

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Between race and animality: European borders, 'colonial dogs', and the policing of humanity

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Abstract

Europe's (post-)colonial borders have been recently marked by a profusion of cases of violence against racialised migrants with the use of police dogs, following a continual process of integration of canines into the border apparatus of violence. Engaging simultaneously with the recent post-colonial literature on border and migration security *and* the incipient domain of animal studies, this article investigates the colonial and racial origins and effects of this phenomenon. Contextualising the weaponisation of dogs at Europe's borders today within a much longer history of racial violence, the article shows how canines have been systematically deployed by colonial and white supremacist powers against racialised bodies as tools to enact and secure racial order. Attentive to the ways in which modern humanness has been predicated upon its removal from the food chain, the article argues that the use of police dogs at Europe's borders operates by reinforcing the non- or less-than-human status of racialised migrants by marking them as 'animal-like' and 'edible' bodies. Conceptualising this method as 'the politics of edibility', the article then shows how the exposure of migrants to the threat of 'dog bites' functions as a form of reinforcing racial hierarchies in a Europe traversed by racial anxieties.

Keywords: animality; borders; colonialism; edibility; race; security

Introduction

If they catch you crossing illegally, they beat you and attack you with clubs and dogs. They are inhumane.¹

On 16 December 2016, a dozen migrants – the majority unaccompanied minors – attempted to enter Hungary from the Serbian border. The guards who patrolled the area, noticing the presence of the migrants from the Hungarian side of the fence, rapidly came up with a decision to dissuade the migrants from crossing. Opening the fence only a little, they unleashed one of the most feared 'weapons' onto that group of young men and children: the police dog, which, following the orders of the guards, started hunting the group.² Turned into a 'living weapon', the dog only stopped after hearing the commands from its handler, which only occurred after three persons were severely bitten, two of them children. Pushed back to the Serbian side of the frontier, the migrants were

¹Nick Fagge, 'Hungarian guards are accused of beating up migrants on Europe's toughest border', *Daily Mail Online* (15 November 2016), available at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3926466/They-hit-wooden-batons-sprayed-tear-gas-face-set-dogs-Patrolling-Europe-s-toughest-frontier-Hungary-guards-accused-beating-migrants.html>.

²Apostolis Fotiadis, 'Frontex's history of handling abuse evidence dogs Balkan expansion', *Reporting Democracy* (6 February 2020), available at <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/02/06/frontex-history-of-handling-abuse-evidence-dogs-balkan-expansion/>.

then abandoned by the border authorities with no medical assistance.³ Imprinted on their bodies, however, remained the marks of the dog bites, a persistent mark of the terror upon which the European⁴ border regime is founded.

The use of dogs to chase, surveil, police, and push back migrants at Europe's borderzones is not exceptional. As the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) reports, at the European borderzones 'police dogs are regularly unleashed and set on people-on-the-move, leading to infection-prone dog bites on all parts of the body'.⁵ Several cases of violence with police dogs against migrants have been reported over the past years in countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, France, Poland, Italy, and so forth, especially in areas where border crossings are more frequent.⁶ Well known for their role in domestic forms of policing and surveillance, police dogs have been absorbed into Europe's migration architecture, helping border forces patrol, surveil, and secure borders against the 'unauthorised' arrival of Global South migrants.⁷ Despite the profusion of police-dog attacks at the border, there has been little research on the topic within critical border and migration studies. With that in mind, the article poses the following questions. Where does the practice of using dogs to police, govern, and attack 'undesired' and racialised migrants come from? What are the racial/racialising underpinnings and effects of such practices of violence at the border? And, centrally, what can the weaponisation of dogs at the European borders to attack and bite migrants tell us about race, racialisation, and coloniality?

In responding to these questions, the article takes forward the task of linking contemporary 'neoliberal forms of policing, incarceration, bordering, and surveillance' to their respective 'colonial and racial capitalist histories, from the enclosures in Europe to the (settler) colonies and slave plantation'.⁸ As the article shows, the horror invoked by the figure of police dogs at the European borderzones is not accidental and is in no way unique to current times. Quite the contrary, it must be contextualised within a wider history of colonial terror and policing that takes us back to central moments in the history of colonial domination and white⁹ supremacy, including the extermination of Indigenous populations; the surveillance and persecution of enslaved Black people in the plantations; colonial counter-insurgent movements against rebels; and the policing of Black protesters during the civil rights movements in the United States. In retrieving these colonial and white supremacist histories, the article shows how dogs have been systematically 'weaponised' and used as a device to establish colonial dominance as well as to police and enforce racial order. By pairing these different historical moments, the article argues that the use of police dogs against migrants at Europe's borderzones can be seen as part of a violent attempt to secure racial order in a Europe purportedly under a 'migrant crisis'.¹⁰

The article also reflects more extensively upon the (de)humanising – and racialising – effects of a method of violence that consists, by and large, of using an animal to 'bite' another person at the border or, at least, to threaten another person with an animal bite. Looking at the ways in

³Ibid.

⁴When I refer to contemporary Europe in this article, I mainly refer to Maurice Stierl's understanding of 'EUrope', which 'problematizes frequently employed usages that equate the EU with Europe and Europe with the EU and [suggests], moreover, that EUrope is not reducible to the institutions of the EU'. Maurice Stierl, 'The Mediterranean as a carceral seascape', *Political Geography*, 88 (2021), pp. 1–10 (p. 2).

⁵Hope Barker and Milena Zajović (eds), *The Black Book of Pushbacks: Expanded and Updated Edition, Volumes I and II* (Leipzig: Border Violence Monitoring Network, 2022), p. 37.

⁶Ibid., p. 37.

⁷Lucy Mayblin and Joe Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021).

⁸Sabrina Axster, Ida Danewid, Asher Goldstein, Matt Mahmoudi, Cemal Burak Tansel and Lauren Wilcox, 'Colonial lives of the carceral archipelago: Rethinking the neoliberal security state', *International Political Sociology*, 15:3 (2021), pp. 415–39 (p. 417).

⁹In this article, I make the conscious – and political – choice of not capitalising 'w' in white or whiteness while capitalising other 'racial' and 'ethnic' categories such as Black(ness), Indigenous, Brown, etc.

¹⁰Nicholas De Genova, 'The "migrant crisis" as racial crisis: Do *Black Lives Matter* in Europe?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:10 (2018), pp. 1765–82; Ida Danewid, 'Policing the (migrant) crisis: Stuart Hall and the defence of whiteness', *Security Dialogue*, 53:1 (2022), pp. 21–37.

which the idea of modern humanness has been predicated, among other things, upon its removal from the food chain and consequent separation from ‘the animal’, I show how the dog becomes in such situations a proxy for a (de)humanising process of *animalisation* that is predicated on the enactment of racialised bodies as ‘edible’. Conceptualising this method as ‘the politics of edibility’, I show how its use allows for the policing of racial order, reproducing a persistent link between modern humanness and whiteness that has been crucial for the reproduction of colonialism and white supremacy.¹¹ Centrally, however, I do not suggest that dogs must be seen as the *perpetrators* of violence. The violence committed by border and police authorities with the use of canines is primarily seen here as the culmination of a process of weaponisation of dogs that seeks to amplify their ‘capacity for violence’ and turn them into highly ‘obedient’ and ‘controllable’ bodies. This process that involves, *inter alia*, the selection, breeding, and training of canines and ‘is contingent on the dog’s body being taken over by human agents and institutional forces so as to transform the canine into an obedient, disciplined “working dog”’.¹²

In doing so, the article brings together post-colonial insights on the connections between borders, coloniality, and race in Europe¹³ and the incipient domain of animal and interspecies studies in International Relations (IR).¹⁴ It does so by unearthing the role of non-human animals as tools of racialisation and (de)humanisation in broader processes of border security and governance in Europe and by bringing to light the ways in which often-overlooked intimacies between animality and race play out at European borders. To bridge those two bodies of literature, however, is not an easy task. On the one hand, it requires interrogating the use of registers of animality to challenge humanness in ways that, historically and now, are explicitly racist. On the other hand, it necessitates that we simultaneously remain open to the worth of animals rather than flattening out racialised people into the residual, non-human category of animals.

The article starts by uncovering cases of violence by border and police authorities with the use of police dogs against racialised migrants at the European borderzones, particularly in the Balkans, where this practice has become pervasive. The analysis relies extensively on institutional reports on border violence as well as interviews conducted by NGOs with migrants pushed back by border

¹¹Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

¹²Tyler Wall, ‘“For the very existence of civilization”: The police dog and racial terror’, *American Quarterly*, 68:4 (2016), pp. 861–882 (p. 867); Harriet Smith, Mara Miele, Nickie Charles, and Rebekah Fox, ‘Becoming with a police dog: Training technologies for bonding’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 46:2 (2021), pp. 478–94.

¹³To name but a few, Ida Danewid, ‘White innocence in the Black Mediterranean: Hospitality and the erasure of history’, *Third World Quarterly*, 38:7 (2017), pp. 1674–89; Amy Niang, ‘The slave, the migrant and the ontological topographies of the international’, *International Relations*, 34:3 (2020), pp. 333–53; Mayblin and Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism*; Martina Tazzioli, ‘The making of racialized subjects: Practices, history, struggles’, *Security Dialogue*, 52:1 (2021), pp. 107–14; Nandita Rani Sharma, *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); Nadine El-Enany, *(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Polly Pallister-Wilkins, ‘Whitescapes: A posthumanist political ecology of alpine migrant (im)mobility’, *Political Geography*, 92 (2022), p. 102517, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102517>; Tarsis Brito, ‘(Dis)possessive borders, (dis)possessed bodies: Race and property at the postcolonial European borders’, *International Political Sociology*, 17:2 (2023), pp. 1–18; Sabrina Axster, ‘“We try to humanise their stories”: Interrogating the representation of migrants and refugees through the shift from “poverty porn” to humanisation and resilience’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 51:2 (2023), pp. 615–39; Thom Davies and Arshad Isakjee, ‘Ruins of empire: Refugees, race and the postcolonial geographies of European migrant camps’, *Geoforum*, 102 (2019), pp. 214–17; De Genova, ‘“Migrant crisis”’; Gurminder K. Bhambra, ‘The current crisis of Europe: Refugees, colonialism, and the limits of cosmopolitanism’, *European Law Journal*, 23:5 (2017), pp. 395–405.

¹⁴Lauren Wilcox, ‘Drones, swarms and becoming-insect: Feminist utopias and posthuman politics’, *Feminist Review*, 116:1 (2017), pp. 25–45; Matthew Leep, ‘Stray dogs, post-humanism and cosmopolitan belongingness: Interspecies hospitality in times of war’, *Journal of International Studies*, 47:1 (2018), pp. 45–66; Pallister-Wilkins, ‘Whitescapes’; Nick Vaughan-Williams, ‘“We are not animals!” Humanitarian border security and zoopolitical spaces in Europe’, *Political Geography*, 45 (2015), pp. 1–10; Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden, ‘Civilisation and the domination of the animal’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 42:3 (2014), pp. 746–66; Stefanie R. Fishel, ‘The global tree: Forests and the possibility of a multispecies IR’, *Review of International Studies*, 49:2 (2022), pp. 223–40; Tore Fougner, ‘Engaging the “animal question” in International Relations’, *International Studies Review*, 23:3 (2021), pp. 862–86.

and police authorities in the Balkans. The second section places the article in conversation with both post-colonial scholarship on border and migration studies and contemporary literature on animal studies. My third section looks at the historical uses of dogs by Western colonialism and illustrates how dogs have been historically weaponised by colonial powers as tools to police racial order. The subsequent section coins the concept of ‘the politics of edibility’ and explains how the violence perpetrated with the use of dogs operates as a device that (de)humanises its targets by enacting them as ‘animal-like’ and ‘edible bodies’. My final section looks back at border security in today’s Europe and argues that the reappearance of dogs as an instrument of violence, policing, and punishment of racialised migrants will be seen as a colonial legacy used to secure racial order in a contemporary Europe that is haunted by racial anxieties.

Police dogs and border violence in Europe

The violent employment of canines against migrants at contemporary European borders has as its backdrop the continual process of militarisation and policing of the European – and, in particular, European Union (EU) – borders which has been intensified since 2015, when a discourse of ‘migrant crisis’ has been advanced and crystallised in Europe.¹⁵ The coming of Global South migrants, most of them fleeing conflicts, invasions, political persecutions, and extreme forms of poverty, was quickly turned into a major political and security issue by both the media and European politicians.¹⁶ The movement of people from the Global South towards Europe has been portrayed as an unprecedented migrant ‘crisis’ that necessitated an immediate security response. In such a scenario, practices of violence against migrants have become more and more normalised, leading to thousands of migrant deaths, disappearances, and traumas.¹⁷ Many such modes of violence and governance at the European border have been scrutinised by migration and border security scholars, including carceral practices of detention and confinement,¹⁸ surveillance,¹⁹ dispossession,²⁰ etc.

Despite having become particularly pervasive at Europe’s borderzones, however, the use of police dogs by border authorities to police, surveil, and attack migrants has thus far received little attention within border and migration studies.²¹ In a report published in 2022, one can see that cases of violence and intimidation with the use of police dogs at European borders have consistently grown since 2017, with hundreds of cases being reported over the past years.²² Although those cases cut across multiple borderzones in Europe, the use of police dogs as a weapon against migrants has become particularly pervasive in land-pushback operations in the Balkans, particularly at the EU borderzones in this region.²³ This is not a coincidence: the so-called Western Balkan route is, after all, one of the main migratory paths into Europe and has been marked by the increasing use of

¹⁵ Danewid, ‘Policing the (migrant) crisis’; Gurminder K. Bhambra, ‘Europe won’t resolve the “migrant crisis” until it faces its own past’, *The Conversation* (1 September, 2015), available at {<http://theconversation.com/europe-wont-resolve-the-migrant-crisis-until-it-faces-its-own-past-46555>}.

¹⁶ Ranabir Samaddar, *The Postcolonial Age of Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 142.

¹⁷ Julia Black, ‘Annual regional review’, International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021, available at {<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl601/files/publication/file/MMP%20annual%20regional%20overview%202021%20Europe.pdf>}.

¹⁸ Martina Tazzioli, *Border Abolitionism: Migration Containment and the Genealogies of Struggles and Rescues* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

¹⁹ Corey Johnson and Reece Jones, ‘The biopolitics and geopolitics of border enforcement in Melilla’, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 6:1 (2018), pp. 61–80.

²⁰ Martina Tazzioli, ‘“Choking without killing”: Opacity and the grey area of migration governmentality’, *Political Geography*, 89 (2021), pp. 1–9.

²¹ See Fotiadis, ‘Frontex’s history of handling abuse evidence dogs Balkan expansion’; Barker and Zajović, *The Black Book of Pushbacks*.

²² Barker and Zajović, *The Black Book of Pushbacks*.

²³ Fotiadis, ‘Frontex’s history of handling abuse evidence dogs Balkan expansion’; Barker and Zajović, *The Black Book of Pushbacks*; Lucy Pasha-Robinson, ‘Refugee children suffering dog bites and “violent” beatings by border police in Balkans’,

border violence as a form of ‘deterrence’ against migrant crossings.²⁴ EU countries such as Croatia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Hungary have been especially committed to the use of police dogs in their pushback operations, employing K-9 forces to police, intimidate, and punish migrants.²⁵ The standardisation of such practices has led to the profusion of ‘dog bite wounds’ in migrants, especially on their limbs.²⁶

The increasing reliance on police dogs in border operations as a weapon of physical and psychological violence in this region has been described by NGOs as ‘a policy designed to render migrants physically incapable of crossing the border’²⁷ and a ‘way for police to make the passage as inhospitable as possible’.²⁸ In a particularly gruesome case in Croatia on 2 December 2019, six Syrian migrants, including two children, were attacked by one unmuzzled police dog – likely a Belgian Malinois – after having crossed the border between Bosnia and Croatia. Despite the group’s attempts to explain that they had the intention to claim asylum in Croatia, armed border authorities told the migrants to lie on the ground and then ordered an unmuzzled police dog to attack and bite them, causing serious wounds to some of the migrants and almost reaching a major blood vessel in one of them. After several minutes of indiscriminate attacks by the police dog, the migrants were then loaded into the back of a van and forced to disembark on a small road at the border between Croatia and Bosnia.²⁹

The use of dogs as a weapon to inflict violence also becomes visible in another pushback case from Bulgaria to Turkey. In this case, a Syrian migrant reported that while a police dog bit his legs, ‘the officers were saying “bravo bravo” to encourage the dog. I managed to move the dog away from my legs but the officers brought it back and made it bite me again.’³⁰ In their statements, migrants often emphasise that the attacks are not accidental. In other words, they do not occur due to a certain incapacity of the dog handler to supposedly control a ‘disobedient’ police dog. On the contrary, in most instances, migrants state that they are ordered to lie on the ground before the attacks begin³¹ and that border and police authorities ‘don’t stop them (the dogs). They smile and congratulate them’³² during the attacks.

The incorporation of police dogs into pushback operations also seems to be predicated on an attempt to intimidate migrants, generating strong reactions of fear and terror and discouraging them from recrossing the borders.³³ As BVMN reports, canines – often unmuzzled – are routinely used by police officers to threaten and scare migrants. In a pushback report from Slovenia to Bosnia in June 2021, for instance, five unmuzzled police dogs (two Malinois, two Rottweilers, and one German Shepherd) were used to intimidate Algerian migrants captured at the border.

The Independent (25 January 2017), available at, [<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/children-attacked-dogs-violently-beaten-border-police-brutality-balkans-serbia-belgrade-bulgaria-a7546366.html>].

²⁴Karolína Augustová and Jack Sapoch, ‘Border violence as border deterrence’, *Movements*, 5:1 (2020), pp. 219–31.

²⁵See, for instance, Fotiadis, ‘Frontex’s history of handling abuse evidence dogs Balkan expansion’; Lucy Pasha-Robinson, ‘Refugee children suffering dog bites and “violent” beatings by border police in Balkans’; European Council on Refugees and Exiles, ‘Systemic pushbacks and border violence continue in the Balkans’; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), [<https://reliefweb.int/report/hungary/systemic-pushbacks-and-border-violence-continue-balkans>]; ‘Bulgaria uses police dogs, violence in migrant pushbacks: HRW’, *Al Jazeera*, 26 May 2022, available at [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/26/bulgaria-uses-police-dogs-violence-in-migrant-pushbacks-hrw>].

²⁶Council of Europe, *32nd General Report of the CPT: European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (Strasbourg: Strasbourg Cedex, 2023).

²⁷Border Violence Monitoring Network, ‘Illegal push-backs & border violence reports Balkan region December 2019’ (December 2019), pp. 1–17.

²⁸Pasha-Robinson, ‘Refugee children suffering dog bites and “violent” beatings by border police in Balkans’.

²⁹Barker and Zavjović, *The Black Book of Pushbacks*, p. 4.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 420.

³¹Border Violence Monitoring Network, ‘Torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of refugees and migrants in Croatia in 2019’ (2019).

³²Border Violence Monitoring Network, ‘Illegal push-backs & border violence reports Balkan region December 2019’.

³³Natasha Mellersh, ‘Bulgaria uses violence and police dogs in migrant pushbacks says HRW’, *InfoMigrants* (27 May 2022), available at [<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/40800/bulgaria-uses-violence-and-police-dogs-in-migrant-pushbacks-says-hrw>].

Forcing migrants to sit on the floor, police officers would keep ‘the dogs on the leash but suddenly let it go a little bit and then abruptly pull[ed] the dog back again’, in a clear attempt to terrorise migrants.³⁴ The use of police dogs as a weapon of intimidation also becomes clear in the words of an Afghan migrant – part of a group of 12 people – pushed back on the Bulgarian border in April 2022:

There was a man [in our group] who started speaking Bulgarian. That man had worked in Bulgaria for three or four years and that’s how he knew the language. The police asked him questions ... then they released the dog [on him]. [We all] saw the dog biting him, his hands were bleeding ... after this attack, *police were... scaring this person with the dog. The dog’s leash was in their hands, and they would pretend to release it.*³⁵

Here it is central to note that, although oftentimes dogs and dog handlers belong to the national state police where they are employed, Frontex itself has not only offered a dog-handler manual and training to EU countries since 2009 but also has its own ‘canine battalion’.³⁶ The so-called Frontex K-9 Team is an international team of dogs and dog handlers who are sent to the EU to participate in border patrols, often assisting national border forces to intercept migrants who try to cross illegally.³⁷ As a result, it has not been uncommon for Frontex itself to be involved in cases of violence against migrants inflicted by its police dogs. In a case of K-9 attacks against migrants in Hungary’s frontier with Serbia in October 2016, for instance, the dog handler and the dog involved in the incident were not part of the Hungarian national border force but instead members of Frontex from Finland.³⁸ In this episode, a woman who was part of a group of four migrants was severely attacked and bitten by an unmuzzled Frontex patrol dog. The internal report filed by Frontex to justify the aggression, however, states that the migrant attacked appeared suddenly from the bushes, scaring the animal, which then ‘reacted by biting, which is a natural defence reaction for service dogs’.³⁹ The report also adds that ‘due to long leash, darkness and very limited vision, dog handler didn’t manage to see person before the dog’.⁴⁰

This case is illuminating for many reasons. It exposes, for instance, how police dogs have also been used by Frontex to evade their responsibilities in cases of violence and torture. Because dogs are not fully ‘controllable’, there is always the risk that they can ‘overreact’ or simply react in unforeseen ways, leading to cases of violence that were not ‘intended’ by Frontex dog handlers. As troublesome as it may be, there is, in this case, an implicit responsabilisation of the victim – it is her ‘sudden appearance’ that ‘caused’ the dog to react aggressively by biting – and of the police dog itself, who, after all, can never be fully ‘governable’. What is left out of the equation here is not only that the dog was already unmuzzled before the coming of the victim but also, and more importantly, the fact that it is Frontex itself that decided to train and deploy police dogs as bordering devices, making the agency fully responsible for the behaviour of the dogs.

A symbol of terror and brutalisation for migrants, police dogs are – not without a dose of irony – often portrayed in Frontex’s publicity on social media as amicable and docile. Posts thanking their ‘four-legged friends for their service in Frontex operations’ usually praise the canines for their courage, loyalty, and companionship. These posts are often accompanied by photos of dog

³⁴Barker and Zajović, *The Black Book of Pushbacks*, p. 192.

³⁵Testimony of an Afghan migrant’s encounter with police forces at the Bulgarian border in ‘Bulgaria: Migrants brutally pushed back at Turkish border’, Human Rights Watch (26 May 2022), available at {<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/26/bulgaria-migrants-brutally-pushed-back-turkish-border>} (italics added).

³⁶See ‘Policija: The Frontex agency project team draws up a manual for service dog handlers’, Republic of Slovenia Ministry of the Interior (10 February 2009), available at {<https://www.policija.si/eng/newsroom/news-archive/news-archive/94920-the-frontex-agency-project-team-draws-up-a-manual-for-service-dog-handlers-2009>}.

³⁷Fotiadis, ‘Frontex’s history of handling abuse evidence dogs Balkan expansion’.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Frontex, ‘Serious Incident Report 445’, 2016.

⁴⁰Ibid.

handlers with their dogs in which both look relaxed and happy to be together.⁴¹ Behind these posts, there seems to be a desire to detach the image of the police dog and the dog handler as symbols of terror and power and replace it with the unconscious image of the pet and the pet owner, attracting support from the public, who sympathise with both the dogs and the dog handlers. This handler-dog bond, however, is an essential part of the process of weaponisation of dogs, as Harriet Smith et al. argue.⁴² As the authors explain, ‘the central pillar in the training relationship is forming the bond between the dog and handler, which is built through the joint actions and care expressed through shared “knowing” and shared objects.’⁴³ This bond of trust between handler and dog, thus, is in actuality a condition for the policing work of intimidation, dissuasion, and, of course, violence performed by police dogs at borderzones.

Dogs, thus, have been weaponised by EU member states and Frontex and deployed as tools to attack and intimidate migrants who are caught while crossing the borders.⁴⁴ Selected and trained to operate as bordering devices in land pushbacks, canines are made to play the role of brave – albeit amicable – guardians of Europe’s borders. They operate as a relentless watchman who never sleeps, watching the gates of the territory, barking when someone approaches, and ferociously biting whoever dares to trespass. In light of that, my next section first contextualises the weaponisation of police dogs against migrants as part of Europe’s anxious attempts to secure racial order by reinforcing colour lines. It then points to the necessity of bridging contemporary post-colonial scholarship on migration and border security and animal studies for a better and more nuanced understanding of the racial and colonial underpinnings of this process of weaponisation of dogs at Europe’s borders.

(Post-)colonial borders and the intimacies between race and animality

The generalisation of police-dog attacks against migrants at European borderzones is situated within a much broader process of intensification of practices of policing, governance, and, of course, border violence in Europe associated with Europe’s so-called migrant crisis. This process has been recently addressed by post-colonial scholarship in both IR and migration and border studies writ large. For post-colonial scholars, in order to understand Europe’s contemporary ‘migrant crisis’, it is indispensable that we treat it not as a moment of exceptionality, but as ‘part of Europe’s ongoing encounter with the world that it created through more than 500 years of empire, colonial conquest, and slavery.’⁴⁵ This involves questioning the very ‘crisis’ parlance invoked by European politicians and the EU itself, which often frames the arrival of Muslimified, Black, Brown, and non-white migrants from the Global South as a process of ‘invasion’, as if Europe were ‘under siege.’⁴⁶ This narrative, it is argued, often evades Europe’s historical – and current – responsibility for creating and maintaining the very conditions that prompt migrants to seek asylum in Europe in the first place, contributing to the consolidation of a framing of this historical moment that is centred around Europe’s ‘innocence.’⁴⁷

For post-colonial scholarship, thus, Europe’s fortification and militarisation of its outer borders is fundamentally embedded in racial and (post-)colonial dynamics.⁴⁸ More simply put,

⁴¹See for instance Frontex [@Frontex], ‘On International Dog Day, we thank all our four-legged friends for their service in Frontex operations!’ [Twitter post], 1 July 2020, available at {<https://twitter.com/Frontex/status/1278275009304309760>}.

⁴²Smith, Miele, Charles, and Fox, ‘Becoming with a police dog.’

⁴³Ibid., p. 488.

⁴⁴Barker and Zajović, *The Black Book of Pushbacks*.

⁴⁵Danewid, ‘White innocence in the Black Mediterranean’, p. 1680.

⁴⁶Ghassan Hage, ‘État de siège: A dying domesticating colonialism?’, *American Ethnologist*, 43:1 (2016), pp. 38–49; Vicki Squire, Nina Perkowski, Dallal Stevens and Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Reclaiming Migration: Voices from Europe’s ‘Migrant Crisis’* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021).

⁴⁷Danewid, ‘White innocence in the Black Mediterranean’, p. 1680.

⁴⁸Tazzioli, ‘The making of racialized subjects’; Brito, ‘(Dis)possessive borders, (dis)possessed bodies’; Mayblin and Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism*; Gabriele Proglia, Camilla Hawthorne, Ida Danewid et al., *The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders and Citizenship* (Cham: Springer, 2021).

post-colonial scholarship convincingly argues that to understand the violent targeting of Global South migrants who seek sanctuary in Europe, it is central that we go beyond a concern with ‘sovereignty’ and indeed seriously reckon with the legacies of colonialism and racial capitalism.⁴⁹ The combat of Global South migration in Europe is seen primarily as a racial issue, that is, a phenomenon that relies on an implicit – and sometimes overt – construction of migrants as ‘racial others’ whose arrival purportedly threatens to disrupt Europe’s (white) social fabric. Post-colonial literature, thus, suggests that the already-institutionalised practices of border violence against Global South migrants are not simply limited to a purported attempt to preserve or take back ‘sovereign control’. The fact that border violence is directed almost exclusively at racialised migrants coming from the Global South is not coincidental but can be seen as an anxious attempt to (racially) demarcate the bodies *that matter* from the ones that can be violated, abandoned, and left to die.⁵⁰ Border violence, in other words, operates by marking and reinforcing racial hierarchies between Europe and its racialised others, perpetuating a colonial understanding that non-white bodies are not properly ‘human’ or at least ‘not as human’ and can therefore be subject to violence and exclusion.⁵¹ In doing so, Europe’s borders reaffirm and demarcate the racial lines between those whose bodies are ‘human’ enough to be welcomed on European soil vis-à-vis the ones who can and should be excluded from Europe’s space of ‘shared humanity’.⁵²

Race, thus, has been a central issue in the post-colonial literature on border security in Europe, as a force that shapes and informs dynamics of violence, exclusion, and (de)humanisation at the border.⁵³ That said, although race appears as a focal point in this literature, there has been less attention to the ways in which race and animality entangle and reinforce each other at the border. This has led to a certain elision not only of the role of animals in practices of racial violence and (de)humanisation but also of how notions of animality inform and undergird processes of violence and racialisation at the border. This becomes particularly important in the context of police dogs at the European borders, where, as I have shown, canines are weaponised to attack migrants and patrol Europe’s (racialised) borders, essentially operating as tools to secure racial order and further (de)humanise migrants. Bridging the gap between post-colonial and critical race scholarship within IR and border and migration studies *and* animal studies, thus, can be seen an important step to advance our current understanding of border security and governance.

Combining post-colonial border studies and animal studies involves two main steps. First, it requires remaining open to the role of animals within security dynamics of governance, policing, and violence. As IR scholars on animal studies have demonstrated over the past decade, non-human animals are not ‘outside’ the domain of politics. Quite the contrary, they have been deeply embedded in social structures of power and security as both political ‘agents’ and/or targets.⁵⁴ As scholars have noted, animals have been a ‘lively matter in the institutions and practices of warfare,’⁵⁵ border security, and policing globally, having been integrated into systems of violence and governance.⁵⁶ In the case of police dogs at the European borderzones, thus, this involves inquiring into

⁴⁹See for instance Nivi Manchanda and Sharri Plonski, ‘Between mobile corridors and immobilizing borders: Race, fixity and friction in Palestine/Israel’, *International Affairs*, 98:1 (2022), pp. 183–207.

⁵⁰Arshad Isakjee, Thom Davies, Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik and Karolina Augustova, ‘Liberal violence and the racial borders of the European Union’, *Antipode*, 52:6 (2020), pp. 1751–73.

⁵¹Polly Pallister-Wilkins, ‘Saving the souls of white folk: Humanitarianism as white supremacy’, *Security Dialogue*, 52:1 (2021), pp. 98–106; Vicki Squire, ‘Migration and the politics of “the human”: Confronting the privileged subjects of IR’, *International Relations*, 34:3 (2020), pp. 290–308.

⁵²See Bhambra, ‘The current crisis of Europe’.

⁵³Thom Tyerman, ‘Everyday borders in Calais: The globally intimate injustices of segregation’, *Geopolitics*, 26:2 (2019), pp. 464–85 (p. 468).

⁵⁴Fougnier, ‘Engaging the “animal question”’.

⁵⁵Erika Cudworth and Steve Hobden, ‘The posthuman way of war’, *Security Dialogue*, 46:6 (2015), pp. 513–29.

⁵⁶Rafi Youatt, ‘Interspecies relations, international relations: Rethinking anthropocentric politics’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43:1 (2014), pp. 207–23; Fred A. Wilcox, *Scorched Earth: Legacies of Chemical Warfare in Vietnam* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011); Fougnier, ‘Engaging the “animal question”’.

the roles and political and racial effects of the weaponisation of dogs in order to threaten, police, and physically punish migrants at the borderzones.

Second, and central here, bridging this gap involves inquiring about the complex interaction between *animality* and race within colonial and white supremacist orders. As I have briefly noted above, post-colonial scholarship in IR and border and migration studies has been deeply concerned with how racialisation operates by partially or fully excluding Global South migrants from the modern contours of Western ‘shared humanity’.⁵⁷ As post-colonial thought and critical race scholarship have shown us, despite its universal connotations within liberal and cosmopolitan paradigms, the idea of modern humanness has been racialised from its very inception and, hence, is not simply ‘available’ to everyone.⁵⁸ The very notion that we can talk about a ‘shared humanity’, as Sabrina Axster explains, is ‘blind to the colonial racial hierarchies underpinning who has historically been considered “human” in the first place and who could thus ascend to the space of our “shared humanity”’.⁵⁹ More simply put, while modernity and Enlightenment produced a purportedly ‘universal’ category of humanness based on ideas of freedom, rationality, autonomy, etc., this category was in actuality constructed through the partial and sometimes full exclusion of racialised and colonised bodies, who were continually produced as either non- or sub-human.⁶⁰ Racialisation, in other words, has been often described ‘a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans’.⁶¹

That said, although current post-colonial literature in migration and border studies is often aware of the ways in which a racialised human/non-human divide informs migration and border dynamics, there is certainly less attention to the relationships between modern humanness, race, and animality. Animality, however, has been central to the production and delimiting of humanness in at least two main ways. On the one hand, humanness has often been produced either as either a *negation* of ‘animality’ or as an entity that is ‘less of an animal’ than the ‘true’ animals.⁶² In other words, the denial of the animal status of humanness has been a way to differentiate humans from other species and produce and reinforce anthropocentric⁶³ ideas that humanness is both exceptional in its nature and superior to animality. Often associated with ideas of bestiality, savagery, absence of rational/civilisational traces, and even disposability,⁶⁴ animal lives have been historically produced as less worthy and therefore available for practices of commodification and exploitation.⁶⁵

On the other hand, and central here, the idea of animality has been paramount in colonial and white supremacist contexts to the production and reinforcement of *racial lines* between a (white)

⁵⁷ Brito, ‘(Dis)possessive borders, (dis)possessed bodies’; Niang, ‘The slave, the migrant and the ontological topographies of the international’; Squire, ‘Migration and the politics of “the human”’; Vaughan-Williams, “‘We are not animals!’”

⁵⁸ Squire, ‘Migration and the politics of “the human”’; Polly Pallister-Wilkins, ‘Saving the souls of white folk’; Lucy Mayblin, *Asylum after Empire: Colonial Legacies in the Politics of Asylum Seeking* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

⁵⁹ Axster, “‘We try to humanise their stories’”, p. 618.

⁶⁰ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁶¹ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 4.

⁶² Fougner, ‘Engaging the “animal question”’; Cudworth and Hobden, ‘Civilisation and the domination of the animal’; Youatt, ‘Interspecies relations, international relations’.

⁶³ Anthropocentrism is seen here as the ‘ideology that humans are morally more significant than other forms of life’ (Youatt, ‘Interspecies relations, international relations’, p. 208).

⁶⁴ David Baumeister, ‘Black animality from Kant to Fanon’, *Theory & Event*, 24:4 (2021), pp. 951–76.

⁶⁵ Matthew Leep, ‘Toxic entanglements: Multispecies politics, white phosphorus, and the Iraq War in Alaska’, *Review of International Studies*, 49:2 (2023), 258–77; Leep, ‘Stray dogs, post-humanism and cosmopolitan belongingness’; Fishel, ‘The global tree’; Audra Mitchell, ‘Is IR going extinct?’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 23:1 (2017), pp. 3–25; Stephen Hobden, ‘Being “a good animal”’: Adorno, posthumanism, and International Relations’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 40:3–4 (2015), pp. 251–63.

human subjectivity and its non- or sub-human racialised others.⁶⁶ Practices of animalisation have been central to the production of some bodies as ‘racially inferior’, essentially pushing them outside the boundaries of modern humanness. As Claire Jean Kim suggests, animality has always been ‘integral to the production of racial difference,’⁶⁷ as a central mechanism to order racial hierarchies and determine the worthiness of bodies. In this hierarchical scheme, the *modern* human – a category historically conflated with whiteness itself⁶⁸ – has been systematically placed at the top, as the deserving master of nature, animals, and animal-like racialised Others. As Mollie Godfrey explains, animalisation has been a political tool ‘used to not only deauthorize black violence and dehumanize black people, but to authorize white violence and humanize white people.’⁶⁹ Animalising certain bodies, in sum, has been a persistent colonial – and post-colonial – method deployed to create and maintain racial difference, perpetuating the idea that non-white bodies are not only ‘less human’ but also ‘disposable’.

This is not to say, however, that practices of animalisation have followed a unique pattern. Quite the contrary, animalisation has historically been a highly contextual endeavour insofar as animality itself is made to signify myriad things – including notions of bestiality, savagery, disposability, unruliness, and so forth.⁷⁰ Animalisation, for instance, has been used as a justification for slavery.⁷¹ Advancing the idea that Black people were purportedly ‘animal-like’ and consequently prone to unruliness and indiscipline was central to the legitimization of slavery. This association allowed for a portrayal of slavery as a process of ‘domestication’ of Black people, a process that required continual policing and surveillance on the part of slavers.⁷² It was this same association of Black people with ideas of ‘animal bestiality’ in settler-colonial spaces like the USA, for instance, that was behind the generalised fear of Black men after abolition, who were seen as potential sexual predators and criminals. This process not only led to myriad episodes of lynching but was also central to the creation and institutionalisation of policing institutions in the USA.⁷³ The association of colonised peoples with animality was also used as an excuse for imperial projects in Africa and Asia, which were often portrayed in Europe as civilisational projects that would essentially bring racialised ‘savages’ into humanity.⁷⁴ Remaining open to the complex and multiple entanglements between animality and race, thus, is essential for a better and more nuanced understanding of processes of racialisation in IR and, more specifically, at the borders, as the next sections illustrate.

Post-colonial literature, thus, has played a paramount role in unearthing the role of race and colonialism in shaping contemporary practices of border violence against Global South migrants at Europe’s borders. Borders, it has been argued, have been central tools for the preservation of racial hierarchies and, centrally, for the continual (de)humanisation of racialised bodies, who are continually excluded from Western understandings of ‘shared’ humanness. The lack of engagement with animality within this literature, however, meant that we have missed central dynamics of racialisation and (de)humanisation at the border. This includes, on the one hand, the roles of animals in processes of border security and, on the other, the importance of registers of animality in processes of racialisation at the border. With that in mind, my next sections take seriously the entanglements between race, animality, and colonialism. I start by contextualising the current

⁶⁶ Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, ‘Animal: New directions in the theorization of race and posthumanism’, *Feminist Studies*, 39:3 (2013), pp. 669–85.

⁶⁷ Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Sylvia Wynter, ‘Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation – an argument’, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3:3 (2003), pp. 257–337.

⁶⁹ Mollie Godfrey, ‘Sheep, rats, and jungle beasts: Black humanisms and the protest fiction debate’, *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 74:2 (2018), pp. 39–62 (p. 51).

⁷⁰ See for instance Julie Sze, ‘Race, animality, and animal studies’, *American Quarterly*, 72:2 (2020), pp. 499–500.

⁷¹ Baumeister, ‘Black animality from Kant to Fanon’.

⁷² Larry H. Spruill, ‘Slave patrols, “packs of negro dogs” and policing black communities’, *Phylon*, 53:1 (2016), pp. 42–66.

⁷³ Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

⁷⁴ Baumeister, ‘Black animality from Kant to Fanon’.

weaponisation of dogs against racialised migrants at Europe's borders within a much longer colonial and white supremacist history that takes us to central moments in Europe's colonial and racial projects of domination. Doing so, I show, pushes us to see the 'reappearance' of this practice in Europe today not as an exception, but as deeply embedded in colonial and white supremacist systems of domination that have not infrequently weaponised dogs to police a racial order predicated on the non- or sub-humanness of racialised persons. I then reflect more deeply on the (de)humanising and racialising effects of the exposure of people to dog bites and/or the threat thereof through an analysis of the links between edibility and humanness.

'Colonial dogs' and the policing of racial hierarchies

I don't need to tell you that no rations or expenditures are authorized for the nourishment of the dogs; *you should give them Blacks to eat*. (Donatien-Marie-Joseph de Vimeur, the Vicomte de Rochambeau)⁷⁵

In 1803, a ship containing 100 dogs coming from Cuba reached Saint-Domingue. Upon their arrival, the dogs were adorned with silk ribbons and cockades and taken for what could be best described as a parade. Celebrated by a multitude of people in the streets, the arrival of the canines was seen as an occasion for festivity and joy by the colonisers. The celebrations that followed their arrival, however, can be juxtaposed with the turbulent political atmosphere on the island. For this event took place during a period of massive and widespread turmoil in Saint-Domingue.⁷⁶ A massive revolt was taking place locally due to fears that France would seek to restore slavery after reconquering Saint-Domingue. The fear was justified, for France had indeed re-established slavery in other insurgent colonies, after periods of revolt on the part of Black enslaved people.⁷⁷

The dogs did not land in Saint-Domingue fortuitously. They were part of a new counter-insurgency strategy being tested by the French. The idea, by and large, was to use dogs as weapons of war against Black rebels, a weapon designed to hunt and devour them. The canine method, carried forward by General Donatien de Rochambeau, necessitated, however, a unique kind of training, that is, an exercise that could instil in the dogs a desire for 'Black' flesh. To do so, many exercises were introduced by the French army to train the dogs to associate Blackness with both the ideas of 'food' and 'threat'. In one of these exercises, dogs 'were kept in kennels and introduced to a dummy resembling a Black' person.⁷⁸ Inside the dummy – which simulated a Black person's 'body' – soldiers inserted blood and entrails so as to make it more 'attractive' for dogs.

The attempt to forcefully make dogs crave Black bodies was first put to test in Saint-Domingue in a public spectacle of violence and terror. Witnessed by a crowd, hungry dogs – who had been purposefully starved for days – were unleashed and ordered to attack a Black prisoner. Reports of the time, however, suggest that despite the commands shouted by French soldiers, dogs simply stood still, completely unaware of what they were supposed to do. The Black prisoner did not seem to be regarded as 'food' nor as a menace. Irritated by the inaction of the canines and the public embarrassment caused by the scene, their handlers decided to take the first step and cut 'open the victim's stomach' so that the 'dogs warmed up to the scent of blood.'⁷⁹ The strategy proved to be effective, as the dogs did not wait too long before starting to eat the prisoner, 'to the roar of the crowd and the blare of military music.'⁸⁰ To ensure that the 'taste' for Black flesh did not go away, the French army decided that dogs were to be fed with human flesh throughout the missions. As

⁷⁵Cited in Sara E. Johnson, "'You should give them Blacks to eat': Waging inter-American wars of torture and terror,' *American Quarterly*, 61:1 (2009), pp. 65–92 (p. 67; italics added).

⁷⁶Philippe R. Girard, 'War unleashed: The use of war dogs during the Haitian War of Independence,' *Napoleonica La Revue*, 15:3 (2012), pp. 80–105 (p. 80).

⁷⁷Girard, 'War unleashed'.

⁷⁸Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*, p. 56.

⁷⁹Girard, 'War unleashed,' p. 85.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 85.

Sara E. Johnson aptly notes, the use of dogs to eat Black people can be seen, before anything, as a ‘staged performance of white supremacy and domination’,⁸¹ wherein dogs were made to operate as the very ‘jaw and teeth’ of the empire, despite not infrequently resisting their weaponisation. Here it is central to note that, as Josh Doble explains, it is not that dogs do not naturally ‘see’ race, but they can be trained to do so, embodying and naturalising racist structures.⁸²

The use of dogs to hunt and devour Black rebels in Saint-Domingue was not unique in the history of Western colonialism. Quite the contrary, dogs have been consistently weaponised by colonial powers to terrorise, dissuade, eliminate, surveil, and dispossess racialised populations, playing important roles in the production, reinforcement, and securing of racial order historically. For instance, canines had already been used by the Spanish empire in the Americas since the end of the 15th century as weapons to dominate and exterminate natives as well as to suppress local revolts and insurgencies against the empire. Wearing armour, ‘the dogs often preceded the horsemen in column, panting with “foam dripping from their mouths”’.⁸³ During Spanish conquests in the Americas, mastiffs and greyhounds were trained by the colonisers to chase, kill, and eat Indigenous people, rapidly becoming a symbol of terror for the native populations. Dogs were trained to kill Indigenous people by ‘tearing out their throats’ with such a fierce bite that they would quickly ‘open their victims to the entrails’.⁸⁴ For that, canines were not only starved for days before the battles but were also continually fed human flesh so that they would not lose their taste for it. Some reports of the time even pointed to the existence of ‘butchers’ in the Americas that, among other things, sold Indigenous peoples’ body parts, allowing the colonisers to continually feed their dogs on human flesh.⁸⁵

Dogs also became a central tool in the management of slavery in the Americas, operating as a tool to protect a racial capitalist order based on continuous (de)humanisation, commodification, and exploitation of Black people. They were utilised in three main ways. First, they were deployed as a tool of surveillance. Dogs were trained to alert their masters by barking at or attacking Black people who either stopped working or were trying to escape the plantations. In doing so, dogs protected the slaver’s ‘property’ – here the Black enslaved person – by ensuring that they would not run away. Second, dogs were used by plantation owners for their acute sense of smell to track and hunt fugitives. Third, dogs were used as weapons of terror, on some occasions being ordered to attack, kill, and eat Black rebels with the purpose of punishing the fugitive *and* ‘teaching a lesson’ to the other enslaved people. Imported from Cuba and Germany, dogs were trained to only act ferociously when in contact with Black people.⁸⁶ For that, enslaved Black people working at the plantations were forced to continuously beat puppies so that dogs would grow associating their ‘Blackness’ with threat and enmity.⁸⁷

Dogs were also deployed during the European colonisation of Africa in the 20th century.⁸⁸ The Italian empire, for instance, incorporated dogs into their armies and trained them to be aggressive towards ‘Arab-looking’ communities in Libya. One of their training methods involved using ‘dummy mannequins with “blood-filled bladders” around their neck’.⁸⁹ In another training exercise,

⁸¹ Sara E. Johnson, ‘You should give them blacks to eat’, p. 68.

⁸² Josh Doble, ‘Can dogs be racist? The colonial legacies of racialized dogs in Kenya and Zambia’, *History Workshop Journal*, 89 (2020), pp. 68–89.

⁸³ John J. Ensminger, ‘From hunters to hell hounds: The dogs of Columbus and transformations of the human–canine relationship in the early Spanish Caribbean’, *Colonial Latin American Review*, 31:3 (2022), pp. 354–80.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Ensminger, ‘From hunters to hell hounds’, p. 373.

⁸⁶ Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*, p. 48.

⁸⁷ Paula Cepeda Gallo and Chloë Taylor, ‘Carceral canines’.

⁸⁸ Doble, ‘Can dogs be racist?’; Josh Doble, ‘Empire, race and canine training: Dogs as racial weapons in the twentieth century’, *Sniffing the Past~Dogs and History* (September 2021), available at: <https://sniffingthepast.wordpress.com/2021/09/02/empire-race-and-canine-training-dogs-as-racial-weapons-in-the-twentieth-century/>.

⁸⁹ Josh Doble, ‘Empire, race and canine training’.

‘a soldier dressed as an “Arab” would abuse the dogs and a soldier dressed in Italian uniform would reward and feed them.’⁹⁰ Similar patterns of training were also seen in South Africa under colonial control, where national police forces continually trained dogs to recognise the ‘scent’ of ‘Black African people’, to facilitate their hunting during policing operations.⁹¹

The weaponisation of dogs at the hands of white supremacist and colonial orders, however, did not disappear with the formal ending of plantation society and colonialism. It remained in settler and (post-)colonial spaces and societies as a ‘key symbolic figure of racist violence that placed historical subjugation in conversation with the present.’⁹² The emergence and dissemination of K-9 units all around the world illuminate the degree to which dogs have been – forcefully – embedded within state structures of policing and security, exercising roles of intimidation, detection, surveillance, the chase of criminals, and violence. The contemporary use of police dogs, however, relies on more complex and ‘advanced’ training methods that are often designed to look like ‘fun games’ for the dogs. Those methods, as Harriet Smith et al. explain, operate in a less confrontational manner and seek not only to enhance the dog’s capacity for violence and intimidation but also to turn canines into highly obedient and ‘objectified’ beings.⁹³

Although dogs are no longer ‘taught’ to specifically target racialised bodies, their use still tends to follow racial registers. Police dog patrols in the Global North, for instance, are much more frequent in racialised communities, which are seen as more ‘likely’ to present criminal behaviour.⁹⁴ The USA, not surprisingly, appears here as a major instance of this racialised and indeed racist deployment of canine forms of policing and brutality. One of the most illustrative examples of this phenomenon took place during the civil rights campaigns in the 1960s, when police dogs were systematically used by police forces to bite and lunge at young Black protestors in the South.⁹⁵ Furthermore, in Los Angeles, for instance, where police officers were caught calling African Americans ‘dog biscuits’⁹⁶ while ordering police dogs to attack them, only Black and Latino individuals were bitten by police dogs during the first six months of 2013.⁹⁷ More recently, another emblematic case of overt violence with police dogs took place in 2020 in the USA, when Black protestors were subjected to dog chasing and bites during anti-racist demonstrations that followed the killing of George Floyd.⁹⁸

The history of the weaponisation of dogs against racialised people by white supremacist and colonial powers shows us that there is a certain link between such episodes of racial violence with dogs, despite their temporal and sometimes geographical distance. The uses of dogs as weapons to exterminate Indigenous populations, massacre anti-colonial insurgents, police and punish enslaved people, attack racialised protestors, and now ‘protect’ European borders from racialised migrants have an important element of continuity in the ways in which dogs are recurrently used to *enact, protect, and/or reinforce racial order*. As the cases above show us, dogs have been weaponised to establish and reaffirm the dominance of whiteness and have been turned into important tools to police colonial and white supremacist orders of exploitation and subjugation. It is not a coincidence, for instance, that the exploitation of the dog’s capacity for violence

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Wall, “For the very existence of civilization”, p. 861.

⁹³ Smith, Miele, Charles, and Fox, ‘Becoming with a police dog’, p. 490.

⁹⁴ Shontel Stewart, ‘Man’s best friend? How dogs have been used to oppress African Americans’, *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, 25 (2020), pp. 184–206.

⁹⁵ Trone Dowd, ‘The violent, racist history of K-9 units’, *Vice* (7 September 2022), available at <https://www.vice.com/en/article/g5vjjb/k9-unit-history>.

⁹⁶ Jim Newton, ‘L.A. finds mixed results in curbing police dog bites’, *Los Angeles Times* (1 March 1996), available at <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-03-01-mn-41895-story.html>.

⁹⁷ Tim Walker, “Racist” LA police dogs only bite Latinos and African-Americans’, *The Independent* (11 October 2013), available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/racist-la-police-dogs-only-bite-latinos-and-africanamericans-8874913.html>.

⁹⁸ Merritt Clifton, “Animals & thugs”: Horses, dogs, police & the George Floyd protests’, *Animals 24-7* (11 June 2020), available at <https://www.animals24-7.org/2020/06/11/animals-thugs-horses-dogs-police-the-george-floyd-protests/>.

has been particularly acute at times when racial order was at stake – e.g. anti-colonial and anti-slavery rebellions, anti-racist protests, etc. This is not to say, however, that the entangled history between racialised and colonised people and dogs has been limited to such instances. Indigenous and colonised populations, after all, have also nurtured relationships of companionship with dogs, which were however many times interrupted and undone by settler-colonial powers. As scholars have shown, ‘native’ canines, who had been domesticated by Indigenous populations for centuries, have been systematically killed by colonial settlers in the Americas⁹⁹ as well as in Australia¹⁰⁰ and replaced by European dogs.

Looking at the history of the weaponisation of dogs by colonial powers to protect and enforce racial order is not simply an excavation practice. It allows us to see the contemporary use of police dogs to police, punish, and ‘bite’ racialised migrants at Europe’s racialised borders not as an exceptional phenomenon but as embedded within a much longer history of colonial and white supremacist weaponisation of canines to protect racial order. That said, there is another aspect of this phenomenon that requires more attention, which brings us back to our previous discussions regarding the links between race, animality, and modern humanness. It is not simply that dogs are made to operate as a security device in the name of racial order. There is in this systematic process of exposing bodies to the threat of ‘dog bites’ a further element of (de)humanisation and racialisation that needs to be accounted for. As I show below, this discussion takes us to the intimacies between humanness, animality, and ‘edibility’ under modernity.

The politics of edibility and the (un)making of humanness

A friend fell on the floor and the dog jumped over him. He’s very deadly eaten, he can’t walk now.¹⁰¹

The dog’s jaw clamped around his leg and the animal mauled his upper calf, tearing the flesh.¹⁰²

The dog ran toward me, but I hid behind the police. I saw the dog biting other people. It seemed worse than death to be bitten by a dog like that.¹⁰³

One central feature of the type of violence inflicted through the weaponisation of dogs is the ‘dog bite’ or, at least, the threat thereof. As the historical examples above show, colonisers and slavers often trained dogs to bite – and sometimes eat – racialised bodies as a strategy of policing, governance, and punishment. This method, furthermore, has remained a capital part of today’s process of weaponisation of dogs by police, border, and military forces, where canines are trained to bite upon command. It is also particularly pervasive in the cases analysed here at EU borders in the Balkans, where dog bites have become generalised in practices of pushbacks, producing physical traumas and wounds and provoking fear.

To understand the terror and discomfort instigated by the imagery of the dog bite, however, one first needs to take into consideration the importance of the idea of ‘edibility’ for modern conceptions of ‘humanness.’ The modern idea that humanness is separable from animality, that is, that

⁹⁹Máire Ní Leathlobhair, Angela R. Perri, Evan K. Irving-Pease, et al., ‘The evolutionary history of dogs in the Americas’, *Science*, 361:6397 (2018), pp. 81–5.

¹⁰⁰Rowena Lennox and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, ‘Colonialism and conservation’, *Borderlands Journal*, 20:1 (2021), pp. 49–88.

¹⁰¹Testimony from a migrant pushed back from Croatia to Bosnia. The description ‘deadly eaten’ refers to the gravity of the wounds caused by police dog bites to an Afghan migrant during a land pushback operation on the Croatian side of the border. According to the testimony, the migrant attacked by the police dogs was so severely injured in his legs and back, as a result of the bites, that he was not able to walk. Barker and Zajović, *The Black Book of Pushbacks*, p. 341.

¹⁰²Testimony from a migrant pushed back from Croatia to Bosnia. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰³Testimony from an Afghan migrant’s encounter with police forces at the Bulgarian border. In ‘Bulgaria: Migrants brutally pushed back’ (italics added).

humans are somewhat exceptional, has relied extensively upon a certain notion of 'non-edibility'.¹⁰⁴ Modern humanness, in its opposition to animality, has been historically predicated 'on the disavowal of being an (edible) animal'.¹⁰⁵ Humans can eat animals, and animals can always potentially eat other animals. Human flesh, nevertheless, is continually protected and detached from this food chain. For humans are not embedded in this cycle of consumption as equals. Rather, they are positioned within anthropocentric modernity as exceptional beings, non- or less-of-an-animal¹⁰⁶ living beings who, unlike the others, *should not be available for consumption*. In such a modern scheme, neither non-human animals nor humans should be allowed to eat human flesh.

The modern attachment to the idea of human non-edibility has spurred disgust, horror, and indeed fear of potentially 'cannibal' Indigenous and Black populations on the part of colonisers.¹⁰⁷ The always-present possibility of the racialised other being a cannibal, committing the 'sin' of eating human flesh, has permeated the colonial imaginary.¹⁰⁸ The idea of anthropophagy was a central aspect of the discourse around barbarism and played a significant role in colonial descriptions of Indigenous populations in the Americas, corroborating 'scientific' dictates concerning the purported savage animality of non-white peoples.¹⁰⁹ Kant, for instance, once described Indigenous populations of Paraguay as 'savages' who are 'dangerous cannibals'.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland in their journey to the Americas describe some of the Indigenous populations as a 'cruel and savage race ...who eat(s) the flesh of men and boys, and captives and slaves'.¹¹¹ Paul Lyon summarises this cannibal anxiety when he states that 'if a cannibal cannot be distinguished from a non-cannibal, the whole chain by which "civilized" people distinguish themselves from the "non-civilized" comes apart'.¹¹²

The colonial concern with the figure of the cannibal also represented a colonial and white fear of being incorporated by the racial other, both figuratively and literally. A fear, in other words, that the 'exceptional civilization' of whiteness could be 'devoured' by the 'savage' other.¹¹³ This discourse is somewhat mirrored today in Europe's 'migrant crisis', when racial anxiety over the possibility of being 'incorporated' by the racialised other's culture can be often heard. Narratives around the dangers of acculturation by 'Muslims', conspiracy theories about 'the great replacement', fears over the purportedly higher birth rates of racialised communities, losing its resources, etc. all point to a certain white fear of being figuratively consumed by the racialised other, a dread of 'becoming' the other and therefore 'losing itself'. This colonial fear of the potential cannibalism of the racialised other was already acknowledged by Frantz Fanon, who described the continual fear of the coloniser of being 'devoured' by 'the negro'.¹¹⁴

That said, although cannibalism has been more often addressed as a way to break with the modern commandment of human non-edibility, not much has been said about how the 'animal bite' itself destabilises and challenges this logic by bringing the edibility of the human body to the fore.

¹⁰⁴ Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*.

¹⁰⁵ Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Imperial transgressions: The animal and human in the idea of race', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 35:1 (2015), 156–72; Baumeister, 'Black animality from Kant to Fanon'.

¹⁰⁷ Jeff Berglund, *Cannibal Fictions: American Exploration of Colonialism, Race, Gender, and Sexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁸ Francis B. Nyamnjoh, 'Introduction: Cannibalism as food for thought', in Francis B. Nyamnjoh (ed.), *Eating and Being Eaten: Cannibalism as Food for Thought* (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2018), pp. 1–98.

¹⁰⁹ Oliver Eberl, 'Kant on race and barbarism: Towards a more complex view on racism and anti-colonialism in Kant', *Kantian Review*, 24:3 (2019), pp. 385–413.

¹¹⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 393.

¹¹¹ Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America during the Years 1799–1804, vol. II* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1907), p. 266.

¹¹² Paul Lyons, 'From man-eaters to spam-eaters: Literary tourism and the discourse of cannibalism from Herman Melville to Paul Theroux', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 51:2 (1995), pp. 33–62 (p. 41).

¹¹³ Berglund, *Cannibal Fictions*, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

Protecting the human body against the ‘animal bite’ has also been capital for the production and policing of modern humanness as something distinct and exceptional, either non- or less of an animal.¹¹⁵ This is one of the reasons why dog bites spur such horrifying discomfort. Beyond the violence and brutality of the bites themselves, they encapsulate a very ‘human’ fear of becoming ‘edible’. They operate, in other words, as a reminder of human animality, a reminder that the human body, tantamount to the animal one, can also be eaten. The recent campaigns in the United Kingdom to ban American XL bullies after the breed was linked to several attacks illustrate this process of fear of being ‘bitten’ by dogs that inhabits discussions around the dog’s deservingness – or not – to share space with ‘humans’.¹¹⁶

That said, my focus here is particularly on what can be seen as a process of forced exposure of racialised bodies to the ‘dog bite’ that has been historically conducted by colonial and white supremacist social orders, which I call here *the politics of edibility*. In light of the links between humanness and non-edibility, the subjection of racialised bodies to dog bites can be seen as a (de)humanising practice that marks its targets as edible. A method of violence, in other words, that operates by bringing their ‘animal edibility’ to the fore. The politics of edibility, thus, can be seen as a form of ‘bordering’ that polices and reinforces racialised human/non-human lines by reaffirming the non- or sub-human status of the racialised other. This is a phenomenon, thus, that pushes the racialised body towards an ‘animal condition’ by relegating it to an ‘animal’ space of edibility,¹¹⁷ all the while reinforcing humanness as a space reserved for the white and colonial self. That said, it is important to clarify that the process of edibilisation of the body *does not* require that the bite happen. The very terror caused by the *possibility* of being ‘bitten’, that is, of being ‘eaten alive’, is already part of the process of *becoming edible*, that is, of having its ‘animal edibility’ brought to the fore and violently exposed. It is not a coincidence that the mere threat of dog bites by border and police forces – or sometimes even the very presence of police dogs – is often described by migrants as a terrifying and (de)humanising experience.

The concept of politics of edibility, therefore, is seen here as a racialising and (de)humanising mode of violence that relies on the weaponisation of the dog and aims both at enforcing colonial and white dominance and preserving a racial order predicated on the non- or sub-humanity of racialised bodies. The idea of edibility, I have argued, illustrates this process of animalisation through the denial or removal of the modern privilege of ‘human non-edibility’ that the bite operates – in both its actual and virtual status. This makes the politics of edibility into what can be conceptualised as a process of cannibalism-by-proxy that reinforces and indeed polices racial difference by simultaneously demarcating humans from non-humans; humans from animals; and whiteness from its racialised others. This is a process that, as Francis B Nyamnjoh would perhaps argue, operates by ‘literally, socially, and metaphorically’ producing racialised bodies as available for colonial and racial capitalist violent forms of ‘consumption’.¹¹⁸

Bordering humanity, securing Europe: The police dog and the protection of colour lines

Don’t run, police! If you run, I will free the dogs.¹¹⁹

I wanted to go to Europe to be safe, to live *as a human*, and look I’m just an animal here!¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*.

¹¹⁶ Jessica Murray, ‘Why are American XL Bullies being banned and how will it work?’, *The Guardian* (15 September 2023), available at {<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/sep/15/why-are-american-xl-bullies-being-banned-and-how-will-it-work>}.

¹¹⁷ Boisseron, *Afro-Dog*, p. 71.

¹¹⁸ Nyamnjoh, ‘Introduction: Cannibalism as food for thought’, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Recollection by a migrant pushed back by Croatian police from Croatia to Bosnia, in Barker and Zajović, *The Black Book of Pushbacks*, p. 353.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1105.

The contemporary racialised use of police dogs by European states, with the warrant of Frontex, to police, surveil, and attack migrants at the borders should thus be seen as part of colonialism's afterlives that continually haunt our present. This phenomenon, naturally, is not the only colonial practice that resurfaces in Europe today. As post-colonial scholarship has noticed, Europe's border apparatus of security, especially over the past decade, has been marked by a broader process of readaptation of previous colonial and racial capitalist practices and rationales, which includes, among others, (dis)possessive practices of confiscation;¹²¹ carceral technologies of confinement;¹²² migrant camps;¹²³ practices of naval interception, deportation, and disembarkation;¹²⁴ etc. The import of previous colonial rationales and practices used to secure racial order in the colonies can be seen as part of Europe's attempts to reinforce colour lines at a time in which the increasing migration from the Global South has been ideologically constructed as a (racial) crisis that purportedly threatens the dominance of whiteness.¹²⁵

The redeployment of dogs at Europe's borders as weapons to secure racial order by threatening, punishing, and expelling racialised migrants allows us to reassess this policy as another iteration of what I have called here 'the politics of edibility'. The continual exposure of the migrant to the dog bite – or the threat thereof – in other words operates as a radical form of border violence that systematically constructs the migrant as an 'edible body', that is, an animalistic and less-than-human body that is fit for 'animal consumption'. Centrally, thus, the deployment of this policy is not accidental. This can be seen as part of the broader process of (de)humanisation carried out by Europe's border apparatus of security in the context of Europe's so-called migrant crisis.¹²⁶ The use of police dogs, more simply put, like other forms of border violence, enables Europe to demarcate and secure the lines between those whose lives are worthy *and* those whose lives are 'disposable' and do not fully belong within the contours of Europe's liberal humanity.¹²⁷ It does so not only by reinforcing Europe's modern and human subjectivity – in opposition to the migrant's non- or sub-human status – but also essentially by denying migrants access to 'modern humanness', further (de)humanising them.

It is worth noting, however, that by arguing that the contemporary deployment of police dogs to secure Europe's post-colonial and racialised borders can be paired with previous forms of colonial and white supremacist violence, I am in no way affirming that those contexts are the same. There is something unique about each of the historical moments addressed here, and one cannot simply remove context from the analysis. That said, it is indeed my argument here that pairing today's use of police dogs at Europe's borders with previous colonial and racial capitalist episodes of canine weaponisation against racialised people allows us to challenge, in a post-colonial ethos, the always too quick subsuming of borders into mere sovereignty or inside/outside dynamics, centring instead the oft-hidden racial and colonial continuities underpinning bordering dynamics.¹²⁸ It allows us, in other words, to bring to the fore the functions of borders as tools intended to reinforce and secure persistent (post-)colonial and racial hierarchies. Furthermore, juxtaposing those moments also helps us uncover the complex, continuous, and evolving entanglements between anthropocentrism and racism and the various ways in which they inform Europe's practices of border violence today.

¹²¹ Brito, '(Dis)possessive borders, (dis)possessed bodies'.

¹²² Martina Tazzioli, 'Digital expulsions: Refugees' carcerality and the technological disruptions of asylum', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 41:7 (2023), pp. 1301–16.

¹²³ Davies and Isakjee, 'Ruins of empire'.

¹²⁴ Martin Lemberg-Pedersen, 'Manufacturing displacement. externalization and postcoloniality in European migration control', *Global Affairs*, 5:3 (2019), pp. 247–71.

¹²⁵ Danewid, 'Policing the (migrant) crisis'.

¹²⁶ Squire, 'Migration and the politics of "the human"'

¹²⁷ Arshad Isakjee, Thom Davies, Jelena Obradović-Wochnik, and Karolína Augustová, 'Liberal violence and the racial borders of the European Union', *Antipode*, 52:6 (2020), pp. 1751–73.

¹²⁸ For a more thorough theorisation of juxtaposition methods and racial violence, see Katharine M. Millar, 'What makes violence martial? Adopt a sniper and normative imaginaries of violence in the contemporary United States', *Security Dialogue*, 52:6 (2021), pp. 493–511 (p. 498).

Conclusion

This article has analysed the practice of weaponisation of police dogs at Europe's borders, a practice that has become more and more institutionalised over the past years with the advent of a purported 'migrant crisis'. Contextualising this phenomenon within a longer colonial and white supremacist history, I have argued that the use of police dogs by border and police authorities operates as a form of racial/racialising violence that reinforces colour lines by reaffirming the non- or sub-human status of racialised migrants who seek to cross the border towards EU territory. This is undertaken, I have shown, through what I have conceptualised here as a persistent 'politics of edibility' that, through inflicting pain and terror on racialised bodies through the weaponisation of the dog's capacity for violence, continually constructs racialised people as 'edible bodies', reinforcing their non- or sub-human status.

The article has also investigated and reflected on the complex intimacies between race and animality in dynamics of border security, essentially bridging post-colonial and race scholarship and animal studies. On the one hand, it has shown how non-human animals have been embedded in racist, colonial, and anthropocentric structures of domination. In the case of police dogs, more specifically, the article has exposed how they have been made into part of the border apparatus of security in Europe and tasked with policing and reinforcing racial order as weapons of attack, policing, and dissuasion. On the other hand, the article has also explored the intimacies between racialisation and animality. It has done so not only by exposing how they have been historically entangled but also by developing an account for how such intimacies can be seen in the contemporary deployment of canines to attack and police racialised migrants at Europe's borders.

Further reflecting upon and examining the links between race, animality, and coloniality has the potential to provide IR with a richer and more complex grasp of themes such as governance, migration, security, bordering, and so forth. Future research can extend the discussions held here, for instance, by exploring other ways in which animals are embedded in security practices of racialisation, (de)humanisation, and colonial domination whether at the border or other spaces. Another avenue of research consists in investigating alternative ways in which notions of animality inform processes of racialisation – and vice-versa – in international politics.

Video Abstract. To view the online video abstract, please visit: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000032>.

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