

Dog walking: Doing class and undoing anthropocentrism

Abstract

Beginning with anecdotal accounts about the aspirations of black middle-class people, with dog walking as the point of entry, this study sought to understand the meanings attached to dog walking from the perspectives of ten middle-class black people who walk their dogs. Applying discourse analysis to interview data we found that dog walking is a habituated class performance. While some disavowed the idea of dog walking as a performance of middle classness, we suggest that performativity is always at play in the social practice of dog walking. Secondly, the study found that we should nuance our understandings of black middle-class people in order to recognize the continuities and discontinuities with the black working class. Finally, the study found that black people relate to their dogs in ways that disturb the colonial artifact of the human–animal binary. We observe that dog walking and orders of care exceed utilitarian needs and suggest cosmological and psychological relatedness that undo deeply rooted anthropocentrism in the social sciences. Ultimately, through the lens of class, the study suggests that the human is less distinct from the animal than the Chain of Being would have us believe.

Introduction

In December 2012, while still state president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma ‘let the dogs out’ when he said that black people that spend money buying and taking care of dogs should instead care for people. In his view, pets were not for blacks. Reporting on the event held in rural KwaZulu-Natal, Bongani Hans and Yusuf Moolla observed that Zuma stated that “spending money on buying a dog, taking it to the vet and for walks belonged to white culture and was not the African way, which was to focus on the

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family. There was a new generation of young Africans who were trying to adopt other lifestyles and even trying to look like others” (2012: np). In the social media contestation that followed this address, Khaya Xaba, a spokesperson for the Young Communist League tweeted that “rich man’s dog gets more in the way of vaccination, medicine and medical care than do the workers upon whom the rich man’s wealth was built” (IOL, 2012: np). In this rhetorical gesture about dogs, the former president and those who defended him were making several suggestions – that black middle-class people that walk dogs are performing white behaviour, that this performance reflected lack of care for fellow human beings, the family excluded nonhumans, and that black people did not walk dogs until they began to mimic white people because they desired whiteness. A number of scholars have pointed to the ambiguities of black people’s class transition towards the middle class (for example, Canham and Williams, 2017; Khunou, 2015; and Modisha, 2008). However, class mobility is entangled with negative associations from working class black people and political elites such as Zuma (Iqani, 2017). Sell outs, imitators of Western culture, traitors, hypocrites, and coconuts, are some of the accusations levelled at the black middle class for occupying this class position.

In South African popular culture, the ensuing controversy brought the practice of dog walking into sharp relief. While Zuma had spoken about medical care for dogs, as the most visible representation of the black person-dog nexus, dog walking in particular received attention. There are two registers on the practice of dog walking by black people that are worth remarking on. The first is the entrenched practice of uniformed domestic workers and gardeners walking the pedigreed dogs of their employers. In 2014, Marc Shoul held a photographic exhibition of domestic workers and gardener’s walking dogs in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg (Shoul, 2014). This practice is not the focus of this paper. Instead, what is of interest is the more recent phenomenon of black middle-class people walking their own dogs, that Zuma characterised as a “new generation of young Africans who were trying to adopt other lifestyles”. Against this scrutiny of black middle-class people’s animal habits, the paper explores how black middle-class people living in Johannesburg suburbs understand the practice of dog walking. The driving concern of this paper is a curiosity as to how dogs have come to stand in as signifiers of class and race, how these identities are inflected through historical and ongoing realities and meanings, and how the pet dog has come to disturb human-animal hierarchies. We begin by situating dog walking in the literature and outlining our theoretical position. We next outline the methodological choices made based on interviews conducted with ten black dog owners who walk their dogs and live in middle-class suburbs of Johannesburg. This is followed by a discussion of the findings to this study.

The layered meanings of dogs

Dogs were racialised as guard dogs meant to keep the black other off the property of colonial and apartheid farmers and homeowners. Everyday racism often meant that dogs were treated better than black people. For instance, white farmers were known to sit with their dogs in the front of the truck while employees rode at the back. In addition, dogs were generally well fed, and their health was seen as a priority when compared to the pervasive mistreatment of black people. Warnings such as “Basoba Inja”, “Passop vir die hond”, or “Beware of the dog” on driveways and gates of homesteads were often targeted at the imagined black intruder. The use of African languages on these warning signs is an indication of the target audience or perceived threat. On beaches dogs and black people often occupied the same register of undesirables – “no natives and dogs”. Dogs fell into the yawning fissure of black-white relations and drew attention to a contested hierarchy of value between the black human and the animal. The animalisation of black people within the same plane of undesired dogs has led to a wariness of being rendered doglike. Baderoon (2016: 345) however cautions that “to focus exclusively on invective obscures the complex range of associations about human relations with dogs in South Africa”. We follow this pathway towards unveiling the complexity of human-dog relations historically and in the present.

As a feature of colonial power and oppression, McKenzie (2009) notes that for most white families in Melbourne, dogs were reared to warn off Aborigines in the 1840s. Dogs were weaponised to stand guard between indigenous people and colonial settlers. In almost all colonial settler communities, white settlers intervened in the relationship between dogs and local subjugated populations. For McKenzie (2009: 238), “dogs and their control thus had the potential to intersect profoundly in the battles of race and class enacted through a variety of nineteenth-century societies”. The presence of dogs in literature (e.g. King, 1853; Jabavu, 1960) suggests that they have been a part of black lives for centuries. Dande’s (2020) archival work points to the presence of dogs in precolonial Africa. Colonial settlers and apartheid officials, however, often intervened in the relationship between black people and black people’s dogs. This was largely done by killing these dogs in large numbers as a means of imposing control over oppressed populations. In Cape Town, the dogs belonging to black people were often destroyed ostensibly because they roamed the streets unlike the more domesticated pedigreed dogs of middle-class white people that remained closer to the home. Van Sittert and Swart (2003) however observe that black residential areas were often targeted for dog culling while white people’s dogs that roamed the streets were not killed. Police were often involved in clearing the streets of stray and dangerous dogs (Ogbom, 1993). According to Van Sittert and Swart (2003) black dog owners in Port Elizabeth complained that the enemy of the state was the underclass dog, while ‘prized

animals' were not targeted for culling. Culling was tied to the interrelated relationship between breed, race, and class – the underclass mongrel (Baderoon, 2016). Diseases such as rabies were often used as the premise to control dog populations through mass culling and enacting bylaws for their control. Public safety was thus regularly used as an excuse to bypass the law and enact discriminatory practices. In addition to public safety and control of 'roaming' dogs, Van Sittert and Swart (2003) suggest that in the nineteenth century, 'wild' dogs were cleared off the streets in order to make way for bourgeoisie pedestrians and their pedigree dogs. As a means of introducing more 'humane' forms of dog control, on dog tax that was imposed on people (Dande, 2020). However, this was primarily targeted at the black underclasses and the tax required all dog owners to pay a levy for each dog in the homestead (Mbeki, 1964; Van Sittert and Swart, 2003).

While other animals fared much worse than dogs, these rules had the effect of dog control in the cities and regulated the conditions under which black people could own dogs in urban areas. Philol (1995) shows how companion animals such as dogs and cats have become domesticated for city and urban spheres while sheep, pigs and other domesticated animals have not been able to make this transition and remain on the peripheries of cities and in rural areas. Therefore, while dogs were able to move from the wild and into the homes of the middle classes in urban spaces, other animals were excluded. Animals have a long-enmeshed history in complex power relations with humans (Philol, 1995). Geographies have been imposed on animals in ways that determine where they live, how they navigate space and who can own them under what conditions. Perhaps more than any other animal, dogs have been at the centre of this complex maze of power relations. Despite this literature on dogs, the intersection of dog walking, class, black people and anthropocentrism is generally absent. Dog walking has largely been the preserve of health psychology, geriatric studies and medical science. It has not been associated with class, gender or race and the psycho-social aspects have received scant attention.

Pedigree dog walking – a middle class gesture

According to Ritvo (1986) the English institutionalized their affection for their dogs in Victorian England. This affection manifested through the pride that they demonstrated for their pedigreed dogs. Pure breed dogs were particularly important markers of prestige for middle-class Britons who had begun to imitate the pastimes of the aristocracy. The pedigree of the dog and the forms of leisure that pure breeds enabled indexed the class position of dog owners (Ritvo, 1986). It is likely that British settlers in South Africa would have mimicked the fashions of their homeland. McKenzie (2009) supports the contention that South Africa's urban bourgeoisie took its cultural cues on taste and style from English society. This would have served as an indication of

their own sophistication. Indeed, Van Sittert and Swart (2007: 144) note that “a new sensibility towards animals emerged among the urban middle class modelled on Victorian Britain”. Similarly, Dande (2020: 175) suggests that through the pride that white Rhodesians showed for their dogs, they were indicating their Britishness and levels of civilization as “more English than the English themselves”. Dog pride was closely tied to the affections that owners expressed for their pet dogs. To be clear, domesticated dogs were not a European invention. As Van Sittert & Swart (2003: 139) remind us, “each epoch of human-canine interaction produced its own peculiar animal, literally a pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial dog, as well as its dark doppelgänger, the wild, ‘Kaffir’ or stray dog”. While dogs have long been domesticated in Africa (Egyptian paintings show different types of breeds), pedigree and class sensibilities attached to dogs was a British habit brought to South Africa by English settlers and adopted by blacks in their class transitions from working to middle class. Though North Africans and Romans had long demonstrated the link between dog breeds and class, British colonization imported and enforced these tastes in South Africa.

Studies on the relationship between humans and dogs in Southern Africa are generally lacking (Van Sittert & Swart, 2007). While Soga accounts for the types of dogs reared among the Xhosa of the Eastern Cape and Bryant describes the dogs that were domesticated in KwaZulu-Natal (Van Sittert & Swart, 2007), we know little about the human-dog relations. McKenzie (2009) and Van Sittert & Swart (2007) provide insight into how urban dog rearing became more controlled than in rural contexts. Much of these practices were solidified in the second half of the nineteenth century. Using the example of Cape Town, McKenzie (2009) illustrates that as the city self-consciously became aware of respectability politics, anxiety about the high prevalence of stray dogs increased. The conditions under which dogs would inhabit the city were crafted in relation to this politics of respectability. McKenzie (2009) and Philol (1995) observe that the physical landscape of the city is intimately interwoven with the moral landscape. Taming dogs and eradicating the city of excess wild dogs was a means for the bourgeois class to bring order to the city. For McKenzie (2009), stray dogs were associated with the disorderly underclass, she notes: “[a]t one and the same time, dogs in early nineteenth-century Cape Town were valued members of the respectable household and sources of dirt and disorder on the street” (2009: 236). However, given the underclass position of black South Africans and the states’ interest in relegating them to the peripheries of the cityscape and rural areas, they have been omitted from research on human-dog relations. Rather than utility value favoured by black South African (hunting, security, companionship), middle-class white dog owners are said to have bred dogs for their physical attributes and their dogs represented their purchasing power of pure breeds. They thus represented their class position through their pure-bred pedigree dogs.

Black people, dogs and disruptions of anthropocentrism

Here, we surface the other side of the controversy of the presumed lack of humanity among dog walkers by examining the relationship between Africans and animals. In this regard, enlightenment scholars pointed to Africans as unevolved and close to animals in the hierarchy of the Chain of Being (Wynter, 2003). After the initial animalisation of African people, modernity sought to create a fissure between animals and Africans. This cleft would enable African achievement of humanity and the success of religiously inflected modernism. Clothing, religion, and education were symbols that distinguished between the African human and the animal which occupies the lowest rung of the Chain of Being (Jackson, 2020; Coly, 2015; Maathai, 2006). For example, Tropp (2008) illustrates how the colonial annexation of the former Transkei involved the extermination of hunting dogs to enable colonial administrators to take over large tracts of indigenous forests where locals hunted. Colonialism enforced distinctions between the human and the animal while simultaneously exploiting colonial subjects. Seeking to undo the work of modernity, those within the broad category of animalism have pointed to seamless continuity between animals and humans to collapse the species distinction separating these life forms. Caring for dogs “as though they were human” would be an instantiation of an ethics of care that sees no significant boundaries between the animal and the human (Herrmann, Waxman, Medin, 2010). For instance, Dande’s (2020) social history of the relationship between Zimbabweans and dogs, disrupts human-centred or anthropocentric histories by pointing to complex precolonial dog-human relations. He contends that “African-owned dogs have strayed between nature and culture, between being work animals and being pets, and between human settlements and wild environments, between their physical bodies and being spiritually significant animals or political metaphors” (Dande, 2020: ii). Similarly, indigenous scholars from the Americas point to an expansive cosmology where animals, plants, people, water, and other natural elements possess a spirit and are co-constitutive (Marker, 2015; Simpson, 2017). While scholarship that critiques speciesism has gained ground over the past decade (see Jackson, 2020), it has remained largely peripheral. This avoidance of the natural world and biological science by the humanities and social sciences has largely been a means of avoiding the essentialising history of eugenics (Brown, 2015). Rossini (2006: n.p.) observes that “as a consequence of this disciplinary division of labour, scientific debates between and within different academic fields remain trapped in the dead-end street of the dualisms nature/culture, essentialism/constructivism, materiality/discourse and sex/gender”. In this paper, we traverse some of these divides. Therefore, in addition to dog walking as a performance of class, we attempt to understand what surfaces if we read it as a gesture of the collapse of speciesism. On the one hand, we have a discourse that reads dog walking as coloniality, on the other, we wonder if it could be a practice that works against the human-nature binary. Our findings suggest that both meanings may be true.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was used to conduct this study. For Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter (2006) this approach is ideal for engaging the experiences of human participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were useful for exploring experiences of participants and they enabled us to gain a better understanding of social phenomena (Babbie, 2016; Patton & Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling enabled us to look for people who fit the inclusion criteria of black-middle class people that owned and walked their dogs. The purposive sampling technique was supported by the snowballing method. In snowballing research participants are asked to suggest other likely participants that could be interviewed (Patton & Patton, 2012). The sample consisted of ten black middle-class inhabitants of Johannesburg's suburbs who own and walk dogs. Participants were all over the age of 18 and therefore within the age of consent. The group comprised of six men and four women with an average age of 36. The youngest was 30 and the oldest was 51. Many of the participants occupied senior positions within financial services industry and included a chief executive officer and others were in higher education institutions and in managerial positions. These participants were active dog walkers residing in Northcliff, Randburg, Parktown, Melville, Rosebank and Norwood. These are middle-class suburbs and were historically exclusively inhabited by white people. The majority of the participants shared a working-class upbringing and early exposure to dogs. Interviews were conducted over approximately 50 – 80 minutes. Interviews were conducted at participants homes or places of work. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviewer met many of the dogs in person or saw pictures of them.

The data were analysed using discourse analysis. This is a qualitative approach that reflects the turn to language within the broader milieu of postmodernism. This kind of research assumes a social constructionist view based on the view that discourse not only reflects the social world but actively creates it (Aguinaldo, 2012). Following Parker (1992), discourse analysis demonstrates how versions of the world, or social reality is constructed around culturally available scripts. A focus on discourse moves us from an emphasis on intrapsychic causation towards an engagement with the social world. To analyse the interviews, we followed Parker's (2013) guiding principles on doing discourse analysis: to study phenomena as historically constituted; to view the area of study and data through theoretical lenses; and lastly, for the research process to have an account of subjectivity. Since it is both a methodological and analytical concern, we briefly address the matter of subjectivity here. As black middle-class men, our subject positions as researchers are implicated in our interest in this work and in how we interpret the data of this study. Our racial, class and gender subjectivities are informed by the cultural scripts available to us. We are conscious of how this may both enable and constrain this study.

Findings and Discussion

Two broad themes emerged as preoccupations from the data obtained from the interviews. These are dog walking as a performance of class while simultaneously disavowing class position, and dog walking as a disruption of human-animal hierarchies. We discuss each of these in relation to theories of performativity, habitus, class, and anthropocentrism. To preserve the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms are used.

Dog walking as performative

In this section we interrogate the view that dog walking might be a performative gesture that signifies middle-class identity among black people. Lumby (2009) sees identity as being related to performativity, for it is through performance that identities solidify and evolve with time. Iedema and Caldas-Coulthard (2008) contend that identity is affected by how we consume products, participate socially, our lifestyle, social class and to some degree, levels of education. In South Africa, the act or performance of dog walking has long been associated with the middle class. When one is the owner of a pedigree dog, lives in a middle-class suburb and walks their dog(s), this might be seen as a performance of middle-class identity. According to Burke (2006), identity is not a fixed construct and can shift over time. Consequently, when one transitions from a working-class community to reside in a middle-class suburb, they begin to adapt their habits towards those that are more desirable in the new community of residence. They adopt the middle-class habitus of the community within which they reside. The act of walking one's dog may be interpreted as one of the requisite behaviours necessary to accomplish the new class status. This coheres with Butler's (1990) observations that identity is a performance of race, gender, class and social status. Black middle-class identities are embedded in their investments based on their representations of race and social status within their community in middle-class suburbs.

The following excerpts suggest that participants used pragmatic lenses to think about the practice of dog walking. They did not immediately associate dog walking with a class position but saw it as a necessity occasioned by the requirements of their place of residence. Thabo explained,

“No, no, no, no...we just living in constrained spaces, and we just...ja giving the dogs exercise and to be fit.”

Below, we see commentary from Mbali and David.

Mbali: *“It's more the accessibility to facilities and resources, it's the... like I say, a township dog can go for a walk and come back whenever it feels like, you know. I can't*

do that in the suburbs the bylaws are different. So, the nature of the environment dictates the lifestyle that one lives.”

David: *“No, no, no it’s that... we never used to do it [dog walking] because we had a plenty of space. But now after moving to a suburb where there isn’t that much space and there are bylaws that do not allow for dogs to be roaming the streets. Whereas, where I come from, if I don’t see my dog the whole day, that’s okay. It’s gone on a walkabout and I will see it at night. In a suburb they will call the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Animals) on me, ja. Nah...it has nothing to do with wanting to be anything. It’s the nature of the environment that we find ourselves in. You happen to be living in a suburban area with certain bylaws and abiding by those bylaws doesn’t make you white. You can abide all you want, but you can never be white. It doesn’t mean you are aspiring to be white or anything.”*

In the preceding excerpts, Mbali, Thabo and David explain dog walking in relation to pragmatic concerns such as space. In this regard, Thabo notes that because of constrained living spaces in suburbia, it is necessary to walk dogs as a form of exercise. David contends that this is unlike the space that is available in townships and rural areas where dogs have more space to freely roam around the yard or neighbourhood. Moreover, since suburban bylaws require dogs to be on a leash when in public spaces, dog walking is the only possibility for dog exercise. They suggest that suburban spaces and behaviours are under more surveillance and control to ensure practices that convey and portray middle-class etiquette. All three participants explain dog walking comparatively – the freedom of township and rural spaces where they previously lived is compared to the rule-bound and scripted suburbia. Democratisation and the class transition to middle-class lives has come with new rules of sociality (Modisha, 2007; Canham and Williams, 2017). Suburban life comes with new forms of surveillance that go beyond practical constraints to include scripted habits of middle-class life. Colonial bylaws that were created to enhance status and register social mobility are used to bolster social difference and police belonging and class parameters. We might also read the bylaws as forms of disciplining suburban middle-class subjectivities. The participants lean into the rules of middle classness to secure belonging in their new neighbourhoods.

David is adamant that operating within the limits of the law is not an indication of a desire for whiteness or the mimicking of white behaviour. This is a rebuttal of the former president’s assertion that the behaviours of black middle-class people are a performance of whiteness. However, the theories of habitus and performativity ask us to explore everyday behaviours that appear to be self-evident. As Butler (1988) notes, performativity indexes practices that are expressed through everyday socially

sanctioned acts that become normative. Repeated performances entrench the actions until they appear self-evident and objective realities. Through the example of gender, Butler (1990) illustrates how repeated performances of valued behaviours and sanction against non-conformity come to socially construct identity. Similarly, habitus points to dispositions and habits that come to represent a particular class location. These are socialised norms that become durable and reinforced in the confluence of individual agency and social structure (Bourdieu, 1990). We therefore become habituated to certain performances over time and we unconsciously internalise these habits as objective. Similarly, following the principles of discourse analysis, we infuse this social practice with theory and argue that the black middle classes become habituated to dog walking. It is therefore important to hold constant both explanatory frames – environmental constraints and environmental expectations – for thinking about dog walking among middle-class suburban dwellers.

We however observe that participants are also engaging in discursive strategies of positioning to disavow and distance themselves from discursive constructions of dog-walking that associate the practice with aspirations to class-status. Instead, they favour a construction of the practice as mere performance to fit into their immediate social environments. Such a reading potentially understates the emphasis that Butler (1990) places on the emergence of subjectivity *through* repetitive acts of doing that signal, reinforce and reproduce the sense of who we are. Therefore, while it is possible to engage in the performance of particular subjectivities while striking an ironic distance (that is, we walk our dogs in particular ways – on a leash, around the neighbourhood streets, as opposed to how we would walk with our dogs while hunting and herding – not because we want to be middle-class, but because we need to fit into the environment of the neighbourhood), even this ironic, deliberate, conscious performance by and large reinforces and reproduces the construction of the broader subjectivity of middle-classed South African (with its attendant historical, social and cultural baggage). The ultimate result leans into a performative gesture of middle classness.

Not all participants completely disavowed class performativity. Mlu highlights the physical benefits of dog walking. He sees it as an alternative to expensive gym membership.

Mlu: *“Yes, I have a German Shepard. His name is Nelson. He is a symbolic reminder of the oppression faced by my people and also a positive living representation of reconciliation of the struggles faced. I am a mature man, not old man, that does not have time to exercise at these foreign money-making schemes that are called gyms but dog walking is a great way to get out for me and exercise.”*

Mlu has named his dog after anti-apartheid leader, Nelson Mandela. While he highlights the political symbolism, he does not refer to the class symbolism of his dog Nelson. It is however discursively inferred through the pedigree of the German Shepherd dog. The dog is expensive to look after and it is clearly a middle-class pet. Purchasing purebred dogs is an old tradition that Dande (2020: 174) contends signifies “aspirational symbols of upward class mobility”. However, since Mlu is firmly located in the middle class, he is simultaneously performing and resisting middle-class habitus. He does the latter through invoking struggle against inequality in the naming of the dog. In this instance, he has an expensive critique of inequality. This points to the doubling that is evident in the lives of many contemporary middle-class black people (Khunou, 2015; Modisha, 2007). This duality allows claims to race solidarity and class comforts.

Unlike the double discursive register of other participants, Themba’s talk about his dogs suggests a clearer and less ambiguous performance of class. His dogs are high pedigree, and he spends a significant amount of money in ensuring that they are fed and healthy. The latter is supported by health insurance. He contrasts the habits and cost of dog ownership with those of working-class townships where dogs cost less to look after and require less attention.

Themba: *“My dogs are on medical aid and per month I would say, I roughly spend about R6000 on them. The big dog eats a lot and the other two small ones are quite picky when it comes to food, so I have to buy a variety and sometimes I have to buy again during the month. But this was not the case growing up in the township, the dog just existed and roamed around the kasi [township] unattended.”*

The cost of keeping his dogs falls foul of the Communist League spokesperson assertion from the introduction to this paper when he tweeted that “rich man’s dog gets more in the way of vaccination, medicine and medical care than do the workers upon whom the rich man’s wealth was built”. Performing class might be said to fall within the ethical breach of orders of care and the perpetuation of inequality. We however reread this interpretation in this next theme.

Through the accounts of a range of participants, we see that while many believe that dog walking is not a performance of a middle-class habitus, but a necessity based on suburban bylaws, the choices made by participants including the pedigree of dogs they own are informed by a middle-class habituation. Through this performance, they do a double take on identity in ways that signal racial solidarity while simultaneously enjoying the comforts of middle-class lives. Dog walking is a prism into these practices of identity making.

Reclaiming dogs in black culture – a challenge to anthropocentrism

Participants were unanimous in their disagreement with former president Zuma's assertion that loving animals was un-African. They claimed dogs as an important and well-established part of African culture. This coheres with indigenous scholarship, and in Southern Africa, with historians such as Dande (2020). While participants appeared to support the claim that animals should not be more important than people, their discourses suggested that in practice, they did not appear to subscribe to a hierarchy of care. Participant's everyday practices suggest that they do not subscribe to speciesism where "human beings have a moral status superior to that of non-human animals" (Singer, 2009: 567). In this respect, Thabo asserts: "*Dogs have always been part of the black history and this makes us very African*". He elaborates: "*I have always lived among such beautiful animals, my granny would always tell us that a household should have a cat, dog and chickens*".

Thabo observes that dogs were an important part of his rural childhood and that his family had between five and six dogs. The teachings by his grandmother indicate that animals were crucial for sociality in his family. Human sociality was insufficient on its own. This aligns with Dande's (2020) archival work on Zimbabwean human-dog relations. Gugu alludes to a similar socialisation around dogs:

"I grew up around dogs; I grew up with dogs everywhere"

Everyday activities such as hunting and herding animals always involved dogs as assistants and companions. There is a sense in which the dogs can be said to be peers and partners in these activities. Thabo's intervention assists us to historicise human-dog relations by extricating them from discourses of whiteness.

Thabo: "*I am a rural or village boy. I come from a small area in Ulundi. I was fortunate enough to participate in hunting, herding and doing all these rural duties a man in the area did. My father back then had 5 or 6 dogs that most community members feared because of how aggressive they were, so one could say, our house was well protected [laughs aloud]."*

In the excerpt below, Sbu is adamant that Africans love their dogs and that there is no contradiction between caring for animals and by implication, people. This statement unsettles anthropocentric conceptions and hierarchies of care.

Sbu: "*Look there's nothing African or un-African about it... you know being African does not necessarily equate to being cruel to animals or not taking care of animals*

umm... So the fact that it's not a pronounced practice in an African culture and by the way it's not that Africans do not love their dogs, they may just not have the time to walk them."

Sbu is not coy about expressing their love for their dog. He sees the dog as a member of the family.

"Just as a family and sibling because it was there before I had children"

He formed a bond with his "best friend" because he had it before he got married and had children. He notes,

"before I had children the dog was my best friend that's why I love my dog".

Elsewhere, he jokingly suggests that his wife is jealous of the relationship that he has with his dog.

Dogs were seen as important for familial sociality such as companionship, destressing, teaching children responsibility and offering security and protection. Mbali sees the role of suburban dogs as similar to those of rural areas. For her, dogs "protect the family and keep the kids company". Dogs occupy a central role in Thabo's life. He asserts that he loves his dogs more than some humans. This contention disturbs the human centric hierarchy of care. Importantly, Thabo is not claiming that his dogs are necessarily more important than people. Instead, he contends that his dogs and humans occupy the same zone of affection. The order of care is not hierarchical but horizontal. Dog walking has mutual benefits for him and his dogs.

Thabo: *"There has been a shift in emotional connectedness and investment. We now walk dogs, have them on medical aid and converse with them like humans [laughs]. I for one love my dogs more than other humans, they have been the greatest of company."*

Thabo: *"I normally walk my dogs after a long and exhausting day at the office, they help me distress and think clearly as I am walking through the park or streets. I mean, they also enjoy it, they wiggle their tails and actually smile, my dogs smile [laughs]. So yeah, dog walking for me is a futuristic form of exercise that stimulates the mind and muscles."*

Thabo has a knowing relationship with his dog. They read each other for enjoyment and following Watts (2013) can be said to have an inter-species agreement. In this

regard, she contends that “habitats and ecosystems are better understood as societies from an Indigenous point of view; meaning that they have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements, and further their ability to interpret, understand and implement. Non-human beings are active members of society” (Watts, 2013: 23). In this sense, suburbia’s regulated, and constrained spaces necessitate human-dog understandings of navigating the space.

Ayanda reminisces about her childhood pet and how her love for dogs has been a consistent part of her life. For her, Misty provides valuable companionship that coheres with the reason that psychological literature gives for dog walking (Collis and McNicholas, 1998). Importantly, Misty enables a boundless love that exceeds measure in human terms (Baderoon, 2016). Ayanda recounts:

“Well, funny enough I kinda grew up doing it. My late father bought me my first puppy at the age of 6 and I’d walk with him almost everywhere. So, I guess I took over that habit and since then, the love of dogs has never faded.”

She adds:

“Yep, now it’s somehow formal but still fun and exciting. I walk her almost every day of the week as she is very energetic and filled with adventure. So, it has become part of my daily habit and it is always filled with love. I stay alone so walking Misty takes away the loneliness and boredom... It is like you are one with the animal, you feel its joy and frustrations.”

While Ayanda does not associate dog walking with class, she highlights the emotional connectedness that dogs enable. These accounts suggest that middle-class black sociality is decidedly less human centric and more open to dogs. Ayanda’s claim that “it is like you are one with the animal” captures an affection that defies speciesism’s assumption that human’s necessarily occupy a higher moral order than animals. Mlu similarly speaks of his children’s love for their dog Nelson.

“The dog is well looked after by the kids, which is also beneficial for them in terms of learning to be affectionate as they are boys and it instils discipline and responsibility. They love Nelson, I am sure you saw the pictures of him in the passage, walking Nelson also helps him get out and meet our dogs.”

However, despite the intimate sociality between his children and dog, Mlu is careful to distinguish between his love for people and Nelson. “I love Nelson and all but such love will never exceed that of my human beings.” Here, Mlu sidesteps the accusation

that middle-class black people mimic white people by caring for their dogs more than they do for the other. He practices what Caviola and Capraro (2020) describe as liking but devaluing of animals. However, in practice, Nelson occupies a pivotal role in the affective and social space of his family. The dog's picture hangs on the walls together with those of cherished humans. Nelson facilitates connection with neighbours, fosters responsibility and engenders care.

In the following excerpts by Mbali and Gugu, we observe a similar transgression of human – animal binaries. The ethics of care are clearly inflected by middle-class habits. The dogs wear clothes, they sleep in the bed, they have balanced diets and sometimes take baths. Mbali contends:

“Yes, believe it or not she has a set of clothes, which we get her often and we’ve had to sterilize her, uhm, there too many babies and random dogs at night.”

She adds,

“My baby (dog) stays indoors, she sometimes sleeps with me that’s if I had been away, that’s when she misses me [laughs].”

Gugu talks about the cleaning practices of her dogs:

“We also have domestic lady who is also tasked to clean the dog kennels once a week, like removing the dog faeces and sometimes giving them a bath.”

Gugu and Mbali signify the emotional and performative habitus of class that are often associated with white people. For example, dressing dogs and sharing one's bed with them is generally seen as indulgent behaviour that white people engage in. These accounts diversify the possibilities of doing black middle-class identity. It is not one thing. They also illustrate transspecies orders of care that are not premised on hierarchies of value.

By reading the participants practices of care as disrupting the human-animal binary, we seek to avoid the parochial tendencies of scholarship that relies on purely sociocultural constructions while also sidestepping impoverished versions of posthumanism. Rossini (2006, n.p.) critiques post humanist tendencies that “only imagine the hybridity of human existence in the figure of the cyborg” and that separate the “material body from the immaterial mind to gain heroic invulnerability, perfection and immortality”. We rely on sociocultural constructions but are not limited these. In this regard, we engage in a post-humanist decentering of anthropocentrism by considering the relational spaces between humans and their dogs. Participant's

discursive practices do not point to heroic scripts. Their relationships with their dogs signal provisional and evolving positions inflected by class, geography, care and affects of vulnerability such as loneliness and companionship.

Conclusion

A reliance on discourse has meant that we only read the figure of dogs through the discursive representations of their human owners. The limits of discourse mean that we have not centred the worldview of the dogs themselves. An indigenous lens that attends to the value of the non-human and natural world on its own terms but as inseparable from humans and the broader cosmology would no doubt have illuminated a fuller exposition of non-hierarchical animal-human relations (Watts, 2013). However, our interest in the place of class in black life meant that a more discursive frame was more productive. With former South African president Zuma's provocation as a point of departure, we explored the practice of dog walking among black middle-class people. We found that while middle-class subjectivities are highly contested, the practice of dog walking is closely tied to a performative gesture of class that black people living in middle-class suburbs are habituated towards. This means that the class position of the participants is important for understanding the genres of care and relation that they practice with their dogs. Moreover, their practices of care and relation to their dogs disrupt a rigid speciesism that sees dogs as occupying a lower moral order and ethics of care. This finding does not suggest that working class and rural practices of care do not challenge anthropocentrism. Instead, it illuminates how these practices are inflected through the performance of class. To insure the health of one's dogs is to perform a class based ethics of care. To declare affection for a dog in ways that upset anthropocentric orders of care is to unsettle the sacrosanct place of the human in modernist hierarchies of being. Relatedly, we observed that the strategies of middle-class disavowal that participants engaged in might be more explicitly ready as attempts to discursively resist accusations of being cultural or class sell-outs, or indeed as a means to attempt to reconcile this ideological conflict of being black and middle class.

This study has explored polemic positions that have hitherto assumed the moral high ground with a basis in the unshakeable supremacy of the human in black culture. Since black people's humanity has always been in question, the embrace of the human and the investment in the distinction between other animal species is understandable. However, to allow colonial tropes to come between inter-species relations is equally short-sighted. The study suggests that in practice, these boundaries are more symbolic than real. Participants pointed to familial histories of relation and care for dogs that illustrate that black people have a long association with dogs that is based on a reciprocal ethics of care and affection. Middle-class habitus has however elevated

these practices of care to registers that are read as humanlike and therefore as more clearly disrupting human-animal binaries. However, some participants sought to downplay the place of class in favour of historicising human-dog orders of care. Our analyses have nevertheless strayed from a literal reading of the participants discourses and instead understood these in relation to theoretical registers. Through the application of class, habitus, performativity, and post-humanist lenses, we have sought to make the implicit more explicit (Parker, 2013). The implication for dog walking is that the performative elements of this practice are sublimated and denied. The analysis required an interpretative frame that does not take participants views at face value but one that instead engages with the nuances of duality emerging from an embrace of a classless identity while materially and spatially living a middle-class life. Similarly, while one participant pointed to humans as holding a higher moral order, his everyday practices suggested a non-hierarchical value system. This study therefore suggests that class mobility changes the available performative registers in ways that more overtly challenge the place of the human in cultures assumed to be anthropocentric.

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