

Biopolitics of the More-Than-Human: Forensic Ecologies of Violence

By Joseph Pugliese. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. 312 pp. \$27.95 (paperback). ISBN: 978-1-478-00802-6

Joseph Pugliese's new work, *Biopolitics of the More-Than-Human*, speaks to our current moment by pursuing new ways of theorizing state violence, power, and law that 'do justice' to its more-than-human dimensions. Pugliese's central aim is to illustrate and express the relational ecologies that state violence in its diverse forms acts upon and disrupts, from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories to the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and US drone warfare. In taking this aim, Pugliese works from a tradition of "biopolitical" theorizing that he traces back to Michel Foucault's work on the "governmentalized management of life and death" (2). Excavating what he refers to as "the category's foundational, but unspoken, dependence on speciesism" (6), Pugliese seeks to broaden the concept of biopolitics by foregrounding what he calls "a spectrum of otherwise invisibilized biopolitical modalities" that operate on trees, soil, air, water, rocks, and other more-than-human entities (7). The approach he takes is modeled on the discipline of forensics – the science of revealing "evidentiary truth" from the material traces of a crime scene – while refusing its scientific and objectifying lens (14-15). Instead, Pugliese pursues a form of "counter-forensics" inspired by the work of Eyal Weizman and indigenous scholars like Daniel Wildcat and Gregory Cajete. Whereas orthodox understandings of forensics view animals, plants, land, and other more-than-human entities as "mere background to human victims" (23), Pugliese's approach seeks to "overturn this relationship of (human) figure to ground (all other-than-human entities)" in order "to map suffering's communal dimensions...locating it within ecologies of relationality" (23).

In the book's four body chapters, Pugliese's forensic investigation of relational ecologies operates across different sites and modes of state violence. In chapter one Pugliese explores what he calls the "zoopolitics" of Israeli settler colonialism, which "frame Palestinian people as effectively nonhuman animal forms of life that can be caged, experimented on, and killed with impunity" (41). We witness, for example, the forced "herding" of Palestinians in checkpoint cages, which produce "embodied zoopolitical effects" by enacting the "speciation of the Palestinian as the animal other" (52-55). Furthermore, Pugliese shows us the ways in which the Israeli Defense Forces use Palestinians as an "ideal weapons-testing laboratory" for Israeli arms manufacturers (70), which is juxtaposed with the gruesome use of animal subjects for military training and experimentation (74). Across these different episodes we witness the ways in which the Israeli state enacts and reproduces a "bestialization" of the Palestinian people that renders them cage-able and killable.

Chapter two continues the investigation of Israel's settler colonial violence while exploring what Pugliese calls its diverse "biopolitical modalities." A core aim of this chapter is to "heterogenize the otherwise homogenous category of biopolitics" by exploring the different ways in which it acts on more-than-human ecologies, which includes "aquapolitics" (the "biopolitics of water"), "phytopolitics" (involving vegetal life), "pedonpolitics" (soil), and "aeropolitics" (air) (86-87). Pugliese details the ways in which Israel's "Operation Protective Edge" targeted Palestinian water, plants, trees, soil, and air, disrupting and suffusing them with firepower and toxic chemicals. In contrast to

Israel's settler colonial violence, Pugliese highlights and affirms the connection of Palestinians with their land and its more-than-human inhabitants (119). In this way Pugliese treats the olive and lemon trees of Palestine as crucial actors in the drama of Israeli occupation and Palestinian resistance.

Chapter three takes us into the confines of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp to explore its modalities of zoopolitical power as well as the more-than-human alliances through which detainees resist and affirm despite their horrific circumstances. As Pugliese shows, Guantanamo evidences a "hierarchization of life" in which human subjects may be assigned a status lower than that of non-human animals. For example, under US law, human detainees are refused the status of "protected persons" whereas in accordance with the Endangered Species Act, iguanas receive protection (135). Yet amidst this soul-crushing imprisonment Pugliese finds moments of affirmation: he describes beautiful encounters between the detainees and birds and ants frequenting the prison. For Pugliese, these encounters reveal a "zoosemiotics of interspecies language and communication" that creates the space of "The Open" (drawing on while reworking Heidegger) (143-145) through which detainees temporarily transcend the horrors of extrajudicial imprisonment.

The final chapter turns to an exploration of the human-machine-algorithmic apparatuses that underpin drone warfare and the ecologies of death that constitute the receiving end of these killing assemblages. Pugliese details how drone targeting apparatuses express the "bioinformalization of life" by reducing living bodies to informational "patterns of life" that can be algorithmically processed as killable or not (168). In contrast to its purported scientificity, Pugliese frames this algorithmic process as an "art of divination" that is inherently imprecise and subject to the racial and gender biases of its human architects (184-187). Using Merleau-Ponty's concept of "flesh of the world," Pugliese conceptualizes the killing fields of drone warfare. According to Pugliese, the site of a drone massacre witnesses "intercorporeal assemblages of flesh where individual beings have been rendered into undifferentiated biological substance" (193). In this way, Pugliese suggests that guiding concepts of Western metaphysics and anthropocentric law – namely, the human individual and its property – are "precisely what is rendered inoperative in the aftermath of a drone strike" (191).

Pugliese's book makes a valuable contribution to the fields of critical legal studies, critical security studies, and geopolitical ecology by foregrounding the ecological dimensions of settler colonial, imperial, and state violence. Furthermore, he admirably weaves a decolonial lens with new materialism and draws effectively on indigenous cosmo-epistemologies to expand the way we conceptualize, perceive, and feel these forms of more-than-human violence.

However, the book also has its shortcomings. For one, concepts like biopolitics and necropolitics are used in a loose way throughout the text that is not always clearly defined or justified. Pugliese intends to follow Foucault's use of the term "biopolitics" in his late lectures (2). Yet while Foucault uses the concept to describe historically specific regimes and techniques of power-knowledge through which the biological processes of populations are made legible and governable, for Pugliese biopolitics becomes a totalizing signifier that appears to encompass every practice through which states govern and kill. In this rendering, everything from drone warfare to indiscriminate shelling of civilians and plants by the IDF to expropriating, bombing, and polluting water and soil is

subsumed under what Pugliese calls the “governing category of biopolitics” (7). Yet it is not made clear why “biopolitics” deserves such a superordinate status, a status which is primarily asserted rather than defended. This is not to say that concepts like biopolitics and necropolitics have nothing of value to offer in conceptualizing the phenomena Pugliese explores, but more precise and justified use of these concepts would clarify what they add or catch that other approaches otherwise miss.

Furthermore, while many readers will appreciate the philosophical richness and dexterity of Pugliese’s prose, others will find it tediously verbose. I find myself experiencing both feelings throughout the text, at times appreciating Pugliese’s ability to effortlessly weave philosophical reflection with rich (and often harrowing) empirical analysis, at other times wondering what is added by his conceptual pyrotechnics and feeling that they weaken the power of his insights. For me Pugliese is at his best when he lets the quite striking journalistic accounts, official reports, oral testimonies, and “racio-speciesist” statements from Israeli and US officials speak for themselves, with only minimal philosophical elaboration. After all, if we follow Pugliese’s suggestion that human and more-than-human testimonies are inherently expressive, without need for the forensic analyst to “bring the ‘mute witness’ to speech” (20), then it is not clear why we need Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, Hegel, Heidegger, etc. to make them speak.

Still, while the book can be tough-going at times (at least for this reviewer), its valuable contributions make it worth the effort for those seeking ways to conceptualize and challenge the ecocidal logics of settler colonialism, US imperialism, and anthropocentric law.

Michael J. Albert
SOAS University of London, UK