

Becoming-More-Than Urban: Wildlife Mobilities, Borders, and the Resilience of Cities in an Era of Environmental Change

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While climate crises and increasing extinction rates unsettle the future of planetary life, news about the diversity of fauna and flora in cities have grown in the past few decades. Media reports highlight abundant wild life roaming urban corridors in cities across the world—from leopards in Mumbai, to coyotes in Chicago, to wild parrots in Santiago, to hyenas in Harar, to wild boar in Berlin. As a result of rising global temperatures, urban sprawl, increasing traffic, deforestation, and the consolidation of farmland, many animals have made the city their habitat. Yet due to environmental degradation, climate change, war, neocolonial formations, and the rise of nationalisms, the world is marked by an increasing loss of hospitable environments for both humans and nonhumans. The question of which lives flourish or perish in today's cities thus obtains renewed urgency. Engagements with urban ecosystems therefore face the challenge not only of mapping the mechanisms and conditions shaping urban lives, but also the task of understanding new practices of "ecological care" (Puig 2017) and forms of living and dying together on an increasingly damaged planet (Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015, Parreñas 2018).

My book project tackles these challenges. Drawing on historical research and ethnographic fieldwork with wildlife ecologists, ornithologists, foresters, hunters, environmental stewards, and urban residents in Berlin and Chicago, I examine how climate change, shifting political borders, and migrations shape the dynamics of urban wildlife and transform public, scientific, and everyday understandings of what it means to be urban. To do so, the project focuses on several case studies of animals (such as wild boar and migratory birds) that have utilized urban anthropogenic environments and have incited considerable public and scientific debate about human-animal conflicts in the city.

Situating the vulnerable presence of animals in a broader context of climate change, colonial extraction, and a resurgence of nationalist forces in the Global North, I ask: When do more-than-human mobilities become an affair of the state and a matter of political concern in the city? In what ways do different practices of wildlife management and scientific knowledge production challenge or link up with the commodification of life and with existing border regimes to regulate human mobilities in the city and beyond? How do scientific, municipal and everyday practices of monitoring, managing, caring, and creating refuge for urban wildlife change what it means to be urban—at a time when desires for purity, profit, and segregation too often shape dominant political responses to ecological degradation, displacement, and exclusion? What possibilities do these practices offer for decolonizing human-environment relations and creating more livable cities for both humans and nonhumans? Addressing these questions, the project bridges existing divides in anthropology and the environmental humanities that either examine the urban dynamics of climate change and biodiversity on one hand, or border politics, mobility, race, and nationalism on the other hand.