

# Abstract

Dogs played an instrumental role in imperialism and colonialism in South Africa and eventually in the formation of the apartheid nation state and its system of racial oppression. Canines were central weapons and protectors at the colonial and apartheid frontiers. Diverse relations between humans and canines served to index deep-seated, affectively charged notions of race, class, personhood, gender and civility across the social spectrum.

Given their role in the past and their significance in the present, this dissertation takes dogs as an entry point to explore the afterlife of colonialism and apartheid in the country. It is based on sixteen months of fieldwork among people differently situated in the political and racialised history of the country: Among people in a working-class settlement in the Eastern Cape Province who work primarily as domestic workers and who enter middle- and upper-class homes and areas on a daily basis, and among rescue workers and volunteers in Cape Town in the Western Cape Province who 'save' dogs from the city's townships.

The thesis argues that while dogs are mediators through which people make innovative claims to belonging and citizenship as the boundaries of the nation have been redrawn, ultimately, they are sites through which colonial and apartheid relations and configurations of power are reinvented and reconfigured.

Seeking to give nuance to widespread notions in popular and scholarly literature of the dog as 'man's best friend', the dissertation argues for a theoretical focus that moves beyond an emphasis on symmetry and mutuality in the contemporary study of animals to one that foregrounds dogs as boundary markers through which relations of power and hierarchies are reflected and made.