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Public Dog Shelter

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1. Introduction

In May 2024, I arrived in a city in Romania. My initial plan was to ethnographically explore how humans and dogs form relationships in private shelters. However, my research plan had to be revised because I was unable to gain access to private shelters. One of the two never gave me a reply. The other gave me an answer thanks to the help of a Romanian professor, but when I contacted them again a week before my arrival to discuss the details, I no longer received a reply. After I arrived in the city, I took a taxi to the address written on their webpage, but I could not find the shelter.¹ I was afraid that I might not be able to carry out the research at all. At that time, I was given the opportunity to conduct research at the public dog shelter. Saleco. I was able to receive help from a Romanian professor, and at his request a high-ranking city official asked the public shelter to provide me with access.

I had a negative perception of public shelters. This impression was formed through preliminary research on the internet. International NGOs that actively intervene in the stray dog issue in Romania often portrayed public shelters as very negative places. Many other private shelters in Romania also described public shelters as bad spaces. In particular, in stories about rescuing dogs from so-called “kill shelters” and relocating them to private shelters, public shelters were often depicted as obvious failures. I had also heard that public shelters did not accept volunteers, and this immediately led me to imagine them as closed places. It was as if they were hiding something.

My first day at Saleco reinforced this negative impression. On the first day, one of the administrative staff of Saleco came to pick me up at the accommodation where I was staying. A history student from the local university came along to help for basic interpretation. In the car, I tried to talk with the staff member as kindly as possible, but he kept a cold and rigid attitude. Even to questions from the Romanian student, he answered only briefly, and the air inside the car was heavy.

Saleco was located about ten minutes outside the city. The car stopped in front of a huge iron gate, and when the staff honked, the guard came out and opened it. As I got out of the car, Coloman, a veterinary assistant, approached us. He had once worked in the United States when he was young, so his English was quite fluent. Therefore he was assigned to be responsible for

¹ The reason was that the place where the dogs were cared for and the location of the shelter office were different.

me. While we were briefly introducing ourselves, the director of the shelter came out. She was very defensive and asked me, “What do you want?” I said that I wanted to participate in taking care of the dogs at the shelter. When I said that I wanted to come regularly for several weeks rather than just visiting once, she was clearly reluctant. However, because there had been a request from a high-ranking city official, it also seemed difficult for her to refuse. In the end, she said that Coloman would help me and left. In this way, my research began as someone’s care for me conflicted with another person’s preferences and intentions.z

After the director left, Coloman showed me the shelter. We started from the cages near the entrance and slowly walked toward the innermost part. The site was much larger than I had expected, and there were about a thousand dogs. There were thirty outdoor cages. These had been recently installed as part of a major renovation ten years ago, and the facilities appeared to be in decent shape. However, the indoor cages were a different story.

Behind the outdoor cages, there was a very old building, which, according to Coloman, had been there since the shelter opened about thirty years ago. When I entered the building, I was immediately struck with bewilderment. Inside the building, fifty cages were crammed closely together, and the facilities looked very poor. The walls were patched with Styrofoam. It had been filled inside the walls, but the outside had broken, so the inside was exposed. The Styrofoam had absorbed all kinds of smells, and it gave off a very unpleasant odor reminiscent of death, disease, and suffering. The dogs barked madly at me. The barking echoed against the walls and sounded even louder. My sight, hearing, and smell were instantly overwhelmed, and I tried not to show my tension as I followed Coloman. That day, when I returned to my dormitory room, I told my roommate that the place felt like a prison where dogs were waiting for death, and that I did not want to go back again.

What I had imagined at first was that in private shelters, humans and dogs would form interspecies kinship based on compassion, love, and intimacy. The websites of the two private shelters I had originally considered were filled with stories of rescuing dogs that had been in difficult situations. Each dog had its own story, and some of them had surprisingly strong narratives. I had expected to explore such stories, and most of them were supposed to be beautiful. However, what I encountered at Saleco was completely different. The dogs did not have individual lives, nor were they respected as individual beings. The shelter felt like a bad place, and its practices seemed less like care than like control or management.

But these negative impressions were soon revised. Yet this did not mean that Saleco was not a negative place. Instead, I came to avoid simply describing its care as “bad.” Initially, I contrasted private shelters with public shelters. Private shelters seemed to provide warm and affectionate care, whereas public shelters did not. However, during my time at Saleco, I realized that this dichotomy hardly explained how care operated. Affection was not the central prerequisite of caregiving. Instead, care was shaped and sustained by power, management, the distribution of risk, the physical environment, institutional regulations, and surrounding materials. To categorically call it “bad” became increasingly impossible.

I initially had a particular idea of what constituted “good care.” At the beginning, I tried to maintain this criterion of “good care” as sharply as possible. Because the recipients of care were animals, I thought I had to take greater responsibility. Yet these boundaries soon became blurred.

One day, a Shiba Inu wearing a collar arrived at the shelter. My colleagues commented on how beautiful the dog was, but I could not stop thinking about the collar. It meant that this dog had once belonged to someone and had received care. That day, I asked the veterinary assistant, “Why do people dislike dogs and abandon them?” He gave me an unexpected answer: “Only people who like dogs abandon them. People who dislike dogs never raise them in the first place.” Abandonment, desertion, and suffering were thus revealed as the outcomes of love. This was only the beginning of the many paradoxes I would come to encounter.

Just as the paradox of abandoning a dog as an outcome of love exists, there are also many other paradoxes within dog care. Through this research, I explore the multifaceted aspects of dog care in the city of Romania. This study is also a process of tracing how my negative prejudice toward public shelters was dismantled. I will also show how love and intimacy can prove powerless, and how acts that may appear unethical, such as control and distancing, can be connected to care.

Just as love can paradoxically turn into abandonment, violence, and suffering could also take the form of care. To make sense of these apparent contradictions, it was necessary to situate care within a broader social and political context. Through the process of dismantling my own negative preconceptions about the shelter, I came to focus on these paradoxes and contradictions.

The key contribution of this study is that it represents, to my knowledge, the first ethnographic account of a public dog shelter conducted in a post-socialist context. Previous studies of animal shelters have largely been centered on Western cases, and many have relied on interviews with animal lovers or short-term volunteering experiences (Alger & Alger, 2019; Guenther, 2020; Irvine, 2003; Srinivasan, 2013). While there are ethnographic studies on human–dog relations in post-socialist countries, there has been no examination of public shelters. By looking at shelter operations from the inside, I was able to show that care here was not primarily a response to ethical demands, but was embedded in broader social transformations, particularly those related to city-making. In this context, multispecies relations could not be defined universally, but had to be traced alongside historical and institutional changes. In doing so, I hope to contribute to expanding both the empirical and conceptual scope of multispecies research.

Yet there are limitations as well. First, because of the strong political dynamics within the shelter, I could not focus on multispecies research to the extent I had initially planned. This was also in part due to the methodological shortcomings of multispecies ethnography itself. Second, in witnessing forms of care that appeared as control and violence, I was constantly compelled to reflect on my own ethical position, yet I could not arrive at a clear answer. What I did try to do, however, was to hold on to, and continually return to, the shock and distress I experienced in the early stages of my fieldwork.

Chapter 2 presents reflections on what I gained through participant observation and the questions that still remain. I will show the various power relations and hierarchies inside the public dog shelter, along with the failures and small methodological contributions that arose from attempting multispecies ethnography. In Chapter 3, I interpret the shelter as part of the city's care infrastructure. The public dog shelter is not infrastructure for dogs, but for the city. In this chapter, I will show how street dogs come to be categorized as problematic or not depending on whether they receive care, and how problematic dogs are regarded as abnormal beings within the city, explained through Mary Douglas's concept of pollution. Chapter 4 demonstrates the complexities of caregiving practices within the shelter, focusing on the ambivalence and intricacies of care, as well as the negotiations and adjustments around process and agency.

1.1 Care

One of the most influential definitions of care is given by Fisher and Tronto: “everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p.40). Tronto acknowledges that this definition may be criticized as overly broad. Yet, she emphasizes that if care were to be narrowly defined, its layered and overlapping qualities would be overlooked (Tronto, 2013). Human beings are inherently vulnerable and, at some point, inevitably receive care from others (p.26). Therefore, Care is Universal. At the same time, care is a fundamental characteristic of collective human life, and it is implemented and practiced differently across societies (Mattingly and McKearney, 2023; Tronto, 2013). Questions of who is entitled to receive care and who is expected to provide it are deeply tied to power and interests.

Studies on care have developed in diverse contexts. Early discussions focused on women and motherhood, but later feminist scholars criticized the gendering of care. Nevertheless, the impression remained strong that care originated with women, and particularly within kinship relations. From the 1990s onward, alongside the tendencies of neoliberal economic structures, discussions of care expanded into national and institutional arenas (see Thelen, 2015). Thelen (2015) traces the development of these theories of care and points out that care discourses have been fragmented within dichotomies such as private/public. This leads to an argument that care should be placed at the core of social organization and used as a lens through which to understand society (ibid).

This is distinct from emphasis on the relationality of care. Tronto (2003) and Mol (2008), for instance, present care as a relational construct. In Mol’s (2008) case, the agents of this relationship extend beyond humans to include nonhumans, technologies, norms, and environments. For Mol (2008), care is not something unilaterally delivered by medical professionals, but rather a collaborative process coordinated by patients, technologies, norms, and environments. Mol (2008) places technology as a primary agent of care. In clinical settings, thermometers, oxygen masks, laboratory tests, and video cameras are all crucial elements of caregiving. That technology can act as an agent of care means that care is not merely an expression of affection or warm intent, but something that can be taught through experience and experimentation. Thus, care can also include management and systems.

Mol (2008) especially stresses how the logic of care differs from the logic of choice that is emphasized in capitalism. As care has come to be discussed within capitalist frameworks, its specificity has been lost, and care labor has been simplified into something akin to a purchasable commodity (ibid). In the process of expressing care through pre-existing structural languages, its complexity and subtle details were stripped away. Mol et al. (2010) emphasize again that care is difficult to express in words, and that small gestures, such as placing a hand on someone at the right moment, must be recognized as integral components of care. They stress that care may sometimes be inefficient or illogical within market economies. This leads to the conclusion that care does not necessarily aim for, nor guarantee, good outcomes. Care is an action without a fixed answer, and good care is a persistent patchwork within a world filled with ambivalence and shifting tensions (Mol et al, 2010, p.15).

Bellacasa (2017), meanwhile, seeks to overcome the limitations of prior discussions by extending care into the nonhuman. She conceptualizes care as a triple intersection of emotional states, material practices, and ethical obligations, paying particular attention to the duties derived from relationships (p.5). Both Mol (2008, 2010) and Bellacasa (2017) attempt to broaden understandings of care, but their work also gives the impression of locating care within the domain of ethics.

However, many researchers have demonstrated that care is either indifferent to or even in conflict with ethics. Care is about choosing whom to save and whom to exclude, and thus is closer to the realms of control and politics than to ethics (Thelen, 2015; Tronto, 2013;). This concern becomes even more pronounced in multispecies care. Such insights highlight that care may fail to be carried out as intended, and may even result in harmful outcomes. Bocci (2017)'s research, for instance, shows the paradox of care for death in the removal of goats to protect tortoises in the Galápagos. Stevenson (2014) similarly points out that care may take the form of control and management, and thus may not be beneficial to recipients.

Focusing on care as the central element of social organization strengthens the analysis of society, as Thelen (2015) argues. If care is understood only as coordination within relationships, its multifaceted qualities cannot be fully grasped. This risks reinforcing categorical divisions, such as kin/non-kin and domestic/public, while overlooking the generative powers of care. It also makes it more difficult to analyze care beyond its ethical and emotional dimensions. Again, care is universal but not singular in form: it is reconstructed through concrete practices and power relations across diverse social and cultural contexts, while also generating new

relationships. For this reason, Thelen (2015) states that writing about care means following a subject that changes across time and space. Building on this perspective, I aim to show how, in the field of a Romanian public dog shelter, care becomes a site of power, exclusion, and relationship-making.

1.2 Multispecies Studies and Multispecies Ethnography

In 2010, Kirksey and Helmreich published an article in *Cultural Anthropology* titled *The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography*. This ambitious piece sought to give coherence to multispecies research, which had developed in complex ways at the intersection of environmental studies, science and technology studies, and animal studies. Multispecies ethnography goes beyond asking how humans perceive nonhumans. It instead attends to how different beings co-constitute worlds and live together. Following the lives of diverse organisms, this approach also aims to discover a form of “biocultural hope.” (Kirksey and Helmreich, p.545)

Beings that had long remained at the margins of anthropology were brought to the center. Unsurprisingly, this move drew attention from other scholars as well. Eduardo Kohn (2013), for example, asked not how humans think about forests but how forests think. He treated more-than-human entities as proper objects of curiosity. For Kohn (2013), human-centered symbolic systems cannot account for nonhumans. Instead, we must attend to indexical relations that connect humans and nonhumans. From this perspective, the more-than-human is not about granting voice or agency to nonhumans. It is about fundamentally rethinking the categories of analysis themselves. To understand nonhumans, we need not symbols but indices, new ways of imagining how beings are connected. This demand is linked to the call for the decolonization of thought.

Smart (2014) argued that this trend is not entirely new. It may instead revive older anthropological traditions. Smart (2014) reminds us that as early as 1868, Morgan showed us the culture of beavers. Traditional anthropology once actively included nonhumans. But with the rise of reflexive writing, nonhumans were gradually excluded from ethnography. Renewed attention to nonhumans, therefore, is less an innovation than a recovery of anthropology’s forgotten potential.

The need for multispecies research also intersects with broader reflections on the Anthropocene. Tsing (2015) showed how something as unlikely as mushrooms has always been entangled

with human lives. Haraway (2007) urged us to acknowledge that the human body itself is never singular but composed of countless microbes. Tsing emphasized that human history is inseparable from interspecies history. Non-human beings have always been there, co-evolving with us. They don't just share space with us; they have co-evolved with us, become part of us. Ignoring this fact or labeling them as "others" would be a mistake.

Yet multispecies research also has limits. It often gives the impression of portraying human–nonhuman relations too optimistically. Even Kirksey and Helmreich (2010), while noting the diversity of such relations, framed them largely in terms of companion species or violence, two relatively narrow categories (p.552). Multispecies research has not developed along a stable academic path, but most work emphasizes ethical responsibility. It tends to immerse itself passionately in nonhuman lives and calls for reflecting on how to live together on a so-called damaged planet (Tsing, 2017). This positions multispecies relations within a moral and ethical register of mutual responsibility. At times, however, such work risks romanticizing human–nonhuman relations.²

Watson (2016) even criticized that the turn to the is a “return to mythology.” He argued that representing animals as objects of ethnographic knowledge, especially when stripped of scientific or field-based knowledge and rendered as optimistic figures, risks replacing them with human stories.³

Methodological challenges also remain. Harry Wels (2020) conducted experiments in multispecies ethnography through his work in South African wildlife conservation. He proposed three key methodological concepts: observation, becoming-with, and reflexivity. Wels (2020) emphasized the difficulty of observation, while human participants can complement observation with language and writing, nonhuman animals cannot. He admitted

² For example, in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), Haraway uses the metaphor of string figures to suggest that humans and nonhumans can discover many new patterns together. Through this game of passing strings back and forth, worlds are made collectively, and countless different dimensions of relation can emerge. Such relations are not necessarily beautiful or good; they may also be bad or even horrific. Yet in these cases, ethical responsibility is placed on humans, which gives the impression of once again determining what counts as the “right” kind of relationship.

³ He specifically criticizes Van Dooren's study of crows, pointing out that the rhetorical move of treating crows in philosophical and metaphorical terms carries the risk of reinforcing human exceptionalism. At the core of this critique lies the neglect of scientific grounds such as the politics of conservation surrounding the crows, the history of Hawaii, and the species-specific characteristics of the birds themselves. He argues that multispecies researchers of this kind project the anxieties of the ecological age onto animals, and that this mobilizes animal lives not as a true overcoming of human exceptionalism, but rather as mythic works of mourning staged for the sake of the human future. (see Smart, 2024, p 162–166)

that his methods are not a complete framework. Yet he argued that through observation, imaginative becoming-with, and reflexivity, we can continue to open the field of multispecies ethnography.

Hartigan (2007) introduced an imaginative technique of “interviewing” plants in his study of care for different plant species. To understand a plant better, one must touch it, draw it, and engage with it directly. Hartigan (2017) further argues that multispecies ethnography involving animals requires the integration of ethology to grasp animal life more fully. Engaging more deeply with scientific knowledge about coexisting beings might not be the only absolute way to understand nonhumans, but it is undoubtedly helpful. This idea is also shared by Watson (2016), who emphasizes that bringing scientific knowledge into multispecies research is crucial for understanding the other. Haraway, in her *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), explores her relationship with her companion dog not only at the personal level, but also at evolutionary and historical levels. She draws on biology, feminist theory, philosophy, Catholic theology, biopolitics, and postcolonial thought to illuminate the deep truths of interspecies relations. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why her writing is so compelling.

Multispecies research remains an experimental field, full of proposals and challenges. No definitive methodology has yet been established, and criticisms abound regarding what such research can achieve. But how could it ever be easy to understand relationships with beings whose lives cannot be fully captured in language? Multispecies ethnography is a challenge at every step, and I will embrace this challenge as I explore interspecies relations within the specific context of a public shelter in Romania.

1.3 Multispecies Care

As discussed above, care is marked by ambivalence and is always entangled with the distribution of power. In human–nonhuman relations, this ambivalence often becomes even more pronounced. Practices of care directed toward nonhumans frequently involve the hierarchization of life itself. Bocci’s (2017) study, for example, demonstrates how goats in the Galápagos were eradicated to save turtles. Goats, deemed less valuable were sacrificed.

Parreñas’s (2018) research makes such asymmetries of power even more explicit. Examining orangutan rehabilitation centers, she shows how care practices, such as designating species as endangered or managing protected areas, are revealed as techniques of control enacted through a colonial gaze. Classification and confinement are not undertaken from the perspective of the

orangutans, but from that of humans. What emerges here is not merely inequality within human–nonhuman relations, but the recognition that the very project of care itself is fundamentally a political, indeed colonial, enterprise.

Analyses of nonhuman care must therefore challenge the restrictive binaries of Western social theory. Locke’s (2017) study of elephant care in Nepal highlights this complexity. Human caregiving toward elephants is embedded in state structures, legal frameworks, and bureaucratic systems, while simultaneously shaped by the deification of elephants. This makes it difficult to represent elephants and humans within familiar linguistic categories. Any account that erases elephants’ agency risks distortion. Care for elephants encompasses love, affection, and responsibility, but also violence and discipline. The divine status of elephants renders the analysis of their care inherently contradictory and demanding (*ibid*). Locke (2017) insists that only by embracing such complexity can multispecies care be adequately understood.

Because care often presents itself as ethical, it can sometimes resist critique. Friederic, Buzzett, & Valencia (2021) illustrate the truth of the story of Arthur. During the Adventure Racing World Championship in Ecuador, Swedish team captain Mikael Lindnord rescued a dog, later known as Arthur. When an Ecuadorian later claimed ownership of the dog, Lindnord refused to return it, arguing that the dog had been injured and infected with parasites and therefore had not received proper care (*ibid*). Claiming that he could provide better care, Lindnord asserted ownership. Later, Lindnord wrote a book in which Arthur is portrayed as a brave dog who overcame hardships to find his home, while Lindnord is depicted as a hero who faced obstacles to rescue the dog. He even returned after founding the Arthur Foundation to promote animal welfare. This episode highlights both the contested standards of care and the problem of colonial intervention under the guise of providing “better” care.

Multispecies care, as a form of care, cannot be understood simply as a benevolent practice. It is implicated in power and control. Public dog care in Romania, too, appears to be about tending to dogs, yet is in fact embedded within institutional and political frameworks. At the same time, multispecies care cannot be reduced solely to domination. Locke (2017) asks: Can elephants form meaningful, consent-based relations of care with humans? If so, must such interspecies possibilities be foreclosed from life? These questions suggest that multispecies care may serve as a site of negotiation and imagination, opening up possibilities for envisioning what a good life might mean across species. This study likewise seeks both to uncover the operations of power within care and to create a space for imagining alternative ways of living.

2. Methodology and Field Site

2.1 Saleco

2.1.1 Saleco, a Public Dog Shelter

The site of my field research was the public dog shelter in the city, operated by the company Saleco. Saleco is a large enterprise primarily responsible for urban cleanliness. It manages waste collection, as well as the repair and maintenance of city roads. About ten years ago, Saleco took over a privately run shelter and developed it into a public shelter. That moment coincided with a period when the issue of stray dogs in Romania had escalated into a significant social conflict. According to my interlocutor, during this period, many local governments began to establish contracts with particular shelters to manage public facilities. It was in this context that Saleco, already engaged in urban sanitation, expanded its scope by acquiring a shelter and turning it into a public one.

The stray dog issue in Romania was already considered an “old” problem by the 1990s (Pencea & Brădăţan, 2015, p.2). Many observers trace its roots to Ceauşescu’s modernization policies, a topic I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. Public debates identifying stray dogs as a social threat began more decisively in 2001. That year, Georgeta Stoicescu, who had been attacked in front of her home, brought a case to the European Court of Human Rights. This led to the introduction of euthanasia legislation in Romania. In practice, the law permitted large-scale, indiscriminate euthanasia. This, in turn, generated deep social divisions and ultimately resulted in the adoption of a basic law on animal protection. The new regulations effectively prohibited euthanasia, yet they also generated confusion on the ground. Some argued that euthanasia should still be permitted at the discretion of local governments, but the Constitutional Court rejected this position. (Pencea & Brădăţan, 2015, p.3-5) Pencea and Brădăţan (2015) concluded that although euthanasia was generally discouraged, the frequent revisions to the law only exacerbated social conflict without providing clarity. (p.5)

The most decisive turning point came in 2013, with the so-called Ionuţ Anghel case. In that year, four-year-old Ionuţ Anghel was fatally mauled by street dogs while visiting a park with his grandmother, an event that provoked widespread public outrage. Then-president Traian Băsescu declared, “Humans are above dogs,” signaling the imposition of biopolitical measures

against dogs.⁴ Shortly thereafter, Law #258/2013 was passed, mandating euthanasia after a two-week holding period. Although constitutional challenges were raised, the law was ultimately upheld. (Pencea & Brădăţan, 2015, p.6)

These hardline policies, however, generated further conflict and confusion. According to the report by Pencea & Brădăţan, between September 2013 and the summer of 2014, a total of 34,000 dogs were captured in Bucharest alone. Of these, 16,000 were euthanized, but another 16,000 were adopted. Many people lined up in front of shelters to adopt dogs as a form of protest, suggesting that the question of how best to respond to the stray dog issue remained deeply contested at the societal level. The eventual resolution was that each local government gained the right to operate shelters according to its own regulations. The report emphasizes that local authorities formulated policies in relation not only to animal protection agencies but also to their own constituencies (Pencea & Brădăţan, 2015, p.8).

This was a brief history showing how Saleco changed from a private shelter to a public one. Through its contract with the city, Saleco acquired a shelter and developed it into a public facility, which has been maintained with considerable success over the past decade. By 2024, when I conducted my fieldwork, Saleco had become a large shelter housing around one thousand dogs across more than eighty cages. Its stated mission is to protect and manage dogs, promote adoption, regulate the stray population, and provide information on responsible dog ownership. Beyond offering immediate protection, the company frames its goal as reducing the problem of stray dogs while simultaneously improving the lives of both animals and humans.

2.1.2 Hierarchy Inscribed in Space

On the first day I formally began working, the veterinary assistant, Coloman, told me to come rest in his office after feeding the dogs. Since the director had said that Coloman was the one who would help and take responsibility for me, I followed his words without much thought. His office was set up inside a container box, with two desks, a refrigerator for storing medicine, and a private toilet. We sat in chairs and talked about his younger days when he had worked in places like the United States and Belarus. The door was not fully closed, but left ajar by about a hand's width, so that no one outside could see in.

⁴ See BBC News (2013, September 9) for a detailed report: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24015166>

As I was talking with Coloman, care workers sometimes came and banged loudly on the container walls from outside. Coloman told me not to mind them. At first, I did not understand what this meant, so I stayed still. Later, I learned that the care workers were doing this to attract my attention. They imagined sexual situations from the fact that I was alone with Coloman in such a small space. After realizing this, I decided to remain outside during breaks. The next day, when Coloman again told me to rest inside his office, I answered that I would stay outside. Coloman replied, “No, the outside is for them and the dogs. You’re elite, so you should rest inside”

To Coloman, I was an “elite” who did not belong in the outside, which he considered the space of “the dogs and the care workers.” While I had come there to work alongside the care workers, he perceived me instead as closer to the administrative staff or veterinary assistants. He therefore felt it inappropriate for me to rest outdoors. Space was not merely a physical division; it encoded hierarchies of rank and relational order.

At first, Saleco seemed like a united world unto itself. The massive iron gate at the entrance felt like it separated the city from Saleco. On one side lay the citizens’ space of the city, and on the other, a space proper for dogs but improper for citizens. Over time, I came to see that while the gate indeed implied a boundary with the city, I realized that Saleco could not be understood as a single, unified space. Inside it were many further spatial divisions.

The most obvious distinction was between human spaces and dog spaces. But on closer look, both human spaces and dog spaces were themselves divided hierarchically. Where one could spend time depended on one’s position. The boundaries appeared very clear and were rarely crossed. At Saleco, there were about one thousand dogs and thirty human workers. There were six administrative staff, three veterinary assistants, three security guards working shifts, and the rest were dog care workers. A hierarchy based on work tasks structured relations among them, which was reflected in differences in spatial access. Most of the care workers and guards, except for three individuals, were racially identified as Roma. I discuss this aspect in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Saleco was located somewhat outside the city. Passing through the huge iron gate, one encountered an untidy landscape. The road was unevenly covered with gravel, and piles of discarded materials from the city were stacked haphazardly. Weeds grew chaotically, beyond which stood a yellow and red slide and a rusting swing set. These discarded materials belonged

to another business operator who shared the property with Saleco, who used the site to dump urban waste.

To the left of the entrance was a small one-story building that housed the administrative offices, toilets, and a medical room. In front of the building was a lovely garden decorated with grapevines. Passing by that, one reached the cluster of container boxes: one served as the veterinary assistant's office, another as the director's office, and the rest as storage. Beyond that, the dog cages began with thirty outdoor cages and about fifty indoor cages in a former livestock building inherited when the site was acquired thirty years ago. Administrative staff worked inside their offices, and sometimes I would go entire days without seeing them, since even our working hours differed. At least one veterinary assistant stayed at the shelter during the day. At the same time, the other two were busy with outside tasks, such as removing carcasses of dogs, cats, or rats from the city, capturing stray dogs, or collecting food. Veterinary assistants worked close to the dogs, but rarely touched them or entered the cages. When I first met one of them, I thought he was a visitor. He was wearing a pink polo shirt, light beige pants, and loafers matching the color of his trousers. Belonging was tied to what one wore, or was permitted to wear.

Care workers were each assigned a specific set of cages. One was given five outdoor cages or about eight indoor cages. Care workers worked directly with dogs, but only in the cages assigned to them. Of course, they sometimes cleaned others' cages when colleagues were on break or away for outside work, but this was exceptional. When not working, care workers usually rested on benches outside. There was a small room in the building set aside for them, but it was rarely used. The room was narrow, dark, and dirty. Intended initially for brooms and cleaning tools, it had only been furnished with a sofa that doubled as a bed. The window could only open halfway, and there was no light. When one care worker showed me this room, others scolded him, saying, "Why are you showing her this dirty room?" So most of them stayed outside. Coloman's "outside" was this residual space, belonging to those who were not administrative staff or veterinary assistants. It included the cages, the open ground in front of them, and the broken, weathered benches there. More precisely, it was the wandering space of those who had no designated office.

These spatial boundaries carried real force. I often spoke about toilets at the site, and one fellow student once asked me why I mentioned toilets so much. Toilets revealed starkly how

uncomfortable my position was, and reminded me that I was an intruder. Each time I thought about the toilets, I realized that I could never become an insider, nor did I want to.

Inside the administrative building, there was a very clean toilet. Care workers used a makeshift toilet beyond the dog cages, but most preferred to go into the bushes. The toilet was narrow and dirty. Care workers did not use the administrative toilets, though it was unclear whether this was a formal rule or an implicit one.

Since I spent between four and eight hours at the site each day, using the toilet was a real issue for me. Would using the care workers' toilets help me better understand their unpleasant working conditions? I thought that if I asked to use the administrative toilets, they probably wouldn't refuse, but they wouldn't welcome it either. Using the administrative toilets might highlight the unfairness of the care workers' toilet situation. Moreover, my sneakers were always dirty, which made me reluctant to enter the administrative building at all. The cleanliness of the administrative toilets contrasted sharply with my own dirtiness, silently rejecting me. I obeyed this implicit rule of cleanliness.

Just as human spaces were hierarchically segmented, so too were the dogs' spaces. Humans could freely enter and exit dog cages at will, but for dogs to leave required active escape. And their lives were determined mainly by the cages to which they belonged. Dog cages were divided into outdoor cages, indoor cages, and special cages for those giving birth, injured, or considered overly aggressive. Dogs lived in one of these, or sometimes outside altogether. Dogs, too, rarely left the spaces assigned to them. Where a dog ended up was often determined by chance, but it profoundly shaped its life. Dogs in outdoor cages had a higher chance of adoption. During my research, about five were adopted, all from outdoor cages. Visitors mostly toured cages 41 through 50. Ultimately, whether human or dog, one's position determined one's possibilities and value.

Within this landscape, the weeds also played a role. From the moment one entered through the gate, overgrown weeds could be seen. On closer inspection, however, these weeds were not random, but marked boundaries. Beyond where the weeds grew was the land of another business operator, and Coloman advised me not to go there. On the boundaries of Saleco, weeds did not grow because people walked through every day, and during the summer, they were regularly cut to prevent mosquitoes. But on the adjacent land, which staff did not frequent daily, the weeds flourished.

Sometimes, dogs would escape their cages and run into these weeds. In the undergrowth lay discarded scraps, especially pipes, and the dogs often took shelter inside them. Since staff could not easily enter that land, escaped dogs were not pursued, nor did it seem that anyone thought they should be. Dogs crossed boundaries that humans could not. Another interesting element was the bench in the central square. It had been brought there by the scrap collector, but care workers used it as if it were their resting spot. In summer, however, the weeds grew and swallowed the bench, rendering it unusable. Since staff were not authorized to manage this space, they had to find other places to sit. Unmanaged, the bench could no longer serve as a resting spot. Thus, the weeds were not merely neglected vegetation. They marked who could go where and who could exert influence over what.

2.1.3 Situated Knowledge and the Position of Being Human

The knowledge I produced varied depending on my position. What I came to know was fundamentally relational and, in most cases, no more than the knowledge I generated by living alongside the care workers. I often thought that if another anthropologist had instead spent their time with the administrative staff, their account of Saleco would have looked entirely different from mine.

Haraway (1988) challenges the claim that knowledge is scientific and objective, emphasizing that all knowledge arises from particular positions. The blind faith that produced knowledge is “objective” is, for her, in fact greedy (Haraway, 1988, p.581). What is truly trustworthy, she argues, is situated knowledge, which becomes credible when one recognizes and reveals one’s position. Making one’s position explicit is also the more ethical choice.

When I was inside the veterinary assistant’s office, I grew distant from the care workers. I could say a great deal about the dogs in cages 41 through 45, but could not confidently say that I “knew” the others. The closer I was to one space, the more other relations were excluded. This distance did not necessarily mean emotional conflict or hostility, but it did constitute a form of social distance. It marked differences in the density of social relations. The knowledge I produced emerged through navigating these distances. Each time I reflected on what I could say about Saleco, I was reminded that the shelter was not a single community but composed of multiple layers of relations, and I tried not to overgeneralize.

Finally, I wish to share one further concern. One of the persistent questions I faced was that, even as I reflected on my positionality and sought a deeper understanding, I could not escape

the fact that I was positioned as a human. When Haraway (1988) broadly critiqued and challenged the myth of objectivity in human knowledge production, did this not also open an opportunity to reflect on the positionality of being human? In observing and recording the relations between humans and dogs in the shelter, and especially in interpreting the relations generated by dogs themselves, I could not help but rely on human sensory faculties. I did not “see” the dogs as such; I wrote down what I, as a human, saw of them. Over time, I developed a deeper understanding of what it means to see dogs, but this process was never straightforward. Therefore, my thesis is not a record of knowledge about nonhuman care, but rather a reflection on the human effort to understand it, an effort that will be further developed in the following chapters. In this sense, my methodology aligns with Haraway’s notion of situated knowledge, while also underscoring the limits of producing knowledge from the position of being human.

2.2 Participant Observation

2.2.1 Subjectivity and Complexity

One afternoon, during a break, several other care workers and I were sitting together on the central bench. During these breaks, we sometimes chatted, ate food, or silently stared at our phones. Sometimes we crossed our arms and took short naps. On that day, as usual, we were resting this way when suddenly my colleagues stood up and told me to move to the back. When I asked why, they said monitoring had arrived. Whenever supervisors from headquarters visited, the workers were not supposed to appear idle. We all moved together to the back of the dog cages. One of the workers brought me a broken water bucket and told me to sit on it. It was less than thirty centimeters high and very uncomfortable. Others found stones or planks to sit on. Around us were dog feces, chicken bones, and dusty ground, making it impossible to sit directly on the earth. I felt an instant surge of anger, thinking about how no proper resting space was guaranteed.

A few days later, an administrative staff member scolded the care workers for not managing the wheelbarrows properly. One cart had broken, and they were ordered to assemble a new one. Voices were raised in the process. Again, I found myself indignant, wondering why the administration did not simply provide better tools. As time passed, I increasingly identified with my fellow care workers.

Inside the shelter, I empathized with the care workers. But outside, I sometimes identified with Saleco as an institution. When people spoke negatively about Saleco, I found myself wanting to argue back. Regarding the dirtiness of the cages, I wanted to explain that although the conditions looked poor, the staff cleaned them every single day; only the sheer number of dogs made it impossible to keep them spotless. Saleco was far from ideal, but because I knew more about it, I also found more ways to justify it. Without empathy, I felt it would be impossible to write an ethnography. Yet at times, this subjectivity also unsettled me.

The deeper I became immersed in the field, the harder it became to maintain a critical distance. The word I most often used was “complex.” To say something was complex carried two meanings. First, it reflected the real entanglements of the field: dogs, humans, administration, care, love, control, protection, and exclusion all operated simultaneously in a single scene, making it impossible to reduce to one meaning. Second, “complex” was also my way of postponing or avoiding immediate ethical judgment. For example, during a forced sterilization surgery, I felt deeply uncomfortable, even unjust. But as a researcher, I also felt responsible to maintain analytical distance. Rather than condemning it directly, I deferred judgment by labeling it “complex.”

Dan Cohen (2017) argues that “complexity” has been overused in anthropology. As a discipline born out of the study of others, anthropology has long been criticized as a colonial science that once legitimized European imperialism. In response, anthropologists turned to complexity as a way of respecting alterity. But, Cohen suggests, this often made “complexity” into an end in itself. What is complex, he argues, is not society but the methodological tensions embedded in knowledge production.

Complexity can help capture the multilayered entanglements of reality. But describing everything as complex risks avoiding ethical responsibility. In spaces where the lives and deaths of nonhuman animals are at stake, where biopolitical decisions are constantly made, should not the researcher’s ethical response be all the more urgent? Attention to complexity enriches vision, but it can also silence us in the face of violence or injustice. And when the affected beings cannot resist in language, does this silence not become even more problematic?

Bourdieu posed the question of how one can be both subject and object, both actor and observer at once, emphasizing the need for “participant objectivation” (Bourdieu, 2003, p.281). For him, what mattered above all was that researchers turn their analytical gaze upon themselves

and examine the structural conditions shaping their production of knowledge. The feelings and sensations of the researcher are important, but more important still is analyzing why one feels them. For example, my sense of disgust during a forced sterilization stemmed from my own ethical beliefs that such procedures should not be performed and from my positionality. I felt that this reflexive process was indispensable. Yet at the same time, it seemed insufficient.

Doesn't the border of the responsibility differ depending on who the subjects of our research are? When studying dogs, beings who cannot speak back directly, I began to wonder whether greater responsibility was demanded of me. Was this responsibility being erased behind the word "complex" and within the closeness I developed with the field? Participant observation is indeed a powerful resource, but also a limitation. Especially in contexts where the subjects cannot resist in language, I felt that the ethical burden placed on the researcher is profound. In the field, I tried to maintain distance and avoid influencing anything. But in this thesis, I aim to make visible the inequalities hidden behind the word "complex."

2.2.3 Time and Constraint

As time passed, it seemed natural that the more I immersed myself in the field and built relationships, the more qualitatively rich information I could obtain. One of the core elements of participant observation is precisely the time spent with those one seeks to understand. Time itself possesses agency.

I spent six and a half weeks in the field, going to the shelter nearly every day. I usually stayed for at least five hours, sometimes up to eight, so the amount of data I collected was not small. Yet I still felt a sense of regret. I wished I could have observed seasonal changes, and above all, I increasingly realized the powerful force of time. The more time I spent with the staff, the more I came to know, not merely because of growing familiarity, but because repetition over time compelled greater honesty.

Once, I brought a box of grapes to share with the workers. The veterinary assistant asked me if I brought it for my breakfast and told me to eat it inside his office, warning me that the care workers might steal it. He advised me not to bring wallets or valuables to the shelter, saying, "They always steal." Once, I lost my second phone, which contained my Korean SIM card.. After I realized I lost it, I was confused. I wanted to believe that my coworkers didn't harm me, but at the same time, I kept thinking about what the veterinary assistant told me. However, the next day I found the phone again. It had been a mishap caused by my rushed departure, as I

often adjusted my schedule to leave with the veterinary assistant who gave me a ride. Since I retrieved it, I wondered whether the idea that “they steal everything” was exaggerated or rooted in prejudice. At the same time, I also noted the significance of how, when the phone was found, they deliberately kept it in the director’s office to ensure it was safely returned to me. This idea that “they always steal” remained unexplored at the close of my first period of fieldwork.

However, during the summer, I witnessed them taking something without permission. I saw them secretly loading scrap metal into a car from one corner of the property. The veterinary assistant regarded it as theft, and I, too, thought it could be considered stealing. Yet the situation was not simple because the ownership was ambiguous. Perhaps they belonged to a businessman who had once intended to sell them but had left them abandoned. When they noticed me watching, they smiled awkwardly. The veterinary assistant told me, “You didn’t see that,” and another worker also asked me to pretend not to know. I complied, but as this act was repeated and caught my eye again, one of them eventually told me that the profit from selling the scraps far exceeded their monthly salary.

The reason I was able to obtain such candid information was not simply because of familiarity, nor because they liked me more. The more time I spend there, the more they get used to me and like me. Some of the workers call me ‘sora mea (my sister)’ and it gives me a lot of confidence. But more importantly, time itself was a crucial resource for research. It was not merely the passage of days, but a force that gradually revealed hidden realities. As time passed and practices became more apparent, I found it increasingly difficult to hide or avoid discussing them. Meanwhile, by pretending not to notice, I too naturally shifted from an outsider to a bystander. When our eyes met as they loaded the scrap metal, my faint smile or feigned ignorance became part of the accumulated process. Time forged relationships; these relationships did not always take the form of intimacy, but constrained us in multiple ways. Ultimately, time was not just a backdrop, but an active agent guiding the research. Sometimes it was generous, and other times, merciless.

2.2.4 Do not Harm

Before arriving at the field site, I had of course reflected on the ethical responsibilities I was expected to uphold as a researcher. Among these, perhaps the most important was the injunction: “Do not harm.” In a text we read during the preparatory course, Katie Nelson reflected on her own experience. She had conducted research with Mexican migrant students

living in Minnesota. To protect them, she sought to maintain their anonymity, yet some wanted their identities to be explicitly acknowledged. The researcher thus had to weigh participants' wishes against potential risks, balancing and deciding between them. This case illustrates how what appears to be a straightforward and obvious injunction, "do not harm," can involve unexpected tensions and conflicts.

Before arriving at the site, I thought: How much harm could I, just a graduate student, possibly cause? The most I imagined was that my work might negatively affect the reputation of the public shelter. In retrospect, that was perhaps the simplest aspect. I soon realized that my very presence, my sheer alterity, affected the workers, especially their relations with one another.

The care workers with whom I worked found me fascinating and liked me very much. For many, I was the first East Asian woman they had ever met, and this excited them. I felt that their excitement placed me in a vulnerable position, and indeed it did. Yet at the same time, my presence also put them in an unfamiliar situation, rendering them vulnerable. At times, they taught me words such as "pervert," "bastard," and "dicksucker," and then insisted that I point out which among them was the "dicksucker." While framed as a kind of joke or game, this also generated a complex structure of sexual tension between them as men and me as a woman. It also reinforced or reshaped hierarchies among the men themselves. When such questions arose, care workers usually wanted me to designate a specific individual. This became a game of sorts, where the goal was to identify the person who could most easily be treated with disrespect.

They also often asked me which of them I liked best, or who I thought was most handsome. While I usually managed to deflect such questions, at times they were very persistent. On several occasions, I have said that my favorite was Connor because he was my supervisor. I worked with him on cages 41 through 45, so it simply makes sense for me to pick someone I am closest to. When I gave this answer, the others said I must "like white men." Although I denied it, my response still provoked jealousy toward Connor.

One worker openly complained about me working alongside Connor, saying that he monopolized the privilege of being with a woman. I tried to counter this by joking about how I gave Connor twice as much work, yet some workers still longed to be the one "chosen" by me. This dynamic made both Connor and me uncomfortable. Although I felt safest when I was with him, I deliberately avoided sitting with him during breaks, instead spending time with Roma workers, in order to reduce such tensions.

Erickson (2016) has noted that harm in anthropology has often been conceived as something arising mainly during the publication process. In reality, however, various forms of harm can and do occur throughout the fieldwork itself. Drawing in particular on examples from educational ethnography, Erickson argued for the necessity of a new ethical standard: a commitment to strive throughout the research process to “not harm.”

I did, at times, cause difficulties for Connor. Once, I overturned a wheelbarrow full of excrement into a drainage ditch, forcing him to spend half an hour inside shoveling it out. I felt guilty, but I did not see this as real harm. However, when other workers spoke negatively about him in relation to me, it felt like harm. Ultimately, “do not harm” proved to be a delicate demand, extending far beyond simply avoiding acts of physical or verbal violence, or preventing exposure to them. It required a more encompassing awareness: of how the researcher’s presence itself could generate specific social flows of feeling, and how these flows might render someone uncomfortable or isolated.

2.3 Staying with Dogs: An Attempt at Multispecies Ethnography

After taking the weekend off, I returned to the shelter on Monday. Some dogs were gathered around a structure in the cage. I was startled, fearing that there might be insects or rats under the structure. When my cat encounters a gnat, she always tears off its wings and leaves it crawling on the floor, and I often watch her do this. With this in mind, I sprayed water forcefully at the box to remove the dead body. The scattered dogs soon regrouped around it. Summoning my courage, I bent down and examined the gap between the floor and the box structure. I saw nothing. When I pulled and shook the box to move it, several fluorescent rubber balls rolled out.

They must have been left as gifts by visitors who had come over the weekend. I threw a ball toward the dogs, expecting them to bring it back to me. I even shouted in a commanding tone, but they didn't react much to the ball. An employee passing by shouted back, “Those dogs don’t know how to play!” I then threw a ball into the next cage, where a Shiba Inu who had only recently arrived was staying. The Shiba played with the ball in the way I expected, pushing and pulling it with his forepaws, as though playing soccer. But the other dogs only tore the balls apart. Soon, fragments of neon yellow rubber were scattered around the cage. Although I was disappointed that the dogs did not bring the ball back to me, I realized at the same time that I

had been forcing onto them what I regarded as natural. I had to acknowledge that dogs did not share the social agreements I carried with me.

In preparing for fieldwork, I had read key texts on human–animal relations. Haraway’s *Companion Species Manifesto* and *Staying with the Trouble* left a deep impression on me, and Han’s (2022) text on kin-making with companion animals in the anxiety of the COVID-19 pandemic was equally compelling. My interest expanded further, connecting to Jun’s (2024) work on multispecies compassion within shelters, and Govindrajan’s (2015) analysis of kinship ties with sacrificial goats.

According to Kirksey and Helmreich (2010), multispecies ethnography recognizes that, in the Anthropocene, humans are enmeshed in multispecies communities, and it seeks to explore, through writing and ethnographic practice, the worlds co-created by humans and their nonhuman others (p.549). As I explained in the theoretical section, I was drawn immediately to the narrative power of multispecies research. Yet methodologically and academically, I also felt disoriented.

First, I worried that exploring the worlds of animals, birds, or insects might reproduce colonial practices: were we not once again interpreting the world from a human-centered perspective, in ways convenient to ourselves? Second, when I arrived at my fieldsite, I found it easier to discuss topics related to humans, especially in a setting with a racialized hierarchy. This naturally directed my focus toward that subject. It appears to be more significant and also simpler to explore in the short term. Researching different species can often be quite confusing. While observing the dogs, I was uncertain whether I was really “understanding” them. In fact, I often thought that I only had the right to speak about the people who inhabited the landscape of the dogs, rather than the dogs themselves. As this thought deepened, I grew increasingly cautious about whether I even had the right to speak about humans. Yet, burdened by this anxiety and painful self-reflection, I nonetheless wanted to experiment with multispecies ethnography.

Van Dooren, Kirksey & Münster (2016) emphasize the art of attentiveness in multispecies ethnography, which they define as “paying attention to others and crafting meaningful response.” The world, they argue, is a relational outcome co-constituted by humans and nonhumans (Haraway, 2008; Van Dooren et al., 2016). To look attentively requires what they call passionate immersion: entering into the world of those one wishes to understand, and even

accepting the effects that this immersion has on the researcher (Van Dooren et al., 2016). In other words, it is a process of deep observation, developed into reciprocal responsiveness and participation in the making of a shared world (Wels, 2020). This deep observation and art of attentiveness is, for them, the very core of multispecies ethnography.

Although I remained uncertain, one point became clear: strong observation formed the foundation of multispecies research. Thus, when I returned to the site in July, I decided to spend twenty minutes each day simply looking at the dogs. I brought a small box and placed it in front of cages 41 through 45, sitting down before them. The key was to abandon impatience and to just look for a long time. But I soon realized a problem: the dogs liked me too much. They expected me to approach them, and they barked eagerly at the bars. I tried to wait for the barking to subside, but their calls for me lasted longer than my patience could bear.

Two days later, I moved the box in front of cages 51 through 55. The outdoor cages that began with number 41 ended at number 50, followed by a ten-meter gap before resuming at 51. The dogs from 51 onward were neither unfamiliar with me nor expectant that I would enter and play with them. They were indifferent, allowing me to observe without the difficulty of ignoring pleas for attention. I observed several behaviors in dogs, including the formation of hierarchies, clustering with others of similar size, displaying subtle caution toward those they were not close to, and some even cooling themselves by climbing into their water bowls. In contrast, others avoided drinking from water contaminated by such use. But, there were two problems. First, it was nothing different from what I already bodily learned from my cages. Second, I was unsure how these observations could be turned into knowledge. One reason was that I did not truly know these dogs. To observe without disturbance, I had to maintain distance from them but this same distance made interpretation difficult.

I often relied on imagination to try to grasp what the dogs were thinking. At first, I thought I was composing fairy tales. But in truth, I used imagination even with human interlocutors. When someone told me something or worked in a specific way, I wondered what it meant. When I heard someone singing or walking heavily while I was working, I imagined what they were doing. As Ingold (2021) has argued, imagination is not the fabrication of fiction, but a process of creation, attentive observation, and correspondence with the world. (p.5-6) For him, the term imagination encompassed these three processes. He admitted that “imagination” could not precisely describe his methodology for understanding the world, but also that he found no better alternative. For me, what mattered in approaching dogs was not anthropomorphizing and

then fixing those thoughts as truth, but questioning whether what I thought they showed me was indeed accurate, and continuing to observe. Reflexivity was crucial. Imagination was not unique to the study of nonhumans. Okley likewise described participant observation as an entanglement of “mind, imagination, and intellect” (Okley, 2012, p.80). In my view, this imagination meant integrating sensorially embodied, ineffable experiences into understanding.

I sometimes wanted to bark with the dogs. Barking was a fascinating mode of communication. At times it had a clear purpose, at other times it seemed ambiguous. The outdoor cages contained structures of different heights. Some had alpha dogs with a higher rank. In cage 43, there was a dog we called “King.” A German Shepherd mix, he was young, strong, and intelligent. He did not allow other dogs to climb onto his box, nor did he permit defecation or urination anywhere in the cage. In 43, excretion always occurred at the entrance. King seemed to perceive his field of vision as his domain, which meant that in nearby cages, no dog occupied elevated positions. When another dog attempted to climb, King barked sharply, and his warning did not need to last long.

There were also prolonged episodes of barking. Once, when we transported a dog from near the end of the outdoor cages to the medical room, placing the transport crate on a cart, the dogs in the outdoor cages barked at us the entire way. Whenever a dog was captured and moved, the others unfailingly barked. I wondered why. Did the forced relocation of a dog trigger memories for them? Was it an expression of protest? Though I could not answer these questions, I was sure that barking spread like a wave. Once one began, others looked toward the target and joined in. Sometimes they barked simply in response to others. Yet a dog barking alone in its cage could not keep it up for long. They soon fell silent.

In any case, the important thing was to throw myself into the world of the dogs, awakening all my senses. I sometimes felt as if the dogs greeted me with their eyes. Some watched me silently as I passed by without demanding play, as though saying, “Hello. You look busy.” But of course, was that really what they were saying? I had to reflect deeply, for perception can easily deceive. At first, I thought the environment was intolerably bad, and I wrote that the dogs seemed to be waiting for death. Yet over time, I abandoned such thoughts, even though the environment itself had not improved. One reason, among many, was that I had simply grown accustomed.

On my first arrival, I was overwhelmed by unfamiliar sensations: the dark, poorly lit building, the damp walls infused with the dogs' odor, the deafening sound of barking. Having never experienced such sensations before, I even felt a degree of fear. But once I became accustomed to the barking and the smell, I concluded that my initial judgment had been exaggerated. Yet a difficulty remained. Had I been deceived by the unpleasant smell and barking at first, or was it the sense of familiarity that deceived me later?

Although my own fieldwork lasted only six and a half weeks, I tried to train myself in "becoming with dogs", not in romantic or ethical terms, but by learning how to attend to the frictional spaces where humans and dogs encounter one another. For me, multispecies ethnography felt less like a theory than a practice, and I accepted that such practice necessarily leaves behind incompleteness and ambiguity.

Nonetheless, through sensorial observation and thoughtful response, I sought to record an ethnographic world shared with dogs. It was certainly not easy, and much remained ambiguous. Was sensory observation scientific? As Watson (2016) has criticized, perhaps my subjectivity intruded too deeply, projecting new ideals onto the field. Such fears were not absent. Yet still, through observing, sensing, and reflecting, I was able to trace interspecies relations a little more deeply. Multispecies ethnography remains an experimental practice accompanied by incompleteness. My own incompleteness, therefore, is not a flaw, but a condition that makes possible the experimental writing of an open world that multispecies ethnography aspires to.

3. Saleco as an Urban Care Infrastructure

Fortunately, during my research, I was able to stay at a university dormitory. Around this dormitory lived two six-month-old dogs who, judging by their similar appearance, seemed to be siblings. They roamed freely around the area. Once, when I walked to a supermarket about ten minutes away, one of the dogs led the way alongside me. Along the way, we had to cross two pedestrian crossings, and the dog knew precisely when to stop and wait. When we arrived at the supermarket, a student happened to walk out and greeted the dog. Without hesitation, the dog left me and followed the student to the dormitory.

The students called the two dogs “the little ones.” Although the dogs still showed signs of youth, they were tall enough to jump over a knee, so the name “little ones” felt somewhat ironic. Food and water were always placed around the buildings, and the dogs mingled freely with the students. They sometimes slept in front of the dormitory stairs and occasionally joined in when students played foot volleyball or badminton. I quickly grew fond of these dogs and hoped the Saleco would miss them. Whenever the veterinary assistant came to pick me up, I deliberately stood at a distance, hoping he would not recognize the dogs. But eventually, Coloman spotted them. With some tension in my voice, I asked, “Are you going to take them?” He replied, “Only if they are problematic.” Saleco did not capture all dogs, only those deemed to be a problem.

But what did problematic really mean? It wasn’t a fixed standard but a fluid concept negotiated through various factors. Sometimes it depended on the attributes of the dog, but more decisively, it hinged on whether the dog was considered worthy to be cared for. Even a dog with a bad temperament was not positioned for capture if it received care from residents.

This chapter argues that Saleco is not merely a shelter but part of the city’s care infrastructure, redistributing disorder to sustain an image of modern order. I argue that the shelter does not simply capture the stray dogs but actively negotiates the boundaries of urban order through practices of exclusion. Section 3.1 explores communal forms of dog care and non-exclusive ownership. It shows how Romanian stray dog discourse cannot be reduced to narratives of abandonment, but instead reflects transformations of urban order. Section 3.2 analyzes how dogs become constructed as pollutions, drawing on Mary Douglas’s theory. Here, I will trace the shift classifications and explore how the reallocation or neutralize disorder works. Section 3.3. turns to the practices of urban care of Saleco, highlighting how the care is performed through invisibility and negotiations. Finally, Section 3.4 shows the category of non-

problematic dogs, demonstrating how the care reposition certain dogs within the boundaries of normality.

3.1 Communal Care and the Boundaries of Ownership

Romania is said to have more stray dogs than any other country in Europe. Animal welfare organizations such as Four Paws International estimate that more than 500,000 stray dogs live across Romania.⁵ Yet many argue that it is virtually impossible to know the exact number. What is certain, however, is that a large population of stray dogs lives in Romanian cities. Why, then, do so many dogs roam the streets?

The texts I read before beginning my fieldwork often traced the origins to the urbanization policies of Ceaușescu's regime. A BBC article states that "since former communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu ordered in the 1980s the demolition of vast areas of houses in Bucharest and other cities, and their replacement with concrete blocks of flats, forcing the owners to abandon their dogs."⁶ Similarly, Crețan's study confirms that the most significant wave of abandonment occurred during this period (Crețan, 2015, p.159). According to this account, as villagers moved into small urban apartments, they could not bring their dogs. The abandoned dogs then thrived on their own.

This sounded highly persuasive, and at first, I accepted it rather uncritically. However, conversations in the field revealed that the situation was more complex. A veterinary assistant pointed out that many people had brought their dogs into the cities. Some expected they could continue to care for the dogs in similar ways. Yet the urban environment differed fundamentally from neighborhoods of houses with yards. Dogs could no longer live in the same manner as part of a community. Urbanization, alongside spatial reorganization, thus reshaped human–dog relationships. The dogs brought into the cities reproduced rapidly within these unfinished urban landscapes (Mihăilescu, 2013, as cited in Crețan, 2015).

The dogs I encountered at the dormitory were difficult to categorize as either owned or entirely stray. The one-to-one owner–dog relationship was not the sole norm. Students' care practices formed a unique communal relationship with the dogs, enabling their urban existence.

⁵ <https://www.four-paws.org/campaigns-topics/topics/help-for-stray-animals/stray-animal-care-in-romania>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24489505>

This sense of communal ownership is also evident in the stories of my interlocutor, Mădălin, who regularly visited Saleco as a representative of an animal welfare organization. He had rescued about 300 dogs from shelters and placed them in domestic or international adoptions. At the time of my research, he was personally caring for around 50 dogs and 50 cats at his own home. He recalled first rescuing dogs in 2014, during the period when the forced euthanasia law was activated.

Mădălin placed food and water in his yard, and several dogs would freely come and go. He often walked with them to the edge of the village in the mornings and encountered them again on his return in the evenings. But once euthanasia policies intensified and captures became more frequent, he had to hide the dogs inside his yard. When dog catchers appeared, neighbors would notify one another. Residents would place dogs in yards or under stairwells to signal that they were not wild strays. Again, care repositioned these dogs into the category of not to be captured.

Mădălin said he considered those dogs his own because if they caused trouble or were injured, he would intervene. At the same time, he mentioned that other residents might also have intervened. Responsibility was not exclusive but distributed. It was thus natural for several people to think of the same dogs as their own. Such communal care demanded an imagination of ownership different from conventional, individualist models.

Fijn (2018) criticizes domestication studies for often homogenizing human–animal communities and ignoring social and cultural differences (p.73). She notes, for instance, that while Mongolian dogs may appear domesticated (by European standards), they are not typically obedient in the way livestock dogs are expected to be. Their role is protection, and disobedience may even be a virtue. Dingoes, conversely, are classified as feral, yet among Aboriginal people, dingoes are embedded in myth, ancestry, and narrative. For them, the distinction between dog and dingo may be meaningless or complex, even if non-Indigenous observers impose it readily. Fijn (2018) thus argues that studies of human–dog relations must avoid universal classificatory frameworks and instead account for local particularities.

Srinivasan's (2013) study further demonstrates how cultural differences shape animal policy. In Britain, where exclusive ownership norms prevail, stray dogs are perceived as ownerless and alien. Intervention is therefore deemed necessary and legitimate. By contrast, in India, stray dogs are more naturally accepted. Srinivasan highlights the Tamil term *theru nai* ("street

dog”), which reflects that dogs may legitimately belong to the street. Consequently, intervention is not automatically regarded as essential. This cultural difference produces an irony: euthanasia is more frequent in Britain, despite its reputation for animal welfare.

At Saleco, the term “*câine fără stăpân*” (dog without a master) was widely used. The phrase presupposes that a dog must gain social recognition through exclusive ownership, implying that those without masters are implicitly categorized for capture. In my view, this expression signals the orientation Saleco seeks to enforce. Yet this institutional orientation does not always align with broader social perceptions. Rather, it represents an administrative attempt to interpret human–dog relations in a way that legitimizes exclusion.

According to a report by Pencea & Brădăţan (2015), stray dogs in Romania are classified as Vagabond dogs, Street dogs, and Community street dogs. The latter are those cared for by residents but without legal owners, occupying an ambiguous position. Mihăilescu (2013), similarly, describes fluid, non-exclusive ownership relations. His book recounts: “*Leuţu ended up having a kind of house of his own, a strange one, half on the street, half in the neighbors’ yard, with the exit on the sidewalk in front of us.*” The community’s care forged relationships with dogs without imposing exclusive responsibility.

In this context, we must reconsider the notion of “abandonment.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, abandonment means “to cease to support or look after (someone); to desert.” The term applies when one leaves behind something that one owns. But if clear ownership did not exist between humans and dogs, then abandonment is inappropriate. Within communal, distributed relationships of ownership, care, and responsibility, abandonment cannot exist in the conventional sense. Thus, Romania’s stray dog issue is less the result of simple abandonment than a relational transformation produced by the clash between non-exclusive ownership practices and modern urban life. The problem lay not in dogs being discarded, but in shifting social classification systems surrounding care and ownership.

3.2 Dogs as Pollution

Some dogs defecated immediately after the cage had been cleaned, leaving feces on the freshly washed floor. In the mornings, when I arrived at work, the cages were full of excrement. Yet this did not feel abnormal; it seemed natural. By contrast, a single piece of feces on a clean and orderly floor stood out so much that it appeared abnormal. At times, I even felt a sense of

resentment toward the dogs that defecated right after cleaning, as if they were challenging the system of cleanliness I had just established.

This example shows that what is perceived as dirty is not determined solely by the material properties of matter, but by more complex factors. The same feces could or could not be perceived as pollution depending on when and where they were encountered.

Mary Douglas (1966/2002) defines pollution as “matter out of place”, arguing that pollution is not an intrinsic property but rather a violation of a social classificatory system. The same substance may or may not be considered polluting, depending on its context and location. In this section, I apply Douglas’s theory to examine how dogs come to be constructed as pollution in urban spaces, and how Saleco establishes and reproduces a particular order.

3.2.1 Concepts of Pollution

I often visited a restaurant located inside a city park. The park was one of the most popular destinations for family outings, and the restaurant was always crowded. Cats and dogs that are living nearby usually gather around people’s tables. Cats often climbed directly onto the tables without hesitation, while dogs lingered at people’s feet. Once, a couple with their child was eating when both a cat and a dog approached them. The child petted the cat, and soon after turned to the dog with curiosity. When the child tried to touch the dog, the mother firmly intervened, saying, “No, it’s dirty.”

Douglas (1966/2002) emphasized that pollution is always symbolic. According to her, Europeans often assume that their notions of pollution are objective and hygienic, whereas the pollution concepts of so-called primitive societies are religious and symbolic (p. 36). She questioned this assumption, highlighting that ideas of dirt are symbolic everywhere. A shoe on a dining table is not considered dirty due to the dust on the shoe, but rather because the table is not a proper place for shoes. Thus, Douglas (1966/2002) defined pollution as matter out of place (p. 37). Moreover, pollution is a transgression of order; it represents a threat to the community (p. 41).

Speltini and Passini (2014) stress that the history of cleanliness reflects the history of a society and its culture. What is defined as clean or dirty is socially and culturally determined. Even within the same cultural context, assessments of pollution can vary depending on social or religious affiliation (p. 206). Sensory perception, such as sight, smell, and taste, as well as

judgment, prejudice, economic factors, emotions such as disgust, and fears, can all shape what counts as pollution (p. 214).

Pollution is located outside the classificatory system and represents disorder. By recognizing anomalies that generate disorder, one becomes more aware of the boundaries of classification. Sticky entities that occupy the margins of categories create discomfort and therefore must be removed. (Douglas, 1966/2002) This may be done through denial, through physical elimination, by casting them as taboo, or by stigmatizing them as dangerous and controlling them. In all cases, the central aim is the restoration of order (Douglas, 1966/2002, p. 41).

The dog that approached the child in the park may have been dirty. It may have carried dust or soil on its body, and it may have harbored fleas or ticks. But when the woman declared the dog to be dirty, was she only referring to hygiene? Was the cat necessarily clean enough to touch? This seemingly ordinary scene demonstrates that the declaration of the dog as dirty was not merely about hygiene. The dog, being larger than the child, could represent a potential threat. At that moment, the social stigma of dogs as risky and polluting was made immediately visible.

3.2.2 Temporality and Social Construction of Pollution

If pollution is determined by social classification, then what counts as pollution becomes a matter of negotiation. Jerolmack (2008) traces the reclassification of pigeons from non-polluting to polluting animals. He shows that in the 1930s, pigeons were not regarded as repulsive but instead as sources of pleasure for people. Over time, however, and especially with the rising prominence of public hygiene and health concerns, pigeons came to be seen as carriers of disease and thus became objects of disgust. The author highlights in particular a 1963 incident in New York in which two residents died. Although news reports clarified that pigeons were not uniquely dangerous compared to other wild animals, many believed that pigeons had transmitted the disease that killed the residents. Pigeons were stigmatized as threats to public health and thus reclassified as abnormal beings (ibid).

This illustrates how definitions of pollution shift with historical context and social sentiment. Similarly, perceptions of dogs in Romania have changed over time. As mentioned earlier, Pencea and Brădăţan (2015) note in their report that dogs once coexisted naturally with communities, and were not necessarily considered beings to be eliminated from the city. Yet decisive incidents and institutional changes fostered a more hostile stance toward stray dogs. After highly publicized events, dogs came to be regarded through social consensus as abnormal

elements that disrupted the urban landscape. As Douglas (1966/2002) argues, pollution is never a concept established in isolation but rather a byproduct of classificatory systems that exclude what is deemed inappropriate (p. 36). Stray dogs in Romania were similarly reconstituted as polluted beings, pushed beyond the boundaries of social order as society itself changed.

The incident that triggered forced euthanasia policies for strays was the death of Ionuț Anghel, for which Constantin Ciorăscu was held responsible. He owned a piece of green land near the park where the incident took place, which was also slated for real estate development. Although he initially received a suspended sentence, the victim's family appealed, resulting in a prison sentence. His crime lay in failing to properly manage and control the dogs living on his land so that they would not harm people. In addition to imprisonment, he was ordered to pay approximately 1.6 million euros in damages to the victim's family.

Ciorăscu's wife expressed dissatisfaction with the verdict. She argued that another party also shared responsibility for the property, and further emphasized that her husband had not even been present at the site when the incident occurred. She highlighted that the trial was completed in only two hearings, remarking, "I do not say the prosecutor was swayed by public opinion, but there was pressure, and someone had to be sacrificed."⁷

Although I am not in a position to interpret Romanian law, the fact that Ciorăscu received a three-year prison sentence for indirect responsibility suggests that the case was treated with extreme seriousness. His wife's comments, moreover, point to the political nature of the trial. The case illustrates the social conflict and intense controversy surrounding how stray dogs should be treated, and signals the growing public insistence that effective control must be exercised over them.

In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas seemed to view society as a unified whole. Yet in *Natural Symbols* (1970) she acknowledged diversity within society, proposing the concepts of "group" and "grid" to explain variation. "Group" refers to the degree of integration of individuals into a social unit, while "grid" indicates the extent to which external rules constrain individuals. On this basis, she mapped societies into four quadrants: firmly integrated with strong regulations,

⁷ For a detailed news report on this issue, see: HotNews. (2015, February 23). *Cazul Ionuț Anghel: Constantin Ciorăscu vrea să ceară anularea condamnării*. HotNews.ro. <https://hotnews.ro/cazul-ionuț-anghel-constantin-ciorăscu-vrea-să-ceară-anularea-condamnării-450123>

strongly integrated with weak rules, weakly integrated with strong rules, and weakly integrated with weak rules.

The prison sentence for Constantin Ciorăscu suggests the presence of a social norm that dogs are threats requiring control. Yet whether this norm was genuinely strong remains ambiguous. His wife's statement implies that political considerations may have influenced the ruling, and thus that the judicial orientation did not necessarily coincide with the way broader society received it. Indeed, the dogs living around the dormitory that I described earlier show that the norm requiring the elimination of strays from urban space did not exert overwhelming force. Nonetheless, disorder cannot persist indefinitely. In such a fragmented terrain of perceptions, purification systems are necessary. Accordingly, public shelters such as Saleco should not be understood merely as facilities for housing dogs but rather as state projects designed to mediate conflicts and maintain order in the absence of a fully consolidated social consensus.

3.2.3 Care as Reallocation of Pollution

One resident I spoke with remarked, when I told her that I was working at Saleco, "The city has never been this clean." For her, an urban landscape without dogs was mapped directly onto cleanliness.

She had moved to the city when the socialist housing blocks had just begun to be constructed. Her apartment was located in one of the very first blocks to be built. At that time, the surroundings were largely undeveloped, and consequently there were many dogs. The urban landscape of that period was very different from today. She recalled that she would sometimes take a detour to avoid packs of dogs. Because roaming dogs could be dangerous, it was almost impossible to see children riding bicycles on their own. It was also difficult to cultivate flowers in gardens, as dogs defecated anywhere. She explained that now these concerns had disappeared because the city has become clean.

Yet, this cleanliness did not merely refer to hygiene. It signified order, safety, predictability, and peacefulness. The disappearance of dogs did not simply mean that the underdeveloped urban landscape of the past had been stripped of dogs. The space left behind was not left empty. As she put it, it had become "a better living environment," a landscape that had been modernized with bakeries, supermarkets, and flower shops.

It is telling that Saleco promoted a campaign encouraging dog owners to implant microchips. While Saleco was, in most cases, not publicly visible, it was remarkably proactive in this campaign. Across the city, posters proclaimed: “Be a responsible pet owner.” These could be seen on public transport screens and on major city bulletin boards. Dog owners could visit one of three veterinary clinics in the city to have a microchip implanted for free. This initiative aligned with Saleco’s vision of establishing and disseminating information about a proper canine culture. A microchipped dog, even if caught while roaming, could be returned to its owner. In this way, the possibility of dogs remaining in the city as pollutants was reduced.

What particularly caught my eye was the image on the campaign posters: a very cheerful and happy-looking Border Collie. I told Coloman that it would have been better to use photos of the dogs currently living at the shelter. He replied that the dogs in the shelter were not beautiful. This was certainly not true. There were many beautiful dogs in the shelter. Yet Coloman’s notion of beauty was not about objective traits, but about socially accepted aesthetics. The large black dogs, which were numerous in the shelter, were perceived as not beautiful. They were almost taken for granted as beings that did not belong in the city, beings that could not live happily with owners in urban life. Ultimately, the beauty Coloman referred to aligned with the order of dog ownership in the modern city, with the aesthetics of the urban landscape itself. In this sense, the campaign and its aesthetic distinctions did more than simply regulate pet ownership: they visualized which dogs belonged in the order of the city and which had to be excluded.

Douglas emphasized that the removal of pollution is not a negative act but the achievement of order. This perspective enables the suspension of moral judgment, as maintaining communal order becomes the higher moral principle. Speltini and Passini (2014) pointed out that the removal of pollution can become a strategy of exclusion. Disgust at pollution can lead to separation, removal, and even destruction by violent or immoral means (p.210) Once a distinction has been drawn, cognitive and emotional reactions can be organized even in the absence of clear evidence of dirt or disease (ibid).

The order Saleco sought to achieve was not only the maintenance of the present modern urban landscape but also the imagined urban landscape of the future. For this reason, Saleco did not seek to capture all dogs, but only to remove those impurities that did not fit the urban landscape. Dogs walking with their owners in parks or along the riverside, or pedigree breeds such as Border Collies, fit the city’s scenery. By contrast, dogs wandering without owners did not.

Visible pollution becomes a threat. This threat derives from the identity of impurity as pollution. Yet this identity can be dissolved once the matter is relocated to its proper place. For example, when garbage is placed inside a bin, it no longer carries the identity of disorder; it ceases to be perceived as a threat (Douglas, 1996/2002, p.161). In this sense, Saleco's practice was the reallocation of pollution. Before and immediately after entering the shelter, the dogs were physically the same. But the moment they passed through the gate, their social meaning changed. They were no longer perceived as a threat. Through spatial reallocation, Saleco neutralized its potential to disrupt social order.

Acts that restore order also reinforce existing or imagined orders. The more dogs Saleco captured, the more strongly the idea was reinforced that a dog-free city is the norm. Douglas (1966/2002) showed that when the Dinka performed rain rituals, the ritual was not merely instrumental. The ritual itself was efficacious in reinforcing the order that not having rain is abnormal (p.69). Similarly, Saleco's work went beyond merely adjusting the position of dogs: it reinforced the order of a dog-free city.

In this way, Saleco's role was not simply a technical matter of dog capture. It was a political act that reallocated pollution and, in doing so, confirmed and strengthened the normality imagined by the modern city. Yet this reallocation was not always carried out in the same manner. Saleco avoided methods that might appear violent or undermine citizens' satisfaction, instead maintaining urban order through invisible adjustments. Thus, the concrete practices of removing pollution were carried out quietly, in ways that remained largely unseen. The following section will explore these practices in more detail.

3.3 Practices of Urban Care

3.3.1 Invisibility of Care

Saleco was located at the margins of the city. In the early stages of my fieldwork, employees would come to pick me up, but as time went on, I had to travel there alone. Reaching Saleco in the morning by public transport was not easy. From the bus terminal at the edge of the city, I had to walk about 25 minutes more, often along roads without sidewalks. For this reason, I usually took a taxi before sunrise. One day, as I was about to leave, the taxi driver asked if I was sure this was my destination and if I was safe.

Although there were many houses around Saleco, they were not visible from the unpaved road where the taxi entered. From that side, only a construction site for a new housing complex could be seen, and the surroundings did not look particularly safe. Thus, it was not surprising that to the taxi driver, an Asian woman visibly unfamiliar with the place, getting out there before daylight seemed troubling. When I explained that there was a dog shelter, she was astonished. Saleco was a large shelter, known to many, but its exact location was not widely known. Even a taxi driver, usually well-acquainted with every corner of the city, found it unfamiliar.

It is difficult to imagine such a large animal shelter being located in the middle of the city, for many reasons: the value of the land, the noise of barking dogs, and concerns about hygiene and odor. I came to think that Saleco deliberately chose not to make its operations too visible.

What always struck me was how well Saleco's vehicles were maintained. There were two kinds: smaller minivans, mainly for administrative staff on official business trips, and two large vans used by veterinary assistants for capturing dogs, transporting them, and collecting chicken bones from nearby factories. Both types looked immaculately clean on the outside. Inside, however, they were completely different. Administrative vehicles were tidy, with air fresheners near the dashboard and spotless floor mats. The large vans, by contrast, were perpetually messy. Gloves used for catching dogs and piles of paperwork covered the seats, while the mats were caked with mud from workers' boots. Storage compartments were disorganized, and the floor was soiled with excrement or chicken waste. The stench was overwhelming. Yet since the vans had no interior lighting, the filth was seldom noticed and mostly ignored.

Even though the interiors were chaotic and dirty, the exteriors were kept meticulously clean. After every outing, workers were assigned to wash them thoroughly, hosing down the surface, scrubbing with detergent, even using long poles to reach the roof. This daily routine required significant effort but was indispensable. On the white body of the van, the inscription read "Serviciul Public de Gestionare a Câinilor Fără Stăpân" (Public Service for the Management of Stray Dogs). From the outside, the vehicles conveyed an image of dedication to caring for dogs. What remained hidden, however, was the suffering of the dogs inside and the dirt of the labor that sustained this image.

One morning, I saw the corpse of a cat on my way to work. When I returned in the evening, it had disappeared without a trace. In that absence, I sensed care; yet most people would probably not perceive care in the simple fact of a clean street. Laugier (2021) argues that the better care is, the less visible it becomes. Care is not hidden, but rather overlooked, because people prefer not to see it. The result is that a clean city remains as the product of invisible labor.⁸

What citizens perceived of Saleco was its spotless, well-maintained vehicles. They did not sense Saleco in the absence of animal corpses on the streets. This invisibility is of the same order as the immaculate images of newly installed cages on Saleco's official website. Invisibility here was not a neutral feature: it was actively shaped both by the public's reluctance to see and by the institution's choice not to display.

3.3.2 Negotiations of Care Boundaries

In mid-July, city temperatures reached 40°C. Yet the workers still went out to catch dogs. Depending on the number of dogs targeted for capture on a given day, the routine varied; typically, the vehicle left the shelter early in the morning and returned around noon. That day, because seven dogs had to be caught, the van arrived back slightly after midday. As the vehicle pulled in, workers gathered around the building. The dogs had to be unloaded from the closed cargo compartment and transferred inside. When one worker opened the compartment door, a wave of hot, heavy air poured out. Several dogs confined in small transport cages panted with their tongues hanging out, visibly suffering. The cages in which they lay were filled with urine and feces. The veterinary assistant who climbed down from the driver's seat explained to me that the dogs had suffered from the heat. Since the cargo space had no windows, it was poorly ventilated, and the dogs had to endure long hours inside.

I often searched YouTube for information on Romania's stray dogs. Typing keywords like Romania, dog catcher, and stray dogs typically brought up titles such as massive massacre or 'stop this cruelty. One video caught my attention: two dog catchers trapped a dog with a snare. The dog writhed in pain and howled as a pickup truck pulled up. The catchers seized the

⁸ Laugier (2021) suggests that care is invisible for several reasons. First, it is still because care is usually described in the private sector. Second, seeing care unveils the vulnerability of humans. Third, people try not to recognize the care work, since care workers are generally in a lower class. Fourth, well-done care is not visible.

animal by its limbs and tossed it into a cage in the truck's cargo bed, where another dog was already sitting. Several children stood by watching. The uploader added a pointed caption: "Encouraged and assisted by the children... this is Romania!" It seemed the video maker experienced a complex unease arising from the dog catchers, the truck, the snare, and the approving spectators.

Pearson (2017) has analyzed the issue of stray dogs in Paris up to the eve of World War I. Public hygiene officials there addressed the problem under the goal of making the city safe, clean, and modern. Street dogs were considered threats to Paris's modernity, hygiene, and international prestige. Dogs were classified alongside prostitutes, manual laborers, beggars, and street vendors as dangerous classes. (Pearson, 2017, p.146) Again, dogs were thus again categorized as "pollution," and their elimination was a means of achieving urban order.

This article shows that, even though there was a broad social consensus on the need for strong policies to create a clean city, specific practices often faced resistance. It should be done least cruelly and most promptly (Pearson, 2017, p.153). Methods considered excessively cruel could provoke public backlash. Saleco's clean, windowless white vans fit this social demand for an appropriate form of care. Even if citizens agreed that stray dogs needed to be removed, the method had to be moderated. Witnessing the transport of captured dogs was unpleasant. People seemed aware that dogs were being removed, but gave little thought to where they were taken. That absence of curiosity was deliberate. Saleco wished to conceal the cruelty of capture, hence the use of vehicles whose spotless exteriors revealed nothing of their interior.

In Paris, hostility toward stray dogs was intense; police officers sometimes even shot them in front of citizens. Yet such heavy-handed policies later came under political pressure. (ibid., p.154) Interestingly, the pressure arose from fears that overly brutal responses could damage the city's image of modernity. Just as the boundaries of what counts as "pollution" are continually negotiated, the means of purification must also remain within what society deems acceptable.

Likewise, Saleco avoided overly drastic methods of removal, for these could tarnish the city's modern image. It calibrated its practices so that citizens would not be disturbed. It refrained from carrying out euthanasia and avoided using snares in public, methods that could appear excessively cruel. Indiscriminate euthanasia could provoke protests from animal protection groups, potentially destabilizing the very order the institution sought to maintain. Considering

the shifting legal landscape of recent years, the norm of a city without stray dogs was less than stable. To sustain this fragile order, it was crucial to prevent strong resistance or threats from emerging.

The refusal to perform euthanasia was another meaningful aspect. Saleco did not euthanize dogs. But whether this was inherently a superior method was ambiguous. Dogs sometimes fought severely. Those badly injured were moved to separate cages. Staff sprayed wounds with a hemostatic aerosol, but provided no further treatment. The dogs had to recover on their own in another enclosure. On one occasion, a dog was so badly injured that recovery was impossible; it was left to die slowly. While most people would favor the policy of not euthanizing, and it indeed became institutionalized as a rule, this approach was not necessarily the most appropriate in every situation.

Not long after I began working, a veterinary assistant asked me to evaluate Saleco. I admitted that at first I had thought poorly of it, but considering the actual conditions and resources, I now found it acceptable. The shelter was far from perfect, but under present constraints, it could not realistically do much better. Coloman agreed, remarking, “It’s no match for shelters in Europe, like in England or Switzerland, but still it’s not bad.” When I asked him about shelters in England and Switzerland, he confessed he knew nothing firsthand. He simply imagined dogs running freely on grassy lawns and assumed they must be happier there.

Yet whether England or Switzerland truly offered better care is uncertain. In England, especially, the picture is complex. The 1988 Stray Dogs Act mandated that strays be kept for seven days, after which they could be euthanized. In practice, euthanasia was widely carried out. The RSPCA, known as the world’s oldest and largest animal welfare organization, insisted it did not practice unnecessary euthanasia but simultaneously argued that even healthy animals sometimes needed to be put down for reasons of “animal welfare.” Thus, the presence or absence of euthanasia does not straightforwardly signal better or worse care.

What mattered was that Coloman idealized the shelters of England and Switzerland. His words invoked an imagined form of purification, rooted in collective expectations of social order.⁹

⁹ One reason I can think of for him mentioning England and Switzerland as comparisons is that the public shelter in the same city is run by women from England and Switzerland.

Through this section, I have shown how dogs, as pollution, illuminate the imagined order of the modern city. In such an order, unattractive, large, or aggressive dogs were excluded. Spatial relocation reorganized threats. At the same time, the process of purification could not be excessively cruel. Ultimately, Saleco's role extended beyond the technical procedure of housing strays. It affirmed and reinforced the city's imagined cleanliness and normality. Yet, as the diversity of public discourse on stray dogs suggests, this classification always retained the possibility of change. Saleco thus is a political infrastructure for maintaining the city's current order.

3.4 Non-problematic dogs

So far, I have shown how dogs come to be positioned outside classificatory systems, and how Saleco works as an urban care infrastructure to restore that disorder. Finally, I turn my focus to the dogs that remain within the city.

Behind Dormitory A, where I was staying, there were several residential apartment blocks. At the entrance of one of these buildings, two elderly dogs were always sitting. One was a tiny dog, its fur had likely once been black, but had turned entirely gray with age. The other was a medium-sized dog with orange-colored fur. I sometimes found these dogs uncomfortable, as they barked fiercely whenever people passed by.

They spent most of the day sitting in front of the entrance, occasionally wandering around the neighborhood. When I left for the shelter in the mornings, they were not visible. Out of curiosity, one day, I looked inside the entrance of the building and found them sleeping under the stairs. The first floor of the building had a small garden, and from this garden one could enter the main door. Straight ahead was a staircase, and beside it a narrow hallway. The dogs' houses were under the stairs, toward this hallway. At night, they slept there.

One day, when I passed by, the small dog barked furiously. An elderly woman, who was planting a flowering tree in the garden, explained to me, "He is old and deaf." It seems she was defending the dog's inappropriate behavior. These dogs barked madly every day, but within the bounds tolerated by the residents. They received care, and thus they were not considered a problem. Being a "non-problem dog" was closely tied to people's patience and their provision of care.

Within Romanian society, the existence of community dogs was generally accepted. Even after the dogs came to be stigmatized as threats and disorderly beings around 2010 (Cretan, 2015; Mihailescu, 2013; Pencea & Brădăţan, 2015), citizens continued to ascribe normality to community dogs, and this normality was sustained through care. As Mary Douglas (1966/2002) reminds us, social order is not only maintained through material and instrumental control, but also through tolerance, acceptance, and care.

A study by Hughes et al. (2017) focused on garbage bags as a material means of transforming waste, a “dirty” substance, into something acceptable. Sanitation workers considered waste inside a garbage bag tolerable and normal, but waste scattered outside was still regarded as dirty. I was reminded of this by the collars hanging around the necks of the two dogs at the apartment entrance. Dogs with collars were not immediately identified as strays; instead, they were perceived as being cared for by someone, thus protected from dog-catchers’ raids or citizens’ complaints. In other words, being “non-problematic” was essentially created through care, but this care could also be materialized and made visible through objects.

Size and breed also influenced perceptions of whether a dog was problematic. On the first evening I arrived in Romania, my fellow students and I went for a night walk with our professor. The Romanian professor explained the history of the buildings and memories of his childhood, while we walked with a mix of excitement and anxiety about beginning our fieldwork. The neighborhood was part of the old city, filled not with high-rise apartment blocks but with low, one- to two-story houses. Before reaching the main road, I counted at least three dogs, and it made me assume the city had many strays. Yet afterward, I rarely encountered strays, and especially not in residential clusters or central areas. When I told a veterinary assistant about seeing several dogs near the hotel where my professors stayed, he paused and then asked: “Were those dogs small?” Indeed, dogs tolerated by residents were usually small and, therefore, non-threatening.

In fact, during my observations, the dogs that entered Saleco were almost always medium to large adult dogs. Some entered pregnant, but I never saw very young puppies brought to the shelter. During my entire fieldwork, not a single puppy entered, and small adult dogs were extremely rare, only one in a thousand. This small dog received special care from staff and was kept outside the enclosures.

Though uncommon, some dogs did leave the shelter again. It was difficult to find clear external similarities among them.¹⁰ Once, two dogs from cage number 50 were adopted overseas simultaneously. One was large-bodied with short legs, creating a comical appearance (but he was lovely). The other was a black mixed-breed dog, one of over a hundred in the shelter. Surely both had good dog-nality, but could overseas adopters really have known this? They had decided based only on a few photographs.

Mădălin explained that overseas adopters sometimes decided to adopt a dog based on nothing more than a handful of pictures, without ever meeting it. When I asked why, he replied simply: “Because they liked that dog.” I tried to understand human–dog relations through observable, material means, but affection and the sense of “destiny” still played a decisive role, sometimes in ways that seemed almost random. What was certain, however, was that the only way a dog could leave the shelter was by being chosen as the recipient of human care.

Dogs that did not become problems, or that were rescued from the shelter and reintroduced into the city, were those deemed socially qualified. This qualification was produced by various elements: material signs, residents’ tolerance, or chance encounters of affection. Ultimately, this qualification was embodied in the presence or absence of care. Dogs judged to deserve care, because of their size, appearance, beauty, or long-standing bonds, were not problems. But this distinction also produced inequalities between dogs with such qualifications and those without. As Thelen (2015, 2021) emphasizes, care is not neutral but constitutes a power process that produces differences, draws boundaries, and excludes.

3.5 Care as an Urban Network

So far, I have shown how Saleco maintained the order of a clean city. One impression that stayed with me was that, although Saleco operated quietly on the urban margins, its work was deeply entangled with everyday city life. At the same time, Saleco itself also received care from the city. The chicken bones fed to the dogs, for instance, came from a factory that supplied meat to a well-known restaurant chain. Whenever I saw that restaurant, I thought about how closely Saleco and the city’s citizens were connected. Yet for the diners, the idea that their

¹⁰ Mădălin often took photos of the dogs to prepare adoption materials, but his photos were never flattering. I once asked him to photograph a particularly beautiful dog, red-furred, sweet-natured, gentle, whom I thought surely deserved a good owner. But Mădălin’s photo failed to capture this. The symmetry was off, and the dog looked unattractive. I complained about his photography skills, but Mădălin insisted that photos were not important. “If people want to adopt, they will find their dog anyway,” he said.

meal was linked to the shelter would have seemed absurd, almost unimaginable. The joy of discovering such invisible connections reminded me once again of Tronto and Fisher's definition of care as the network that sustains our world. Saleco, as an urban care infrastructure, reveals how multispecies care is entangled with governance, power, aesthetics, and exclusion.

Up to this point, I have examined how public dog care was framed within the logic of urban hygiene and safety, designed to realize a modern urban landscape. In the following chapter, I explore how this logic materializes in concrete practices through scenes from inside the shelter.

4. Care in the Shelter

It was late July, 6:20 in the morning. The staff were already at the shelter, though the work had not yet begun. Because there was no electricity near the dog cages, work could only start after the sun had fully risen. Each employee prepared for the day in their way. I liked this time of day very much, because the sunrise over the lake was beautiful. Before the sun rose, looseness and tension, calm and busyness coexisted in paradoxical ways. This twilight brought to mind the expression, the hour between the dog and the wolf.¹¹

One morning, I saw a staff member holding a candle, walking past the outdoor cages toward the building. He walked slightly apart from the cages so as not to provoke the dogs. The dogs noticed his passing, but, perhaps judging that he was not approaching them, they remained curled up and silent, watching him. Out of curiosity, I followed.

After passing ten outdoor cages and turning left, we reached an old building. The iron gate was ajar, and the staff member twisted his body to slip inside. I did the same, trying not to touch the door. He disappeared deeper into the building, perhaps to check on the dogs he cared for, while I hesitated and stopped in the central hall.

Although it was not completely dark outside, inside the building was pitch black. The farther corners were submerged in shadow, and with my sight obstructed, my other senses grew sharp. I heard the faint sounds of dogs moving in their cages, sounds that felt strangely unfamiliar. I thought of stepping back out into the open air, expecting the tension might lift, yet I dared not move for fear of triggering an eruption of barking. I did not want to bother the neighborhood residents, and so I stayed still, leaning into the sliver of light seeping through the iron door. In that moment, the dogs and I encountered one another through energies, sounds, even smells, senses I had not relied on before.

How much time passed? Perhaps only two or three minutes, though it felt much longer. At the far end of the corridor, Ionuț opened a door. The heavy iron door creaked, and sunlight poured in. Through the ragged holes in the cages, and through the door itself, light streamed inside,

¹¹ Originally used by shepherds to describe the ambiguous time when one could not tell whether the figure approaching was a friend dog or an enemy wolf, the phrase came to metaphorically signify situations of uncertainty and is often borrowed in Korean literature and television shows.

revealing what had been hidden: the dogs watching me through the bars, clothes hung by the workers the day before, a shovel and broom leaning against the wall, a bent water bucket. Strangeness and tension dissipated, replaced by familiarity. In this illuminated scene, I felt closer to the dogs, lighter, and I stepped back outside.

This brief moment left a deep impression on me. The worker walking at a distance to avoid agitating the dogs, the dogs watching silently instead of barking, and my own posture of stillness, so as not to wake the neighborhood, and the ragged holes in the dog cages all reminded me that we were bound together through care. It also showed that interspecies care emerges at the intersection of time, light, sound, sight, and the delicate negotiation of distance. While I was in the building, the dogs clearly sensed me, and I sensed them through their breathing and the rattling of bars. Yet we did not provoke each other. After sunrise, we met again as co-inhabitants of the same environment, but before then, we had approached each other as strangers, cautiously exploring.

In this chapter, as illustrated by the vignette above, I show how practices of care are negotiated and carried out within ambiguity. Section 4.1 emphasizes that care in the shelter does not flow unilaterally from humans to dogs, but is instead woven into a network entangling humans, animals, environments, and tools. In Section 4.2, I highlight the ambivalence of care through the violent scene of ovariohysterectomy. Section 4.3 focuses on the unequal distribution of care, exploring how the notion of “dirty work” reveals and reinforces class and ethnic inequalities. Section 4.4 examines strategies of distancing, showing how distance itself can sustain care. Section 4.5 turns to the relationship between affection and care: while volunteers and citizens often use affection as a benchmark of good care, in practice affection is not a prerequisite. Section 4.6 demonstrates how care is distributed differentially and how dogs themselves negotiate entitlement to special forms of care. Finally, Section 4.7 synthesizes the preceding discussions to argue that care is a political and unfinished process.

4.1 Care as a co-situated network

The terms “care recipient” and “care provider” suggest that there is a clear distinction between those who give and those who receive care. When I entered the field, I intended to work as a care provider and naturally assumed I would be the one giving care to the dogs. Yet it did not take long before I realized that I, the researcher and the caregiver, was in fact the one receiving the most care. Not only I, but everyone in the shelter was simultaneously a provider and a

recipient of care. Nor was care given by humans alone. I received care not only from my colleagues but also from the dogs, and from non-human elements such as weather and tools, which provided care both to me and to the animals.

Next to the veterinary assistant's office was cage number 41. From there, ten cages were lined up; a few meters further, cages 51 through 70 stood. Behind them was an old building with another fifty or so cages inside. The veterinary assistant assigned me to Connor, the worker responsible for cages 41 through 45. He explained that Connor was more gentle than the others and would therefore take good care of me. In my view, I was placed there also because these cages were right beside the office, in a busy passageway where many people were always walking. Since someone would always see me, this positioning protected me from various risks.¹²

Whatever the reason, Connor's responsibility to "care for me" was something of a burden. It was also an inconvenience for the dogs in cages 41 through 45. At first, Connor had to work twice as hard because of me. In the first phase of the fieldwork, I arrived between 8:00 and 8:30, in line with the veterinary assistant's schedule. But cleaning started around 7:30 in May. It means by the time I arrived, cleaning was often finished. To give me a role, Connor left cages 41 and 42 undone. But clearly, he had cleaned them beforehand, particularly the difficult corner or high structures that were too challenging for me. This allowed him to keep the cages clean while letting me feel I was participating. As time passed, I grew more skilled at sweeping and told Connor he no longer needed to prepare in advance. After checking my work several times, he entrusted cages 41 and 42 entirely to me.

Connor never really understood why I wanted to do more work. He believed I could conduct my research simply by observing him from outside the cages and tried to spare me as much physical labor as possible. But this was not what I wanted. Our ideas of care did not align, and so I had to articulate what I needed and demonstrate my ability to work. Through this negotiation, our collaboration was adjusted. Even then, his care for me did not end: he began

¹² I cautiously wondered whether the veterinary assistant's description of Connor as "gentle" may have also referred to the fact that Connor was Romanian, not Roma. This hinted at power relations inside the shelter. Among the roughly twenty caregivers, kinship or quasi-kinship ties among Roma workers often shaped authority and influence. Connor, being outside of these networks, may have been considered both more neutral and more reliable in protecting me, an outsider, should problems arise.

inspecting the cages after I cleaned, and stayed close by in case I needed help. My improved skills enabled me to take on more work, but this did not reduce my tasks. Care created new work; its total volume was not fixed but expanded through negotiation.

My dual position as caregiver and care recipient inevitably shaped the care provided to the dogs. The kind of care Connor offered me had direct consequences for the dogs. Sometimes this produced conflict, complementarity.

The very first task entrusted entirely to me was giving water. This required only placing the hose in the trough and waiting until it filled, easy enough for a novice. Yet emptying the water boxes was another matter. The plastic containers, which held at least eighty liters, were extremely heavy to overturn. To help me, Connor pre-emptively tipped the boxes before I arrived. This made my work easier, but it also meant the dogs were left without water for several hours, since water was replenished only after cleaning was finished. In May, I did not notice this inconvenience of dogs. But by July, I realized the heat made the dogs suffer during extended periods without water. I demonstrated that I could overturn the troughs myself, and after that, Connor stopped tipping them in advance.

Sometimes the care directed at me was transformed into better care for the dogs. Connor worried that when he left for the summer holiday, cages 41 through 45 would become my sole responsibility. Before departing, he devised ways to help me manage. He gave me a small metal fitting that could be attached to the hose to increase water pressure. In May, cleaning with water was easy, but by July, it required more effort. By then, the floors of cages 41 through 45 had been resurfaced with cement. Cleaning with water is not very effective on bare stone ground. With cement, however, water cleaning became much more effective and necessary as the smooth surface heated faster under the summer sun. Removing feces flattened and dried onto the ground required high pressure, which was exhausting for me with my weaker grip strength. The metal tool made the task manageable, and I could clean the floors properly.

Tools were vital in care. One of the most challenging tasks I faced was transferring the collected feces and debris into a cart. Connor easily balanced a shovel in his left hand, sweeping with the broom in his right, flicking the waste neatly onto the shovel. For me, the broom was taller than my body and required strong forearm power. I could barely manage a third of what he did. Eventually, I developed a method of propping the shovel against a wall and using both hands to sweep waste onto it, but it was inefficient. Once, seeing my struggle, Gogu entered the pen

and showed me how to adjust the broom. He shaved the bristles to make it lighter, then stepped on the broomstick to change its angle. With this adjustment, the broom became easier to use, and the altered angle lifted debris more effectively. “Connor is too tall to understand the problems of us (shorter people)” Gogu added. His remark reminded me that what counts as an appropriate tool in care depends on the caregiver’s bodily characteristics.

Weather also shaped care practices. At first, I emptied water bowls outside the cage. But in summer, especially once the floors were cemented, I directed the water toward the inside, allowing it to cool the overheated ground. Without the cement surface, this practice would have been either useless or messy. In other words, weather and environment combined to shape how care was enacted. As Mol, Moser, and Pols (2010) argue, care is adjusted and reconfigured depending on how tools and techniques are combined. The metal part from Connor and the new cement floors acted as technical agents that transformed the methods and quality of care.

I also sometimes received care from the dogs. When I grew tired of my colleagues’ teasing or felt burdened by their attention, I hid inside the cages. Once inside, the dogs greeted me with wagging tails, and the staff left me alone. The dogs did not intentionally mean to care for me, yet I experienced their presence as care.

Thus, care was complex and continuous. I entered as a caregiver, but was never purely so; the care was not unidirectional. The care was adjusted depending on abilities, available tools, and environmental conditions such as weather or infrastructure. Care was woven from these heterogeneous elements.

Mol (2008) has likewise described diabetes treatment as an integrated network. Doctors, nurses, patients, and tools interacted in complex ways to produce care. Physicians prescribed, nurses administered, but patients also had to take medication and monitor their own blood sugar. Devices such as glucometers and syringes played crucial roles; nurses taught their use, and patients employed them daily to sustain their bodies. Care also included a nurse’s touch on the patient’s arm or sharing a cup of tea for comfort. Care could not be reduced to discrete acts but was enacted as a collective process (*ibid*).

The expectation that patients must also care for themselves applied equally to the dogs. We could provide food, but could not force them to eat. In cage 41, there was a greyhound mix that seemed abandoned by its owner. Much larger than the other dogs, it never joined conflicts or

competed for food, and did not eat at all. Each day, it sat sadly in the kennel. I worried, but could not force it to eat. In another context, with more time and resources, staff might have helped, but in Saleco, this was impossible.

The care I received adjusted the care the dogs received, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. Even when I was acting as a caregiver, my care could not work if the dog did not accept me. Tools and environments also made a difference; what care could be offered was continually negotiated in relation to resources and conditions. In this way, care in the shelter appeared as a comprehensive network: negotiated, asymmetrical, and relational.

4.2 The Ambivalence of Care: Care as a Violent Practice

The day I first participated in an ovariohysterectomy remains etched in my memory as a profound shock. This surgery challenged the basic imagination that care is good or ethical, or at least that its purpose is good.

In the morning, the veterinary assistant Coloman told me that there would be sterilization surgeries that afternoon. When I asked if I could participate, Coloman warned me that it was not a pleasant sight. I replied that I would be fine, and asked, “But sterilization is necessary, isn’t it?” Coloman answered that it was the most efficient method for population control. At this point, I think I was focusing less on what sterilization concretely entailed and more on the overarching principle that it was necessary for population management. As one of the efficient solutions, a certain degree of pain, the biopolitical violence inflicted upon dogs who had not given consent, could be overlooked and indeed had to be forgotten.

The first thing I realized was that sterilization was not a single surgical act, but a continuous practice encompassing everything before and after the operation. First, the dogs had to be moved to the medical room. Watching pregnant dogs being taken out of cages and forced into transport kennels was unsettling. At first, the staff tried to drive the dog inside the transport kennels, but the dog did not comply. Staff had to resort to the long-handled snare. One worker connoered the dog and slipped the snare over its head; the dog jumped wildly in resistance. Tightening the loop, the worker pressed the dog to the ground and dragged it into the kennel. In this way, five dogs were restrained and transported to the medical room. The kennel was lower than the dogs’ sitting height, so they had to wait lying down.

Around noon, the veterinarian arrived. She appeared to be a woman in her late forties or early fifties, elegantly dressed. She drove directly into the shelter and parked in front of the building.

Usually, staff or visitors parked outside and walked in, but she received special treatment. The veterinary assistant and other staff came out to greet her, and she headed to the medical room as though the site was entirely familiar. While I introduced myself and asked whether I could participate, another staff member approached and asked if she would like some coffee. The veterinarian replied that she would like an Irish coffee with a touch of whiskey, and cheerfully agreed that I could join the surgery.

While she drank her coffee, small preparations were carried out. The veterinary assistant administered anesthesia to the first dog, while Ionuț disinfected the surgical table. Ionuț and another worker lifted the dog onto the table and tied its four legs to the corner. The dog whimpered anxiously, but people carried on with casual conversations about daily life. At first, I stood awkwardly near the entrance, but Mădălin, the head of the animal welfare organization, urged me to come inside, guiding me across the surgery room. He asked if I was scared, and I admitted I was a little nervous.

Meanwhile, the veterinarian slipped protective sleeves over her elegant blouse to guard her arms from blood splatter. Then the surgery began. With a scalpel, she opened the abdomen of the dog and reached inside, easily pulling something out. “One, two, three, four! Four puppies!” Mădălin nudged me and explained what it was. The organs pulled from the abdomen were the uterus and ovaries. The uterus was shaped like a long tunnel, and inside were four lumps the size of tennis balls. These lumps were alive and visibly writhing. Without hesitation, the veterinarian cut off the end, and Ionuț opened the lid of a trash can positioned beneath the table. The four fetuses dropped straight into the trash. She then checked the abdominal cavity for abnormalities and closed it up.

The entire procedure took less than five minutes. During those five minutes, four puppies had been discarded into the trash, and I stood shocked, while the team smoothly reset the scene. Ionuț assisted the veterinarian in suturing the abdomen, and when she finished, she stepped back to sip her coffee and chat with the staff again. Meanwhile, Ionuț untied the dog’s legs and placed it into a carrier in the medical room. He wiped down the surgical table with alcohol-soaked cotton, blood dripping to the floor. Another worker brought the next dog, tying its legs. This time, anesthesia did not take well, and the dog struggled violently. The large brown dog was twice the size of the others, and the veterinarian instructed the assistant to administer another dose.

Again, the surgery lasted less than five minutes. After finishing, the veterinarian stepped back to smoke a cigarette, and I helped Ionuț untie the dog. I had touched and played with countless dogs at the shelter, but the feel of a dog on the operating table was somehow different. Its legs did not move fluidly but were rigid, and its fur felt stiff. Ionuț placed the dog into another carrier and again cleaned the table, now smeared with urine and blood. The trash bin attached beneath the table now held nine small bodies, what might have become puppies.

I reflected on how romanticized my idea of sterilization had been. After all, what could surgery to prevent an animal from reproducing be, other than the removal of reproductive organs? Only recently, I had sterilized my cat, yet I had never once thought concretely about what that meant. Sterilization was, in fact, the removal of organs from a body without consent, and sometimes involved erasing living beings in the process. Yet it was regarded as necessary, and therefore as okay. My earlier question to Coloman, whether sterilization was essential for population control, revealed my assumption that if the goal was justified, the pollution of the act itself could be normalized to some extent.

Sterilization was a political practice aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the shelter. Within the shelter, ovariectomies were performed only on pregnant female dogs. Fortunately, the likelihood of pregnancies inside the shelter had greatly diminished: many dogs had already been sterilized long ago, and new arrivals were separated by sex. The veterinarian said that in the past she had performed several surgeries a day, but now she only operated once every two weeks on four or five dogs. The veterinary assistant hoped that, in time, sterilization might scarcely be needed at all.

The method often referred to as Trap, Neuter and Release (TNR) has been recognized as effective for controlling urban stray populations. But Saleco's dogs rarely returned to the streets.¹³ Thus, it wasn't easy to see these sterilizations as measures to reduce the urban dog population. The assistant often told me that Saleco could house around 1,200 dogs. On my first visit, he said there were 950. Dogs arrived every day, and far more entered than died. Yet when I left in mid-August, he again said the shelter held 950 dogs. There was a palpable tension: population growth threatened shelter operations, but the staff also had a duty to catch every reported stray.

¹³ To adopt a dog from Saleco requires strict screening. Particularly in domestic adoptions, owners must promise to keep the dog indoors as private property. Yet I did encounter one case where several dogs were collectively sterilized at the owner's expense and then released around a factory to live as community dogs. However, this was technically outside the city's boundaries and therefore beyond Saleco's mandate for capture and management.

In this context, sterilization emerged as a practice to sustain the shelter's care capacity, a political adjustment to make care possible.

My failure to see the essence of sterilization was not mine alone. I thought about how the very term had concealed its violence. "Sterilization" did not capture the brutality of an ovariectomy. What if instead we used the term "ovariectomy," or explicitly described it as terminating living canine fetuses?

There were similar debates surrounding euthanasia. When the mandatory euthanasia policy was enacted in 2014, the animal rescue organization 4Popen told the BBC: "We did our own poll, and if you change the word to killing (from euthanasia), nobody wants that."¹⁴ The term "euthanasia" softened the sense of destroying life, instead emphasizing ethical necessity. Broad public debate about euthanasia had rendered its meaning more visible, providing people an opportunity to explicitly oppose it. In contrast, sterilization has mainly remained obscure.

Examples abound where violence is employed as a means of care with ostensibly good intentions. Parreñas (2018) has shown that staff working with captured orangutans sometimes deliberately hit or ignore them, to prevent the animals from becoming too accustomed to humans, thereby keeping open the possibility of their rehabilitation. Conversely, cases exist where intentions were not good, yet the outcome was. Zelinger (2017) showed that people who care for birds often harbor hatred and contempt for their predators. This hatred and contempt sometimes generated protective actions: safeguarding cats so that they could no longer indiscriminately hunt birds. Care thus could be carried out through violence, sometimes beginning with feelings of hostility.

Furthermore, Bocci (2017) has shown that killing itself can even become the purpose of care. Bocci (2017) studied Project Isabela (PI) in the Galápagos, which sought to protect tortoises by eradicating 200,000 goats. Humans biopolitically intervened in goats' lives: altering their bodies, luring them, setting them against each other. The outcome was 200,000 goats killed across 600,000 hectares. Bocci (2017) argued that care here extended beyond using violence as a means to plan and enact death deliberately. Citing Law's study of the UK foot-and-mouth crisis, Bocci explained how practices of care for a "good death" were carried out by culling infected cattle. In that case, care and death did not conflict but were reconciled. In contrast, in

¹⁴ BBC News, "Romania Parliament Backs Stray Dog Culling," 9 September 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24015166>.

PI, death was not an exception; it was carefully managed, but the direct goal of care. The purpose was not a good death but more deaths, an abundance of death itself (ibid., p.437).

Likewise, the scene of ovariectomy I witnessed left cracks in the assumption that care is inherently good or ethical, or at least oriented toward ethical ends. Care could mean sustaining life, but it also involves political judgments and practices of selection and elimination. It was not only that violence could serve as a means of care, but that sometimes violence and death themselves became its aims. Care, violence, and death were not mutually exclusive but coexisted within the same acts.

4.3 Distribution of Care Work

One of my fellow students from the University of Vienna, who was also enrolled in the fieldwork course, once visited Saleco. On the way back home, she asked me, “Do you know that they are Roma?” I replied, “Roma?” She clarified, “Gypsies.” Until she emphasized that fact, I had not realized that the staff were of a different ethnicity. After that conversation, when I returned to the shelter, I began to notice the differences.

Over time, of course, I would have come to recognize their different ethnic background anyway. In conversations among the staff, their identity as “Gypsies”¹⁵ was frequently highlighted, and sometimes marked in ways of othering by veterinary assistants or administrative employees. When the workers themselves spoke about their identity, it was sometimes in a positive way, but often in a self-deprecating tone.

I once sat together with several caregivers as they taught me how to count in Romanian. Gogu would repeat something after I spoke a number, and the others laughed. When I asked what it was, Gogu explained it was counting in the Gypsy language. When I asked him to teach me, he refused: “No need. These are numbers used for only counting trash” I was taken aback. On another occasion, a colleague said, “Cleaning garbage is Gypsy’s work.” The statement carried a trace of resistance to the social order, but at the same time revealed its internalization. They often perceived themselves as belonging to the lower class, frequently assigned to cleaning work, and at times identified themselves with garbage itself.

¹⁵ In my thesis, I will use the term “Gypsy” instead of “Roma” as I believe my interlocutors prefer to refer to themselves as Gypsy.

Of course, not all caregivers were Roma. Connor, Ionuț, and Titu were not. Yet whether Gypsy or not, caregivers at the shelter were generally perceived as belonging to a lower class.

In this chapter, I analyze the inequality of care work on two levels. Section 4.3.1 examines how dog-care tasks were disproportionately delegated to lower-class workers, unequally distributed even within the same site. Section 4.3.2 then shows how this unequal distribution of tasks also produced unequal distributions of vulnerability. Through this, I demonstrate how the allocation of care allows us to trace the reproduction of social inequality.

4.3.1 Dirty Work and the Distribution of Care Work

Due to my lack of skill, I was often the worker who got myself needlessly dirtier than anyone else. I frequently ended up smeared with feces, and I had to throw away two pairs of shoes. Although I was often stressed by the lingering smell of dogs on my body, I generally felt a sense of pride in my work at Saleco. Others, too, evaluated my efforts positively. Especially the fact that I willingly chose to work in dirty places to pursue a meaningful research topic was sometimes even regarded as a kind of badge of honor. However, the very same tasks, when performed by other shelter workers, were judged differently. Their work was considered “dirty work.” This demonstrates that dirty work is not defined simply by the inherent qualities of the task, but is interpreted according to social perceptions and the connections to which the task is attached.

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) define dirty work as involving physical, social, and moral taint (p. 414). Physical taint refers to tasks that are physically filthy or dangerous; social taint refers to work involving contact with those socially regarded as low or degraded; moral taint refers to work considered ethically suspect or disreputable. Yet even if a job involves all three forms of taint, if it carries occupational prestige, it is not necessarily regarded as dirty.

At Saleco, the labor was physically filthy and arduous. It was also socially devalued and particularly considering that some workers were assigned there as substitute labor because they could not pay fines. Above all, dog-catching work was regarded as morally tainted. This moral taint was not confined to the act itself, but intensified by the social evaluation of the workers who performed it continuously. Saleco’s tasks thus embodied a prototypical combination of physical, social, and moral taint. When I did the same tasks, however, my social status as a researcher meant that my work was not simply dismissed as dirty. But the other workers had no such prestige.

Occupational prestige not only neutralizes the stigma of dirt but also legitimizes the relegation of more tainted work to lower-class workers. A surgical scene makes this especially clear. In the operating room, the veterinarian's work involved taking life, yet it was not regarded as dirty. Here I wish to emphasize that the most morally tainted aspects of the work were unequally distributed. The veterinarian, during surgery, asked me about anthropology as a discipline particularly whether it was lucrative. She suggested that if I liked working with animals, I should consider veterinary school. She proudly emphasized that her son had also become a veterinarian, and she spoke of her own professional success over ten years of work at Saleco. This conversation revealed her pride in her profession, and that for her, surgery was a venue to display her professionalism.

In reality, however, her contribution was only a part of the surgical process. The continuity of surgery began long before she arrived and continued until the next day. Workers had to transport dogs, monitor them during rest, and return them afterwards, tasks requiring substantial unseen effort. The veterinarian appeared to perform the most important role, but in fact handled only a small portion of the whole.

After she left, Ionuț rearranged the cramped bodies of the dogs inside the kennels. The dogs had been tossed into transport cages so that their legs and torsos overlapped. Ionuț struggled to reposition them since the cages were fixed to the floor and narrow at the entrance, but eventually succeeded. He did it for the dogs, as they awoke from anesthesia, would be less uncomfortable. Afterwards, he cleaned the surgical table once more. I tried to help by taking out a trash bag, but as I tied it shut, a foul odor escaped from a mixture of organs, puppy fetuses, urine, and blood-soaked towels. I flinched, trying to hide my disgust. Ionuț gestured me aside and said "Dirty".

The division of roles in this surgical scene can be understood through Simpson & Hughes's (2020) concept of the moral division of labor. It means that some people avoid dirty work, while others are forced to do the stigmatized labor for them. Crucially, it is those higher in the hierarchy who are able to pass down the taint.

Looking closely, it is in fact the veterinarian who removes the puppy fetuses, perhaps the most morally tainted act. Yet paradoxically, the most ethical acts, like the gentle patting of a whimpering dog, the careful adjustment of bodies, and the checking of what the vet had missed, were performed by Ionuț. And yet, it was he who put discarded life into the trash and carried it

away. The contamination of the work was subtly displaced onto Ionuț. Despite the fact that his labor was indispensable, it was dismissed as dirty auxiliary work and connected to his low self-perception. When I asked him how he had become so skilled in the operating room, he replied: “It’s dirty work. Someone has to do it.”

Care labor at Saleco thus embodied physical, social, and moral taint, disproportionately delegated to those of lower social status. If a profession had occupational prestige, even the same taint could be neutralized through skill and authority. But dog care was considered unskilled, prestige-less work, leaving its dirt unredeemed. Coupled with ethnic stigma, this reinforced negative impressions of Roma workers. In this way, dog care at Saleco was positioned within the social hierarchy as prototypical “dirty work,” where dirt itself solidified into stigma, revealing not just practical divisions of labor but how care itself is socially situated.

4.3.2 Unequal Distribution of Vulnerability

As usual, several new dogs arrived at the shelter. A white truck was parked near the building, and staff approached it to help unload the animals. Coloman, a veterinary assistant, stepped out with a grim expression. Even before he opened the rear door, the fierce growl of a dog could be heard from inside. When the door was finally opened, a dog with black-and-white fur appeared, barking furiously¹⁶.

Two colleagues who had gone out to capture the dog climbed down from the front seat. Raul, one of them, looked particularly irritated, and the other, Gezit, told me that the barking dog had bitten Raul. Blood was trickling slightly down Raul’s leg. Another veterinary assistant, Mario, soon appeared carrying a cup of green liquid and two pills. The dog was still highly agitated and continued barking. The assistant attempted to administer a rabies vaccine, but the animal resisted so violently that it was nearly impossible. One worker shook the transport cage, while another reached in from behind and just barely managed to inject the shot. Afterwards, two

¹⁶ Due to its aggressive behavior towards humans, this dog was eventually housed in a single kennel. Ironically, it formed a close bond with me, often smiling, wagging its tail, and patiently waiting whenever I approached. Despite having cataracts and nearly losing its sight, it still greeted me warmly. Coloman speculated that it might have liked my scent. I was unsure why it was placed in a different kennel. Other dogs were kept separately because they were labeled ‘fight dogs’, but this dog was separated because it had bitten humans. Coloman explained that the separation was also due to its cataracts; placing it in a separate kennel was not only because it had bitten humans but also because it was vulnerable to other dogs.

caregivers carried the cage together, though the dog's struggles made the iron bars rattle violently.

When the situation calmed, I looked for Raul. He was sitting, applying disinfectant to his leg while checking his phone. When I asked if he was alright, he replied nonchalantly that this was not the first time he had been bitten. I asked if he had received rabies vaccination, but he said no.

I asked other workers as well, and to my surprise, more than half of them had never received a rabies vaccination. Even some who regularly went out to capture dogs were unvaccinated. Their reasons varied: some said the process was cumbersome, others claimed not to trust vaccines, and some said it was too expensive. When I asked whether Saleco covered vaccination, they said it did not. In contrast, all administrative staff were vaccinated, as were veterinary assistants. Yet these employees rarely entered the cages. For them, vaccination was provided as part of the standard employment contract in the public shelter. Even Mădălin, a volunteer from an animal welfare center who regularly visited the public shelter, was required to be vaccinated. Strikingly, the caregivers who worked most closely with the dogs were neither required to be vaccinated nor provided with the vaccine. Even the green liquid and pills Mario had brought were not medically recognized as effective prophylaxis against rabies.

When I asked why rabies vaccination was not mandatory for caregivers, a veterinary assistant explained that they had a choice. In other words, if they were unvaccinated, it was framed as their own responsibility. Annemarie Mol (2008) has shown that the logic of choice, which is the basic logic of the market economy, does not necessarily guarantee good care. With the market economy, individuals are assumed to be rational, so their choices are understood as the best possible decision based on available information. Accordingly, they are held personally responsible for those choices. From the perspective of neoliberalism, human life is regarded as the total of individual "choices," and individuals are responsible for those choices. (Tronto, 2013., Mol, 2008). Moreover, we rarely have as many real options as the rhetoric of choice suggests, so such choices can hardly be considered pure. "Choice" is not freedom. When you are oppressed, the choices available to you are often bad choices. (Tronto, 2013, p. 40) To allow someone who is at risk of rabies exposure to "choose" not to be vaccinated, and to leave

that decision unchallenged, is abandonment. More fundamentally, such choices are often structurally forced or induced.¹⁷

The unequal vulnerability of caregivers was also apparent in the broader protective environment. Caregivers were required to wear long pants to avoid flea bites and scratches. When I returned to the field in July, I agonized over whether to wear protective clothing. An administrative staff member told me that wearing protective clothes in the summer heat would be unbearable. Since I worked in the outdoor cages which are directly under the sun, the staff advised me not to wear it. But this was not a simple decision. Administrative staff were unaware of the problems I faced when working in shorts.

The dogs would jump and scratch my legs, leaving wounds. Fleas falling from their bodies landed on my skin. I dreaded the moment when decaying chicken bones, sometimes with bits of rotten flesh still attached, touched an open scratch. Dog feces stuck to my shoes and legs, and rusty shovels and carts seemed equally hazardous. The “less hot” choice recommended by the administrative staff completely ignored these risks. The same choice can mean very different things depending on one’s position.

Even within the same care site, responsibility and vulnerability were distributed unequally along socioeconomic and ethnic lines. Parreñas (2018) describes similar tensions between Western volunteers and local workers at an orangutan rehabilitation center. Although both groups shared the aspiration of returning orangutans to the wild, their experiences diverged. Physical contact with orangutans was dangerous and potentially fatal, but for commercial volunteers, this risk was embraced as part of an enriching holiday, one from which they could withdraw at any time.

At Saleco, caregivers faced the highest risks while being afforded the least protection. This reveals much about how providers of dog care were socially regarded. As Tronto (2013) has emphasized, care work often includes dirty work such as cleaning, and once shifted out of the home, its unequal distribution becomes even more visible (p.2) Because care work is devalued, it has historically been assigned disproportionately to women and to those in lower classes. It is considered something anyone can do, a low-value task. Longstanding labor discrimination

¹⁷ The situation was in fact more complex. Some caregivers gave me lengthy explanations about why vaccines were harmful, and it seemed they genuinely believed in their dangers, and I have no right to judge about the rightness of vaccination.

and inadequate compensation perpetuate a vicious cycle, embedding material and ideological inequalities (Tronto 2013, p.106).

The case of Saleco thus shows that vulnerability in care is not natural, nor simply the result of individual choice, but a structural distribution produced at the intersection of class, race, and occupational hierarchy. This makes clear that care is not merely the act of protecting but also a social process that reproduces inequality (Thelen, 2021).

4.4 Distancing

It was heartbreaking for me to say goodbye to the dogs. Therefore, in the last few days of the fieldwork, I started spending more time inside the cage, playing with them. One day, as I was about to leave after petting them, the dogs blocked my feet, refusing to let me go. A fat dog suddenly held my hand in its teeth. Startled by the sensation, I shouted, “No!” The dog quickly ran away. A colleague who was passing by asked what had happened, and when I showed him the bite marks on my hand. He said: “No, no. You have to keep the proper distance.”

But what counts as proper distance? It was clear that I had established a much closer distance to the dogs than other workers. Every time I entered the cage, I worried that the dogs might slip out through the gate. To get in, one had to unlock the latch from outside, slip through the narrow opening without swinging the gate wide, and quickly lock it again from the inside. I always feared that the dogs might rush out between my legs. When I expressed this concern to Connor, he told me that I was letting the dogs get too close.

Indeed, whenever I approached, the dogs gathered at the gate in anticipation of being touched or played with. Even if they had no intention of escaping, their excitement might easily push them outside. In contrast, when Connor or other colleagues entered, the dogs rarely crowded at the door. I often observed colleagues entering by banging the bars with a broom or shovel, saying “Iși!” (“Move!” in Romanian). The dogs would then either retreat inside or remain indifferent. My closer distance made me more vulnerable: not only to the risk of losing dogs but also to being bitten, scratched, or dirtied.

Closeness also meant emotional vulnerability. When a small dog was accidentally killed by a veterinary assistant driving a car, I was devastated. If a dog I liked seemed unwell or refused to eat, I became anxious. I even carried a spray used to stop bleeding, applying it to the slightest wound. This made my work heavier and more exhausting. Other staff dismissed such concerns,

saying the dogs would heal naturally, just as our cuts and scratches eventually do. But because I had grown emotionally entangled, I could not ignore these minor injuries.¹⁸

Compared to me, the other workers maintained what could be described as professional or distant relationships with the dogs. When I first toured the shelter, I asked the veterinary assistant whether the dogs had names. He replied, almost incredulously, “There are too many of them.” With nearly a thousand dogs, I initially accepted this explanation. But within just two weeks, I had given names or nicknames to many of the dogs in my pens, based on their appearance or personality.¹⁹ It was not difficult at all. Thus, “too many dogs” was not a sufficient explanation for the absence of names.

I wondered if, even without officially naming the dogs, individual caregivers had their own informal ways of referring to them as I did. Since each worker was in daily physical contact with dogs, they surely recognized individual traits. Some of them mentioned that they also named some dogs, although naming was generally discouraged. One worker told me, “I named a dog Leo, and Leo died. I named another dog Munti, and Munti died.” His words revealed that what they sought to avoid was not naming itself, but the deeper relationships such naming could create.

Why avoid such individualized relationships? Guenther’s (2020) ethnography of an American shelter shows that official staff, unlike volunteers, tend to maintain formal, distanced relations, treating dogs as a collective rather than as individuals. They even use the term “termination” to describe death, softening its emotional weight. For Guenther (2020), this distancing stemmed from overwork: staff were too busy to form personal bonds.

Saleco, however, was more complex. Caregivers there physically met the dogs constantly, more like volunteers in Guenther’s story than staff. Individual relationships were therefore not exceptional but almost inevitable. Still, a certain distance was maintained.

¹⁸ But this care entirely for my satisfaction. If I fall and scrape my knee, I will just brush off the dirt and move on. But if a friend or family member who I deeply care falls, I would offer ointment or other treatments. Even if it isn’t necessary. Similarly, I sprayed medicine on dogs even when it was not strictly needed.

¹⁹ For example, I called a brown dog “Barley,” a small fat orange one “Little Chubby,” and one with a white spot on its snout “Whitedot.” These were not truly names, I never called the dogs by them, and they did not respond to them, but simply a way to distinguish and record them in my notes. Yet once given, these names were intuitive and easy to remember.)

Tallberg and Jordan (2021) argue that in settings where care and killing intersect, workers face the “caring-killing paradox.” To cope with the emotional contamination, they rationalize their actions or intentionally distance themselves (Tallberg and Jordan, 2021). Their study is persuasive, but it primarily focuses on volunteers driven by strong personal attachment to animals, making it less applicable to Saleco.

At Saleco, most workers did not join out of personal vocation but out of economic or practical necessity. As a result, they experienced less emotional contamination than volunteers. For instance, when a young veterinary assistant, Dario, accidentally ran over a puppy during a capture operation, I was shocked. The two care workers who accompanied him, however, responded matter-of-factly. They did not celebrate the incident, but neither did they appear devastated. Dario, by contrast, who became a veterinary assistant to be close with animals, was visibly distressed.²⁰ The emotional weight of the same accident differed depending on one’s position and motivations.

This does not mean that staff disliked dogs. On the contrary, many cherished their own pets at home. Connor doted on his Maltese, which he took on every trip and another worker proudly spoke of his adopted French bulldog. Artur, who had young children, kept a small-breed dog whose photo was his phone’s wallpaper. What they distinguished was not between liking and disliking dogs, but between “dogs that belong to human households” and “shelter dogs.” The latter were more easily objectified, less emotionally demanding, and thus more manageable.

Yet even at Saleco, emotional contamination could not be eliminated entirely. The statement “I named Leo, and Leo died. I named Munti, and Munti died” suggests that certain dogs did receive special attention, creating inevitable vulnerability. This vulnerability made distancing a widespread strategy. In this sense, distancing was not a sign of indifference or dehumanization, but a condition for sustainable care.

In relation to distancing within care, it is useful to refer to Candea’s (2010) discussion additionally. He points out that studies of human–animal relations have often developed through a dichotomous view of engagement and detachment, and argues that this opposition itself needs to be problematized (Candea, 2010, p. 242). Through his ethnography of the

²⁰ His personal motivation to become a veterinary assistant stems from his childhood experiences on a farm.

Kalahari Meerkat Project, he shows that detachment is not the absence of relation but an active way of forming relations. The researchers did not establish good relations with the meerkats by petting them or approaching them with affection. Although the meerkats sometimes climbed onto the researchers' shoulders or made bodily contact, this did not stem from affection but from the animals' habituation, treating the researchers as part of the landscape. Such "cultivating polite distance" was what allowed the relationship to continue (p. 256).

In the shelter, likewise, staff could deliberately keep their distance in order to prevent emotional contamination. Yet this did not necessarily mean indifference or inhumane treatment, but rather can be understood as a method of being with the dogs and sustaining coexistence within that space.

4.5 Affection and Care

In July, I met two women volunteering at a private shelter. Both were very active on a Facebook page that encouraged people to adopt dogs from the public shelter. I had hoped to visit the shelter directly, but they preferred meeting in a cafe, so we eventually gathered at a cafe in the city.

They described Saleco as unethical. For them, being "unethical" meant lacking affection. They argued that Saleco's employees did not truly love the dogs, but worked there to earn money. Therefore, care in Saleco was inevitably negative. By contrast, the private shelter, though less well-equipped, was run by people motivated by genuine affection. Thus, they claimed that their care was warmer and superior.

They showed me some pictures. To be honest, I was negatively surprised by the poor condition of the facilities. I had assumed that a private shelter would be better equipped. Instead, the dogs were confined in small, rusted cages with low ceilings, making the space look stifling. The dirt floors were soaked with unidentifiable substances. The woman remarked, "Yes, the ground is a bit dirty," but once again emphasized that what mattered most was that the dogs were cared for with affection. Affection seemed to compensate for material deprivation.

Citizens also criticized Saleco for showing no affection toward dogs. During my fieldwork, Saleco had to hire more caregivers. Saleco's Facebook page announced three new job openings. In the comments section, people expressed disdain by using the Romanian term for "dog catchers." Some insisted that only those who truly loved dogs should be allowed to work there.

When I asked an administrative officer what kind of people they wished to hire, they told me they preferred those who could stay long-term, and ideally, strong men. For them, affection or how much one liked dogs was not a prerequisite for being a caregiver.

In fact, I may have been the person at Saleco who loved the dogs most and cared for them in the most affectionate manner. Yet my lack of strength and technical skill often resulted in poor care. Each outdoor cage contained doghouses where the animals could rest or shelter from the rain and snow. The large central doghouse was about a meter high and fixed and immovable. On either side were smaller structures, about 40 centimeters tall and three meters wide, which were not fixed and could be moved. Every Friday was a deep cleaning day, and these movable structures had to be shifted in order to clean underneath them. When they were moved, layers of dust, insects, food scraps, feces, and chicken bones were revealed.

Connor carried out this task about three times a week. Other employees also moved the structures and cleaned underneath whenever time allowed. But I found it difficult to manage without help; the doghouses were simply too heavy. Alone, I could not shift them. I experimented with using a pressure hose to clean underneath, but this did not leave the area as clean as sweeping once the structures were moved. While Connor was away for the holiday, I only moved them once a week.

My lack of strength also created confusion for the dogs. Feeding them chicken bones was physically demanding. I had to push a wheelbarrow loaded with bones uphill, which was exhausting. It was difficult enough just to push the wheelbarrow without letting the dogs escape through the gate, but distributing the bones evenly was an even greater challenge. Connor would grab both handles of the wheelbarrow and shake it vigorously from side to side, scattering the bones across the pen. This technique was impossible for me. When I tried, I only managed to topple the wheelbarrow.

Most of the time, I would push the wheelbarrow into the pen and then tip it over, leaving a pile of bones in the center. But this was not suitable for dogs with a clear dominance hierarchy. If the food was spread evenly across the space, as Connor did, the dominant dogs could not guard all the positions, and the weaker dogs had a chance to eat. By contrast, when the food was concentrated in one spot, dominant dogs easily blocked access for the others. I sometimes used a broom or shovel to spread the bones more evenly, but it was never easy, and each time I felt hopelessly inadequate.

Care continued to be valued more when it was perceived as grounded in emotion, love, and affection. However, as I demonstrated from my study, affection did not necessarily guarantee better care. On the contrary, practices unrelated to affection sometimes provided better outcomes. Mol (2008) pointed out that inanimate tools without affection, such as syringes and glucose meters, were essential for good care.

In the social imagination, care was still evaluated through the lens of affection. Zabaliūtė (2023), found that a diabetes patient idealized the care of her daughter while criticizing the care of her “cold” daughter-in-law. Even though the daughter no longer lived with her and no longer provided daily care, she was still imagined as the one who truly cared. This study shows that affection acts as a political demand. For the patient, the issue was not only how she experienced care, but also how she understood the dissolution of traditional family structures and broader political transformations. Affection was not the guarantee of better care, but it was central to the imagination of what good care should be. Perhaps in imagining better care, we invoke immeasurable elements such as love and affection to fill the gaps left by imperfect practices.

Where does the idea come from that unpaid care is more genuine, while paid care is cold and less ethical? Two volunteers believed that care should stem from genuine feelings, and once tied to money, its authenticity is compromised. They contrasted their “warm” unpaid care with the supposedly “cold” care of paid employees. At times, in the private shelter, they even struggled to afford food for the dogs. When I asked how they managed, they explained that much of it came from Facebook donations: they would post pictures of sad-looking dogs and appeal for funds. When they succeeded in buying food through these efforts, they felt their affectionate care had been validated. Their struggle was both exhausting and painful, but also served as a badge of honor. I sensed that the volunteers affirmed their own affection by pushing themselves to the limits of self-exploitation.

At Saleco, by contrast, food provision was never at risk. The warehouse was always stocked with dry food, and Saleco had an arrangement with a poultry factory to collect discarded chicken bones. However, volunteers expressed disgust at the practice of feeding chicken bones. On Facebook pages supporting public shelters, one often saw posts with phrases like, “They’re feeding chicken bones again!” accompanied by vomiting emojis. The disgust here was not only about the bones themselves, but about what they symbolized: cheap, low-quality food that merely sustained life. Such care was seen as repulsive.

As Thelen (2021) argues, the dichotomy between unpaid care as authentic and paid care as less ethical reinforces the emotional moralization of care. More importantly, it obscures the structural conditions of care. In reality, good care depends less on affection and more on infrastructure, labor conditions, and stable resources. Reducing care to emotion and affection can even legitimize exploitative practices.

The notion that only affectionate care is good care recalls the debates of the 1970s “Wages for Housework” movement. When Mariarosa Dalla Costa and others argued that domestic labor should be remunerated, many were shocked: how could one assign monetary value to acts performed out of love? A mother’s domestic care was seen as sacred precisely because it was motivated by affection and excluded from economic calculation. To assign wages, critics argued, would demean it. In this sense, I came to view the volunteers’ self-sacrificial stance not only as altruism but also as a way to secure moral satisfaction and affirm their social position.

Yet affection is not irrelevant either. In nonhuman care, affection may work as a way to fill the gaps left by inadequate institutional rules. I want to emphasize the unfinished character of care. As many scholars have noted, care is an open-ended process (Mol, 2008; Thelen, 2015), whose outcomes are difficult to predict. In this sense, to care with affection means recognizing the possibility of failure and nevertheless imagining futures.

The volunteers I met knew the individual stories of the shelter dogs: how they had arrived, their traits, and what kind of lives they might lead if adopted. They imagined the dogs’ futures. Such acts of imagining were rarely found at Saleco, where most dogs would die in the shelter, with no imagined future beyond survival. Volunteers gave dogs bow ties and balloons as gifts. While such objects were almost useless and rarely looked nice, these gestures represented a vision of a future life outside the shelter walls.

4.6 Care as Relation and Difference

4.6.1 Care and Noticing

The door of the cargo was opened, and the staff were unloading frozen chicken bones into wheelbarrows. Due to the hot weather, the bones had partly thawed, with blood splattering around and a pungent stench in the air. Connor, visibly displeased, told me not to come close. He complained that the bones were sharp and could cause injury, that the smell would cling to

the body, and that there was also the risk of exposure to Salmonella. Some workers used their hands or feet to shove the bones roughly into the wheelbarrow, but Connor never did that and also advised me not to do it.

He tried to avoid direct contact with the bones. Yet his approach changed when it came to pen number 43, where a German shepherd we called “the King” lived. This dog always stayed on top of a high structure and would not come down, so his food had to be delivered separately. Connor wore thick ski gloves and lifted the chicken bones with both hands, placing them in front of the King. When I asked, “But don’t you hate touching them because they’re dirty?” he answered, “He is King, so he has to be fed differently.” When the summer heat started, Connor brought a bucket with a handle, filled it with water, and carried it to the King. When I asked him why, he replied, “Now the King also wants to drink water separately.” When I asked how he knew, Connor seemed confused. Later, he told me that because he had watched the King closely, he could sense it.

Generally, care in the shelter was uniform, but occasionally these different forms of care emerged. And such care began with observation. By watching the German shepherd in cage 43 more closely, Connor was able to perceive his needs. Observing more carefully makes it possible to notice what the dog wants.

I experienced something similar. By August, I had gained a deeper understanding of the dogs in cages 41 to 45 compared to the others. In cage 41, an old dog was constantly harassed by a pit bull mix in the same enclosure. This pit bull mix barked fiercely at anyone passing by, and the staff called him “Loco,” meaning “crazy.” Loco and the other dogs bullied the old dog, especially preventing him from ever drinking water.

To help the old dog drink, Connor would bang a broom on the floor whenever he entered cage 41. The dogs would retreat into the house or corners, and Connor would then stand in front of the old dog, blocking others from approaching while he drank. Though this posture might look coercive toward the old dog, it was in fact a protective gesture. The old dog, still wary of the others, could gulp down water under Connor’s shield.

After Connor left on a trip, I had to give the old dog water alone. But the pit bull did not fear me; instead, it often threatened me, even during cleaning. Connor’s method did not work for me. I had to find a different way, and I started spraying water into the air so that it trickled

toward the old dog's feet, letting him drink the flowing stream while half-hidden in his shelter. Once a veterinary assistant saw me doing this, he thought I was playing with water to cool off from the heat.

Just as other staff could not easily notice the needs of the dogs in my section, I too was largely ignorant or indifferent to those in other cages. I tried to observe other workers whenever I had time, and sometimes it puzzled me. Each care practice features different details, reflecting the specific needs of their care recipients, the dogs. In other cases, needs that were obvious even with minimal observation were ignored or dismissed.

For example, in one cage managed by Titu, the fencing was loose near the ground, allowing dogs to crawl into the adjacent cage, sometimes even trapping their necks. Titu never repaired this. One day, when Titu was on holiday, another worker came to clean Titu's section. He brought wires and cable ties to secure the fencing and prevent the problem. A simple fix sufficed, but Titu had never done it.

Tronto and Fisher distinguish four stages of care: first, noticing unmet needs (caring about); second, taking responsibility to address them (caring for); third, providing care (care giving); and fourth, checking the response of the care receiver (care receiving). Later, Tronto added a fifth stage, caring with, to highlight the need for solidarity in order to make care democratically distributed (Tronto, 2013, p.22-23). Each stage corresponds to specific moral qualities: attentiveness in the first, responsibility in the second, competence in the third (not only as technical skill but also as moral requirement), and responsiveness in the fourth. (Tronto, 2013, p.34-35).

Just as Connor perceived the King's desires by close attention, care can begin with such attentiveness.²¹ Yet noticing does not automatically translate into responsibility or action. As Titu's case shows, some needs were addressed while others were dismissed as unnecessary or "not my job." This illustrates that Tronto's ideal model of care ethics cannot rely solely on the moral qualities of individual workers. Had the administrative structure or supervisory system intervened, the fencing issue could have been resolved earlier despite Titu's indifference. Thus,

²¹ Especially in the context of multispecies care, the skill of noticing becomes all the more crucial. Since animals cannot articulate their desires in human language, attentiveness must be even more finely tuned.

good care does not depend only on a worker's attentiveness or responsibility, but also on how it is distributed and coordinated within a structure.

4.6.2 Exceptional Care, Deservingness and Partiality

In July, about thirty dogs were living outside. As the number of injured animals increased, the space previously used to isolate young puppies had to be repurposed. As a result, the medium-sized puppies, about four months old, were sent outside. Among them, one dog quickly became the leader of the group. This is Cookie.

Cookie was a Pekingese mix. Although he was fully grown, his small body was no bigger than that of the four-month-old puppies. Cookie had been found on the street in early July and brought to Saleco. Because of his small size, he was initially placed in the puppy cage, where he quickly became the “boss.” Once moved outside, Cookie ran freely through the shelter. Despite his tiny body, he was fearless. At the time, there were several larger adult dogs also living outdoors, but Cookie led even those ten times his size and eagerly joined in fights. Unlike most adult dogs, Cookie always lingered close to humans. Other dogs that had escaped from their cages and ended up outside rarely approached people. At best, they would sneak over to snatch fallen chicken bones and then retreat to a distance. But Cookie stayed near the staff, resting at their feet during breaks or begging for bits of sausage and bread.

By Saleco's rules, Cookie should have been confined to a cage. One day, a worker placed him inside, but another soon released him, saying he was too small. Even though inside the cage, Cookie had boldly fought the bigger dogs and even claimed the first share of food. He was repeatedly let out. Once, a puppy he had played with outside stood crying at the fence, reaching its paw through the wire mesh until it nearly injured itself. Eventually, Cookie was released again. At other times, he managed to escape on his own. In time, the staff became accustomed to his presence outside.

One day, the staff grew busy. A visitor had complained about seeing dogs roaming outside of the cages. The director ordered all the dogs rounded up. A worker told me to catch Cookie. But as I reached out to lift him, Alina, the cleaning lady at Saleco, stopped me. “No.” Alina insisted Cookie would not be confined. She pointed to bowls of food and water she had placed near the garden. When another worker attempted to seize Cookie, Alina again intervened: “Not that one.”

There were a thousand dogs in the shelter. Why was Cookie the only one to receive such exceptional care? Thelen (2015, 2021) notes that entitlement to care is always socially negotiated. Who counts as legitimately deserving of care varies not only across societies but also within them, shaped by gender, age, ethnicity, or social status (Thelen, 2021, p.5). Entitlement could be asserted in negative terms. Saleco is the example. Stray dogs were captured and confined because leaving them on the streets would be too costly for the city. Thus, urban citizens were the true “entitled” recipients of care to reduce the cost.

Within the shelter, another negotiation took place. Cookie acquired entitlement to individual care. This was enabled by his bold Dog-ality, friendliness, tiny size for an adult, and the fact that he was a mixed-breed of a recognizable type. Most importantly, it was made possible because Alina actively defended him, refusing to let him be caged. Without Alina’s intervention, Cookie might well have been confined like the others in the name of order and efficiency.

This raised another question for me. I sometimes check the Facebook pages of Saleco or the city’s volunteers. In winter photos, Cookie still roams outside, with Alina’s bowls of food and water beside her. I was happy to see this simultaneously I could not silence the thought: what about the other thousand? Tronto (2013) argues that democratic care is not simply about distributing care evenly, but about spreading responsibility across society so that the needs of all recipients are recognized equally. In this sense, care must be democratic, since it is always tied to how resources are institutionally allocated. From this perspective, exceptional care that deviates from equal distribution constitutes partiality and, therefore, inequality.

Partiality evokes unfairness, conflict, and exclusion. It separates Cookie from the other dogs and treats him differently. The term itself suggests something unjust. Yet in practice, partiality sometimes worked as a way of compensating for what standardized care could not address. Cookie’s case revealed an ethic of care that opposed Tronto’s vision of democratic distribution. It showed that care is not always guided by fairness alone; at times, partiality was what sustained the reality of care. Fairness, in other words, cannot be assumed to be the sole purpose of care. Sometimes, unequal and selective ethics fill the gap between the ideal and reality.

4.6.3 Unnamed Care

There were so-called “dangerous dogs” in the shelter. The veterinary assistant described them as Presa Canario or their mixed breed. These two dogs lived in a makeshift kennel installed

along the passage between the outdoor cages and the building. They had been found in a dog-fighting arena and were placed here because they were considered too dangerous to be housed with other dogs. The staff advised me not to get too close to their cage. Honestly, I found the two dogs somewhat frightening yet I was fascinated by them. Their bodies were sleek and muscular, and above all, they carried an extraordinarily sharp gaze. In their eyes, I sometimes detected something resembling human intelligence. I felt they were actively analyzing the people who walked by. This was both unsettling and intriguing.

This kennel was assigned to Ionuț. One day, I watched him clean their space. The cage was barely large enough to hold the two dogs, and cleaning did not look easy. Yet as he moved around, the dogs shifted alongside him, allowing him to tidy the floor. Throughout the process, they kept their eyes fixed on him. When he finished, Ionuț reached out his hand toward one of them. At that moment, the gray dog stood up and embraced him. Soon they began to dance together: the dog rested its front paws on his arms, balancing on its hind legs, and moved in rhythm with him. Ionuț started humming, and together they danced for a long while. The black dog patiently waited for its turn, and when the gray dog finally lowered its paws, the black dog rose and embraced it too. Ionuț stroked it gently, and they swayed together in harmony. After the joyful dance, Ionuț smiled, as if acknowledging my gaze, and patted the dogs once more. I wanted to ask him what that dance had meant, but he usually avoided bothersome questions (and I was probably the most annoying presence in the shelter), so the chance never came. Yet the scene lingered in my mind.

What did this moment mean? It was one of the most powerful and beautiful experiences I had in the shelter, but also one of the hardest to name. To touch those dangerous dogs was to engage in an act of vulnerability, and from that act, a relationship began. Words alone cannot capture this scene. I still remember Ionuț's meaningless humming, the tapping sounds of paws on the ground, the two bodies embracing despite the heat, and myself standing there watching. As Watson (2016) suggests, perhaps I was merely projecting my ideals, turning them into a kind of myth. Still, this encounter resisted normative language. Intimacy and danger lay on the same line, crossing each other in a fleeting moment.

4.7 Unfinished Care: Politics and the Challenge of Multispecies Studies

In this chapter, I examined how care was constituted and enacted within the shelter. Care emerged as a symbiotic network in which humans, dogs, tools, and environments were

entangled. Yet the forms of care I observed diverged sharply from conventional assumptions of benevolence, affection, or warmth; they could not be reduced to something inherently ethical or good. The scene of surgery revealed how violence toward other species was routinized in the name of care.

Care labor was also distributed unequally, producing structural vulnerabilities for workers. Physically dirty and morally tainted tasks were disproportionately relegated to those of lower social status, while those most in need of protection were denied even minimal guarantees of safety. Caregivers themselves were also recipients of care, but this care was often misaligned with their actual needs and justified through the neoliberal “logic of choice.” Practices of distancing, affection, and exceptional favoritism further demonstrated that care was always negotiated, selectively enacted, and endlessly patched together.

The case of Saleco shows that care is not a simple act of protection, but a social process that simultaneously reproduces hierarchies while also opening cracks for resistance and challenge. Care sustains life, yet generates inequality and difference. It is always an unfinished practice. (Mol, 2008, Thelen, 2021)

At the same time, the political weight of care was so overwhelming that my initial plan to focus on the experiences of nonhuman animals could not be fully realized. The inequalities, hierarchies, and distributions surrounding humans appeared so starkly that my attention as a researcher was inevitably drawn to their political dimensions. As a result, I could not adequately capture how the dogs themselves experienced care, nor how they occupied political positions within it. This suggests that research on multispecies care may require even greater time and commitment, and it calls for further exploration into an expanded ethics of multispecies care.

5. Conclusion: Reimagining Dog Care

This study has analyzed the Romanian public dog shelter as a political infrastructure, showing how care operates as a means of sustaining urban order and aesthetics. At the same time, it has revealed that care within the shelter is a complex practice entangled with hierarchy, power, violence, and affection. I have also emphasized that human–dog relations are not simply romantic or ideal, but are shaped within the asymmetrical distribution of power, and that this calls for sustained development of multispecies ethnography.

Care in public dog shelters appeared on the surface to be directed at dogs, but in practice it was directed at the city. Dogs were not simply four-legged animals, but social beings situated within human systems of control and interpretation. Dogs with owners were granted the right to dwell within the city, while ownerless dogs were classified as “abnormal pollution.” Yet, even ownerless dogs could be reclassified as non-polluting if they received care. Stray dogs were imagined as threats to public health, safety, and the aesthetics of the modern city. Those who did not fit the ideal urban landscape had to be removed. Saleco’s capture and confinement of dogs reinforced this logic of safety and aesthetics, reproducing unequal relations between humans and nonhumans. The removal of dogs from the city was framed as an act of care for animals, but beneath this veneer lay the imperative of caring for the city itself. At the same time, overtly cruel methods risked public backlash, so Saleco carried out its work as invisibly as possible, constantly negotiating between these pressures.

Chapter 4 explored how this politically constituted care was reconfigured inside the shelter. Unlike previous studies that focused on policies or interviews, I worked alongside shelter workers, documenting their practices, hierarchies, and the messy, inconsistent scenes of care. The care I observed was dirty, inefficient, violent, and exclusionary. Within the shelter, dogs were not protagonists; instead, social hierarchies, unequal distributions of risk, and structural neglect shaped dog care. What sustained care was not affection or love, but distance and indifference. Care was not distributed equally: some dogs received special treatment, while the rest were treated merely as one among a thousand. Furthermore, dog care was stigmatized as low-status labor, disproportionately relegated to marginalized workers. Even within the same surgical room, participants’ self-perceptions and roles diverged sharply, and the distribution of care often reinforced inequality.

While many scholars highlight the complexity of care, they still tend to idealize it as an ethical value. Care is positioned as a matter of justice, responsibility, and democracy (Tronto). Especially in discussions of nonhuman care, responsibility is coupled with the human duty to protect the environment and provide better conditions for life (Locke, Parreñas). While I share this aspiration, I also argue that not all sites of care are homogeneous. For instance, as the case of Mikael Lindnord claiming ownership over a dog “because it was dirty and wounded” illustrates, ethical claims to care can sometimes intersect with colonial gazes.

Inside the shelter, care had no fixed meaning. It was constituted through affect, power, tools, weather, and social context, and at times degenerated into violence that was difficult to justify. At other times, care disappeared unnamed, or persisted only as moments that resisted explanation, such as when Ionuț danced with the so-called “dangerous dogs.” These encounters defied easy interpretation, but they revealed the ambivalence of interspecies care.

Human–dog relations are often imagined romantically. Studies of care have tended to emphasize private, positive experiences. I too, when I first encountered ethnographies of human–animal relations, found persuasive the call to “strive for flourishing together across species.” Yet what I witnessed in the field was far from romantic. Human–dog relations must be re-evaluated beyond idealized narratives, to account for their ambiguity, incompleteness, and inequality.

No one in the shelter asked why dog care was necessary in the first place. Workers like Connor and Coloman simply remarked that the dogs were better off not starving and having companions in their pens. I too thought this was reasonable, but none of us ever asked the dogs themselves. In the Anthropocene, imagining multispecies relations is inevitable. As Haraway reminds us, humans are themselves microbial consortia (Haraway 2008, p.31), and as Tsing emphasizes, human nature is in fact interspecies relationship (Tsing, 2012). These arguments are compelling. Yet many multispecies studies, in their focus on urgency and aspiration, have not sufficiently examined methodological limits. We must first acknowledge the constraints of human senses and interpretation. I wanted to understand dogs, but ultimately concluded that complete understanding was impossible. More time and deeper observation do not guarantee truth. This points to the need for new methodological paradigms.

The moment I was bitten by a fat dog in one of the pens crystallized this realization. The dog demanded that I stay and play; I felt it clearly. The physical sensation of its teeth sinking into

my skin, the transmission of saliva and bacteria into my body, this was a visceral moment of contact, evoking Haraway's question, "Whom do you touch?" I was moved by this encounter. Yet beyond the intensity of the sensation, what remained? Even had I spent more time with this dog, the relation would not necessarily have deepened into some higher form of togetherness. It was a real, truthful moment, but not evidence of trans-species intimacy. Rather, it symbolized power, hierarchy, and ephemerality. This reminded me that human–dog relations cannot be imagined romantically; they are always partial, unequal, and unstable.

Thus, this study repositions care not as a simple ethical value but as a field of power, exclusion, and inequality. It also argues that multispecies ethnography must move beyond the idealization of intimacy and instead confront the asymmetrical, power-laden realities of interspecies life. As the moment of being bitten illustrates, multispecies ethnography is always incomplete, risky, and demanding of new methodological imagination. Future research must not evade this incompleteness and inequality, but take them as its starting point.

6. References

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7. Appendix

7.1 Abstract German

Diese Studie untersuchte anhand von teilnehmender Beobachtung in einem rumänischen öffentlichen Tierheim, wie die Pflege in einem solchen Tierheim mit Beziehungen zwischen verschiedenen Arten, Politik, Infrastruktur und Ungleichheit verflochten ist. Auf städtischer Ebene wurde die öffentliche Hundepflege unter dem Vorwand des Schutzes streunender Hunde präsentiert, tatsächlich zielte sie jedoch auf die Aufrechterhaltung der städtischen Hygiene, Sicherheit und Modernität ab. Anhand von Mary Douglas' Konzept der Verschmutzung erklärte ich, wie herrenlose Hunde als abnormale Wesen klassifiziert und in das Tierheim gebracht wurden und wie gleichzeitig sogar streunende Hunde durch Pflege als normale Wesen neu definiert werden konnten.

Innerhalb des Tierheims war die Pflege fragmentiert und wurde durch endlose Verhandlungen durchgeführt. Gleichgültigkeit, Distanzierung und Gewalt waren Faktoren, die die Pflege im Tierheim aufrechterhielten. Die meisten Hunde wurden leicht als „Hunde“ ausgegrenzt, aber einige erlangten Qualifikationen und erhielten eine Sonderbehandlung. Die Pflegearbeit war ungleich verteilt, und die Arbeiter wurden in eine mehrschichtige Verletzlichkeit gebracht. Die schmutzigere Arbeit wurde an die Verletzlicheren übertragen.

Meines Wissens ist dies der erste ethnografische Versuch, der aus dem Inneren eines rumänischen Hundeheims geschrieben wurde. Diese Studie konzentrierte sich auf zwei Punkte. Erstens sollte sie zur Erweiterung der Pflegeforschung beitragen, indem sie Pflege nicht als ethischen Wert der Lebenserhaltung, sondern als politische Praxis neu positionierte. Zweitens verband sie multispezies Ethnografie und Pflege. Damit plädierte ich dafür, die Beziehungen zwischen Mensch und Hund nicht unter dem Gesichtspunkt von Intimität, Ethik oder Gegenseitigkeit zu betrachten, sondern unter dem Gesichtspunkt von Asymmetrie, Instabilität und Unvollständigkeit.

7.2 Abstract English

This study explored how care in a Romanian public dog shelter is entangled with multispecies relations, politics, infrastructure, and inequality, through participant observation inside the shelter. At the urban level, public dog care was presented under the pretext of protecting stray dogs, but in fact it was aimed at maintaining urban hygiene, safety, and modernity. Using Mary Douglas's concept of pollution, I explained how ownerless dogs were classified as abnormal beings and relocated into the shelter, and at the same time how even stray dogs could be redefined as normal beings through care.

Inside the shelter, care was fragmented and carried out through endless negotiation. Indifference, distancing, and violence were factors that sustained care in the shelter. Most dogs were easily othered as the species "dog," but some acquired qualifications and received special treatment. Care labor was unequally distributed, and workers were placed in layered vulnerability. The dirtier work was transferred to the more vulnerable.

To my knowledge, this is the first ethnographic attempt written from inside a Romanian dog shelter. This study focused on two points. First, it aimed to contribute to the expansion of care studies by repositioning care not as an ethical value of sustaining life but as a political practice. Second, it combined multispecies ethnography and care. Through this, I urged that human–dog relations should be seen not from intimacy, ethics, or reciprocity, but from conditions such as asymmetry, instability, and incompleteness.