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DE LAS AMÉRICAS

VOCES

Rethinking Human-Animal Relations in the Americas

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Abstract
The text presents excerpts from the roundtable "Rethinking Human-Animal Relations in the Americas," which brought together researchers in history, anthropology, and archaeology to explore the complex interdependence between people and animals in the American continent. The discussion focused on three main themes: first, the catastrophic impact of colonialism on human-animal relations, especially in the practices of Andean camelid rearing and the imposition of colonial views that treated animals as commodities; second, the need to critical engage with Indigenous cosmologies of more-than-human worlds, questioning Western categories such as "animal" and re-evaluating the widespread application of theoretical models like Perspectivism; and, third, the urgency to decolonize human-animal studies through interdisciplinarity approaches and methodologies that prioritize Indigenous concepts, categories and epistemologies. Participants emphasized the importance of new types of evidence, such as colonial-period zooarchaeology and linguistics data, to better understand the cultural transformations, negotiations, and form of resistances that have shaped human-animals in the Americas.

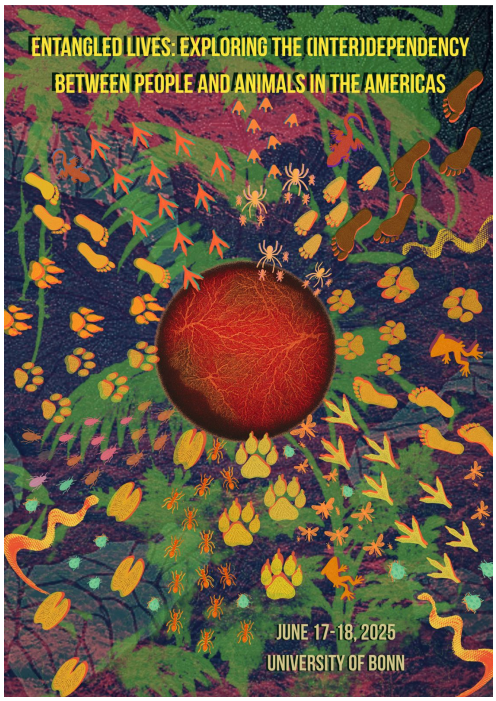
Keywords
Human-animal relations, Colonialism in the Americas, Indigenous concepts, Decolonization, Interdisciplinarity

Resumen
El texto presenta extractos de la mesa redonda "Repensar las relaciones entre humanos y animales en las Américas", que reunió a investigadores en historia, antropología y arqueología para explorar la compleja interdependencia entre las personas y los animales en el continente americano. El debate se centró en tres temas principales: en primer lugar, el impacto catastrófico del colonialismo en las relaciones entre humanos y animales, especialmente en las prácticas de cría de camélidos andinos y la imposición de puntos de vista coloniales que trataban a los animales como mercancías; en segundo lugar, la necesidad de abordar de forma crítica las cosmologías indígenas de mundos más allá de lo humano, cuestionando categorías occidentales como "animal" y reevaluando la aplicación generalizada de modelos teóricos como el perspectivismo; y, en tercer lugar, la urgencia de descolonizar los estudios sobre las relaciones entre humanos y animales mediante enfoques y metodologías interdisciplinarios que den prioridad a los conceptos, categorías y epistemologías indígenas. Los participantes destacaron la importancia de nuevos tipos de pruebas, como los datos zooarqueológicos y lingüísticos del período colonial, para comprender mejor las transformaciones culturales, las negociaciones y las formas de resistencia que han dado forma a las relaciones entre humanos y animales en América.

Palabras clave
Relaciones entre humanos y animales, colonialismo en las Américas, conceptos indígenas, descolonización, interdisciplinariedad

Resumo
O texto apresenta trechos da mesa-redonda "Repensando as Relações Humano-Animal nas Américas", que reuniu pesquisadores de história, antropologia e arqueologia para explorar a complexa interdependência entre pessoas e animais no continente americano. A discussão se concentrou em três temas principais: primeiro, o impacto catastrófico do colonialismo nas relações humano-animal, especialmente nas práticas de criação de camelídeos andinos e na imposição de visões coloniais que tratavam os animais como mercadorias; segundo, a necessidade de se engajar criticamente com as cosmologias indígenas de mundos mais-que-humanos, questionando categorias ocidentais como "animal" e reavaliando a aplicação generalizada de modelos teóricos como o Perspectivismo; e, terceiro, a urgência em descolonizar os estudos humano-animais por meio de abordagens interdisciplinares e metodologias que priorizem conceitos, categorias e epistemologias indígenas. Os participantes enfatizaram a importância de novos tipos de evidência, como a zooarqueologia do período colonial e dados linguísticos, para melhor compreender as transformações culturais, negociações e formas de resistência que moldaram as relações humano-animais nas Américas.

Palavras-chave
Relações humano-animal, colonialismo nas Américas, conceitos indígenas, descolonização, interdisciplinaridade



Introduction

Throughout history and across geographies, humans have depended on animals for survival and to build societies. Today, the inherent (inter)dependencies that characterize human-animal relations and their broader implications for social, political, and ecological systems are at the forefront of scholarly inquiry. In the context of accelerated global ecological disruptions, often framed within, though also critically debated as Anthropocene, it is imperative to incorporate ecological perspectives into the discussions of asymmetrical dependencies, colonization, and slavery, thereby fostering dialogue on human-animal interactions.

Focusing on processes of familiarization, embodied knowledge, and mutual dependency, the workshop "Entangled Lives: Exploring the (Inter)Dependencies between People and Animals in the Americas", held in Bonn in June 2025, examined how Indigenous relationships with animals, ranging from domesticated species to those often framed as "wild," both shaped and were shaped by broader dynamics of power, extractivism, and resistance.[1]

Bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives from history, anthropology, and archaeology, the workshop convened a group of researchers including Denise Arnold, Miguel Astor-Aguilera, Aliocha Maldavsky, Ana Paula Motta, Marcy Norton, Gustavo Politis, and Felipe Vander Velden. They participated in a roundtable discussion titled "Rethinking Human-Animal Relations in the Americas," moderated by Carla Jaimes Betancourt and transcribed in full below. This publication presents their conversations in an edited form, preserving the reflective and conversational tone of the original exchanges, and concludes with a reflective discussion by Taynã Tagliati and Carla J. Betancourt.

Roundtable Discussion

Carla Jaimes Betancourt (CJB): Thank you again for your presence, energy, and thoughtful contributions throughout this workshop. Now we move to the final roundtable discussion, "Rethinking human-animal relations in the Americas."

Rather than concluding with a conventional open discussion, we've chosen to try out an experimental format inspired by focus group dynamics. We designed this roundtable to be focused, dialogical, and concise, while still leaving room for spontaneity and cross-cutting contributions. This is part of our broader goal to explore multimodal forms of academic exchange and move beyond traditional formats such as edited volumes.

[1] We gratefully acknowledge that this workshop was funded and held within the framework of the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft EXC 2036).

As moderator, I will pose targeted thematic questions to specific panelists, drawing on the topics they addressed in their presentations and in their broader scholarship. The first question concerns exploring the impact of the historical process of human-animal relationships and is directed to Aliocha and Denise.

Impact of the Historical Process of Human-Animal Relationships

Q: How did colonial encounters reshape human-animal relationships, both from the perspective of Indigenous populations and the colonizers?

Aliocha Maldavsky (AM): Well, it's still hard for me to answer that question. I can discuss possible methods to understand these relationships, which is preferable to giving a direct answer. The first step is to understand what that relationship actually was before the conquest, which is nearly impossible for me as a historian. And just because we observe certain practices today that seem deeply rooted, we cannot assume that they were the same before the arrival of the Spaniards. I'm convinced of that.

I believe there are many anthropologists here, so we have numerous examples of practices described by anthropology that result from post-industrialization. So, how did it change after the Conquest? It is hard to answer. I'm very cautious about that.

I think we can explore the linguistic avenue through the vocabulary of care, specifically how it is being modified and reused in texts written in Indigenous languages. For example, I've tried to explore this term *uywa*, which is also studied by anthropologists, and refers to the animals, people, and some seeds that are taken care of by people. However, we still lack a comprehensive inventory of vocabulary related to livestock rearing techniques. It would be interesting —and still is— to look at old dictionaries on this subject. For instance, the term *uywa* appears in a 1560 dictionary, where it is defined as animal care and understood as domestication. But the term wasn't used for livestock by the 17th century in sermons, which clearly referred to that practice. So, does that mean Spaniards didn't want to use this term, or didn't the Andean people refer to livestock with the term *uywa*? It might mean that this term is only used for alpacas and llamas, not for sheep, the imported livestock.

So, that's one way. The market issue seems crucial to me for understanding these changes because of the rise of commercial exchange and profit, which has contributed to changing the status of farm animals, turning them into commodities. I also think Andean people adopted this viewpoint because it was necessary for their survival. That would be the answer I can give to this particular issue.

But we also see —I will end with this— that there are plays and stories in which European animals are more than just integrated, such as the appearance of figures of bulls on the tops of houses, expected to protect them. This means that these foreign an-

imals were incorporated into a native way of understanding anthropozoological relationships. This suggests that Catholic Christians did not necessarily systematically prohibit these practices. That would be my concern with that.

Denise Arnold (DA): John Murra's studies of pre-Conquest camelid herding practices in the Andes (Murra 1965, 1975) indicate how Spanish arrival changed these. As a consequence, the Inca practices of raising camelids in the Andes to produce special breeds with fine fleece disappeared within years. Some precolonial llamas are said to have had fleeces finer than those of alpacas today, and there's evidence of that at the Chiribaya site of El Yaral, in Moquegua, Peru, studied by Jane Wheeler et al. (1992, 1995). After the Conquest, camelid herds suffered a reduction in size, and breeds crossed in the wild to create hybrids. So, there's a tremendous change in the production of cloth and fleece in those early years of the Peruvian colonial period.

There must also have been tremendous changes in the complexity of long-standing herding practices, because even under the Inca, they had special herds for the Sun, the Moon, the Thunder, and so on, and these had different fleece colors. There was also animal breeding for different purposes: sacrifice, weaving, meat, caravan trade, and more. Certain animals were selected for sacrifice. The meat-producing animals had been bred to be much larger. This knowledge, too, must have been lost early on. Also, animals had been raised formerly in different environments and on different pastures in preparation for those various activities —whether for meat, fiber, or sacrifice— and were classified into different age groups and classes of fiber, among other distinctions. So there were completely different modalities of herding post-Conquest.

Nowadays herding practices vary from region to region. But modern herders remember how, in the Inca past, the males were separated out into high-walled enclosures up on the hillsides, while females were kept in family corrals close to the houses to be herded and taken to pasture every day.

There's now evidence from coastal Chimú sites such as Huanchaquito or Las Llamas in the Moche Valley, dating to around 1400-1450, of tremendous sacrifices of hundreds of llamas together with children, probably during the El Niño climate events (Cagnato et al. 2021). The Spanish Church intervened during the colonial period to prevent these practices, but sacrifices have continued to this day. Even during Bolivia's first government under the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) party, animal sacrifices were regularly held at the archaeological site of Tiwanaku. So these rituals persisted, albeit in a more controlled manner (Spedding and Arnold 2008: 328).

In relation to Andean weaving practices using animal fibres, the Spaniards demanded a different kind of cloth, for example, the baize made from sheep's wool. But there were interesting moments during the colonial period, for example, when silk was introduced to the Andes from China, via the Philippines, arriving in Lima, then being carried up

from Cusco, then to Puno, and finally to La Paz. As a result, Andeans themselves became very passionate about producing something similar to silk. For example, the Aymara weavers around Lake Titicaca started to produce a very fine cloth, like silk, called *tornasol*, where the warp and weft were of different colours and both could be seen at once. It was a new venture, although it was based on the Andeans' own traditions and techniques. This, in turn, was highly valued by Indigenous leaders and introduced into their own dress, so it became something that the Andean people adopted (Arnold 2023).

There must also have been a significant change in the Colony's number of llamas, guanacos, and vicuñas found in the lakeside area, as this area was gradually emptied of llamas and taken over by sheep herding, often supported by the local monasteries. However, I've noticed that this trend is gradually reversing in modern times, and more camelids are now seen in this region, as compared to thirty years ago. Also, the distribution of animals between the coast and the highlands must have changed. In precolonial times, there was camelid herding in both regions. But nowadays, what is left of camelid herding occurs in the highlands. So those herding practices, too, have changed since the Conquest.

Another important point is how the introduction of sheep and cattle herding in the Colony has caused extensive ecological damage to Andean soils, and a general erosion of extensive regions, because of the shape of their hooves, whereas camelid hooves do not damage the soil surface in the same way. Camelids were also moved constantly as they were herded to avoid these problems.

CJB: I once attended a lecture on Chimú sacrificial practices in which the last meal of the llamas was analysed and found to contain a notable amount of chili peppers (Cagnato et al. 2021). This made me think how compelling it would be to compare those findings with the final meals of the sacrificed children.

DA: At the Huanchaquito Chimú site, the llamas seem to have been pastured on maize fodder, but then, at the time of sacrifice, they were fed exotic foods such as manioc, chili peppers, and cooked food (ibid.). We do not know yet about the children. But at some *capaccocha* sacrifices at Inka high-altitude sites, the children had a special diet in the period leading up to the sacrifice, then they were given alcohol and coca leaves at the time of the sacrifice.

CJB: The presence of chili peppers (*ají*) in the llamas' stomach contents prompts me to wonder whether similar ingredients might have been included in the children's last diet—perhaps as a deliberate way to ritually bind human and animal offerings within a shared act of transformation.

Building on this reflection, we now turn our attention to Indigenous Cosmologies. The question is addressed to Felipe, Gustavo, and Miguel.

Indigenous Cosmologies

Q: How do we approach analysing ways Indigenous peoples understand animal agency, incorporate animals into their cosmologies, and engage with them in daily life?

Felipe Vander Velden: I believe there is an initial, necessary, and prior task that must be undertaken before we ask ourselves about animal agencies or engagements with animals in the daily lives of Indigenous communities. This task involves asking, recalling Tim Ingold (1998), "what is an animal" or what can count as an animal?"—within the ethnographic contexts in which we conduct our research. This is because, as we know, most, if not all, Amerindian (at least South American) languages lack the concept of "animal" and a word to name it. So, how can we speak of animals if, so to speak, animals do not exist?

This is an urgent task, I think, because the human sciences need to rethink their borrowing of concepts from the biological sciences; in other words, we need ethnographic concepts or ethnographic theories about the animal or animals. The ways to do this are not yet very clear to me. But I believe we need to negotiate meanings with Indigenous peoples: in my own work with cattle, I argue that "ox" and "cow" are already the products of a long negotiation —spanning centuries in some cases— and are creatures about which some consensus seems to exist. Perhaps one proof of this is that neologisms created by many Indigenous peoples in their own languages to name cattle have quickly been and continue to be replaced by Portuguese or Spanish loanwords (*boi* or *buey*, *vaca*, *gado* or *ganado*). The Karitiana themselves increasingly use the Portuguese term boi in their native language, instead of the native *opoko irip'*, "the whiteman's tapir" or "the other's tapir." From monsters or game prey to livestock, and later to herd animals and a form of wealth—it's as if the "ox," gradually, through the routinization of its presence, becomes something else over time.

So, I believe that before we analyze what animals do in Native communities and how Indigenous peoples relate to them, we need to rethink the very category of the animal —the concept of the animal— and do so in each specific context. In order not to carry a foreign category into Indigenous worlds.

Let us remember, in passing, that this category is unstable even among us, and its boundaries may vary, as happened with Indigenous peoples themselves, who throughout the colonial period —and even still today— have been considered animals or pests whose only possible fate was extermination.

That said, I would like to focus on a point that has set the tone for ethnographic analyses of relationships with animals —at least in Amazonia— and which affects how we think about animal agency, engagements with animals, and the position of animals in Amerindian cosmologies. This is the perspectivist theory, the perspectivism of Eduardo

Viveiros de Castro (1998). I think many people have forgotten that perspectivism is a model, an abstraction, meant to help us think about the various Amerindian worlds —to think Amerindian thought— and not an explanation of all and each one of these worlds.

But I believe —and I guess many other ethnologists would agree— that the perspectivist model has been used as a faithful description of all Amerindian contexts, in every situation involving encounters between humans and other-than-human beings called animals. Take, for example, the basic perspectivist — or animist — claim, repeated like a mantra: "in the Amazon, animals are people." But my own ethnographic material from the Karitiana, and many other ethnographies, seem to suggest that animals are or can be people only on certain occasions or in specific contexts (Vander Velden 2012b). They are not people all the time. And they are certainly not human people: even in mythology, where this personal quality of animals appears more clearly, these "animal people" are not exactly *human* people, but another kind of people. And there are many other contexts in which animals are, as several Indigenous groups say, "just animals," "only animals" (these are Indigenous expressions), and not people or anything else.

I remember the first time I went to the field, in 2003 — the day when I was chatting with some men at the back of a house, and a skinny, dirty dog appeared, one of those typical village dogs, as we say in Brazil. Someone looked at the animal and said, "There goes the jaguar's manioc." Everyone laughed, and I thought to myself: "Look, perspectivism in action—he's saying that, from the jaguar's point of view, the dog is manioc!" But years later, reflecting on this event, I think there was no perspectivism at all, just a metaphorical joke: what my Karitiana friend was saying is that, since it is common for jaguars to kill and devour many hunting dogs, they are the jaguar's food, just as manioc is human food. The dog, from the jaguar's point of view, is food—which is not a strange claim at all, either to us or to our zoology.

So I believe, once again, that ethnographies must, before addressing the animal or animals, ethnographically inquire what is or what can be or when something can be considered an animal. This is a necessary task if we are to understand the multifaceted presence of "animals" in Indigenous practical and symbolic worlds, as well as the very intellectual negotiation processes that allow us to handle the category "animal" in a way that is intelligible both to our Indigenous interlocutors and to our academic audiences.

Gustavo Politis (GP): Indeed, many Indigenous people don't have a word for "animal," but they do recognize a sense of otherness between humans and other beings that don't look human. It could be human, perhaps. The common response I get from interlocutors is that some animals have a kind of human origin, or a human soul or spirit. They never claim animals to be people. They always say they are *like* people, and these "like people" mean that they distinguish between humans and others. I

think it's worth reflecting on how we can understand the relationship between these non-Western ontologies of Indigenous peoples and the other beings they encounter.

One thing I learned from my own research is that, of course, not all animals are the same. Some animals are truly embodied, superior, and strong spirits. But others are just bodies of monkeys, deer, or other animals; they don't embody anything meaningful, they are just living creatures. For example, among the Nukak of Colombia, they have a complex system of taboos (Politis 2007). Some animals are eaten, while others are not. Some animals are associated with people who enter the water and become peccaries, transforming their appearances. Other beings are simply animals —creatures that have existed forever— without any particular ontological explanation, as, for example, the sloth. Sloths are typical; they do not embody any specific subjectivity or agency—they simply exist.

I think one of the first steps in addressing this is to recognize that different animals embody different things. Another point is that familiarizing animals involves integrating them into the domestic sphere, socializing them, and ontologically making them part of human life—a shared practice in the Americas. I don't want to overgeneralize because I haven't fully understood everything. Most Indigenous peoples in Amazonia tame animals as pets—usually the offspring of the animals they hunt. They are brought to the village or camp and become part of domestic life, becoming part of the society.

We have observed this in the Amazon, which is the typical example, but we also have evidence of the same pattern in historical accounts and ethnographies in the Pampas and Patagonia. So even in places where this perspective —or ontology— is not fully developed in anthropological theory, we see it is a shared attitude, and we should explore it further.

Therefore, there are two points I want to make to finish addressing the question. One issue is that similar approaches to understanding the relationship among people, animals, and non-human entities often overrepresent Amazonian cases. Other parts of South America, such as the Pampas, Patagonia, the Llanos in Venezuela, and many others, each have their own nuances and differences. As I mentioned, this perspectivist ontology has been dominant over the last decade or so and has been applied to various contexts. Therefore, I believe we are now in the process of examining the similarities and differences between these ontologies through specific case studies in South America.

And to conclude, I am always concerned with the chronology and the historical trajectory of this relationship, which is why I call myself an archaeologist. I'm trying to understand how far back these ontologies and cosmologies originated, and when they developed in South America. Archaeology provides helpful examples. In my checklist, one of the key things I consider when trying to visualize whether an animal was tamed

or familiarized is whether it was buried. I believe the way the dead animal is treated can provide clues to how this animal was considered in society when alive. For example, in the Amazon, ethnography and sometimes archaeology show that some animals are buried alone, not with a person. This suggests they were treated similarly to humans, as part of the community. Conversely, many animals, such as llamas, are buried with a person, often sacrificed to accompany the human. Exploring these differences can offer crucial insights about how these animals were perceived in past societies across the Amazon, the Andes, the Pampas, Patagonia, and other parts of South America.

CJB: I recalled that, some years ago, Jair Boro Munduruku, one of Bruna Rocha's students, presented a thesis on items left behind in villages by people, which archaeologists used to collect but are now no longer allowed to do (Munduruku 2019). These include deer heads and skulls, among others, as well as those of other mammals. In our own excavations in the Llanos de Mojos, we've never found deer skulls in domestic contexts, despite the abundance of other faunal remains. Jair Munduruku's thesis offers an intriguing explanation: deer skulls were sometimes placed in trees as spiritual protectors of the village. This reminds us that not all ritual gestures leave archaeological traces—some remain suspended, quite literally, beyond the ground record.

GP: In many cases, within ethnography, the skull follows a different trajectory from the rest of the body. They are handed over to protect or assist the spirit in finding a body, as with the Hoti people in Venezuela. So, the trajectories of the different body parts vary and relate to these people's conception of the animal and its spirit.

Miguel Astor-Aguilera: This topic brings up very uncomfortable questions. I think the first question is, who are our conversation partners? We study Indigenous peoples, but the question is, do we really want to know what Indigenous peoples think (see Astor-Aguilera 2010)?

And I think that has to do with the categories, right? There's the idea that, for example, there is no Mayan word for animal. Period. And it gets tricky because we're interested in categories and we define them, right? So, a toad or a frog, the Maya would say *"mooch"*. They do not categorically differentiate between a toad and a frog. We do. The same applies to how we scientifically differentiate between a tortoise and a turtle; they do not, other than to conversationally contextualize them if needed.

They are not interested in those species types of differences. All this is very fluid and very inclusive to them, whereas we are more interested in separating and making very discrete differences, where this is not the case, and it is not just in the Indigenous Americas. So, one of the things I have gone through —and I am still going through— is a catharsis and the pain of dealing with a world quite different from the three sister Abrahamic religions.

And if you look into the Indigenous Middle East during the ancient period of the three religions, where most of us are socially conditioned, unless you come from a world other than the one I come. It is similar to what you find in the Native Americas. If you go back into the ancient Middle East, you find that it is not the way we think now. Discretely classifying supernatural, natural, deities, gods, and other theological categories becomes very, very muddy.

And that makes me, and I assume most of you, very uncomfortable, because what we are trying to do is understand something from our point of view, and if it is that fluid and messy, how do we deal with it? The idea again is that there is no polar binary difference as we tend to make.

Most Indigenous societies in the Americas have very ethnocentric terms for themselves. For instance, "'True people,' not the Zuni over there," say the Hopi, and vice versa. We have to realize that this is what created a great deal of animosity between these societies and why the Maya would go to war with each other. It is not just that those people over there, from Southern Mexico to Central Mexico, but also my neighbor— "they are not the true people; we are the true people". The evidence depends on what we choose to do with it. So, I completely agree with Felipe about perspectivism. The issue is, again, of what we do in trying to understand native worldviews.

The ontological turn, it has become a very fashionable concept, if you have not noticed. The problem is that when I go to listen to conferences dealing with ontology, I do not even hear where they are in terms of the subject. I go to hear talks about, or symposiums on ontology, but nobody explains what ontology is. And so, over perspectivism, like you mentioned. It is great that we are dealing with this. And I think it is necessary, but not just this. "Oh, it's a hot topic, I want to write a book on perspectivism, or I want to write a book on ontology."

But what exactly does that mean? Because the peoples that we are talking about do not analyze in this way. So I say it is the unpacking of Indigenous Worlds on their terms that is needed.

If we genuinely want to understand Indigenous peoples in the Americas, for example, we need to stop talking theology. Because it is not there. This is imposed by colonialism, by the friars; it is in their European dictionaries that we find the theology rather than in actual Indigenous concepts. European colonizers were not interested in understanding the peoples they conquered; they were interested in administrating them and exterminating their native traditions (see Graham 2011: 82).

Therefore, they were de facto considered to be worshipping false gods, and they had false religion, etc. This is very uncomfortable, and I feel uncomfortable talking about it. And I think slowly, it is going more and more with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1999), Luis Costa and Carlos Fausto (2010), and my collaboration with Graham Harvey (see

Astor-Aguilera and Harvey 2018), as we try to take Indigenous Worlds more seriously. It is increasingly heading in this direction. It makes things more difficult for us, but I personally think that the challenge makes it more exciting. It means more work and is hard, but I believe it makes the work much more accurate.

CJB: Thank you. Let's now address the important issue of decolonizing human-animal studies. The question is addressed to Marcy and Ana Paula.

Decolonization of Human-Animal Studies

Q: What methodological approaches should be created and employed to decolonize and/or de-Westernize human-animal studies?

Marcy Norton: To answer the question, I will make a few (somewhat grouchy) observations about the ever-growing interdisciplinary field of human-animal studies. And then I will offer some prescriptions for de-Westernizing human-animal studies.

First, I think there's a genealogy of the discovery of animal subjectivity rooted in both scientific and philosophical traditions. For example, Derrida has a revelation standing in his bathroom naked, and his cat looks at him, and he recognizes that cats are subjects (Derrida 2002). Additionally, modern science has contributed through remarkable studies showing the incredible capacities of different animals, leading scholars to declare that other-than-human animals have subjectivity. Of course, we also know that other cultures, including Indigenous cultures, have known about animal subjectivity for a very long time. In other words, animal subjectivity didn't need to be discovered by modern philosophers or scientists. Rather, it was only a discovery because of the particular trajectory of human-animal relationships within the West.

My second observation is that for a long time, the starting point for historians has been to see animals as objects – for instance, this is the case in traditional studies of ranching and agriculture, wherein animals are treated first and foremost as commodities. Since the objectification of animals is so inscribed into the historiography, there's still a lot of work that needs to be done to go beyond that. My third observation concerns anthropology. Here, I'm often troubled by a lack of attention to historicity: as it relates to animals, I think present-day ethnographers sometimes pay insufficient attention to the effects of exposure to livestock husbandry in Indigenous communities.[2]

So, *here are* five prescriptions (many of which have already been articulated by the other speakers).

[2] There are important exceptions of course. See, in particular, Felipe Vander Velden (2012a) and Luiz Costa (2012).

First: Start with Indigenous categories, both in terms of practices and concepts. For me, the concept of *iegue* (a Kalinago term that means a tamed or familiarized animal and is also equivalent to an animal whom one feeds) was where I started with this. I prefer this term to "pet," because, as I discuss in my book, "pet" genealogically emerges later than *iegue* (Norton 2015, 2024). And the term "pet" actually emerged because of European interaction with people who practiced animal familiarization and therefore had a different set of ideas about affective relationships with animals. Another example of where it is really important to consider Indigenous categories rather than those of outsiders, are practices often labeled as "sacrifice" (another theme I explore in my book).

Second: Don't universalize Western perspectives. Here I am thinking of all kinds of questions that implicitly or even explicitly assume that the Western way of doing things is the norm, and deviations from that need to be explained. An example of this kind of question is "Why didn't Indigenous people domesticate animals?" (Diamond 1997). Such questions take a Western development as the yardstick by which another question should be measured. This is one of the reasons that familiarization has been so absent in historiography. In fact, we need to actually "provincialize" animal husbandry as the oddity in the *longue durée* of human-animal relationships.[3] For animal husbandry is actually a pretty recent development, and it didn't occur everywhere.

Third: As others have pointed out, be cautious when using categories such as "ontology" and "cosmovision." I think these kinds of holistic categories don't work very well when looking at history. For instance, what happens when Indigenous people start practicing animal husbandry? Are they still in the same ontology, or have they entered a European ontology, or neither? My squeamishness about ontology is partly why I developed the analytic of "mode of interaction" (Norton 2024: 2-3, 17-18). I thought there was a need for a category that recognized that deep structures do organize cultural activities, but that was less encompassing than "ontology" or "cosmovision." I also wanted a category that could align with emic perspectives. I think such intermediate structures are important in our efforts to understand cultural entanglements.

Four: This is sort of a corollary to number three: Do not essentialize either Indigenous or Western cultures. Both Indigenous and Western cultures have changed as a result of centuries of interaction. For instance, another thing I explore in my book is that modern science itself owes a lot to its engagement with Indigenous perspectives during the early modern period (Norton 2019, 2024: 302-327). Therefore, framing the West and Indigenous worlds as fixed or static is problematic, as both are constantly changing.

Five: Decolonizing and de-Westernizing human-animal studies requires interdisciplinarity. I think this workshop itself has been such a beautiful example of this with these

[3] On provincialization, see Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000).

conversations and cross-disciplinary exchanges. Archaeologists, ethnographers, and historians can all learn from each other.

Ana Paula Motta (APM): I think I'm going to orient my answer specifically towards methodologies for decolonization, but perhaps not focusing so much on Indigenous cosmologies, as this has already been discussed quite extensively.

But to conclude with Marcy's last point and begin from there, I think it's important to open conversations across different disciplines and identify commonalities among fields like archaeology, anthropology, history, environmental humanities, ethology, and conservation biology. We all deal with or study non-humans and also human populations, even though we do so in different ways.

I believe many of the debates we see today, especially in archaeology, have been raised years ago in other disciplines. A common point of criticism concerns how data is gathered. For example, in ethology, when studying the significance of animals for different groups, we often rely heavily on ethological knowledge gathered from a positivist perspective.

There are ongoing debates about whether using ethological knowledge is actually valuable or not, because this is tied to a specific theoretical positioning on how people gather data and relate to it. Different perspectives discuss how to approach this problem. It is an internalistic versus externalistic debate, whereby externalistic approaches are presented as more positivistic and 'objective' in understanding animals, while internalistic approaches consider particular narratives, doing so through storytelling and recalling specific encounters with animals or different species. There are different ways of constructing narratives, and how we apply these methods to our study.

And in that sense, I would really like to focus on the methodological developments happening, particularly from environmental humanities, such as multispecies ethnographies. I think it's important to try to immerse ourselves in other ways of being and knowing our surroundings. So, I try to highlight this different perspective from the Enlightenment to humanism, regarding how we understand the centrality of humans in the world and across different realities.

However, we are still humans. We study animals and non-humans from a human perspective. So, how can we truly overcome these limitations and think beyond our own centrality and anthropocentrism? I believe it's important to consider how, even in the 80s, we discussed cyborg theories—about how we can use technology as a way of merging human and non-human agencies.

Through technology, we can also develop a different understanding of other species. Many anthropologists, for example, are experimenting with various technologies and methodologies to study coral reefs in Australia by using underwater acoustics and

recording different sounds to understand how disturbances affect fish communication. I think it's important that we experiment more with the methodological tools available to us.

So, different tools could be, for example, to use sound recordings to create multispecies soundscapes to understand human-animal communication and what type of disturbances, or even sound contamination we can perceive. For example, in the Pantanal, there is a lot of noise disturbance from various boats traveling through the area. Other researchers are experimenting with various cameras, such as those installed on dogs' collars in dog parks, to try to understand the landscape from a dog's perspective.

And that's something that could be done, using camera traps and other technology, to observe how different multispecies come together. So, I think there are many opportunities to experiment and really push the boundaries of how we sense multispecies encounters, for example.

CJB: I recently read in *El País* that Bolivia is currently one of the main hotspots for jaguar hunting. This is quite surprising, especially considering that jaguars had not been a major concern on the Red List for a while. However, with the growing presence of extractive industries —including some operated by Chinese companies— the demand for jaguar parts has increased significantly. This has led to a noticeable rise in illegal hunting, with reports of dozens of jaguars being killed annually.

These changes reveal how external economic interests can influence local dynamics. When we worked in Indigenous territories —among the Tacana, Tsimane', and Mosetén— jaguars were traditionally not hunted. On the contrary, people regarded them with respect and associated them with shamanic power. If members of these same communities now engage in jaguar hunting, it represents a profound transformation—not only in terms of livelihoods but also in the cultural and spiritual meanings attached to these animals.

APM: To add quickly to that, I think it's interesting to note that when we conducted interviews in Beni and asked people if they've encountered jaguars, the responses varied quite a bit. Some mentioned seeing a jaguar [*tigre* as they call them in this area], but they may not have seen one in over twenty years. So, it's interesting to see how people and our own oral memory work in that sense and how different individuals relate to these animals in particular.

CJB: And now we move to the last topic of this roundtable: Visions of the Future. This final subsection is not addressed to any particular person; we welcome contributions from anyone who wishes to share their perspective.

Visions for the Future

Q: Based on your research in this discussion, what are some of the most pressing unanswered questions of promising future research directions within the field of human animal relations in the Americas in your discipline?

AM: Well, in my discipline, I would say that it is very important to look for more sources. We still depend too much on chronicles. Scrutinizing native words and trying to understand linguistic translations and their uses is essential because it might be one of the best ways to understand what the changes were and what the silences were, too. I think we should look at the words chosen to signify some European concepts of animals and try to understand why some other words were not chosen. And we have a lot of linguistic documentation that hasn't been closely looked at.

Then I would also like to encourage archaeologists to conduct further research on the colonial period, for which there is ample material. As historians, we have documents, but as Marcy told us, these are colonial texts, and we must scrutinize them and select them carefully. We lack these other pieces of evidence. So we really need substantial development of zooarchaeology in the colonial period to cross different types of evidence.

CJB: Zooarchaeology in colonial contexts could be particularly valuable. It could help us understand how relationships with animals were transformed —not just economically or ecologically, but also symbolically and politically— through processes like missionization, forced resettlement, or new forms of labor and diet. These transformations are often mentioned in texts, but the material evidence is essential to interpret what actually happened on the ground, especially in Indigenous territories.

GP: I think that from an archaeology perspective, things have significantly changed over the past twenty years. In the past, archaeologists mostly studied animals from a subsistence or economic standpoint. In the last two decades, this has begun to shift, and now zooarchaeology books highlight social aspects. Nowadays, I would say we're moving toward a greater focus on the ideas and thought processes in archaeology. We're trying to approach the archaeological record not only from subsistence or social angles but also from an ideological dimension.

I think it's advancing, and many projects are incorporating this perspective. However, I also have a warning or some concerns about the tendency to impose ideas, models, or frameworks onto the archaeological record—using contemporary frameworks developed from Amazonia and Andean scholarship to interpret or explain long durations without establishing a clear connection to what we actually want to see in the archaeological record. Ethnography and history are very helpful, but sometimes we rely on both when examining past societies that span two or three thousand years. We all rec-

ognize that societies and cultures change over time. Therefore, even though applying contemporary or historical frameworks as models is very appealing and tempting, it may also be somewhat misleading and might obscure the proper understanding of past societies.

Comment from the audience (Kodiak Aracena): I think it is important what you say because including purpose and reason in archaeologists' studies is complex due to the limited knowledge of the past. However, I believe the turning point for including purpose and reason is that we can imagine societies that were not only built by humans but also involved animals and non-human beings. In this case, the interpretation based on this perspective will influence the outcome of investigations. Of course, it should be approached carefully because it's hard to interpret what could or could not have happened, similar to avoiding direct comparisons between the present and the past. Still, using this as a model can be helpful, as it allows us to consider the possibility that certain behaviors or events may have occurred in the past.

GP: Yes, of course, I believe this will help expand our interpretative horizons, and I am ready to explore them. However, as you said, not to impose them—just to explore and use them as a frame of reference, which will help us interpret the archaeological record from different options, perspectives, or alternatives.

DA: As an anthropologist, I think it's not so much a problem seeing things from a human perspective, but we need to avoid a human supremacist bias. Recently, I had to write about water and spondylus shells (Arnold in press), and it was a real challenge to try to write differently—making myself more equal with these things, as I tried to negotiate some kind of multispecies ethnography. That's important, and it requires new methods if we're going to do fieldwork about it.

I also think it is important to learn local languages. So many people now are pursuing anthropology without any language learning, which seems a mistake. I understand that funds and time are more limited, but if you don't work through the language spoken by the group you're working with, then the results will be more superficial. I also think it could be helpful to have more philosophical training, as they do in France, and to revisit classical ethnographies, analyzing them from this philosophical perspective—not just from a Western philosophical point of view, but also incorporating the new insights we are gaining from other debates and experiences.

CJB: I agree entirely. Language plays a pivotal role in the analysis of historical sources, particularly when tracing the presence of plant and animal names. Attending to linguistic transformations allows us to follow how meanings and relationships evolve across time and space, revealing the layers of translation, appropriation, and dependency embedded within them.

Paving the Way: Questions for Future Research

As we have seen, debates on human-animal relations are far from closure. A central point of departure is the need to rethink the categories we use to name things in Indigenous societies and to be more faithful to Indigenous concepts. This concern perhaps arises from the emergent dominance of philosophical enquiries in Anthropology and related disciplines and the multiplication of new terms rescued from Greco-Latin roots, such as "*chthulucene*" or "*sympoiesis*" (Haraway 2015, 2016). Such a concern reveals the tensions faced by those working with Indigenous communities. Still, we also want to call attention to the fact that modern science and philosophy are not fixed in time and owe much to Indigenous perspectives, as this discussion highlights. The issue partially emerges from the need to translate Indigenous thought into Western scientific narratives, and perhaps reducing the problem of using Western categories to describe Indigenous perspectives involves supporting and engaging more with Indigenous scholarship.

In addition to this encompassing departure point, three main topics and lines of argument on animals as subjects of ethnographic, archaeological, or historical enquiries emerged during the roundtable discussion. The first is directly related to this opening statement. It concerns the urgency of decolonizing or rethinking categories, such as the category "animal" itself. It was stressed that the status of animals as "people" or "like people" does not imply that animals are "human people." Instead, these classifications should be ethnographically grounded, recognizing that the status of beings is situational rather than fixed. Critically, there is a need to take caution with totalizing frameworks, such as those contained in the concept of "ontology." Also, even though Perspectivism was never intended for this aim, it is not uncommon in the literature to treat it as a generalizing, fixed model of "Amazonian ontology," reinforcing Indigenous essentialization.

Second, speakers addressed the catastrophic impacts of colonization in the Americas. It disrupted specialized ritual and practical knowledge tied to human–animal relations, as exemplified in the Andes with camelids and the introduction of sheep. It also brought along a commodifying view of animals, as sheep were introduced as commodities, unlike the pre-established relation to camelids. At the same time, the introduction of exotic animal species posed ecological hazards, including soil erosion. Colonial dynamics also resulted in Indigenous people creatively accommodating new elements into their social systems, for example, by incorporating foreign animals or animal-derived products, such as silk, into native symbolic systems that were certainly not those of pre-colonization, but neither were those established in Europe.

The third recurring point was the call for greater interdisciplinary work, along with the use of new technologies to visualize human and other-than-human agency. To this discussion, we add that intellectual pluralism must extend not only across academic

disciplines but also across forms of knowledge production. Local and Indigenous communities have their own approaches to History, Anthropology, and Archaeology, and adopting more truly collaborative frameworks —beyond including an interlocutor in the research— not only during field or archival research but throughout the process is essential to foster genuinely shared perspectives and transformative insights.

Instead of closing this dialogical publication with final remarks, we would like to offer some points of departure in the form of questions for future collaborations and research. First, given that colonial trade introduced goods and new livestock that caused ecological damage, how do we best analyze the long-term ethical and material destabilization caused by global commodity flows on Indigenous concepts of animal care and dependency? Second, how can archaeological and ethnographic research in the Pampas, Patagonia, the Caribbean, and other non-Amazonian regions be used to develop alternative Amerindian theories that challenge and nuance the over-representation of Amazonian-derived models? Third, if neither Western nor Indigenous cultures are fixed, what historical or linguistic methodologies can capture the dynamic process of (asymmetrical) co-creation and mutual transformation? Fourth, how can researchers develop intermediate analytical tools (such as "mode of interaction") and experiment with multispecies technologies, such as soundscapes, to access non-human perspectives without resorting to vague or totalizing terms like "ontology" or "cosmovision"?

Finally, this dialogue underscores the next steps towards moving beyond mere critique. It posits the necessity of commitment through interdisciplinary and collaborative methodologies to co-create a history and narrative in which animals are acknowledged as central agents in the making of the Americas.

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