"We are *not* animals!" Humanitarian border security and zoopolitical spaces in EUrope[1]

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A B S T R A C T

This article juxtaposes two prominent discourses accompanying the neoliberalisation of EUrope's borders. The first is the emerging notion of humanitarian 'migrant-centredness' found in the policies of elites and security professionals in the field of EUropean border security and migration management. The second is the use of animalised metaphors and imagery that pervade narratives of 'irregular' migrants' embodied experiences of detention across and beyond EUrope. It argues that what is at stake in this juxtaposition is more than simply a discrepancy between the 'rhetoric' of neoliberal bordering and the 'reality' of 'irregular' migrants' experiences. Such a view, which is commonly held among diverse critics of border violence, ultimately makes a problematic appeal back to the very humanitarian frame that has already been coopted by authorities associated with or even complicit in that violence. Seeking an alternative diagnosis and ground for critique beyond the 'rhetoric/reality' bind, the analysis draws on conceptual resources found in (post)biopolitical theory — particularly Jacques Derrida's concept of 'zoopolitics' — in order to identify and explore animalisation as a specific spatial technology of power. Understanding the work that the zoopolitical threshold does in shaping contemporary spaces of incarceration and producing animalised subjects offers new insights into both governmental logics of border security and the limits of humanitarian-based critiques.

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Introduction

Since the NATO-led bombing of Libya and the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the municipal zoo in Tripoli has been closed to public visitors and put to a different use: it is now a migrant processing centre. While the capital city has twenty-two permanent processing centres, in recent years these are reported to have exceeded their capacity and each day the zoo receives on average twenty 'irregular' migrants destined for the European Union (EU), typically from Ghana, Nigeria, and Chad (The Guardian, 2013). According to Libyan news sources, the processing centre is located at the edge of the grounds of the zoo — it has barred doors and windows, is sparsely furnished such that detainees are forced to sleep on the floor, and 'an ironic sticker, grazed by a gunshot hole, advertises a Libyan tourism company' (Libya Herald, 2013). Libyan authorities — in receipt of €10 million for assistance in border control from the EU under the terms of the European Neighbourhood Policy (Amnesty, 2013) — outsource the operation of the zoo to local private militias. The militias round-up 'irregular' migrants

suspected of attempting to leave for the EU on boats launched from nearby Gargaresh beach and bring them to the zoo for medical examinations to test for hepatitis C and HIV (NPR, 2013). Evidence presented by NGOs suggests that human rights abuses are endemic not only in Tripoli zoo, but across Libyan processing centres: 'They [the guards] don't even enter our room because they say that we smell and have illnesses. They constantly insult us, and call us: "You *donkey*, you *dog*". When we are moving in their way, they look disgusted and slap us [...]' (unnamed male detainee from The Gambia held in Tripoli zoo, quoted in Amnesty, 2013: 14, emphasis added).

This scenario illustrates the well-established insight that the borders of 'EUrope' have undergone a series of spatial displacements and temporal deferrals to form a continuum of violence that problematizes the traditional logic of inside/outside associated with the modern geopolitical imagination (Bigo, 2001; Walker, 2000; Walters, 2002).[2] The *off-shoring* of EU bordering practices to neighbouring states such as Libya — whereby attempts to control the mobility of certain populations deemed to be 'irregular'[3] are projected beyond the territorial limits of EU Member States — has become a central feature of migration management and broader initiatives to performatively secure the external dimension of EUropean space (Bialasiewicz, 2011; see also Migeurop, 2012). These

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practices are typified by the work of the EU external border management agency Frontex whose missions have extended far beyond the Mediterranean Sea into West Africa and increasingly come to resemble military operations (Balibar, 2009; Borderline Europe, 2013; Picum, 2010). Extra-territorial projections of the border have also given rise to the *out-sourcing* of bordering practices involving a *de facto* transfer of governance from the EU to states in North Africa and to the east (Bialasiewicz, 2012). In turn, third states often pursue a strategy of further sub-contracting border control to private security companies and local militias who profit from amplifying the perceived threat of 'irregular' migration as part of a cyclical industry (Andersson, 2014: 121). As is also well documented, the off-shoring and out-sourcing of the EU's borders has not led simply to the *delegation of* but rather the *derogation from* responsibility for international protection of 'irregular' migrants under international law (Gammeltoft-Hansen, 2011). NGOs and the United Nations (UN) point to systematic human rights abuses, which have led to allegations that EUrope is seeking to wash its 'dirty hands' of a problem that it has had a role in producing (Human Rights Watch, 2011; see also Amnesty, 2013; Borderline Europe, 2013; Migeurop, 2012; Pro Asyl, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). Such evidence also indicates that these abuses are not geographically delimited to sites beyond EUrope, but can also be found at land and sea borderzones and throughout Member States' territories.

However, despite these existing insights, a central aspect of the Tripoli zoo-turned-processing-centre — and its wider political and spatial significance — nevertheless remains elusive: the fact that *humans* in Tripoli are (mis)placed in a *zoo* for the ends of EUropean border security and migration management. *Prima facie* it might be suggested that the re-designation of this zoological space is merely a function of the chaotic asylum system in Libya and the short-term exigencies of over-crowding in processing centres established for that purpose (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013). Yet, a significant body of NGO research indicates that thousands of 'irregular' migrants are detained in zoo-like spaces not only in Libya, but also Morocco (Médicin Sans Frontières, 2013) and southern EU Member States including Italy, Cyprus, Greece, and Spain (Borderline Europe, 2013). Perhaps more significantly still, as the analysis will go on to identify and investigate in greater detail, animalisation is a powerful and recurring discourse — understood as an assemblage of linguistic and material phenomena[4] — that structures many 'irregular' migrants' testimonies of their embodied encounter with diverse aspects of EUropean border security at various sites — particularly, though not exclusively, in the context of contemporary spaces of incarceration. While some testimonies feature political claims made in the name of a common *humanity* (Johnson, 2013; Puggioni, 2013), others are characterised by the reverse narrative of *dehumanisation* and the repeated demand of many 'irregular' migrants 'We are *not* animals'! (Borderline Europe, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2011b; Médicin Sans Frontières, 2013; Migeurop, 2012; Pro Asyl, 2012a, 2012b). This raises a number of questions: What is the political and spatial significance of the animalisation of 'irregular' migrants in the context of contemporary EUropean border security practices? How does the attempt to (re)produce animalised subjectivities in dehumanising spaces create the conditions of possibility for particular forms of bordering? Where might we find conceptual resources for understanding the work that the human/animal distinction does in shaping both techniques of governance and critique?

In seeking to address these questions the article begins with an overview of the emergent neoliberal discourse of humanitarian 'migrant-centeredness' (EU Commission, 2011a), which increasingly places the *human* in a catchall manner at the heart of EU border security and migration management. Notions of 'humanitarian border security' are then critically juxtaposed with the

animalisation of 'irregular' migrants primarily — though not exclusively — in spaces across the Greece–Turkey borderlands. Against prominent diagnoses, I argue that there is more at stake in this juxtaposition than merely a difference between the 'rhetoric' of humanitarian policies and the 'reality' of dehumanising practices. The need to step back and search for alternative critical philosophical resources is increasingly pressing because many of the conventional grounds for critiquing border violence found in academic and non-academic literatures that focus on an abstract and idealised human subject — human rights, humanitarianism, and 'migrant-centredness' — have already been coopted by authorities complicit in that violence. Several writers (Andersson, 2014; Coutin, 2005; Khosravi, 2010) have already noted the prominence of animal metaphors and imagery in representations of 'irregular' migration at border sites globally. Building upon these observations, I argue that the animalisation of 'irregular' migrants constitutes a specific spatial technology of power that neither Foucaultian biopolitics nor Agambenian thanatopolitics — two prominent frames mobilised within critical approaches to border security and migration — can adequately grasp. The former works largely within an anthropocentric frame of understanding biopower as applying to the already given referent object of 'man-as-species'. Agamben's (2004) lesser-known treatment of the 'anthropological machine' appreciates what is at stake in the production of animalised subjectivities, but his engagement with the human/animal distinction is limited in respect of its tethering to the figure of *homo sacer*.

In response, I draw on Derrida's (2009) recent lectures published posthumously as *The Beast and the Sovereign* in order to develop the notion of the 'zoopolitical border'. This spatial-ontological device seeks to characterise both the bestial potentiality of humanitarian EUropean border security and its reliance on the creation of spaces of confinement in which attempts are made to render otherwise 'irregular' populations 'knowable' and therefore governable. By emphasising the performative production of zoopolitical spaces — such as the Tripoli zoo-turned-processing-centre — I suggest that it is possible to open up new avenues for critiquing the limits of humanitarian border security beyond the dominant rhetoric/reality frame. As such, the article responds to extant calls for the development of alternative border imaginaries apposite to the complexities of bordering practices in global politics (Johnson et al., 2011; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2012; Rumford, 2008; Walker, 2000), the further elaboration of the (post)biopolitical paradigm (Debrix & Barder, 2012; Wolfe, 2012), and the exploration of how Derrida's zoopolitical treatment of the relationship between biopolitics, sovereignty and the human/animal distinction might help 'inform a new, critical geography' (Rasmussen, 2013: 1130). Crucially, however, the analysis departs from recent efforts to bring 'the animal' and animal-–human relations back in to political geography and border-making (Brown & Rasmussen, 2010; Collard, 2012; Philo & Wilbert, 2000; Sundberg, 2011). Rather, I focus more specifically on how the zoopolitical logic identified by Derrida operates as the constitutive outside of humanitarian discourses, the application of human rights, and the citizen as the 'proper' human subject in spaces of animalisation across EUrope.

Humanitarianism and biopolitical border security in Europe

Many critical scholars have sought to move beyond debates about the continued importance or likely obsolescence of state borders under conditions of globalisation by tracing the changing nature and location of EUrope's borders wrought by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the multiple and often contradictory territorial dynamics of European integration (see, for example, Balibar, 1998, 2009; Bialasiewicz, 2011; Bigo, 2001; Guild, 2009; van Houtum,