

[Review] Maan Barua.

Lively Cities: Reconfiguring Urban Ecology.

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Wendy Woodward

University of the Western Cape

Lively Cities animates the cities of Delhi with close studies of macaques and cattle respectively, and London with parakeets. Maan Barua not only challenges conventional urban theory, insisting on a liveliness made up of other-than-human urban inhabitants and actors, but ushers the reader into imagining urban ontology in more expansive ways. Delhi and London are not figured as metropole and colonial cities but as having intertwined histories and natures in Barua's reading of postcolonial urbanism in a minor key.

While Barua clarifies that *Lively Cities* is not necessarily an animal geography, it beguiles the reader with other-than-human animals as 'guides into another urban world' (13). Both postcolonial and posthumanist, this text has animals as 'observant participants', urban grammar as a polyphony in a minor key. Ethnographic research conceptualises meshworks rather than dyadic relations between humans and animals in an extensive re-visioning of urbanicity.

Inclusive narratives encourage readers to rethink city matters and definitions we may take for granted. Who inhabits the city and who belongs? What is urban infrastructure? Relationships between human and nonhuman animals, as Barua suggests, are themselves infrastructural. He writes persuasively and often with literary flair, inserting an offhanded occasional Shakespearean phrase. The term 'technologies of enchantment' (27) is itself an enchanting term.

Vibrant accounts and anecdotes convey an embodied sense of the macaques in Delhi and their enmeshment in the city. Barua invites us into macaque environments – asking whether a macaque turning off a tap he'd been drinking from signals his understanding of the need to deflect human hostility. As 'arboreal flaneurs' (37) they structure their own versions of the city. They infiltrate urban lore, spirituality, superstition, urban fears. At Hanuman's Temple macaques reign; banana sellers make precarious livings selling fruit to devotees. Urban macaques become performative, adopting the posture of begging in ways that do not feature with rural macaques.

Contemporary issues are situated (as they are in relation to parakeets and cows) in terms of city histories. Attempts to rid Delhi of macaques are labyrinthine and sometimes amusing. Delhi's Municipal Council, for example, admitted defeat after ten years; the State Forest Department refused a brief to get involved as macaques, they argued, are 'commensal' and therefore urban inhabitants. For Barua, a politics of commensality should be included in any consideration of the urban; in relation to macaques, it is 'both astral and grounded' (101-2). With the Hindu nationalist revival, Hanuman worship has increased, with urban middle classes insisting on feeding the monkeys.

The politics of commensality with parakeets in London are no less fraught, with rose-ringed or ring-necked parakeets embodying 'other-than-human migrant[s]' (105). Defined as such via a micropolitics of race, prejudice against human migrants is transposed onto the birds who render London's ecologies postcolonial. Barua contributes to debates on the decolonising of nature, with parakeets in London 'pos[ing] questions about what a colonial city might mean' (149). He refers almost wistfully to the more amenable relationships between human and nonhuman inhabitants of Delhi, to what he calls a 'politics of livability' (149).

Views of 'biotic nativism' (113) are antagonistic to the newcomers, yet the British Trust for Ornithology has, by and large, exonerated parakeets in relation to ousting native species. Barua includes engaging stories about the parakeets themselves: how they have established themselves in London, how they have charmed people into feeding them in gestures of hospitality, how they have changed their noisy behaviours so as not to alert peregrines, and have evolved differently from those in India in order to adapt to their new environment.

The final chapters deal with ‘pastoral formations’ in Delhi. Through ‘urban pastoralism’ and via the presence of cows in the city, Barua argues that a different conceptual vocabulary is needed, critiquing the European metropole with its ideals of an animal-free city. Cattle, like macaques may have been drafted as symbols in right wing Hindustan politics, but it’s the immanence of the bovine body that signifies. What follows is a precise mapping out of Kaali’s day. A cow from an urban dairy, she is a knowledgeable bovine flaneur, her route predicated on food offered at different times. She takes in markets, garbage dumps, waste collection sites, parks and various acts of hospitality from humans on her daily travels. As a prime embodiment of a participant observer or an observant participant she is a ‘cocreator’ (281) of an economic settlement.

The state’s attempts to remove dairies from the city limits has failed; Barua examines in great detail the proliferation of municipal regulations from the imposition of British ideas in the late nineteenth century onwards pertaining to cattle. Fittingly, the behaviours of cattle, like those of the macaques, have undermined colonial imperatives to order the city. For Barua then, an ‘ontology of the economic’ (237) has to incorporate the ecological as well as the cultural.

What enlivens such analyses in *Lively Cities* is the immanence of the other than human animals, not in an embedded way, he maintains, but in a meshwork. In relation to urban dairies in Delhi, the concept of ‘other-than-human work’ (242) may be controversial in Human Animal Studies debate but certainly the cows are agentic in their own ‘urban world making’ (243) as they develop their own knowledge of the city. While the practices of urban cows who have to feed themselves may not be tantamount to cruelty because of the care that Delhi residents offer them, tragically, bovine knowledge does not prevent them from consuming plastic, with many dying of impaction.

Lively cities may never be ‘settled’ (275), as Barua suggests, but can humans accept other than human inhabitants? Cape Town has its own very particular urban flaneurs. With an alpha male chacma baboon recently considering eyewear in an upmarket shopping centre, we urgently need Barua’s astute and compassionate approach in re-configuring our own urban ecology.