BOOK REVIEWS

D. Whyte, *Ecocide: Kill the Corporation Before it Kills us*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, 240pp, £9.99 (paperback).

Reviewed by Samantha Fletcher

The term ecocide dates back to the 1950s, but was more recently made popular and brought into the public consciousness anew by the late barrister and international campaigner Polly Higgins (1968–2019). Throughout her life's work, Polly Higgins sought to bring global recognition to the pressing matter of ecocide; the widespread, severe and systematic mass destruction of nature, the environment and its ecosystems. Higgins further campaigned to make ecocide part of criminal law and her ideas have been the catalyst for countless further campaigns and authored texts concerned with unpacking these very issues. *Ecocide: Kill the Corporation Before it Kills us* is born out of these concerns about the “deliberate destruction of our natural environment” (2) alongside “the entirety of threats to the sustainability of the planet: climate change, the ravaging of ecosystems, the eradication of species and the pollution of air, land and water.” (3).

What *Ecocide: Kill the Corporation Before it Kills us* offers its readers specifically is a comprehensive and coherent depiction of the inextricable relationship between the proliferation of the corporation and ecocide. For the regular reader of corporate crime and harm literature this will come as no surprise, as it has long been well documented that the very structure, essence and nature of the corporation is one of destruction, made manifest by its structured irresponsibility and negligence in multiple arenas. These facts are reiterated in the book and this is always something worth repeating, especially given the continued conspicuous absence and lack of accountability of the corporation in public debate, something which continues to serve to mask its protagonist role in environmental destruction (8). For readers familiar with other works from David Whyte and colleagues, the book's concern regarding the corporation and its role in relation to ecocide, both historically and contemporarily, are the natural continuations and expansions to an already well-established set of literature on the nature of the corporation. This book proposes a compelling, and I would argue, undeniable argument, through its rigorous and exceptionally well researched content, that averting the ecocide crisis will remain impossible whilst the corporation continues to dominate worldwide. This book demonstrates with all certainty, via a series of key illustrations, that the corporation is “probably as close as we could get to a model organisation that is capable of destroying our world.” (3). To compound matters

further, “the corporation—the mechanism that capitalism uses to reproduce itself—was designed in a way that virtually guarantees ecocide.” (4)

Having thoroughly accounted for how and why, without an end to the corporation as we know it, we are doomed to see the continued unabated destruction of the environment, the final parts of the book begin to advance a set of collective arguments about the corporation’s role in ecocide. The standout aspect of this book, which sets it apart in what is often a quite daunting surfeit of literature concerned with the Anthropocene epoch, is that the book is also a call to organize to address ecocide and the corporation in quite explicit terms. This is done by presenting and disentangling the various forms of action that might be taken—which is, as the book’s title attests, ultimately to kill the corporation before it kills us. Of course, whenever the subject of abolishing—or even so much as vaguely diminishing the power of—the corporation is proposed, the often-cited rebuttal is about the impact it will have on everyday people and their lives. This very real concern, regarding how our lives are so embroiled in the corporation that their subsequent demise might result in extensive job loss, demolished pensions, to name just some examples, can understandably leave people feeling impotent in the face of corporate domination. But when these concerns are shorthand into the “too big to fail” mantra posited by the ruling political elite, it is, as Whyte shows us, a misrepresentation of the situation.

There are, clearly, several possible ways forward—and it is in this book that the reader can simultaneously be informed about both the nature of the corporation but also what we might do with the knowledge of its intricate edifices to form a suitable plan of action to bring about its end peaceably for its victims. Without revealing too much of the latter content, this includes, but is not limited to: challenging “green market fetishization” which only serves to problematically reinforce the existence of the corporation; intervening in both the extraction and financing of raw material—referred to in the book as “controlling the starting point” (156); and breaking the corporate structure, including ending impunity for executives, shareholders and investors (167–73). It is these aspects that ultimately mark *Ecocide: Kill the Corporation Before it Kills us* as an absolute must read.

In summary, the book generously offers a comprehensive framework regarding what groundwork needs to be done to realize an end to the corporation but in such a way that it would ensure justice for people and the environment, rather than increasing their victimization. In effect, one might well describe the book as a call to mobilize accordingly, ensuring that we transmute these understandings of the nuanced intricacies of corporate structures outlined by Whyte, which by design bring about environmental devastation, into the development of and actualization to end ecocide by the corporation. *Ecocide: Kill the Corporation Before it Kills us* is set to be yet another important classic in corporate crime scholarship, but it is

also an invitation to organize and to develop the key ways we might kill the corporation, quite literally before it kills us. It is of course an invitation that I strongly recommend we all act on without delay.

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