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Revenant Ecologies: Defying the Violence of Extinction and Conservation by Audra Mitchell, Minneapolis; London, University of Minnesota Press, 2023, vii + 361 pp., US\$30, £24.16 (paperback), ISBN 9781517906818

Mo Koundje, one of the most famous western lowland gorillas at London Zoo, died in 1938 at the young age of seven from Bright's disease, linked to his omnivorous diet whilst in captivity. His huge popularity was partly due to his anthropomorphic abilities such as eating his dinner at the table using cutlery. Mok, as he was also known, was purchased from Jean Charles André Capagorry, a colonial administrator in the former French Congo, who had acquired him two years prior. It is unlikely that whoever sold him to Capagorry would have happened upon a healthy baby gorilla in the jungle. In all likelihood, Mok was pried from his dead mother's arms after she was shot. Taking baby primates in this way increased their chances of bonding with their carers and becoming docile, cutlery-using animals. No consideration was given at the time as to how this now critically endangered species was obtained, transported and entrapped in order to bring an illusion of nature into the heart of London. The violence surrounding Mok's story was only echoed in the mental breakdown of his long-term partner, Moina, who also died shortly after (Machin 2022).

Mok's story is perpetuated throughout history and across species, yet current conservation efforts are linked to genocide and ecocide, still rooted in colonial violence and exploitation. Audra Mitchell's *Revenant Ecologies* brings these to the forefront, aiming 'to shift popular understandings of extinction, reframing it as an expression of global structures of violence' (3). Working within a tight frame of help and harm, and a world-view dominated by divides, Mitchell's book offers reconciliatory alternatives to bypass the dogma of conservation practices as irrefutably good. From the beginning, they use the term *revenance*, 'the theory that this time of immense rupture and destruction is also shaped by currents of return, of tending and renewing life toward alternative futures' (3). In other words, Mitchell reminds us that in order to decide how we shape our future, we must understand and acknowledge previous and current models of conservation.

Mitchell combats the failure of crisis terminology by focusing not only on 'the resources or capital implied by terms like "species," "ecosystems," or "biodiversity" but irreplaceable relationships and the conditions of co-constitution that enable the thriving of *plural* life-forms' (2). They are in favour of *(bio)plurality*, a term that subverts capitalist systems modelled on profit and loss when it comes to decision-making processes and policies pertaining to conservation. Rather than focusing on divides, *(bio)plurality* embraces life in all of its cosmovisions. Beginning their analysis transversally by exploring the enormity of scale across space and time, Mitchell reminds us that extinction is not as easily definable, quantifiable and predictable as Western research has proposed, but is a complex co-mingling of human and more-than-human life and death.

Mitchell highlights the misalignment of conservation as it is used to create a world dominated by sameness, modelled across a variety of life-forms which are determined by a Western culture. This implies the survival of perfect plants, animals, and even humans, who may be able to cope better with the challenges imposed by a radically different future (a dystopian

vision) which we are currently in the process of shaping. Mitchell argues that seeing extinction as ‘megadeath’ (41) is problematically a passive process, happening to beings rather than something which is done to them. This, coupled with the ‘uneven value assigned to beings’ (48), creates a climate of discrimination and tension – one in which the interests of life, both human and more-than-human are not at the forefront, actually countering the assumed values of conservation.

In the second chapter, Mitchell’s focus on relations that are broken within an extinction discourse rather than individual animals shows that worlds exist in relationality, including relationality with the human. In this way, their argument is transcorporeal, (bio)plurality embodying a ‘de-posthumanist vision’ (71) that is not anthropocentric nor ecocentric, but somewhere in-between. Hierarchies arise within existing ‘conservation and extinction processes [where] there is a need to provide a service to humans and within that category only certain humans’ (74) – here, the idea of services is not only anthropocentric but discriminatory. When it comes to the animal, the system is based on hierarchies depending on charisma and values assigned usually for economic gain. Mitchell argues that instead of trying to impose our Western thoughts, methods, and practices onto local communities who know their surroundings in distinct and in-depth ways (i.e. deep time, Dreaming), we should take into account their knowledge and views when it comes to extinction and conservation.

In doing so, as we can see in Chapter 3, we would adhere to the notion of ‘cohabitation’ (96), which sees extinction as the breaking down of relationships between beings who are living in shared spaces. Removing pieces of the puzzle in terms of individual extinctions destabilises the entire picture and leaves crucial gaps, which cannot be mitigated by notions such as biodiversity offsetting. Here, Mitchell focuses on ‘Earth/ Body’ violence and draws together two very different scales of extinction processes and effects, extending the destruction of (bio)plurality to global structures of violence. Earth/ Body violence can be seen as an attack against the connections forged through cohabitation. Mitchell’s more-than-human notions of the body tap into elements of ‘porosity’ which are also contained in Astrida Neimanis’s exploration of transcorporeality (Neimanis 2017). Highlighting the complex relationships between life-forms is a constant reminder about the wide-reaching implications of localised pockets of destruction.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, Mitchell gives examples of invasive states and the widespread harms of colonialism, also linked to invasive species and their global spread, colonial extraction, and the destruction of (bio)plurality. They focus on the eliminative violence of the relationships between human and more-than-human groups. Mitchell uses a variety of case studies to reinforce her arguments and provides examples such as the Inuit-Qimmit relations (Inuit and sled dogs), and Kānaka-manō relations (Kānaka and sharks). Mitchell proposes that ‘extinction’ and ‘genocide’ need to be used carefully to refer to the destruction of (bio)plural relations and other efforts such as ‘large-scale social, political, cultural, economic, and other transformations, including collective (re)worlding and collective movement toward’ (193) these relations.

In the last two chapters Mitchell addresses apocalyptic conservation and revenant ecologies through the lens of speculative realism, along with the *Living Planet Report* (2018-2020). They criticise Edward O. Wilson's *Half-Earth* (2016) for failing to include BIPOC 'cosmovisions and knowledges' (228) in a meaningful way and instead referring to them in relation to myths. Placing the words 'stories' and 'theories' alongside each other divided by a slash, offers Mitchell the opportunity to tap into Indigenous knowledge and culture, highlighting the fact that these BIPOC knowledge systems should not be regarded merely as storytelling. In the final chapter, BIPOC literature is outlined as a powerful tool used to transmit learnings and indispensable information. Mitchell reminds us that global structures of violence need to be addressed through the essential process of '*revenge*—the return of violenced, silenced, and eliminated life forms' (239). Revenant forms of agency are employed to disrupt Western timelines and relations, and reclaiming modes of thinking that are actively being erased through the violence of conservation.

In *Revenant Ecologies* Mitchell demonstrates that conservation can be done in wrong ways and challenges mainstream Western thinking, which funds and often ignores the views of people who are at the forefront of destruction, but have little or no say in the matter. The broad scope of the study is useful to a wide range of academic and non-academic readers with an interest in extinction and conservation, and is written in an accessible and clear style. Mitchell's work could also be linked to that of Joshua Bennett, who also draws parallels between the oppression of BIPOC and animals (Bennet 2020). A deeper exploration of the more-than-human, transcorporeality, and the *body* would have helped solidify some of the bonds of (bio)plurality that Mitchell speaks of. Reframing the narrative can be seen as a purification process in reversal of current tendencies of extractive and eliminative violence. Extinction and conservation are geared towards certain desirable goals and are masking residual suffering in the process. It is easy to fall into the trap of the *good* of conservation without realising how much harm is generated in the process. In doing battle with these conventions, Mitchell dismantles the key questions of who, where and why someone is worth saving.

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