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Audra Mitchell, *Revenant Ecologies: Defying the Violence of Extinction and Conservation* (University of Minnesota Press, 2023).

Review by Rosaleen Duffy, University of Sheffield in *Environmental Peacebuilding Journal*

Revenant Ecologies by Audra Mitchell is an excellent book. It is a rare example of a book that can serve as both an introductory text to understanding the features and critiques of Western hegemonic forms of conservation, as well as a highly original and thought-provoking challenge to academics who are already very familiar with these debates. For me this is by far one of the best books I have read on conservation. Mitchell develops the central idea of (bio)plurality by centring BIPOC thinking throughout the book, to cement how revenant ecologies can offer hope in the face of environmental destruction – while clearly showing how conservation underpinned by western hegemonic thinking is often responsible for driving that destruction often via very violent means.

The focus on the multiple forms of violence embedded in conservation and in extinction will be of particular interest to readers of *Environment and Security*. For example, the chapter on Earth/Body violence demonstrates how the terms extinction and biodiversity loss cannot do justice to the systemic destruction of beings, life forms and worlds. Instead, readers are encouraged to think through the breaking of connections and undermining of relations of co-existence. But the central idea of ‘revenant ecologies’ is a powerfully hopeful idea running through the book. Moving beyond ideas of restoration, rewilding or simple ideas of the ‘return’ to particular forms of nature, Mitchell suggests that revenant ecologies are not linear reversals to an earlier point in time; instead revenant ecologies are a homecoming and a reclamation of possible futures for people, animals and ecosystems. Chapter seven, especially, is devoted to showcasing particular writings that exemplify revenant ecologies.

One of the things that really stands out about the book is Audra Mitchell’s very specific and engaging writing style. Right at the outside of the book, Mitchell centres her experience and knowledge as a neurodivergent scholar in order to explain how writing as an autistic person generates novel insights about conservation and extinction. The phrase ‘tour de force’ can be overused, but by centring autism Mitchell draws the reader in by examining conservation in all its complexities and by offering a sustained and highly original critique. At a surface level the book is about one thing: revenant ecologies. But a deeper reading shows this book is about *everything*: the dominant capitalist system, the destructive forces of on-going colonial legacies, the production of knowledge, the need to centre BIPOC, disabled/crip and queer knowledges, the need to dismantle current forms of conservation, our understandings of environmental crisis, and more. This is very effective – and means that the book should be read as a whole rather than as discreet chapters. As such it is a very innovative book. There are lots of different themes I could pick out, but here I will highlight just three as an indicator of the kind of complex analysis readers can expect.

First, I really appreciated Mitchell’s explanation of the links between the terms genocide and ecocide, and how that creates challenges in using the term ecocide. Mitchell uses the examples of the destruction of qimmit, buffalo and white sharks as more than systematic killings. Instead of using international norms like genocide and ecocide as benchmarks, it is critical to place these killings in the context of local norms; in the case of qimmit the systematic destruction of the dogs is also about the systematic destruction of the kinship ties between qimmit and Inuit peoples, and the destruction of Inuit ways of living. This cannot be captured by international definitions of either genocide or ecocide.

Second, Mitchell's carefully highlights environmental ableism. The different ways that the inequalities in impacts of environmental change are distributed on disabled people and communities is rarely highlighted and discussed. In this book environmental ableism draws our attention to the logics of dumping ecological harms in to bodies defined as damaged, degraded or impure, such that the active elimination of those bodies is desired.

Third, Mitchell offers one of the clearest and most sustained critique of the idea of Half Earth, put forward by E.O. Wilson and popularised by conservation NGOs, international organisations, mainstream media, philanthropists and celebrities. Half Earth is an idea in ascendancy, and its logics underpin aspects of the international commitment to 30x30, endorsed by the Convention on Biological Diversity. Mitchell places the idea of Half Earth in the context of the risks of apocalyptic visions and discourses about the environment. Such apocalyptic visions of the future, expressed via emergency thinking about the need to tackle environmental destruction through common refrains like climate emergency, we are running out of time, and so on, contain very clear risks. Mitchell argues that because apocalyptic visions are invested with whiteness, eurocentrism and ableism, they can lead to the kinds of futures that entrench existing structures of power, violence and oppression. For example, in Half Earth, BIPOC communities are defined and presented as aggressive, violent, backward, hostile or indifferent to the environment. Several critics of Half Earth (and 30x30) have already highlighted the ways these ideas about taking urgent action to save the Earth could lead to mass scale injustices including the removal of already marginalised and oppressed communities from areas that are defined as highly biodiverse by western science. Emergency thinking can usher in a new raft of injustices, while deepening and extending existing ones, as it opens the door to greater levels of eco-apartheid without tackling the systemic reasons for environmental destruction (colonialism and capitalism).

Finally, for scholars interested in environment-security interactions, this book will provide a fascinating and challenging read. It is especially important for offering a critique of the ways environmental change is often articulated as a security threat. Instead, this book powerfully demonstrates how the threats come from the destructive forces of capitalism, colonialism and conservation itself. I highly recommend reading this book, I found it a very thought provoking piece of work.