

Making the “man-eater”: the role of the state in producing more-than-human geographies of deathly encounter

Jared Margulies (University of Sheffield, UK)

Where, and under what conditions does it become acceptable to kill a tiger? What can the procedures of classifying a tiger as a “man-eater” teach us about the shifting politics embedded in more-than-human landscapes of encounter—as spaces of fraught entanglement? This paper draws on fieldwork from South India to address these questions, and in doing so explores the many uses of animals by the state in maintaining territorial hegemony in the name of wildlife conservation. I draw on Mbembe’s (2003) concept of necropolitics and McIntyre and Nast’s (2011) spatialisation of the term—the necropolis—in order to analyse how the Indian state attempts to manage increasingly violent human-wildlife relations in a contested commodity agricultural landscape ‘mapped’ as critical conservation space. Examining the process of how the state goes about reclassifying tigers from strictly protected species to killable—the process of making a “man-eater”—helps articulate the persistent and foundational role of capital in mediating the relations forged in landscapes where species meet. This paper responds to calls across political ecology and political geography to better theorize the role of non-human animals as essential subjects of inquiry (Collard 2012; Hobson 2006; Sundberg 2011), and how state efforts to manage human-wildlife relations in an era of increasing multispecies entanglement are resisted across animal worlds.