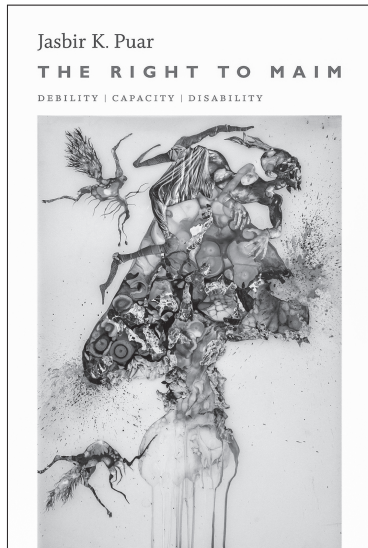




Recent Books



The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability, by Jasbir K. Puar. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. 296 pages. \$94.95 cloth, \$26.95 paper, e-book available.

REVIEWED BY NIMROD BEN ZEEV

Jasbir K. Puar's *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* illuminates the conditions that produce disability in the global south and within disenfranchised communities in the global north where four-fifths of the world's people with disabilities reside (p. xvii). At the core of this study is Puar's insistence that disability among the disenfranchised is not merely the product of a disabling event but of "the deliberate conditions of population debilitation" (p. 73), endemic to "poverty, permanent war, racism, imperialism, and colonialism" (p. 69).

Recognizing these debilitating conditions requires a new approach to biopolitics, Puar argues. Scholars, beginning with Foucault, often portray biopolitics as toggling between life and death. In contrast, Puar contends, debilitation and the production of disability can become biopolitical ends aimed at extracting value "from populations that would otherwise be disposable" (p. xviii). Incorporating notions of risk and statistical likelihood, Puar's biopolitics of debilitation challenges the notion that disability is always somehow inevitable or accidental. Rather, it shows how racialized bodies are specifically made available for injury, through labor, war, or both, in ways that are profitable to neoliberal capitalism, a fact unrecognized by dominant disability rights paradigms. This targeting for injury—and, in its most extreme articulation, targeting *to* injure—is what Puar calls the "right to maim." If the "right to kill" is the essence of the sovereign right over life, the right to maim is at the heart of the biopolitics of debilitation.

The Right to Maim covers a vast range of issues. In the introduction and first two chapters, Puar draws connections between race, neoliberalism, U.S. imperialism, queer suicide, trans becoming, and the limits of "disability discourse" exceptionalism, rights, and pride. Chapter 3 proposes a new approach to Israeli "pinkwashing" that incorporates many of the themes of the first two chapters. This means the book appeals to multiple—albeit highly specialized—readerships. However, it also

means that these chapters can be disjointed and difficult to follow without extensive familiarity with the works of the theorists that Puar references or the specialized terminology she employs. Thus, of the many readers who could potentially benefit from Puar's important claims regarding the production of debility, only a frustratingly limited number are likely to find much of the book accessible.

Chapter 4 is the book's centerpiece, from which the titular "right to maim" is derived. Here, Puar focuses on Israeli military and political policies toward Palestinians in the occupied territories, and particularly in Gaza. Since the First Intifada, those policies have been shaped by what Puar describes as an "*implicit* claim to the 'right to maim' and debilitate Palestinian bodies," rather than kill them—a "shoot-to-injure" policy that she compares with U.S. law enforcement's "shoot-to-kill" policy with regard to black Americans (p. 128). The author states that for Israel, the policy has proven productive both as a form of control and in sustaining claims to "a humanitarian approach to warfare" (p. 129), framed in liberal terms as less violent than shooting to kill. Puar argues that adopting "the vantage of the occupied" (p. 140) reveals how Israeli policy toward Gaza, and to a lesser extent, the West Bank, intentionally uses debilitation as an instrument of control. Importantly for Puar, Israeli use of the right to maim also depends upon the widespread belief "on both sides of the occupation" (p. 108) that death for one's country is noble, and that disability is worse than death (pp. 140–41).

The attempt to adopt "the vantage of the occupied" and to relate Israeli use of the right to maim to Palestinian (and also Israeli, albeit to a lesser extent) attitudes towards death and disability is where the limits of the author's source base are most pronounced. Palestinian NGO reports and the works of Palestinian scholars and journalists Puar utilizes are important sources; however, they offer limited support for the broader cultural claims that her argument hinges upon. To make her claim about Palestinians embracing death over disability credible, a deeper engagement with Palestinians' conceptions and experiences of disability would have been necessary.

Such an engagement could have focused on portrayals of disability and debilitation in Palestinian cultural production, of which there is no shortage, from *Men in the Sun* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), through *Wild Thorns* (Interlink Books, 2011), to the 2005 film *Paradise Now*, or on fieldwork of the sort Puar herself engaged in but did not incorporate, as the postscript attests. Missing, too, is a consideration of the centrality of dangerous employment (particularly in construction)—in Israel or on Israeli settlements—among West Bank Palestinians and Palestinian citizens of Israel. A noticeable omission considering Puar's emphasis on debilitating labor elsewhere.

Even applied only to contemporary Gaza, Puar's claim risks obscuring more than it uncovers. Media reports about attitudes towards maiming and death among young Gazans protesting at the Israel-Gaza fence reveal considerably more complexity. Often already regarding life in Gaza as a form of death-in-life, these youth explicitly express their wish to be injured or killed, based on a variety of reasons that have little to do with notions of "noble death."^{*}

* Amira Hass, "Palestinian Protesters in Gaza: Don't Wound Us—Kill Us," *Haaretz*, 13 August 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-palestinian-protesters-in-gaza-don-t-wound-us-kill-us-1.6366805>.

These criticisms aside, Puar's larger aim of calling attention to debilitation as an instrument of exploitation and control is a crucial contribution to efforts to understand the relationships between material bodies, the state, and capitalism. This is especially true as scholarly and popular discourses on precarity focus increasingly on its white-collar, Euro-American manifestations, neglecting all the bodies that are on the line due to precarity elsewhere.

After *The Right to Maim*'s initial publication in November 2017, and again after it was granted the National Women's Studies Association Book Prize in September 2018, critics attempted to generate scandal around the book and its publisher, Duke University Press, with accusations of anti-Semitism or even blood libel. These accusations—likely promoted by those who have not read it, let alone carefully—should not be allowed to reduce it to polemic. Readers able to make their way through *The Right to Maim*'s arduous language and somewhat disjointed structure will be rewarded with new ways to think about crucial questions.

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The Privatisation of Israeli Security, by Shir Hever. London: Pluto Press, 2017. 256 pages. \$99.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper, \$25.00 e-book.

REVIEWED BY LYNDALE HERMAN

In *The Privatisation of Israeli Security*, Hever presents a timely and captivating argument that the Israeli government has gradually privatized significant components of state security. Over the two decades spanning 1994–2014, privatization occurred both through sale and outsourcing, as well as “by default” (p. 11), with outsourcing of various security responsibilities claiming the largest portion of the activities. Much as in his first book, *The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation* (Pluto Press, 2010), Hever draws on Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu for most of his theoretical analysis to address the transition of military elites, from active service to the private sector, as well as their leadership

role in much of the privatization drive.

This book fits into the sub-genre of literature that addresses the Israeli occupation through the lens of political economy, continuing to build on the groundbreaking research of Sarah Roy's *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995) that arguably launched this approach to studying the occupation. Hever's unique contribution comes from his focus on the Israeli security establishment; here, he builds on work by Neve Gordon, Shira Havkin, and Tariq Dana, as well as Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler's *The Global Political Economy of Israel* (Pluto Press, 2002).