

# Book Review

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**Salazar Parreñas, Juno. *Decolonizing Extinction: The Work of Care in Orangutan Rehabilitation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018, 288 pages.**

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Juno Salazar Parreñas explores the theory of decolonization in Sarawak, Malaysia, a territory shaped by colonial legacies and postcolonial institutions. This book analyzes the politics of extinction from the feminist perspective of gender, sexuality, and social inequalities between humans and nonhumans (primarily orangutans but also turtles, crocodiles, sun bears as well as microbes and other biological agents and natural substances like rocks, trees, forest, etcetera). The author focuses on the continued colonialism of the region and its impact on humans, particularly displaced Indigenous people residing in Sarawak, and nonhumans, particularly displaced orangutans.

After conducting participant observation for a period of two years in two wildlife centres in Sarawak, the Lundu and Batu Wildlife Centres, Parreñas suggests that decolonization should not be subject to a predetermined conclusion but concerned with processes and experimentations, particularly those that prioritize the well-being of nonhuman others. Rather than fearing the extinction of specific species, Parreñas proposes individuals to consider the power relations taking place between humans and nonhumans, especially regarding issues of life and death. The author's objective is to illustrate how important differences and interdependencies across kinds are within a historical context of colonialism, mobility, and refuge. As such, Parreñas' monograph is an interesting and valuable work since her approach pushes the boundaries of interdependencies by persuading the reader to focus on the relationships toward nonhuman others. More precisely, she suggests readers consider the risk of humans and nonhumans living together, even though humans may risk their own lives in doing so.

This monograph is divided into three sections and structured over four timescales related to affective encounters between humans and nonhumans. The timescales are recorded chronologically and refer to interdependencies of places and memory. The first part addresses how social relations between humans and nonhumans are shaped by both colonial hierarchies and the intersectionalities of race, gender, sexuality, and species. The second part refers to enclosures as understood, lived, enacted, and contested in everyday life by both wildlife species and Indigenous caretakers. The last part reflects on the futures for humans and nonhuman beings. Mostly, these chapters examine the double standard that orangutans face by being perceived as both assets for profit and agents of liberatory decolonization. This last part also questions the futures of nonhuman others such as local microbes and other biological agents, like rocks, trees, forests, etcetera.

Parreñas begins with the daily work undertaken by Barbara Harrison with orangutans between 1956 and 1967 in her home in Sarawak as part of a rehabilitation experiment of the Sarawak museum run by Barbara's husband, Tom Harrison. With the help of local labour, Barbara managed a domestic laboratory housing with displaced and orphaned orangutans. She applied the method of "ape motherhood" to teach orangutans to live independently, while living together with human caretakers, a method that become replaced by more current ideas of "tough love." For Barbara, this interspecies experiment represented the opportunity to engage with the production of both specific forms of social relations and modern scientific knowledge, since, for human caretakers, the affective encounters with orangutans imply new forms of wage labour. Barbara's work took place during the period of political transition of Sarawak from the British empire to the federal state of Malaysia, a period marked by colonial hierarchies, political economy, and postcolonial conditions of labour.

The private-public domain prevailing in Barbara's rehabilitation experiment is contrasted in the second chapter by the public setting of the Lundu Wildlife Centre in Sarawak. Here, the book addresses the affective feelings between living/non-living bodies. The bodily presence experienced between and among humans and nonhuman beings represents a valuable marker involving specific geography, space, and time. This chapter also mentions the global economy of commercial volunteerism along with the colonial, capitalist inequalities of the region, as the Lundu Wildlife Centre depends on the revenues from volunteers' fees to remain open. It examines how affective relations at the wildlife centre

not only refer to affection in the sense of tenderness but also to the rejection of such an approach. For example, it reflects on the concept of “tough” as the human performance of “being tough” when dealing with orangutans. Even though both Indigenous low-wage workers and commercial volunteers, also referred to as vacationing ecotourists, share mutual feelings of vulnerability when dealing with nonhumans, it is commercial volunteers who are the most likely to avoid bodily injuries. Such a scenario is caused by the postcolonial inequalities that allow for some bodies to be more at risk than others.

The monograph’s third chapter turns to the inequalities of gender and sexuality prevailing among orangutans as well as the space limitations under which they live. In this section, Parreñas connects space to issues of gender, sex, and sexuality to show how the life of orangutans in the space of Sarawak means these species experience new forms of violence. In fact, in this context, compulsory heterosexuality is imposed among semi-wild populations. Under the premise of endangered species, displaced orangutans are encouraged to sexually reproduce, despite the implications of forced sociality, the lack of space, the regularity of forced copulation, and the female orangutans’ avoidance of selecting a mate. Even though some local workers at Batu Wildlife Centre refer to some of these acts of reproduction as “rape”, they avoid the subject, since in their views such behaviour is inherently linked to biological and therefore ‘natural’ characteristics. Moreover, local workers describe what they perceive to be the feelings of semi-wild female orangutans, as *bebas* (free) beings living in constant fear. Parreñas states that Western women volunteers come to terms with the sexual violence experienced by the female orangutans by prioritizing reproductive capacity over the female orangutans’ well-being. By prioritizing the reproduction of endangered species, these settings ignore other factors of great concern, for example, the fact of providing the orangutans with suitable spaces.

Parreñas examines the interactions that take place between displaced Indigenous caretakers at the Lundu Wildlife Centre and displaced animals such as turtles, crocodiles, sun bears and orangutans. By sharing space, human and nonhuman actors learn new ways of knowledge and new forms of becoming. The interactions between them are shaped by the colonial legacies prevailing in the region. The presence of both parties, Iban workers and endangered species, is shaped by the orangutans’ loss of habitat and food security. While endangered species are required to remain in the wildlife centre’s enclosure to avoid extinction, Iban workers are also required to provide their hard labour in this new economy to maintain their own livelihoods. It is in this shift of

labour — from hunting, tending, cultivating, and foraging to becoming animal handlers — that mutual experiences occur, and animals and animal handlers become experienced with each other.

The final chapters reflect on the possibilities for the future of Sarawak's orangutans and Sarawak's individuals within the limited space of the wildlife centres. Parreñas develops in more detail both the concept of arrested autonomy, or arrested independence, as well as the relationship among Sarawak's people, Sarawak's orangutans, and the political state. It is through the relations among these three actors that the politics of decolonization are created, maintained, and reinforced. Parreñas uses the comparison made by one of the male volunteers between the wildlife centre and the hospice where his grandmother lives: both sites are created as commercial enterprises even though they may not be highly lucrative; these places hold entities (either humans or nonhuman beings) against their will; they both provide care to beings dealing with death, in addition to both constantly negotiating the life and death of the species they are caring for.

*Decolonizing Extinction* is a book for both undergraduate and graduate students, not only of anthropology, but also primatology, Southeast Asian history, environmental, science and technology, and women, gender, and queer studies. The most important contribution that the book makes is the nuanced ethnographic narratives that display the intersectionalities of race, gender, sex, sexuality, and nationality among humans and between humans and nonhuman beings. If the book has a drawback, it is that it does not explore class disparities between international volunteers and Indigenous workers. Still, the monograph is an important contribution to studies of decolonization.