



**Jasbir K. Puar.** *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. 296 pp. \$26.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8223-6918-9.

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**Published on** H-Disability (July, 2018)

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“Hands Up, Don’t Shoot!,” the title of the preface, refers to the summer of 2014, when police shot Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the fifty-one-day siege of Gaza by Israeli forces took place. Jasbir Puar marks the difference between the American police force, with its goal of death, and the Israeli army, with its goal of debilitation. Noting the alliances between the Black Lives Matter and Free Palestine movements, Puar goes on to explain debility and capacity as useful concepts for discussing disability in a meaningful way given the shifting cultural contexts in which disability is defined. People can be debilitated or capacitated within an existence of being disabled or nondisabled. Disability, in *The Right to Maim*, is “a register of biopolitical population control”; biopolitics, as a conceptual paradigm, “can thus be read as a theory of debility and capacity” (p. xviii). Puar’s acknowledgments tell us that the book is “first and foremost about biopolitics” (p. xxv). She makes clear her political stance with her dedication of the book to the “fortitude of the Palestinian people” and the liberation of Palestine (p. xxviii).

In the introduction, “The Cost of Getting Better,” Puar takes up the phenomenon of gay youth suicide and the “It Gets Better” campaign of the 2010s. “I have been struck,” she writes, “by how the discourses surrounding gay youth suicide partake in a spurious binarization of an interdependent re-

lationship between bodily capacity and bodily debility” (p. 1). Neoliberalism, she argues, demands bodily capacity at the same time as its structures of inequality promote debility. Queer suicide, in the context of “slow death,” a term she uses from Lauren Berlant’s work, needs to be viewed in a larger context than moving from debility to capacity. [1] She proposes the framework of disability studies, posthumanism, and critical animal studies as a way to approach the larger context of a “nonanthropocentric, interspecies vision of affective politics” of subaltern space (p. 29). The introduction closes with a brief overview of the subsequent chapters, described as an analysis of “trans becoming in relation to affect and the matter of race” (pp. 30-31); US imperialism; Israel’s debilitation of Palestine; and Israel’s “sovereign right to maim” alongside the right to kill (p. 31).

Chapter 1, “Bodies with New Organs: Becoming Trans, Becoming Disabled,” considers the relationship between the disability rights movement and transgender activism in terms of the law, in terms of passing, and as an ontological force. The latter, in the context of posthumanism and animal studies, has implications for understanding race. Rather than deconstructing race, with the white male as determinant, Puar suggests we could resist biopolitical control more effectively by proliferating its dynamic meanings.

“Crip Nationalism: From Narrative Prosthesis to Disaster Capitalism,” the second chapter, consists of four parts. The first part, “Working and Warring,” opens with a lengthy excerpt from *A Thousand Plateaus* (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 1987) on the genealogy of accident and mutilation. In the Deleuzian view, there is no accident: mutilation and amputation “are part of the biopolitical scripting of populations available for injury, whether through labor or warring or both” (p. 64). Puar goes on to situate crip nationalism as a “transnational deployment of exceptionalism” that relies on a system of Othering (p. 71). In the second part, “From Modernist Exception to Postmodernist Exceptionalism,” Puar addresses the failures of the Americans with Disabilities Act, pointing out that the same system (capitalist logic) that created the problem is used in an attempt to fix it. The third part of this chapter is “Narrative Prosthesis,” in which Puar extends the implications of David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder’s work on literary theory (*Narrative Prosthesis*, 2000) to hip-hop artists, indigenous populations in colonial states, and blackness. The common denominator here is futurity and one’s capacity to inhabit it. Disaster capitalism, she argues, maintains disability as a disaster—“endemic, durational, and profitable” (p. 88). “The Disability that is Already Here/Elsewhere” is the fourth part, in which Puar discusses the tensions between celebrating and preventing disability and between perceptions of disability in the United States and disability elsewhere, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of US actions.

Chapter 3, “Disabled Diaspora, Rehabilitating State: The Queer Politics of Reproduction in Palestine/Israel” takes up “pinkwashing,” which is, Puar claims, Israel’s use of gay rights propaganda to detract attention from its occupation of Palestine. The focus on inclusivity, she asserts, is limited to cisgender and gender conformity, and stands beside gender segregation in Orthodox Jewish communities. In establishing Israel as a rehabilitative act (rehabilitating the debilitations of

statelessness and genocide), the model Jewish body was decidedly nondisabled, masculine, and heterosexual. Rehabilitation banished the “Oriental” in the European Jew, recreated Europe in Palestine, and conceptually separated the Jew from the Arab. The fear of maiming then becomes “a spectacular imperial tool, projecting the fear of maiming by Palestinians onto Palestinians through the debilitating effects of the occupation; this mechanism is the displacement necessary to secure able-bodied citizenry of Israel” (p. 107).

“Will Not Let Die: Debilitation and Inhuman Biopolitics in Palestine,” chapter 4, focuses on the population targeted for injury, moving on from the focus in previous chapters on the population that is available for injury. Israel maintains biopolitical control through maiming, not killing; maiming, Puar claims, poses as a humanitarian manifestation of a “let live” mentality, but is actually a manifestation of the mentality of “will not let die” (p. 139). The section “No Future” takes up the fate of Palestinian children, targeted for stunting, PTSD, gunshot wounds, and so on. Puar calls her analysis an “anti-Zionist hermeneutic” (p. 153). “The ultimate purpose of this analysis,” she writes, coming full circle from her opening statement, “is to labor in the service of a Free Palestine” (p. 154).

The postscript, “Treatment without Checkpoints,” looks at debility within disability among the disability service providers at the checkpoints in Palestine, then extends the concept to other populations. Debilitated disability as a result of collective punishment demands a complicated activism. The desire for mobility extends beyond the individual body to the collective displaced population. Progress in achieving a positive disability identity, Puar concludes, will not come about until the end of Palestinian occupation.

*The Right to Maim* is not written for a general audience. It is a theoretical investigation into the meanings of disability, debility, capacity, queerness, and race in global biopolitical contexts. As such, it is not for everyone. Readers who have nev-

er worked their way through Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis*, for example, will find this work slow going. I do not see its place in any undergraduate class, though it could be useful in theory-based graduate seminars. Readers who are fluent in theoretical scholarship, especially in disability theory, will find this to be a fulfilling read.

Note

[1]. Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (2007): 754-80.

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**Citation:** M. Lynn Rose. Review of Puar, Jasbir K. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. H-Disability, H-Net Reviews. July, 2018.

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