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The Animal Body, Violence and Moral Panic: the Case of Mila the Dog

In April of 2010 Serbia was rocked by the news that a dog whose paws had been cut off was found in the Medakovic neighborhood of Belgrade. Miraculously, the dog was still alive, but in bad condition. The news media named the dog Mila (which, aside from being a Serbian female name, can also mean “dear one” or “gentle one”) and the Serbian public followed the story of Mila’s plight and subsequent recovery with great interest and much comment, so much so that the event became a trigger for a moral panic of sorts.

In this paper I have attempted to point out how the Serbian public, with reference to the case of Mila the dog, conceptualizes violence against animals, as well as to point out that folk classifications of living creatures – such as the one which distinguishes animals from meat (see Mullin 1999) – influence the understanding and conceptualization of violence as a phenomenon. Secondly, I have attempted to uncover which elements of the event in question caused a moral panic in Serbia, and which had inhibited the development of a serious public discussion of the issue of animal suffering. In that sense, the object of this paper is twofold – on the one hand it aims to point out why a discussion of the systematic and systemic violence against animals did not occur, and on the other, it serves to point out those elements of the event which caused the panic.

Key words:
human-animal relations, the case of Mila the dog, moral panic.