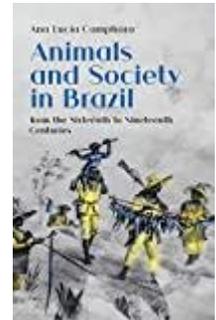


**Ana Lucia Camphora.** *Animals and Society in Brazil, from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries.* Cambridgeshire: White Horse Press, 2021. 194 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-912186-17-4.



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In accounts and records of the past, nonhuman animals occupy an ambiguous space. The archival record is filled with evidence of contemporary human recognition of the ways in which nonhuman animals were central to social, political, economic, and cultural transformations. Yet in many histories, especially those of socioeconomic developments, nonhuman animals remain at the margins of trajectories seemingly driven by human agents. Ana Lucia Camphora's engaging *Animals and Society in Brazil from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth centuries* is part of a growing body of scholarship that aims to resolve this tension, at least in part, by rethinking the human past through the lens of nonhuman animals. In Camphora's case, the focus is on the first four centuries of Brazil's history. She opens and closes the book citing the early twentieth-century polymath Luís Câmara Cascudo's "provocative" definition of "animal"—"something 'made by God [which] possesses language and organization, has leaders, laws, friends and enemies'"—as an invitation to

think about proximity rather than rigid boundaries (pp. 5, 150). The pages between offer a broad survey of the "web of interactions" in which early Brazil's culture, economy and society were forged.

*Animals and Society* is an expert translation from Portuguese of a book published in Brazil in 2017; the translator, Miriam Adelman, is a sociologist and scholar of equestrian culture. The book is intended, as Camphora stresses, to introduce a range of readers and students to the topic. The edition is replete with illustrations and includes both a chronological chart of Brazil's history and a list of animals included in the text, identified with English, binomial, and Portuguese names (many of latter originate in Indigenous languages). Throughout the six chapters, Camphora's approach is markedly interdisciplinary. She draws on economic and social histories, environmental studies, interspecies studies, anthropology, sociology, and literary studies. The book is also grounded in a critical rereading of well-known travel accounts, early chronicles, and later canonical inter-

pretations of Brazil's history for evidence of the "materiality" of interactions and their meanings (p. 5).

As the early chapters make especially clear, understanding the roles and impact of nonhuman animals in Portuguese America's first four centuries entails recognizing a contingent production and transfer of knowledge. Both before and after the arrival of the Portuguese in America, humans perceived that much about the forest could be learned from observing nonhuman animals' interaction with its flora. What could harm and what could heal could be discerned, one chronicler noted, by paying attention to the plants that brown howler monkeys applied to their wounds. Although they sometimes denied it, Europeans depended as well on Native knowledge to assess nonhuman animals they encountered for the first time after arriving in America.

Camphora's account of these exchanges, occurring as the Portuguese sought to exert their dominion over lands and peoples in eastern South America, illuminates very different approaches to human and nonhuman animal interactions. While for Natives hummingbirds were sacred creatures never to be slain or eaten, Europeans came to partake of their beauty in other ways, stuffing their small dead bodies in order to pin them on hats and dresses or using their feathers in the fabrication of artificial flowers. Nor did Portuguese conquerors and settlers contemplate the jaguar as thoroughly as people who had long contended with its threatening potential and perceived in its unique lack of fear of humans a sign that it was something more like a spirit than an animal. Yet perhaps the biggest rupture in nonhuman and human relations brought about by Portuguese colonization took shape in the human hunting of nonhuman animals. Although settlers scrutinized Native hunting skills to sharpen their own, contemporary accounts of European predation, Camphora observes, "recognized a difference between the feelings of 'superiority' that mobilized the

European hunter and how they were expressed as power over other living beings, and Amerindian conceptions of being at one with other species" (p. 60). Still, recognition of an animal continuum was partly absorbed into forms of knowledge that circulated in colonial and postcolonial societies, such as the idea of beings that took the form of deer, turtle, or armadillos and protected other animals by punishing human hunters. The traditional folk-dances and storytelling of *Bumba-meu-boi* also evince a commitment to transcendent nonhuman and human-animal exchanges that begin in the human womb and extend to human intercession in the resurrection of a bull.

As mention of the bull indicates, the history of animals and society in Brazil is also a history of domesticated animals brought to the Americas by Europeans. The first cattle arrived in Brazil in the 1530s, with new stock introduced regularly in the years that followed, including sheep, pigs, chickens, goats, guinea fowl from Africa, horses, and mules. Some, most notably the horse, were crucial to the re-creation of Portuguese political and social hierarchies. While Portuguese settlers brought these domesticated animals to serve them as they had in Europe, in more expansive natural environments these animals could leave behind human containment and become feral. By the end of the sixteenth century in some places, horses had become a nuisance, trampling on crops and invading other human spaces.

European colonization, Camphora stresses, cannot be fully understood without tracing the impact of these animals on both physical environments and within Native communities. Even as the Portuguese brought domesticated animals to South America to sustain their settlements, Native peoples experienced them as part of a process of conquest and dispossession. The Portuguese rode horses into Tupinambá villages before burning them to the ground. Yet, with time Native peoples incorporated both horses and dogs into practices such as hunting and warfare. The *Mbayá-*

Guaykuro people's mastery of the equestrian arts terrified settler expeditions into their lands. Such incorporations could take place on Native terms and without the adoption of European domestication. Native peoples, for example, let chickens into their villages but did not consume them or their eggs, preferring instead to use their feathers as ornamentation. In these and other instances, Camphora concludes, the animals brought to South America by Europeans were "agents of historical change, influencing the hearts, minds and behavior of native peoples and colonizers" (p. 81).

This striking reference to nonhuman animal agency, one which should invite both further empirical research and theorization, is somewhat at odds with the various histories of animals and society that Camphora meticulously traces as relentless human processes of commodification and killing. In the sixteenth century, Portuguese settlers' trafficked birds, most notably parrots, and other animals of Brazil's tropical forests as collectors' items, sending them back to Europe alive or dead and dried in salt. As the Portuguese settled the Brazilian coast and hinterland, they disarticulated animal bodies for food, clothing, and ornamentation and as repositories of medicinal substances. Horns, teeth, claws, bones, skins, hooves, shells, and tallow featured in recipes to cure a range of afflictions. While Natives earlier had extracted blubber from stranded whales to make oil, by the seventeenth century the Portuguese had expanded whale hunting off the coast of Bahia dramatically and into sheltered waters where whales went to give birth. They built terrestrial oil mills along the coast where up to two hundred whales were dismembered each year. Herds of cattle that grew to as large as two thousand were driven across hinterlands and corralled. By the early eighteenth century, some were killed in slaughterhouses, sites subjected to reform intended to make the killing less gruesome in the nineteenth century, as grazing was displaced by more systematic breeding and a new cycle of species transfer that featured Indian Zebu cattle began. Throughout the

colonial period and the nineteenth century, animals were also bred for brutal use in transportation both across Brazil and within Brazilian cities. The violence and commodification that defined the European settlers' approach to nonhuman animals, as Camphora also observes and could have explored more fully, converged with the violence and commodification within regimes of slavery that shaped Brazil's social order as a whole.

Throughout the book, Camphora points to moments of reckoning, when humans sought to reform or overturn their treatment of nonhuman animals that lived both among them and beyond the reach of human society. Along these lines, the book succeeds admirably in giving readers an opportunity to consider the need for more circumspect approaches to nonhuman and human relations in the present and the future based on the "impressive diversity of possible connections between beings that are very diverse and very close to another" (p. 150).

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