turn to five organizations that seek to address these contested social problems. I

explore their mission statements and campaigns to analyze how they are already engaging with

sociological denial and how they could do more. The conclusion offers suggestions for how

structural denial can be confronted, emphasizing the need for sociologists and social movement

actors to give more weight to the psychosocial, alongside the already prevalent sociospatial and

sociomental perspectives.

Acknowledgments

Denial: A Sociological Theory

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Chapter One

Introduction

In February 2014, the Barnard Center for Research on Women began a dialogue series called "No One is Disposable."[1] In a conversation between activist Reina Gossett and legal scholar Dean Spade, Spade argues that when it comes to crime, poverty, and mental illness, the dominant approach in the United States is to attempt to hide the problems away in order to try to "live in a world where [we] don't have to see that kind of thing."[2] Spade and Gossett connect this directly to prison, which they then connect to the larger societal structure and its problems. Prisons come to stand for what we, as a society, do not want to deal with, paradoxically masked as a solution to the problem. Many social problems, though, are masked by myths of social progress. Supreme Court decisions on gay marriage distract from police brutality and the persistent murder of trans people, particularly trans people of color. Inequality has not gone away. Consider, for example, how slavery shifted into Jim Crow, and with a black president in office there were comparable rates of police shootings of black people as there were lynchings during the Jim Crow era.[3]

The conversation between Spade and Gossett sparked in me a realization that so much of what we deal with as sociologists is related to denial, though it is not often addressed as such. Denial becomes more than a social problem itself; as denial is implemented, ironically, to "deal" with other social problems, it becomes ingrained into the fiber of society as a structural arrangement. In this dissertation, I take up how sociologists might examine denial in far greater social and philosophical detail by highlighting how it appears in many sociological literatures, specifically literature that addresses space, classification, and the unconscious. Using cognitive sociology as a model—a theoretical orientation that as Zerubavel details in "Generally

Speaking," encourages tapping disparate examples to investigate patterns[4]—I look for patterns of denial in seemingly disparate settings, including industrialized slaughter, settler colonialism in the United States, Israeli apartheid as it relates to the United States, mass incarceration, and environmental destruction. I also focus on social disagreements over these examples, which creates contention over who and what is being denied. Yet, as I argue overall denial is itself structured into society at all levels, from its physical geography to its cognitive classification systems to the collective unconscious.

METHODOLOGY

In this theoretical dissertation, I draw on a pair of methodological frameworks: feminist methodology, in which the position of the observer in relation to the observed is emphasized, and social pattern analysis. Both methodologies influenced how I approached the subject of sociological denial as well as my selection of the cases I explored. As a feminist sociologist, I place myself in my work and use sociological tools to organize my own experiences and "situated" knowledge as an activist working on issues brought up in this dissertation. Again, and in addition, social pattern analysis as detailed in Zerubavel's significant "methodological" essay "Generally Speaking"[5] provides the second framework around which I have organized the ensuing sociological, philosophical, and theoretical investigation. I discuss both methodologies in greater depth below.

First, I used feminist methodology to identify cases insofar as—drawing on the work of Reinharz, Haraway, Hill Collins and Harding, among others—I begin with where I am "situated" in the world.[6] According to Reinharz, for example, a relationship constantly pervades how observers/researchers view that which is observed/researched and needs to be spelled out. Feminists like Reinharz explain that because no work can be value free, our methodologies must

acknowledge this fact and work from this position. Thus, I take it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage that I am familiar as an activist with five cases: mass incarceration, industrialized animal slaughter, environmental destruction, settler colonialism in the United States (the process where colonizers came to a land and remained on the land), and Israeli apartheid.

Second, though, with respect to social pattern analysis, I have selected these cases precisely because they are at once similar and different. Similarly, I contend that each involves denial but that they do so in quite varying ways: questioning climate change and forgetting animal slaughter (when eating meat) are extremely divergent examples, even as I argue that common aspects of sociological denial are involved across these instances. This is where social pattern analysis is relevant as a method that values the use of disparate examples in cases, like denial, where recurrent themes would otherwise be hard or impossible to discern from only one case or from more obviously equitable instances.

This brings me to what is also, and relatedly, a central reason for selecting the major examples on which this dissertation focuses. The five topics to be discussed share three selection criteria. First, in each of these cases, there has been contention within and without the social problem; at least two sides of debate emerged. Second, a given problem may be a very old one (such as colonialism), but contemporary instantiations recur as with the settler colonialism and Israeli-Palestinian examples. Third and finally, each of my examples has spawned contemporary social movements precisely because of debates about whether and in what way social denial has occurred. Below I take up each of these three points in turn. Though countless other examples could have been discussed, especially with the results of the 2016 election making past social denial more obvious, the differences in these cases have allowed for the similarities to become more analytically meaningful.

Contention

Contention emerges when defining a social problem. What is a problem? When discussing denial, this question becomes quite complicated. Indeed, the contention I have used as a criterion is about this very question: Is there even a problem? Is, for example, mass incarceration a problem? Because this is a sociological project, this is a conceptual—not moral—problematic. And the argument must follow regardless of whether one morally agrees. Therefore, I do not proceed with this work making an argument that, say, incarceration or eating meat is wrong. Rather, I identify a series of consistent principles related to violation, which I explain below, that are articulated from the social movement side of the contention. These violations are at times themselves denied—claimed not to be violations. And at other times it is denied the violation is unjust. The latter denial becomes more complicated to confront sociologically than morally. For the purposes of this dissertation, I return to the criteria indicated above: again, one important reason for selecting the cases is contention exists on whether it is in fact an "issue."

To elucidate this problem, let me turn to industrialized animal slaughter. Of the five issues I take up in this dissertation, one might say that this is the most contentious in the sense that many do not recognize a problem with the situation of industrialized animal slaughter. If the reader does not see the relevance of an analysis of the production of meat, it is this very opinion that makes it relevant—because other people feel the relevance to social conditions very strongly. The same might be said for a reader who thinks prisons are necessary to lock away bad people; prison abolitionists feel the opposite very strongly. Like the paradox of denial—knowing and not knowing—the examples I take up in this dissertation are all problems for some and not problems for others. In this work I focus not on whether or not the social movements or

mainstream society are morally justified in their claims but rather how and why the claims are made.

The central condition of this first criterion, contention, is that certain claims about violations are being made. Generally speaking, claims made by social movements are claims of violation of rights to spatial and bodily autonomy. These are moral and not legal rights, for in all of these cases the violations are legally permissible. This condition accentuates the contention because society itself has deemed these actions acceptable, yet not everyone agrees. A cow does not have the legal right to her life or her bodily or spatial freedom. But social movements would claim that she has a moral right. Those convicted of a crime lose legal rights over their own bodies and freedom of movement. Social movements claim this violates a moral right. Palestinians in Gaza do not have permission to move freely, to either leave or stay on their land. With international laws possibly exempted, Israel has the legal right to produce these conditions of limited bodily and spatial autonomy, but social movements claim they do not have the moral right to do this. Though the Dakota Access Pipeline may move forward with legal authority, native tribes, veterans, and many other social movement actors have claimed an injustice, a moral wrong. And most destruction of the environment is perfectly legal, though social movements would claim that it is nonetheless *wrong*, or morally unjust, and ultimately violates the autonomy of the earth itself and the bodily and spatial freedom of those inhabiting this earth (which is everyone) when humans continue to suffer the effects of climate change.

Of course, many other social movements exist that I do not discuss, and as much as they may articulate the movement as a struggle over a social problem, the contention does not exist in the same way. Seeking to end rape and rape culture is also very important to me as a feminist scholar-activist, but I do not discuss it in this dissertation because unlike the other cases, rape is

illegal. This, however, points to an important consideration—producing change in the laws alone, or even what people are "allowed" to say in mainstream discourse, will not be enough to end the conditions. Though rape is "on-the-books" illegal, the culture at large still seems uncertain about whether or not rape is morally wrong. There is contention, but it is not the same contention; though rape persists, the discourse is not a question of whether it should persist as a social necessity.

Contemporary Instantiations

The second criterion for the examples discussed in this dissertation is that, even though many of the issues date back for centuries, these are contemporary instantiations. For example, the colonization of North America by settlers dates back to 1492 but the struggle is not over, and there are still contestations over the rights of indigenous people, for example in the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the rights over the Standing Rock territory. The struggle between Israel and Palestine dates back thousands of years depending on the perspective one takes, though the more contemporary issues began at the end of World War II and continue today through the expansion of Israeli settlements. The destruction of the earth has been in the works for hundreds of years, though the severity and rapidity of climate change brings the issue to intense relevance at present. Though the eating of meat is not new, the industrialized factory setting of meat production and animal slaughter is recent and has been fine-tuned through technological advancement. Under the Obama administration, prison reform entered the mainstream discourse after decades of prison expansion that created mass incarceration, as opposed to incarceration, which is a new phenomenon, with a new struggle, and that brings me to the third criterion.

Social Movements

A related social movement is a necessary condition of the examples because contention necessitates (at least) one side fighting the dominant narrative, led by social movements. In the penultimate chapter of this dissertation, I explicitly take up this criterion and how social movements have come up against and struggled with social denial in these issues. Social movements are tasked with creating change, and they must do so in the face of denial. To investigate how social movements try to create change despite the social fact of collective denial, I explore the documents and campaigns of five organizations, each taking up one of the five issues discussed in the previous three chapters. I look at textual documents to find common arguments and critiques. Specifically, I explore the work of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Greenpeace, the Vera Institute for Justice, Stand with Standing Rock, and the United States Coalition for Palestinian Rights. There are many other organizations and collectives addressing these issues, but my reasons to choose these large ones for the purposes of this study are as follows. All of these organizations are national or international, are recognized as key players in the social movements for their respective issues. Though environmental concerns and indigenous rights overlap, particularly with the pipeline threatening the environment and indigenous sovereignty, I have primarily tried to select organizations that are not intersectional, in the sense of taking up more than one cause at a time.

Social Pattern Analysis

With its origins in classical sociology (particularly Simmel, continuing through Goffman and many other sociologists) *social pattern analysis*,[7] a term coined by Eviatar Zerubavel, explores general forms and patterns of varied cultural and historical situations. Though not oblivious to individual and situational differences, social pattern analysts are more centrally

concerned with articulating generalities and near universals. Using this as a mode of inquiry, one decontextualizes findings from specific contexts. What is unique about social pattern analysis is that it allows a researcher to engage deeply with specific contexts and still speak generally about social patterns. Within this theoretical project, I use this method to articulate how denial operates on many different levels of social interaction. I can thereby traverse varied examples, moving through how denial manifests itself in myriad ways. As with patterns in the real world, there are slippages and leaks between them, but the typologies developed through social pattern analysis serve as a helpful hermeneutic for examining the complexity and depth of denial in Western society. Consequently, I use this method to theoretically investigate denial.

Because this methodology requires the identification of patterns, which become identified through the process of theorization, at the start of the investigation it may not be clear exactly how the pattern will unfold. Indeed, the theory of denial I articulate in this work was not known until after the process had begun. In developing theory, the sociologist may see a pattern—perhaps even just unconsciously—only to identify it explicitly in the end. Social pattern analysis allowed me to see patterns that allowed me to identify denial's function at three levels—geography, classification system, and unconscious aggression.

CONTEXTUALIZING DENIAL AS SOCIOLOGICAL

Two books to date have been written on denial as an explicitly sociological phenomenon. These theorize denial as their central focus rather than a special type of denial like climate change. Here I focus on these two works but expand my analysis on the general literature on denial in the literature review that follows. Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial*[8] and Eviatar Zerubavel's *The Elephant in the Room*[9] lay the groundwork for taking up denial as a social pattern. Zerubavel focuses on conspiracies of silence, and Cohen is most concerned with

bystanders to atrocities and genocides. Though both provide a small but substantive literature with which to converse, my approach differs in significant ways. For the kinds of denial I will take up in this dissertation, the concept of the bystander alone will not be as useful as it was for Cohen. For instance, one does not typically speak of bystanders to climate change. Though atrocious, climate change is not an *atrocitiy* in the general sense of the word. The examples I will take up in this dissertation are more complicated—a cheeseburger, for one, cannot be talked about as an atrocity, but it still arguably involves sociological denial.

In this dissertation I also shift the chronology of denial farther back than Cohen and Zerubavel; both are focused on the things people "know" are wrong and why they do not act. I want to know why society creates these environments so that one *does not have to* act. I am much less concerned here with the aberrant than I am with the ordinary. While Cohen and Zerubavel focus is on the exceptional, I focus on the mundane. Consequently, rather than viewing only specific problems of denial, I see denial itself as a key aspect of the structuring of society. Through examining patterns of denial, I was able to identify three mechanisms of sociological denial—comprising my theoretical approach to denial—and to which one chapter is devoted. These mechanisms—physical distancing, cognitive classification, and unconscious aggression—all have related methods of analysis that I call, respectively, sociospatial, sociomental, and psychosocial.

I thus also look more to the workings of the unconscious as an explanation than do Cohen and Zerubavel. Neither takes the unconscious as a significant sociological problem that must be thought of in sociological terms, referring to primarily the cognitive aspects of denial in culture. In addition to expanding the discussion of sociological denial to the unconscious, I also explore

how denial is manifested materially, in space. This analysis facilitates engaging the question of the creation of physical and psychic environments that allow for denial.

MECHANISMS OF DENIAL

In this dissertation I focus on three key mechanisms I have identified through social pattern analysis and through which social denial is produced and maintained: physical distancing, cognitive classification, and unconscious aggression. None of these is complete on its own; denial is always partial, as it can never be complete or it would cease to be paradoxical. In other words, one must always have a balance of partial awareness and partial ignorance, which are produced through the three mechanisms. Physical distancing requires spatial separation: the built environment is constructed to make it so that members of a community, culture, or society do not have to see certain things; in fact, space is often arranged so that it is impossible to see things simply at will. However, not everything is separated physically, and things are not always hidden, so there must be other ways to account for denial. Cognitive classification produces denial in another way. Even when a given society can see what they have geographically been cut off from, they can and do use categories to divide the world into "us and them" categories. The cultural and cognitive production of the "other" does much work as a mechanism of denial to separate those one cares for from those one does not. However, though categories may be necessary to human sociality, oppression based on categories need not be. So how can the production of not just any "other" but the hated "other" be accounted for? This is where the unconscious mechanisms of denial come into play. This mechanism of denial helps to illuminate what might be left out of the categories, i.e., why we might collectively and unconsciously want others to suffer. This mechanism can be so ephemeral that the structural issues may not be fully visible, which points back to the first mechanism—the actual structure of society. These three

mechanisms then work in tandem, cyclically, to produce and maintain denial at the structural level.

<center>PARADIGMS FOR ANALYSIS OF DENIAL</center>

To address the three mechanisms of denial identified, I employ three paradigms of analysis that target each mechanism at the relevant scale of society: the sociospatial, the sociomental, and the psychosocial. Each paradigm has strengths and limitations. The sociospatial paradigm helps demonstrate that the social structure is constructed to produce certain conditions, but it does not account for the ideological. For example, it does not explain why the structure is produced this way; it focuses on the fact *that* social structure is produced this way. The system becomes a Durkheimian *social fact*, without awareness of the ideological justifications that create the system. For such further insight, I turn to the next paradigm, the sociomental. This paradigm helps to understand the division of the world into categories: even when one can physically see things, one's cultural categories of cognition sometimes prevents "seeing" them—they are placed out of a cognitive framing of the world, or *hidden in plain sight*, as Eviatar Zerubavel might say.[10] What the sociomental does not explain is change—it can be a static paradigm in some of the same ways the sociospatial paradigm can be, focusing on *that* things are a certain way instead of *why*. The final paradigm, the psychosocial, complements the first two with an analysis that goes deeper into the *why*. Denial is a paradox of knowing and not knowing, and thus this complexity must be accounted for with some kind of understanding of the unconscious to piece together the possibility of both knowing and not knowing. Yet this psychosocial paradigm does not provide the same possibility for empirical evidence that a sociospatial or sociomental framework would; I thus use all three in this dissertation.

<center>-11-</center>

I have selected these three paradigms not just for their contribution to the study of denial but because together they offer a comprehensive view of the social world. Each paradigm is grounded in the perspective of a particular classical theorist, namely, Marx, Durkheim, and Freud. Together they illuminate denial in different but overlapping ways. My aim is to work through the advantages and disadvantages of each, focusing here, in the introduction, on the larger approach to studying that particular scale of sociality and, in the later chapters, exemplifying the strengths of the paradigms by using them to analyze a mechanism of denial.

Sociospatial

A materialist analysis drawing from Marx requires any examination of social processes to start with the material world—to look at material conditions and understand the reciprocal experience of how humans shape the world and how they are shaped by the world. Marx, as a historical materialist, starts with the material to keep his theory grounded in actual conditions. In *Capital Volume 1* Marx begins his analysis with the commodity; this is because commodities can be touched, felt, and seen, in contrast to something like money, which is a representation.[11] Ultimately, Marx follows the materiality of the commodity to make the argument for class struggle. In this way, he begins with an incontestable fact—the materiality of the object—on which he grounds the whole of his argument. Using a materialist theory can help to illuminate social problems by grounding the argument in the materiality of the cases that concern the present study. People are incarcerated, locked in cages. Animals are slaughtered en masse on brutal factory farms. Black people are gunned down and murdered by the police. The climate is rapidly changing. Israel continues to develop settlements on Palestinian land. Mass social action needed to be taken to halt the Dakota Access Pipeline from being built through sacred Native American land.

I also start with Marx because he reminds his readers to begin with what they can experience through their senses, what they see or touch, and, in relation to denial, what they do not have to see or experience. This is what leads me to consider geographic and spatial relations. Thinking of materiality as being inextricably linked to the social world prompts scrutiny of how the world is divided—the material actualities of social divisions. Whereas for Weber, class might be more connected to cognitive understandings of status, for Marx, class boundaries are a material distinction and labor a material practice. Marx states that,

> Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature.[12]

Our labor is not just a manipulation of the built environment but a true engagement where the relationship is reciprocal. Humanity is not apart from nature; humans' truest calling is to allow nature to shape humanity. Labor creates people as much as people create things out of their resources.

Labor, for Marx, is species being, people's calling to engage as humans in the world; it is the perversion of labor under capitalism that makes capitalism so monstrous. Labor is the purest form of engagement with the world, and capitalism changes those terms, denying what kind of lives individuals should and could be living. As Marx observed, "At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials."[13] Under capitalism, this is constrained— workers are alienated from their species being, and we find no purpose in their labor. In turning

species being into wage labor under capital, capitalism makes a move to deny that people have

this call to labor and engagement outside of the constraints of capitalism. Capitalism is premised

on the denial of species being.

In "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," Marx makes clear how much loss there is

under capitalism:

> So much does labour's realization appear as a loss of reality that the worker loses reality
> to the point of starving to death. So much does objectification appear as a loss of the
> object that the worker is robbed of the objects most necessary not only for his life but for
> his work. Indeed, labour itself becomes an object which he can get hold of only with the
> greatest effort and with the most irregular interruptions. So much does the appropriation
> of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the worker produces the fewer
> he can possess and the more he falls under the dominion of his product, capital.[14]

Social actors become estranged from themselves in capitalism, but capitalism, along with what

Marx calls political economy, "conceals the estrangement."[15] In not recognizing what a society

loses in capitalism, social subjects deny the loss exists, cannot grieve it, and build denial into the

structure of the society. I call this paradigm and method of analysis, informed by Marxism, the

sociospatial paradigm because I focus on space as the specific instantiation of materiality.

Sociomental

Althusser picks up where Marx leaves off, providing a groundwork for thinking through

the superstructure, whereas Marx was focused more on the base. Althusser bridges this transition

from sociospatial analysis to the sociomental paradigm. Though Althusser is a Marxist, his

expansion of the confines of materiality of traditional Marxism to include ideology is helpful

here for seeing the dialectical relationship between the sociospatial and the sociomental.

Whereas Marx focused on the conditions of production, Althusser uses ideology to understand

the reproduction of society. To understand denial, it is necessary as well to understand how to

reproduce a society that is based on denial. Here the paradox of denial begins to be visible—the

society reproduces conditions that its members both know and do not know they are reproducing. As Althusser paraphrases Marx, "Every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year. The ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production."[16] By the reproduction of society, I mean here the reproduction of a system built on putting things out of sight—what the sociospatial analysis accounts for—but that system must be reproduced over and over again, with some conscious intention. So the question of this next scale of analysis is, how is it possible to see things and still keep them out of mind? To whom, to what, where, and when do individuals pay attention and when are they able to turn that attention off?

In the Marxist language of Althusser, a move from sociospatial analysis to sociomental is a move from the base to the superstructure:

> We can therefore say that the great theoretical advantage of the Marxist topography, i.e. of the spatial metaphor of the edifice (base and superstructure) is simultaneously that it reveals that questions of determination (or of index of effectivity) are crucial; that it reveals that it is the base which in the last instance determines the whole edifice; and that, as a consequence, it obliges us to pose the theoretical problem of the types of "derivatory" effectivity peculiar to the superstructure, i.e. it obliges us to think what the Marxist tradition calls conjointly the relative autonomy of the superstructure and the reciprocal action of the superstructure on the base.[17]

In this approach to understanding society, Althusser leads into a different sociological tradition, Durkheimian analysis. Although Durkheim and Althusser have different conceptions of society, their views are similar in terms of the production of the individual. Althusser states that "throughout this schema we observe that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every 'subject' endowed with a 'consciousness' and believing in the 'ideas' that his 'consciousness' inspires in him and freely accepts, must act according to his ideas', must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice."[18]

Like Althusser, Durkheim intricately connects society with individual consciousness to produce an understanding of how consciousness is shaped by the social world: "The consciousness of society, moreover, is not of a different nature from that of the individual. The latter is also produced by a coalescence of elementary consciousnesses (*consciences*), of representations or impressions which are concentrated in a more or less definite self (*moi*); it is a 'coalesced whole' like the social consciousness."[19] As if Durkheim were finishing Althusser's argument, presented earlier, on the reproduction of the means of production, he says that "society can exist only if it penetrates the consciousness of individuals and fashions it in 'its image and resemblance.'"[21] The shift in focus is from material and geographic divisions to how these divisions manifest cognitively, for material divisions are often porous; there is always a cognitive trace that cannot be hidden completely. Durkheim provides the tools for grounding this cognitive understanding of denial in his initial articulation of the sociological production of the self. For Durkheim, the social world produces members of a society as individuals and shapes their mental lives.[22] The social realm, and more specifically the collective, come to shape what is normal in the production of the social world. Durkheim argues that even spatial and temporal divisions are of social origin: "To dispose things spatially there must be a possibility of placing them differently, of putting some at the right, others at the left, these above, those below, at the north of or at the south of, east or west of, etc., etc., just as to dispose states of consciousness temporally there must be a possibility of localizing them at determined dates."[23] A Durkheimian perspective then provides a richer analysis of the social world, and of denial specifically, by balancing the spatial analysis with that of cognition. Cognitive sociology, via a sociomental analysis, helps demonstrate how these material divisions reflect in social consciousness—from these material divisions comes an even more solid cognitive division into "us" and "them."

Psychosocial

Durkheim's position that mental life is produced through society recommends a look, as well, at how to account for the social production of the unconscious. I now move dialectically beyond the conscious to consider how the unconscious is also socially structured. All of Freudian theory relies on the idea that the unconscious is structured through social interactions, be they as macro as civilization or as micro as an infant being fed. The self, including the unconscious, is a social production.

We see evidence of the social development of the self, not only in Durkheim but in Freud as well, particularly in his *Three Essays*. From the earliest stages of development, all aspects of the psyche are constructed in relation to the social environment. This is a unique feature of the human species—other mammals are born less premature than humans and thus do not have the same opportunity for social development. The premature birth of humans, after only three and not four "trimesters," is foundational to understanding how members of the species are produced as highly social beings. Unlike a calf, for example, who can be somewhat self-sufficient after birth, walking minutes after being born, human infants are completely dependent on the social environment they are born into—as Freud recognized.[24]

The first seeds of sexuality, as the foundation of the individual psyche, can be seen in infancy. One example is the autoerotic act of thumbsucking: Although autoerotic, it is a socially produced act. This behavior "is determined by a search for some pleasure which has already been experienced and is now remembered." This memory is of the "most vital activity" of being fed. The development of the infant is necessarily social; they must be cared for to survive. Sexuality, and thus the self, emerges from a social interaction with a caregiver, the biological drive to be

fed, the pleasure of the erotogenic zones of the lips, and the memory of the pleasure of this interaction.[25]

The unconscious development of individuality and agency is again produced through biosocial and psychosocial processes. Once the infant progresses out of the first stage of autoerotic sexuality, the next stage is also equally a balance between the biological and social, further demonstrating that they cannot be thought of separately. "Like the labial zone, the anal zone is well suited by its position to act as a medium through which sexuality may attach itself to other somatic functions."[26] This well-suited medium for sexuality functions such that an individual child may express control over their body by defecating on their own terms. This expresses the child's willful compliance or disobedience to social order, but of course these are not consciously formed thoughts in young children; this happens unconsciously.

For Freud, the biology of the body and the materiality of the environment are inseparable from the social world and the psyche. He offers to sociology an analysis of the individual that is grounded not only in the social environment but also in the materiality of the body. This illustrates the thread between the three scales of society—the sociospatial, the sociomental, and this psychosocial level of the unconscious. Psychosocial frameworks can shed light on denial in different ways. Though most psychoanalysis is still targeted toward individual psyches, I maintain that psychoanalysis is always inherently a sociological project because the unconscious exceeds the individual subject and is produced by, and inextricable from, its social conditions. Thus even as I turn to psychoanalysis in the final paradigm, my argument remains structural and macro.

These three paradigms help to construct a more complete picture of denial than in the previous sociological literature on the subject; the spatial, cognitive, and unconscious ways in

which people make classifications and push things out of mind and physically away must be understood. The chapters of this dissertation will include an integration of cases and theory within three mechanisms of denial that all work in tandem.

DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

The ensuing Chapter 2 offers a literature review on the topic of denial. Because exploring denial as an explicitly sociological phenomenon is still a relatively new undertaking, I explore denial as it has been written about in varied different contexts. In doing so, I underscore the importance of this unique articulation of sociological denial, and I situate the dissertation in relation to a larger literature.

In Chapter 3, I take up denial as it is manifested through physical distancing whereby problems are hidden away. This kind of denial is often presented as a way of dealing with the problem but is in fact a mode of avoidance. I use literature on space and geography to develop a Marxist sociospatial paradigm to analyze physical distancing. Through exploration of the five contested social problems, I identity patterns of distancing through containment, exclusion, and elimination. One example of distancing, which I discuss in depth in Chapter 3, is use of mass incarceration in the United States. Rather than confront the social conditions that lead to racism, poverty, and addiction, society criminalizes entire populations of people and locks them away in cage-like structures, i.e., prison cells. Prisons are often physically removed from populated areas in rural areas with small-town populations. Jails are often not in communities either. Presenting a notorious example, New York City's Rikers Island. Here, jailed members of society are physically moved to an island that exists only as a jail. There are exceptions to this "out of sight, out of mind" mentality, though, and the rest of Chapter 3 explores the limits of spatial analysis.

In Chapter 4, I turn to mechanisms that allow people to continue to keep distancing themselves from injustice even once it is in their minds. It explores denial through cognitive classifications of the way the "other" is produced and divided among categories. This includes and yet goes deeper than geographic divisions. In the social production of "us" and "them," we ("us") are able to distance ourselves from the "other"; such distancing is often used in order to deny their oppression. I trace patterns of othering through ideas of dominion, cultural identity, and dehumanization. A historical example is the production of a racialized other to justify genocide of Native Americans and slavery; such denial facilitated the colonization of the Americas and the labor to develop the American economy. In a more contemporary example, the production of the "criminal other" justifies incarcerating huge percentages of black and brown people. Having now talked about the geographic and material structures as well as the phenomenological structures of consciousness, I next consider more deeply the unconscious structures.

The third mechanism of denial is examined in Chapter 5. Here I examine why it is unfortunately not sufficient just to bring awareness to problems—because it is possible to both know and not know at the same time. Awareness and ignorance are paradoxically compatible systems of thought. To explain this paradox, I draw in this chapter from psychoanalytic literature to examine unconscious aggression, which I argue is central to denial—in contrast to other theories that would maintain denial is about avoiding displeasure. I look at examples of cruelty in society, from the torture of solitary confinement to genocide. Particularly, I focus on the construction of the self and the state, good/bad binaries, and disavowal. By doing so I make the argument that part of the split that happens in denial is that people are ambivalent, culturally, about the suffering of others because they have unacknowledged aggression.

In the Chapter 6, I then turn to five organizations to explore claims of social movement actors explicitly. As mentioned in the methodology above, I look at the work of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Greenpeace, the Vera Institute for Justice, Stand with Standing Rock, and the United States Coalition for Palestinian Rights. I analyze their campaigns to see how their work connects to my study and how and why (or why not) they are taking up denial in implicit or explicit ways.

Because the topics covered in this dissertation are hard to process, their circumstances allow them to so often push deeper down in their psyches, out of their lives and consciousness. This dissertation's conclusion takes up the process of confronting denial and what social actors will have to do to confront structural denial. The conclusion also makes the argument that more psychosocial analysis is needed in sociology, particularly in the study of social change, because it is necessary to understand how the unconscious is related to the social world. Those who are concerned about social problems such as those addressed by the organizations analyzed here must accept the paradox of denial, that one both knows and does not know that one participates in these structures of oppression—and even more difficult to bear, that the same individuals both want and do not want these structures to exist. Only in moving past the fantasy that the world is just, can we start to make it so.

Notes

[1] Reina Gossett and Dean Spade, "No One Is Disposable: Everyday Practices of Prison Abolition," Barnard Center for Research on Women, February 7, 2014, video, 1:04:05, accessed July 15, 2016, http://bcrw.barnard.edu/event/no-one-is-disposable-everyday-practices-of-prison-abolition/.

[2] Gossett and Spade, "No One Is Disposable."

[3] Isabel Wilkerson, "Mike Brown's Shooting and Jim Crow Lynchings Have Too Much in Common. It's Time for America to Own Up," *Guardian*, August 25, 2014, accessed July 15, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/25/mike-brown-shooting-jim-crow-lynchings-in-common.

[4] Eviatar Zerubavel, "Generally Speaking: The Logic and Mechanics of Social Pattern Analysis," *Sociological Forum* 22, no. 2 (June 2007): 131–45.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2003), 81–102; Sandra Harding, ed., *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2003), 103–126.

[7] Zerubavel, "Generally Speaking."

[8] Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

[9] Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[10] Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Social Structure of Irrelevance* (Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[11] Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (1867; repr., London: Penguin Classics, 1992).

[12] Ibid., 283.

[13] Ibid., 284.

[14] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 72.

[15] Ibid., 73.

[16] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 135–136.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 167–168.

[19] Emile Durkheim, *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society*, ed. Robert N. Bellah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 13.

[21] Durkheim, *Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society*, 149.

[22] Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

[23] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (1912; repr. New York: Free Press, 1995).

[24] Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, rev. ed. (1905; repr. New York: Basic Books, 2000).

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 51.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Whole societies are based on forms of cruelty, discrimination, repression or exclusion which are "known" about but never openly acknowledged.

—Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial*[1]

In this chapter I review much of the existing literature on denial. In examining denial as a psychological concept, I have limited the scope to psychoanalysis, focusing on both Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud and contemporary readings of their work. Though denial is very relevant to Sigmund Freud's work, he has no explicit examination of the concept, and the reader can only make inferences through related concepts such as disavowal and repression—however, it should be noted that in the translation to English, the broadness of the original German term becomes narrowed. His daughter, Anna Freud, however, does explore denial explicitly in her analysis of defense mechanisms. After I present the psychological background, I turn to sociologists who have theorized denial as a sociological concept; in particular I focus on the work of Stanley Cohen, Eviatar Zerubavel, and Kari Norgaard. Following this, I move to outline specific cases of denial that scholars have examined. I conclude by showing how my work moves beyond the previous literature.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DENIAL

I begin this section with Freud, who used the German terms *Verneinung* (negation) and *Verleurgnung* (disavowal), though both can be translated as denial. Sacerdoti and Semi explain that Freud intended *Verneinung* to express a repression that had been brought into consciousness in a disguised form.[2] "Thus the subject-matter of a repressed image or thought can make its way

into consciousness on condition that it is *denied*. Negation is a way of taking account of what is repressed; indeed, it is actually a removal of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed."[3] This is a preconscious process, in contrast to *Verleugnung*, which is an unconscious defense mechanism that facilitates the disavowal of external reality. If one is experiencing *Verleugnung*, the unconscious disavowal prevents *Verneinung* from occurring in the preconscious. It is only in later psychoanalytic work, after Freud, that these two concepts become more generalized and understood as "denial," without the specific meaning of negation or disavowal. In "Fetishism," Freud does note an important aspect of denial—it is active and not passive: "In the case we are discussing, on the contrary, we see that the perception has persisted and that a very energetic action has been exerted to keep up the denial of it."[4] And in "Negation" he adds, "To deny something in one's judgement is at bottom the same thing as to say: 'That is something that I would rather repress.'"[5] It is important to note that even though there are distinctions among all the concepts, they do not operate in isolation. Chayes points out that repression and denial assist each other. Chayes also argues that one might in fact think of repression as a vicissitude of denial.[6]

Anna Freud takes up denial more explicitly through her analysis of defense mechanisms, among which is denial. She states:

> Psychoanalytic investigation of the problems of defense has developed in the following way: beginning with the conflicts between the id and the ego institutions (as exemplified in hysteria, obsessional neurosis, etc.), it passed on to the struggle between the ego and the superego (in melancholia) and then proceeded to the study of the conflicts between the ego and the outside world (cf. the infantile animal phobia discussed in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*). In all these situations of conflict the person's ego is seeking to repudiate a part of his own id. Thus the institution which sets up the defense and the invading force which is warded off are always the same; the variable factors are the motives which impel the ego to resort to defensive measures. Ultimately all such measures are designed to secure the ego and to save it from experiencing unpleasure. However, the ego does not defend itself only against the unpleasure arising from within.

In the same early period in which it becomes acquainted with dangerous internal instinctual stimuli it also experiences unpleasure which has its source in the outside world. The ego is in close contact with that world, from which it borrows its love.[7]

For Anna Freud, denial is a reaction to an external danger or unpleasure, whereas repression is a reaction to an internal dilemma, and "struggling with instinctual stimuli."[8] Denial is not, for Freud, a neurosis but a normal part of ego development. It is natural to seek an escape from painful external reality, though in healthy development, children grow to have more agency in their world and their psyche and thus should not need to engage in defense mechanisms to the extent the younger child must. "Instead of perceiving the painful impression and subsequently canceling it by withdrawing its cathexis, it is open to the ego to refuse to encounter the dangerous external situation at all. It can take to flight and so, in the truest sense of the word, 'avoid' the occasions of unpleasure."[9]

These psychoanalytic conceptions of denial are important not only for their own field but also for sociology. I turn now to how sociologists have developed a sociological conception of denial.

SOCIOLOGICAL DENIAL

In this section I use the work of Stanley Cohen, Eviatar Zerubavel, and Kari Norgaard to show how sociologists have developed a theory of denial. Much of this work is in the subfield of cognitive sociology, focusing on how culture shapes human processing and perception of the world.

States of Denial

Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial* is the first book to explicitly lay out a sociological conception of denial. Cohen states, "Whole societies are based on forms of cruelty, discrimination, repression or exclusion which are 'known' about but never openly

acknowledged."[10] In this work, Cohen is specifically concerned with human rights violations and how to make bystanders to suffering and atrocities begin to work toward acknowledgment and action.

Cohen understands denial as a paradox because it is only ever partial.[11] He defines denial as "a statement about the world or the self (or about your knowledge of the world or your self) which is neither literally true nor a lie intended to deceive others but allows for the strange possibility of simultaneously knowing and not-knowing. The existence of what is denied must be 'somehow' known, and statements expressing this denial must be 'somehow' believed in."[12] He argues that it is necessary to understand denial as a paradox, but many applications of the concept, outside of psychoanalysis, miss this crucial aspect. For Cohen, a guiding definition of denial can come from psychoanalysis, particularly Bollas: it is the "need to be innocent of a troubling recognition."[13]

Cohen identifies types for multiple forms of denial. Literal or factual denial is outright denial—"that did not happen." Interpretive denial is denial that admits an event occurred but refuses to interpret the event in a particular way—"yes that happened, but it wasn't like that." Implicatory denial admits that an event occurred and was intended in a certain way but that it does not matter that it happened. In all of these forms, Cohen argues, denial manifests cognitively, emotionally, morally, and through (in)action.[14]

In addition to the different forms of denial, there are multiple levels of denial and multiple temporalities. Denial can be personal, official, or cultural and can be historical or contemporary. Personal denial is what individuals do in their personal lives. Official denial is when a government officially rewrites history—"this event did not occur." Cultural denial differs from official denial, though they are both macro forms of denial. Cultural denial is not official

but consists of culturally agreed-upon "unknowns." All of these forms of denial can occur about past events that are either "forgotten" or overtly denied (historical denial) or can manifest in the present (contemporary denial).[15]

For Cohen, the antidote to denial is acknowledgment. Acknowledgment is a deliberately multidefinitional concept distinct from knowledge, though how exactly it is distinct remains unstated. Knowledge would be part of denial—the knowing to the not-knowing—and it is therefore insufficient to combat the problem and paradox of denial, "How to convey a reality that cannot be denied."[16] Acknowledgment is meant to transcend the paradox to a deeper knowing that would cancel out the "not-knowing." This acknowledgment remains individual, however, an individual resistance against cultural denial. In other words, Cohen posits solutions to denial as though it were additive—many individuals in denial—but does not have solutions for collective denial—denial that exists as a social fact, beyond just the sum of individual denial. Cohen asserts the need for collective acknowledgment but struggles to articulate acknowledgments beyond the level of the individual. "It is your human right not to have to face the truth about yourself; you can create your favourite fiction and live in blissful self-deception and bad faith. At the political level, though, we simply cannot tolerate states of denial. There is no room for compromise. Even if truth telling is not a value in itself, denial *must* always affect others."[17]

His suggestions to combat denial include giving money to organizations that fight for human rights, a benign form of channeled acknowledgment. Cohen says "let them give in peace" but does not acknowledge how channeled acknowledgment can still perpetuate denial. For example, "I donate to Amnesty International and now I am exempt from other responsibilities." He also suggests other tools to combat denial, such as bystander intervention trainings, much in the way first aid and CPR are offered as courses for the general public.[18] He also discusses the

possibility of making literal denial illegal as a possible remedy. The point of these interventions, however insufficient, is to begin to address that "the gap is between concern and action" because people are generally concerned and compassionate but lack resources for action.[19] Though Cohen struggles with a solution to the problem, the true contribution of his book is to lay out the problem of denial as a sociological concern.

Elephants in the Room

Eviatar Zerubavel's work on denial begins with his interest in cognitive sociology, attention, and irrelevance. In his book *Social Mindscapes* one can find the seeds of his more explicit later work on denial. He states that

> when we exclude certain parts of reality from our attention and concern as irrelevant, we do so not just as human beings but also as social beings. In other words, it is usually as members of particular thought communities that we ignore certain things. It is our social environment that normally determines what we attend and ignore. In helping set the horizons of our attention and concern, it is often society that defines what we consider relevant.[20]

Using cognitive sociology, Zerubavel uncovers the social dimension to what people do and do not perceive and what social beings process as relevant information.

As Zerubavel begins to take on denial explicitly, first in an article and later in a book, both called *The Elephant in the Room*, he lays out the social organization of denial. The elephant in the room is a concept that serves as the social equivalent of denial.

> What makes the metaphor of "the elephant in the room" so evocative is the choice of such a large animal. Unlike a grasshopper on a twig, which we are unable to notice because it is so well camouflaged that its outlines practically blend with the surrounding background, the elephant has a commanding visual presence that is objectively unavoidable. Thus if we manage not to notice it, it can only be as a result of a deliberate act of ignoring, since naturally it would be practically impossible not to notice it! Not noticing an elephant, in other words, involves blindness to the obvious.[21]

From this theory of *elephants*, Zerubavel develops a theory of social conspiracies of silence. Similar to the psychoanalytic perspective, Zerubavel highlights that the process of silence and denial is active, not passive. This is particularly true because what is denied is often "beg[ing] for attention."[22] This point is crucial to why Zerubavel uses the elephant metaphor—these are not subtle matters that are overlooked, they are "highly conspicuous" and require much social and cognitive work to avoid.[23]

Through his analysis Zerubavel identifies *rules of denial*. These include attention, ignoring, irrelevance, taboo, and tact.[24] These rules are not just followed by individuals but are social processes of what could be called "co-denial."[25] The rules of denial are actually cognitive and behavioral skills. Attention is shaped by not just one's physical capacities and senses but by one's social environment, and it changes culturally and over time. Through the cultural shaping of attention, we *learn to ignore*. Once individuals know how to ignore, they use this tool to shape what is relevant. While it might be important to notice the outfit one is wearing, one is socialized to know that the color of the buttons is largely irrelevant. More strict rules about ignoring come in the form of taboo—prohibitions on what is allowed to be seen and on what information the social actor should take in. Tact is what Zerubavel identifies as the milder form of taboo, consisting of subtle guidelines for polite social engagement rather than the strict prohibitions of taboo.[26]

From these socially produced rules, Zerubavel turns to the social system to further examine conspiracies of silence. Proximity to the elephant, and time around the elephant affect the likelihood of participation in a conspiracy. There is more pressure the closer one gets, and the longer one is nearby. But it is not just intimacy but also "formal relations and the social environments that foster them (such as bureaucracy) . . . [that] are more likely to discourage

openness and thereby promote silence."[27] And unlike ordinary secrets, the more people involved, the stronger the conspiracy.

Zerubavel's development of a specifically cognitive sociological understanding of denial has been instrumental in pushing forward a sociology of denial. Kari Norgaard draws heavily from Zerubavel to develop a specific analysis of climate change denial while further developing on Zerubavel and Cohen's work.

Living in Denial

Norgaard expands on the work of Cohen and Zerubavel through an ethnographic study of a Norwegian town to uncover the social structure of denial and develop a theory that is relevant to the United States as well as Norway. What Norgaard does that Cohen and Zerubavel do not is explicitly bring in the relation between political economy and denial.

> Why and how middle-class and wealthy people perpetuate environmental problems is as important to the field of environmental justice as critical White studies is to the field of race, or masculinity is to the study of gender. For people of color living on low-lying Pacific islands or struggling from flooding in New Orleans, the key questions of the moment may be how to effectively organize to bring attention to their plight and justice to their lives. For middle-class environmentalists living in wealthy nations like myself, the key questions look different: Why are so many people in the first world so willing to live in denial? How is this denial managed? What does it look and feel like? What are its personal and social consequences?[28]

Norgaard expands the sociological study of denial to explore how race and class privilege facilitate its social organization. "Wealthy people are protected from full knowledge of many environmental and other social problems by national borders, gated communities, segregated neighborhoods, and their own fine-tuned yet unconscious practices of not noticing, looking the other way, and normalizing disturbing information."[29] In addition to political economy, Norgaard analyzes emotions (fear, guilt, and helplessness) and, like Cohen and Zerubavel, culture and cognition. Norgaard articulates this analysis as a shift away from looking at climate change in an

information deficit model (we don't know enough to act) to a social organization of denial.[30]

"Through a framework of socially organized denial, our view shifts from one in which *understanding* of climate change and *caring* about ecological conditions and our human neighbors are in short supply to one whereby these qualities are acutely present but actively muted in order to protect individual identity and sense of empowerment and to maintain culturally produced conceptions of reality."[31]

Norgaard importantly tries to bring political economy and emotions to the discussion of climate change.[32]

> In blending material from political economy, social psychology, emotions, and culture in an ethnographic case study, this project clarifies why it makes sense to conceive of denial as a socially organized rather than merely individual phenomenon. If Zerubavel asserts that individual acts of avoidance are socially structured, I expand this assertion by illustrating how what individuals choose to pay attention to or avoid reflects not only social norms of attention, but also norms of emotion and conversation.[33]

Through analysis and ethnography, Norgaard adds new concepts to the field of the social organization of denial: "tools of order," "tools of innocence," "moral imagination," and "the social construction of innocence." Tools of order affirm how the world is and should be, and tools of innocence create distance from responsibility.[34] Both of these tools are used in Norwegian climate change denial but are also general concepts for studying sociological denial. Moral imagination and the social construction of innocence, too, are generalizable concepts that emerge from Norgaard's specific findings. These ideas are grounded in the precarity of late capitalism, where one must decide to engage in reality or find more and more ways to construct innocence and distance from the issues.

SPECIFIC CASES OF DENIAL

In the following section I look to how scholars have examined specific cases of denial. Not all of the specific cases are examined with a perspective of sociological denial, though many draw on the work of Cohen and Zerubavel. I will first briefly talk about existential struggles with death anxiety and then transition to more sociological applications of denial.

Various writers have explored denial of death and aging. The approaches to this exploration also vary from philosophical to applied psychology. Nietzsche takes up this issue in his analysis of the denial of life through asceticism in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and his critique of Shopenhauer in *Beyond Good and Evil*.[35] Ernest Becker is perhaps the best-known writer on the topic of denial of death. In this book *The Denial of Death,* he argues that death anxiety is universal, and it is sublimated into various forms of civilization. "Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order to blindly and dumbly rot and disappear forever."[36] In contrast to Becker, Kübler-Ross argues, "denial is usually a temporary defense and will soon be replaced by partial acceptance."[37]

Other scholars have also taken up death through the denial of aging but with a more contemporary sociopolitical perspective. Gillick argues that members of Western societies engage in collective denial of aging, preferring to skip from middle age to death, dying peacefully in their sleep.[38] She argues that though denial can be a good thing—a necessary coping mechanism—denial of aging is so widespread and ingrained as a social practice that it has become a problem for individuals as well as society, in terms of lack of care and support for elders. O'Connor argues that not only are elders not supported but "society does not provide a rite of passage for people entering middle or old age. On the contrary, it systematically ignores

this transition, focusing further ahead on the already aged. Again we can see the presence of a collective denial operating here, a denial of the process of ageing and the need to publicly embrace a new status in society, that of being pre-elderly."[39] He claims most people would rather deny their prospects of frailty, dependence, and death. This collective denial is the reason Western culture has no role for the transition to old age.[40]

Other scholars have written on denial of the death of others, specifically genocides. Lemarchand's *Forgotten Genocides* examines the genocides that have not made it to public discourse and are not collectively mourned nor acknowledged.[41] Auron suggests moving from Arendt's *banality of evil* to thinking through the *banality of denial*. Banality is important because it "connotes a lack of originality; it represents boredom, tediousness, and the absence of creativity. Banality is the extent to which the 'accepted' mundane world has infected our feelings, cognitions, and acts, and how it has influenced our values; it means common, ordinary."[42] Linking the banal with denial facilitates an understanding of the moral and political implications of everyday life. "When the majority of a society, or a society as a whole, decides it would rather do nothing against evil because only then can it continue to survive (in most cases, even to prosper and flourish in materialist terms), the result is moral collapse. As the twentieth century repeatedly showed, evil is not just participatory; it also taints those who merely stand by and observe its spread."[43]

Most writers on the topic of denial struggle with the insufficiency of knowledge as a solution to the problem. Warry poses the question "Why has public awareness of Aboriginal issues in Canada and Australia failed to translate into political action?"[44] This question gets at the core political problem of denial: awareness is not enough for action. He argues that "in neither country, despite political rhetoric, are Aboriginal issues such as self-government, land

claims, treaty renovation, or other critical issues high on the political agenda."[45] This is in part because "to admit the history is to admit both to a record of racism in the past and to the possibility of continued racism and discrimination against Aboriginal peoples in the present."[46] He argues it is time to have a genuine acknowledgment, the necessary step toward reconciliation. Wicks applies a Zerubavelian perspective to animal suffering to the conspiracy of silence around factory-farmed animals.[47] Like Warry she argues that a more genuine acknowledgment is needed and "to break through the wall of silence and puncture the edifice of denial so that public attention is directed toward suffering and turned into effective action."[48]

Vetlesen ties this problem of lack of action to the problem with the "Enlightenment idea that knowledge determines action, so that 'if only people knew, they would act.'"[49] In fact, he argues, drawing on Hamilton, that information deficit is not the problem—as Norgaard argued as well—but is, rather, a surplus of culture. The problem is that *information*, the scientific facts, become "culturalized," and thus no more important than other aspects of culture. In his example, ecologically destructive consumption patterns are equally "culturalized," and thus there is no incentive to turn climate change information into action.

Vetlesen's ideas are different from those of other writers on climate change, like Washington and Cook, who argue "denial is answered by rational thought, so to abandon *reason* is to let denial flourish."[50] Washington and Cook suggest postmodernism contributes to climate change denial, in postmodernist's question of reason. They put their faith in reason and facts to get through to people who can then "make a rational assessment of risks" once the facts speak for themselves.[51] Denial is a choice that one can decide not to participate in any longer: "Can we roll back denial? *We can if we choose to*."[52]

CONCLUSION

In contrast to ideas about rationality preventing denial, my work turns much more to the unconscious and the limits of rationality. Many writers on denial, and Norgaard, Zerubavel, and Cohen specifically, make reference to the unconscious but do not overtly account for it. Much of this is because psychosocial sociology—a sociology that accounts for the unconscious—is currently marginalized in the field (see anthology *The Unhappy Divorce of Psychoanalysis and Sociology*[53]). Another reason is that sociology is invested in rationality, hence much of the critique of postmodernism in writings on denial. Cohen references the fragmented postmodern self, which is similar to a conception of the psychoanalytic self.[54] Writers on denial also cling to the notion of truth and reality, and both are challenged by postmodernism and psychoanalysis. This dissertation tries to resist the urge to reinforce theories of objective truth in its analysis of denial. I therefore devote a chapter to a psychoanalytic reading of denial as a social problem, engaging with this complicated issue more than others have. For example, Cohen poses the question "How can we be responsible for things if they are unconscious?" but does not truly take it up.[55] Psychoanalysis, like postmodernism, can be "bad for politics."[56] However, if we as scholars in this area continue to deny the unconscious because it seriously complicates things, we are still participating in denial and will not have a theory that truly accounts for the issue.

Similarly, most writers on denial do reference emotions in some way—Norgaard specifically expanding this discussion beyond the work of Cohen and Zerubavel—but, in doing so, frame the emotions in a particular way. Previous literature on denial has all maintained that denial is perpetuated by a resistance to pain and suffering. Norgaard specifically develops her theory of emotions of denial around this idea; through her ethnography she identifies fear, guilt, and hopelessness as key emotions in the perpetuation of denial. Though I do not disagree with

the relevance of these emotions, my analysis uses psychoanalysis to go beyond them. I add to the literature an account of aggression. In other theories, it is assumed that people are either neutral to the oppression and suffering of others or, on the other hand, actively wish to see it avoided. None of the theories entertain the painful but true idea that the average person might also, on an unconscious level, have aggression toward others. Theorizing aggression does not reduce people's entire emotional life to their aggression. When I examine aggression in the psychosocial chapter, it is not to make the emotion more primary than others. People are also kind and caring. Aggression, however, is not generally socially accepted. Having aggression is shamed and seen as antithetical to love and kindness—psychoanalysis makes it clear how both exist together and are in fact mutually constituting. This unacknowledged aggression, I argue, is absorbed into the social structure and manifested in social problems.

A second way that my work differs from the existing literature is that I look more closely at the material conditions of society. In expanding Norgaard's turn to political economy beyond its discourses and ideologies to material conditions, I specifically analyze the geography of society. Cohen, like the other writers, argues that denial manifests emotionally, morally, and through actions.[57] But so far no one has analyzed, or even pointed out, how denial manifests spatially. That is why I turn to geography to analyze the physical and spatial arrangements of society and how this both manifests and is manifested by denial.

My work also differs from the previous literature in the examples I engage with. Though I do analyze climate change, I focus more on how humanity has distanced itself from nature than on actual climate change denial. The examples I choose are highly contested and yet mundane. They do not fall under a Zerubavelian conspiracy of silence, per se—as Zerubavel discusses that incest does, for example—for my examples are structural conditions. Cohen's work discusses

nongovernment organizations and their awareness and fundraising campaigns, such as mail campaigns from Amnesty International. Though denial is certainly relevant to how one may ignore the plight of a starving child pictured on the envelope soliciting donations, I have used other more contested examples to highlight the complexity of denial as a sociological phenomenon, such as contemporary contestations over indigenous sovereignty in the United States and Canada. Animal rights activists feel very strongly about the unequivocal immorality of animal slaughter and animal testing, yet most of society feels these actions are necessary to human existence—people must eat meat and ensure product safety with animal testing. Or consider how the average American takes prison to be a necessary, though perhaps flawed, system, and yet there is a growing movement of prison abolitionists. The examples I use are both everyday and structural conditions.

Part of why I chose these examples is that I want to shift the discussion of denial from the social organization of denial to how denial is in the social structure itself. Throughout their prior work, other scholars of denial maintain that the social structure shapes denial in individuals but do not develop a theory about the social structure itself. The focus stays on denial, and I wish to turn the focus onto the structure. Other scholars do not explicitly develop a theory of denial as a social problem at all. By this I mean that it is not just that people deny a social problem but that denial is part of the structure of society and therefore of all social problems.

Cohen raises this possibility, but he does so at the end of his book and does not dive into the implications.

> The free market of late capitalism—by definition a system that denies its immorality— generates its own cultures of denial. More people are made superfluous and marginal: the deskilled, unskilled and sinking poor; the old, who no longer work; the young who cannot find work; the massive shifting populations of migrants, asylum seekers and refuges. The "solution" to these problems now physically reproduces the conditions of denial. The

strategy is *exclusion and segregation*: enclaves of losers and redundant populations, living in the modern version of ghettos, remove enough to become "out of sight, out of mind", separated from enclaves of winners, in their guarded shopping malls, gated communities and retirement villages.[58]

Though Cohen raises this important point, he does not centralize the structural racism and global capitalism that has led to the atrocities they focus on. In a sense, I move back the analysis to conditions that precede the atrocities and bystanders that Cohen analyzes. With this analysis of structural denial, I show how "sympathy commitment and action" are not enough, as Cohen suggests as a remedy.[59] If denial is truly a structural problem, it must be addressed structurally, as I argue in this work, on the scales of geography, cognition, and the unconscious. The following three chapters each analyze denial on those respective scales.

Notes

¹ Cohen, *States of Denial*, 11.
² Giorgio Sacerdoti and Antonio A. Semi, "Denial and Weltanschauung," in *Denial: A Clarification of Concepts and Research*, ed. Elieser Ludwig Edelstein, Donald L. Nathanson, and Andrew M. Stone (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013), 62.
³ Sigmund Freud, "Negation," in *Miscellaneous Papers, 1888–1938*, Collected Papers 5 (London: Hogarth and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1924–1950, 1927), 182.
⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *Miscellaneous Papers, 1888–1938*, Collected Papers 5 (London: Hogarth and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1924–1950, 1927), 200.
⁵ Ibid., 182.
⁶ Michael Frederic Chayes, "Concerning Certain Vicissitudes of Denial in Personality Development," in *Denial: A Clarification of Concepts and Research*, ed. Elieser Ludwig Edelstein, Donald L. Nathanson, and Andrew M. Stone (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013), 88.
⁷ Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (London: Karnac Books, 1992), 69–70.
⁸ Ibid., 109.
⁹ Ibid., 93–94.
¹⁰ Cohen, *States of Denial*, 11.
¹¹ Ibid., 22.
¹² Ibid., 24.
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid., 7–9.
¹⁵ Ibid., 10–14.
¹⁶ Ibid., 187.
¹⁷ Ibid., 295.
¹⁸ Ibid., 267.
¹⁹ Ibid., 289.
²⁰ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 42.
²¹ Eviatar Zerubavel, "The Elephant in the Room: Notes on the Social Organization of Denial," in *Culture in Mind: Toward a Sociology of Culture and Cognition*, ed. Karen A. Cerulo (New York: Routledge, 2002), 22.
²² Zerubavel, *The Elephant in the Room*, 9.
²³ Ibid.
²⁴ Ibid., 17.
²⁵ Ibid., 47.
²⁶ Ibid., 18–32.
²⁷ Ibid., 54.
²⁸ Kari Marie Norgaard, "'We Don't Really Want to Know': Environmental Justice and Socially Organized Denial of Global Warming in Norway," *Organization & Environment* 19, no. 3 (September 2006): 366, doi:10.1177/1086026606292571.
²⁹ Ibid.
³⁰ Kari Marie Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

[31] Ibid., 207.

[32] Ibid., 209.

[33] Ibid., 212–13.

[34] Ibid., 146.

[35] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 2011); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

[36] Ernest Becker, *Denial of Death* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1976), 26.

[37] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families* (London: Routledge, 2008), 32.

[38] Muriel R. Gillick, *The Denial of Aging: Perpetual Youth, Eternal Life, and Other Dangerous Fantasies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 6.

[39] Peter A. O'Connor, *Facing the Fifties: From Denial to Reflection* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 24.

[40] Ibid.

[41] René Lemarchand, ed., *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*, 1st ed., Pennsylvania Studies in Human Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[42] Yair Auron, *The Banality of Denial: Israel and the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 4.

[43] Ibid., 5.

[44] Wayne Warry, *Ending Denial: Understanding Aboriginal Issues* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2007), 64.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Deidre Wicks, "Silence and Denial in Everyday Life—The Case of Animal Suffering," *Animals* 1, no. 4 (February 2011): 187, doi:10.3390/ani1010186.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Arne Johan Vetlesen, *The Denial of Nature: Environmental Philosophy in the Era of Global Capitalism*, Ontological Explorations (London: Routledge, 2015), 9.

[50] Haydn Washington and John Cook, *Climate Change Denial: Heads in the Sand* (London: Earthscan, 2011), 113.

[51] Ibid., 124.

[52] Ibid., 156.

[53] Lynn Chancer and John Andrews, eds., *The Unhappy Divorce of Sociology and Psychoanalysis: Diverse Perspectives on the Psychosocial* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[54] Cohen, *States of Denial*, 280.

[55] Ibid., 30.

[56] Ibid., 280.

[57] Ibid., 7–9.

[58] Ibid., 293.

[59] Ibid., xiii.

Chapter Three

Out of Sight: Distancing and Denial

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social
existence that determines their consciousness.

—Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy"[1]

This chapter takes up denial with materiality, specifically space and geography, as its

starting point. How does denial manifest spatially, and how do spatial arrangements manifest

denial? In this chapter I first articulate how I understand the sociospatial paradigm with which I

analyze the relationship of denial to the physical environment. Next, I move through the forms of

denial that occur in the contested social problems in patterns of containment, exclusion, and

elimination, in cases such as the killings and isolation of Native Americans, the West Bank

Barrier, the geography of prisons and jails, the spatial arrangements of slaughterhouses, and how

society processes waste and trash. Following this discussion, I engage with the strengths and

limits of this paradigm of analysis.

HOW DISTANCING FACILITATES DENIAL

Though denial permeates all aspects of social existence, as Cohen notes, spatial

metaphors form the vocabulary of denial: compartmentalization, bracketing, isolation, putting

knowledge aside, splitting.[2] What, though, would it mean if these were not just metaphors but the

actual material arrangements of society? Many scholars begin their analysis of the social world

with spatial arrangements, but almost none do so in order to understand denial. I draw on varied

work that highlights social problems spatially to illustrate how denial, like other aspects of society and culture, is manifested in sociospatial arrangements.

Norbert Elias argued that western civilization is premised on the practice of "distancing and concealment of morally and physically repugnant practices rather than their elimination or transformation."[3] The entire built environment is based on not having to see things people do not want to deal with. From the location of prisons and asylums to those of bathrooms and laundry rooms, environments are built and space produced so that those who do not have to see certain things will not see them. One could expand Elias's argument to include anything society deems a problem. This distancing often masks the denial of social problems as solutions to the problem. Hide it away, put it out of sight, problem solved. It has become such common practice to conceal problems that these practices are thought to be actual solutions. But distancing and concealment do not transform or eliminate problems; they just allow observers to pretend this to be the case.

The French Marxist Henri Lefebvre argued that "(social) space is a (social) product . . . the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action . . . in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power."[4] Social actors work out their mental concerns through their engagement with and modification of nature and their built environment. The design of cities and countries and national borders is not arbitrary; borders don't just appear, and thus, conditions, like who lives in which places, are socially produced. The social construction of space reciprocates those efforts, shaping how inhabitants understand the world that they are living in. How space is structured is literally about the very foundation, the very ground, that its occupants stand on as a society and as individuals. My argument is that denial is such a part of society that particularly in the United States societal structure is wholly set up to facilitate not having to see, not having to pay attention, so that

Americans can ignore social conditions—so that Americans can be in denial. This manifests in many different ways, including the way space is used and produced to facilitate social denial. Structuring denial into subjects' engagement with space has become a ubiquitous part of social arrangements.

The way socioeconomic problems manifest geographically is, for Neil Smith, a systematic feature of capitalism integral to the mode of production.[5] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, in agreement with Smith, also understands these problems to appear both materially and ideologically as crises interlock with land, labor, and state.[6] Capital must be invested in the built environment to expand capital, but it must also be shifted around and withdrawn to find higher rates of profit.[7] This uneven development that Smith describes is also observed by Ashley Dawson: "Global political economy is patently moving in the opposite direction, towards a world order characterized by higher walls and novel forms of apartheid. Indeed, such a regime of inequality is highly productive to capital, which profits greatly from the wage differentials created by the artificial geographic barriers erected by the state."[8] These physical barriers continue to facilitate hiding social conditions out of sight. Gilmore claims that "from the genocidal wars against Native Americans to the totalitarian chattel slavery perpetrated on Africans, to colonial expansion, to the obliteration of radical anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements, the annals of US history document a normatively aggressive, crisis-driven state." The way the state has sought to "solve" these crises has been through identification, control, and violent elimination of "enemies." Problems are "solved" by trying to eliminate the sight of the problem.[9] I now look at how this problem manifests itself more specifically.

SPATIAL VIOLATIONS

Contested social problems that I discuss in this dissertation are those that are argued by some to violate a moral right to spatial and bodily autonomy. In this chapter I explore three spatial examples of each violation, primarily focusing on settler colonialism, Israeli apartheid, mass incarceration, industrialized animal slaughter, and environmental destruction. In analyzing these cases, I have identified three common patterns of violation: containment, exclusion, and elimination.

Containment

I first look at examples of containment—these include efforts to limit the spatial freedom of certain groups by containing them to certain spaces. One very overt example is the West Bank Barrier, a quite literal mechanism of containment. In 2002, Israel began the construction of the West Bank Barrier, the most expensive domestic project Israel had undertaken. This barrier comprised "a complex network of electronically sensitive fencing, stacked barbed-wire coils, concrete walls, watchtowers, ditches, patrol roads, and trace roads for detecting footprints." In contrast to the barriers that enclose Gaza, the West Bank Barrier is built on the Palestinian side of the 1949 Green Line. Though there was Palestinian as well as international opposition, the project went on to completion.[10] The physical geography of Israel and its boundaries are manifestations of exclusions. According to Dayan, Israel has implemented a permanent state of emergency in which "brute force coexists with, to a sometimes calamitous degree, a systemic practice of discrimination, surveillance, and disappearance. Behind the barriers—and they are everywhere—live the confined, sealed off from the zone of inclusion, the Israeli state."[11] Israel used physical barriers and geography to uphold the system of exclusion of Palestinians through this containment, which is a system of apartheid.

Ashley Dawson argues that apartheid is not a metaphor for social relations, and it is not something to be used loosely. Rather it is a specific set of policies that apply to Israel, though not in the same way as it did in South Africa. He argues the first key element of apartheid in Israel is a series of laws and policies that distinguish between Jews and non-Jews. Jews are granted not just preferred legal status but also material benefits. These material benefits are produced largely through the second key element of Israeli apartheid: policies that are designed to spatially fragment Palestinian territories and thereby produce geographical occupation and domination.[12] Sociospatial forms of containment facilitate the production of open-air prisons for Palestinian people and material oppression that is pushed out of sight, literally behind walls.

In the United States, the ghetto may not have a militarized physical barrier, but segregation operates in a similar way. In *American Apartheid* Massey and Denton[13] shift from previous accounts of race that first sought to find race in the body[14] and later in culture,[15] to looking at how race occurs in space. In contrast to scholars like William Julius Wilson, Massey articulates that the pernicious concentration of poverty in US cities is about racial (and racist) segregation, rather than middle class minorities leaving communities of color. "Segregation acts to concentrate poverty" through a "a spatially isolated underclass of persistently poor minority families."[16] Massey and Denton's work demonstrates that class, race, and space cannot be understood adequately apart from each other. "If racial segregation concentrates poverty in space, it also focuses and exacerbates any *change* in the economic status of minority groups. In a segregated environment, an exogenous economic shock that causes a downward shift in the distribution of minority income . . . will not only bring about an increase in the poverty rate in the group as a whole; it will also cause an increase in the geographic concentration of poverty."[17]

Loïc Wacquant expands the discussion of containment from the ghetto to the continuum

of containment between the ghetto and prison. He explores the dynamic exchanges between class

inequality, particularly ghettoization, and the racialized prison system in what he terms the

"carceral continuum."[18] In the United States, physical space has also been divided up,

particularly between blacks and whites, sometimes legally as in the case of Jim Crow laws in the

south and sometimes simply de facto through redlining and public housing policies.[19] For

Wacquant, the ghetto is the result of the decades of varied segregation policies and

> refers to the concrete experiences and relationships of its occupants, not to the underlying
> ties that firmly anchor them in the metropolitan ensemble—albeit in exclusionary
> fashion. Indeed . . . there exist deep-seated causal and functional linkages between the
> transformation of the ghetto and structural changes that have redrawn the visage of the
> US economy, social space and field of power in reaction to the shock of the progressive
> movements of the 1960s.[20]

Wacquant explains that these forced separations go beyond housing to other basic institutions

like schools, political representation, public services, and employment.[21] These separations then

functionally contain the separated populations. And of course policing and rates of incarceration

also drastically vary by spatial location.

The spatial concentration of poverty is connected to the huge increase in prisons that has

taken place since the 1980s. Gilmore explains that

> the expansion of prison constitutes a geographical solution to socio-economic problems,
> politically organised by the state which is itself in the process of radical restructuring.
> This view brings the complexities and contradictions of globalisation home, by showing
> how already existing social, political and economic relations constitute the conditions of
> possibility (but not inevitability) for ways to solve major problems. In the present
> analysis "major problems" appear, materially and ideologically, as surpluses of finance
> capital, land, labour and state capacity that have accumulated from a series of
> overlapping and interlocking crises stretching across three decades.[22]

Focusing specifically on the rapid development of prisons in California, Gilmore highlights these

connections among geography, the state, and prison by situating prison expansion in the

political-economic geography of globalization. Gilmore explains that the expansion of prisons in the United States is an extension of a dynamic of uneven global development.[23] This method of containment, however, is a part of the larger project of exclusion from the body politic, which I will discuss next.

Exclusion

Exclusion, in the sense that will be discussed in this chapter, is a paradox. What or whom is excluded from a society remains necessary to that society's functioning but without full recognition or benefit from this participation. The labor of those excluded is particularly relevant. Andrea Smith connects the colonization of Africa to the colonization of the United States, arguing that Native Studies are often problematically articulated differently from Black Studies, the first being concerned with colonization and the latter with race. This, however, Smith argues, is a product of antiblackness in that the colonization of Africa is disappeared, and thus Africa appears as "ontologically colonized," always already the property of Europe. Through the disavowal of colonization, black people can be produced as having the ontological condition of being property of the settler state. She contrasts this with the understanding of native peoples as discoverable objects of nature. Citing Kiristina Gail Sailiata's work, Smith points out the problems with differentiating discussions of land and resources from labor, as is often the case in Native Studies and Black Studies. As she explains,

> The formulation of stolen labor versus stolen land obscures the fact that it is the disappearance of Indigenous labor that both justifies stealing Indigenous lands, as well as rendering the work of Black peoples as non-labor. Furthermore, this relationship between Black fungibility and the disappearance of Indigenous labor rests on the commodification of land as property that then prescribes the terms of anti-colonial struggle safely within the confines of nation-state governance.[24]

The exclusion of those whose labor is then exploited is also part of the condition of mass incarceration. Though geographically, prisons and those incarcerated within them are often placed away from heavily populated areas—as though not integral to society—incarcerated people play a central part in social organizations as the prison industrial complex is tied to almost all aspects of culture and government. As discussed above, Ruth Wilson Gilmore's work highlights how much the growth of prisons in the last 30 years has been tied to economic situations and not to crime.[25] The locations of prisons are tied to economics, particularly labor, though they also often play in to the fantasy of the extrication of criminality from society. In former coal mining regions, where natural resources have been depleted as mountain tops have been "removed," supermax prisons are now being built in ecologically precarious locations. Providing jobs to former miners, as well as extracting free labor from those incarcerated, is now a practice in Virginia and Kentucky. Wallens Ridge prison in Virginia, for example, was built to replace the mining industry, and the prison was filled with incarcerated people brought in from all over the country. Private prison companies build these prisons and guarantee that beds will be filled to guarantee industry for the location. Prison and incarceration generally are inextricably tied to labor and capitalism yet are masked as solutions to crime.

Gilmore highlights the false promises made in the state of California. Prisons are promised as a recession-proof and nonpolluting industry that would bring jobs to areas depressed by other industries that were exploitative of land and labor. Yet the creation of prisons has not resulted in jobs or other improvements.[26] Prison development can also bring more representation to these towns by padding the population numbers. Although prison populations are counted for legislative purposes, however, they are not counted by the Environmental Protection Agency

when approving permits. This has contributed to a national trend in which new prisons are built on land that is toxic to both incarcerated people and prison staff.

We thus have a fantasy of exclusion; for the idea of locking people away is itself a form of denial masked as a solution to a problem. It is clearly a way of *not dealing* with someone. Instead of exploring how to deal with the problems that produced "the criminal," the marked people are locked away. Among those pieces of legislation that speak to how denial is part of mass incarceration are Three Strikes laws. In baseball, after three strikes, you're out. The fantasy that, and desire for, society to move people *out* of it is strong. Three convictions and one is kicked out, and a great deal of spatial work is done to facilitate that illusion. But of course it is exactly this: an illusion of removal.

As Wacquant and Travis both note, the increase in incarceration in the United States since the first Bush presidency has also increased the number of people released from prison with few job prospects.[27] Wacquant argues that:

> in the post-Civil Rights era, the remnants of the dark ghetto and the fast-expanding carceral system of the United States have become tightly linked by a triple relationship of functional equivalency, structural homology, and cultural fusion. This relationship has spawned a *carceral continuum* that ensnares a supernumerary population of younger black men, who either reject or are rejected by the deregulated low-wage labor market, in a never-ending circulus between the two institutions. . . . It also plays a pivotal role in the remaking of "race" and the redefinition of the citizenry via the production of a racialized public culture of vilification of criminals.[28]

Wacquant adds that though many people know of this dynamic relationship between urban poverty and incarceration, the situation is still largely ignored, and analysts and policy makers seem not to register the impact imprisonment has on low-income black communities.[29] Here again it is apparent how denial of the actuality of the situation allows for the continuations of "solutions" that address problems only partially.

One overt and obvious example of structuring the environment to hide a social problem

away is, first, that prisons are built at all, and second, that they are built in remote locations.

There is an attempt by the carceral state to hide away the social problems in society, like racism

and poverty, through the creation of prisons. Rather than being the problem, those incarcerated

suffer doubly from social problems—first as victims of the problem and then as victims of the

so-called solution. Ross notes that within the rise of the supermax prisons and increased

incarceration, punishment is increasingly meted out beyond the public view, hidden inside these

large, bureaucratic state-run structures called jails and prisons.[30]

Michelle Alexander, much in line with Gilmore and Wacquant, argues that the denial of

the severity of the problem of mass incarceration is "facilitated by persistent racial segregation in

housing and schools, by political demagoguery, by racialized media imagery, and by the ease of

changing one's perception of reality simply by changing television channels. . . . Those confined

to prisons are out of sight, out of mind; once released they are typically confined to ghettos."[32]

Providing even more evidence for Wacquant's theory of the *carceral continuum*, Alexander

highlights the spatial dynamic of mass incarceration, which she says

> achieves racial segregation by segregating prisoners—the majority of whom are black
> and brown—from mainstream society. Prisoners are kept behind bars typically more than
> 100 miles from home. Even prisons—the actual buildings—are a rare sight for many
> Americans, as they are often located far from population centers. Although rural counties
> contain only 20 percent of the U.S. prison population, 60 percent of new prison
> construction occurs there. Prisoners are thus hidden from public view—out of sight, out
> of mind. . . . Bars and walls keep hundreds of thousands of black and brown people away
> from mainstream society—a form of apartheid unlike any the world has seen."[33]

Wacquant calls this segregation via the ghetto an institution of forced confinement, a social

prison that operates alongside judicial prisons.[34]

> A ghetto is essentially a sociospatial device that enables a dominant status group in an
> urban setting to simultaneously *ostracize and exploit* a subordinate group endowed with

negative symbolic capital, that is, an incarnate property perceived to make contact with members of the category degrading by virtue of what Max Weber calls a "negative social estimation of honor." Put differently, the ghetto is the materialization of a *relation* of ethnoracial control and closure built out of four elements: (i) stigma, (ii) constraint, (iii) territorial confinement, and (iv) institutional encasement. The resulting formation is a distinctive *space*, containing an ethnically homogenous *population*, which finds itself forced to develop within it a set of interlinked *institutions* that duplicates the organizational framework of the broader society from which that group is banished and supplies the scaffoldings for the construction of its specific "style of life" and social strategies. This parallel institutional nexus affords the subordinate group a measure of protection, autonomy, and dignity, but at the cost of locking it in a relationship of structural subordination and dependency. The ghetto, in short, operates as an *ethnoracial prison*.[35]

A manifestation of Wacquant's analysis appears in the case of New York City. The policing of the black and brown community in New York City leads to the filling of Rikers Island jail, built on a toxic waste landfill and a hazardous place for the population forced to live there.[36] Rikers, which is a jail and not a prison, holds a large percentage of people awaiting trial who have not been convicted. In 2015, it was reported that Rikers contained over 400 people who had been locked up for more than two years awaiting trial, with no conviction, and six people who had been kept on pending cases for more than six years.[37] Michael Jacobson, a former correction commissioner who currently heads the Institute for State and Local Governance at the City University of New York, has stated that in the last 20 years New York courts have taken longer and longer to resolve felony cases, even as the number of cases has declined.[38] A viscerally disturbing example of the consequences of keeping people locked up in these conditions, is Kalief Browder and his tragic suicide after spending three years as a teenager locked up pretrial in Rikers Island. Kalief suffered abuse by guards on multiple occasions. Unable to recover from the trauma, Kalief killed himself after multiple earlier suicide attempts.[39]

Part of the problem is Rikers Island's spatial arrangement: it is literally an island apart from the rest of the city. Rikers, made invisible in myriad ways, is not identified on New York

City subway maps. A new guerilla campaign called #SeeRikers seeks to address this by placing clear stickers printed in red with "RIKERS IS HERE" on the subway maps. Estefanía Acosta de la Peña, Laura Sánchez, and Misha Volf, Design Studies students at the Parsons School of Design, explain that their project is meant to highlight that Rikers Island's absence on the maps is "emblematic of a broader cultural willingness to overlook the places, policies, and practices that support the systemic violence of mass incarceration."[40] But of course it is not just emblematic; the geographic structure is not just a symbol of the cultural willingness to allow for mass incarceration but is part and parcel of it.

Bill DeBlasio, the mayor of New York, and Andrew Cuomo, governor of the state of New York have differing opinions on what to do about Rikers. Cuomo said in an interview that New Yorkers need to "admit that Rikers, as it is, doesn't work and admit that it should be closed down, that's step one, and then we'll get to step two," but DeBlasio has said the city "does not have a viable pathway to that at this point" and added, "Where are you going to put them? How are you going to pay for them?"[41] DeBlasio is clearly committed to denial through distancing: there needs to be a place to hide them away. And if not Rikers, where?

Melissa Mark-Viverito, New York City Council speaker, said, "Rikers Island has come to represent our worst tendencies, and our biggest failures. . . . For too long, Rikers has stood not for more justice, but for revenge. We must explore how we can get the population of Rikers to be so small that the dream of shutting it down becomes a reality."[42] Norman Seabrook, president of the Correction Officers Benevolent Association, added that "no one is volunteering to build a jail in their district or on Park Avenue."[43] Seabrook and Mark-Viverito seem to see what DeBlasio does not, namely that what is needed is not a new place to hide people away but a rethinking of incarceration.

This logic of exclusion extends beyond humans to the land, the earth, and nonhuman animals, as well. Humans' alienation from nature and from their own nature is a denial effected by colonialism, capitalism, and spatial arrangements. Given the connections between Western disavowal of nature through the genocide of native people, in part for their ties to nature, it is no surprise that it is hard for US society to grapple with its effects on the climate. The effects of capitalism on the earth can go largely unseen by most people in the United States. Western privileges allow most Americans not to have to engage with their waste, through excluding it from sight, and to produce the illusion of a separation from nature. People in cities talk about getting out of town to go be in nature—lakes and forests—but fail to see that cities are part of nature as well, and what happens in cities is connected to the larger ecosystems.

Those of us who live in houses that exist separate from nature do not see ourselves as integrated into nature. We try to keep bugs out of our apartments. Within our homes we separate space so as not to have to see our waste—we have toilets that flush away waste, trash that magically gets taken off the curb after we go to sleep and before we leave for work in the morning. In NYC the sewer system is actually far from invisible but is constructed to appear so. It consists of 6,000 miles of pipes, 135,000 sewer catch basins, ninety-three pump stations, and fourteen massive sewage treatment plants and requires a staff of 6,000 and $2 billion a year just to maintain. As one may suspect, however, when the system is no longer invisible, the burden of the city's waste falls disproportionately on poor and minority neighborhoods.[44]

Garbage also requires complex processes to create the illusion that it has disappeared. Most New Yorkers take for granted the 7,200 people in 2,000 trucks who take 10,000 tons of trash and 1,500 tons of recyclables every day. In 1895 street cleaning was overhauled and given a military structure and hierarchy that had trash collectors wear white uniforms to cultivate the

image of cleanliness. Still, the trash was just dumped into the ocean until 1934, despite having been illegal since the 1880s; it continued because New York City politicians could not figure out what else to do—the city literally could not confront the problem of its own waste. After 1934 the city used landfills until they were all filled up. Now 85 percent of trash is exported out of the city at a cost of $300 million a year.[45] Most people do not know where their trash goes; they do not see the long process of biodegradation and do not have to *immediately* deal with the consequences of all of the nonbiodegradable products and packaging the developed world uses. Very few people have to confront the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, twice the size of Texas, in the Pacific Ocean. This garbage patch largely consists of tiny pieces of plastic, which never actually biodegrades and instead just breaks into smaller and smaller pieces.[46]

Of course, everyone on the planet will have to face the long-term consequences. Žižek states this similarly when identifying ecology and disavowal as the crucial aspect of understanding ideology today:

> I think ecology, the way we approach the ecological problematic is maybe the crucial field of ideology today. . . . But why don't we do anything about it. It is, I think, a nice example of what in psychoanalysis we call disavowment. The logic is that of, "I know very well, but I act as if I don't know." Precisely in the case of ecology, I know very well there may be global warming, everything will explode and be destroyed. But after reading a treatise on it, what do I do? I step out, I see not [trash], but I see nice trees, birds singing, and even if I know rationally all this is in danger, I simply do not believe that all this can be destroyed.[47]

The likelihood that you walk outside and see trash and waste reflects your position in the sociospatial arrangements of society.

This also applies to how much one engages in the needs of physical reproduction generally, and specifically in the production of meat. Not only is industrialized slaughter harmful to the animals who die violent deaths, but it is also incredibly dangerous work for employees.

Workers regularly suffer amputations; machines such as skinners, band saws, wing saws, and hide grippers resulted in thirty-four injuries at ten of Tyson Foods' meatpacking plants in just the first nine months of 2015. Each week Tyson, America's biggest meat producer, "processes" 35 million chickens, 400,000 hogs, and 128,000 cattle.[48] To conceptualize the extent of these figures, in 2009, there were 1.6 billion wild birds in Europe (this includes all species together). Yet 1.9 billion chickens were raised in Europe in 2009 for food.[49] This kind of labor, as a part of the industry, is also toxic to the environment. While 195 countries at COP21, the United Nations 2015 Climate Change Conference, pledged to pursue "efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius" and gradually reduce emissions, there was no acknowledgment that animal agriculture is responsible for over half of those emissions, nor that 80 percent of deforestation in the Amazon and about 14 percent of the world's total annual deforestation is also a result of animal agriculture.[50]

In slaughterhouses, the work of killing is excluded from even the workers. Pachirat's brilliant analysis of industrialized slaughterhouses illustrates how spatial arrangements help to maintain what I would call a split in the workers' egos and allow for one who works and even handles the flesh of dead cows not to see the violence. Through a first-hand account of working in various jobs at an industrialized slaughterhouse, Pachirat describes the spatial mechanisms that assist in this split for the workers. The cows are brought to the slaughterhouse in trucks and delivered into a cattle pen. From there, they are put through a (dis)assembly line, first to the "kill floor," then to the cooler, then to a separate space for fabrication, and finally the shipping dock at the other end of the factory. Even on the kill floor, the moment of death is isolated; it remains somewhat unclear and variable from animal to animal which worker has actually done the killing. First, the knocker puts a bolt in the cow's head. Then, separately, the indexer may have

to do a second, more gun-like, shot into the cow's head as he spaces out the animals on the line. Next, the presticker and the sticker slash the animal's throat, a first cut by the presticker and a second deeper slash by the sticker. Pachirat makes clear that the workers' positions are all separate; only the sticker and presticker can see each other. Following this, the animals are electrocuted in order to have one last final surge of blood pumped prior to entering the "bleed pit." At this point, the animal is supposed to be dead, but sometimes workers ever farther down the line will take the act that finally brings death.[51]

Pachirat's ethnography of a slaughterhouse is, in his own accounting, a work that precisely explores Norbert Elias's phenomenon of distancing that grounds Western civilization— i.e., "a labor considered morally and physically repellent by the vast majority of society that is sequestered from view rather than eliminated or transformed"[52]—as the killing of animals is hidden even from most of the workers in the slaughterhouse. In thinking through alienation and estrangement as Marx articulated these concepts, the slaughterhouse seems to be the perfect example of the problems with labor under capitalism. Factory farming and industrialized slaughter would not be possible without the denial of species being. This kind of labor, like most assembly line labor, divorces the relationship between nature and laborer.

Elimination

The tools of exclusion can lead to even more serious consequences—elimination. This was the project of Nazi Germany and is entering the rhetoric of the United States with Trump's ban on Muslims. This scenario undoes the paradox of exclusion wherein the excluded are nonetheless integral to society. In elimination, society can tip the paradoxical balance of exclusion to its extreme. Here, I explore how this dynamic manifested in the elimination and genocide of Native Americans. There are countless examples of native elimination, one of which

is the story of Yosemite National Park. A popular understanding of national parks is that they are preserved spaces of land, but this erases the often violent displacement of the Natives that inhabited the land before its "preservation." Yosemite was known as Ahwahnee to the Ahwahneechee Indians. California soldiers eliminated the Ahwahneechee from the land during the Mariposa War in 1851. To survive and stay in their homeland, the Ahwahneechee returned to take employment as "Indian performers." This went on until 1968 when, during a fire-fighting drill, their remaining homes were burned down and they were finally completely evicted from the land.[53] National parks like Yosemite are socially produced products of settler colonialism, which violently eliminated its inhabitants but produce the image of having preserved a natural condition, thus eliminating an acknowledgment of that condition's own violent production.

Patrick Wolfe's explication of the *logic of elimination* frames settler colonialism as a grounding mechanism of society that applies not only to when the land was first colonized but to how this process continues to the present. Wolfe focuses on the logic of elimination that often results in genocide in settler colonialist societies like the United States. Arguing that "settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal," Wolfe's work highlights the denial in the process of settler colonialism. "Indigenous North Americans were not killed, driven away, romanticized, assimilated, fenced in, bred White, and otherwise eliminated as the original owners of the land *but as Indians*."[54] Morgensen extends Wolfe's theory by noting that "the 'logic of elimination' constitutes settler colonialism in the genocide and amalgamation of Indigenous peoples, by indicating that this also indigenises and naturalises white settler nations as projections of the West."[55] In this way, the physical and cultural elimination of Indigenous people allows for white settlers to naturalize their establishment on native lands: "Settler colonialism does not simply replace native society tout court. Rather, the process of replacement

maintains the refractory imprint of the native counter-claim. This phenomenon is not confined to the realm of symbolism."[56] The denial of the native through the logic of elimination primarily unfolds spatially.

Wolfe explains that settler colonialism is premised on a logic of elimination because it aims to secure and maintain territory, and one way or another the original owners or occupants of the territory must be eliminated. He notes that assimilation can be even more effective than mass killings, but "the resort to mass killings can reflect the proclaimed inassimilability of the victim group, as in the case of Jews in relation to the 'Aryan' blood stock"[57] or the "failed assimilation" of the Cherokees as was the case in the United States leading to their removal in what is known now as the Trail of Tears. Through Wolfe's analysis, it becomes clear that physicality and geography are important parts in facilitating a mental process of belonging and exclusion that will be taken up itself in the next chapter.

The disavowal of the colonization of both Africa and North America is foundational to the structure of contemporary US society. Audra Simpson highlights this disavowal when she argues that most discourses of settler colonialism assume that it is, in fact, *settled*. Without complete extermination and genocide, how could it be settled? And even then it is not possible to simply move on from the legacy of founding a society on genocide and extermination.[58]

CONCLUSION

Although all the scholars I have discussed in this chapter tackle important issues, none except Žižek and, Michelle Alexander briefly, addresses denial. I wish to highlight, however, this unspoken common thread that weaves through these diverse social problems. I am interested in the paradox of denial: humans build things out of sight but are still the ones who build them. What these theories do not account for is how people and communities manage to set up physical

systems of denial—physically build them—and yet still not see them even when they come into sight. What this sociospatial paradigm does not explain is that denial depends on knowing and not knowing; that this is true can be seen very clearly in this chapter but not the reasons why. To talk about denial one must go deeper than just the material spatial arrangements so as to address socially constructed understandings of the world.

Moving from the evidence in this chapter *that* geography aids denial, I must now move to how geography is built with intention *to* deny. And this means Marx was not fully correct about material existence shaping consciousness—there is a reciprocal relationship. Michelle Alexander sees this too when she articulates that few Americans recognize that every year hundreds of thousands of people are swept through the prison system because the systemic discrimination and exclusion are rationalized. She states that the collective denial is not merely inconvenient but a major block to transformation and a true understanding of race in society. The sociospatial aspects of denial cannot come into existence without discursive structures that produce the conditions of the "criminal other," for example.[59] This can expand beyond race to apply to major blocks to any kind of social transformation. As Bauman has said, "The method of territorial and functional separation is deployed both outwardly and inwardly."[60] In the next chapter I move from the outward manifestation of sociospatial division to look at how denial manifests inwardly, in a sociomental account of patterns of denial.

Notes

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[5] Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, 3rd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 134.

[6] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Globalisation and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism," *Race & Class* 40, no. 2/3 (1999): 171–88.

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[20] Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 46.

[21] Ibid., 62.

[22] Gilmore, "Globalisation and US Prison Growth," 174.

[23] Ibid.

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[26] Gilmore, "Globalisation and US Prison Growth," 184.

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Chapter Four

Out of Mind: Categories and Denial

We do not understand except in thinking through concepts. But sensory reality is not cut out to enter spontaneously and by itself the framework of our concepts. It resists this, and to make it pliant with it, we must force it to some extent, submit it to all sorts of laborious operations that alter it to make it assimilable by the mind, and we never manage to triumph completely over its resistance.

—Durkheim, *The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions*[1]

This chapter explores denial through classification and categorization. It is about the work of consciousness; this is not mutually exclusive from the geographic divisions discussed in the previous chapter. But scholars with this approach have a different starting point. The previous chapter explored spatial differentiations as a layer of denial. In this chapter, I present a cognitive approach to how denial operates sociologically—what I call the sociomental paradigm. This chapter follows the process of denial through epistemic violations constructed through ideas of dominion, identity, and dehumanization, in particular contested social problems: American nationalist identity production; the production of the "other" in the context of Israel and Palestine; the production of criminality as a racialized phenomenon that manifests in the school-to-prison pipeline; the sociomental production of animals as meat; and the split between nature and the social, particularly in the context of disasters. Following the discussion of these examples, the benefits and limitations of the sociomental framework are highlighted for sociology, generally, and the study of denial, specifically.

HOW CATEGORIES FACILITATE DENIAL

In the first chapter, I talked about physically building walls; this chapter is about cognitively putting up walls, so to speak. In the face of knowledge that is difficult to bear, humans build cognitive walls. This is not always a moral issue on the individual level. It is hard to know what to do with information about suffering, as Stanley Cohen elaborates in his book on denial: because of this, "every personal life and every society is built on denial."[2] There are gradations between watching one's Jewish neighbors being taken to concentration camps and tossing a piece of mail about starving children into the recycling bin, and indeed Cohen highlights the various ways to be a bystander to suffering. Much is happening cognitively to allow for inaction.

Erving Goffman's understanding of the social production of cognition is seen through his examination of what people do and do not take in—or, as he puts it, what is in and out of the frame. One of Goffman's many examples of how people take in information differently depending on the frame is a stream of print flashed along the bottom of a television screen with, for example, a weather announcement. There is a capacity to take in the TV show and the weather announcement at the same time. For Goffman, this illustrates how both attention and cognition can be split in (at least) two.[3] This splitting of cognition applies not only to the taking-in of media but to social activity. Goffman explains that boundary markers or brackets are both spatial and temporal; they function like a picture frame in that they "are presumably neither part of the content of activity proper nor part of the world outside the activity but rather both inside and outside, a paradoxical condition already alluded to and not to be avoided just because it cannot easily be thought about clearly."[4] Goffman clearly establishes the possibility of split cognition as a practice of everyday life.

Whereas Goffman's focus is on the mechanisms that render something out of frame, Eviatar Zerubavel is more interested in how attention is structured within the frame. For example, it is not just that one pays attention to what is in the frame and not outside of it (the gallery wall) but that one pays attention to the apple in the painting and not to the brush strokes that compose the still life.[5] In a sense, Zerubavel goes beyond Goffman in not only saying that individuals are able to split their cognition in two but that they also make judgments about what they perceive as relevant and irrelevant; this division functions through social delineations. He argues that "despite the fact that we often regard what we essentially ignore when we focus our attention on something as irrelevant or 'extraneous,' nothing is inherently irrelevant or extraneous."[6]

Inattention is not a moral problem, per se, but part of society. When people put something out of frame and out of mind, they genuinely can no longer know it. The depth of this split between knowing something one minute and not knowing it another minute is such that it is not about simply forgetting. Social cognition, the sociomental aspects of thought, facilitates this split between attention and inattention. Consequently, for Zerubavel, attention and inattention are sociomental mechanisms of classifying and dividing the world. Attention is "arguably the most important organizing feature of our conscious life."[7] Visibility is therefore not a trait of a physical properties but rather the extent to which attention is paid to it. Attention, through noticing and ignoring, are sociomental acts that are socially produced through culture. "We are *socialized* into culturally, subculturally (ideologically, professionally), and historically specific norms, conventions, and *traditions* of attending that actually determine what we come to regard as attention-worthy and what we effectively ignore."[8] This particular socialization feeds denial.

When Cohen writes about denial he specifies there are different ways that people deny. Factual denial, the most overt form, is when someone says directly that something did not happen. Interpretive denial is slightly more nuanced—one can admit that something happened but argue that it did not happen *exactly* like that or it did not mean what others think it meant. These both can happen through either conscious lying or unconscious denial. A third way that one can deny is through reframing cognition, emotion, and morality: I did not know it, I did not feel that way about it, it was not wrong. Through these typologies of denial Cohen makes clear that denial is not simple. As he explains, through a cognitive approach, the language of denial sometimes does not even include the word denial itself, and certainly not psychoanalytic terms like repression. Cohen says instead that denial is often discussed as "perception without awareness." In this way of speaking, much as Goffman and Zerubavel have shown, denial is understood through stimuli and attention, not emotionally but as "faulty cognition." Though not emotional, this is still a sociomental process: Cohen notes that these "attentional tricks" of content that one does or does not take in are shared through cultures and families.[9]

Sykes and Matza highlight how what one focuses on is informed through one's social group. In their case, they focus on "juvenile delinquent" subcultures. These subcultures help group members "neutralize" the impact of their actions through specific, socially shared techniques. The researchers found four main techniques. The first three are similar: denial of responsibility; denial of injury; and denial of a victim. Here, groups put more attention on certain aspects of a situation than others. The fourth technique, the condemnation of condemners, is also about attention. Sykes and Matza state, "The delinquent shifts the focus of attention from his own deviant acts to the motives and behavior of those who disapprove of his violations."[10] The final technique of neutralization, an appeal to higher loyalties, like the previous techniques, is

also about socially conditioned placement of attention. In this final technique, more attention is paid to subculture values than mainstream social values. The youth discussed in this classic study all participate in sociomental processes of denial through shared culture, which is developed through sociological processes.

Though in a much different way, Mary Douglas also illustrates the cultural specificity of classification through examining dirt cross-culturally. Douglas writes, "Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment."[11] Douglas understands that classifications happen in all cultures, but that some cultures do not afford other cultures' classification systems with the same respect. In looking at Western approaches to the home, for instance, Douglas points out that the typical rituals of a Western woman are shaped through classifications that are not so different from those of any other culture:

> When we honestly reflect on our busy scrubbings and cleanings in this light we know that we are not mainly trying to avoid disease. We are separating, placing boundaries, making visible statements about the home that we are intending to create out of the material house. If we keep the bathroom cleaning materials away from the kitchen cleaning materials and send the men to the downstairs lavatory and the women upstairs, we are essentially doing the same thing as the Bushman wife when she arrives at a new camp.[12]

By taking such a mundane example as dirt as her object, Douglas explores the sometimes invisible classification systems in all cultures. Dirt, she says, "is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter."[13] This by-product can be understood sometimes without reference to the original classification: in other words, we know *dirt* without having to think of *clean*.

Classification is all about inclusion and exclusion; "naming splits the world into two," as Zygmunt Bauman has said.[14] This system of naming is a necessary precondition to a sociomental manifestation of denial where the "other" is denied. And "invariably, such operation of

inclusion/exclusion is an act of violence perpetrated upon the world, and requires the support of a certain amount of coercion. It can hold as long as the volume of applied coercion remains adequate to the task of outbalancing the extent of created discrepancy."[15] In a sense, Bauman explicitly and necessarily politicizes what the other theorists do not—that every act of differential attention is made political by that sociomental process of splitting what one does and does not pay attention to.

For Bauman, ambivalence is "the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category" and is "a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregating) function that language is meant to perform. The main symptom of disorder is the acute discomfort felt when one is unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions."[16] Ambivalence, through language and structure, lies at the center of the negotiation between order and chaos. "Through its naming/classifying function, language posits itself between a solidly founded, orderly world fit for human habitation, and a contingent world of randomness, in which human survival weapons—memory, the capacity for learning—would be useless, if not downright suicidal. Language strives to sustain the order and to deny or suppress randomness and contingency."[17] Thus in Bauman's conceptualization, denial of contingency—the unknown, the inexpressible—is the foundation of the very structure of knowing and of language.

Arguing that all cultures make impositions on reality, Edward Said, like Bauman, politicizes some of the same concepts and patterns that Goffman and Zerubavel make clear. Said is particularly interested in the process through which the West has come to understand the Orient.[18] Focusing on a specific cultural and historical cognitive split, Said's theory of Orientalism—the way in which the West has come to understand the East through what he terms

the "Orientalist stage"—is a system of moral and epistemological rigor, a system of social classification that "is taught, it has its own societies, periodicals, traditions, vocabulary, rhetoric, all in basic ways connected to and supplied by the prevailing cultural and political norms of the West."[19] Said goes a step beyond Zerubavel and Goffman to suggest that the ways in which cognitive splits are produced are not just social, in the neutral sense of the term, but also political and in some cases nationalistic and oppressive. Reading Durkheim through Said's perspective casts light on how political sociomental processes are: "We do not understand except in thinking through concepts. But sensory reality is not cut out to enter spontaneously and by itself the framework of our concepts. It resists this, and to make it pliant with it, we must force it to some extent, submit it to all sorts of laborious operations that alter it to make it assimilable by the mind, and we never manage to triumph completely over its resistance."[20] I turn now to seeing this struggle in the five cases.

EPISTEMIC VIOLATIONS

I have identified three common patterns of epistemic violations of moral rights to spatial and bodily autonomy that social movements claim. These violations occur through ideas about dominion, identity construction through the erasure of the other, and ruptures in commonality through dehumanization.

Dominion

Cultural conceptions of dominion have shaped many of the conditions that contested social movements struggle against. Colonialism is a prime example. In the 1840s and 1850s white settlers of the original thirteen colonies called themselves native Americans. These nativist parties had no sense of irony when pushing to keep more not-yet-white immigrants out of the United States, as well as Chinese and Japanese immigrants. There was particular concern about

Irish and German Catholics from a group of "native Americans" that became known as the Know-Nothing Party, garnering their name from how they responded to participation in their secret society—they knew nothing about what the questioner was talking about. Though the parties of the 1800s dissolved, their spirit continued in groups like the Ku Klux Klan and in many ways the dominant anti-immigrant discourse of the late 2010s Republican party. Even views that are more liberal still embrace the idea that settlers have dominion over the land—this is seen in the ironic way the Canadian government grants recognition to First Nations people. Canada's dominion over the land gives the nation its ability to make that recognition, as it paradoxically acknowledges the original owners of the land.[21] In this way sociospatial issues are pushed to sociomental ones, from issues of land to issues of culture.[22]

This is also true in Israel and Palestine, where some are seen to have dominion over land and others are not. Max Weber's essay *Politics as a Vocation* articulates the state as that which has the legitimate use of violence within a given territory.[23] Legitimacy is, in part, granted through ideas of who has dominion over the territory. Conceptions of Israeli dominion over territory render illegitmate any resistance on the part of the Palestinians and allow them to be continually marked as terrorists. Thus, dominion leads to identity construction.

Cultural Identity

How is it that a group of settlers, as in the case of the United States, can become so oblivious to the circumstances that produced the conditions of their society? American nationalist identity is formed through erasure—denial of the actual circumstances of the nation's founding. At the same time these parties developed in the United States, specifically from 1820 to 1844, 100,000 American Indians were removed from their homes and transported west of the Mississippi, up to a third of them dying or being killed during this process. Native peoples in the

Americas were not eliminated without effort or massive discussion and public policy. Native elimination was a much-discussed issue of which people had awareness—even as historians continue to ignore its significance.[24] Yet settlers were able to also not-know about this when they positioned themselves as the natives. Andrea Smith calls out this denial when she argues, "By instituting repressive immigration policies, the U.S. government is once again asserting that it— and not indigenous nations—should determine who can be on these lands."[25]

Sociomental processes of belonging and national identity facilitate Americans' ability to disavow the country's history. As stated before, categorization itself is a political project of inclusion and exclusion. The same process of categorization that embodies the paradox of denial is seen in the discourse around Thanksgiving. In 1863, following the violence of the Civil War, Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a national holiday. From its origins, Thanksgiving was a myth meant to unite a divided country.[26] It was never based in the reality it supposedly celebrates. Thanksgiving as a holiday is exemplary of American denial of Native American genocide and elimination; it expresses the awareness of the history at the same time as it manifests disavowal. The United States collectively participates in an annual celebration of denial. The truth of the "first Thankgiving" is not a story of friendship. The Wampanoag people did engage in a relationship with the pilgrims and helped them to survive the harsh northeastern winter, but when the Wampanoag contracted diseases from the English settlers, the pilgrims saw an opportunity to conquer them. A war began that the pilgrims won. Wampanoags who weren't killed were sent as slaves to the West Indies. The pilgrims gave thanks in a day of celebration where they played games with the decapitated heads of the indigenous people.[27] A people can only do this to another people when they have set up sociomental categories of cultural identity, through exclusion, to produce a great deal of denial.

State- and nation-making are sociological processes built on and necessitating categorization. This is inextricable from racial categorization, as Gilmore has defined it: "Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."[28] Gilmore further argues that "racism is the ordinary means through which dehumanization achieves ideological normality" though it concomitantly produces that very racism.[29] She argues that as old races die though extermination or assimilation, new races emerge. This is a biopoltical, not biological, phenomenon, and this means that the state depends on classification plus militarism to maintain any kind of national coherence. Moreover, this is done through physical and ideological force. As Gilmore writes, "the racializations of Muslims in the current era does double duty in both establishing an enemy whose being can be projected through the allegation of unshakable heritage (fundamentally, what the fiction of race is at best) and renewing the racial order of the US polity as normal, even as it changes."[30] This is clearly seen in the Republican rhetoric of the 2016 election season, as this discourse has only proliferated since September 11th, 2001.

This is important to recognize not only when talking about the United States as a settler colonial state but as an imperial force that funds the Israeli apartheid state. Mumia Abu-Jamal explains this well when he says, "The US doesn't hate Palestine. The truth is something far worse, for dismissal is more damning than hatred. Palestine, its people, its history, its culture, its art, its poetry, its very land, is dismissed as a mere trifle by the US Empire, not dissimilar to the response of the old British Empire, which dispatched the lands, hopes and dreams of the Palestinians, with cold, imperial aplomb."[31] People dismiss the plight of Palestinians while refusing to acknowledge that Palestinian humanity is being denied.

Dayan highlights that what are especially masked in the debates are the "unique and various forms of violence used to control the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the eruption of the Second Palestinian Intifada in September 2000."[32] This masking can be uncovered in many examples. Corey Robin notes, regarding the *Washington Post* headline "13 Israeli soldiers, 70 others killed," that Palestinians are literally "othered."[33] Thus Dayan's becomes able to answer his own question: "Dispossessed of their homes and ancestral lands and labeled as outsiders and enemies, Palestinians are confined as nothing more than superfluity."[34]

The construction of cultural identity through othering extends beyond settler colonialism in the United States to mass incarceration as well. Michelle Alexander poses the question: "Is it possible that the roundup, lockdown, and exclusion of black men en masse from the body politic has occurred largely unnoticed? The answer is yes and no."[35] Alexander makes the process of categorizing who is disposable clear with this comparison: "The vastly different sentences afforded drunk drivers and drug offenders speaks volumes to regarding who is viewed as disposable—someone to be purged from the body politic—and who is not."[36]

Alexander makes clear that what is denied about prison is race—that racism is structural.[37] "The critical point here is that for black men, the stigma of being a 'criminal' in the era of mass incarceration is fundamentally a *racial* stigma."[38] In perhaps her most profound point, she argues that in colorblind US society, one cannot express open hatred of blacks, but one can, and perhaps in dominant discourse, should, hate criminals.[39] Through this racial caste system the social construction of the *criminalblackman* emerges: "The criminal label is essential, for forms of explicit racial exclusion are not only prohibited but widely condemned. Thus, black youth must be made—labeled—criminals."[40] Once this is done, black people are excluded from

nationalist constructions of identity. This is important especially now that "alt-right" white supremacy is emerging as a particular kind of nationalism in the Trump era.

The importance of the label and the sociomental development of these categories is why Wacquant posits that more than a Marxist lens is needed for talking about incarceration (and, I would argue, for society generally)—Durkheim is needed to elucidate symbolic racism. He explains, "The prison symbolizes material divisions and materializes relations of symbolic power."[41] Wacquant very explicitly connects labels of worth and the unworthy poor to criminality.[42] He explains that inmates have a triple stigma: moral, class, and caste. In the racial criminalization of poverty, blacks are labeled criminal (moral stigma), poor (class stigma), and black (caste stigma in an antiblack society).[43]

Dehumanization

Dehumanization follows from such forms of cultural identity construction. This is how unarmed 18-year-old female students, like Hadil Hashlamoun, are gunned down at checkpoints for requesting to be frisked by a female soldier. Hashlamoun died of the ten gunshot wounds after being left for thirty minutes bleeding on the ground before the Israel Defense Forces allowed doctors to approach her. In this kind of production of the enemy, Bauman is all too correct when he says, "Defence of one's own right to live needs a denial of such right to the Other."[44] And this allows Palestinian children to be killed without regard. Dayan argues, "Palestinians are labeled as 'terrorists' by the powerful, so that lethal force is the rule and extreme violence—or exemplary disregard—may be directed indiscriminately against civilians and non-civilians alike."[45] Cultural identity can extend beyond nation to humanity—those not included in the same identity are no longer human.

Gilmore offers a rigorous economic analysis of prison expansion to show that crime has very little to do with the dramatic increases in mass incarceration and the development of twenty-three new prisons in California since 1984. Gilmore's work helps illuminate how in capitalism the work of the state is to produce and perpetuate racism though geographic means—a theory of racial capitalism. But this is not only a geographic project but one that concerns identity construction. Gilmore states, "The media, government officials and policy advisers endlessly refer to the moral panic over crime and connect prison growth to public desire for social order." This is not as much about the state's definition of crime as it is about deviance and is therefore "a moral [but] not (necessarily) legal panic."[46] It is a distinction, Gilmore suggests, which allows public anxiety about social deviance to overshadow more immediate issues like recessions, inflation, and unemployment. A moral panic functionally forecloses an acknowledgment of material conditions. Denial, then, is a central condition for the development of a post-Keynesian state that relies on mass incarceration to facilitate the illusion of a moral society that is anything but and helps to perpetuate the racist capitalist state.

The dehumanization of black people can, unfortunately, be seen in countless examples. Here, I will focus on how dehumanization through the construction of black criminality manifests in the school-to-prison pipeline. Of course, this pipeline can be analyzed in various ways—I am thinking particularly how racial capitalism relies on a large prison population and an underclass—but here I focus on the criminalization of children of color and police in school. This is exemplified in what happened to Madisyn Moore, a six-year-old girl who took a piece of candy off of her teacher's desk. The security guard handcuffed the child under a stairwell until her mother was able to come and get her crying child uncuffed.[47] Situations in which black children are constituted as criminals from a young age are not uncommon, and the system is

designed to perpetuate the production of black youth as criminals in the fact that security guards are there to police the children, not protect them. Educators are also being trained to interrogate students with techniques that are even questionable to use on adults in jails—even as students do not have the same rights as those who have been formally arrested. The training teaches them not to stop when they see tears because "tears are the beginning of a confession" and to make sure to take their phones "so they can't call their mothers."[48] That makes this statistic all the more upsetting: School security officers outnumber counselors in four out of the ten largest public school districts in the country including three of the nation's five biggest school districts, which are New York City, Chicago, and Miami-Dade.[49] Situations that used to be handled in schools by school staff, like fights between students, are now criminalized, and students can face arrest. Of course, students who have already been criminalized through sociomental processes of racialization are more likely to suffer from these laws as their acts, even as small as taking a piece of candy, are seen as criminal. This racist process is a tragic manifestation of sociomental categories that allow the public to deny children's youth and criminalize and dehumanize people by skin color.

In no way do I wish to compare the experiences of oppressed people to those of nonhuman animals, but I do compare the tactics of the oppressor in its methods of domination and violation, and this is also in the case of farmed animals. Of course, it might seem strange to talk about the nonhuman in a section on dehumanization, but what Adams has identified as the absent referent is relevant beyond her application to animals. Very few see the animals that they eat before the animals' bodies have been turned into pieces of meat. But with the exception of young children,[50] most know they are eating animals. Still, people find ways to distance themselves from that knowledge. Carol J. Adams points out how this takes place: "Dismembered

bodies are called 'whole,' creating the contradiction of purchasing a 'whole bird' whose feathers, feet and head are missing. Can a dead bird really be a 'fresh young chicken' as the plastic wrapping at the meat counter proclaims?"[51] We recreate the ontology of chicken-as-meat as raw chicken, rather than formerly living beings.[52] This is what Carol J. Adams calls the "absent referent." As a form of denial, the absent referent is a paradox; something could only be a referent if it is in some way present.[53] It becomes absent because it is denied: in Simmel's terms, the animals are the stranger in society, always absent and yet also present.

The absent referent happens in three ways: literally, through definition, and metaphorically. Carol J. Adams conceptualizes the absent referent in developing a feminist-vegetarian critical theory. In thinking about animals used for food, the absent referent can be seen in all three ways. Animals are literally killed so their presence is literally absent from consumers' lives—most consumers never meet the animals they eat. As she writes, "without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food." Food definitions make animals absent; "pork" absents the "pig". Adams continues, "Our culture further mystifies the term 'meat' with gastronomic language, so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine." And, third, the absent referent is evoked metaphorically when people say things like "I feel like a piece of meat": they don't acknowledge what it is like to be a piece of meat—and that meat is by definition dead and devoid of feelings. "The absent referent permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity; it also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present."[54]

Even Stanley Cohen, who wrote the book on denial, cannot confront the absent referent of animals as meat:

> I am particularly oblivious—in total denial—about animal issues. I know that the treatment of animals in cruel experiments and factory farming is difficult to defend. I can

even see the case for becoming a vegetarian. But in the end, much like people throwing away an Amnesty leaflet, my filters go into automatic drive: this is not my responsibility; there are worse problems; there are plenty of other people looking after this. What do you mean, I'm in denial every time I eat a hamburger?[55]

Here Cohen very helpfully exemplifies the paradox of denial: like most omnivores, he is not at all intellectually unaware of the problems with meat eating and yet he is still able to put it out of mind.

Timothy Pachirat, in his ethnography of industrialized slaughter, begins with the story of six cows that escaped an industrialized slaughterhouse in Nebraska in 2004. One cow separated from the others and was cornered in an alley of another nearby slaughterhouse. Surrounded by workers from the first slaughterhouse and Omaha police officers armed with shotguns, the cow was not easily corralled and was shot dead by the police officers. This occurred during a ten-minute break for workers at the second slaughterhouse who were greatly disturbed and horrified by the shooting, comparing it to a recent shooting of an unarmed Mexican man by the Omaha Police. Pachirat's story is compelling because one expects that slaughterhouse workers would be anesthetized to such things—in the United States, after all, a cow is killed *every twelve seconds*, which is the name of Pachirat's book—and yet they were shocked and sickened by the shooting of one cow.

Sociomental processes also facilitate denial of humanity's ties to nature. Even the phrase "ties to nature" elides humans as an inextricable part of nature. The entire discourse of nature versus nurture, and even the idea that sociology and biology are disciplines removed from each other, plays into the distancing of human culture from nature. It is a sociomental process that people engage in when designating something as "nature," and this involves power and denial.

This problem also arises when "natural disasters" occur. Neil Smith makes the argument, as do many environmental geographers, that what makes a natural event a disaster is not the

natural event itself but the social relations of the locations. Smith focuses specifically on Hurricane Katrina when he says that the divorce of social conditions from natural events facilitates circumstances like the Bush administration's ability to blame over one thousand people's deaths on an act of nature. What Smith calls "ideological camouflage"—this process of categorizing a disaster as "natural"—I would call a sociomental production of denial. Because, as Smith surmises, "disasters don't simply flatten landscapes, washing them smooth. Rather they deepen and erode the ruts of social difference they encounter," but categorizing them as "natural disaster" masks this truth.[56]

<center>CONCLUSION</center>

Charles Mills asks readers to imagine what he calls *white ignorance*: "Imagine an ignorance that resists. Imagine an ignorance that fights back. Imagine an ignorance militant, aggressive, not to be intimidated, an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly—not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as knowledge."[57] Denial is not something that can be remedied by knowledge and awareness because that is the very thing that causes the denial. That is, without awareness, there could be nothing to deny. Denial complicates any linear move between knowledge and action. Awareness is necessary but insufficient. Since denial is a paradox, one paradoxically denies what one knows and, in some contexts, talks about all the time and in other cases even ingests. Despite the fact that both Cohen and Zerubavel focus their attention on horrible things, it is not just horrible things that become the objects of denial; denial is an everyday practice that applies on every level, from lunch to favorite holidays.

Because denial is a paradox, there is no easy way to spot it; denial hides itself in inattention; that is its very character. Hannah Arendt's understanding of self-deception is helpful

here because it too is a paradox—how can one deceive oneself? "Self-deception still pre-

supposes a distinction between truth and falsehood, between fact and fantasy," she writes,

"which disappears in an entirely defactualized mind. . . . Self-deception is the danger par

excellence; the self-deceived deceiver loses all contact, not only with his audience but with the

real world which will catch up with him, as he can remove only his mind from it and not his

body."[58]

This chapter has explained how sociomental processes are a key aspect of understanding

denial. But is it as simple as just splitting the world into categories? Bauman argues,

> Drawing clear dividing lines between normal and abnormal, orderly and chaotic, sane and
> sick, reasonable and mad, are all accomplishments of power. To draw such lines is to
> dominate; it is the domination which wears the masks of norm or health, which appears
> now as reason, now as sanity, now as law and order. . . . Power turns out its enemies by
> denying them what it strives to secure for itself; and the enemy exists only of and through
> that denial. . . . When (if) it succeeds, the inseparable will have been separated, the
> indivisible divided, existence will no longer seem fragile nor the world mysterious.[59]

To go deeper into understanding this sociomental classification, Bauman turns to psychoanalysis,

as I will do in the next chapter. As he explains,

> Psychoanalysis was to be an art of interpretation. It transformed the human world, the
> whole of it . . . into a text to be interpreted; it refused to accept the pinned-on labels as
> meanings, the filing-cabinet code-names as identities. . . . By asking questions, it sapped
> the structure whose substance was the prohibition of asking. It was the very essence of
> psychoanalytical challenge that no code of interpretation is privileged, no one meaning-
> giving context is obviously superior to others, no one meaning is to be chosen to the
> exclusion of others. Things are not what we are told they are or forced to believe they
> should be.[60]

In this spirit, I move from examining *that* sociomental processes facilitate denial, to *why*—a

query that moves this dissertation to the unconscious.

Notes

[1] Emile Durkheim, "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions," *Durkheimian Studies/Etudes Durkheimiennes* 11 (2005): 38.

[2] Cohen, *States of Denial*, 295.

[3] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 215.

[4] Ibid., 251.

[5] This is Thomas DeGloma's example (personal communication).

[6] Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Social Structure of Irrelevance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8.

[7] Ibid., 1.

[8] Ibid., 10.

[9] Cohen, *States of Denial*, 42–45.

[10] Gresham M. Sykes and David Matza, "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency," *American Sociological Review* 22, no. 6 (December 1957): 668.

[11] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2001), 2.

[12] Ibid., 69.

[13] Ibid., 36.

[14] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 2.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 1.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Vintage, 1979); Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

[19] Said, *Orientalism*, 67–68.

[20] Durkheim, "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions," 38.

[21] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[22] Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 20.

[23] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 77–128.

[24] Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 136.

[25] Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2015), 179.

[26] Sarah Sunshine Manning, "Thanksgiving Myth Creates Fairytale of Land Theft, Betrayal, Genocide," *Indian Country Today*, November 23, 2015, accessed July 15, 2016, http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/11/23/manning-thanksgiving-myth-creates-fairytale-land-theft-betrayal-genocide-162517.

[27] Manning, "Thanksgiving Myth Creates Fairytale of Land Theft, Betrayal, Genocide."

[28] Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 27.

[29] Ibid., 243.

30 Ibid., 244.

31 Mumia Abu-Jamal, "What Is Palestine to the US?," in *Letters to Palestine: Writers Respond to War and Occupation*, ed. Vijay Prashad (London: Verso, 2015), 17.

32 Dayan, "How Not to Talk About Gaza," 95.

33 Corey Robin, "A Gaza Breviary," in *Letters to Palestine: Writers Respond to War and Occupation*, ed. Vijay Prashad (London: Verso, 2015), 132.

34 Dayan, "How Not to Talk About Gaza," 99.

35 Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 181.

36 Ibid., 206–7.

37 Ibid., 183.

38 Ibid., 198.

39 Ibid., 199.

40 Ibid., 200.

41 Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*, xvi.

42 Ibid., 79.

43 Ibid., 186.

44 Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 46.

45 Dayan, "How Not to Talk About Gaza," 96.

46 Gilmore, "Globalisation and US Prison Growth: From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism," 172.

47 Sarah K. Burris, "Crying 6-Year-Old Put in Handcuffs under School's Stairs for Taking Candy off Teacher's Desk," *Raw Story*, March 20, 2016, accessed July 15, 2016, http://www.rawstory.com/2016/03/crying-6-year-old-put-in-handcuffs-under-schools-stairs-for-taking-candy-off-teachers-desk/.

48 Douglas Starr, "Why Are Educators Learning How to Interrogate Their Students?," *New Yorker*, March 25, 2016, accessed July 15, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/why-are-educators-learning-how-to-interrogate-their-students.

49 Matt Barnum, "Exclusive—Data Shows 3 of the 5 Biggest School Districts Hire More Security Officers Than Counselors," *The 74*, March 27, 2016, accessed July 15, 2016, https://www.the74million.org/article/exclusive-data-shows-3-of-the-5-biggest-school-districts-hire-more-security-officers-than-counselors.

50 Countless online videos depict children discovering the meat they are being fed to be parts of animals; these exemplify the cultural production of the absent referent.

51 Carol J. Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 97.

52 Thanks to David Regan for talking this through with me.

53 Carol J. Adams, *Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 97.

54 Ibid., 66–68.

55 Cohen, *States of Denial*, 289.

56 Neil Smith, "There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster," *Understanding Katrina*, June 11, 2006, accessed July 15, 2016, http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Smith/, para. 8.

57 Charles Mills, "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, SUNY Series, Philosophy and Race (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 13.

[58] Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics: Reflections on The Pentagon Papers," *New York Review of Books*, November 18, 1971.

[59] Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 174.

[60] Ibid., 175.

Chapter Five

More in Mind Than We Know: The Unconscious and Denial

The main idea behind this study of aggression is that if society is in danger, it is not because of man's aggressiveness but because of the repression of personal aggressiveness in individuals.

—Winnicott "Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development"[1]

Thus far I have talked about upsetting and tragic circumstances and patterns of social behavior but without explicitly posing the question, Why are we doing this? I have been focusing on how social actors engage in denial, or that they do so. In the sociospatial chapter I argued that denial is laid out spatially, then that denial is structured in cognitive sociomental processing. Here I move through the psychosocial scale and engage with the unconscious to uncover aggression in denial, which is then highlighted through unconscious motivations for contested social problems, particularly constructions of the self, ideas of good and bad, and disavowal. The psychosocial paradigm demonstrates that denial is not simply about avoiding displeasure but about active engagement in expressions of aggression.

THE UNCONSCIOUS AND DENIAL

The unconscious is not just in the individual psyche. Many have argued that there is a social unconscious—the concept appears in the work of all the classical theorists, though not necessarily explicitly acknowledged. Implicit in any idea of social norms and patterns is an unconscious. Social patterns of thinking, shared categories, and shared meanings emerge but are not always explicitly identified. There must be an unconscious that does this. Fanon argues that this collective unconscious is a consequence of an "impulsive cultural imposition."[2] Cultural neuroses embodied by individuals are produced not by the individual but by the environment.[3]

Psychoanalysts have also talked about this phenomenon to account for what they see in their patients. Layton calls these *normative unconscious processes*. "Normative unconscious processes refer to that aspect of the unconscious that pulls to repeat affect/behavior/cognition patterns that uphold the very social norms that cause psychic distress in the first place."[4]

What would it mean for sociology to acknowledge this largely unspoken unconscious? Perhaps then scholars could take seriously Lynn Chancer's question, What "if patterned social defense mechanisms could be identified, though they might require concepts that both use and point beyond Freudian notions culled from empirical observations of individuals (not groups)?"[5] Could it be that "an underlying connection between sociology and psychoanalysis is one of hyper- rather than irrelevance. If so, then exploring rather than denying the unconscious as a star Freudian tenet matters, the psychodynamic becomes the sociological and vice versa."[6] Chancer is right to ask this question, as the unspoken hyperrelevance of the unconscious appears in various literatures.

Durkheim makes clear the relevance of the unconscious when he talks about coercive sociality. Joshua Howard, in his reading of Durkheim, suggests that what Durkheim is really talking about when he refers to the coercive aspects of culture are unconscious cultural processes. One does not consciously identify a dollar bill on the street as money, as different from a piece of litter on the sidewalk; these distinctions are made unconsciously.[7] Yet some social theorists, such as Zerubavel, do not see the unconscious as part of the purview of sociology. Part of this is because it is hard, or impossible, to empirically verify the unconscious. Yet psychoanalysts have tools for engaging with the unconscious and revealing its manifestations. What would it mean for sociology to explore the unconscious with some of these

tools? Regardless of whether or not sociologists acknowledge it—whether we remain in denial or not—the unconscious is part of culture.

Guattari's view posits the unconscious as very much part of culture—it is "something that we drag around with ourselves both in our gestures and daily objects, as well as on TV, that is part of the zeitgeist, and even, and perhaps especially, in our day-to-day problems. . . . Thus, the unconscious works inside individuals in their manner of perceiving the world and living their body, territory, and sex, as well as inside the couple, the family, school, neighborhood, factories, stadiums, and universities."[8] An understanding of the unconscious such as this suggests consideration of Bourdieu's *habitus* or Althusser's ideology as a theory of the unconscious.

Jacques Lacan's articulation of the unconscious is helpful in furthering this analysis: he argues the unconscious is the unknown known. He claims that "[psycho]*analysis appears on the scene* to announce that there is knowledge which does not know itself."[9] Sociologists have been saying this, as well, just not explicitly. Articulating the unconscious as such is incredibly helpful in furthering the work of the theorists mentioned in the previous sections. Lacan offers space to consider what sociologists have taken in to ourselves, but not consciously.

So what does this mean for denial? For one, the unconscious complicates understandings of agency. Members of a society do not consciously choose their social structures. Their dynamic engagement as individuals with the social structure may largely be happening in the unconscious modulation between the two, rather than in, say, policy decisions. The unconscious also allows exploration of what happens when something is put out of sight and out of mind, as discussed in the previous two chapters. The psychosocial approach, which explores the unconscious socially, allows scholars to look for what has been materially and cognitively swept under the rug. A psychosocial approach makes the residue of these cultural patterns visible and draws out some

consequences that remain unseen in the other paradigms. Psychoanalysis reconciles the contradiction or paradox of denial much more than the other paradigms—that with denial one both knows *and* doesn't know. The other paradigms demonstrate that this happens but not how it happens.

For Freud, there are many ways to not-know. Repression is sometimes understood as not knowing one's own instinctual denial, whereas disavowal is sometimes considered to be the not-knowing of external stimuli when both or either are too difficult to bear. These distinctions often blur along with the connection between internal and external environment. Any denial is an energy-intensive action.[10] Stanley Cohen uses a psychoanalytic concept to establish his definition of denial. Drawing on Bollas and encompassing both repression and disavowal, Cohen's formula for denial is "the need to be innocent of a troubling recognition," something "too threatening to confront, but impossible to ignore."[11] Theorists like Cohen have argued that people ignore inconvenient truths,[12] much like the title of the famous documentary about climate change— denial can be very convenient. Anna Freud, in her elaboration on defense mechanisms, furthers the discussion of denial in a way I find useful for understanding denial. Conflicts engaged in by the ego, whether it be with the id, the superego, or the external world, all manifest with defensive mechanisms to save the ego from experiencing unpleasure.[13]

I think denial, however, is much more complex than providing convenience or avoiding unpleasure. I thus diverge from Sigmund Freud slightly, as well as from Anna Freud's elaboration on defense mechanisms. In this chapter I propose that the social pattern of denial is not about ignoring but about a complex unconscious mix of desire and aggression. I draw here on Klein and Winnicott to rethink denial and make the concept more applicable to the workings of the social unconscious.

Melanie Klein's paranoid schizoid position is a state of being, originating in childhood but often left unresolved, where a subject without the means to adequately protect the ego experiences the world being rigorously split between good and bad so that they may be able to project all the bad and only introject the positive. Upon the subject's reaching maturity the bad would ideally be integrated into the ego, as well, yet when the individual is still in the paranoid schizoid position, a persecutory and then reciprocally paranoid stance is developed around the object on which the "bad" was projected.[14] Klein presents the unconscious as divided, so that people may not even be consciously aware of the divisions or classifications they are constantly making—certainly this is true, as shown in the previous chapter, in people's inability to think outside culturally produced categories. But I find Klein's analysis of the bad most useful for the study of denial. Here I move beyond the sociospatial and sociomental chapters to consider why denial happens.

For Klein, the depressive position is melancholia in its nascent state—the baby is weaned, and greedy and destructive fantasies emerge; "[love, goodness, security] are felt by the baby to be lost, and lost as a result of his own uncontrollable greedy and destructive phantasies and impulses against his mother's breasts."[15] Adam Phillips links and bridges Klein and Winnicott's theories—he argues for the necessity of seeing Klein in Winnicott's work.[16] Klein's depressive position corresponds to Winnicott's *stage of concern*—this is when the capacity for guilt emerges—the guilt and concern wrapped up in the infant's desire for the mother. Moving from the breast of Klein to Winnicott's mother, the baby now struggles with reconciling the mother she eats with the mother who cares for her. The baby feels guilt for wanting to devour the mother she loves and concern about what her desire might to do the mother.[17] In comparison, in

the earlier paranoid schizoid position, the baby cannot feel guilt because the mother has not yet

been integrated—she remains two part-objects.[18]

In the earliest stage of the baby's development, it is not just the mother that is split—the

ego develops a split, as well, through processes of introjection and projection.

> Experiences of a painful nature, frustrations from internal and external sources, which are
> felt as persecution, are primarily attributed to the external and internal persecuting
> objects. In all such experiences, persecutory anxiety and aggression reinforce each other.
> For while the infant's aggressive impulse through projection play a fundamental part in
> his building up of persecutory figures, these very figures increase his persecutory anxiety
> and in turn reinforce his aggressive impulses and phantasies against the external and
> internal objects felt to be dangerous.[19]

Aggression plays a huge part in the development of the ego—it is both introjected and projected.

Winnicott posits the aggressive impulse as even more important than erotic impulses.

This is a huge move away from Freud and what I find most useful for this discussion.

Understandings of denial shift when examined through aggressive impulses rather than solely

erotic and pleasure impulses; it can no longer be understood as simply a mechanism of protecting

the ego from pain or displeasure. Aggression precedes ego development, as Winnicott argues,

and thus is part of the psychic structure from its very formation.[20] "Aggression is part of the

primitive expression of love," Winnicott explains; this is seen even as the fetus kicks in the

womb.[21] Because there is no such thing as complete id satisfaction, reactive aggression can be

detected from the moment of the primitive love impulse.[22] But erotic life can develop without

integration with the aggressive reactive life. The erotic life doesn't feel as real, however, and the

person lives primarily within their aggressive life, which is dependent on opposition. Because the

sense of self isn't integrated or fused, and and the erotic life doesn't feel real, the self becomes

organized around aggression and then later persecution.[23]

> The immediate conclusion to be drawn from this observation is that in the early stages,
> when the *Me* and the *Not-Me* are being established, it is the aggressive component that

more surely drives the individual to a need for a *Not-Me* or an object that is felt to be *external*. The erotic experiences can be completed while the object is subjectively conceived or personally created, or while the individual is near to the narcissistic state of primary identification of earlier date. The erotic experiences can be completed by anything that brings relief to the erotic instinctual drive, and that allows of forepleasure, rising tension of general and local excitement, climax and detumescence or its equivalent, followed by a period of lack of desire. . . . On the other hand, the aggressive impulses do not give any satisfactory experience unless there is opposition. The opposition must come from the environment, from the *Not-Me* which gradually comes to be distinguished from the *Me*.[24]

How might satisfaction of the aggressive impulse be conceived in relation to denial?

For Klein, it is not a coincidence that the split structure of ego development for children is the same for individuals mourning. "My contention is that the child goes through states of mind comparable to the mourning of the adult, or rather, that this early mourning is revived whenever grief is experienced in later life."[25] Thus melancholia can be thought of in terms of aggression. For Freud, melancholia, in contrast to mourning, is when the object-loss is withdrawn from consciousness and the loss is internalized: "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself."[26] The ego tries to incorporate the object by devouring it.[27] The problem is that though the object is gone, the love is not, so the love seeks refuge in identification with the object, but so too do the other feelings for the object. The hate operates in abusing and debasing the substitute object, which is the ego itself. The paradoxically enjoyable self-tormenting of melancholia is of particular interest here. "The melancholic's erotic cathexis in regard to his object has thus undergone a double vicissitude: part of it has regressed to identification, but the other part, under the influence of the conflict due to ambivalence, has been carried back to the stage of sadism, which is nearer to that conflict."[28] Unfortunately, there is no winning in melancholia. When the lost object is gone, it is gone, and there are severe consequences to denial of loss through melancholia.

Butler follows Klein in discussing melancholia in this way; introjection of the lost object can lead to dangerous consequences. "The result is that for the ego to live, it must let the other die, but that proves difficult when 'letting die' feels too close to 'murder' or, indeed, to taking impossible responsibility for the other's death. Better to take one's own life than become a murderer, even if taking one's life confirms oneself as a murderer of the self."[29] Thinking of denial this way, denial without aggression is not possible. This is why, Cheng says, "the melancholic's relationship to the object is now no longer just love of nostalgia but also profound resentment. The melancholic is not melancholic because he or she has lost something but because he or she has introjected that which he or she now reviles. Thus the melancholic is stuck in more ways than just temporally; he or she is stuck—almost choking on—the hateful and loved thing he or she just devoured."[30]

Neither the sociospatial or sociomental paradigms account for aggression, but the examples in the last two chapters indicate that aggression is a major part of denial. All of the exclusions discussed—prisons, elimination of entire populations of people, eating animals—all play in to what Cheng describes here:

> At this moment *loss* becomes *exclusion* in the melancholic landscape. What Freud does not address . . . but what must be a consequence of this psychical drama is the multiple layers of denial and exclusion that the melancholic must exercise in order to maintain this elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss. First, the melancholic must deny loss as loss in order to sustain the fiction of possession. Second, the melancholic would have to make sure that the 'object' never returns, for such a return would surely jeopardize the cannibalistic project that, one might note, is a form of possession more intimate than any material relation could produce. Thus although it may seem reasonable to imagine that the griever may wish for the return of the loved one, once this digestive process has occurred, the ego may in fact not want or cannot afford such homecoming.[31]

I begin now to look at examples with this psychosocial insight.

Unconscious aggression that produces conditions of violation happens through three mechanisms that I have identified: constructions of the self, tensions between good and bad, and disavowal. I explore these, primarily focusing on settler colonialism, Israeli apartheid, mass incarceration, industrialized animal slaughter, and environmental destruction.

Construction of the Self

Aggression is a central psychoanalytic concept necessary to an understanding of what is not addressed in the sociomental framework for identity construction. This is clear in an analysis of settler colonialism in the United States, particularly in the 1800s. Michael Rogin analyzes the psychosocial aspects of the Jacksonian-era elimination of Native Americans alongside US liberalism, understood as the "unchallenged primacy of propertied individualism across the political spectrum."[32] Liberalism insisted that white men conquer and separate themselves from nature, in contrast to the American Indians, who were seen as in harmony with nature. Because property was key to liberalism, the communal understanding of land held by American Indians was seen as primitive.

> The consequence was forbidden nostalgia, for the nurturing, blissful, and primitively violent connection to nature that white Americans had to leave behind. At the core of liberalism lay the belief that such human connections to each other and to the land were dreams only, subjects of nostalgia or sentimentalization but impossible in the existing adult world. By suggesting the reality of the dream, Indian societies posted a severe threat to liberal identity. The only safe Indians were dead, sanitized, or totally dependent on white benevolence.[33]

Rogin explains that whites understood evolution of societies to follow the same logic of an individual—the American Indians were still children to the white parents. This was the actual discourse, not his post-hoc analysis—the whites actually spoke in terms of familial relations in speeches and published writings. It is no surprise whites are found to have projected this idea

onto American Indians when analyzed through a psychosocial perspective. And it clarifies how the whites could commit genocide against the people for whom they were supposed to hold paternal care. Rogin explains that

> the symbols of Indian policy expressed repressed anxiety at the premature separation from warm, maternal protection. In the white fantasy, Indians remain in the oral stage, sustained by and unseparated from mother nature. They are at once symbols of a lost childhood bliss and, as bad children, repositories of murderous negative projections. Adult independence wreaks vengeance upon its own nostalgia for infant dependence. The Indian's tie with nature must be broken, literally by uprooting him, figuratively by civilizing him, finally by killing him.[34]

The melancholic liberal white settler cannot confront his own loss, and to preserve the introjected object he clings to, he must murder the American Indian to avoid facing the reality of his loss. The melancholic devours but can never be satisfied. Rogin argues that whites regressed and sought to regain the lost attachment by "expanding, swallowing, and incorporating" the land.[35]

Rogin points out the white settlers were in denial—how could they settle the land under the assertion that men have the power to control their fate, and then destroy another group of people?[36] The whites projected their own feelings and actions onto the American Indians. President Andrew Jackson complained that "an Indian will claim everything and anything" after coercing a treaty that granted him ten million acres of Cherokee land.[37] American Indians were accused of killing babies and devouring flesh, when in reality it was a practice of whites to kill American Indian babies.[38] This rewriting of "history rescued a man from melancholy; he could tread on Indian graves in peace."[39]

This same melancholic construction of the self occurs with meat, as well. If melancholy is ingestion of the lost object, what might that mean for what one actually ingests? Chen says that "'the animal' stands in to melancholically symbolize what is being lost as a consequence

('natural' or not) of human dominance over the earth it occupies."[40] This is of course symbolic, as Chen states, but when one eats the animal, be it a cow, pig, or chicken, one literally ingests one's melancholy. In a Winnicottian perspective, aggressive impulses are satisfied in opposition to the "Not-Me"; thus, meat eating is a complicated dance, an artful psychic maneuvering, of negotiating the self and the other. This is visible, too, in dairy—mother's milk stolen from another. Many do not make the connection that milk they drink is available to them only because the baby it was made for has been slaughtered and eaten for lunch. Most humans eat other animals—no longer hidden from sight, these animals are literally placed in(side) consumers' faces, three meals a day—but most people do not want to really think about the "meat" that they eat as actual animals. Humans weave together core psychoanalytic concepts in their engagement with animals-as-food. The self, the other, the body, the mother, the breast are all presented in the act of eating a cheeseburger. Melancholic tensions of desire and aggression, lost objects, and unfulfilled wishes play out in the consumption of other beings.

This melancholic reaction is also manifested in the understanding of earth as property. Kovel argues "that a man's self—the inner idea of his personage—is united with and enlarged by part of the 'thing'-world" through property.[41] Property becomes a paradox: property melancholically recreates the connection with the earth from which the same concept of property is severed. With the breaking up of the earth into pieces of property, humans have lost concern for the well-being of the earth as a whole. The earth is in trouble, and more and more of the consequences of climate change will emerge in the next decades. Climate scientists are now stating that "society is in such grave peril" that they must now step beyond the role of researchers and become involved politically to issue clear warnings about this stark reality.[42]

Climate change denial would not be quite so terrifyingly pervasive if the public weren't already so accustomed to denial as a social practice.

Good/Bad

If the construction of self is so precarious as it is in a melancholic state, one also cannot adequately negotiate the balance between good and bad. This split is particularly clear in Israel, where the state has very clearly negotiated a split between itself as good and the Palestinians as bad. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) provide to vegan soldiers berets made without wool and boots made without animal leather. Vegan meal options are provided for all soldiers who want them. Israel has been called the "most vegan country in the world." The country itself is home to many vegans, has many vegan establishments, and is promoted by many leading animal rights organizations such as PETA, which has recommended to other armies to be more like the IDF. Vegan Israeli soldiers explain that the IDF supports their compassionate lifestyle choices—one particular soldier noted that if the army had not been able to "provide conditions that had harmed no living creatures" she would not have enlisted in a combat unit.[43] This phenomenon parallels that of pinkwashing, in which Israel is internationally lauded for being particularly gay friendly.[44] How can the countless killings of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers be reconciled with the same combat unit soldiers' understandings of themselves as not harming any living beings?

Ahmad Safi, the director of the Palestinian Animal League, argues the only interpretation is that Palestinians are not considered to be living creatures. Between January 2000 and January 2016, Israeli forces killed 1,977 Palestinian children.[45] In contrast, from September 2000 to July 2014, the number of Israeli children killed at the hands of Palestinian militants was 131.[46] Numbers like these are not accidents. How is it that Israel can come to completely disavow the humanity of the people they have expelled from the land? Kovel argues that Israel, as a settler-

colonial state, has produced a racism to "denigrate the culture of the lesser people as to call them animals, or even vermin or bacteria, or to regard them as incapable of civilization, or, particularly apt these days, to consider them as congenital terrorists, in contrast to [its] own terrorists who act in a higher, that is, more human cause."[47] This denigration, apparent in the above example of the vegan soldier, manifests as a denial. The splitting of the social psyche allows for kindness to some (farm animals) while letting aggression out on the Palestinian people.

This split also plays out in the United States, which reproduces itself as a "good" state by punishing the "bad." Solitary confinement is torture but is widely practiced in US prisons. What allows for a society to hold itself above others for not using torture, while simultaneously committing widespread acts of torture? The answer is not so simple as to be denial alone but must be a sort of denial that accounts for aggression. Albert Woodfox was recently released from prison, albeit not soon enough, unfortunately, to avoid having earned the title of America's longest-standing solitary confinement prisoner.[48] Woodfox, one of the Angola Three, along with Herman Wallace and Robert King, was falsely accused of murder because of his activism against racism. All three suffered decades of solitary confinement in 6-by-9-foot cells; Woodfox spent a total of forty-three years and ten months in almost continuous solitary confinement. He describes his experience as "an evil," explaining that "solitary confinement is the most torturous experience a human being can be put through in prison. It's punishment without ending." Finding an accurate number of people in solitary confinement is a difficult task, but an estimated eighty thousand people are in restricted housing, another name for solitary confinement.[49]

Woodfox describes the process of trying to keep his sanity: "The panic attacks started with sweating. You sweat and you can't stop. You become soaking wet—you are asleep in your

bunk and everything is soaking wet. Then when the claustrophobia starts it feels like the atmosphere is pressing down on you. That was hard. I used to talk to myself to convince myself I was strong enough to survive, just to hold on to my sanity until the feeling went away." But he explains that because many people in solitary confinement are unable to read and write, they have less intellectual strength to help them survive the torture. He says, "Some of the guys found the pressure so great that they just laid down in a foetal position and stopped communicating with anybody. I've seen other guys who just want to talk and make noise, guys who want to scream. Breaking up manifests itself in any number of ways in individuals."[50]

What kind of society does this to people? People deemed criminals are taken and tortured. President Andrew Jackson and others accused Native Americans of crimes such as killing white babies and then killed native babies. Michael Rogin explains this behavior: "Punishing the criminal permitted them to participate in the forbidden criminal activity."[51] The prison system isn't about confining societal dangers; it masquerades as a way to keep the "good" safe but is actually a way to channel societal aggressivity toward an acceptable target, those deemed "bad" in the good/bad split—the "Criminal." By materially isolating people in solitary, members of the society at large unconsciously isolate and protect their fragile conceptions of self.

Michelle Alexander points out it is no longer socially acceptable to hate black people, but one can hate the criminal.[52] This was the rhetoric used around "superpredators" during the Clinton administration and the rhetoric that continues today. In 2015, New York City Police Commissioner Bill Bratton said,

> There are people in our society, I'm sorry, they're criminals. They're bad people. You don't want to put them in diversion programs; you don't want to keep them out of jail. We need to work very hard to put them in jail and keep them there for a long time, because they're a danger to the rest of us, and that's the reality. . . . We can't lose sight of

the fact that we have a hardcore criminal population in this city of several thousand people who have no values, who have no respect for human life.[53]

Bratton's attitude exemplifies Rogin's point—people accused of having no respect for human life are then treated with no respect for their lives as humans.

This is why Durkheim said, "In a sense—although certainly the expression is egregiously inaccurate—one can say that up to a certain point the criminal is no longer a human being, that we are justified in no longer viewing him as man."[54] I interpret Durkheim to mean that people justify their view of criminals through their racialized projection of aggressivity and dehumanization. Fanon knew this when he said that "projecting his desires onto the black man, the white man behaves as if the black man actually had [these qualities]."[55] Fanon sees this paradox clearly because he bore the consequences of a racist society. "However, the scapegoat for white society, which is based on the myths of progress, civilization, liberalism, education, enlightenment, and refinement, will be precisely the force that opposes the expansion and triumph of these myths. This oppositional brute force is provided by the black man."[56] And the black man is forced, along with black women and children, to contain the state's aggression in his very body, in very small cells.

Disavowal

Of course, a society, or more particularly, a state, cannot explain that it is has constructed itself in this fashion and thus must produce conditions of disavowal. In fact, this rewriting of the construction of statehood is a key point that Audra Simpson makes when she says, "How to stop a story that is always being told? Or, how to change a story that is always being told? The story that settler-colonial nation-states tend to tell about themselves is that they are new; they are beneficent; they have successfully 'settled' all issues prior to their beginning."[57] Dunbar-Ortiz points out that there are currently "more than five hundred federally recognized Indigenous

communities and nations, comprising nearly three million people in the United States. These are

the descendants of the fifteen million original inhabitants of the land, the majority of whom were

farmers who lived in towns."[58] Dunbar-Ortiz contends that

> US history, as well as inherited Indigenous trauma, cannot be understood without dealing
> with the genocide that the United States committed against Indigenous peoples. From the
> colonial period through the founding of the United States and continuing in the twenty-
> first century, this has entailed torture, terror, sexual abuse, massacres, systematic military
> occupations, removals of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories, and
> removals of Indigenous children to military-like boarding schools. The absence of even
> the slightest note of regret or tragedy in the annual celebration of the US independence
> betrays a deep disconnect in the consciousness of US Americans.[59]

This denial runs deep, as it is built into the entire societal structure. When Obama spoke about

brokering a deal between Israel and Palestine he affirmed the ability for complete denial with

this statement: "We sometimes make mistakes. We have not been perfect. But if you look at the

track record, as you say, America was not born as a colonial power."[60] The denial of the violence

of early white settlers has been passed down through culture for generations. And this is not just

because present-day Americans cannot bear to look back on the country's violent history but

because this social aggression is still present, as seen in the violent dispossession of native lands

before the halting of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Slavoj Žižek defines his concept of fetishistic disavowal as "I know it, but I don't want to

know that I know, so I don't know."[61] Using slaughterhouses as an example, Žižek draws

attention to what people try not to pay attention to, what people would need to forget "in an act

which suspended symbolic efficiency" to go on functioning in society; "what [we] know . . . but

. . . refuse to fully assume the consequences of this knowledge, so that [we] can continue acting

as if [we] don't know it."[62] I am less concerned here with the ethics of eating meat than its use as

an example par excellence of denial in its literal manifestation of the melancholic relation. This

can be illustrated through a mundane example: lunch. Though much sociomental and

sociospatial work has been done to turn a pig into a ham sandwich, someone who orders it for lunch nonetheless knows it is an animal. To reiterate, denial is not ignorance; it can only happen when the denier knows the truth. By the time customers get to the lunch counter, despite their spatial and cognitive labor, they still know they are about to eat an animal. So how does denial play out here? The psychosocial perspective makes clear that aggression is not aberrant; it is present all the time and is apparent when one eats the flesh of another being. It is an incredibly aggressive act to devour another being, much as the melancholic devouring desire is aggressive. Returning to Mel Chen's point that the animal stands for what has been lost in humanity's domination over the earth, a human who eats the animal is melancholically relating to his or her loss from humanity's broken bonds to nature.

Moving from nonhuman animals to the earth and nature itself, a continued pattern of aggression is particularly evident as a manifestation through capitalism. Some of the same tensions of aggression and identity that are present in meat eating are present in the destruction of the planet. There is a foreclosure in US society of humans' primary bond with earth, as Kovel explains: "Industrialization is not an independent force . . . but the hammer with which nature is smashed for the sake of capital."[63] Capitalism is an exploitative and destructive system that alienates people from their species being as a form of denial. Kovel makes a similar argument when he says, "Separation/alienation/splitting is the fundamental gesture of capital. It applies to the expropriation of peasants, but also forcefully to the industrial system, where technological prowess in the service of value-expansion puts the finishing touches to the domination of nature."[64] In trying to dominate earth, humans manifest their split from nature.

Of course, when the effects of environmental destruction are not distributed evenly it can be easier for the more privileged to stay in denial; this is why, Smith points out, marginalized

communities suffer its primary effects.[65] Native reservations are called reservations because the United States owns the land and reserves it for native people. Ownership, however, means the United States can still do what it pleases with the land, such that military and nuclear testing is almost exclusively done on reservations.[66] Yet, Smith points out, Malthusian logic is used to blame the global south for climate destruction through overpopulation, which, when it exists, results directly from specific colonial practices.[67] By shifting blame and, at least for now, the consequences on to the oppressed, the privileged can remain in denial.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

Jefferson points out that the move away from psychoanalysis in both psychology and sociology has prevented an adequate understanding of hatred, particularly racial hatred, because it curtails an understanding of its unconscious dynamics.[68] One major contribution of this chapter is to highlight unconscious desire for the things I discussed. Other discussions of denial[69] contain less analysis of the desire for atrocities. But people want others in prison. People want to eat animals that were brutally slaughtered. What is denied is the desire for this and the deniers' aggressivity. Members of a society have culturally shared desires and aggressions. It's not enough to ask why members of a population don't act; the question needs to be why they set up a culture where they don't have to. Built environments and cultures are constructed around their communities' largely unconscious aggressivity without their acknowledgment that this is the case.

The assumption in other theories is that individuals are all neutral to bad things, that no one wants them, and that they deny them because they are too bad, too traumatic to handle. In this chapter I have shown the situation is more complicated than this. Denial is not about avoiding displeasure but about expressing aggression. There is a scene in *The Walking Dead*

where the peaceful town of Woodbury, supposedly protected from the zombie apocalypse (a metaphor for the aggressivity of the outside world?), has a monthly arena fight between humans and zombies. The "governor" of the town says it helps the residents "blow off steam," but it is not meant to be understood that way by the audience, who is horrified by the "truth."[70] Evident here is the murderous rage of normality, a trope common in stories such as "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson[71] and the 2013 film *The Purge*.[72] In both the story and the film, once a year violence is encouraged. In "The Lottery," once a year the town stones to death a member of a family selected by a lottery. In *The Purge*, for 12 hours a year, all crime, including murder, is legal. These stories highlight the problem taken up in this chapter: humans have violent drives and impulses. Society cannot be properly accounted for without understanding the aggressivity in each member and in the overall culture. These examples need not be taken literally, however; if crime were legal for 12 hours a year, I suspect people would not actually all go massacre each other. But I do think that what these stories do is represent the denied aggressivity that Western culture sublimates into meat eating and prison, for example. Only a psychosocial scale of analysis can adequately account for this dimension of society.

Notes

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[3] Ibid., 188.

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[5] Lynn Chancer, "Sociology, Psychoanalysis, and Marginalization: Unconscious Defenses and Disciplinary Interests," *Sociological Forum* 28, no. 3 (September 2013): 466.

[6] Ibid., 454.

[7] Joshua Howard, "Seeing Things as Social: Collective Representations, Intentionality, and the Conception of Social Objects in Durkheim's Account of Social Facts," in *Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting* (Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, 2016).

[8] Félix Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte/Smart Art, 2011), 10.

[9] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 88.

[10] Freud, "Fetishism," 200.

[11] Cohen, *States of Denial*, 24, 27.

[12] Ibid., 33.

[13] Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*.

[14] Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works 1921–1945* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

[15] Melanie Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works 1921–1945* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 345.

[16] Adam Phillips, *Winnicott* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 9.

[17] Ibid., 107–8.

[18] Ibid., 56.

[19] Melanie Klein, "On the Theory of Anxiety and Guilt," in *The Writings of Melanie Klein: Envy and Gratitude and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1948), 32.

[20] Winnicott, "Aggression in Relation to Emotional Development," 216.

[21] Ibid., 205.

[22] Ibid., 210.

[23] Ibid., 217.

[24] Ibid., 215.

[25] Melanie Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works 1921–1945* (New York: Free Press, 1940), 344.

[26] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press: The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), 246.

[27] Ibid., 249–50.

[28] Ibid., 251–52.

[29] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 173–74.

[30] Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie*, 135.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 138.

[35] Ibid., 139.

[36] Ibid., 167.

[37] Ibid., 147.

[38] Ibid., 148.

[39] Ibid., 168.

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Chapter Six

Denial and Social Movements

Social movement organizations seek to confront contested social problems—these

organizations make impacts with their work, but do they challenge the structural denial that

perpetuates the problems they struggle against? In this chapter I use the theory developed in the

previous three chapters to analyze the platforms and campaigns of five organizations. These

organizations correspond to the contested social problems I explored in past chapters: the Vera

Institute for Justice (mass incarceration), Greenpeace (environmental destruction), the United

States Campaign for Palestinian Rights, Standing Rock (settler colonialism), and People for the

Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA; industrialized animal slaughter). I chose the organizations

to analyze based on three criteria: they are national or international organizations, they are well

known, and they are predominantly single-issue organizations. Although there is some overlap

between Greenpeace and Standing Rock in that both are concerned with the Dakota Access

Pipeline, the organizations are still primarily focused on one issue each—Greenpeace is

primarily concerned with the environment and Standing Rock primarily with indigenous rights.

In the previous chapters, I identified how denial manifests on three levels of the social

and how within each level there are three specific manifestations. I therefore explore how the

organizations' approaches to social change address denial as it manifests spatially in

containment, exclusion, and elimination. I look at how they address denial cognitively as it

manifests in ideas of dominion, identity construction through the other, and dehumanization.

And finally, I explore how they address denial psychosocially through unconscious aggression as

it manifests in constructions of the self, a split between good and bad, and disavowal. In my

analysis of these organizations, I use their websites as a text to see how they address these issues

and, perhaps, denial. I also look to how a discussion of denial does or does not factor into their work. In the conclusion, I discuss similarities among the organizations' approaches and how they address structural problems that may also address structural denial.

ORGANIZATIONS

In this section, I describe the five organizations: the Vera Institute for Justice, PETA, Greenpeace, the United States Campaign for Palestinian Rights, and Stand with Standing Rock. I discuss the founding and mission of each organization.

Vera Institute for Justice

The Vera Institute for Justice emerged from a project that began in 1961. Louis Schweitzer and Herb Sturz created a social experiment they called the Manhattan Bond Project, which led to national reform of the bail system in the United States. Vera, named for Schweitzer's mother, arose from this project's success. Vera is currently undertaking over sixty projects "that aim to unravel the impediments to human dignity and justice, while changing the lives of individuals."[1] Its work is "characterized by a disciplined focus on specific problems, partnering with public sector leaders willing to work with us to seek change, and a reliance on rigorous research."[2] The Vera Institute's mission is "to drive change. To urgently build and improve justice systems that ensure fairness, promote safety, and strengthen communities."[3]

The organization's approach is to work with people who share its vision and what organizers consider the most pressing issues of the day "from the causes and consequences of mass incarceration, racial disparities, and the loss of public trust in law enforcement, to the unmet needs of the vulnerable, the marginalized, and those harmed by crime and violence."[4] Within this vision there are three core priorities:

- "Closing mass incarceration's front door": "Our goal is substantially fewer people held in jail";

- "Promoting safety, trust, and justice in a diverse America": "Our goal is a justice system fully prepared to deliver access, safety, and fairness to the diverse communities that make up America";

- "Significantly improving the conditions of confinement": "Our goal is envisioning and enacting a system that prioritizes rehabilitation and socialization over retribution."[5]

Within these three priorities Vera has three commitments or focuses: *securing equal justice, ending mass incarceration*, and *strengthening families and communities*. Each focus has action areas. Those covered under securing equal justice include "building bridges between police and communities, supporting immigrants, reaching all victims, ensuring access for people with disabilities and deaf people, [and] promoting racial equity in prosecution." The action areas for ending mass incarceration are "reducing the use of jails, bringing dignity to life behind bars, providing second chances, [and] scoping the problem." Action areas for strengthening families and communities include "supporting kids and young adults, restoring community and family bonds, [and] expanding access to health care."[6] There are more targeted focus issues within all the action areas. The institute's work is very organized and specific—each aspect of its work is targeted toward Vera's specific goals.

Vera's work is aimed at influencing government officials, pushing for change from within the system. The institute relies on research and evidence to produce documents to inform policy. Like the Manhattan Bond Project, the organization continues to pilot solutions that are then expanded upon success. For example, Vera produced a report on the negative impact of pretrial detention, examining how jail contributes to the larger problem of mass incarceration.

Through this report, it is pursuing changes to address the findings. Vera is committed to shrinking jailed populations through reducing money as a determinant for release, reducing overreliance on arrest, and diversion from jails for substance use and mental health services. The organization is also doing work in over a dozen states and large cities to provide an extensive analysis of their current practices of solitary confinement. It is, additionally, working to use experimental federal funding of college in prison to generate sustained investment.[7]

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

In 1981, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) was formed as the organizers fought their first case against animal exploitation. The Silver Springs Monkey Case, as it is now called, resulted in the criminal conviction of an animal experimenter who was charged with animal cruelty. PETA, as the largest animal rights organization in the world, has as its mission to focus primarily on animal suffering in four main areas: the food industry, the clothing trade, laboratories, and the entertainment industry.[8] There are over five million PETA members and supporters worldwide. The organization primarily works through "public education, cruelty investigations, research, animal rescue, legislation, special events, celebrity involvement, and protest campaigns."[9] Its slogan is "animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment or abuse in any other way."[10] PETA's current campaigns include military trauma training, US and French dog laboratories, SeaWorld (both in general and Corky the orca in particular), veganism in diet and clothing, fashion brand Canada Goose's use of fur and down, cruel animal acts at UniverSoul Circus, adoptable animals, cruelty-free cosmetics, the NIH and its primate laboratories, the abuse of Australian and US wool sheep, the slaughter of seals for their skin ("Canada's shame"), and America's loneliest elephants.[11] Though none of its current campaigns explicitly target companies or individuals who use animals for

food, PETA promotes ongoing advocacy in this area (exemplified in the "How to Go Vegan in 3

Simple Steps" campaign); this is what I will focus on.

PETA focuses on cows, turkeys, pigs, ducks, geese, chickens, and fish and other sea

animals in its discussion of factoring farming, looking not only at the suffering of animals but

also on the environment and human health. Additionally, the organization focuses on how "free-

range" and "organic" labels deceive customers. Though its work is directed at multiple

audiences, a large majority of it seems to be targeted toward the general public.

> The abuse that animals suffer at human hands is heartbreaking, sickening, and infuriating. It's even more so when we realize that the everyday choices we make—such as what we eat for lunch and the kind of shampoo we buy—may be directly supporting some of this abuse. But as hard as it is to think about, we can't stop animals' suffering if we simply look the other way and pretend it isn't happening. Animals are counting on compassionate people like you to give them a voice and be their heroes by learning about the issues they face and taking action. Each of us has the power to save animals from nightmarish suffering—and best of all, it's easier than you might think. If you're ready to join the millions of other compassionate people who are working to create a kinder, better world for animals, please read on to learn how animals suffer in the food, animal experimentation, entertainment, clothing and pet-trade industries. Together, we can make a difference.[12]

PETA is known, in its own words, for "uncompromising, unwavering views on animal rights.

We aren't afraid to make the difficult comparisons, say the unpopular thing, or point out the

uncomfortable truth, if it means that animals will benefit. . . . Our positions may be controversial,

but they are always true to our driving mission: to stop animal abuse worldwide." Controversy

has been key to PETA's strategy.[13]

Greenpeace

Greenpeace was founded in 1971 by a group of people who organized to protest US

nuclear testing off the coast of Alaska. In the organization's own words, members "bear witness"

to environmental destruction by peaceful and nonviolent means. Its approach is to raise the level

and quality of public debate. It has political and commercial independence because 250,000 members in the United States and 2.8 million worldwide members provide funding through individual contributions. In the last 45 years Greenpeace has worked to "ban commercial whaling, convince the world's leaders to stop nuclear testing, [and] protect Antarctica," to name a few of its activities. Greenpeace is also committed to human social justice, which organizers see as essential to challenging the systems of power and privilege that threaten the earth—destruction of the earth will place disproportionate burdens on vulnerable communities.[14] The current campaigns that the organization is working on are "saving the Arctic," "fighting global warming," living free of toxic chemicals, "defending democracy," "protecting forests," "protecting [the] oceans," and "promoting sustainable food."[15] In addition to creating awareness among the general public, Greenpeace produces reports and conduct investigations.

United States Campaign for Palestinian Rights

Founded in 2001 and originally called the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, the US Campaign for Palestinian Rights (USCPR) is a national coalition of hundreds of groups working to advocate for Palestinian rights and a shift in US policy. This coalition is united on two sets of principles. These common principles include support for "a just and lasting peace for Palestinians and Israelis based on human rights, international law, equality, and relevant UN resolutions" and for "the Palestinian struggle to achieve freedom from Israeli military occupation, justice for refugees through the implementation of their right of return, full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right to self-determination," alongside opposition to "U.S. military, diplomatic, financial, corporate, and all other forms of support for Israel's occupation and apartheid policies toward Palestinians" and to "Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, all forms of racism, and any other expressions of bigotry directed at any person or group. We also

reject the charge of anti-Semitism when it is used spuriously to silence legitimate criticism of Israel's policies and practices."

The organization also has a set of antiracism principles, including opposition to "all forms of racism and any other expressions of bigotry directed at any person or group" and to "Zionism as a political system that privileges the rights of Jews over the rights of others. We also reject the charge of anti-Semitism when it is used spuriously to silence legitimate criticism of Israel's policies and practices." It is also within the scope of its antiracism activities that the coalition "works to end actions and transform oppressive structures that sustain injustice in Palestine/Israel"; the materials add, "We must also ensure that our actions and the actions of those within our organization and coalition do not serve to support or perpetuate other racist or bigoted behaviors, practices, and structures." These principles guide USCPR's work, which is predominantly focused in two areas: government affairs and the boycott, divest, and sanction (BDS) movement. The majority of its work is committed to mobilizing and organizing those already involved in the Palestinian rights movements, though some is also to produce general awareness of the oppression of Palestinian people.[16]

Stand with Standing Rock

Stand with Standing Rock is an official site of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which has been mobilizing against the Dakota Access Pipeline. The Oceti Sakowin camp is a gathering of indigenous nations on the Standing Rock reservation. The tribe is currently located in both North and South Dakota, and in the past its territory extended to parts of Montana, Wyoming, Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska. On July 25, 2016, The US Army Corps of Engineers authorized the construction of a 1,100-mile pipeline, known as the Dakota Access Pipeline, which would transport crude oil through the Standing Rock land, specifically sacred lands. Since 2014, when

the pipeline was still a proposal, Standing Rock has been organizing against its construction.

Though primarily organized by native people and organizations, Standing Rock has thousands of

supporters including "conservations groups [including Greenpeace], businesses, ministries and

congregations, celebrities, influential leaders, labor unions, student groups, and organizations

such as the United Nations Human Rights Council"; there are also about two dozen members of

Congress who oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline.[17]

Stand with Standing Rock primarily works to promote awareness for the Standing Rock

people and the fight against the pipeline. The organization does this in three ways, by creating a

"global call to action" with marches, such as the March 10, 2017, march in Washington, DC; by

serving as a platform for people to learn more about Standing Rock, the Oceti Sakowin camp,

and the fight against the pipeline and for clean water; and by soliciting donations to support the

struggle against the pipeline.[18]

ANALYSIS

One might at first assume that these organizations need to address denial by overtly

bringing it to the public's attention and awareness, but given the analysis of denial in the

preceding chapters it is evident that awareness is not sufficient for social change. Each

organization is addressing a contested social problem, though they do not all do this in the same

way. Given this, the variety of interventions for social change in these organizations is important,

as denial manifests on multiple levels—many of the organizations seek to shift policy first,

which would then shift the social structure and result in a change of public opinion.

How Organizations Achieve Their Goals

The Vera Institute for Justice primarily works with those in government who can produce

policy, though some of its efforts do engage the general public—the director recently wrote a

New York Times op-ed on the struggles of returning home after incarceration.[19] PETA, on the

other hand, primarily targets the public, though some of its efforts focus on shaping policy.

Greenpeace, like PETA, also primarily targets the public through mass mobilizations,

campaigns, and petitions. USCPR works with the government to try to pursue resolutions and

legislation and mobilizes and organizes those already interested in supporting Palestinian rights.

Stand with Standing Rock's goal is to gather resources for the people on the ground at Standing

Rock and cultivate awareness and support nationally through marches and statements of support

from public figures and lawmakers.

Each organization's mission is to remedy the specific problem it focuses on, and they see

their problems ending in specific ways—each is looking for a specific kind of change. For

example, PETA would have all people "go vegan," and Stand with Standing Rock wants to

preserve indigenous sovereignty over native lands and stop the Dakota Access Pipeline's

construction. Given the different organizations' intended audiences and goals, their strategies to

achieve social change vary. They are not all advocacy organizations that seek to generate support

for their issues, and they are not all trying to "unveil" the issues to the public. They also vary on

how much effort they invest in trying to convince people of an injustice—some try to promote

their cause among the general public, while others focus on organizing people who are like-

minded, and still others focus on first creating the conditions that would lead to change. To

examine the way the organizations handle these options, I examine one way each has tried to

effect change.

The Vera Institute for Justice has many campaigns, but here I will focus on its efforts to

bring college education to prisons. Vera's Expanding Access to Postsecondary Education Project

provides resources to state departments of corrections and encourages state and local policy

makers to implement postsecondary education. Through technical assistance, training, and

information the project helps prisons develop policies and practices to increase access to

programs and serve as models for other states to follow. Vera took the opportunity presented to

them with the July 2015 announcement of the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program of the US

Department of Education. Vera produced a report that showed that "people who participate in

prison education programs are 43 percent less likely to recidivate." They also found these

programs lower violence within the prison.[20]

PETA is known for its controversial and sensational ad campaigns, meant to generate

public discussion—in its own words, organizers use "gimmicks" like "wearing a funny costume,

engaging in a public stunt, or taking [their] clothes off" that are sometimes "silly" to "reach the

masses." The organization says, "Experience has taught us that provocative and controversial

campaigns make the difference between allowing important yet depressing subjects to remain

invisible and exposing them to the public." It focuses on "campaigns that draw international

media coverage to previously hidden issues."[21] For example, PETA does not shy away from

sharing brutality

> Ramon Moreno, a longtime slaughterhouse worker, told *The Washington Post* that he
> frequently has to cut the legs off completely conscious cows. "They blink. They make
> noises," he says. "The head moves, the eyes are wide and looking around. . . . They die
> piece by piece." Another worker, Martin Fuentes, told the *Post* that many animals are still
> alive and conscious for as long as seven minutes after their throats have been cut. "The
> line is never stopped simply because an animal is alive." Because the industry makes
> more money the more animals it kills, workers who stop to alert officials to abuses at
> their slaughterhouse risk losing their jobs. The meat industry thrives on a workforce made
> up largely of impoverished and exploited workers, many of them immigrants who can
> never complain about poor working conditions or cruelty to animals for fear of being
> deported.[22]

PETA targets its messages to individuals and encourages individual responses to the social

problems they identify. The concluding messages on its website pages are always some variation

of "The best way to help put an end to this cruelty is to stop eating meat and other animal

products. Order PETA's free vegetarian/vegan starter kit today for great tips and free recipes to

help you make the transition to an animal-friendly diet."[23] The organization very specifically

focuses on how "you," the individual, can create social change through abstaining from

consumption of animal products.

Greenpeace targets its work toward organizing people who support their cause rather than

converting people to agree with them. For example, the organization does not try to convince

people that climate change is real. The section on "The Science" of climate change simply states,

"There's no more debating if climate change is a reality. Scientists agree: the world is getting

warmer and human activity is largely responsible. Today, our planet is hotter than it has been in

2,000 years, and on track to grower hotter than it's been in two million years."[24] The website

follows this with claims about how "citizens are demanding action" and calls to "join us."

Greenpeace is recruiting to its "resistance"—in this way it looks for people who are already

concerned about its issues and looking to do more.

> Donald Trump is packing his cabinet with climate change deniers and promises to pursue
> more drilling, fracking, and mining of these dangerous fuels. We see a different future —
> one built on clean, renewable energy. We believe that a 100 percent renewable energy
> future is not only within reach, it's our best chance . . . to preserve the planet. Trump may
> do his best to delay the inevitable clean energy revolution, but he can't stop it. If climate
> denial is going to be the default position of the Trump White House, then relentless
> resistance will be the default position of the American people.[25]

As this example suggests, in contrast to PETA, Greenpeace's communications strategy is to

assume agreement on the issue and that the organization represents the "default position of the

American people."

Like Greenpeace, USCPR also works to mobilize those who support its cause rather than

primarily convincing others of the merits of the cause. The organization's work takes two

approaches, government affairs and the boycott, divest, and sanction movement. Because the

United States supports Israel through military aid and diplomatic backing at the United Nations,

USCPR's work is to intervene in US government support of Israel. It also works to challenge

federal and state legislation that seeks to prohibit or criminalize the boycott, divestment, and

sanctions movement and provides resources for students to develop BDS campaigns on their

campuses and to push their universities to divest from corporations that profit from occupied

Palestine.[26]

Stand with Standing Rock's global call to action is meant to support those four thousand

people who participated in the camp. The Standing Rock tribe's actions are all guided by its

principle of nonviolence, including the symbolic action it takes to bring awareness to the cause.

For example, one attempt to develop solidarity and public awareness was when "Standing Rock

youth and tribal members (ages 6–25) from the reservation ran 2,200 miles to Washington, D.C.

to deliver a petition with 160,000 signatures on Change.org opposing the pipeline to the

President of the United States. After running for 2,200 miles, they were only able to meet with

Army Corps officials, and held several rallies along the way."[27]

Strategies and Denial

With these varied strategies for outreach and action, there are multiple ways each

organization addresses the problem of denial. In this section I explore overlaps between how the

organizations address denial and how I identified the problem in earlier chapters. In the previous

chapters I explored denial spatially through containment, exclusion, and elimination; cognitively

through dominion, identity construction through the other, and dehumanization; and

psychosocially through constructions of the self, a split between good and bad, and disavowal. I

suspected the psychosocial would be addressed the least, and for the majority of cases, I was

correct—most attempts are targeted toward structural/spatial change and sociomental change. I found that the Vera Institute had the overall most comprehensive approach to achieving social change. Vera's project, discussed above, falls under its action area "bringing dignity to life behind bars."[28] This project, as I will explain below, targets spatial, cognitive, and psychosocial aspects of denial. Ironically PETA, who tries to overtly call out denial more than any other organization, is the least comprehensive, with the range of their strategies, to actually combating denial. They focus most overtly on bringing cognitive awareness but do not address change sociospatially or psychosocially. As I discussed in chapter two, if denial is understood as structural then it cannot be successfully combated by targeting individuals alone—this is where Stanley Cohen did not fully connect his theory to his policy recommendations.

I see the Vera Institute for Justice as having the most comprehensive approach to social change, and it is therefore the most equipped to address denial, even though it spends the least time of the five organizations trying to shape public opinion. Not that public opinion is irrelevant to its work—its director does outreach such as *New York Times* op-eds—but that its primary mission is to create the change the organization wants to see rather than convincing others of the need for that change. They are then, in practice, no longer living and working in denial. Though Vera does not try to tell the world about denial in the way, for example, PETA does, it moves past denial in its work. The institute's work to bring college education to prison does spatial, cognitive, and unconscious work to disrupt denial of the problems of mass incarceration. Education disrupts the carceral continuum identified by Wacquant (and discussed at length in chapter three).[29] Challenging the cycle of recidivism and social death from incarceration creates opportunities for those formerly incarcerated and helps to challenge their invisibility and disposability, as well as their sociospatial exclusion and containment from society. The

sociomental dimension of denial is addressed, too, by college education programs. Prison is dehumanizing, and Vera's program is meant to bring dignity (to the extent one could bring dignity to a dehumanizing situation) to those incarcerated. Vera challenges this dehumanization by supporting funding for college education programs, reminding those both inside and outside the prison system that those who are incarcerated are still fully human. The psychosocial benefits of college education programs in prison are more speculative, but the present analysis of unconscious aggression suggests that the cumulative sociospatial and sociomental effects of college education for those who were incarcerated may result in a structural change of status and spatial and mental exclusion from society to the extent that the formerly incarcerated would no longer be the hated "criminal other" onto which the culture at large projects its social aggression. These cumulative effects are why I would suggest Vera's program would be the most likely to challenge structural denial.

As I mentioned, PETA has a very different approach from Vera's. PETA shows the public what is hidden behind the walls of a slaughterhouse. However, as I have argued, denial is not ignorance, and people already know that animals are slaughtered in slaughterhouses—no one is ever actually ignorant of the fact that meat is animals. In this way, PETA's main approach to showing the horrific realities of animal processing actually denies denial, paradoxically, in the attempt to call out the denial. In other words, when PETA's rhetoric forgets that denial is a paradox of knowing and not knowing and treats the problem instead as ignorance, it feed into the paradox. Animals used for meat are literally slaughtered and butchered, and people who eat them literally eat body parts—bones and flesh; people eat the leg of (a) lamb, chicken breasts, pork ribs. PETA overlooks denial in its campaign to show people what they already know. Showing the reality to a public that already knows is not enough—PETA must confront that people can

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"not know" even as they take in all of this information. Of course, that said, PETA has five million members and supporters worldwide, so it must be doing something effective. Its focus on individual change is compelling. "You can help end suffering by going vegan" is an easy and palatable approach to change. Though of course going vegan may sound extreme to some, it is not actually a radical or structural change that disrupts society or social norms and systems of oppression. In this way, though PETA presents itself as an "in your face" controversial figure in the animal rights movement, it actually maintains the status quo in terms of the changes it suggests. This maintenance of the status quo, in the end, does not challenge structural denial, or even the systemic oppression of farm animals. PETA thus only works on the sociomental scale and not sociospatially or psychosocially.

Greenpeace has an interesting approach that differs from the other organizations—the way it organizes its literature sidesteps denial by writing as though everyone already supports their cause. I do not think the organization is only appealing to those that agree with its goals already, though it is doing that too; I think Greenpeace is presenting its side as if it is the only reasonable one. Rather than acknowledge that many average people are in denial about climate change, the organization frames it as if only a few powerful elites deny climate change—the Koch brothers, for example. It positions itself as "your" voice—the voice of the people. This is an interesting sociomental approach to change in that it starts with the world Greenpeace wants—the world where everyone is against environmental destruction. The organization also seeks to challenge those who have the power to shape the discourse on climate change; in this way it may also effect sociomental change. Like PETA, Greenpeace seems to focus less on producing sociospatial or psychosocial change and more on shaping the discourse around the issue, which would then in turn produce changes on other levels.

USCPR, as a coalition of those organizing for Palestinian rights, primarily works with those who already support its goals—strengthening and expanding the BDS movement and working to make sure that BDS stays legal in the face of growing legislation movements that seek to criminalize BDS—and engages only minimally in outreach to the general public to make them aware of Israeli apartheid. Boycotting, divesting, and sanctioning Israel provides a lot of opportunities for change on different levels. Like Vera's strategies for change, BDS's can be quite comprehensive. Sociospatially, BDS is ultimately meant to undo Palestinians' geographic oppression resulting from Israeli apartheid. By refusing to invest in anyone profiting from the apartheid, BDS would make it no longer profitable, following a model of South African resistance. Though BDS is also about material shifts, it requires a shift in consciousness and a deliberate investment in no longer othering the Palestinians and making their cause one's own. There is also a psychosocial dimension to BDS—the potential for a deeper resistance to othering that penetrates the unconscious: In truly caring for an(other) enough to take action on their behalf, one may work to undo the unconscious split between good and bad and have a more integrated understanding of the world.

Stand with Standing Rock is a complicated organization to analyze because of the complexity and historical depth of settler colonialism. The Sioux tribe has survived five centuries of oppression by European settlers, now Americans. Stand with Standing Rock addresses the centuries of displacement and exploitation while also remaining focused on the specific iteration of this oppression that is the Dakota Access Pipeline. Resisting the pipeline is resisting settler colonialism. The camp at Standing Rock's protection of the land, the marches, and the symbolic act of hand-delivering petition signatures and solicitation of support from those around the country are all efforts to resist settler colonialism but could not possibly undo the most insidious

aspects of American colonialism—genocide has already been committed. This organization can really only continue to resist, but ending the problem could not end without a full revolution of the entire society. However, the actions of those committed to protecting the land and water, and therefore the people of Standing Rock, have brought attention to settler colonialism in a way that has not otherwise happened in recent times. Organizers' resistance has generated a new discourse around the issues of settler colonialism and, though it may not stop the pipeline and will not end settler colonialism, these actions may have ignited a sociomental spark, bringing these issues into consciousness.

CONCLUSION

There are a lot of ways to create social change and especially targeted, specific social change. These organizations have used very different approaches with little overlap. The most common level of social change to target is the sociomental. This is as I expected, as it is also the level that academic work on the subject has focused. Overhauling a social structure is obviously no easy task, and any organization that has it as a goal (as did some but not all of those examined) will have an understandably difficult project. In many cases, the psychosocial scale is too abstract to be the initial point of intervention, so the organizations that do address the psychosocial do so by concretizing that project through geographic and structural interventions. I found that no organizations seek to address the psychosocial dimensions of the problem on their own, and if they do it is a result of addressing another level. Though I do think social change will be best effected through interventions on the sociospatial, sociomental, and psychosocial levels, these organizations do effect varying degrees of social change without always addressing all three.

The most significant finding of this study of organizations is that with the exception of PETA, most organizations do not try to address denial directly. I do not necessarily think that this is a problem, however, because I do not think that denial is best resolved overtly. This might sound contradictory, but since denial is a paradox, it may have to be addressed through interventions that seem paradoxical. In fact, what I think organizations could learn from my study is that perhaps trying to address denial of the issue may not be the best approach to resolve the issue. This is why I think the Vera Institute, though it does the least to shape public opinion directly, actually takes the most comprehensive approach to ultimately combating social change. To fight denial, as I have learned from these organizations, one might need, paradoxically, to begin to act as if we are living in the world we want to live in and create the conditions for a transformation to that world.

Notes

[1] Vera Institute for Justice, "About," Vera Institute for Justice website, accessed March 16, 2017, https://www.vera.org/about.

[2] Ibid., para. 15.

[3] Ibid., para. 1.

[4] Ibid., para. 2.

[5] Vera Institute for Justice, "Our Strategic Priorities," Vera Institute for Justice website, accessed March 16, 2017, https://www.vera.org/strategic-priorities.

[6] Vera Institute for Justice, "Issues," Vera Institute for Justice website, accessed March 16, 2017, https://www.vera.org/issues.

[7] Vera, "Our Strategic Priorities."

[8] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, "PETA's History: Compassion in Action," PETA website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.peta.org/about-peta/learn-about-peta/history/.

[9] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, "About PETA," PETA website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.peta.org/about-peta/.

[10] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, "People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA): The Animal Rights Organization," PETA homepage, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.peta.org/.

[11] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, "Campaigns," PETA website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.peta.org/action/campaigns/.

[12] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, "Animal Issues," PETA website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.peta.org/issues/.

[13] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, "Uncompromising Stance on Animal Rights," PETA website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.peta.org/about-peta/why-peta/.

[14] Greenpeace, "About," Greenpeace website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/about/.

[15] Greenpeace, "What We Do," Greenpeace website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/what-we-do/.

[16] United States Coalition for Palestinian Rights, "About Us," USCPR website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://uscpr.org/about-us/.

[17] Stand with Standing Rock, "History," Stand with Standing Rock website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://standwithstandingrock.net/history/.

[18] Stand with Standing Rock, "Stand with Standing Rock," Stand with Standing Rock homepage, accessed March 16, 2017, http://standwithstandingrock.net/.

[19] Nicholas Turner, "A Home After Prison," *New York Times*, June 21, 2016, accessed March 16, 2017, https://nyti.ms/2nxkXn6.

[20] Margaret diZerega and Fred Patrick, "Bringing College Back to Prison," Vera Institute for Justice, accessed March 16, 2017, https://www.vera.org/spotlights/bringing-college-back-to-prison; Ruth Delaney, Ram Subramanian, and Fred Patrick, "Making the Grade," Vera Institute for Justice, accessed March 16, 2017, https://www.vera.org/publications/making-the-grade-postsecondary-education-programs-in-prison.

[21] PETA, "About PETA."

[22] People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, "Cow Transport and Slaughter," PETA website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/factory-farming/cows/cow-transport-slaughter/.

[23] PETA, "Cow Transport and Slaughter," para. 7.

[24] Greenpeace, "Climate Change: The Science," Greenpeace website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/global-warming/climate-science/.

[25] Greenpeace, "Global Warming," Greenpeace website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/global-warming/.

[26] United States Coalition for Palestinian Rights, "Campaigns," USCPR website, accessed March 16, 2017, http://uscpr.org/campaign/.

[27] Stand with Standing Rock, "History," Stand with Standing Rock, accessed March 16, 2017, http://standwithstandingrock.net/history/

[28] Vera Institute for Justice, "Bringing Dignity to Life Behind Bars," Vera Institute for Justice website, accessed March 16, 2017, https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/bringing-dignity-to-life-behind-bars.

[29] Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh."

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Mark Rudd rose from his aisle seat and walked slowly, deliberately, to the front of St. Paul's Chapel. Several hundred members of the Columbia University community shifted decorously in their seats as Vice President David B. Truman prepared to deliver a five-minute eulogy to Martin Luther King, assassinated in Memphis five days before. Veering to his right, Rudd stepped up into the choir, cut in front of the vice president and placed himself in front of the microphone. Truman stopped; the microphone went dead. "Dr. Truman and President Kirk are committing a moral outrage against the memory of Dr. King," Rudd said quietly, leaning over the lectern. How, he demanded, can the leaders of the University eulogize a man who died while trying to unionize sanitation workers when they have, for years, fought the unionization of the University's own black and Puerto Rican workers? How can these administrators praise a man who fought for human dignity when they have stolen land from the people of Harlem? And how, Rudd asked, can Columbia laud a man who preached non-violent dis-obedience when it is disciplining its own students for peaceful protest? "Dr. Truman and President Kirk are committing a moral outrage against the memory of Dr. King," Rudd repeated. "We will therefore protest this obscenity." He stepped down from the stage and walked, shoulders hunched slightly forward, down the center aisle and out the main chapel door into the April sun. Forty others followed him. Truman continued on his way to the microphone and delivered his eulogy as if nothing had happened.

—Jerry L. Avorn, Up against the Ivy Wall[1]

In this dissertation, I take an Althusserian perspective—just as no one individual can be outside of ideology, no one can be outside of denial. That is not to say that awareness is not possible but to emphasize that the argument I am making is structural: if denial is integral to society, and one cannot be out of society, then one must participate in the systems of denial. Just as no white person can ever be exempt from participation in a racist society yet may still be vigorously antiracist, everyone exists in a society that produces denial. I am not making arguments about individuals; my argument is that denial is macrosociological and structural. Therefore, I am not interested in proposing that if one does not agree with ending something that I articulate as an injustice, meat eating for example, that one is in denial; rather, I am saying that society is structured by denial and is structured to produce denial. I do this with respect to the

meat example by highlighting the social structures that cultivate denial, such as the industrialized farm settings and the sociolinguistic maneuvers that turn a pig into pork. The dissertation is a project about denial as a sociological problem and not the sociological impact of a psychological problem. In this regard, then, asking "Who is in denial?" may be like asking who is in capitalism or who is in sexism?

My argument is to consider denial on this level. Of course, denial is still a psychological phenomenon, as well, and individuals are in denial about varied issues. I, however, wish to emphasize the macroanalysis and thus do not engage in this current work on the situation of individuals. This is comparable to a structural analysis of racism that makes a separate point, distinct from talking about individual racists. In this work, I show the conditions through which sociological denial becomes possible, regardless of individual intentions or awareness. Though I do have opinions on the ethics of many of the issues I take up, as I suspect readers do, too, the dissertation is not itself an ethical argument but a theoretical project that articulates structural patterns of denial.

Sociological factors, such as gender, race, and class, play a crucial part in who it is that can more easily be in denial. For example, residential segregation in the United States does not prevent people in poverty from knowing about wealth but does allow the wealthy not to see the conditions in which those without wealth live. Hegemonic masculinity, too, shapes how one may or may not be able to engage with an issue. Men have been shown to express more "pro-meat" opinions and emphasize their desire for red and rare meat.[2] Cultural scripts about what it means to be a man interfere with the ability to acknowledge the sentience of a farm animal, so that men who find less-hegemonic ways of doing their masculinity are able to "do meat" differently.[3] And, similarly, it is easier for people of color to acknowledge racism in society, whereas white people

still resist even saying that black lives matter. The existing literature on denial does not untangle these complications sufficiently, focusing rather on a limited psychological "who" that is in denial, namely *the bystander*.

No one is ever fully out of denial nor should necessarily be so. Denial on the individual level is a protective mechanism that cannot be avoided. The aggregation of denial—when it reaches a societal scale—is however a quite different issue. When denial is ingrained in social institutions and these ideal types are cultural patterns, it has gone well beyond being a coping mechanism. Structural denial limits individual agency to act in the social world. That most will never bear direct witness to the industrialized slaughter of animals, those kept in solitary confinement, the destruction and death in Gaza, the genocide the United States was founded on, or the extinction of species due to climate change does not keep society or its members safe. It is not coping. It is the result of a pathological social structure built on hiding problems that affect everyone, albeit to differing degrees, depending on social position.

I am not proposing to eliminate denial, not that it would even be possible. Audre Lorde said, "Revolution is not a one-time event, it is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change in established, outgrown responses"[4]—this is how denial must be confronted. Cohen compares denial to a physical defense, like an eyelid. It can be helpful, but not if you keep your eyes shut forever.[5] So given that social actors will always have to be confronting denial, how can they enact social change? Denial is a process individuals participate in, not a state. Individuals participate in it sociospatially, sociomentally, and psychosocially, and it shifts and moves among these three scales. In this chapter, I take up how progress is possible given this complex situation of denial.

In this dissertation I have talked about five major examples: settler colonialism, mass incarceration, Israeli apartheid, industrialized animal slaughter, and humans' disconnection from nature. But this dissertation is not about these cases; I have provided these as examples of the social patterns of denial. In a conclusion it is typical to answer the question "So what?"; this is a difficult question to address when speaking about denial—there are not clear policy implications to follow from here. And I cannot propose ways to "solve" these five examples of social problems, particularly when so many don't even see these circumstances as problems—we must lock up the bad people, we must eat animals to survive, and the earth and land are here for our taking and we are entitled to use it as we please. Because my dissertation is not just about these issues but about the social patterns of denial, even if these five issues were solved, social patterns of denial would just play out in another area. There are countless possible examples to talk about, both personal and political. This is not just about deciding to abolish prisons or recognize Palestine as a state but about recognizing the societal patterns of denial that could reproduce this in infinite other contexts.

As long as societies are structured around denial, there is not a clear solution to each individual problem I have presented, as was evident in the myriad approaches to social change presented in chapter six. Sometimes possible solutions emerge, but what I have sought to show through analyzing three scales of society, and not just one, is that denial is modulated among the three scales. Interventions may move something between scales, for example, from the psychosocial to the sociomental or from sociomental to sociospatial. These interventions are not unimportant but are insufficient. Racism, for example, may no longer be primarily constructed sociomentally, as overt racism has been shifted to sociospatial structures and unconscious processes. Progress becomes tricky, then. The Civil Rights progress of the sixties was not

unimportant, but if the socially conscious are not vigilant, the problem will flow to other scales. This vigilance needs to extend to the relations of how denial shifts among these three scales. Otherwise, as happened in 2016, Donald Trump can emerge, rearticulating sociomental and overt conceptions of racism that had been hiding in the structures and our unconsciouses. Without confronting denial, these problems are simply moved in and out of sight and consciousness. This is how fascism sneaks up on a society.

This iterative scale-shifting process needs to be constant. As I have shown in this dissertation, in contrast to how it has been discussed in other literatures on the topic, denial is not just about knowing, it is a sociological phenomenon that is structural, cognitive, and unconscious. When denial is addressed just in terms of knowledge, it is not viewed as fully sociological because the focus is solely on the sociomental. Fixing denial through acknowledgment as Cohen and Zerubavel have suggested doesn't address the physical structure and material manifestations of denial or implicit and unconscious aspects. Any plausible solution must vigilantly move up and down through all three scales. And those committed to understanding and enacting social change must remember the significance of the unconscious. Fighting denial in terms of acknowledgment risks individuating responsibility in a neoliberal context that evades social responsibility. The structures of denial must be broken down on all three scales to break down—this is a sociological problem that needs a sociological solution.

Another problem of acknowledgment, aside from not confronting all three scales, is that it cannot be sufficient when people have the capacity to not-know, as well. This complicates all levels of politics. We know to use safer sex supplies, but we don't. We know to avoid refined sugar, but we don't. We know we should quit smoking, but we don't. We know we should

recycle and use less plastic, but we don't. What a complicated situation for social change we have uncovered.

Some discussions of denial position postmodern and deconstructionist ideas of "truth" as part of the problem of denial. Derrida and Foucault are scapegoated and accused of facilitating denial by questioning the nature of truth with "simply ludicrous" ideas.[6] What these people miss, however, is that it is not an objective truth that needs to be asserted to end denial. In fact, denial can only really exist if one knows, on the one hand, *a* truth, whatever truth that is—and then denies that truth. Denial only works when one has a sense of a truth to be denied. So the problem isn't that people don't think there is an objective truth—as if all the facts aren't in on climate change, for example; that is only a post-facto, postdenial rationale. Knowledge that you deny is not the same thing as denying truth or reality. It's about the paradox more than if the knowledge were true or not.

There are many ways in which people are pushing back by making some of this conscious and challenging how categories are created, and there are even some examples of moving from categorical to structural change. But it is too easy, if one is not careful, to end up with strategies for social change that are too easily ignored and denied. When Mark Rudd protested the whitewashing of Dr. King's legacy, as shown in the opening quote, people acted as if it had never happened. Much emotional and political energy went into such an action, and though it may have helped to mobilize like-minded people, it did not effect the change or spark the acknowledgment that I suspect Rudd may have hoped for.

Naming the elephants in the room, as Zerubavel has suggested, is an insufficient action because the structural aspects of denial are put on like blinders on a horse. Individuals can only

see so far. And certain changes paradoxically reproduce the system—or as Fanon has said,

"certain concessions are shackles":

> The people and every militant should be conscious of the historical law which stipulates
> that certain concessions are in fact shackles. . . . The colonized must be made to see that
> colonialism never gives away anything for nothing. . . . Whatever gains the colonized
> make through armed or political struggle, they are not the result of the colonizer's good
> will or goodness of heart but to the fact that he can no longer postpone such concessions.
> . . . The colonized, at the most, can accept a concession from the colonial authorities, but
> never a compromise.[7]

These compromises are reforms that perpetuate the circumstances that produced the need for the

reform in the first place. Placing Harriet Tubman's face on the twenty-dollar bill does nothing to

challenge the structural and unconscious denial of racism and slavery in the United States.

Moving Andrew Jackson to the back of the bill highlights the exact problem here—we have not

truly disrupted the status quo or acknowledged the problems—we have merely rearranged the

placement.

These reformist strategies that perpetuate the system are all too common in work around

prisons. Dean Spade does a very good job highlighting these problematic strategies, such as hate

crimes legislation that actually provides more money for law enforcement and their problematic

practices of policing.[8] The same can be said for the development of prisons for trans people—if

prisons are built for trans people, trans people will just be found to fill the prison. This

reproduces the structure of mass incarceration and the denial that buttresses these acts, as though

people can be hidden away or the illusion that "correctional facilities" actually *correct* people.

The entire current discussion around reforms of drug laws play into this phenomenon as

well. Mass incarceration would still exist en masse if all drug offenders were released today.

Society does not want to confront that in order to adequately address this problem what needs to

be addressed is "violent crime." The discussion of violence remains masked, and structural

change that would actually confront mass incarceration remains stalled as long as society refuses to confront state violence and continues to criminalize certain kinds of violence over others while at the same time doing nothing to confront the conditions that produce violence in all contexts.

Another reform is challenging private prisons. This is important as the for-profit model creates incentives for prisons to be full, without regard to actual crime rates, but the majority of prisons are not private. When reforms target only private prisons, the conditions that produced the growth of the private prison industry—namely state and federal prison overpopulation—fall from view. These reforms fail to get at the root of the problem and allow denial to continue to flourish.

Not every political strategy, however, has to play into this problem—there are ways to do work without an immediate revolution that don't prevent its inevitability. For example, "Banning the Box" is a movement to remove the box that asks if you have been convicted of a felony from various application forms, such as for housing and employment. A relatively simple change, banning the box would confront sociospatial, sociomental, and psychosocial aspects of denial around criminality. Sociospatially, it would address housing and income disparites and has the potential to confront the residential segregation that Wacquant has pointed out to be such a key element in the reproduction of the carceral state. Sociomentally, it addresses society's systems of categories and places less emphasis on othering people who have been convicted of a felony. Psychosocially, the unconscious aggression placed on criminals is diverted when a society can no longer continue to punish them through poverty and stigma once their sentences are over.

Reenfranchising people who have been convicted of a felony also works to confront multiple scales of denial around mass incarceration. Allowing people who have been so directly affected by the law to participate in legislative processes may produce more democratic

conditions where formerly incarcerated people have rights to representation with all the resultant

material benefits, as well as no longer being barred from civil society for life.

We can also begin to put fewer people in prison by practicing transformative justice.

When Mariame Kaba explains her view of transformative justice, it is clear she understands the

need to address problems on multiple scales. She states:

> And when you talk about transformative justice, at least for myself, what I'm talking
> about is that individual relationships occur within larger constructs, and there are larger
> forces that impact our lives, which structure our relationships and our institutions. And
> so, you have to also fight in a collective way against those forces of oppression. So while
> you're addressing interpersonal conflicts and while you're trying to make sure that people
> in communities know each other, have relationships with each other, have some tools to
> be able to address the issues that come, the harm that people cause. While that's
> important, you also need to talk about making sure people have living wages so that they
> have a way to live and aren't having to rely on the illegal or underground economies that
> are already criminalized to be able to make a living, but that they actually have the ability
> to take care of their needs. And it's not just a living wage— it might also be that we need
> to be fighting for guaranteed jobs, or in some cases people like to talk about a basic
> income.[9]

Without addressing denial on all three scales, people interested in social progress risk not

confronting it adequately and just waiting for it to resurface. But any alternative that must shift

power from the structure reproduces its own conditions. While it does give me hope that people

are talking about mass incarceration, the discourse must specifically engage with denial to effect

change. Talking about it alone will not be enough when it can just be put out of mind afterward.

Limited reformist strategies are not exclusive to discussion of mass incarceration. Well-

financed social fantasies of "humane meat" derail any actual changes for animals who are being

slaughtered. And undercover investigations have shown no substantive difference in the

"humanely" raised "meat" and the inhumanely raised counterpart that serves as the absent

referent. Effecting change requires real structural change like a redistribution of subsidies for

farmers. The ecological impact of meat consumption, as well as the land that is appropriated

from indigenous people and the natural resources that are exploited for meat production would also have to be accounted for. Simultaneously, consumers would need to challenge their conscious and unconscious relations to animals and examine the complexity of their desire to eat them.

Confronting denial is no easy task, and there is no easy solution. Denial exists as a social pattern that is deeply ingrained in society and flows through all scales of social arrangements. If we are to confront denial, we must do so with that in mind—without being in denial about just how much denial we are in.

Notes

[1] Jerry L. Avorn, *Up Against the Ivy Wall: A History of the Columbia Crisis* (New York: Scribner, 1968).

[2] Elin Kubberød et al., "Gender Specfic Preferences and Attitudes towards Meat," *Food Quality and Preference* 13 (2002): 285–94.

[3] Jeffery Sobal, "Men, Meat, and Marriage: Models of Masculinity," *Food and Foodways* 13, no. 1–2 (March 2005): 135–58.

[4] Audre Lorde, "Learning from the 60s," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 140–41.

[5] Cohen, *States of Denial*, 30.

[6] Ibid., 280; Washington and Cook, *Climate Change Denial*.

[7] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 92.

[8] Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, rev. ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[9] Dan Sloan, "A World Without Prisons: A Conversation with Mariame Kaba," *Lumpen Magazine*, April 7, 2016, accessed July 15, 2016, http://www.lumpenmagazine.org/a-world-without-prisons-a-conversation-with-mariame-kaba/.

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