Timothy P. Barnard, *Imperial Creatures: Humans and Other Animals in Colonial Singapore 1819–1942*, 2019, Singapore: NUS Press, xiii + 336 pp. ISBN: 9789813250871, price: 36.00 SGD (paperback).

This book covers a century and a half of human-animal relations, narrated from a historical perspective, with varied themes, centered around Singapore, a small but economically—and civilizationally (p. 116)—significant region of Southeast Asia. It begins with the arrival of Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1819 and ends with the country's capture by the Japanese Imperial Army in 1942. Covering these dates, Barnard weaves a roughly chronological series of six chapters that could stand alone as well-developed essays. These chapters resonate with intersecting themes from benchmark works in the genre of animal studies: the 'ecological imperialism' of Alfred Crosby, the "estate" and "creatures" of Harriet Ritvo, the "changing attitudes" to the "natural world" of Keith Thomas, and even the grand politico-economic and socio-ecological vistas of William Cronon—although Cronon is not referenced in the book.

Barnard updates these classics by referencing the burgeoning number of historical and sociological/anthropological studies of the empiricities of animal lives as approached from the humanities and environmental history. With its story-telling strengths, the book can easily be enjoyed by anyone curious about how a "history of animals" can be done in the early twenty-first century. A major strength of the book is its singularity of focus, which is "the interaction of humans and other animals in [...] the period of high imperialism" (p. 13). This "empire and animals" matrix is presented quite strongly in the opening chapter: "This study will begin with an exploration of what imperialism meant for the natural landscape of Singapore. As the island fell under colonial rule, so did *all of the creatures* that lived on it" (p. 13, emphasis added).

Such a totalizing view (*all creatures*), coupled with an emphasis on the role of an "*outside* economic and political force" that would "*completely transform* a tropical island economically, socially, and physically" (p. 5, emphasis added), can be read as underlining the *dramatic* effect of imperialist/colonial exploits in altering a broad range of Singapore's life and realities. In the succeeding chapters, "imperial" activities are examined through particular animals: dogs (in Chapters 2, 3, and 5) and cattle (in Chapters 4 and 6), as well as birds, chickens, elephants, fishes, tigers, buffaloes, and many others are highlighted in public, colonial, and imperial lives and spaces.

Such a framing allows Barnard a good analytical handling of the dynamics between, and vagaries of, political economy (the workings of British East India Company) and human affects ("cruelty") as these relate to animals. For example, Chapter 4 (titled "Defining Cruelty") is a meticulous resurfacing of

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an 1872 event wherein the Maharaja of Johor entertained his guests with an “animal contest” between a “royal tiger and a buffalo bull” in which “it was important for the tiger to lose” (p. 105). Intriguing as this vignette is on its own, it becomes even more fascinating as the discussion moves towards a dialectical presentation of the founding of an institution, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [SPCA] (pp. 122–147).

By quoting from English-language newspapers of the time, the book’s account of the “cruel, merciless and brutal” killings (p. 40) of stray dogs in the 1840s and relating this to the political economy of colonial deployment of Indian convicts weaves together a compelling picture of how Singapore was ‘made’.

The system of using convicts to kill dogs was due to Singapore being under the East India Company as a merchant colony, where there was very little financial outlay for anything beyond rudimentary services. This resulted in much of the manual labor in service to governmental needs falling to those who could not refuse, Indian men who were exiled to the Company port as their punishment, who carried out numerous tasks in early colonial Singapore, particularly the construction of roads and buildings that laid the foundation for the town. ‘Dog killing’ was among the lowliest of duties these men could be assigned.

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Barnard’s book closes (for its epilogue, pp. 236–241) with the life-story of Edred John Henry Corner, a deputy director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens from the 1920s up to the Second World War. Corner’s (1992) use of trained macaque monkeys for “botanizing” (p. 16) purposes has acquired some fame, training monkeys to function as skillful field hands in locating plant samples in the forests. Barnard recounted one such monkey named Merah: “a remarkable research assistant, eventually collecting over 300 unique specimens during its two years of service” (p. 237). The relation of Corner to his monkeys up to the period of war, and the fate of the monkeys at this crisis, caps Barnard’s series of stories and is exceptionally poignant. As a whole, the book is a moving presentation of imperial violence as it affects other domains (and lives) that are not usually examined in colonial histories of violence.

However, in the end, the book’s “imperial” thematic focus has a serious limitation. I would like to underline what I think is constantly a “missing half” in any colonial/imperial framing approach to human-animal relations: centering too much the acts (intended or not) of colonial agents/institutions and its by-products could end up presenting these animals as almost *nothing but* ‘imperial

creatures'. What might this singular thematic focus overlook? The influential world of relationships between animals and agents who fall outside the colonial/imperial framework. There, one could see the 'non-imperial' side of animal lives that are equally worth recounting.

Perhaps one key site where one can see this is in the relation of animals to the *pawang* (animal tamer), a figure with an enduring role in much of South-east Asia (Paluga 2012: 122). If understood from this angle, Corner's "botanical monkeys" are as much a 'creation' of his own colonial and institutional desires, as that of 'native' drives. The figure of the *pawang* can be glimpsed, however thinly, in Corner's (1992) own self-centering account of his short-tailed macaque 'trainings'. For one, Corner's first "botanical monkey" came from a village called Kampong Berok (literally, a "village of tamed monkeys"), where, as he said, "I enquired, also, into training and words of command" (Corner 1992: 2) from knowledgeable villagers.

What are the lives, acts, and thoughts of the "animal tamers" about animals in such a village? From Corner's account, Barnard was able to pick up on the role of local "assistants" who "oversaw their [the monkeys'] care and training" (p. 238, and noting footnote 4, the "monkey boy"), but unfortunately, failed to pursue it further. Perhaps including this world of the Malay *pawang* could have opened a more reflexive and philosophical "history of animals" (*sensu* Timofeeva 2018). It remains a promising but unexplored aspect of this history. Indeed, like Corner, the soldier/journalist Henri Carel Zentgraaff (n.d. [ca. 1938]) was fascinated by "the secret science of pawangs" (*de geheime wetenschap der pawangs*), those who "know infinitely more about the nature and habits [of animals] ... than is contained in all Western books" (*weten oneindig meer van aard en gewoonten ... dan in alle Westersche boeken staat*) (p. 218).

The British Corner and the Dutch Zentgraaff are two sign-post *colonial* figures that can open queries about these "imperial creatures." The only difference is that Corner's account (and, perhaps unwittingly, Barnard's) closes off this other world that is quite beneath and beyond colonial/imperial re-imaginings of animal lives. After all, as the Borges/Foucaultian "modes of classifying animals" (reiterated in Timofeeva 2018: 74) puts it, not all are about "(a) belonging to the emperor", "(b) [being] embalmed", or "(c) [being] tame"; some ways of classifying animals are "(f) fabulous", "(i) frenzied", or so obscure that they "(n) from a long way off look like flies".

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