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“We are *not* animals!”

Humanitarian border security and zoopolitical spaces in Europe¹

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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 (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 Neighborhood 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 centers: ‘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; Vaughan-Williams 2011). These 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 and 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 (Médecin 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 phenomena⁴ – 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; Médecin 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 2006; 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’. Giorgio 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 Jacques 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 and Neilson 2013; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012; Rumford 2008; Walker 2010), the further elaboration of the (post)biopolitical paradigm (Debrix and 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 (Philo and Wilbert 2000; Brown and Rasmussen 2010; Collard 2012; 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 2010; Rumford 2008; Sidaway 2006; Walker 2000; Walters 2002, 2011). Against this backdrop a number of commentators have noted the neoliberalisation of border control, which is increasingly characterised by the ‘managerial language of cooperation and partnership’ (Bialasiewicz 2012), the rise of for-profit public-private partnerships as part of a EUrope-wide homeland security industry (Prokkola 2013), and a new emphasis on ‘customer experience’ and levels of satisfaction among so-called ‘trusted travellers’ at ‘regular’ land, sea, and air border crossing points (Vaughan-Williams 2010). Whereas the traditional paradigm of border control focused on the prevention of movement and defence of territory, more recent bordering practices have also sought to manage and indeed *enhance* flows of certain people, services, and goods (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Central to this shift has been the augmented role of ‘smart’ border security technologies based on intelligence-led risk assessments, which aim to operate *preemptively* in order to identify and intervene *before* potential movements deemed to be suspicious leave their point of origin (Amoore 2006; Dijstelbloem 2011). However, as William Walters (2011: 138) has argued, what has so far received less critical attention is the way in which these developments have been accompanied by what he calls the ‘birth of the humanitarian border’ in EUrope (see also

Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Ticktin 2011). Building on Walters and others I suggest that it is instructive to consider the recent emergence of the humanitarian discourse of ‘migrant-centeredness’ and it is against this policy backdrop that I seek to critically juxtapose testimonies of animalisation and examine the prior role of the human/animal distinction in shaping the field of European border security practices.

Launched in December 2011, the EU Commission’s ‘Global Approach to Migration and Mobility’ (GAMM) is the overarching policy framework for the field of EU border security and migration management. François Crepeau, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, refers to the GAMM as ‘shaping and influencing all other management decisions by all entities of the EU’ in this field (UN 2013). The most recent version of the GAMM developed as a direct policy response to the perceived threat of increased ‘irregular’ migration following the political unrest across North Africa since early 2011. In its ‘Communication on Migration’ on 4 May 2011 the EU Commission claims that more than 20,000 ‘irregular’ migrants from North Africa ‘illegally’ obtained access to the EU between January and May 2011; that Italy, Malta and Greece were most exposed to these ‘irregular’ dynamics; and that these Member States were in greatest need of assistance in returning ‘irregular’ migrants to their countries of origin. In this document the problem of ‘irregular’ migration is in part framed using the traditional language of security, as unauthorised population movement is presented as threatening, *inter alia*, good governance (EU Commission 2011a: 2), employment rates among EU citizens (EU Commission 2011a: 3), the economic competitiveness, welfare systems, and social cohesion of member states (EU Commission 2011a: 4-5), and the effectiveness and credibility of the external Schengen border (EU Commission 2011a: 7). However, alongside this language associated with the ‘securitization’ of migration – a move that took place in the late 1980s/early 1990s

(Huysmans 2006) – is a strong humanitarian concern expressed for the lives and well-being of ‘irregular’ migrants precisely as *humans* with the same fundamental rights as EU citizens.

Eschewing traditional ‘statist’ paradigms, the GAMM calls explicitly for a ‘migrant-centred’ approach to border security and migration management and commits EU Member States to being ‘among the frontrunners’ in promoting international protection (EU Commission 2011a: 6). A particular feature of the GAMM is its catchall focus on the human rights, safety, and well-being of each *individual* migrant rather than on formal juridical-political categories of migrants: ‘In essence, migration governance is not about “flows”, “stocks”, and “routes”, it is about *people*’ (EU Commission 2011a: 6, emphasis added). Elsewhere, it is argued that this approach reflects and reinforces the EU Commission’s respect for the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the importance of protecting migrants’ not only within the territorial limits of EU Member States, but also ‘along the migratory routes, in countries of origin, transit and destination’ (EU Commission 2011e: 14). While the GAMM emphasises the particular need to protect ‘vulnerable’ migrants — classified as unaccompanied minors, asylum seekers, victims of trafficking, stranded migrants and women — it also refers more generally to mainstreaming democratic principles and human rights for *all* migrants as human beings irrespective of their origin, destination or ‘legal status’: ‘A migrant-centered approach is also about *empowering migrants*, and ensuring that they have access to all relevant information about the opportunities provided by legal migration channels and the risks of irregular migration’ (EU Commission 2011e: 14, emphasis added).

Notably this ‘humanitarian’ approach to border security and the aims of the GAMM more generally were reiterated by EU officials in the aftermath of the deaths of at least 366 Eritreans and Somalis in Italian waters off the island of Lampedusa on 3 October 2013.

Describing the incident as a ‘terrible tragedy’ Cecilia Malmström, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, expressed ‘solidarity both with migrants and countries that are experiencing migratory flows’ and used the occasion to draw attention to the need for ‘quicker tracking, identifying, and the rescuing of more vessels and boats’ in order to ‘prevent the loss of lives at sea’ (EU Commission 2013a). In December 2013 the ‘Task Force Mediterranean’ was established by the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council in order ‘to take determined action [...] to prevent death at sea and to prevent such human tragedies from happening again’ (EU Commission 2013b: 2). Moreover, the work of Frontex was also stressed as not only ‘key to ensuring effective border control in the region’, but also ‘to ensuring the protection of those in need and saving the lives of migrants’ and as such new funding was announced in order to enhance ‘search and rescue’ capabilities across the Mediterranean (EU Commission 2013b: 16). This twinned emphasis on combining the discourses of enhanced ‘border security’ with that of ‘saving lives’ also characterises the framing of and justification for the new ‘European Border Surveillance System’ (EUROSUR) – a €250 million multi-platform surveillance system operational from December 2013 – as a technology designed to *both* ‘reinforce the *control* of the Schengen external borders’ *and* to improve search and rescue capability: ‘We have to become better at identifying and rescuing vessels at risk [...] EUROSUR will improve situational awareness and the capability of early detection of irregular migrants at sea, thus enabling more effective prevention of loss of life’ (EU Commission 2013b: 17). Such ambiguity is further reflected in Operation ‘Mare Nostrum’ – a military-humanitarian initiative launched in October 2013 by the Italian Navy – which Interior Minister Angelino Alfano has referred to as a ‘proud’ mission designed to prevent both human smuggling and the Mediterranean from becoming the ‘lake of death’ (Times of Malta 2014). In each of these examples the securitization of migration has become increasingly entangled with discourses of humanitarianism such that the latter cannot be read straightforwardly as a check on the

excesses of the former (Walters 2011: 147; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013: 187). Rather, echoing Didier Fassin's (2012) work on humanitarian reason and Miriam Ticktin's (2011) study of transnational regimes of care, the discourse of 'migrant-centred' border security constitutes a biopolitical regime of governance: the bodies of 'irregular' populations – their basic needs and vulnerabilities – are targeted and managed by European border security authorities with ambivalent ethical and political effects.

Indeed, the neoliberalisation of border security and migration management, the humanitarian focus of the GAMM, and the emphasis on the well-being of 'irregular' populations are all characteristics closely associated with what Michel Foucault paradigmatically referred to as biopolitics (Foucault 1978, 2004). According to Foucault, the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of new forms of knowledge in Europe – made possible by disciplines such as statistics, demography, epidemiology and biology – that brought biological life (*zoē*) into the modalities of state power (*bios*). Foucault argued that the developments and social changes wrought by industrialisation and demographic growth made the concept of sovereign power – 'the right to *take* life or let *live*' – increasingly anachronistic (Foucault 1978: 136; 2003: 241). Instead, he identified the co-option of sovereign power into two separate yet complementary forms of power: disciplinary power and biopower. Whereas the former is a type of power based on the training and surveillance of the individual human body, the latter seeks to regulate populations through their optimisation and is therefore addressed to 'man-as-species' (Foucault 2004: 243). Taking these two forms of power together, Foucault claimed that the old sovereign right was gradually replaced by the power to 'make live and let die' (Foucault 2004: 247). The 'letting die' part of this equation is made possible by what he calls 'state racism', which introduces a break between life deemed to count and life considered to be abnormal, degenerate, and thus a risk to the health of the population as a whole (Foucault

2004: 254-261). But while the paradigmatic Foucaultian account may be apposite in diagnosing what is at stake in attempts to govern life via humanitarian border security, its core emphasis on ‘making live and letting die’ is insufficient to address the specific spatial technologies of power that operate via dehumanisation and attempt to produce *some* ‘irregular’ migrants as *animalised* subjects.

SPACES OF DEHUMANISATION AND THE ANIMALISATION OF SUBJECTS

Against the backdrop of the militarisation, off-shoring, and out-sourcing of European border security practices and the emergence of neoliberal ‘migrant-centred’ humanitarianism of the GAMM, the ‘exceptional’ practice of detention has become entrenched as a routine method of attempting to control ‘irregular’ mobility throughout the European borderlands.⁵ While the temporary incarceration of ‘irregular’ migrants seeking entry to the EU is not a new phenomenon, research undertaken by the UN and NGOs suggests that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of detainees, the range of sites used as detention centres, and the use of detention as a form of border security particularly since the onset of population movements associated with the Arab Spring. According to ‘Open Access Now!’ in 2012 there were 600,000 ‘irregular’ migrants detained while seeking entry to the EU. Spaces of detention vary considerably from large, clean, permanent and professionally run processing centres to small, makeshift facilities where some of the most egregious human rights abuses take place (Pro Asyl 2012b). Centres may be visible landmarks with high perimeter walls or anonymous spaces invisible to the rest of society; located in urban centres or in rural backwaters; in EU Member States or neighbouring third countries; on land or, as in the case of the Spanish NATO warship that detained more than 100 ‘irregular’ migrants it ‘rescued’ in July 2011, at sea (Migeurop 2011: 8). Far from an exceptional case, however, I want to suggest that the opening example of the Tripoli zoo-turned-processing centre is symptomatic of a more

pervasive and yet under-examined feature of detention in the field of EUropean border security as experienced by some ‘irregular’ migrants: their animalisation in spaces of dehumanisation. This seemingly stands in radical contrast with discourses of humanitarian border security and ‘migrant-centredness’, which leads to the prominent argument that there is a ‘gap’ between policies on the one hand and practices on the ground on the other. However, I will argue that it is a mistake to see these discourses as contradictory: animalisation is a necessary condition of possibility for humanitarianism. Further still, discourses of animalisation expose the limits not only of humanitarian-based critique, but also of Foucaultian biopolitics. Another interpretive key is required.

Dehumanising borderwork

Much of the recent NGO research on the use of detention as an instrument of border security in the EUropean context has focused on the experiences of ‘irregular’ migrants at the Greece-Turkey border, which was described in March 2012 as being EUrope’s ‘barn door’ by Austrian Interior Minister Johanna Mikl Leitner (quoted in Pro Asyl 2013: v). Between 2008 and 2012 the Evros region of Greece – with a 203 km land border with Turkey to the North and a sea border with the Aegean to the South – became a major hub for the arrival of ‘irregular’ migrants to the EU (UNHCR cited in Pro Asyl 2012b: 5). In November 2010 the Greek government requested assistance from the EU Commission and Frontex deployed 175 guest officers recruited from 26 Member States under the auspices of the first Rapid Border Intervention Team (RABIT) operation. The ‘success’ of the Frontex mission has led to the arrest of thousands of ‘irregular’ migrants facing deportation and/or decisions regarding their asylum application by the relevant police directorates (Human Rights Watch 2011b; Pro Asyl 2012b, 2013). Seeking to monitor the work of Frontex in the Evros region several teams of researchers from various NGOs have visited detention facilities at Venna, Fylakio, Tycherio,

Feres, and Soufli (Human Rights Watch 2011b; Pro Asyl 2012b). According to Pro Asyl (2012b), Tycherio detention centre – a former warehouse with high windows and poor ventilation that has been turned into a makeshift processing facility – accommodates an average of 180 people in two cells. Each detainee is effectively allocated an area amounting to 40 cm² of personal space. Under these conditions it is only possible for detainees to sleep sitting in an upright position. The extent of overcrowding means that the toilets are not separated off and often detainees are left with no choice but to sleep in this area: ‘If a detainee [...] has to urinate, police guards would guard him/her to the fields or he/she had to urinate through the bars into the corridor’ (Pro Asyl 2012b: 30). During winter temperatures at the facility regularly fall to minus 10 degrees Celsius and in the summer there is no cooling method. Food is offered to detainees twice a day, but local vendors are also encouraged to visit the facility because the standard portion sizes are often insufficient for adults. There is only one card-operated public telephone, which detainees can use if they purchase a card for €4 that lasts for several minutes only. Similar conditions can be found at Feres, where an average of 85 detainees share 2 cells with no daylight; at Soufli where an average of 170 detainees share one cell and are forced to sleep in sewage (Farsana from Afghanistan, August 2010, quoted in Pro Asyl 2012: 34); and at Fylakio where detainees try to eat less in order to avoid using the toilets (M.S. from Iran, 20 December, 2011, quoted in Pro Asyl 2012b: 37).

To gain insight into how ‘irregular’ migrants encounter, perceive, and experience EU border security practices while in spaces of detention it is instructive to turn to testimonial material, which offer a ‘counter-archive’ to official narratives of EU border security and migration management (Shapiro 2013; see also Walters 2011: 152). Recently, a number of academic commentators have sought to emphasise that detention centers in Europe are often sites of resistance against border security practices. From this perspective, protests and claim-making

among irregular migrants are important aspects of contemporary incarceration and one that is in danger of being overlooked when the focus is on victimisation rather than their political agency (Garelli and Tazzioli 2013; Johnson 2013; McNevin 2013; Puggioni 2013; Squire 2011). However, without denying the existence of practices of resistance in detention centres and their significance in challenging the notion that ‘irregular’ migrants are somehow always merely passive ‘victims’ of border security, the politics of contestation is difficult to discern from work undertaken by NGOs in the Evros region. Instead of depicting politically active subjects who are able to make their voices heard, testimonies from those incarcerated in this region are more commonly characterised by accounts of violent cultures of ‘brutality, despair, and dehumanization’ (Pro Asyl 2012b: 3; see also Amnesty 2013; Human Rights Watch 2011b; Pro Asyl 2012a). This may be because the ability to resist the violence of border security practices is particularly limited at certain sites in this specific region; or because moments of resistance are fleeting and perhaps difficult for researchers to observe or interviewees to testify to (Johnson 2013); or because NGOs choose not to highlight the issue in their reports for political strategic reasons (Fassin 2012); or some combination of these possible explanations.

Many current and former detainees do not speak of ‘protection’, ‘empowerment’, or other terms associated with the GAMM in their encounter with EU border security authorities, but of diverse practices that challenge their sense of belonging to humanity in various ways. For example, interviewees at Fylakio detention centre talked to researchers from Pro Asyl about the fundamentally depersonalising experience of incarceration. On arrival, individual belongings are not tagged with names but are simply thrown onto piles of anonymous possessions. Old trucks are used as makeshift storage units and upon their release ‘irregular’ migrants can no longer find their property: ‘One by one the ex-detainees entered the yard,

which was filled with bags. No names, no numbers, no registration. They searched the piled [sic] of personal belongings: “F” could not find her Asthma medicaments; “H” desperately searched for his documents without a reasonable chance to find even his bag; “A” lost the contact phone numbers of all his relatives’ (Pro Asyl 2012b: 37).

What is particularly striking about a number of these narratives is that they draw directly on a range of animalised language, imagery, and metaphors in order to describe their embodied experiences of detention:

They are aggressive in Fylakio... The police don’t look at us as humans but as animals. They don’t care. They just throw the food inside the cell and they don’t care if people kill one another over the food. Those who are stronger eat. The others don’t (unnamed adult from Georgia described conditions inside Fylakio detention centre, quoted in Human Rights Watch, 2011b).

In four months, I had been given soap twice, and never shampoo nor toothpaste. I didn’t cut my nails in all the time. When I asked the police for scissors, they replied ‘Eat them!’. We had not enough food and we had to eat on the floor like animals. We were always sitting in the dark. We couldn’t go out. [...] The situation was devastating (‘A.T.M.’ from Afghanistan, 11 October 2011, quoted in Pro Asyl 2012b: 43).

They brought us to the place with the big tree. It’s where they bring everyone they push back to Turkey. It is a place for animals, not humans. A stable. There is a wooden hut of maybe 12 x 3 meters. It might be used for keeping the police

dogs ('R' from Afghanistan, with his elderly mother, pushed back from Evros in September 2012, interviewed in Athens, January 6, 2013, quoted in Pro Asyl 2013: 33).

Beyond the immediate context of formal detention spaces in the Greece-Turkey borderlands, testimonies gathered from a range of NGOs working across Europe – especially in southern Mediterranean and North African states – demonstrate that the narrative of animalisation is a potent and recurring theme in 'irregular' migrants' encounters with the many faces of European border security: 'M' from Morocco, interviewed by Pro Asyl in Patras on 3 April 2012, refers to being chased around by security officials at the port 'as if I were a cat' (Pro Asyl 2012a: 21); Marie, 30 years old and interviewed by Médecin Sans Frontières in Morocco in March 2013, testifies that militias providing outsourced border security for the EU 'have sex with you like a dog, morning, noon and night' (Médecin Sans Frontières 2013: 20); 'Mr A', detained in Otopeni in Romania and interviewed by Migeurop on 13 and 14 June 2012, describes being forced to eat 'food dropped on the floor' as if he was an animal (Migeurop 2012); and an unnamed interviewee in Rome, who agreed to speak to Borderline Europe as part of their field research in 2013, said of conditions there: 'We are in a zoo. Every cage has two rooms. The cages have barriers almost 5-6 meters high. We are left there like savage beasts' (Borderline Europe 2013: 24).

The reading advanced here is that the discourse of animalisation is not simply a metaphor used by 'irregular' migrants as a linguistic device, but rather an onto-political account of the material conditions in which their struggles with European border security authorities take place. Indeed, the manner in which testimonies highlight what it means to be 'kept' in zoos and zoo-like spaces that are not befitting of contemporary understandings of what it means to

be ‘human’ points to the way in which some forms of detention rely on animalisation as a specific spatial technology of power. In turn this raises a number of hitherto unaddressed questions: Why might the animalisation of ‘irregular’ migrants assist in the task of policing and (re)producing the borders of Europe as a sovereign political community? How are we to understand the nature of the relationship between the human/animal distinction, sovereign power, and bordering practices?

Animalisation as a spatial technology of power

Among advocates of migrants’ rights a prominent method of framing the apparent disparity between the humanitarianism of the GAMM and the animalisation of some ‘irregular’ migrants is to draw on the language of ‘rhetoric’ versus ‘reality’. For example, in a high-profile UN Report on the Human Rights of Migrants in the EU, François Crepeau draws on evidence from NGOs and his own field research in order to argue that there is a significant ‘gap’ between the two: ‘The EU has certainly progressively developed a more rights-friendly approach with regard to migration policy [but] the Special Rapporteur did not necessarily see this reflected in measures adopted on the ground’ (UN 2013: 9). This line of critique can also be found in Mezzadra and Neilson’s (2013: 171) argument that the EU’s ‘program of humanitarian and rational migration governance could only ever be a dream, leaving the violent face of sovereign power to intervene whenever this frame was broken or fractured in the gap that separates policy from practice’. A major limitation of the ‘rhetoric/reality’ framing as the basis for mounting a critique of violent practices carried out in the name of European humanitarian border security, however, is that ultimately it makes an appeal to rather than challenges the terms on which those practices continue to be justified. An understandable response to the animalisation of ‘irregular’ migrants would be to argue for their ‘rehumanisation’ – as many ‘irregular’ migrants and their advocates across

various sectors do with reference to human rights and international law. Yet, as we have already explored, these grounds for critique are already occupied by the GAMM and so arguing for ‘better’ adherence to policy – as Crepeau and, separately, Mezzadra and Neilson do above – merely serves to further entrench ‘humanitarian border security’ and its attendant ambiguities. This raises a significant problem for the possibility of critique and necessitates alternative critical resources in order to understand what is at stake in the attempt to produce some ‘irregular’ migrants as animalised subjects in dehumanised spaces.

As well as problematising the neoliberal humanitarian rhetoric of ‘migrant-centredness’, testimonies of animalisation also challenge the salience of a more vitalist – or ‘positive’ – reading of biopolitical forms of governance focused on the health, well-being, and optimisation of populations. A greater emphasis on the ‘negative’ dimension of biopolitics and the abandonment of certain subjects from human rights can be found in the work of Giorgio Agamben (1994, 1998, 2013). Seeking to ‘correct’ the Foucaultian account of biopolitics, Agamben has (in)famously sought to reintroduce, chiefly via an engagement with Carl Schmitt, the question of sovereign power into the analysis of biopolitics. On Agamben’s view, as is by now well-known, the activity of sovereign power is originally ‘biopolitical’ in the sense that it relies upon the inclusive exclusion of bare life: a form of life that is neither *zoē* nor *bios*, but a ‘threshold of articulation’ between the two (Agamben 2013: 66). The *dispositif* of the exception produces bare life in zones of juridical and political indistinction where the subject is de-subjectified – as paradigmatically represented by the ancient figure of *homo sacer* in Roman law (Agamben 1998).⁶ Agamben’s diagnoses of sovereign power, bare life, and the camp have been controversially applied to the study of ‘irregular’ migrants – by Agamben (1994) in his short essay ‘We Refugees’ and by other scholars in the context of Europe and beyond (Diken, 2004; De Genova and Peutz, 2010;

Khosravi, 2010; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2004). This application has proved controversial because of what a number of critics consider to be several fatal shortcomings: empirical inaccuracies in the portrayal of migrants as ‘bare life’ (McNevin 2013); an emphasis on control over movement (Squire 2011; Papadopoulos et al 2008); and a seeming inability to conceptualise protest, political claim-making, and resistance (Garelli and Tazzioli 2013; Johnson 2013; McNevin 2013; Puggioni 2013).

A comprehensive evaluation of Agamben’s thesis and these counter-arguments is beyond the more limited scope of the present discussion,⁷ but testimonies of animalisation present a distinctive challenge to both advocates and critics of Agambenian approaches alike: they do not reveal an unconditional exposure to death that Agamben (1998) argues is central to the sovereign ban and yet neither do they readily portray contestation against EU border security authorities. While it is important not to overlook spaces in which the possibilities for resistance are violently curtailed, critics of Agamben’s *homo sacer* thesis are correct to insist on the inadequacies and dangers of drawing parallels between the subject positions of detainees in processing centres across Europe today and those of *Muselmanner* in the Nazi *lager* (Puggioni 2013; Johnson 2013). This common criticism somewhat misses its ultimate target, however, as the latter is more characteristic of some secondary (mis)applications of Agamben’s argument than its original formulation. In *Homo Sacer* Agamben explicitly warns against mistakenly reading the operation of the sovereign ban into mere situations of confinement (Agamben 1998: 28). To some extent the figure of *homo sacer* gestures towards the political salience of the becoming animal of the human: Agamben argues that the figure of the bandit – the subject of the medieval ban in Germanic and Anglo-Saxon sources – was not straightforwardly man nor animal, but a ‘wolf-man’ (Agamben 1998: 105). But while these obscure passages discuss the hybrid subject position of the bandit in

medieval law, Agamben's overall focus in *Homo Sacer* nevertheless remains centered on the border between life and death rather than that between the human and animal (or how the two thresholds interrelate in the context of contemporary biopolitics and thanatopolitical drift).⁸ A more promising point of departure for investigating the mediation of the human/animal distinction can be found in Agamben's lesser-engaged text *The Open* [2004].

Agamben offers an extended discussion of the concept of 'man' not as an essentialised form of life, but rather as the product of a series of 'ceaseless divisions and caesurae' (Agamben 2004: 16). The condition of possibility for the notion of man is a prior separation between human and animal that 'passes first of all as a mobile border within living man' (Agamben 2004:15-16). That is to say, the foundation of man is predicated upon an anterior separation between human and animal: 'It is possible to oppose man to other living things [...] only because something like animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place' (Agamben 2004: 16). With this decentred approach to 'man', Agamben rereads the allied concept of 'humanity' as an 'anthropological machine' that produces the 'divisions and caesurae' necessary for 'man's' self-reproduction: '[humanity] is not a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human' (Agamben 2004: 26). He identifies two historically contingent logics of the anthropological machine: the early modern humanisation of the animal as reflected in 'the man-ape, the enfant sauvage or *Homo ferus*, but also and above all the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form' (Agamben 2004: 37); and the late modern animalisation of the human as in the case of the figure of the 'neomort' or vegetative life maintained only by medical technologies. Nevertheless, at the heart

of both machines is ‘neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself – only a *bare life*’ (Agamben 2004: 38).

In today’s context Agamben argues that what is most urgent for political analysis is not the issue of the practical application of human rights, but rather the prior question of which forms of life are produced by the anthropological machine as being worthy of counting as ‘human’ in the first place: ‘In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics’ (Agamben 2004: 80). Furthermore, it is precisely in order to jam the anthropological machine that Agamben seeks to understand the way in which it works: ‘To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean no longer to seek new—more effective or more authentic—articulations, but rather to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness’ (Agamben 2004: 92). In this commentary, Agamben pushes the anthropocentric limits of the Foucaultian account of biopolitics in order to consider the prior work that the human/animal distinction does in conditioning the possibility of drawing further distinctions within the category of the human – in other words what Foucault referred to as ‘state racism’ (see also Shukin 2009). For this reason, Agamben’s account is potentially helpful for understanding what R.B.J. Walker (2010) has outlined as the need for political analysts to better understand not only the politics of bordering practices, but also the ways in which certain borders enable other borders to be (re)drawn and (re)produced. Agamben’s discussion of the human/animal distinction and the anthropological machine begins to address the issue of what is at stake in the contemporary animalisation of ‘irregular’ migrants in the context of contemporary spaces of detention across Europe. However, Agamben’s move to reconnect this operation back to his *homo sacer* thesis is a reductive one, which ultimately

limits the scope of his investigations into the relationship between animalisation, sovereignty, and biopolitics.⁹ By contrast, I want to argue that a more sustained and open-ended engagement with that relationship – and the basis for a fuller understanding of animalisation as a specific spatial technology of power – can be found in the more recent work of Jacques Derrida and his zoopolitical critique of biopolitics.

Zoopolitical critique

In his series of lectures published posthumously as *The Beast and the Sovereign: Volume 1* [2009] Derrida connects his earlier treatments of terrorism, autoimmunity, and rogue states with the question of the animal (Derrida 2008; see also Calarco 2008; Rasmussen 2013; and Wolfe 2012). He shows how the negotiation of the human/animal distinction is – and always has been – central to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of sovereign power. Before considering this argument and its potential implications for understanding the animalisation of ‘irregular’ migrants in greater depth, it is first necessary to note Derrida’s general approach to the question of the animal.

Like Agamben (2004), Derrida (2008) argues that the human/animal distinction is not a stable trans-historical given, but rather a binary opposition that is often used in a simplistic and reductive way in order to performatively categorise different forms of life. The distinction is not a ‘given’ because, against the Heideggarian view, there is nothing that is essentially ‘proper’ to either ‘human’ or ‘animal’. Instead, the term ‘animal’ is one that the ‘human’ has invented in order not only to define itself against, but also to inscribe a hierarchy such that the human is a form of life whose priority is perpetually reassured. Derrida thus coins the term ‘animot’ to emphasise that the animal is nothing other than ‘an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and authority to give to the

living other' (Derrida 2008: 23). That 'animot' sounds like the plural 'animaux' in French serves to underline the violence that is done to the multiple forms of non-human life that the singular concept of 'animal' necessarily produces (Derrida 2008: 31). Crucially, for Derrida it is impossible to understand what is at stake in the activity of sovereign power – the decision over life and death – without a prior appreciation of its fundamental relationship with the human/animal distinction and the onto-political work that this distinction performs and it is in this context that his lecture series moves beyond the insights established by Agamben in *The Open*.

Developing his earlier theory of sovereignty in *Rogues* [2005] as the reason of the strongest, Derrida argues that the first move of sovereign power is to posit animality as the Other against which reason is defined. This move to identify and exclude the animal in its various forms as the non-human Other reveals the violent foundations on which notions of 'human' sovereign political community are founded: 'the worst, the cruelest, the most inhuman violence has been unleashed against living beings, beasts or humans, and humans in particular who precisely were not accorded the dignity of being fellows' (Derrida 2009: 108). For this reason, as Cary Wolfe has pointed out, while 'thou shalt not kill' purports to be a universal maxim it applies only to forms of life that fall within the 'proper' frame of human protection however that is defined historically and culturally (Wolfe 2012: 9). In keeping with the logic of deconstruction, however, Derrida also seeks to demonstrate how animality is not *external* but rather *intrinsic* to the activity of sovereign power: this operation fundamentally relies upon that which it attempts to exclude. This is because according to Derrida in seeking to perpetually identify and exclude animality sovereign power necessarily acquires the very bestial characteristics it purports to be different and separate from. The animal, the 'improper being', is excluded from the political and this gives the human its

‘proper’ identity in the polis. Yet the practices through which sovereignty mediates the line between the proper/improper, political/apolitical, human/animal are often inhuman: the sovereign is ‘the most brutal beast who respects nothing’ (Derrida, 2009: 19). In this context the line between man and animal, the zoological threshold that sovereignty polices and depends upon, auto-deconstructs. It is precisely this move to exclude the animal and yet its perpetual haunting and reappearance in the figure and activity of sovereign power that Derrida draws upon in order to mount a critique of biopolitics as found in both Foucault and Agamben.

According to Derrida, both Greek words for life – *zoē* and *bios* – are fundamentally related to the zoological and biological question of the nature and location of the limit between animal and man (Derrida, 2009: 309). However, as we have already seen, this limit is in not naturally given, but constitutes a threshold that is intrinsically political because it is bound up with questions of belonging, exclusion, and therefore sovereignty. As with all thresholds, furthermore, it is not secure, but open to the Other and therefore fundamentally deconstructible. On this basis, Derrida challenges the notion – originally taken from Aristotle – that a rigorous separation can be made between *zoē* and *bios* in the first place. Rather, *zoē* the simple act of living associated with ‘animal’ life is always already contaminated by *bios* because, as shown above, sovereign power is not free from the inhumanity it purports to be distinct from. For this reason, Derrida argues that we cannot speak straightforwardly of a modern ‘entry’ of *zoē* into *bios* as per the Foucaultian frame: if these terms fundamental for life have always coexisted then it does not make any sense to think of one as historically being absorbed by the other. Moreover, the same line of critique applies to the Agambenian formulation because if – as Derrida (2009: 316) puts it – the ‘differentiation [between the two

terms] has never been secure' then it makes little sense to refer to a zone of indistinction between them: such a zone would only make sense on the basis of a prior distinction.

On the Derridean reading, the search for a point when biopolitics came into existence is a futile search for an origin: such a move glosses over a host of unexamined and unanswerable questions about who has founded modern politics and on the basis of what founding event (Derrida 2009: 326). Derrida does not deny that there are no novel or historically contingent aspects of political life and neither does he dismiss the salience of the concept of biopower *tout court*. Rather, he argues that biopower 'is an arch-ancient thing and bound up with the very idea of sovereignty', which in turn means that it cannot be analysed outside of the series of bestial moves that seek to identify and exclude animality (Derrida 2009: 330). These are a potentially significant set of reflections because in effect Derrida argues that the question of the animal is central to and yet remains obscured from the biopolitical frame as paradigmatically set out by Foucault and developed by Agamben: he suggests that ultimately both remain trapped within an anthropocentric starting point for understanding life and its attempted capture. For this reason, the term that Derrida prefers to use in place of biopolitics in order to grasp the mediation of the threshold between human and animal that is central to sovereignty is 'zoo-power'. On this view, the 'human' is always already a product of the zoopower that separates him/her from the animal that she/he is supposed not to be. This formulation is most clearly expressed in Derrida's reading of Aristotle for whom 'man is that living being who is taken by politics: he is a political living being, and essentially so. In other words, he is zoo-political, that's his essential definition, that's what is proper to him' (Derrida 2009: 349).

Derrida's 'zoopolitical critique' speaks to several existing research agendas in critical geography – and the interdisciplinary fields of posthuman and postbiopolitical studies more generally – that seek to decentre the human subject as a stable ontological given. In one direction the move to interrogate the prior zoopolitical borders that condition the possibility of what Foucault referred to as 'state racism' among humans paves the way for an understanding of biopolitics in the context of a 'newly expanded community of the living' (Wolfe 2012: 105). The insight that 'the power to animalise humans first lies in the power to animalise the animal as non-human', as Nicole Shukin (2009) puts it, chimes with efforts to recover 'the animal' and animal-human relations in political geographical studies. In this context, Philo and Wilbert (2000), inspired partly by Latour's Actor-Network-Theory approach, have sought to move away from older zoogeographies designed to 'map the distributions of animals' towards an exploration of the ways in which 'humans are always, and have always been, enmeshed in social relations with animals' (2000: 4) such that it is 'impossible to recognise a pure "human" society' (2000: 15). Brown and Rasmussen (2010) illustrate what this might entail more concretely in their study of rural bestiality, specifically the case of Kenneth Pinyan who in 2005 died from a perforated colon following intercourse with a male horse, and ways in which challenging 'human exceptionalism' queers our understanding of the sexual politics of spatiality. Similarly, Collard's (2012: 32) exploration of the encounters and spatial entanglements in cougar-human relations in the context of Vancouver Island reveals 'the struggles over power and life between [...] residents, their pets, livestock, and cougars'. Yet, importantly, Derrida's zoopolitical critique is not simply about bringing non-human animals back into political geography. The analytical and ethical-political risk is that this move on its own merely works to reinscribe the human/animal distinction such that the latter is re-privileged over the former. This ultimately works within rather than deconstructs the human/animal binary and thereby maintains the very zoopolitical logic that Derrida is so

critical of. Such a problem is evident, for example, when Brown and Rasmussen argue: ‘Bestiality requires a consideration of sexual activity along a continuum of activities involving bodies and pleasures, including the range of bodies and pleasures *we* encounter in *our* relationships with animals’ (2010: 159, emphasis added). Emphasising human-animal relations, while potentially significant as an initial step, does not necessarily challenge the prior zoopolitical threshold that gives rise to this assumed separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the first place.

In a different direction for political geography, I want to suggest that Derrida’s zoopolitical critique helps to better understand what is at stake in animalisation as a specific spatial technology of power that attempts to produce and secure spaces of sovereign political community in the name of humanity. Derrida’s insight that the border between the human and the animal is the site at which sovereign power operates offers an alternative conceptual ground for reading the animalised imagery in ‘irregular’ migrants’ testimonies as indicative of something more than merely figurative or metaphoric word-play. Instead, the material conditions of certain detention spaces and their animalising effects can be read as a symptom of the zoopower that seeks to (re)produce sovereign lines of distinction between the ‘proper’ life of the ‘regular’ citizen-subject whose humanity is assured and the ‘improper’ life of the ‘irregular’ migrant whose belonging to humanity is habitually called into question: the former is made possible by and given meaning in contradistinction to the latter. Indeed, reflecting the fundamentally ambiguous nature of the EU’s humanitarian GAMM more generally, the freedom of movement and the protection of the lives of trusted ‘regular’ travellers is logically and substantively dependent upon the production and containment of untrusted ‘irregular’ migrants across European space (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Beyond simply a difference between the ‘rhetoric’ of the EU’s neoliberal humanitarianism on the one hand and the violent

‘realities’ of detention on the other, however, Derrida offers critical resources for diagnosing how the animalisation of ‘irregular’ migrants reveals the bestial potential of contemporary EU border security practices under the rubric of humanitarianism and in turn how these depend upon and reproduce prior zoopolitical distinctions and spaces.

Moreover, it is arguably the zoo – perhaps more so than the camp – that acts as the paradigmatic figure for understanding the specific spatial technology of the animalisation of ‘irregular’ migrants in Europe today. While the camp and the zoo share certain common characteristics – particularly when Agamben’s treatment of the former is read topologically rather than topographically – the latter is in effect the condition of possibility for the former. That is to say, the camp as an exceptional space always already presupposes the prior zoopolitical border drawn between humans and animals. While Derrida observes that, like the camp, ‘zoos are about restricting the movements of living beings’ (Derrida 2009: 298), this is not the only historical and political function of the latter (see also Philo and Wilbert 2000: 13). Importantly, Derrida charts how the zoo in Europe transformed in the nineteenth century from a menagerie solely for the amusement of the sovereign to a space designed for the production of knowledge about the characteristics of different species (Derrida 2009: 283). This reading of the zoo as a paradigmatic space for the purpose of acquiring knowledge of the otherwise unknown Other helps to explain the way in which – far from the thanatopolitical designs of the Nazi *lager* – contemporary spaces of detention are geared towards producing as much information about ‘irregular’ populations as possible. Indeed, one of the distinctive characteristics of contemporary detention centers is precisely that they are spaces that enable the production of knowledge about ‘irregular’ migrants in order that they might be transformed from ‘unknowable’ populations into ‘knowable’ and therefore governable subjects (Gereilli and Tazziloli 2013; see also Ticktin 2011). Thus, for example,

while migrant healthcare programmes have been rolled out across the Evros region in Greece, NGO Euro Surveillance found that medical examinations were designed for the short-term purposes of ‘disease surveillance’ rather than longer-term healthcare as follow-up treatment for chronic illnesses is not offered (Euro Surveillance 2011: 4): a practice mirrored in the testing for hepatitis C and HIV in the opening case of Tripoli zoo.

Finally, the insights of Derrida’s zoopolitical critique demand a keener awareness and interrogation of the operation of the human/animal threshold not only in contemporary border security policies and practices, but also in the context of critical responses to them. This is particularly significant when considering difficult questions about the possibility for resistance, contestation, and other modes of critique of the animalisation of ‘irregular’ migrants. While it may be too hasty to dismiss human rights as a weapon at the disposal of what Foucault (2000) famously referred to as ‘all members of the community of the governed’, any response reliant upon ‘re-humanisation’ runs a risk of inhabiting and thereby reproducing the very zoopolitical logic upon which the violence of contemporary European border politics rests: abstract notions of ‘the human’ always already rely on those excluded from that frame (Wolfe 2012). This is why, on the Derridean view, the neoliberal humanitarian discourse of ‘migrant-centeredness’ is not only insufficient to the task of mounting an effective critique, but is in part constitutive of the very problem that it purports to address and overcome. For this reason, the humanitarianism of the EU’s GAMM is not strictly at odds with the dehumanising practices that it claims to restrain because it also works within rather than deconstructs the human/animal distinction that Derrida has shown sovereign power to rely upon. Ultimately, the Derridean position offers no easy way out of this conundrum and characteristically of deconstruction it certainly does not lend itself towards a clear political programme (Fagan 2013).¹⁰ The zoopolitical threshold cannot be

redrawn more inclusively or democratically and yet it is never stable and always haunted by its constitutive outsides.¹¹ What we are left with, therefore, is a legacy of thought that urges perpetual identification and deconstruction of the zoopolitical categories and spaces through which sovereign power attempts to reproduce itself: an endless work. At the very least this diagnosis provides an alternative basis for the critique not only of the bestial potential of contemporary EU border security policies and practices that render many ‘irregular’ migrants animalised in zoos, but also to the specific spatial technologies of animalisation in detention spaces and the possible limitations of humanitarian discourses purporting to curb the violent excesses of dehumanisation.

CONCLUSION

By now the changing nature and location of Europe’s borders and their violent effects on ‘irregular’ migrant populations are of long-standing concern in academic and non-academic literatures. However, there are two less well-examined elements of the contemporary field of policy and practice that this article has sought to juxtapose and problematize: the explicitly *humanitarian* discourse of ‘migrant-centeredness’ accompanying the neoliberalisation of EU border control; and yet the persistence not only of general human rights abuses, but also a more specific discourse of *animalisation* that structures many ‘irregular’ migrants’ embodied experiences of detention throughout the European borderlands. Beyond merely a mismatch between what the EU says it aims to achieve and what actually happens on the ground, I have argued that the animalised imagery and metaphors found in ‘irregular’ migrants’ testimonies – and also, though to a lesser extent, in official discourses via the use of phrases such as ‘barn doors’ and ‘RABITS’ – is not coincidental and reflects a particular spatial technology of power. Drawing on the recent interventions of Derrida, I have suggested that the animalisation of some ‘irregular’ migrants in detention centres should be understood as a

symptom of the zoopolitical operations of sovereign power and its attempt to immobilise and render otherwise ‘unknowable’ populations ‘knowable’. Such a diagnosis not only opens up an alternative line of critique of the inhuman characteristics of contemporary forms of border security under the banner of humanitarianism, but also complicates and repoliticises the grounds on which a critical response might be made.

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² The article adopts the term ‘EUrope’ to acknowledge that the spatial and legal limits of the ‘EU’ are related to but not coterminous with that of ‘Europe’ (see Bialasiewicz 2011).

³ ‘Irregularity’ is used in inverted commas throughout to denaturalise the category (see Squire 2011).

⁴ For a lengthier discussion of the Foucaultian approach to ‘discourse’ used in this paper see Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams (2014).

⁵ Under the terms of the 2008 EU Directive on Minimum Standards for the Reception of Asylum Seekers detention should only be used as an ‘exceptional measure’ (EU 2008). However, according to UN Special Rapporteur François Crepeau it has become the norm (UN 2013: 12).

⁶ As a number of political geographers have analysed, Agamben uses the concept of the ‘camp’ as a spatial-ontological device beyond the literal sense to refer to the suspension of the law (see for example Debrix and Barder 2012; Minca 2005, 2007).

⁷ For a commentary on Agamben and bordering see Vaughan-Williams (2009). See also Minca (2007) and De Genova and Peutz (2010).

⁸ For more on the anthropocentrism of biopolitical theory see Shukin (2009).

⁹ For extended critiques of Agamben in this regard see Calarco (2008) and Wolfe (2012).

¹⁰ While the Agamben’s position is no clearer some interlocutors have associated it – in contrast to the Derridean stance – with a refusal of the law and human rights (see Calarco 2008).

¹¹ I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out with such clarity.

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