

# 'Doggy-biopolitics': Governing via the First Dog

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## Abstract

Biopolitics, traditionally understood as management of the human population, has been extended to include nonhuman animal life and posthuman life. In this article, we turn to literatures that advance Foucauldian biopolitics to explore the mode of government enabled by the dog of the US presidential family – the First Dog called Bo Obama. With analytical focus on vitalisation efforts, we follow the construction of Bo in various outlets, such as the websites of the White House and an animal rights organisation. Bo's microphysical escapades and the negotiation thereof show how contemporary biopolitics, which targets the vitality of the dog population, is linked to seductive neoliberal management techniques and subjectivities. We discuss 'cuddly management' in relation to Foucauldian scholarship within organisation and management studies and propose that the construction of Bo facilitates interspecies family norms and an empathic embrace of difference circumscribed by vitalisation efforts that we pinpoint as 'doggy-biopolitics'.

## Keywords

Animal studies, domestic animals, First Dog, management techniques, Michel Foucault, posthuman biopolitics, US governing

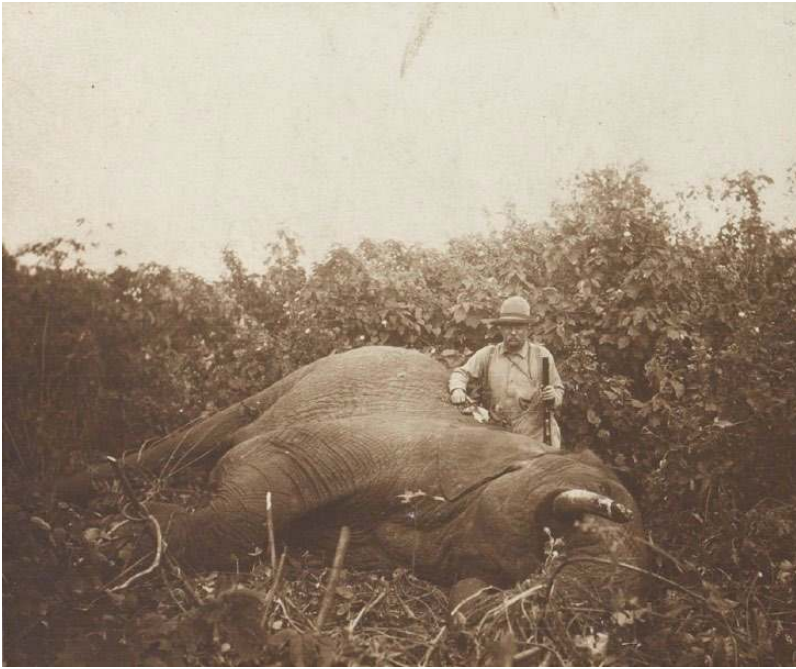
## Introduction

Animals have been used in historical pictures of colonial conquest to manifest sovereign power relations and establish a separation between uncivilised and civilised life, or 'savage' and 'enlightened man' (Haraway, 1989; see also Slater, 2012). Haraway (1989) suggests that Theodore Roosevelt's (1858–1919) trophy hunting is an example of how leaders use the killing of animals to present themselves as the crown of civilisation. Because Roosevelt's travels combined a colonial and exoticist interest with a paternalistic aim to 'civilise' the African continent and enlighten the American people about its nature, she nicknames him the 'Teddy Bear Patriarch' (see Figure 1).

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**Figure 1.** Theodore Roosevelt and elephant, date unknown (Library of Congress 2016a; Photo by Kermit Roosevelt).

However, this pictorial language of sovereignty is reformed today as the notion ‘First Dog’ is widely deployed next to First Lady, First Family and First Marine. This closer relation to animals as pets is something which has been taken to its fore in the case of the Obama family and their dogs, the First Dog of the United States, Bo Obama and his partner, Sunny Obama.

In light of this increased popularity of the canine presidential accessory, we can also expect that new forms of subjectification processes and nonhuman vitalisation efforts are at play. Hence, in this article, we expose the shift in president–pet relations by analysing how Bo Obama partakes in arts of ‘government’, that is, the direction of conduct of individuals or groups for the optimisation of life understood biologically (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003; 239–265; see also Weiskopf and Munro, 2012). By empirically looking into key events and usages of Bo Obama, the aim is to theoretically explore the seductive management techniques and biopolitical strategies (Foucault, 1976/2002: 50–51) that complement the commonly discussed sovereign exercise of power attributed to a US president (see Figure 2). How the relation between Bo and Barack is constructed, either by the White House or other actors, can thus exemplify and broaden our understanding of how contemporary biopolitics is channelled via ‘self-regulating and self-actualizing capacities’ (du Gay, 1996: 138; see also Barratt, 2008; Clegg et al., 2015; Karfakis and Kokkinidis, 2011; Skinner, 2013; Spoelstra, 2007). As we will argue, the First Dog facilitates the creation of specific presidential qualities, good as bad, which can in turn enable a smooth intrusion into the private lives of the citizens (cf. Cruikshank, 1999; Miller and Rose, 2008: 51–52). So far, we know very little about the workings of postdisciplinary forms of control (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012), that is, how movements of freedom are channelled and directed, when subjectivities are activated by ‘incentivized’ choice making (Weiskopf and Willmott, 2015: 527). We know even less about the conditions when this enrolment is facilitated via pets. The anthropomorphisation of the microphysical escapades of



**Figure 2.** Bo and Barack (White House, 2012c; Official White House Photo by Pete Souza).

Bo Obama is exemplary to analyse if we wish to reveal these more diverse and centrifugal power relations, also theoretically emphasised in what Foucauldian organisational scholars call ‘the later Foucault’ (for example, Burrell, 1988: 221; see also Barratt, 2008). Importantly, though, we cannot solely rely on Foucault’s genealogical critique, the histories of his present time, as we now live with an advanced form of biopolitics of our time. We thus ask: How is the United States’ presidential subjectivity negotiated via constructions of the First Dog, and what management techniques are deployed to fashion vital norms and subjectivities?

To answer this question, we have chosen to analytically focus on the human/nonhuman nexus of vitalisation efforts found in the intermingling constructions of Bo and Barack on various Internet sites, not limited to but first and foremost connected to the White House and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). These outlets were chosen due to their rich constructions of good and bad presidential qualities, negotiated with the help of ‘vital and social norms’ (Rose, 2007: 76) for dog–human interaction. The White House is mainly busy constructing a ‘good dog’ with feelings of his own and a loving and caring relation between the First Family and the dog. The animal rights organisation PETA, on the other hand, seeks to cultivate a ‘good environment’ for Bo to secure the wellbeing of the wider canine population.

Even if Foucauldian approaches have been discussed since long within organisation and management studies (OMS; Burrell, 1999: 398, 1988; Knights, 2002; Knights and Collinson, 1987; Knights and Willmott, 1989; McKinlay and Starkey, 1998; Townley, 1993), the purpose is to advance how its biopolitical element can be applied. Biopolitics, traditionally understood as management of ‘the population’, that is, regulating aggregate phenomenon among the human ‘species’ by creating (moral) self-regulation (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003: 242; Rose, 2007: 41–76), has in other fields been extended to include nonhuman animal life (Boggs, 2013; Chrulew, 2011; Holloway, 2007; Palmer, 2001; Rinfret, 2007; Taylor, 2013) and posthuman life (Evans and Reid, 2014; Reid, 2014). This article will thus draw on these literatures to complement previous research within OMS that has touched upon the conceptual interrelationship between ‘management’, ‘life’ and ‘self’ (see, for example, Ahonen et al., 2014; Grey, 2009; Munro, 2012; Nyberg, 2012; Weiskopf and Munro, 2012). The study is thus designed and pursued with the aim to explore how self-management and biopolitics are linked (Hansson et al., 2015).

Our purpose is first to unravel how posthuman biopolitics, which targets the vitality of the dog population, is associated with seductive neoliberal management techniques and subjectivities. Second, we seek to denaturalise and destabilise the formation of this specific pet–president relation (Foucault, 1991; see also Brown, 1998; Clifford, 2001: 151f). We do this by first outlining a brief history of US First Dogs as a background to the study. We thereafter introduce how OMS have handled Foucauldian biopolitics in comparison to other literatures. After devoting a section to a method discussion about genealogy and human–animal relations, we present the analysis. The analysis starts with an exploration of Bo’s relation to the First Family, followed by an examination of the parallel construction of Bo and Barack as subjects. We thereafter connect this analysis to PETA’s responses thereto. To end, we discuss our findings in relation to OMS, and conclude that ‘doggy-biopolitics’ is fundamental to the contemporary deepening of posthuman biopolitics that unfolds hand in hand with US presidential subjectivity and ‘cuddly management’.

This contributes to OMS in three ways: (1) we illustrate how pets can be involved in ‘the different modalities and possible ways that exist for guiding men [or rather, humans]’ (Foucault, 1978–1979/2010: 1); (2) we provide an analysis of how the First Dog facilitates seductive management techniques, cuddly management, coupled to a new repertoire of presidential subjectivity, not envisaged before; and (3) we conceptualise this posthuman biopolitical help to self-management as ‘doggy-biopolitics’.

## US First Dogs

The *Canis familiaris* shares a long history with humans; the species was domesticated 14,000 years ago, if not earlier (see further McHugh, 2004: 13–18). As Haraway points out, humans and dogs do not only share a natural history but also a cultural history (see, for example, Haraway, 2003: 5, 11f, 28, 2004: 300, 2008: 57). Accordingly, Haraway suggests that dogs are humans’ companion species and vice versa: dogs and humans have helped each other to survive and thrive, not only materially but also socially. Dogs are imbued with meanings depending on cultural context and breed, and humans’ self-identity is partly depending on the way they understand themselves in relation to dogs, both on an individual and a collective level. Haraway (2003: 7f, 2008: 72) thus notes that dogs provide humans, and humans provide dogs, with ‘significant otherness’.

Since the first First Dog of the United States, dogs have provided their presidents with significant otherness in that the dogs have played a special role in the construction of presidential identities and political positions. Warren G. Harding’s dog, Laddie Boy (born 1920), was the first famous White House dog, and Laddie Boy gave rise to the title ‘the First Dog’ (Pycior, 2005). Laddie Boy was not only a welcome distraction in the sober White House environment but also a curiosity in the media. Harding wrote a number of letters in the name of Laddie Boy promoting animal welfare issues (Pycior, 2005). He was thus able to use the dog in a humorous way to strive for serious political goals.

US presidents have also treated their dogs as rhetorical resources in speeches, with the belief that doing so could evoke emotional responses in people (see, for example, Broda-Bahm and Kempf, 2004: 237–240; Bruzzi, 2000: 135ff; Dallek, 1995: 481f; Twitchell, 2006: 87). The First Dogs have sometimes even outshone other family members, as in the case of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s (1882–1945) famous dog, Fala, the only other living being depicted and immortalised at his side in the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington DC (see Figure 3).

Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Scottie Fala (born 1940) and Richard Nixon’s Checkers (born 1951) are two famous examples of dogs engaged in US politics. These dogs were made famous in public debate because journalists pulled them into the political debate to question their masters’ good judgement (see, for example, Broda-Bahm and Kempf, 2004: 237–240; Bruzzi, 2000: 135ff;





**Figure 3.** Statues of Fala and Franklin D. Roosevelt at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Washington, DC (Library of Congress 2016b, photo by Carol Highsmith, from the photographs in the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division).

Dallek, 1995: 481f; Twitchell, 2006: 87). Bill Clinton's Labrador, Buddy (born 1997), was likewise used as a rhetorical resource during the Monica Lewinsky scandal (Twitchell, 2006: 87). Buddy was said to be more loyal to his master than his master was to his family, whereby Twitchell (2006: 87) concluded, 'We have learned that whenever a modern president is in trouble he goes into the doghouse and out comes the dog'.

While the previous First Dogs first and foremost have had a rhetorical profile – they have primarily been invoked in relation to certain conflicts and specific problems concerning the presidency – the Obamas' First Dog gained attention even before Bo had been chosen and purchased. Half a year before the 2008 US election, after Barack first promised his daughters a puppy, intense media attention was given to the prospective First Dog. In his victory speech on election night, Barack said, 'Sasha and Malia, I love you both more than you can imagine, and you have earned the new puppy that's coming with us to the White House' (Youtube, 2008). Precautions were taken before Bo was chosen to be the First Dog. He was evaluated by an experienced dog trainer for a month to make sure that 'he'd work with a family with children' (WebMD, n.d.). These precautions are certainly not unique for Bo – Pycior (2005) points out that historically, dogs who have not been fit for the White House – for example untrained dogs and dogs that could not cope with the busy environment – were removed. Even though the family denied that there would ever be another puppy in the White House (see, for example, 2012 election victory speech *The New York Times*, 2012), they got another Portuguese Water Dog in 2013 – a 'friskier' dog, Barack commented in an interview (CNN, 2013b). Sunny, as the new dog was named, would provide Bo with some more 'dog interaction' (DC Decoder, 2013) in an attempt to make his days more fun (Aprildryan, 2013). Even if Sunny is of importance after 2013, our main focus is on her male forerunner, Bo Obama.

## Foucauldian biopolitics revisited

Heidi J. Nast (2006a: 897, 2006b) pointed out that for Foucault 'pet love would be seen as an effect of larger social, political, economic and material-geographical processes' – processes that involve and shape the lives of both humans and other animals. We turn to advancements of Foucauldian biopolitics to treat the hierarchisation of humans and other animals in social theory differently, in order to explore how dogs may enable the subtle forms of normative power appearing adjacent to more conventional contemporary representations of power. One may argue that unlike humans, dogs are not autonomous and rational actors, and therefore cannot be included in studies of power relations and organisational processes. Yet, from a Foucauldian perspective, neither are humans who are only intelligible to themselves and others in relation to a normative system of knowledge (see, for example, Foucault, 1977: 28). As Boggs (2013: 24) underscores, 'there is no [human] subject that predates the relationship with animals'; instead, human and nonhuman subjectivity emerge in 'cross-species encounters' in which the line between humans and animals are continuously drawn and redrawn. Both human and nonhuman subjectivities are thus fundamentally unstable, and it is this instability, or space for negotiation, 'that strategically gets worked out by biopower' (Boggs, 2013: 24). Without going into analytican details, Boggs (2013: 24) also suggests representations of Bo Obama as a fruitful field of inquiry into biopolitical subjectivity.

At the core of the framework used in this study is Foucault's productive notion of power (within OMS, see McKinlay et al., 2012: 4). Rather than being restrictive and prohibitive, power relations enable and encourage people to speak and act in certain ways (see, for example, Foucault, 1977: 27, 1978: 92, 1982). Foucault (1978/1997: 144) conceptualised changes in state power during the Enlightenment era throughout modernity as the governmentalisation of the state. During this era, the main question for government was to find out how to manage the population without direct intervention (Foucault, 1978/1997: 74f). The solution was the liberal state: a decentralisation of power that lets it operate at all levels of society, a form of government at once characterised by liberty and a normative regimentation of the behaviour of its population (Foucault, 1978/1997: 74f; Reid, 2006: 29; Weiskopf and Munro, 2012). A central aspect of the governmentalisation of the state was the creation of a *governmentality*, an attempt to form a universal imperative to govern oneself – to regulate one's behaviour so as to lead a healthy and socially oriented life, both in one's own interest and in the interest of the general population (see Dean, 2010: 24f, 2013; Gordon, 1991; Rose, 1999). Governmentality can thus be described as seeking a *vitalisation* of people for the state – it turns life itself into a resource utilised both by the individuals themselves and by society at large.

Foucault identified an extended form of government in which the role of the sovereign was complemented and partly replaced by a number of governing techniques or 'diverse tactics' ensuring a healthy population, a growing economy and the reproduction of the state (Elden, 2006; Foucault, 1978/1997: 137). This form of government is made possible by a 'bipolar technology' of disciplinary power and biopower (Foucault, 1978: 139; Weiskopf and Munro, 2012). Disciplinary power is a wide system of formal and informal educational institutions and surveillance originally informed by military tactics (Foucault, 1977; Reid, 2006: 23). This system produces 'docile bodies': people who submit to a set of expected behaviours and values in order to become accountable members of their community and society at large (Foucault, 1977: 138). As Weiskopf and Munro (2012) have clarified, biopower denotes the knowledge and techniques used to create, support and improve life on both a personal level and a societal, statistical level (Foucault, 1978: 140ff). Biopower regulation, or biopolitics, includes the distribution and reproduction of norms concerning what is normal and abnormal, healthy and unhealthy (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003: 251; Rose and Miller, 1992). Discipline and biopolitics work in parallel: the subjects of disciplinary power

and biopower become intelligible to themselves and others as ‘objects of knowledge’ – as beings with a body and a psyche, both which can be measured, optimised and enhanced for the good of both individuals and society (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003: 242, 1977: 28, 1978: 139). Disciplinary processes animate bodies and give them meaningful goals ‘through which individuals are brought to work on themselves’, and biopolitics can enhance these goals and the strife for them, as well as make use of these goals on an aggregated level (see also Lemke, 2011: 34; Rabinow and Rose, 2006: 197). In this way, life is simultaneously vitalised and deadened as some qualities of life itself are actively excluded. Assessments of ‘life’ are in other words coupled in a plurality of ways to assessments of the reflexive action of people as they seek to achieve their life goals (Foucault, 1978/1997: 144). And within a given society, humans govern each other and themselves in multifaceted ways (Foucault, 1982: 224). So even if Foucault illuminated how government unfolded differently at different periods in time, ‘the emergence of new technologies of power does not entail the wholesale rejection of older disciplinary elements’ (Munro, 2012: 350). Boggs (2013:187) thus points out that there is no theoretical opposition between the production of subjectivity and biopolitical strategies at a societal level: ‘subjectivity is the battleground as well as the byproduct of biopolitics’, and suggests that this is clear in domesticisation efforts of pets because pets’ lives are bred, controlled and commercialized. And as we especially stress in this article, human pet-relationships are also characterised by both discipline and biopolitical norms.

Foucault’s notion of power has been diversely applied in critical OMS (Knights, 2005), and scholars have lately emphasised the importance of going beyond the workplace ‘analysed as a site for the imposition of corporate control via management’ (Skinner, 2013: 906), with the goal of highlighting more seductive, non-disciplinary forms of power (Munro, 2000), by empirically looking into the everyday work life of employees instead of managers’ top-down rule (Mumby, 2005). Recently, Foucault’s oeuvre has been reappraised within the field (Costas and Grey, 2014; Curtis, 2014; Raffnsøe et al., 2016; Weiskopf and Loacker, 2006). It is possible to identify a turn to what is called ‘the late Michel Foucault’ (Burrell, 1988: 221) or ‘the postdisciplinary Foucault’ (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012) that points to how his work on *askesis* (Munro, 2014), biopolitics and security (Grey, 2009; Munro, 2012) can be useful for OMS. The late Foucault allows OMS scholars to nuance perspectives on how resistance is met before it occurs (Barratt, 2008) by disclosing how the most effective exercise of power is masked (Willmott, 2013). This includes the recognition that a politics of life unfolds ‘alongside both disciplinary techniques of power and the emergence of liberal and neoliberal forms of governmentality’ (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012: 687). In other words, our need to further expose and unsettle the most smoothly working power relations, that is, that power we choose to impose on our selves, is only becoming more urgent, especially as citizens are called on to self-manage posthumanly.

In spite of the increasing interest in Foucault’s later work, with a few exceptions (see especially Ahonen et al., 2014), scholars commonly separate studies of disciplinary power, governmentality and biopolitics, as if a personal ethics can be separated from broader issues of governing, or as if Foucault’s so-called ‘phases’ should rule current analytical approaches. For example, in Nyberg’s (2012) account of how employers target the individual unhealthy body of employees to govern the population, the term ‘biopolitics’ is left out. Leclercq-Vandelannoitte (2011) likewise touches upon regulation of the population as ‘calculated life management’ but also leaves out the term ‘biopolitics’. Conceptually stripping back these articles may of course have been requested by others. Nevertheless, Wray-Bliss (2002) has warned Foucault-informed organisational scholars against such a conceptual limitation, as a personal ethics can never be separated from wider political issues (see also Loacker and Muhr, 2009: 268). On several occasions, Foucault indeed clarified how it became ethically correct to work on one’s individual bodily health for the sake of the whole population (Foucault, 1976/1980; Levay, 2014). Biopolitics is embedded in ‘existing disciplinary techniques’ to modify various instruments

for the regularisation of aleatory events within a population (Foucault, 1975–1976/2003 : 242–246; see also Dillon and Reid, 2009). It is therefore essential to see biopolitics not only as a matter of statistical calculation but also its effects and reproduction at a microlevel where individuals become intelligible to themselves and others through continuous measurements and evaluations according to notions of the healthy body, the apt psyche and a good society.

Critical animal studies and animal geography do in comparison to OMS apply the notion of biopolitics more widely, often with the aim to expose governmentality. The growing body of Foucauldian research on human–animal relations is partly due to the last decades' decrease in biodiversity and the emerging ecological crisis, which has spurred worries about how nonhuman life increasingly falls within the scope of biopolitics. Academic interest has turned to how a neoliberal 'outsourcing logic' (Evans and Reid, 2014: 16) extends biopolitics to include environmental problems (Darier, 1999), climate change (Skoglund, 2014) and discourses of resilience (Reid, 2013). Hereby, biopolitics and seductive management techniques need to be understood in relation to the posthuman world, where the 'absolute boundaries between humans and nonhumans, nature and society have been broken down and all beings are connected together in a series of overlapping "webs" or "networks" of activity' (Fox, 2006: 525 cites Instone, 1998). Due to these posthuman tendencies, we need to carefully scrutinise the different modes for how various species are biopolitically problematised (Reid, 2014: 207). One example is Rinfret's (2007) study of how wildlife managers, resource managers and species managers deploy surveillance tools in resonance with disciplinary and biopolitical power to assess, locate and fashion the life of various species. In the management of wild animals, they are turned into 'docile and useful bodies' according to the logic of disciplinary power while maintaining a constructed form of natural wildness, so that they can be part of animal–human encounters that are of economic utility (Rinfret, 2007: 547). Similarly, Palmer (2003: 56) argued that the regulation and enhancement of urban wildlife exemplify how biopolitics can include animal species welfare – how animals en masse can be individualised and managed via microphysical techniques. Palmer (2001: 344, 358) also identified a 'power spectrum' structuring human–cat relationships that includes human control, discipline, violence and feline resistance. Palmer suggests that the neutering of cats – the management of feline life – can also be regarded as an extreme precaution to force the cat to become a thing that does not resist. A further example is Holloway (2007) who identified connections between different forms of power in the dairy industry. The study shows that animal subjectivity is produced in parallel with changing technologies for dairy farming, and concludes that when individuals emphasise animal corporeality and the 'freedom' of cows, it can be understood as a wider attempt to exert 'control of life' (Holloway, 2007: 1056).

We agree with Palmer (2003: 55) that there are 'many different kinds of human/animal power relations' which operate in tandem and need to be explored. However, instead of previous scholarly emphasis on human control over animals, we would like to unearth how optimisation of vitality of animal life is linked to seductive management of the human. Foucault (1975–1976/2003: 29) advises us not to 'regard power as a phenomenon of mass and homogeneous domination – the domination of one individual over others, of one group over others, or of one class over others'. We also want to add that neither should humans' domination over other animals be taken for granted (although, as has been pointed out, many human–animal relationships follow the logic of domination and sovereign power). An exploration of human–dog relations needs to attend to a wider power spectrum. Humans discipline dogs, but it is a disciplining that goes both ways, as dog owners also adapt to living with dogs (Redmalm, 2013). As Haraway (2004: 308) expresses it, 'If dogs are a human technology, so also is the reverse true, as part of an extended phenotype in a canine sociobiological tale' (see also Haraway, 2008: 262). Following Haraway, norms concerning human–dog interaction do not only inhibit dogs from acting in a human-centred society, but these



norms also enable dogs to co-exist with humans in social settings first and foremost designed for humans. Norms for dog owners to regulate their dogs' diet, exercise and reproduction ensure a healthy and numerically steady population of dogs, which in turn enhance the lives of humans. Furthermore, just as there is what Foucault (1975–1976/2003: 243) calls a 'natalist policy' or norms structuring human reproduction, there are biopolitical precautions taken to manage dogs' reproduction and genetic constitution (Haraway, 2000; 2008: 60f; Marvin, 2005; Palmer et al., 2012). In the case of dogs and humans, inter- and intraspecies power relations are entwined, and there is thus a need to question the norms that shape relations across species borders (Nast, 2006a, 2006b). We will now discuss how we have used this more dynamic and multifaceted view of human–animal power relations to conceptualise Bo Obama's place in the White House.

## Method: following the paw prints of Bo

In the very beginning of Bo's life in the White House, the front page of the White House website highlighted a war in the Middle East, an oil crisis, an economic crisis – and Bo's arrival. Since then, we have followed the construction of Bo in various media outlets. Following Rose (1999: 57), we approach the discourses converging in the representations of Bo with an emphasis on 'superficiality' rather than the interpretation of underlying meanings. Rose (1999) advocates 'an empiricism of the surface, of identifying the differences in what is said, how it is said, and what allows it to be said and to have an effectivity'. The focus is thus not on the 'truth' of certain words or texts but on 'regimes of truth' (Rose, 1999: 29) and 'regimes of practices' (Foucault, 1991: 75) enabling human–canine relationships, that is, the way discursive events gain certain functions and have certain effects, given the context of power and knowledge. This means that we follow the construction of Bo by approaching texts on the subject matter, both serious and satirical, with equal interest: news articles from well-known and less famous media bureaus including material from the White House website, PETA's promotional campaigns, blog posts and amateur and professional video recordings. From an organisational perspective, this also means that we do not see the White House and PETA as fixed containers but instead as social products (cf. Taylor and Spicer, 2007) created via portraits of, and interactions with, what becomes the First Dog. In this way, we hope to be sensitive to the studied situation at hand without applying premature analytical frames (Raffnsøe et al., 2016: 14).

We do not aim to take a complete census of everything ever written on Bo. After all, the relation between Bo and Barack is as Foucault (1991: 78) states in 'Questions of method' constructed through a 'plethora of intelligibilities' impossible to 'put under the sign of a unitary necessity' (see also Brown, 1998). Instead, we aim to contribute to a genealogical 're-serialization' (Walters, 2012: 131) in which First Dogs are disconnected from their position as White House curiosities and presidential props. To genealogically unsettle and politically critique the pet–president relation, the position of the First Dog is instead treated as crucial in the reproduction of biopolitical regulation, and the list of First Dogs is merged with the list of presidents to create a new series: Harding – Laddie Boy, Roosevelt – Fala, Nixon – Checkers and so on. We contribute to such a reserialisation by following the paw prints of Bo: by letting one text about Bo guide us onwards to the next one to expose a sort of canine intertextuality which we then treat as a 'counter-memory' (Walters, 2012: 125) to the regular anthropocentric discursive production of the President. This way of reading texts is a manoeuvre informed by Jacques Derrida's work on animals and animality. Derrida (2008: 14, 48ff, see also Derrida, 1995: 268f) argues that humans' act of 'following' the animal – of persistently devising new ways of differentiating humans from a neutral category of all other animals – produces the idea of humanism's rational and coherent subject, separate from and superior to all other animals. To divert the traditional way of human–animal 'following', Derrida suggests that we

read texts about animals as literally being about nonhuman animals themselves, rather than being symbols or metaphors for humans or ‘the human condition’ (see Lönngren, 2015; McHugh 2011, for elaborations of this approach). Despite our methodological reliance on Derrida, we acknowledge that a Foucauldian analysis should not be limited to textual traces (McKinlay and Starkey, 1998: 5, cites Foucault’s 1972 exchange with Derrida) but be historiographically conscious (Brown, 1998). In other words, we remain aware of how texts are part of a history that could have been written otherwise.

The focus on Bo is also in line with a posthumanist approach as defined by Cary Wolfe (2010: 117ff): it allows for broadening the object of study in the humanities and social sciences to include nonhuman animals, as well as a poststructuralist critique of the humanist notion of the rational ‘autonomous subject of knowledge’, also supported by Foucault (Weiskopf and Willmott, 2015: 529). Instead of dismissing Bo as a superfluous theatre prop used by human actors on a political stage, we have thus chosen to ‘follow’ Bo’s paw prints that run through news and popular media. In practice, this often meant looking for signs that people usually use when following dogs in their everyday lives: we looked for pointed ears, drooling mouths, flapping tongues and wagging tails. Conscious that we as researchers cannot take a position ‘outside’ of discursive production, we start following Bo where we stand and aim to recontextualise images and texts to make possible what Rose (1999: 55) has poetically described as ‘a kind of experimental moment in thought, a moment when thought tries to realize itself in the real’. In other words, we draw on existing discourses to highlight the very act of following to expose the production of human and canine subjectivities and the biopolitical strategies and forms of management that Bo enables. While this might seem like a haphazard form of analysis that corresponds more to canine than human rationality, it is a purposeful research practice that allows us to make a focussed reading to put the matter of microphysics of posthuman biopolitics on the agenda. This is how we have solved the ‘methodological puzzle’ in studies of governmentality and biopolitics that turn to specific empirical phenomena without ‘desire [for] an easy guidebook’ (Hansson et al., 2015: 2, 6). We thus acknowledge the messiness and ‘complex and precarious dynamics of social organization’ that can be analysed by a less conventional method (Alvesson and Willmott, 2004: 186). A purely inductive grounded theory approach would have resulted in a different reading, and may have provided a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the First Dog and his president, at the cost of the present theoretical interest in biopolitics.

We have furthermore not chosen to conduct a detailed interpretation or visual analysis of the materials collected. In contrast, we follow Alvesson and Kärreman (2007: 1265) and ‘emphasize the potential of empirical material as a resource for developing theoretical ideas through’ problematisation and mobilisation. Our primary aim is to ‘mobilize existing frameworks’ to ‘encourage critical reflection’ about the power dynamics around Bo and ‘to enhance our ability to [...] illustrate theory’. We thus mobilise the existing biopolitical framework to learn more about the posthuman condition in the specific relation between Bo and Barack. In addition, turning to Barratt (2003: 1083f), we aim to conduct a study that ‘seeks to connect with the power field which in speaking against majority opinion, seeks to expand the political imagination, to deploy knowledge tactically’. This is how we in alliance with Foucault pursue political critique (Foucault, 1991). It is only by purposefully choosing to analyse vitalisation efforts in the perimeter of Bo that we can learn more about doggy-biopolitics. Importantly, in line with Foucault (1991: 74) we do not attribute any dogmatic universality to our explorations but consider this article to be one of many possible stories to tell about pet-president relations. We see the recontextualisation of texts and images conducted in this article as a tactic to speak against a conventional understanding of human–animal power relations, to better understand the organising role of a presidential pet, and to expand the imagination concerning the place of animals in contemporary and future societies.

## Analysis

We see three aspects as central to doggy-biopolitics, which we present in this section under separate headings. First, dogs allow for a *vitalisation of the family*: they naturalise the nuclear family by providing a warm and lively social surrounding. Second, dogs are involved in a canine *subjectification*: when dogs partake in power relations, they become ‘persons’, which in turn enables modification of human subjectivity. Third, dogs enable a broader *biologisation* of life, analogous to the biologisation of human life Foucault primarily targeted in his genealogical studies. All these issues, soft vitalisation, pet-human subjectification and extended biologisation are immanent to the transformation of biopolitics in posthuman societies.

### *The vitalisation of the family*

In a famous White House photo session, the Obama family is out walking Bo on the lawn outside the White House. Without the dog, the series of images would be an account of a family walking somewhere, together. Where? To a fund-raising meeting? Or a press conference? Thanks to Bo leading the family forward on a leash, the photo depicts the essence of ‘quality time’: this is a family enjoying the moment of being outdoors walking the dog. Bo thus enables the synchronised movement of canine and human bodies in a disciplined fashion, but what is more, he also gives this choreographed movement a purpose – a family engaging together in healthy exercise. In this section we will further show how the vitalisation of the family is central to doggy-biopolitics: dogs reinforce the family as the ‘obligatory locus of affects, feelings, love’ (Foucault, 1978: 108), and in the case of the public First Family, the First Dog may facilitate the reproduction and dissemination of biopolitical family norms where the passions of the adult are regulated (Rose, 1999: 266–267).

When the First Family moved into the White House, Bo entered the centre stage (Sky News, 2009). The first press meeting with Bo was held 14 April 2009 on the White House lawn, which is also the take-off site for the helicopter Marine One. ‘Has he had any accidents yet?’ a journalist asks. ‘Not yet’ Barack replies, and continues, ‘We all have to take turns in walking the dog’. ‘Even you?’ asks another journalist without receiving an audible reply. Barack Obama is then asked if he will let Bo into the oval office, whereby he immediately replies: ‘Of course I will!’ After playing around with the dog, Barack speaks directly to the journalists: ‘We wanna make sure that we’re responsible dog owners, and I hope everybody is, too’. At the end of the film clip, he concludes, ‘I finally got a friend’, alluding to the famous saying ‘If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog’, allegedly first uttered by the former US President Harry Truman (Bellantoniwashtimes, 2009).

In this first meeting with Bo, the behaviour and character of the dog are in focus, but the inquisitive journalists also scrutinise the Obama family’s role as dog owners. What is at stake is Bo’s initiation within the family and the mutual obligations this initiation entails. Furthermore, a happy dog is conceived to mirror a happy family – one in which the dog’s inclusion into the family blurs the border between human and animal (cf. Shell, 1986). The anthropomorphisation of Bo is strengthened by the fact that Bo is repeatedly talked about as though he understands human language – he is even satirically ascribed a human voice, as in this quote from a fictional blog: ‘I suppose even First Dogs have to have rules, but I know I’m awfully hard to say “No!” to when I stare up at Mom and Dad with my soulful brown eyes and give my head a slight tilt as if to say, “Don’t you love me?”’ (dogtime.com, 2012). Similar fictional blog posts speaking for Bo can be found at other sites, with different often anonymous human authors, which emphasise Barack and Michelle Obama’s role as good and ‘human’ parents for their human and canine ‘children’. Barack and Michelle have also made repeated connections between responsible dog ownership, good parenthood and just political leadership. Barack Obama’s references to dogs in his two victory

speeches underscore his role as a loving father to his two daughters. Furthermore, in her last speech as First Lady at the Democratic convention of 2016, Michelle Obama paints a picture of a democratic and egalitarian United States by contrasting the image of 'my daughters – two beautiful, intelligent, black young women – playing with their dogs on the White House lawn' to the fact that she also 'wake[s] up every morning in a house that was built by slaves' (White House, 2016).

Bo is also useful when it comes to other family-related exercises displayed on [Whitehouse.gov](http://Whitehouse.gov), such as playing around and enjoying leisure time. Even some of the White House managers are photographed when Bo decides to play with them (see for example, White House, 2012a). Their playfulness has a distinguished character at the same time as the stereotypically masculine traits of the manager are revamped. Another example is a collection of photos depicting how Barack and Bo are playing football on the White House lawn. Barack wears dark suit trousers and a white shirt and tie, as if he just got home from work and threw off his jacket to play with his 'son'. American football is traditionally a masculine practice associated with strength, fearlessness and a readiness for confrontation. It is also a game that many children engage in, encouraged by their parents, and a game that families watch together. When Barack plays football with Bo, he displays both his engagement with one of the most popular sports in the United States and his role as a genuine American family man. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that if Barack did not have Bo and instead decided to play a game of football with his daughters the image could, in contrast, be read as a potentially controversial feminist statement, given the status of the sport. The familiarity of the Obama family is further accentuated by the fact that Bo plays an integral role in holiday celebrations at the White House, both for Thanksgiving (White House, 2012d) and for Christmas (HollywoodCIA, 2012). Bo even goes Christmas shopping with his 'father', Barack (CBS News, 2011a). None of the human members of the Obama family have been depicted on the official White House Christmas cards, while both Bo and Sunny have been depicted in front of the White House (White House Christmas card, 2013). In a paradoxical way, it is fundamentally the dogs, alone in front of the huge building, that reassure us that the neoliberal institution can actually host a human family.

As biopolitical player, Bo facilitates the making of other seductive links between physical activity, citizens and families – for example, by playing a part in Michelle Obama's 'First Lady's Let's Move! Campaign' (CBS News, 2011b) which is an initiative 'dedicated to solving the problem of obesity within a generation, so that children born today will grow up healthier and able to pursue their dreams' (Letsmove.gov, 2014). 'Let's move!' is directed at parents and highlights that '[y]our involvement is key to ensuring a healthy future for our children' (Letsmove.gov, 2014). In an attempt to make people aware of the benefits of drinking water, the dogs are the faces of the campaign 'Drink UP!' advertised on the webpage: 'If you wanna stay active and healthy, you've gotta Drink UP. Just ask Sunny and Bo' (Letsmove.gov, 2014). Sunny and Bo play an important role here: they imbue the context with liveliness, intensity and playfulness, and accordingly invite the viewer to join the fun. Bo and Sunny bring the viewers closer as their canine bodies can be set in motion in a more lively and compelling way than their human family members – the latter having to maintain a certain façade. Through the dogs, a power that is 'direct, physical, pitting force against force, bearing on material elements' (Foucault, 1977: 26) operates to reproduce and distribute biopolitical norms regarding health by emphasising the biological functions humans share with other animals. The dogs' presence in the texts and imageries accounting for the life of the First Family thus contributes to an optimisation of the vitality of the canine and human population.

### *Canine subjectification*

There is a great deal of knowledge about how human subjectivity is shaped – for example via life stories, self-narratives, descriptions of one's qualities, manipulated photographs on Facebook and





**Figure 4.** Bo Obama baseball card, front and back (White House, 2009; Official White House Photo by Chuck Kennedy).

calls for 'existential self-problematization' (Dean, 2007: 61). But the 'discursively constructed nature of personhood' (Costas and Fleming, 2009: 358) for dogs, that is, the production of canine subjectivity – how a soul is produced 'around, on, within the [canine] body' (Foucault, 1977: 29) – has not been so thoroughly explored. Who is Bo? Using the pronoun 'who' in relation to dogs is considered ungrammatical. The question 'Who?' always presupposes a coherent, conscious, human subject (see Derrida, 1995: 268f). In comparison to animals, it is often a 'who' that is seen as a human subject to whom agency can be ascribed (cf. Dean, 2015). Nevertheless, we have provided the answer to the question of 'who' in the form of a baseball card that is available to order or download at the White House website. The back of the card displays a number of 'cold facts' concerning Bo and biographic details that authenticate his status as a person and as an integral part of the Obama family (Figure 4).

It is now possible for Bo to have opinions, preferences and feelings – even to the extent that Bo can challenge his master's sovereign position. A photo in *The Daily Mail* (2009) shows Barack walking Bo on a leash in the White House with the caption 'Who's leading who? Bo, the Portuguese water dog, and latest addition to the Obama household, takes the President for walkies'. The image suggests that Bo is pulling Barack forward on a leash towards one of his daughters. Yet, it is questionable whether what we see is a flimsy or weak-willed president; instead, if the notion of disciplinary power is applied, the leash between Barack and Bo can be read as a mutual tool rather than a means of domination. In this way, the leash enables Bo and Barack to act in concert and yet be understood as two autonomous persons (compare Michael, 2000). Moreover, the photo constructs a unification of the three family members that are present, whereby the good dog, good father and good leader converge. The dog consequently complements the construction of the president's 'people skills' (Hurrell and Scholarios, 2014: 54) with 'dog skills'. Although, as we shall see, Barack and Bo sometimes fail in keeping up the appearance.

Through images of Bo and Barack acting in unison, we learn not only that Bo is a ‘good boy’, but also that Barack has won his loyalty, presumably through hard work. In one of the White House press images, Barack and Bo are photographed from behind, running through one of the corridors. Bo is dragging his leash behind him; nevertheless, Bo stays at his master’s side, looking up at him, and Barack looks back. It is a perfect depiction of successful advanced liberal government: after thorough discipline, you are set free but choose to voluntarily follow – at least for the moment of the photograph. In this way, Bo is turned into a perfectly honest witness of Barack’s ‘humane’ capabilities, as displayed in relation to this particular animal that is not only domesticated but also politicised as he runs ‘free’ inside the White House.

Bo is not only a subsidiary character that shows up to create a happier First Family and a friendlier White House staff. He has also ‘been eager to help the First Family with their official duties’ (White House, 2013) – for example by being present during Barack Obama’s and Hilary Clinton’s meeting with Burmese opposition politician Aung San Suu Kyi. According to BBC News (2012),

Bo has been taking on ever more responsibilities, presiding over the ceremonials, chairing meetings, sitting in for Vice President Joe Biden. He has also succeeded to seal off potential rivals [...] So what next for Bo? Perhaps he could be the one to save America from falling off the fiscal cliff.

Bo’s capacities have been extended beyond those of his first year in the White House. From a companion who provides leisure time for the First Family, he has now become one of the management team, undoubtedly helping to create a homely atmosphere in the Oval Office. We can thus observe how the novelty news on Bo attempts to include an increasing number of the duties the president performs, with a cuddly touch. Bo is not only a sidekick for family fun but a sidekick for making world affairs more fun. This may show an increased investment in disseminating information to the public that deploys cuddly management techniques to support the enabling state and help to self-management (Figure 5).

In spite of Bo’s many achievements, he also has a dark side – Bo is not always reported as being a good boy. Some people have turned to Bo’s ‘bad dog’ potential to criticise the president. The blog GoodBoyBo.com offered satirical renderings of canine life in the White House until it was shut down in 2010, allegedly because it was written by someone in the White House administration (see Huff and Haefner, 2012). A less sophisticated example is an amateur tourist video on YouTube filmed outside the White House. Spotting Bo on the other side, the filmmaker starts shouting at the dog, telling him: ‘Take a poop, Bo! [...] They deserve it!’ The filmmaker suggests that Bo’s daily bowel movements are in fact expressions of discontent: ‘Hopefully he’s about to take a dump on the White House lawn to just symbolically show what we think of Obama’ (Dice, 2012). While it might seem that the construction of Bo’s bad boy streak is a simple counter-discourse against the rhetorical use of him by the White House press office, Bo’s depicted resistance is crucial in the production of him as a person, and in extension the production of the president’s traits. In video coverage of Michelle Obama, her children and Bo visiting a children’s hospital for Christmas celebration, Bo starts barking at a man in a Santa Claus costume (Associated Press, 2009). Bo is also reported to enjoy chewing on people’s feet, and there is footage of Bo biting and batting at microphones pointed in his face (CNN, 2013a). This list of past crimes only adds to Bo’s personality, since framing one’s pet as capable of resisting rules and norms is a way for owners to endow their pets with personhood (Redmalm, 2013). Consequently, while Bo misbehaves occasionally according to the ‘good dog’ ideal, his being a ‘bad dog’ shows that he is an autonomous person who will not be subdued by any of his many caretakers. Thus, all aspects of the ‘soul’ produced around, on and within Bo make him into *who* he is, and in turn serve the production of contemporary good presidential leadership, both by the mutual disciplining of dog and leader, and by the transformations of Bo’s lively canine features into a spectrum of

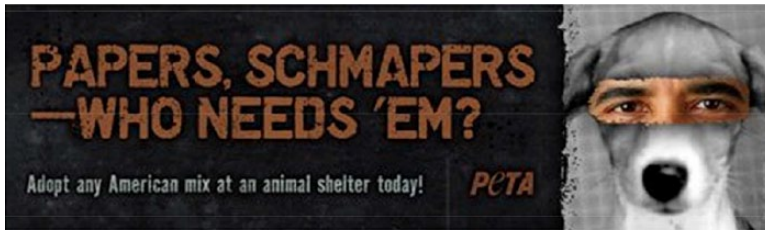


**Figure 5.** Aung San Suu Kyi meets Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton (Secretary of State) (White House, 2012b; Official White House Photo by Pete Souza).

anthropomorphic characteristics: happiness and loyalty, as well as wilfulness and mischievousness. In other words, the disciplinary power dynamics between canine and human bodies make possible biopolitical transformation of canine life and liveliness. This transformation gives the First Dog a specific personality and enables a cuddly presidential subjectivity.

## The biologisation of Bo

While it is uncontroversial to speak of animals as biological beings, an emphasis on humans' animal characteristics is generally believed to depreciate the value of human life. Dogs are in contrast liminal creatures, often described as instinct-driven organisms and descendants of wolves, on one hand, and persons and full-fledged members of human families, on the other (Redmalm, 2014). In this section, we turn to PETA's critical stance towards the president's choice of dog to show how doggy-biopolitics – norms concerning breeding practices and optimisations of dog life – are linked to presidential subjectivity. We suggest that the biologisation of life that is characteristic of biopolitics in this case allows for a special emphasis on empathy by a biopolitical concern extended across species borders, and a simultaneous depoliticisation of controversies around the categorisation of life.



**Figure 6.** Advertisement in connection with Barack Obama's birth papers (PETA, 2011).

When the Obama family openly discussed the choice of their first First Dog, they considered whether to get a shelter dog or a so-called hypoallergenic breed, due to Malia Obama's allergies. Barack Obama made this dilemma public and pointed out that it might be difficult to find a dog of hypoallergenic breed in a shelter, because 'obviously, a lot of shelter dogs are mutts like me' (msnbc News, 2016). Barack Obama's humorous comment was followed by media reports on how comfortable he was talking about his own mixed biological background (NBCNEWS.com, 2008). The animal rights organisation PETA (2009a) picked up on Barack Obama's 'mutts like me', comment and acknowledged that Barack Obama had spoken highly about mutts but still expressed concern that he would go for a specific breed with certain qualities. PETA (2009c) thus stressed the issue of animal rights by connecting it to a humanist anti-racism discourse, saying that 'loving and caring for a member of a different species also teaches compassion for those who are like us in so many ways, except that they are in a different type of body and have a somewhat different culture'. PETA's own President Ingrid E. Newkirk wrote a letter to Barack Obama about racism, suggesting that '[n]o one needs to tell you that this country is proud to be a melting pot and that there is something deeply wrong and elitist about wanting only a purebred dog'. The ultimate consequence of this elitism, she argues, is that '[m]illions of Great American Mutts – the dog that should be our national dog – are set to die in our nation's extremely overcrowded pounds and shelters for lack of good homes'. That is also why the Obamas should look for a homeless puppy of unknown ancestry in a shelter, since that is what '[c]ompassionate people nationwide' do (PETA, 2009b).

PETA delivers a rhetorical dilemma to the president, since he will risk appearing as the opposite of compassionate – unsympathetic or even inhumane – if he does not take on a shelter puppy. This alternative voice can be understood as part of PETA's 'ethical askesis', and Bo may even offer a sort of 'point of resistance' (Munro, 2014: 1134):

[I]f we as Americans were treated the same way that we treat mutts – essentially, ourselves in the dog world – then we'd all be locked up, wasting away in cages, and hoping for someone to take us for 'walkies'. If we can't be true to mutts, then we can't be true to ourselves. (PETA, 2008)

When the Obama family in spite of PETA's demands 'accepted a Portuguese water dog as a gift from Sen. Ted Kennedy', PETA (2009d) announced its disappointment with the Obamas. The story does not end there but continues in 2011, when Barack published the long version of his birth certificate. PETA (2011) was again fast to pick up on the anti-racism discourse and repeat its wish for an increased acceptance of mixed-breed 'paperless' shelter dogs (Figure 6).

The below advertisement, in which PETA replaces the eyes of a dog with the eyes of Barack Obama, makes the quest for empathy even more evident. While Barack and PETA have partly different aims with their use of the figure of the mutt, they both share an emphasis on empathy, which today, as Pedwell (2012: 286) points out, 'has become part and parcel of being a self-managing and



self-enterprising individual within a neoliberal order'. The mutual emphasis on empathy thus resonates with the logic of neoliberal rule. Both Barack and PETA speak in terms of an empathic embrace of difference and engage in an affective politics. According to Pedwell (2012: 289), 'in cultivating "empathy," citizens fuel nationalism by developing a marketable skill which not only contributes to American economic competitiveness but also furnishes articulations of American cultural and ethical exceptionalism'. Just as Pedwell would have us expect, the political moves towards empathy and equality never result in radical programmes – rather the other way around. If PETA would follow through with the comparison implicit in their advertisement, PETA would be suggesting that the way the dog population is violently controlled is analogous to the state's control of undocumented immigrants by means of incarceration and forced deportation. Such an interlinking of animal rights rhetoric and radical cosmopolitanism would then imply a radically different world order for both humans and other animals. Now instead, with the humorous juxtaposition of breedism and racism, the issue of structural discrimination is put on a par with the matter of which dog a father should choose for his daughters. Simultaneously, the parallel breeding and killing of dogs of industrial proportions are reduced into a discussion of the fate of an individual dog. Thus, a part of doggy-biopolitics is the way the intervention on an individual dog turns the focus from controversial issues via dog-centred reason, making difficult political questions into private matters of pet keeping.

When Obama chose a purebred dog, Bo's reproductive capacities also came up on PETA's agenda. PETA argued in an article at their website that it would cost more to regulate the surplus dog population than it did to fight the Iraq War. PETA asked the president to 'Please show that you understand this by making the first dog the last dog of his line and having Bo neutered', and continued by making an analogy to previous White House sex scandals: 'Sex in the White House has been the topic of past scandals, but with a simple "snip," the first dog can set a new tone and a great example' (PETA, 2009c). PETA (2009c) argued that the sterilisation would be of universal gain: 'This will set a fine example for the world to follow, and Bo will be the happier for it'. So eager was PETA (2009c) that the organisation even sent 'a coupon good for one free sterilization at PETA's SNIP clinic, which you are welcome to use or pass on to a member of your Cabinet or someone in a low-income neighbourhood of Washington, D.C'.

Biopolitics arose around human sexuality, coupled to norms about extramarital sex and its assumed uncleanness and degeneration, characteristics that were especially associated with low-income groups and the underclass (see further Foucault, 1978–1979/2010: 66f). By targeting reproduction via norms, for example, the creation of a nuclear family, biopolitics seeks sexual self-control (Sandilands, 1999). As Foucault pointed out in *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1976/2002: 50–51), sexuality is a meeting point for disciplinary tactics and biopolitical strategies, and in this case, both human and canine life are emphasised as entailing reproductive capacities in need of management. By making a connection between dog reproduction and excessive human sexuality, PETA is able to associate the overproduction of dogs with the same repellent characteristics. By making the Obamas responsible for how Bo's reproductive system should be managed, they also aim at distributing this moralised construction of the canine population to the wider population. In one rhetoric move, PETA demands that the president prevents his dog from procreating, suggests that the president refrains from extramarital relations (i.e. adheres to a 'compartmental sexuality'; see Foucault, 1978: 46) and offers the whole population, with an emphasis on those in low-income neighbourhoods, a chance to reflect upon canine sexuality. PETA offers us their visions of collective subjectivity, as they 'hope for a better future self' of the president (cf. Costas and Grey, 2014: 915, 932). In comparison to Costas and Grey (2014), this future self is in a quite political move given to someone else, still possibly functioning as an illusion of Barack for PETA to flee to. PETA's action can thus be understood as part of a wider biopolitical natalist policy for dogs – a way

to manage the surplus dog population with wishes to optimise it reciprocally to the human population. Some humans are thus governed and biopoliticised hand in hand with enhancements of the dog as species to 'help them achieve their full canine potential' (Haraway, 2008: 61).

Doggy-biopolitics, like other posthuman vitalisations, widens what biopolitics of today can legitimately target. In PETA's rhetoric – and in Obama's 'mutts like me' comment – the First Dog is treated as a biological being whose genetic composition and reproductive function (and its eventual removal) are believed to be an ethical and political choice that will affect the wider human and canine population. The way in which Bo is biologised allows both the president of the United States and PETA to address Barack's 'race' in an uncontroversial, humorous way that takes the edge off the issue – or meets resistance before it occurs (Barratt, 2008). The biologisation of Bo thus facilitates the proliferation of a canine natalist policy which itself could be potentially controversial, but instead makes possible a status quo in the sociobiological tale of human–dog relationships in which humans still have sovereign control over the canine population, in spite of the mutual disciplining going on between dogs and owners.

## Conclusion

In light of our illustration, we propose that the relation between Bo and Barack can be seen as part of the contemporary conditions for freedom and of how such freedom is governed (cf. Barratt, 2008) in a turn to pets. Our study of Bo extends the story of governmentality and 'the enterprise form' of social organising (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012) with what seems to tap into 'the moral form' of posthuman organising. The introduction of Bo into the First Family separates civilised pet cuddling from other, less civilised ways of being with animals. Today's 'civilised leaders' do not have control over nature, but are expected to take on an ethical concern for animals and to mirror themselves in these concerns as a vehicle for biopolitical strategies. The direct interventions on Bo, rather than on the individual citizen, exemplifies how the rules of the game for self-crafting are reconfigured with both normative framings and an opening up of a less confined space, wherein individuals are activated to engage in dog-infused ethical decision making to be channelled anew (cf. Weiskopf and Willmott, 2013). Much akin to how Skinner (2013) describes the self-ethical process of becoming a 'good farmer' via the construction of the 'organic' within a community, but in our case without as direct enterprising bents. That is, Bo is not mainly offering us to become better at economic cost benefit analyses on how to 'invest' in certain practices to optimise ourselves as human capital (du Gay, 1996; Weiskopf and Munro, 2012), neither is Bo teamed up with instrumental self-quantification measures to regulate our intentions to enhance biospheric vitality (Chandler in Chandler and Reid, 2016: 27–49). Rather, Bo's presence in the White House, in the media and in political debates extends the biopolitical self-regulative agenda to what we conceptualise as 'doggy-biopolitics', a power exercised in relation to the optimisation of dogs en masse.

Bo is an especially powerful instrument of doggy-biopolitics as he can fulfil the role of a human-like person with a close personal relationship with the members of the First Family, whereas he can also be biologised when characteristics traditionally associated with dogs are needed: liveliness, loyalty and honesty. In contrast to previous First Dogs, Bo is not merely invoked as a rhetorical resource used to meet arguments in a conflict, but is construed as a person with a voice and feelings of his own, invoked by alternative voices to shape and scrutinise presidential subjectivity. As dogs are generally thought to be honest by nature, Bo can be said to be the perfect litmus test for truth. The subjectification of the First Dog gives the president transparency: Bo's expressions of 'pure' liveliness and his behaviour (and misbehaviour) in relation to Barack are managed and transformed to help constructing Bo as a person. This construction in turn contributes to the production of a certain presidential subjectivity: Barack is constructed as a responsive and flexible leader who,

through cuddly management, allows his administration a certain amount of self-management. Finally, PETA enlists Bo in a rhetoric operation to connect the First Dog and the First Family to the wider population of dogs and interspecies families, underpinned by conventional family norms. They do so using controversial notions of 'race' and White House scandals but in a humorous manner to preserve an emphasis on empathy and acceptance.

Bo and Barack are both a symptom and mediators of doggy-biopolitics. In summary, doggy-biopolitics is the result of vitalisation of interspecies social contexts where the bodies of humans and dogs are set in motion in disciplined and more loosely defined self-regulative manners. These movements build human–dog relationships that for the moment are believed to optimise biologised human and canine life. This optimisation of life is enhanced by a refurbishment of norms that aim to help individuals to reach their full human – or canine – potential. Bo and Barack's relationship is constructed as reciprocal: in the discourses around Bo, human and animal are even juxtaposed through the anthropomorphic White House images of Bo, PETA's animalisation of Barack and Barack's reference to himself as a 'mutt'. This rhetorical interplay between animal and human suggests that the biopolitical management of human and animal life becomes increasingly intertwined in the form of posthuman biopolitical criteria. Hence, the seductive empowerment of citizens that Bo facilitates goes beyond the 'governing of reputations' by governments (Power, 2007: 128–51) as it reaches out for management of the dog as species, or even as co-citizens (cf. Donaldson and Kymlicka, 2011). This management at breed and species levels has effects down to the level of self-regulation – once again: 'If we can't be true to mutts, then we can't be true to ourselves' (PETA, 2008). Consequently, we argue that Bo and Barack can be understood as products of the current posthuman condition that facilitates the neoliberal outsourcing of biopolitical problems (Evans and Reid, 2014) to manage various species' lives in manifold ways (cf. Chrulew, 2011; Palmer, 2003; Reid, 2014; Rinfret, 2007).

Smith (2003: 196) has pointed out that 'anxieties about domination and freedom' are characteristics of pet keeping in general. The dilemma between dominance and freedom is solved in the imagery surrounding Bo as his misbehaviour is given as much attention and appreciation as his being 'a good boy'. The potential of Bo to resist, and even violently so (cf. Taylor, 2013: 541), may be a reason why cuddly management techniques are so efficient, a principle similarly applied within soft forms of human resource management (see further Barratt, 2003; Townley, 1998). Here, Bo becomes a subject via which cuddly management takes hold, and an object via which Barack becomes cuddly. Bo Obama thus facilitates a display of cuddly management: human–canine relations allow the president, the First Family and White House managers to manifest empathy, a rich emotional life and authenticity – they are true to themselves when they are true to Bo – and consequently there is an assurance that they hold the truest of intentions when it comes to US governing.. This goes hand in hand with Barack's more general neoliberal rhetoric of the cultivation of empathy as an obligatory 'emotional competency' (Pedwell, 2012: 286). Hereby, we also find one important difference from conventional management. In relation between master and dog, a greater amount of more intense emotional expressions and articulations of empathy is possible and sometimes even obligatory, than in relations between manager and employee. It is Bo's significant otherness to use Haraway's term, which allows for seductive management techniques and displays of cuddly management. Obviously, this display may not reach intended goals, as the relation between Bo and Barack can be interpreted as inauthentic (cf. Costas and Fleming, 2009; Fleming and Spicer, 2003) or give rise to multifaceted responses (cf. Fleming and Spicer, 2007). Indeed, 'our subjectivity is open' (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 542) and as Levay (2014: 11) points out, '[i]t is precisely the frustrated ambitions and undesired effects that generate ever new and ingenious attempts to govern', inasmuch as life constantly escapes administration (see also Foucault, 1978).

Importantly, Foucault (1975–1976/2003 : 27–34) warns the scholar against being blinded by seemingly dominant figures and their assumed exercise of power from above. We thus hope that in this article, we have remained sceptical towards the heroism often found in descriptions of leaders (see for example, Crevani et al., 2010) with regard to both Barack and Bo. While sovereign power is normally portrayed as ‘spectacular and possessed by recognized individuals’, we have shown how also ‘regulatory power and disciplinary power’ can operate, not only through (Taylor, 2013: 542), but directly on, a state president. Indeed, the vast amount of imagery around the relationship between Bo and Barack is a testament of how every aspect of life today is included in work, not least presidential work, to secure the reproduction of neoliberal institutions (Fleming, 2014). Even if our focus has not been to unsettle workplace-based subjectification processes, our exposure of biopolitics via Bo does complement OMS scholars’ interest in how trajectories of ‘management’, ‘life’ and ‘self’ are mutually constitutive of each other (see, for example, Grey, 2009; Munro, 2012; Nyberg, 2012; Weiskopf and Munro, 2012), both in relation to human and nonhuman life. Including how human and nonhuman members of organizations are ‘products of subjectivation [...] constituted by and through power relations and forms of knowledge’ (Ahonen et al., 2014: 277).

Our enquiry into canine presidential accessories in present forms of governmental rationalities has its limits. While a visual analysis or a more conventional analysis of texts would have provided other insights into the grammar of the construction of president and First Dog, we have prioritised a mobilisation of the biopolitical framework and a problematisation of Bo’s role in the current diversification of biopolitical criteria for humans and animals (Reid, 2014). By following the paw prints of Bo, indeed a derationalised less ‘disciplined academic practice’ than what is normally reproduced within the field of OMS (Curtis, 2014: 1764), we have both illustrated and denaturalised how the art of government is formed by negotiations around the relationship between pet and president. Implicitly, our method has thus asked for a reconsideration and transformation of our relations to those others (cf. Weiskopf and Willmott, 2013), who in this case are pets. Rather than adding to theoretical discussions about Foucault in OMS (Ahonen et al., 2014; Barratt, 2008; Chan, 2000; Curtis, 2014), we have rooted our contribution in a more empirical approach to expose posthuman biopolitics. By doing so we show the benefits of applying Foucault’s whole oeuvre in analyses within OMS: as our invaluable neighbouring fields have done long before us (see Grey, 2009; Munro, 2012). To empirically link self-regulation to collective optimisations of life is however not an easy task, why we can only hope that the anthropomorphisation of the microphysical escapades of Bo Obama has served as a pedagogic example for our mobilisation and illustration of theory (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). Theorising on doggy-biopolitics and cuddly management by using Bo as an illustration also challenges anthropocentric tendencies in Foucauldian OMS. Our methodological emphasis on the heterogeneous and dynamic reciprocities of pet–human relationships, their accidental nature of ‘haphazard conflict’ (cf. Brown, 1998), can be a way of deploying knowledge tactically (Barratt, 2003, 2008) to show how malleable biopolitical strategies are. Although the present study is limited in scope, we have pointed to potentially fruitful research areas where OMS, animal studies and political science intersect— areas that until now have largely remained unexplored and remain to be resourced by universities or funding agencies

By drawing on a Foucauldian notion of power as productive and relational, we have challenged the historically simplified image of the sovereign master and the subjugated lapdog. Instead of only critiquing human manipulation, control and regulation *over* animal species life (see, for example, Holloway, 2007; Palmer, 2001; Rinfret, 2007), we emphasise the mutual subjugation to biopolitical criteria in the posthuman world and the seductive management techniques, or cuddly management, that are affirmed and disseminated. As Boggs (2013: 173) remind us, such a focus on nonhuman, or



posthuman, biopolitics can work as a way of 'queering biopolitics'. It is an analytical focus that not only exposes how biopolitics attempts to reach a broader spectrum of forms of life, but that also points to the limits of anthropocentric biopolitical rationality. Hence, if we let them, dogs could become the vanguard of creative forms of resistance as they manage to highlight the inherent instability of subjectivities. Importantly, in a time when biopolitical strategies gradually extend their reach posthumanly and help to self-management is becoming increasingly ingenious, it is paramount to acknowledge dogs' abilities to affirm unregimented life and ways of living. Using dogs metaphorically, Foucault (1984/2011: 243) suggested in his last series of lectures at Collège de France that the cynic philosophers of ancient Greece provided the intellectual instruments for leading 'a life which barks' – a way of criticising political power through a form of norm-defying lived critique. Foucault (1984/2011: 186f) pointed out in one of the lectures, just as he had done in his earlier work (see e.g. Foucault, 1970/1993), that the only equivalent to this form of resistance that he could see in his contemporaries was how some artists made their lives into works of art. We end by suggesting that Foucault's metaphorical use of dogs can be understood literally: living and breathing dogs may offer a similarly shameless and dogged, yet faithful, resistance against the regimentation of life.

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