INTRODUCTION

Method and Field

The studies that follow rely on historical claims made by the historian Michel Foucault in the last decade of his work, though their method is not Foucauldian, nor are their principal arguments about history. In his late lectures on biopolitics, Foucault describes the two-century-long replacement of a politics of sovereignty – where the sovereign's power is quintessentially the power to kill – by political technology focused on life – where life itself becomes the object that power aims to know and control. In this account, Foucault specifies the nineteenth century as the period when biopower shifts its point of application from the individual body to the population or species.

This book shows that the new political salience of biological species put the species concept into crisis. Treating the species concept as a problematic rather than as a statistical aggregate, it proposes a series of symptomatic readings of the concept at work, preponderantly in English poems, but also in fiction and texts from anthropology and natural history, especially the writing of Charles Darwin, and in certain episodes in the history of medicine. In these readings, I take up Nicole Shukin's call to extend Foucault's treatment of biopolitics to encompass the lives of non-human animals; I follow scholarship in the field of animal studies more broadly in arguing that it is in relation to other animals that human beings recognize themselves as such.[1] In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida proposed that thinking about the animal (*la pensée de l'animal*) derives from poetry, and in Part I, this book will consider the constitution of animal species as a poetic undertaking.[2] Finally, while it engages in symptomatic reading as a practice, the book also in part resembles an animal chasing its own tail, in that it makes a secondary argument for the biopolitical ground of key psychoanalytic concepts, including those of the unconscious and of the symptom broadly defined.

In lectures from 1975 to 197 published under the title *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault distinguishes between the discipline of individual bodies,

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which for him characterized the biopolitics of the eighteenth century, and a new technology of power of which "the theory of right and disciplinary practice knew nothing." This technology bears on "the population as political problem, . . . as a biological problem and as power's problem."[3] This "seizure of power" in the late eighteenth century "is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species." Addressed not to the individual but to the population, this biopolitics includes among its "objects of knowledge and the targets it seeks to control" processes such as "the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, and so on."[4] From the late eighteenth century, species and populations emerge as actors on the stage of history; in Britain their centrality to the emergent discipline of political economy is established in Thomas Malthus's 1798 *Essay on the Principle of Population*. From Malthus on, life and death cease to be effects of chance or acts of God, but become facts in the field of political economy, amenable to political management, and determining in their turn other fundamental facts of social life such as the wage rate and the price of staple foods.[5] Though little of my concern in what follows will be with political economy, I will come back to Malthus near the end of this book as part of an argument that Sigmund Freud's concept of the death drive is grounded in thinking about the collective life of populations.

Besides his claim about the nineteenth-century emergence of the population as biopower's target, a second strand of Foucault's argument also orients the studies to follow. It arises from the question, "what becomes of the sovereign's right to kill under the new dispensation of biopower?" Foucault's answer is that under biopower, the monopoly of death loses its juridical function, and that what had indeed always been the logic of war is internalized and made central to the modern state. The hinge on which this transformation turns is that of racism, which is actually Foucault's central topic in the entire series of 1975–6 lectures. In a remarkable passage, he personifies the species subject, asserting its inextricable relation to racism and eugenics:

> [R]acism does make the relationship of war – "If you want to live, the other must die" – function in a way that is completely new and . . . quite compatible with the exercise of biopower . . . [R]acism makes it possible to establish a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or warlike relationship of confrontation, but a biological-type relationship: "The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I – as species rather than individual – can live."[6]

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As the Foucauldian philosopher Roberto Esposito writes, every biopolitics is also a thanatopolitics.[7]

For Foucault and Esposito and for those who have built on their work, the nineteenth-century emergence of the species as biopower's primary object gives a framework for study of the pseudosciences of racial difference and degeneration and of the discourse and practice of eugenics. For Foucault – and for Esposito and Giorgio Agamben among others – the claim that modern state power has the living population as its primary object is historically consequential above all because it provides a framework for understanding fascism and the Holocaust. For all of these writers, from the moment that biopower takes the population as its object, it is implicitly genocidal.

The genocidal tendency in nineteenth-century technologies of power and knowledge will not directly be my concern until we come to consider human populations in the last part of the book. Nevertheless, Foucault theorizes biopower as inscribing racist taxonomies in the mechanisms of the modern state in terms that form part of the context for everything that follows:

> What in fact is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die. The appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races . . . : all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls. It is . . . a way of establishing a biological-type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain.[8]

Foucault's work has a bitter timeliness in the pandemic times in which I write, which have accelerated the politicization of biological life he described and made the marking of differences – of age, ability, economic productivity – within biological populations into a political and cultural obsession.

In the earlier lectures of his 1975–6 course, Foucault traces the biological racism of the nineteenth century to what he represents as the seventeenth-century beginning of the discourse on race in the West. His large claims about race in European history are beyond my scope here; it is a weakness, though, that his treatment deals almost exclusively with events within Europe and includes no accounting for wars of extermination carried out by Europeans against Indigenous populations on five other continents, or for the enslavement and forced transportation to the New World of more than twelve million Africans. The Eurocentrism of Foucault's writing on

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race is replicated when it is developed by Agamben and Esposito; Alexander Weheliye pointedly asks how would "Foucault's and Agamben's theories of modern violence differ if they took the Middle Passage as their point of departure rather than remaining entrapped within the historiographical cum philosophical precincts of fortress Europe?"[9]

Given its Eurocentrism, it is no surprise that Foucault's work on race has rarely been taken up in current critical race studies.[10] Besides Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus*, the major exception has been in the writing of Achille Mbembe, whose "Necropolitics" supplements Foucault's history of biopolitics with a topography of necropolitics. Necropolitics subjugates life to death; it appears outside the nation state, in the plantation, the colony, or in siege states like contemporary Gaza, as well as in such internally excluded spaces as the concentration camp.[11] Located in the field of literary animal studies, this book does not directly contribute to our developing understanding of the history of race and racism; nonetheless, I write in response to current calls for an animal studies engaged with anti-racism.[12] As the texts to be discussed here think about the species category in the context of animal life, they repeatedly come back to race in humans. This is especially true in Darwin and his successors. All of Darwin's work is haunted by race; while the figuration of species kinship as a shared circulation of blood to be studied in Chapter 6 was incorporated in racist discourse and indeed in legislation, especially in the United States; and the discourse of totemism I will take up in Chapter 7 projects onto Indigenous peoples in Australia and North America a post-Darwinian crisis in the species concept of anthropology itself. As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson writes in her study of anti-black racism in the historical conceptualization of human beings as a biological species, "the categories of 'race' and 'species' have coevolved, and are actually *mutually reinforcing*."[13]

Jackson goes on to mount a critique of work in animal studies which views the human–animal binary as foundational for discourses of difference among humans, including those on race. This version of animal studies advocates "on behalf" of animals "without questioning how advocates are constituting themselves in the process."[14] In this book, I take as my point of departure not the supposed difference between humans and other animals, but the fissured and internally differentiated concept of species itself, as applied to life on both sides of the human–animal divide. I have found Foucault indispensable to this project, notwithstanding the Eurocentrism of his work and the lack of attention to non-human animals that Shukin has noted.[15] Foucault's definition of biopower as *making* life in fact makes most sense to me as a characterization of human power over animals. This book is

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largely about how human agency *makes* species; most of its work is done with texts, and making species is certainly in part something we do with words. But biopower as I understand it in this book is principally a force that shapes bodies and forms of life. Human culture is founded on the manufacture of new forms of plant and animal life, a practice that was rationalized in the eighteenth century by Robert Bakewell, who pioneered intensive selective breeding of farm animals, especially cattle and sheep.[16] All domestic species have emerged in a dialectical relation with human agency, sometimes in the period of recorded history and sometimes prior to it. Like biopower as Foucault theorizes it, selective breeding introduces a chiasmus between what must live and what must die within the aggregated life that is its object. Here is Donna Haraway writing about a breeder of Great Pyrenees livestock dogs:

> Weisser emphasizes love of a *kind* of dog, of a breed, and talks about what needs to be done if people care about these dogs as a whole, and not just about their own dogs. Without wincing, she recommends killing an aggressive rescue dog or any dog who has bitten a child; doing so could mean saving the reputation of the breed and the lives of other dogs, not to mention children.[17]

Biopower does not moreover only make species, breeds, and races. As Foucault says, it makes life, and at our historical moment, the link between the power to make life and the machinery of mass death is most inextricable and agonizing in the industrial farms where much of the world's meat, egg, dairy, and fish production now takes place. In the nineteenth-century texts to be studied here, this development is not yet present, though it is intimated.

In reading these texts, I will not be distinguishing in a systematic way between so-called wild and domesticated species; indeed, part of the aim of my reading of Darwin will be to show that this distinction is not rigorously sustainable. A bird to be treated in Chapter 1 provides the first of several different kinds of test case: the wood-grouse, or capercaillie, appears in an 1832 guide to woodland birds and their songs. Originally native to Scotland, the wood-grouse had become extinct there in in the late eighteenth century owing to hunting and loss of habitat. It was reintroduced from northern Europe after the Clearances had begun a process of rewilding, by landlords who wished to increase the rental value of their new estates by offering game-bird hunting. The attempted reintroduction began in the late 1820s, finally succeeding a decade later.[18] Who is to say whether the resultant population is best viewed as wild or not? The fact of

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its existence – which is now once again under threat – surely belongs in the field of politics.

Many of the works to be treated in this book, including Darwin's *Origin*, are of notable aesthetic value. I will close by saying that I do not believe this value grants them special privilege as a communicative medium or a ground for sympathy between human and non-human animals.[19] My own understanding of the relation between politicized life and the aesthetic in the nineteenth century, which in the broadest view is this book's topic, is closer to that of John Keats in "To Autumn," discussed in Chapter 2.[20] For Keats, writing poetry about non-human living things resembles eating them, and his poem's concerns with making live, letting die, speciation, food, and song are also my own in the studies that follow.

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