(Dis)possessive Borders, (Dis)possessed Bodies: Race and Property at the Postcolonial European Borders

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There has been a profusion of institutionalized practices of confiscation and destruction of migrants' belongings during European bordering operations conducted by the police and border authorities. Clothes, shoes, money, food, mobile phones, and even water have been among the items seized by authorities, a practice that exposes migrants to multiple risks. That said, despite the pervasiveness of current (dis)possessive methods, scholars have not yet sufficiently theorized the historical and current links between property, race, and borders. This article argues that such (dis)possessive practices at Europe's borders are not simply *another* method of governance that emerges at Europe's borderzones. Rather, (dis)possession is seen here as *central* to the very (post)colonial functioning of the border itself. The argument is, on the one hand, that Europe's borders have been embedded within a (post)colonial and racial capitalist global order predicated upon multifaceted forms of (dis)possession. And, on the other hand, it is claimed that borders themselves have been sites of continual forms of colonial and racial (dis)possession. In so doing, the article shows how (dis)possession has historically allowed Europe to demarcate, reinforce, and police the status of racialized bodies as *less than human* and *property-like*, that is, as bodies available for colonial and capitalist consumption.

Nombreuses ont été les pratiques institutionnalisées de confiscation et de destruction des possessions des migrants lors des opérations européennes aux frontières de la police et des autorités frontalières. Les habits, les chaussures, l'argent, la nourriture, les téléphones portables et même, l'eau comptent parmi les objets confisqués par les autorités, exposant ainsi les migrants à nombre de risques. Cela dit, malgré l'omniprésence des méthodes de (dé)possession actuelles, les chercheurs n'ont pas encore suffisamment théorisé les liens historiques et actuels entre propriété, race et frontières. Cet article affirme que ces pratiques de (dé)possession aux frontières européennes ne constituent pas simplement une nouvelle méthode de gouvernance qui émergerait aux zones frontalières de l'Europe. Ici, la (dé)possession se conçoit davantage d'après son caractère fondamental pour le fonctionnement très (post)colonial de la frontière elle-même. D'un côté, les frontières européennes sont ancrées au sein d'un ordre mondial capitaliste racial et (post)colonial, basé sur des formes de (dé)possession aux multiples facettes. De l'autre, les frontières elles-mêmes seraient encore la scène de formes de (dé)possession raciale et coloniale. Ce faisant, l'article montre que la (dé)possession a historiquement permis à l'Europe de délimiter, de renforcer et de maintenir le statut de corps racialisés, comme étant inférieurs au statut d'humain et

apparentés à un bien ; c'est-à-dire, des corps ouverts à la consommation coloniale et capitaliste.

Las prácticas institucionalizadas de confiscación y destrucción de pertenencias de los migrantes durante las operaciones fronterizas europeas llevadas a cabo por parte de la policía y las autoridades fronterizas han ido proliferando. Entre los artículos incautados por las autoridades podemos encontrar ropa, zapatos, dinero, alimentos, teléfonos móviles e incluso agua. Esta práctica expone a los migrantes a múltiples riesgos. Dicho esto, a pesar de la omnipresencia de los métodos (des)posesivos actuales, los académicos aún no han teorizado suficientemente los vínculos históricos y actuales existentes entre propiedad, raza y fronteras. Este artículo argumenta que dichas prácticas (des)posesivas en las fronteras de Europa no son simplemente otro método de gobernanza que surge en las zonas fronterizas de Europa. Más bien, la (des)posesión se ve aquí como algo de vital importancia para el funcionamiento (post)colonial de la frontera en sí misma. La discusión señala, por un lado, que las fronteras de Europa se han incluido dentro de un orden global capitalista (post)colonial y racial basado en formas polifacéticas de (des)posesión. Y, por otro lado, afirma que las propias fronteras han sido lugares donde han tenido lugar formas continuas de (des)posesión colonial y racial. Al hacer esto, el artículo muestra cómo la (des)posesión ha permitido históricamente a Europa demarcar, reforzar y vigilar el estatus de los entes racializados, tratándolos como «subhumanos» y similares a la propiedad, es decir, como entes disponibles para el consumo colonial y capitalista.

They come at 5 am, circle around your tent and cut it with knives… It has happened to me so many times. They treat us like animals, *not humans*. (Abdul, a 20-year-old migrant from Sudan)[1]

The day had not properly begun when approximately forty police officers gathered in front of Calais Police Station. The date was January 9, 2021, a particularly cold day in northwest France, with thermometers registering sub-zero temperatures. The reunion of police officers could indicate to unfamiliar eyes that something was out of place, that the tranquillity of the city's routine had been somehow disrupted, interrupted. However, that was not the case, at least not in Calais. This congregation of police officers, all of them well equipped with black masks and uniforms—and some extra protection against the cold—carrying an arsenal of batons and firearms, in no way marked an exceptional day. This was but the start of a mere routine operation. Ready for the assignment, police officers, divided into nine vehicles, headed toward their first assignment of the day: the eviction and destruction of a migrant camp located a short distance from the city center of Calais.

Accustomed to this routine, some of the migrants had already fled before the arrival of the police, carrying their tents and belongings to another temporary location. Other migrants who had remained in the camp, either due to fatigue or due to a rare moment of carelessness, were rapidly evicted, while many of their belongings—including tents, mattresses, essential items, bags, and shoes—were confiscated and destroyed by the police. That some of them were sleeping or preparing breakfast when the violent dispersal of migrants disrupted did not seem to matter much. Those black and brown migrants, gathered on such a small surface, living inside makeshift tents and shelters, simply *could not be there*. In fact, they could not be

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[1]YEUNG, PETER. 2021. "'Like torture': Calais police accused of continued migrant rights abuses." *The Guardian.* Accessed May 4, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jan/13/like-torture-calais-police-accused-of-continued-migrant-rights-abuses..

anywhere. The camp, previously inhabited by hundreds of migrants, was once again "empty", with some "frost-covered sleeping bags and jackets"—shortly to be burnt by the authorities—as the only remaining witnesses of that already ordinary episode (Yeung 2021).

The operation described above is part of a policy designed and operationalized by French and British authorities in Calais to handle the "migrant situation" in the city. This new policy has been named by the media and local NGOs as "the zero-anchor point" or "no fixation-point" policy. In sharp contrast to the previous local encampment strategy, what we see in Calais is a policy that not only does not allow migrants to ever fixate in any geographical point, to ever "belong somewhere", as it were, but also systematically separates migrants from their already scant physical belongings by confiscating and/or destroying them.

The generalized use of confiscations and the denial of "land" are not, however, unique to Calais. Quite the contrary, Calais seems to be a radical iteration of a (dis)possessive[2] phenomenon that slices through different migration regimes in Europe. Examples of such practices at Europe's borders are numerous. In Greece, for instance, migrants frequently have their clothes, phones, and IDs confiscated by the police during maritime and land pushbacks (Amnesty International 2021). In the United Kingdom, the Home Office has recently admitted to having a secret policy of seizing and keeping the phones of migrants who cross the English Channel in small boats (Taylor 2022). Similar cases have also been reported in the Balkans, where violent land pushbacks have been accompanied by the seizure and destruction of clothes, shoes, money, and mobile phones by the police and border authorities (Wallis 2020; European Council on Refugees and Exiles 2022). In summary, those cases are but a few examples of the profusion in Europe of what I call here (dis)possessive techniques at the borders: a process that has been predicated on a systematic denial, limitation, or tout-court extraction of a modern experience of possession—however informal—to the migrant.

Why have (dis)possession techniques become so pervasive at the European borders over the past years? And what does the use of (dis)possession tell us about the very nature of borders and bordering? Engaging with and contributing to the flourishing (post)colonial and decolonial literatures on postcolonialism and migration and border studies (see, for instance, Bhambra 2017; Danewid 2017; De Genova 2018; Vigneswaran 2019; El-Enany 2020; Davies et al. 2021; Mayblin and Turner 2021), this article points to the need to contextualize and theorize the current deployment of (dis)possession at Europe's borders. Despite some engagements with (dis)possessive practices by scholars, I contend that authors have not yet sufficiently theorized on what I argue is an intimate and almost symbiotic relationship between the border and (dis)possession. My argument, in summary, is that (dis)possession is not to be seen as simply *another* method of governance that reappears at Europe's borderzones. Rather, (dis)possession is *central* to the very (post)colonial functioning of the border itself, giving continuity to a colonial and racial capitalist global order simultaneously predicated on capital accumulation and the production and policing of racialized hierarchies.

In this article, ergo, I claim that the use of (dis)possessive techniques at Europe's borders today needs to be embedded within a longer history of European colonialism that has relied not only on the extraction of land, resources, and bodies, but also on the (de)humanization, governance, and exploitation of racialized persons. Looking at the historical ways in which the production of "modern white humanness" has been infused with racialized ideas and practices of (dis)possession,

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[2] Throughout the article, I will use the term "(dis)possession" instead of "dispossession". The reason for this is that it allows us to see more clearly what I understand to be a symbiotic imbrication between possessing and dispossessing, which springs from the modern notion of "possession" as an exclusive phenomenon. Every act of possession is always seen here as a concomitant act of dispossession against others. I will, however, expand on the concept in the section "(Dis)possessing the World".

I argue that today's (dis)possessive borders produce, reinforce, and police "global color lines" that are predicated on "who has the right to possess". This is undertaken by continually reinforcing the status of racialized migrants as *ungeographic* and (*dis)possessed* non- or less-than-human bodies. Such bodies, I show, are not only denied a modern experience of possession but are also marked as expendable and exploitable, that is, as bodies available for colonial and capitalist consumption.

The article also briefly looks at Calais's zero-anchor point policy, which operates here as an illustrative case for my theoretical arguments concerning the connections between race, property, and humanness at Europe's (post)colonial borders. Rather than offer a more thorough and detailed analysis of Calais' migration policies, the article seeks to uncover the (dis)possessive bordering work carried out at Calais' borders, situating it in a (post)colonial landscape that continually reaffirms the status of racialized migrants as expendable and exploitable sites of (dis)possession. In Calais, I show that the work of (dis)possession is predicated on a cornucopia of practices that radically limit, deny, and/or extract the experience of possession, continually separating racialized migrants from space and their material belongings. This interpretive work is undertaken by a qualitative text analysis of NGO, governmental, institutional, and media reports, as well as secondary literature on the case.

The first section engages with the literature on critical migration and border studies. Here I explain how my arguments rely and build upon such literatures, all the while pointing to the need to theorize the relationship between borders and (dis)possession. In the second section, I investigate the historical relationship between possession, race, and subjectivity under colonialism. I argue here that (dis)possession has been a central mechanism to produce racial hierarchies, marking the racialized body as a less-than-human body that was not only made "unable to possess" but also continually transformed into property itself. I situate this process within a broader colonial project of resource extraction and capital accumulation. The third section theorizes the intimate and symbiotic relationship between bordering, colonialism, and racial forms of (dis)possession, focusing specifically on Europe's borders. I then briefly look at Calais's zero-anchor point policy as an illustrative case for my theoretical points, focusing on how bordering is operated through (dis)possessive techniques of governance that continually limit, deny, or extract the migrant's experience of possession.

Borders, Racialized Life/Death Hierarchies, and Colonial Afterlives

It is hard to deny that the advent of the so-called European migrant "crisis" brought with itself a stark interest in issues connected with migration, border control, and mobility. Within this context, the study of Europe's borders has become central to critical scholarship. Controversial policies such as the "hotspot approach" (Tazzioli and Garelli 2020; Topak 2020), the construction of physical walls (Stümer 2019), the outsourcing of border controls within and outside Europe (Spathopoulou, Pauliina Kallio, and Hakli 2021); unjustified imprisonments (De Genova 2018; Axster et al. 2021), and the use of biometric technologies to control migrant movement (Dijstelbloem and Meier 2011), have been extensively addressed by such scholarship. Authors have been particularly interested in examining the ways in which Europe's border produces racialized hierarchies of life between the migrant and Europe as well as the state practices of violence, policing, and exploitation that they enable.

It is therefore in this European violent landscape that bordering practices of (dis)possession seem to "spring up". As I have mentioned, not only are migrants denied possession over space or land, but their very belongings—including clothes, shoes, mobile phones, IDs, tents, etc.—have also become the very targets of border operations, being continually confiscated, and destroyed by authorities. This movement at the borderzones, however, is not isolated but part of a major (dis)possessive

phenomenon in Europe's migration regimes steeped in legalized forms of confiscation by the state. Note, for instance, Denmark's decision in 2016 that allows police to search asylum seekers and confiscate cash and valuables in order to "compensate" the state for the costs of their migration policies (Crouch and Kingsley 2016). Similar laws have also been passed in countries like Switzerland—where authorities have been allowed to confiscate asylum seekers' assets for a period of 20 years—the Netherlands, and the state of Bavaria in Germany, where cash and valuables can be seized if worth more than 750 euros (Coleman 2016). That said, although (dis)possessive methods seem to become more and more entwined with the very practice of bordering itself, there still seems to be room in the literature to theorize the relationship between (dis)possession and border.

A possible reading of (dis)possession within current critical migration and border studies, however, could be through a so-called (bio)political approach. The profusion of (dis)possessive approaches, in other words, could be read as embedded within a wider biopolitical landscape that has been abundantly addressed by critical scholars. Inspired by Michel Foucault's and Giorgio Agamben's theorizations of biopolitics, the so-called biopolitical literature has been particularly centered around the production of "divisions and exclusions that are fostered between "host populations", whose life and wealth should be enhanced, and the racialized refugees who, from a state-based perspective, would threaten the well-being of the former" (Aradau and Tazzioli 2020, 204). Its authors have focused not only on the production of these lines, but also on how they continually undergird migration regimes writ large, including humanitarian policies, detention strategies, and so forth. That is, how these practices substantiate the lines between those who the sovereign power should "make live" and those who should be "let to die" (Topak 2014; Tazzioli 2021).

A biopolitical framework, thus, would push us to look at (dis)possession as immersed in a regime of subjectivity that continually produces and polices hierarchies between life/death, human/non-human, deserving/undeserving, belonging/non-belonging, and so forth. (Dis)possession, in this sense, could be read as part of the state apparatus of governance that produces some populations as "outside" the body politic of the state. By having their "right" to possess denied or extracted, migrants would simply be "excluded" from the zone of normalcy of the state wherein "property rights" are guaranteed and indeed protected. What is more, the effects of (dis)possession on migrants' lives could be easily legible as part of the biopolitical process of "letting die" that the state imposes on undesirable populations (Koros 2021). (Dis)possessive tactics, after all, continually submit migrants to extreme risk, whether by leaving them incommunicable—in the case of mobile phone confiscations—or simply by exposing them to the dangers of weather, hunger, etc.

That said, although a biopolitical approach would rightly push us to trace the process of exclusion of the migrant from the zone of "normalcy" of the state and their exposure to death, the way this process of "othering" is presented not infrequently decontextualizes it from its colonial and racial capitalist histories (see Axster et al. 2021). The risk here, more circumspectly put, would be to obfuscate (dis)possession's historical and current links with colonialism. As authors like Ida Danewid (2017, 1684) convincingly suggest, the often-decontextualized focus on notions of othering, bare life, and strangeness in such literature contributes "to an ideological formation that erases history and undoes the 'umbilical cord' that links Europe and the migrants who are trying to enter the continent". For postcolonial scholars, the production and policing of racialized hierarchies of life at the borders is not simply an issue internal to "a sovereignty logic". This process is embedded within a history of European colonial and racial mastery that has systematically relied on a process of dehumanization and exploitation of racialized populations (Isakjee et al. 2020).

The task within such scholarship, therefore, is to bring to the fore the intimacies between forms of violence and exclusion at the borders and the "histories of exploitation, domination and accumulation which underpinned European and then US empires" (Mayblin and Turner 2021, 67). Authors will claim that the dehumanization of the migrant at the borders is not simply seen as an experience connected to the biopolitical logic of sovereignty but instead a form of reproduction and reinforcement of colonial and racial capitalist structures of exploitation. Europe's borders are thus to be construed as a space that has been from its very inception intimately embedded within a systematic colonial and postcolonial process of extraction and exploitation of racialized peoples (Mayblin and Turner 2021, 74).

The question that remains is: How then can we situate the (dis)possessive methods deployed at European borders against racialized migrants within Europe's long colonial history? More than that, how can we theorize the relationship between border, property, and race within a (post)colonial and racial capitalist global order? After all, although the postcolonial literature pushes us to reflect upon the (post)colonial role of borders in policing and preserving racial hierarchies and global inequalities, there still seems to be space for a deeper theorization of the relationship between borders, property, and racial hierarchies. And it is here that I place the contribution of this article. It, on the one hand, offers a theorization of (dis)possession as a (post)colonial practice that *produces* and *polices* racial hierarchies based on "who has the right to possess". And, on the other hand, the article claims that the use of (dis)possession at Europe's borders is not only *another* governing strategy that produces racialized life/death and human/nonhuman divides. (Dis)possession and borders have always been intimately entwined, sustaining and reinforcing each other. This springs from the fact that borders have always been embedded within a wider colonial and racial capitalist system of theft, plunder, and capital accumulation that has continually operated through widespread forms of (dis)possession of racialized people's lands, resources, and bodies (Robinson 2000; Melamed 2015).

In the subsequent section, I engage with authors, such as Brenna Bhandar (2018), Robert Nichols (2020), Katharine McKittrick (2006), Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015), Rinaldo Walcott (2021), and others, who have reflected on the historical intimacies among (dis)possession, property, and race. In so doing, I explain more concisely what I mean by (dis)possession; its central role in the production of long-standing inequalities; and its connections with the production and policing of colonial and racialized regimes of subjectivity. (Dis)possession, I show, has been embedded within a colonial and racialized regime of ownership that has continually constructed racialized communities as "dispossessed" and "ungeographic" less-than-human bodies in partial or full opposition to a colonial, white, and human possessive subjectivity.

(Dis)possessing the World

> You cannot dominate without seeking to possess the dominated (Moreton-Robinson 2015, XXIV).

(Dis)possession, as David Harvey (2003) shrewdly points out, is not an accident in the history of capitalism, but is indeed crucial for its reproduction. For the author, the multifaceted forms of (dis)possession within neoliberalism should be seen as indicative that capitalism constantly requires and produces its own "other", an "outsider" that can be continually (dis)possessed and ensure the system's continuous drive for capital accumulation (Harvey 2003, 141). And here it is important to notice how "racialized people" have continually offered capitalism, this "other" upon which capital accumulation has relied. Their land, resources, and bodies, after all, have been the raw material for the making and continuation

of such a system (Robinson 2000). For this racial and colonial system has been perennially predicated on the construction of racialized people as sites of (dis)possession, a process based on their exclusion of a white European understanding of humanness that is intimately entwined with the idea of possessing.

Before I start delving into the historical uses of (dis)possession and its effects in terms of race, subjectivity, and capital accumulation, however, it is indispensable to define what the term means here. (Dis)possession is conceptualized here as concomitantly a *set of practices* and a *structural phenomenon* predicated on the denial, limitation, and/or extraction of what I call here a *modern experience of possession.* In light of this definition, it becomes clear that one cannot address property and possession writ large without—tacitly or not—conjuring dispossession. Possession and dispossession, after all, are not antithetical, but intimately and perhaps inevitably intertwined. As Robert Nichols (Nichols 2020) argues, the very logic of "possession" is based on exclusion, as one can only possess something by *not* allowing someone else to possess it. (Dis)possession, in this sense, has not come "after" the establishment of notions of property and possession, it has been the very mechanism behind their making (Nichols 2020, 17). It is therefore not hard to understand why (dis)possession would be so central to a colonial system whose expansion was predicated on the very commodification of the world. A system that, as I show below, has operated through a continual transformation of land, nature, and (racialized) bodies into "things" to be possessed and extracted.

The generalized (dis)possessive process initiated by colonialism not only provided Europe with land and resources, but it also continually produced racialized peoples as "(dis)possessed subjectivities". As Brenna Bhandar (2018, 4) argues, "[M]odernity ushered in a relationship between ownership and subjectivity, wherein the latter was defined through and on the basis of one capacity to appropriate." The right to possess land, things, and one's own personhood, in other words, becomes intimately connected with one's very notion of humanness. To be "human" and to be "able to possess" become almost synonymous. Within this system, the colonial power to control, deny, and even appropriate racialized peoples' access to this experience of possession becomes a tool to grant or remove the racialized Other from the category of "humanness", in a process that has continually legitimated their exploitation.

This phenomenon is particularly noticeable when one analyses the racialized nexus between land, possession, and belongingness. The process of making and belonging to space during colonialism, after all, was not a straightforward process available to everyone. It was, on the contrary, centered around a continual and racialized/ing process of "ungeographicalization" of colonized peoples (McKittrick 2013) that combined strategies of (dis)possession and detachment from land. This project of spatial domination, Katharine McKittrick (2006, 3) argues, was steeped in a logic of profound detachment of the colonized from space, in which their bodies were ceaselessly marked as "ungeographic" that is, unable to "fixate" anywhere and, hence, continually displaced. The importance of the idea of "possession" for this process, however, is not to be overlooked. After all, the production of colonized persons as "ungeographic" was, among other things, based on the idea that the colonized body was not only not allowed but also indeed unable to "possess" land. In a colonial world wherein "possessing land" was understood as an indispensable step for one to "belong to land" (Moreton-Robinson 2015), not being recognized as the righteous owners of land continually marked colonized communities as "out-of-place".

Coarsely speaking, this process of detachment of the colonized from the land happened in two main ways. One version *authorized* the continuous presence of colonized peoples—especially in settler-colonial settings—in certain areas without, however, recognizing their full "possession" over the territory. This policy operated on the basis of a hierarchical distinction between the idea of dominion and

occupancy (Wolfe 2016). Whilst indigenous communities were "allowed" to occupy and use a determined territory, "ultimate title, or dominion, vested in the European sovereign" (Wolfe 2016, 191). As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015, 5) reminds us, this process usually relied on the fiction of "terra nullius", that is, that the land occupied by native populations, in reality, did not belong to anyone—which, in the colonial logic also meant that no one "belonged" to that land either. According to her, the colonizer's sense of belonging in settler-colonial lands derived from a notion of "righteous" ownership over land that, in turn, relied on the constant (dis)possession of natives of the land. In such a scheme, the idea that settler-colonizers were the ones who "rightfully" possessed the land, served as the basis of a sense of "belongingness" to land that, ultimately, excluded indigenous communities. In short, the idea was that because the land *belonged* to them, they also *belonged* to that land. Indigenous communities, on the other hand, for having been deprived of any sense of possession over land, were incapable of fully belonging, neither as *possessing the land* nor as *fully belonging* to that land.

Another version of such politics was centered around the captivity and enslavement of especially Black people in the Americas. In this process, the Black enslaved were, on the one hand, refused any form of ownership over land, and on the other, exposed to a continual process of erasure of their sense of place. In such a process, neither ownership nor occupation was seen as a viable form of relationship between the Black body and its circumambient. This process, not surprisingly, had to do with the very production of "Blackness" itself as a property at the hands of colonialism, that is, a site continually exposed to (dis)possession and commodification. As McKittrick (2006, 4) argues:

> Black self-possession and self-entitlement cannot quite be read as feasible geographic processes in the terms laid out by traditional geographies because the ties between the body and the landscape around these bodies (the traces of history) refuse such a reading, and arguably translate black geographies as homogenous sites of (dis)possession.

Colonialism's project of spatial domination, therefore, was predicated not simply on "land appropriation", but also on a continuous and profound process of ungeographicalization of racialized peoples. In such a world, racialized populations not only were excluded from certain spaces, but were also denied the very possibility of possessing and, thereby, "fully belonging" somewhere. Their bodies were incessantly produced as sites of geographical (dis)possession, and their frail and almost inexistent sense of "territorial grounding" was a mere function of the economic needs of the colonial system. Such process of "ungeographicalization" of racialized communities during colonialism, it is noteworthy, generates a "legacy of racial (dis)possession (that) underwrites how we have come to know space and place" and that continually marks the racialized body as ungeographic (McKittrick 2006, 4).

What is more, the becoming "ungeographic" of the racialized body was contiguous to what Robert Nichols calls a "metaphysical revolution" concerning the status of the land, that is, its colonial transformation into "property" (Nichols 2020, 48). In other words, land was produced as "property" *at the same time that* indigenous and black populations were deemed incapable of "possessing" land. The integration of commodification of land and denial of land as property to colonized and racialized populations was central to the crystallization of a nascent capitalist system that was "grounded in the appropriation and monopolization of the productive powers of the natural world"(Nichols 2020, 103). This double movement, after all, not only commodified space itself but also concomitantly guaranteed its "monopolist" use by the colonizers, the only ones to have full "property rights" over it.

Land possession, nonetheless, is not the only factor that matters here. For land ownership is, I argue, only a fraction of a more fundamental politics that continually manufactured a world in which the very idea of possession was racialized. This is here seen as part of an overarching production of a European white modern

subject, embodied in the idea of "the human", whose very emergence was established through a concomitant process of *possessing the world through dispossessing racialized Others.* In this modern colonial world, *real possession* always lay in the hands of the colonizers, who could choose when and where to intervene in order to effect this (dis)possession. Such a process was operated through a perennial politics of colonial (dis)possession centered around a multi-faceted denial, extraction, or limitation of the experience of possession to racialized bodies. These practices were fundamental to produce racialized subjectivities as essentially removed from ideas of ownership, whether over land, objects, nature, or even their own bodies. Racialized subjectivities, in such a world, were produced as beings without a "full" sense of "belonging", both in the sense of not properly belonging anywhere and in the sense of being denied the experience of having belongings.

To make sense of the historical propinquity between (dis)possession and the racialized subjectivity of the colonized, thus, goes beyond saying that White (or human) property was predicated on the appropriation of the native's lands and on the enslavement of Africans as Cheryl I. Harris (1993) shrewdly points out. It also involves seeing this process of colonial and racialized (dis)possession as a form of continually producing the colonized as a possessed subjectivity or a property tout-court. In other words, as Moreton-Robinson (2015, XX) points out, colonialism creates an order in which there is a profound congruency between "becoming dispossessed" and "becoming possessed". Slavery, once again, symbolizes effectively this process. After all, the enslaved was before anything a (dis)possessed subjectivity that, unable to possess its own personhood, becomes itself a property or a commodity. A being who, by being denied the experience of self-possession that defines the modern liberal individual (Macpherson, 1962), ends up becoming itself property, possessed (Walcott 2021). (Dis)possession, to sum up, was central to the production of what Sylvia Wynter (2003) conceptualizes as the colonial white and bourgeois "human".

(Dis)possession, in this sense, has been inscribed on the very "body, self, or person" (Nichols 2020, 140) of racialized people. It has not infrequently defined their very subjectivities. As Brenna Bhandar (2018, 10) reminds us, the use of "racial regimes of ownership" by colonial powers was an essential aspect of colonialism and fundamental to manipulate and mold racialized people's subjectivities in conformity with the colonizers' interests. One example of this process is the selective inclusion of black enslaved into a grammar of "self-possessed and possessing" humans when the issue was criminal agency (Hartman 1997). Although the enslaved were themselves seen as property, beings who had no "personhood rights" and thus no "legal subjecthood", this could be suspended in order to render them punishable for crimes, including for "stealing". Their inclusion in the "system", in other words, was itself a process of alienation, as if their "possession over their personhoods" were only affirmed at the very moment in which it was appropriated.

To conclude, it is important to clarify that my arguments here are both historical and conceptual, in that (dis)possession is seen as simultaneously essential for the historical production of racial hierarchies and global inequalities *and* as a practice that is, in modernity, deeply associated with the production and policing of "humanness". (Dis)possession has been—and still is—central to defining and policing the boundaries between a modern white possessive human and its racialized others. Possessing the world, possessing one's body, and possessing racialized bodies, all seemed to combine in undergirding a colonial and racial capitalist system steeped in a continuous process of (dis)possession of racialized Others. A world of "self-possessed possessing" modern humans that "rest[ed] on constructing a category of non-owning, non-human human beings" (Epstein 2021, 211).

(Dis)possessive Borders?

The question that remains is how can we then make sense of the emergence of overt (dis)possessive techniques at Europe's borders today? Is it possible to uncover any continuity between historical forms of colonial and racial (dis)possession and Europe's current borders? For us to address this, it is central to establish, once again, that borders themselves are not simply a product of inside/outside sovereign anxieties. The historical formation of border technologies and the legitimation of violent forms of bordering are themselves connected to a desire to regulate and police colonial migration within settler-colonial states and in the imperial metropoles (Mongia 2018, 143). It is in this sense that borders should be understood as "formed by and central to the function of colonial and imperial projects" (Mayblin and Turner 2021, 71). A space whose very existence has been connected with the preservation of colonial and racial global hierarchies.

Borders, therefore, have operated under a wider colonial and racial capitalist global order predicated upon continuous and, to some extent, structural forms of (dis)possession against racialized populations. It is not a coincidence, for instance, that in Europe's so-called "migrant crisis", most migrants come from Global South countries and areas that have been particularly affected by European colonization (De Genova 2018). Nor it is by chance that acts of plunder, theft, military interventions, resource extraction, land grabbing, and structural adjustment programs are frequently the very reasons why migrants are forced to leave their homes in the first place. Historical forms of (dis)possession, ungeographicalization, and colonial accumulation, after all, have been continually behind the decision of Global South migrants to look for refuge in Europe (Walia 2013). European borders are, in this sense, a space that often seeks to regulate the very historical and current effects of colonial and racial forms of (dis)possession, barring Global South populations from accessing the spaces that benefit from imperial forms of capital accumulation (Harvey 2003).

And it is here that one must situate the work of borders, as another tool in a global order predicated on colonial and racial forms of (dis)possession. Bordering dynamics, after all, emerge themselves as part of a colonial and overarching process of affirmation of possession over land, which, as I have shown, has been directly connected with the idea of "belonging". The creation of internal borders in settler colonies and in the metropole has frequently operated within racial registers, institutionalizing a sense of land as an exclusive property of colonizers and/or white communities who could choose how and when to incorporate racialized bodies (Moreton-Robinson 2015). What is more, it is worth noting that by barring racialized and (dis)possessed populations from accessing spaces in the metropole or in the settler colonies that benefited from exploitation, borders have been central tools to preserve global colonial inequalities that resulted from historical forms of colonial (dis)possession (Bhambra 2017). A process that, as I have argued in the previous section, also contributes to the reaffirmation and policing of racialized bodies' (dis)possessed subjectivities.

The (dis)possessive work of borders has also to do with one of its main functions, that is, to determine who is allowed to possess "subject rights". After all, by denying one, the status of "subject" and even "humanness" (see Niang 2020; Squire 2020), borders have also historically contributed to other forms of racialized (dis)possession internally. Note, for instance, how the reliance on notions of "illegal" and "undeserving" migrants has been important to bar racialized populations from accessing labor rights, formal and informal forms of housing, education, and so forth. This phenomenon has historically rendered racialized "illegal" migrants more vulnerable to forms of economic exploitation and marginalization (Bird and Schmid 2021, 8), not to say state and civil forms of violence, discrimination, and arbitrary detentions (Axster et al. 2021). This emanates, one might say, from the very

"nature" of borders, which have been from their very inception concerned with the control of the movement of racialized laborers, guaranteeing the presence of cheap and exploitable force whenever and wherever needed (Mayblin and Turner 2021). Conditioning their inclusion to their very alienation and exploitation, borders have not only systematically denied the racialized body the experience of "modern subjecthood" (Niang 2020; Squire 2020), but also made reaffirmed and policed the very status of racialized populations as expendable and exploitable "property-like" sites of (dis)possession.

Borders, in this sense, need to be contextualized within a wider "colonial and racial matrix of capitalist accumulation of land (conquest and settlement), exploitation of labour (slavery, indentured labour, forced migration) and appropriation of resources" (Chakravartty and Silva 2012, 365). And it is within this structure that the current and indeed more overt use of (dis)possessive tactics European border should be understood. As reports have consistently demonstrated, there seems to be a systematic process of confiscation and/or destruction of migrants' items—including but not limited to mobile phones, blankets, clothes, food, water, and IDs—by Border authorities, whether in the land or the sea. This state-led practice of (dis)possession against racialized migrants has been consistently "stripping people out of land, resources, and their means of livelihood and forcing them to reposition, reorder, or relocate their lives and relationships" (Çaglar and Schiller 2018, 19).

(Dis)possession, I argue, should be understood as a central way of igniting and securing racialized hierarchies at the borders. It does so by reinforcing and securing Europe's colonial status of possessiveness, whiteness, and, of course "humanness", all the while marking the migrants' bodies as ungeographic, dispossessed. A method that concomitantly reinforces the status of racialized migrants as a disposable and "property-like" body that is available to colonial and capitalist forms of exploitation, at the same time, it actively targets the migrants' capacity to fight and resist locally. This, however, as I have mentioned earlier, needs to be thought of not as a moment of exceptionality, but as embedded within a much wider colonial and racial (dis)possessive system of theft, land grabbing, plunder, and capital accumulation. A practice that radically marks the racialized body as "expendable" and "exploitable", that is, a less-than-human body available for capitalist consumption or, if need be, elimination.

Calais, (Dis)possession, and the Zero-Anchor Point Policy

> The police came this morning and woke us up by banging on the tents. The children started to cry because they were so scared but the police continued. Once we got out of the tents, they destroyed them with knives. (Testimony given by a family living in Grande-Synthe. Human Rights Observers—HRO 2020, 22)

Calais has been notoriously connected to the so-called European migrant crisis over the past decade. A common destiny for those who aimed at reaching the United Kingdom, Calais has seen the arrival of thousands and thousands of migrants, coming especially from countries such as Afghanistan, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and many other countries from the Global South (Durie 2021). Although the city is not what one would call a point of entry for migrants, the fact that it both "shares" borders with the United Kingdom through the Eurotunnel and is indeed placed at a short sailing distance from British lands makes Calais an important destiny for those who want to reach the United Kingdom. Calais attracted special international attention during the crisis because it housed, between the beginning of 2015 and October 2016, one of the biggest and most infamous migrant camps in Europe, namely, the Jungle (Mould 2017). The camp became a symbol of the European hostile and inhumane treatment of migrants, due to the generalized

police violence and the precarious conditions offered to migrants, including poor sanitation, little medical assistance, and food insecurity. The handling of the migrant "situation" through the Jungle, nonetheless, reaches an end in October 2016, when authorities decide to implement what has been known as the "zero-anchor point policy" or "no-fixation point policy".

The sometimes called "zero-anchor point policy" or "no-fixation point policy", in sharp contrast to the encampment strategies previously carried out in Calais, points to a form of governance on the borderzone based on a continuous denial, limitation, and extraction of this modern experience of "possession" from the migrant. This policy is carried out locally by police and border authorities with the acquiescence of the judicial and local executive powers. Its design and subsequent implementation, however, have the financial and operational support of the French and British states (Agier 2018). The zero-anchor point policy has especially targeted, on the one hand, the migrant's ability to occupy and attach themselves to land and, on the other, the migrant's possession of their own belongings. This has been undertaken through a continual and state-led process of denial, limitation, and expropriation of the experience of possession—however informal and precarious that might be.

The implementation of this politics has been steeped in practices such as routine evictions, the making of "liveable" areas inaccessible or simply inhospitable, confiscation or destruction of migrants' belongings, food bans, and so forth. The 2020 numbers of these operations in Calais give us the dimension of the situation. According to Human Rights Observers (HRO) (2020, 8), in 2020, there were in Calais at least 967 evictions of informal settlements. During these evictions, at least 2,816 tents and tarps, 802 sleeping bags and blankets, 88 mattresses, and 54 other items of furniture were seized. This policy's consequences for migrants are, unsurprisingly, dire, in terms of both physical and mental health. Since migrants are continually on the move, they struggle to have access to essential services offered by NGOs, a situation that has been aggravated due to the sequential food bans implemented by local authorities (Gentleman 2017). Means of communication, including telephone recharging and Internet access, have also become rarer, contributing to the isolation of migrants from both their families and/or other personal connections. What is more, because evictions can take place at any time and night operations have become more common over the past years, migrants live in a continual state of fear, which affects in special their capacity to sleep properly (Keen 2021).

This section proposes to look at the zero-anchor point policy as an illustrative case study, focusing especially on the use of (dis)possession as a mechanism to enforce racial hierarchies at the border through the denial, limitation, or extraction of the experience of possession. A politics that also drastically limits local possibilities of migrant resistance and solidarity. The reason why I chose Calais is because of the "radicalness" of its (dis)possessive techniques, which allows us to see more clearly the (dis)possessive work of the state at the borders. Such (dis)possessive phenomenon takes two main forms. On the one hand, the form of "ungeographicalization"—the detachment of the migrant from space—and, on the other hand, the institutionalized theft and destruction of migrants' belongings during operations. To do so, I look at NGO and government reports, secondary literature, as well as at international and local media coverage of the migrant "situation" in Calais, foregrounding both the methods deployed by authorities against the migrants and the consequences thereof.

Between Ungeographicalization and Confiscations

The zero-anchor point policy in Calais, not surprisingly, derives its very name from a very unique focus on land. In lieu of making use of more common encampment strategies, this policy insists on using an approach that relies not on the

geographical exclusion of the migrant but on its very ungeographicalization. Migrants, after all, are not simply directed to another area, another migrant camp. Their evictions, in other words, do not represent a moment of "closure" that will redirect them to a secluded area wherein migrants should remain. Migrants are endlessly dispersed, put in motion; denied the possibility of "remaining", "possessing", or "belonging" somewhere, even if for a short period of time. There is no promised space, no foreseeable "grounded future". As HRO (2020, 5) elucidates, "the mechanical nature of eviction operations is such that the State evicts people from their living spaces on a daily basis, regardless of severe weather or even a global pandemic".

Evictions in Calais also have received the active support of the French judicial system, which has been continually instrumentalized against the migrants. The *ordonnance sur requete* (or order on request) procedure, for instance, only requires that the *owners* of the land present their request to the judge for the eviction to be authorized. The migrants, the ones who are effectively and presently occupying the land, are completely disregarded during judicial proceedings, and not seen as bearers of any rights. Perhaps more tellingly, migrants are not even given the right to present their defense in court in those situations, which goes starkly against the French principle of adversarial proceedings. This indifference toward adversarial proceedings happens every time the informal settlements are considered substandard; when the occupation is an obstacle to future construction work; or when the persons living in the land are deemed to be not "identifiable" (Human Rights Watch 2021). In Calais, one of the most common practices amongst authorities to avoid a "fairer" legal process is to simply treat migrants as if they could not be identifiable. The process of demanding their identities is often undertaken verbally and in French, and the "expected" miscommunication leads authorities to simply consider migrants as "non-identifiable" (Maurice 2022). This makes the whole operation "faster" and perversely more "efficient", insofar as it makes sure migrants will not be able to access the judicial system to defend themselves.

If the judicial system operates by somewhat removing the possibility of the migrants presenting their cases in court, then the Police seem to operate through a generalized and indeed "mobile" use of violence (Human Rights Watch 2021). Police violence—both verbal and physical—in Calais has also become "on the move", incessantly enforcing and ensuring that migrants cannot attach to the land and that they cannot, in other words, secure a piece of soil whereupon they can tranquilly remain. The act of settling in, of staying together in a community, of simply sharing a small piece of land with other migrants, is brutally combatted, no matter *where* or *when.* Such a process ignites a haunting violence in the Calais borderzone—that can be actualized anywhere and anytime—whose existence undergirds a continual and incessant process of dispersion of the migrant. The testimonies below help us see in more detail how violence has become ingrained in Calais, continuously setting migrants on the move (Human Rights Watch 2021, 61).

> You can't even walk in peace. The CRS (name of the local police) repeatedly accelerate when they see us walking along the road, as if wanting to hit us with their cans. They make sure that we are in a constant state of fear, never at peace, and always afraid for our life. (Testimony by a displaced person in Calais, HRO 2020, 34)

> For no reason, we didn't do anything, we're just walking and all of a sudden they come, they block us, they gas us and they hit us. (Testimony by a displaced person in Calais HRO 2021, 34)

The process of ungeographicalization of the migrants in Calais also relies on two other mechanisms. On the one hand, the continual erection of barbed wires, fences, and even the deforestation of areas that could potentially become migrant camps (Human Rights Observers—HRO 2020, 4). And on the other, the targeting of

structures of support offered by NGOs and citizens (Care4Calais 2022). The former acts by eliminating potential temporary locations wherein migrants could settle, limiting the number of liveable areas in Calais. The aim here is, quite simply, to leave fewer and fewer options available to migrants. Whereas the latter operates by targeting specific locations for the distribution of food, clothes, medicine, and hygiene items by NGOs, especially in the city center. This has been undertaken both through the passing of food bans, police forms of intimidation against NGO volunteers, and even through the placing of large stones at locals where food distribution takes place (Le Figaro 2022). The continual shutting of these places by local authorities—usually justified through vague ideas of combatting criminality and, more recently, Covid (Préfet du Pas-de-Calais 2020)—contributes to the continual displacement of migrants to different points of the city in order to look for essential items.

What I have thus far called the ungeographicalization of the migrant in Calais, therefore, relies upon five main practices. Continual and automatic evictions; the Judicial System's disregard of the migrants as subjects in land disputes; generalized violence; the elimination of liveable areas; and the continual moving or indeed shutting of points of food and essential items distribution. This process, thus, not only puts migrants in an incessant "en route" mode but also drastically reduces the number of areas available for settling. The combination of these methods, I argue, somewhat transcends common ideas of geographical *exclusion.* It indeed contributes to a perennial and profound ungrounding of migrants in Calais, in a process that continually renders their bodies "ungeographic". Detaching migrants from space itself, this is a practice that controls not only the migrant's capacity to ground or attach to the land but also their capacity to have a more stable hold of this modern experience of "possession"—however informal, precarious, and limited—of land. What is more, the use of endless dispersion means that there is a drastic reduction in the number of spaces for congregation and socialization amongst migrants, affecting local possibilities of resistance and solidarity. After all, being always on the move means that social interaction is briefer and uncertain (Aradau and Tazzioli 2020).

The second axis of this politics, as I have suggested, can be characterized by the continual seizing of migrants' belongings by the police, including—but not limited to—water, food, tents, blankets, mattresses, mobile phones, identity documents, and even shoes. When seized and stored by authorities, the items are often deposited in a "close and humid container, the condensation damaging the belongings and making the air unbreathable in the container" (HRO 2020, 21). The process of finding and claiming these items, nonetheless, is arduous and most likely useless for migrants, who are often unable to recover their belongings or simply happen to find their items to be damaged or emptied (HRO 2020, 21). This is not, however, the only method used by the authorities. Reports suggest that, during the process of eviction, agents frequently start a fire to ensure that whatever is left in the living site is destroyed. Food and water are not spared by the police and are not infrequently burnt along with blankets and makeshift shelters (HRO 2020, 20). In some cases, the police even force migrants to destroy their own tents (HRO 2020, 15).

Not surprisingly, police authorities target special items that are deemed "essential" for survival by migrants. Perishable items such as food and water bottles—even if in a good state—are often burned or disposed of by cleaning companies that accompany police forces during evictions (Cherubini 2021). Tents, mattresses, bags, mobile phones, etc. tend to be stored more often. However, the destruction—especially with the use of knives—or disposal of such items is becoming more and more frequent over time, revealing the brutality of a policy that is overtly aimed at making Calais "inhospitable" for migrants (Fort 2021). The generalized process of confiscation and destruction of migrants' belongings, after all, not only endangers their lives through the confiscation of essential items such as food, water, medicine,

shelter, and mobile phones, but also creates a scenario in which migrants are always more concerned with more pressing issues such as "where to sleep" and "what to eat", making organized resistance something of secondary importance.

The state-led stealing of migrants' belongings, in this sense, continually extracts from the migrant the possibility of "holding possession" of their belongings, marking their bodies as concomitantly "unable to possess", and "available for (dis)possession". The constant fear that their objects will be taken, damaged, or destroyed by the state illustrates the ways in which "property rights" or, quite simply, the "right to possess" are simply disregarded during the state encounters with migrants. As if the possessiveness that modernity promised to its main "subject"—the "human"—could simply be denied, taken, or extracted from the racialized migrant.

This is not to say, nonetheless, that resistance does not exist in Calais. To say that migrants are pushed toward a certain (dis)possessed nonhuman identity is not to suggest that this process is indeed ever finalized. Practices of ungeographicalization and theft, after all, are never able to avoid once and for all new movements of "grounding" or "possessing" on the part of the migrant. The migrant's body remains somewhat in place even if out of place. It occupies and claims, even if for an insignificant moment, a place, a ground, a piece of land. To be on the way, dispersed, mobile, ungrounded, after all, does not entirely preclude moments of grounding, belonging, or possessing land. And, by the same token, to be continually exposed to (dis)possession does not preclude once and for all that the migrant finds subterfuges to claim and reclaim objects and its own body, to possess and repossess. The migrant, more circumspectly put, resists by continually blurring the human/nonhuman lines, that is, by always being a "settler" and a possessor in potential, as it were.

Calais, (Dis)possession, and the Making of Global Color Lines

Two important lessons, thus, can be taken from Calais. The first one revolves around the current importance and indeed centrality of tactics of (dis)possession to Europe's migration regimes. What happens in Calais, after all, is only part of a broader process of (dis)possession that is in place in Europe, where racialized migrants are continually subjected to state-led practices of confiscation and displacement. Focusing on Calais, one can witness on a smaller scale the ways in which the state continually participates in the production of racialized migrants as concomitant "ungeographic" and "(dis)possessed", in a process that continually denies to them the "possessiveness" that underlies modern fictions of humanness. Calais, in this sense, becomes a radical symbol for a more generalized process whereby color lines are enforced and policed *through (dis)possession*. More importantly, however, Calais' use of (dis)possession also pushes us to reflect on the very role of Europe's borders within a global (post)colonial and racial capitalist order that systematically marks racialized communities as ungeographic and (dis)possessed subjectivities. The pervasiveness of (dis)possession in Europe is, after all, neither circumstantial nor unique to Europe's migration landscape. As I have argued, Europe's borders themselves are already immersed in a much wider system of theft, plunder, and accumulation that has continually structured Europe's colonial rule.

Conclusion

This article has argued that there is a deep and indeed symbiotic connection between borders and (dis)possession that can be traced to colonial and racial capitalist processes of (de)humanization and exploitation. Borders, I have argued, have not only been embedded in a wider (post)colonial global order that continually produces racialized subjectivities as disposable non- or less-than-human bodies, but also been active sites of (dis)possession. This can be explained by (dis)possession's

historical connections with the making and policing of racialized subjectivities as well as by its central colonial function in terms of capital accumulation and exploitation. The appearance of more overt forms of (dis)possessive methods in Europe, thus, is not seen here as simply another form of biopolitical control, but indeed embedded within a wider colonial and racial capitalist order predicated upon generalized forms of theft, plunder, and capital accumulation.

The conceptual framework and theoretical insights advanced here contribute more clearly to critical and postcolonial migration and border studies. In this sense, they can be extended and incorporated by analyses of migration regimes in other European and non-European spaces where strategies of (dis)possession are currently employed as a form of "bordering". Similarly, this work also offers insights that can help make sense of diverse sets of practices, including—but not limited to—urban policing of "undesirable" populations in big and multicultural cities; current practices of settler colonialism; and even processes of international occupation. On a more theoretical note, the article offers innovative ways to think about the interconnectedness of notions of property, colonialism, race, and capitalism, contributing to discussions that currently take place within critical race studies as well as (post)colonial and decolonial circles.

Acknowledgments

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