The Chicken or the Iegue: Human-Animal Relationships and the Columbian Exchange

MARCY NORTON

*Nhamácachi*: Animals who come tame before them, whom they believe belong to their Gods, and whom they dare not kill.¹

IN 1543, A TAÍNO MAN HAD BEEN living in the mountains in the central southern part of Hispaniola for twelve years. Though fluent in Spanish and familiar with Spanish ways, he had fled to escape the oppressive exploitation of the *encomienda*. The man survived in the wilderness through a special relationship with three formerly feral pigs, two males and a female. The man and his pigs would go hunting for “wild” pigs, in the same way Europeans hunted prey with dogs—one pig tracking, one seizing, and one assisting, with the Indian giving the final thrust of death with a make-do spear. Once the prey was killed, the man would preside over the ritual distribution of the carcass, as was done in traditional hunts in Europe with dogs, “giving the interior parts to his companions,” while he made a barbecue for himself and salted the flesh for several days’ consumption. When prey was not readily available, the man also foraged for roots and plants, which he ate and shared with his porcine company. “At night,” wrote the conquistador-turned-chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, “the said Indian went to bed among that bestial company, petting for hours one and then the other, devoted to the swine [la porcesa].” Tragedy ensued, however, when the pigs were spotted by several Spanish soldiers who were in the mountains looking for runaway slaves after a recent rebellion. Assuming that these were feral pigs who roamed the countryside rather than the property of an individual, the soldiers slaughtered them. Bereft over their loss, the man told the three soldiers, “Those pigs gave me life and maintained me as I maintained them; they were my friends and good company; one I gave this name, and the other was called so-and-so, and the female pig was called so-and-so.” Oviedo reported that “the deaths of these three

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¹ Raymond Breton, *Dictionaire François-caraïbe* (Auxerre, 1666), 20.
animals brought much pain and suffering to the Indian, and that the soldiers reported feeling very bad for having slaughtered the companionable pigs.”

Oviedo was amazed by “this great novelty” in which “pigs being hunted were converted into being hunters.” He credited the Indian, “being a rational animal and human man,” with impressive ingenuity for “teaching those beasts in hunting, bringing a trainable friendship to that occupation,” and convincing his pigs “to kill others they came across, because their master did not have love for these others.” Yet he also wrote scornfully of the choice to “flee[e] men and be content living with beasts and being bestial.” The conquistador vacillated between considering this an illustration of man’s superiority to animals and viewing it as a case of a man’s debasement into bestialness.

Prying open this sad encounter, we see central divergences between European and Amerindian cultures’ ways of organizing inter-species relationships. Oviedo’s account reveals the European principles of maintaining proper boundaries between humans and beasts and adhering to a hierarchical taxonomy of kinds of animals. In other words, for Oviedo and his European readers, the Taíno man mystified, at best, and erred, at worst, both by living in overly close proximity to “beasts” and so “being bestial,” and by confounding a legitimate “vassal” animal, a category that was confined to certain dogs (as well as horses and raptors) used in hunting and warfare, with the lowliest of livestock animals, the pig. For many Europeans, the human/animal and hunting/livestock binaries were organizing principles, and those who confused or attempted to cross these boundaries were troubling. For Amerindians such as the unnamed Taíno man, the fundamental dividing line was between wild and tame beings. This divide bridged and superseded the human/non-human binary, grouping human kin and tamed animals on one side and human enemies and prey on the other. For this man and many other Amerindians, the transformation of wild into tame, of enemies into kin, of prey into “pets,” was a central and desirable pursuit.

The adoption and taming—or “familiarization”—of non-human animals was ubiquitous among Caribbean and lowland South American indigenous groups. Some individuals of non-human species, ranging from parrots to peccaries, were hunted and consumed; other individuals of the same species were tamed and cherished as iegue, a Carib term that can denote a tamed animal or an adopted human child. Likewise, the same logic organized many Caribbeans’ and South Americans’

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2 Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Historia general y natural de las Indias [hereafter HGN], ed. Juan Pérez de Tudela Bueso, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Madrid, 1992), 1: 221–222. All translations from Spanish and French are my own unless otherwise noted.


5 Because the focus of this article concerns the colonial period, I will primarily use the past tense in referring to the practices of indigenous groups, but as the table in the Appendix and the text make clear, many of these practices continue into the present.
interactions with non-humans prior to European acculturation. Hunting and warfare were understood and enacted as analogous activities in which a primary goal was to obtain captives who would be subject to either the regenerative death of predation or the social birth of adoption. Some captives, primarily though not exclusively children and women, were incorporated into communities, with individuals’ status ranging from kin to slaves. Other captives, primarily men, were killed, often accompanied by cannibalization and/or “trophy-taking” (transforming body parts—heads, bones, teeth—into ritual objects), and so also incorporated in another fashion.

Iegue was a fundamental concept and structure that organized inter-species, as well as intra-human, relationships in many parts of native America. Though there is overlap with the concept of “pet,” a key difference is that the category iegue bridges the divide between humans and other animals. While Amerindian practices of capturing, taming, and socially assimilating wild animals have received some attention from contemporary ethnographers working in lowland South America, historians have not attended to these phenomena. However, a systematic investigation of the extensive, if scattered, ethnohistorical evidence of Amerindians’ predilection to tame wild animals, found in the textual and visual accounts of explorers, soldiers, missionaries, naturalists, and indigenous writers, illuminates the importance of these practices and their vitality over the longue durée, as well as how they affected the reception of domestic animals imported from Europe.

In addition to the intrinsic significance of iegue, understanding the taming process forces us to rethink conventional narratives concerning the place of animal “domestication” in history. That the domestication of animals represents a necessary milestone in the “progress” of a civilization is discernible in, among others, the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, the ancient Greek poet Hesiod’s “stages of man,” colonial discourses about Amerindian barbarism, and Enlightenment narratives of progress, including those of Adam Smith and Karl Marx. An early theorist of animal domestication marked it as the pivotal phase in which man moved beyond “the threshold of barbarism”—to which, “perhaps more than to any other cause, we must attribute the civilizable and the civilized state of mind.”

These social-evolutionary assumptions (stripped of overtly Eurocentric language) survive to a surprising degree in influential scholarship on animal domestication and the related phenomenon of livestock husbandry. Definitions of animal domestication vary, but many consider it “a process through which animals are in-


9 An important exception is the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold; see, for instance, “From Trust to Domination” and The Appropriation of Nature: Essays on Human Ecology and Social Relations (Iowa City, 1987).
tegrated into the domestic realm as property or prestige goods by controlling their reproduction and by providing them with the means for feeding and protection.” For others, who focus more on changes in the animal population than on the perspective of human domesticators, “domestication can be described as the process during which the gene pool of subsequent generations of a population is altered through human selection, with the ultimate result being animals that are capable of dual identification [identifying with both humans and members of the same species—“conspecifics”] and that reproduce in an anthropogenic habitat.” Animal taming shares some features with domestication, namely non-human animals’ “integration into the domestic realm” and their capacity for “dual identification.” Very significantly, taming does not require human involvement in the reproductive process; nor, in the South American context, was it associated with pastoralism or livestock husbandry, “economic systems[s] based on the use of domestic animals.” It makes sense to infer, as is common in the scholarship, that the taming of wild animals was a necessary prelude to “domestication” in Eurasia. However, the converse does not hold: to apply the term “semi-domestication” to the taming of wild animals among present-day “hunter-gatherers” is a distortion, as it implies a teleological and universal trajectory that is not warranted. Jared Diamond makes this teleology (and Eurasian-centrism) explicit when he asks, “Why were Eurasia’s horses domesticated, but not Africa’s zebras? Why Eurasia’s pigs, but not American peccaries or Africa’s three species of true wild pigs? . . . Did all those peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Australia, despite their enormous diversity, nonetheless share some cultural obstacles to domestication not shared with Eurasian peoples?” His answer is that they did not, and the answer he provides is that the native species of Africa, Australia, and the Americas were not suitable “candidates” for domestication. By assuming that only “obstacles” would explain non-Eurasians’ failure to domesticate, Diamond furthers the ancient belief in a universal trajectory of human progress dependent on domestication. He eschews that older model in which non-Westerners’ “barbarism” prevented them from domesticating (large) animals as capably as Eurasians, replacing it with one that blames the surly dispositions of non-Eurasian non-human animals. Evidence suggests that there indeed was a “cultural” reason (but no reason to think “obstacle”) for why the trajectory of animal-human relationships did not lead to Eurasian-style domestication in South America. Parrots, peccaries,
monkeys, tapirs, and sloths, among others, appear eminently tameable. But in the cultural system of Amerindians in the Caribbean and lowland South America, controlling animal reproduction and maintaining livestock was not desirable.

When Amerindian groups did adopt European domesticates, they did so on their own terms, placing them in the same category as other iegue, not that of European livestock. “Columbian Exchange” is the label applied to the intertwined ecological and social consequences of the cross-hemispheric transfer of previously isolated flora and fauna in the wake of European expansion into the Americas beginning in 1492. In Alfred Crosby’s pathbreaking works The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492 and Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900, colonization became more than the intentional actions of humans; it focused on the role of feral pigs, horses, and erosion-causing sheep, as well as smallpox and influenza, in transforming American ecologies. Though Crosby’s seminal scholarship rightfully spotlighted the unintentional effects of hemispheric integration, there was little attention to the extent to which important elements of the transfer depended on human knowledge, particularly non-European knowledge. Markedly absent in these environmental histories and others that followed in their wake is a consideration of the cultural and social apparatus with which Amerindians mediated their interactions with animals, or their responses to novel fauna and social structures (European-style hunting and husbandry) brought by colonizers. Some recent studies have rectified the tendency toward biological determinism, yet there is much more to know about how inter-species encounters depended on social structures and human knowledge possessed by Amerindians.

The arguments being put forward about “domestication” (or the lack thereof) and the Columbian Exchange highlight the agency of Native Americans. But what about the agency of non-human actors, the animals hunted and the iegue tamed? The question of non-human agency and subjectivity is a vexing and fraught issue for the recent surge in scholarship that concerns human-animal relationships, as well as contemporary debates about animal “rights” and “personhood.” But there is no agreement on how to approach non-human animal actors. In the field of environ-
mental history, including the above-mentioned studies concerning the “Columbian Exchange,” animals often figure as one of many components of “nature,” alongside other organisms and subsumed within larger ecological systems; non-human animals are assigned agency, but not subjectivity.19 Other scholars, however, want to challenge anthropocentrism and humans as privileged historical subjects by showing that assumptions about a fundamental divide between humans and (some) other species are groundless. Many are inspired by the work of animal behaviorists, who have shown that capacities once thought to be uniquely human are in fact shared with other species.20 They point to studies showing that dogs have a sense of fairness, elephants exhibit empathy, chimps display language abilities, and many species demonstrate a capacity to grieve.21 Likewise, seeking to efface unwarranted barriers separating humans from other creatures, a number of philosophers focus on the “animal” characteristics of humans rather than the so-called “human” characteristics of animals. These thinkers, among them Cora Diamond and Jacques Derrida, contest the Kantian subject organized around reason, and instead, in the words of Cary Wolfe, show “how our shared embodiment, mortality, and finitude makes us . . . ‘fellow creatures’ in ways that subsume the more traditional markers of ethical consideration, such as the capacity for reason, the ability to enter into contractual agreement or reciprocal behaviors, and so on.”22 Some also invoke the inclusionary agenda of social history and subaltern studies, and see the fight against “anthropocentrism” and “speciesism” as the next frontier, following the struggles against sexism and racism.23 Despite the heterogeneity of this scholarship, there is a shared understanding that the world is divided between subjects (sentient beings who act with conscious intent) and objects (inert matter), though the former category is no longer reserved

as “objects of human analysis” and “as beings in the world who may themselves create change,” see Erica Fudge, Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures (Urbana, Ill., 2004), 3.


20 For instance, Gary Steiner, Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy (Pittsburgh, 2005); Dominick LaCapra, History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009), 157; and see my conclusion below.


22 Cary Wolfe, “Flesh and Finitude: Thinking Animals in (Post)Humanist Philosophy,” SubStance 37, no. 3 (2008): 8–36, here 8. The Ur-text for many following this line is Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, Critical Inquiry 28, no. 2 (2002): 369–418. These philosophers are moving away from earlier kinds of arguments, such as those by Peter Singer, that hinged on proving that animals have certain kinds of faculties. For an overview of these debates, see Steiner, Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents; LaCapra, History and Its Limits.

23 See, for instance, Marianne DeKoven and Michael Lundblad, eds., Species Matters: Humane Advocacy and Cultural Theory (New York, 2012); Erica Fudge, “A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals,” in Rothfels, Representing Animals, 3–18. At the most politicized end of the spectrum, see the website of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies: “ICAS believes that to eliminate the domination and oppression of animals in higher education animal advocacy/rights/liberation/abolitionist scholars must come together under one common field of study, similar to that of other marginalized fields of study (e.g., Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, Latina/o Studies, Native American Studies), while constructively debating theories, tactics, and strategies for the advancement of animal liberation and freedom.” “ICAS’S Core Belief,” http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org/about/.
for humans alone. Other traditions seek to dismantle a nature/culture and subject/object divide altogether.24

Rather than finding methodological, epistemological, or ethical justification in these various traditions that emerge from European lineages (for example, “Western” philosophy, laboratory science, and social sciences), recent landmark studies have sought to recover ideas of animal agency from non-European perspectives. Following the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, we have begun to “move out from the Amerindian world as an object of observation/study into an effort to look to the world (including its non-human components) from an Indigenous point of view. Not the return of the native, but the turn of the native.”25 As Abel Alves in *The Animals of Spain* and the contributors to *Centering Animals in Latin American History* have shown, this is imperative in the Latin American colonial context, where “power over humans is often via power over animals, or the animalization of humans,” so apparent in Oviedo’s account of the Taíno man and his three pigs.26 It is then critical to pay attention to Amerindian ontologies, in the words of anthropologist Carlos Fausto, in which “intentionality and reflexive consciousness are not exclusive attributes of humanity but potentially available to all beings of the cosmos,” so that “animals, plants, gods, and spirits are also potentially persons and can occupy a subject position in their dealings with humans.”27 Part of the value of recovering Amerindian concepts of animal agency and practices concerning iegue, and therefore trans-species notions of subjectivity, is that it avoids the universalization of specifically European notions of subjectivity and agency, particularly important in fraught colonial settings. It also reveals that there exist trajectories other than European traditions that have led to today’s trans-species understanding of “personhood.”28

Recent scholarship has emphasized cultural continuities among pre-contact in-
indigenous groups in the Caribbean Islands and lowland South America, likely a consequence of migration patterns and interactions resulting from warfare and trade. The ubiquity of animal familiarization across these areas lends support to such cultural categorizations. (See the Appendix.) The evidence is drawn particularly from Amerindian communities who inhabited the Greater and Lesser Antilles; the littoral of northern South America, extending to Panama; the tropical forest and savanna regions of the Orinoco River Basin (modern-day Venezuela); intermediate areas in the Guianas; and the coastal region south of the Amazon (Brazil).

The concurrence in the taming practices recorded in colonial-era texts and those described by ethnographers in the last 150 years is compelling and warrants the temporal reach of the *longue durée*. However, we must be attentive to the important critiques of “upstreaming” (assuming that the practices and beliefs of contemporary indigenous groups necessarily were those of their ancestors) and anthropological approaches that have assumed an “ethnographic present” (for example, belief in an unchanging “primitive” society). Accordingly, it is important not to interpolate identities, practices, or other aspects of culture discernible in one period into another, or to attribute those from one ethnic group to another. Rather, where there is independent evidence for similar phenomena across time, they should be considered comparatively and seen as support for the strength of a particular structure rather than as evidence for some overall “timelessness.”


31 Another reason for considering this phenomenon across this vast time period is that different groups and regions suffered the consequences of European colonialism at different times. For example, the “contact period” gave way to colonialism before the end of the fifteenth century on Hispaniola, whereas that shift took place among the groups inhabiting the Lesser Antilles in the middle of the seventeenth century, among those in the Orinoco region in the late seventeenth century, and among other Amazonian groups within the last century. Whitehead, “Crises and Transformations of Invaded Societies”; Franz Scaramelli and Kay Tarble, “Fundación y desarrollo de la frontera colonial en el Orinoco Medio (1400–1930),” *Antropologica* 103 (2005): 87–118, here 94; Adélia Engrácia de Oliveira, “The Evidence for the Nature of the Process of Indigenous Deculturation and Destabilization in the Brazilian Amazon in the Last Three Hundred Years: Preliminary Data,” in Roosevelt, *Amazonian Indians from Prehistory to the Present*, 95–119.
suggests that there was (and in some places is) a common core to practices across the indigenous Caribbean and lowland South America is not incompatible with the fact that there were (and are) regional and local variations.

IEGUE needs to be understood in the context of “predation” and “familiarization,” as they mediated both intra-human and inter-species relationships in the Caribbean and lowland South America. The Brazilian anthropologist Carlos Fausto, following Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, has suggested that “warfare in Amazonia is to be seen as a particular form of consumption, inflicted toward the appropriation of the victim’s capacities and corporeal constituents” or “the conversion of the enemy’s destruction into the production of kin I call the mode of producing persons by means of the destruction of persons.”

If one objective of Amerindian warfare is to capture the “vital capital” that is “contained in war trophies [and] bodily substances,” it “also comprises the capabilities of actual men and women—namely, the reproductive power of female captives, the warring abilities of captive boys brought up as members of their masters’ societies, and the labor force of slaves, servants, and tributaries who contribute services or goods,” in the words of Fernando Santos-Granero. He is one of several scholars who have explored the incorporation of captives into the host community as wives, children, and “slaves,” widespread practices across the native Circum-Caribbean and South America.

These two facets of predation as a way to create “vital capital” or to produce new


On mortuary endocannibalism as a form of predation among twentieth-century Wari’ and ritual serial killing of kanaimá in indigenous Guiana, see Beth A. Conklin, Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society (Austin, Tex., 2001); Neil L. Whitehead, Dark Shamans: Kanaimá and the Poetics of Violent Death (Durham, N.C., 2002). Predation can also be manifest in realms that do not directly involve killing or death. For instance, Christine-Anne Taylor proposes that “we find a relation of violent capture” in twentieth-century Jivaroan marriage, explaining that there is “prestige linked to successfully ‘domesticating’ a woman captured in warfare and turning her into a loving spouse, a definite sign of masculine achievement since this is a feat that can only be carried off, it is thought, by mature and experienced men who know exactly how to dose seduction and coercion to achieve a proper taming.” Anne Christine Taylor, “Wives, Pets, and Affines: Marriage among the Jivaro,” in Laura Rival and Neil
subjects are well illustrated by captive warfare as practiced among the Kalinago of the Lesser Antilles. Raymond Breton was a missionary who lived among the Kalinago on the island of Dominica for long stretches between 1642 and 1654. His *Dictionnaire caraibe-français* (1665) and *Dictionaire françois-caraibe* (1666) were as much ethnographic compendia as lexicons, and the dictionary “genre” may well allow native categories and points of view to percolate more readily than other genres of European sources used for ethnohistorical reconstruction. Captive warfare, and the resultant adoptions and ritual anthropophagy, appear in several places in the *Dictionnaire caraibe-français*. Under the entry for “caïman huétoucounou,” translated as “we go to war,” Breton explained: “they make great preparations, gathering several pirogues and canoes; they bring only one woman on each vessel to comb their hair, apply red paint, and feed them . . . They kill their prisoners with a hit of *bouttou*: if they are women, they give them as wives and slaves to old men; if they are male children, they keep them as slaves; if they are grown, they make them fast, because they don’t eat any fat, then they kill them.” In this concise passage, Breton describes the two outcomes of predation.

Breton perceived that among his Kalinago hosts there was an equivalence between killing a captive and giving birth (which also was analogous to adopting). For instance, he included a word, “iuenematobou,” defined as meaning both “my first-born” and “the reason for my fast,” elaborating that “savages fast quite often, particularly at the death of kin, the arrival of a first child, and the capture of an enemy.” Elsewhere he offered a glimpse of an evocative scene under his entry concerning proper names. After explaining that adults considered it dangerous to be called by proper names, he added that they might be known as “the father of so and so” or “the mother of so and so,” since children could be named. Or, “when they are drinking and half drunk, they act as if it is a great honor that they are known by the name of the Arawak that they killed.” This process relates to what Fausto, in his study of “familiarizing predation” over the *longue durée* in lowland South America, has explained as “the appropriation of an alien subjectivity through the transformation of the killer-victim relation into a father-child or namer-named relation.”


34 Santos-Granero, *Vital Enemies*, 49–55, 175–177; Norton, “Going to the Birds,” 64–66. Kalinago have also been known as “Island Caribs.”


36 Raymond Breton, *Dictionaire caraibe-français: Meslé de quantité de remarques historiques pour l’esclaircissement de la langue* (Auxerre, 1665); Breton, *Dictionaire françois-caraibe*.


38 Breton, *Dictionaire caraibe-français*, 373.

39 Ibid., 221–222.

bolically the two outcomes of warfare, adoption and consumption, were linked, both generative of life.

If predation led to the “appropriation and familiarization of alien subjectivities” through both consumption and adoption among humans, it did so as well between humans and other beings. Breton’s Kalinago hosts celebrated rites that articulated the proximity of consumption and adoption as twinned elements of predation. Breton described a feast, “one of their most solemn,” in which birds of prey he identified as *mansphoenix* (a species of raptor, likely a kite) were forced to play a starring role. Several months before the feast, men sought birds in their nests (“little ones for the little ones, and for the married men, big and heavy ones”) to raise for this “mystere” (rite). On the day of the feast, the chief warrior crushed his bird against his head, letting the blood trickle down and leaving it there for the duration of the ceremony. Soon thereafter, those who “have had a child or killed an Arawak” did the same, smashing their birds with red chili. The men then smeared the bloodied, chili-covered carcasses on the boy initiates. Earlier the boys had their flesh incised with agouti teeth; other times, Breton mentioned that the old women in the community were responsible for cutting boys with sharp pineapple leaves. At the end, each boy and man ate the heart of “his bird,” then swallowed a vomit-inducing tobacco infusion.

These rites illuminate at least two significant characteristics of predation that were widespread across lowland South America. First, we see how the permeable body—the openings of skin and mouth—led the predator/warrior/hunter to manifest the qualities of who or what he had ingested. It is also likely that the agouti-teeth device used to cut the flesh of the young initiates had a handle made from the bone of a prisoner of war who had been ritually killed—allowing, too, the transfer of some

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42. Breton identified the “mansphoenix” as a *millan*, or kite; *Dictionaire caraibe-français*, 37. References to this bird are also on 21, 100, 231, 255, and 290. See also Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les français*, 2: 252. Lawrence Waldron, “Like Turtles, Islands Float Away: Emergent Distinctions in the Zoomorphic Iconography of Saladoïd Ceramics of the Lesser Antilles, 250 BCE to 650 CE” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2010), 183.


44. Breton, *Dictionaire caraibe-français*, 203. He also wrote of a gourd filled with the flesh of the raptor *mansphoenix* “that they wear around their neck like a relic in order to become strong and valiant” (192).

of the vitality of the deceased. When warriors ingested the flesh, donned the skin, wore the teeth, and soaked up the blood of raptors or jaguars, they were appropriating the courage, ferocity, and power of these apex predators. These are rites in which outer display and internal transformation were linked through the materiality of objects, whether it was flesh digested, blood entering the bloodstream, or feathers, teeth, or pelts covering hair and skin. The belief that in ingesting another being one took on its essential attributes was manifested in attitudes toward less prestigious prey animals as well.

A second characteristic of the rites of raptor sacrifice described by Breton was the “familiarization” of the sacrificial being. This is what Fausto calls “familiarizing predation,” in which the captor/predator relates to the captive/prey as “between father and adopted child or between master and xerimbabo (wild pet).” He finds equivalences between the way Tupinamba captors temporarily “adopted” their prisoners of war as kin before killing them, and the way Jivaro warriors “adopted” pigs before killing them to mark successful raiding expeditions, rites very similar to the bird adoption and killings described by Breton. In ordinary life, one would not eat a familiarized being—a human or non-human iegue. But in these liminal rituals, the ceremonial adoption of a subject who was to be killed underscored the connections creating a subject through birth (or adoption) and appropriating a subject through incorporation (or killing).

Non-human iegue are kin who are fed, not prey whom one eats. Though a few contemporary ethnographers in South America—above all Catherine Howard (Waiwai), Loretta Cormier (Guajá), Felipe Ferreira Vander Velden (Karitiana), and Luiz Costa (Kanamari)—have attended to the creation of “wild pets,” particularly in contexts in which European domesticated animals have been integrated, the phenomenon has not been considered in historical perspective. This neglect is due in part

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46 Breton, Dictionaire caraibe-français, 191.
47 Rochefort, The History of the Caribby-Islands, 2: 303; André Thevet, Les singularitez de la France Antarctique (Paris, 1558), chap. 30. In surveying contemporary Amazonian ethnographies, Carlos Fausto argues that in other instances, prey (or human corpses) was made into game and thereby “desubjectified,” so that a “person” would not be consumed; “Feasting on People,” 501–504. See also Luiz Costa, “Making Animals into Food among the Kanamari of Western Amazonia,” in Marc Brightman, Vanessa Elisa Grotti, and Olga Ulturgasheva, eds., Animism in Rainforest and Tundra: Personhood, Animals, Plants and Things in Contemporary Amazonia and Siberia (New York, 2012), 96–112.
48 Fausto, “Of Enemies and Pets,” 937, 938. In this article Fausto identified them as peccaries, but he has since communicated that they were, in fact, domestic pigs, possibly substituting for peccaries once used. The original source is Rafael Karsten, The Head-Hunters of Western Amazonas: The Life and Culture of the Jibaro Indians of Eastern Ecuador and Peru (Helsingfors, 1935), 228.
to the fact that European explorers’ and colonists’ assumptions about animal domestication made it difficult for them to see *iegue* as an independent or significant cultural production. Moreover, as the preponderance of early and late modern visitors were male and much of the work of familiarization was gendered female (particularly in comparison to the quintessentially male activity of hunting), outsiders had minimal exposure or access to it. Given these blind spots, the fact that colonial texts (and a few images) *do* offer so many glimpses of animal adoption practices among native Amerindians is telling.

Among the most important evidence for the notion that the category of tame beings was of primary importance to groups throughout the Caribbean and lowland South America is linguistic. Breton defined the term *iegé* (male form; the female form he recorded was *nilliguini*) as “an animal whom one feeds” in his Carib-French volume and as “*my* animal” in the French-Carib volume, thereby emphasizing both the nurturing and the proprietary aspects of the term. In another gloss, he further illuminated the concept by explaining that his Kalinago hosts did not raise animals in order to eat them; rather, they were kept for “diversion” or for their services: roosters for their wake-up crows, brightly plumaged birds for their feathers, or dogs for their help in hunting pigs and agouti, for example. He concluded, “if they have chickens, they would die before eating them,” a proscription that extended to “even an egg.” Breton understood that the Kalinago’s *iegé* was fundamentally different from European livestock because the former were not supposed to be slaughtered by their guardians. He also provided the definition for another word, *nhamacachi* (or *nhamacachitina*), which he translated as “Animals who come tame before them, whom they believe to belong to their Gods, and whom they dare not kill.”

Carib-speaking groups far removed in time and space use related terms in the same way as the Kalinago. Ethnographer Patrick Menget reported that Txica/Hex Nchu on the Xingu River (an eastern tributary of the Amazon) defined *egu* as “a familiar animal who lives in one’s lodging”; among the *egu* present were various types of birds (macaws, parrots, and also an aquatic species), monkeys, and the large rodent capybara. The term was also applied to adopted children, as well as to “trophies taken (and Eating).” The first to systematically take note of the phenomenon may have been the missionary-ethnographer Everard Ferdinand Im Thurn, “Tame Animals among the Red Men of America,” *Timehri* 1 (1882): 25–43.


51 These definitions are from Breton, *Dictionaire caraïbe-français*, 290; *Dictionaire français-caraïbe*, 19–20, my emphasis. For more on the feeding aspect of familiarization and making kin, see pp. 20, 22 below.
from enemy cadavers, in particular flutes made of tibia, human teeth mounted into necklaces.”

This is clear evidence for the conceptual interrelatedness of predation and familiarization in captive warfare and interactions with non-human animals alike. Among the nearby Kalapalo, another Carib-speaking group on the Upper Xingu, itologu is the related term that ethnographer Ellen Basso defines as “pets,” paradigmatically birds. She elaborates that the “pet-owner” relationship (itologu-oto) “is characterized on the human side by nurture and protection within a household, and on the avian side by lack of ifutisu (in the sense of shyness), in other words, by tameness.” She notes that the relationship is analogous to that between parents and their children: “Children and pets alike are ideally supposed to be fed, reared, and kept within the confines of the house.”

Like Breton, Basso noted that although itologu can belong to species considered edible, “they themselves are never eaten, nor are they supposed to be killed,” and they should receive burials upon death. Similar constellations of meanings exist in the other major South American languages.

Beyond this linguistic evidence, colonial chroniclers and missionaries have left us fleeting but suggestive remarks about familiarization. José Gumilla and Felipe Gilij were part of the group of Jesuits who founded missions and lived among the native inhabitants of the area along the Middle Orinoco and its tributaries (Venezuela) in the early and middle eighteenth centuries. Their mission settlements were multiethnic, attracting Arawak- and Carib-speaking groups seeking protection from Dutch and Carib slaving expeditions, including the Otomac, Saliva, Maypure, and Tamanaco peoples.

Based on his experience with mission Indians on the Orinoco between the Apure and Guaviare Rivers, Gumilla wrote succinctly in his chapter of “animals they kill for their enjoyments and others whom they raise with care.” Gilij, who spent eighteen years in the region, went a step further and pondered the phenomenon itself, noting that “although there are no domestic animals among the Orinocoans, there are nevertheless domesticated ones to whom the savage nation...
gives a particular name in order to distinguish between those that are wild and tamed [amansadas],” finding it “incredible how tame and manageable they become.” He marveled at the “very rare ability of the Indians to tame the wild beasts,” wondering, “will it be believed by those who have never been to the Orinoco”?57

Because of their wide range—flourishing in insular as well as landlocked environments—birds in general and parrot species in particular were perhaps the subset of animals most commonly and pervasively familiarized.\(^{58}\) From the very earliest days of exploration, Europeans enthusiastically noted Amerindians’ readiness to supply tamed parrots. During his exploration of Hispaniola, Columbus acquired “as many [parrots] as were asked for,” at least forty.\(^{59}\) Portuguese and French explorers and colonists who interacted with Tupinamba in the sixteenth century were struck by “how the savages of this land hold [macaws] very dear,” lodging them in their homes, yet not having “to enclose them, as we do here”; plucking their feathers several times a year for ritual objects; teaching them to speak; and “calling them in their language ‘their friends.’”\(^{60}\) Juan Rivero, a Jesuit living among indigenous communities in the Orinoco basin in the early eighteenth century, wrote of abundant “parrots and macaws for which the Indians are great enthusiasts, particularly the Añaguá people, and they raise them not only for their diversion and recreation but also for their interest in their feathers, which adorn their headdresses.”\(^{61}\) Though parrot species were particularly attractive for their speaking ability and brilliant feathers (which could be plucked without killing the bird), many other varieties of birds were tamed as well. Everard Ferdinand Im Thurn, a missionary with ethnographic inclinations, visited indigenous communities along the Essequibo River and tributaries in British Guiana in 1878 and remarked on at least five different species of birds as well as various kinds of parrots in one village alone.\(^{62}\) “Among the commonest tame animals in Indian houses,” according to Im Thurn, were the trumpet birds, who liked to have


\(^{62}\) Im Thurn, “Tame Animals among the Red Men of America,” 29. These included trumpet birds,
their heads stroked and “follow[ed] their masters . . . like dogs,” even “some distance from home.” Sometimes “an exuberance of good spirits” prompted the birds to turn somersaults on these jaunts.63

Amerindians in the islands extended adoption practices beyond the ubiquitous parrots to include iguanas and manatees.64 In the first decade of the sixteenth century, before the Spanish conquest was complete, a Taino chief caught a young manatee in his nets and opted not to kill him for food (manatee were prized for their succulent meat among native Caribbean and invading Spaniards alike).65 Instead, the captive was brought to an estuary, fed with human staples (yucca, cassava bread), and named Matu (“meaning generous or noble”). Anghiera exclaimed that “for twenty-five years this fish lived at liberty in the waters of the lake, and grew to an extraordinary size.” Matu liked “to play upon the bank with the servants of the cacique, and especially with the young son who was in the habit of feeding it,” and was known to carry riders on his back as he swam across the estuary.

On the mainland, the variety of animal candidates for adoption reflected the unrivaled faunal diversity of South American tropical habitats. Monkeys, not surprisingly, feature almost as prominently as parrots, as suggested by a drawing by the native Andean author and artist Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. (See Figure 2.) He depicted the female ancestor of the peoples of the Eastern Amazon flanked by a parrot and a monkey, likely among the things/beings that lowland groups traded in return for highland goods such as precious metals.66 Oviedo recalled tamed monkeys so abundant that “every day they are brought to Spain.”67 Gilij noted especially the *mico* monkeys, “who seem to even understand one’s very thoughts.”68 In addition to the monkeys and parrots, Oviedo wrote about various tamed creatures—a sloth, a fox, and a *bivana*—who came into European settlements as a result of trades with mainland Amerindians. Oviedo acquired the tamed fox (“they are great jesters and mischievous”) from Caribs, via traders in Cartagena, in return for some fishhooks.69 He compared the *bivana* (probably a kinkajou, a rainforest relative of the raccoon),


64 Im Thurn, “Tame Animals among the Red Men of America,” 30–31.


69 Oviedo, *HGN*, 2: 48 (sloth), 49 (fox).
procured on the mainland (Paria), to a domestic cat and described how it nestled in the folds of his clothing. In the eighteenth century, Gumilla wrote of a creature known as *cusicusi* (perhaps a species of olingo) that was known for its nocturnal habits and long tongue, used for investigating small crevices, and “when it arrives at the bed of its master, it does the same with his nostrils, and if it finds his mouth open, that too.” Gumilla described Amerindians’ facility for taming a wide range of animals, marveling in particular at the affectionate nature of deer and referring fondly to his own “little tapir.” Im Thurn mentioned two kinds of deer (one of whom “made great friends with me, so that when I was sitting on the ground, it used to climb up and stand with all four legs gathered together on one of my shoulders,” and “it never missed an opportunity of emptying my tobacco pouch, pushing it open with its nose and eating the contents.”), peccaries (who “become very tame—too much so sometimes for they follow their master wherever he goes and sometimes even insist upon getting into his hammock”), coatis (who “play about with the dogs”), and a variety of rodents, including the capybara. Henry Bates, an Englishman who traveled in Amazonia in the nineteenth century, recorded “twenty-two species of quadrupeds that he has found tame in the encampments of the tribes of that valley,” including tapirs, agouti, guinea pigs, and peccaries.

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71 Gumilla, *El Orinoco ilustrado y defendido*, 299. He wrote that it was tailless, but Caulín wrote that the animal in question does have a tail, making it fit the description of the genus *Bassaricyon*; *Historia coro-graphica natural y evangelica de la Nueva Andalucia*, 36.
73 Im Thurn, “Tame Animals among the Red Men of America,” 36.

It is beyond the scope of this article to investigate how dogs fit into this schema, in part because it is difficult to disentangle pre-conquest and colonial indigenous practices concerning dogs. Many, if not all, Amerindian groups in the Caribbean and South America interacted with dogs prior to European contact. Waldron, “Like Turtles, Islands Float Away,” 119–126; Omar J. Linares, “El perro de monte, *speothos venaticus* (Lund), en el norte de Venezuela (Canidae),” *Memoria de la Sociedad de Ciencias Naturales La Salle* 27, no. 77 (1967): 83–86. But see also Marion Schwartz, *A History of Dogs in the Early Americas* (New Haven, Conn., 1997). Whatever the pre-contact situation, many groups were quick to adopt European hunting dogs (both the breeds and the methods). European influence on Kalinago human-canine relationships is suggested by the terms related to dogs in Breton’s dictionary that incorporate *chien*; *Dictionaire caraïbe-français*, 113, 154; *Dictionaire français-caraïbe*, 70, 73. See also Terstre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les français*, 246; Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit*, 42. My speculative hypothesis is that dogs were seen like any other species of animals—with some individuals fit for familiarization and others not. For instance, the author of the “Histoire naturelle des Indes” described feral dogs that were either killed or captured young and trained for hunting (fol. 66r). The similarities in the familiarization process for hunting dogs compared to that of other animals can be seen below in Gilij’s description. For parallels with contemporary human-canine relationships among the Amazonian Achuar, see Eduardo Kohn, “How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement,” *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 1 (2007): 3–24.
Aggregating evidence from different accounts reveals that taming, far from being accidental or incidental, entailed a series of ritualized activities. The first step, of course, was the procurement of the individual animal. Sometimes these were the orphaned young of prey animals, but from the earliest sources it is also evident that there were intentional efforts to capture wild animals to make iegue. An illustrated sixteenth-century manuscript titled “Histoire naturelle des Indes” devoted significant space in text and image to animal adoption practices, including “the manner
of catching parrots” of Amerindians in Trinidad and Nicaragua. Among the former, a captive parrot was deployed as bait to lure his compatriots into a cage with his cries of distress. The eighteenth-century missionary Gilij described how Amerindians of the Orinoco basin captured baby monkeys. The appearance of a mother monkey with her babies clinging to her back offered an “opportune moment for the hunter. He directs a spray of poisoned arrows at the mother, and she falls to the ground with the children still clinging strongly to her back, as when she was alive. They are still quite fierce onwards but not so much to be afraid of taking them back in order to raise them.” Anticipating their featured role as animal-tamers, women participated in at least some of these expeditions; during peccary hunts, according to Gilij, “the women take part in order to bring back piglets.”

The next stage was taming, a process subsumed into endowing an other with personhood, be it an infant, a wild animal, or a captive animal. The most central activity was feeding, as suggested by the linguistic equivalence between taming and feeding: for example, Breton defined the term *iegue* as “an animal that one feeds” and included a related term, *aquënnëmëátina*, which translated as both “I don’t have an animal,” and “I don’t make any food”—in other words, there is no animal to feed. Feeding was often gendered; women, for the most part, were in charge of familiarization and socialization, linked to their role as mothers. Matías Ruiz Blanco, a Franciscan who evangelized among Carib-speaking groups (Cumangoto, Palenque) along the South American littoral in the mid-seventeenth century, wrote in the context of discussing child-rearing practices, “the women have a gift for raising the little animals [*animalejos*] that they capture,” and noted that if baby animals “do not eat, [mothers] give them their breasts.” As this suggests, newly incorporated animals were treated much like human infants and babies. Im Thurn described this

75 It is thought that at least two different scribes and two different artists contributed to the manuscript, and it illustrates some thirty ports of call in the Circum-Caribbean; Verlyn Klinkenborg, Introduction to *Histoire naturelle des Indes: The Drake Manuscript*, xv–xxii.

76 *Histoire naturelle des Indes*, fol. 83r, p. 264. Of the “Indians of Nicaragua,” it says: “They use an arrow with a cotton pad at the end and when the bird is struck, it does not die, but only falls, being dazed” (fol. 88r, p. 264). See also Tertre, *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les françois*, 2: 249; Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas y tierra firme del Mar Oceano*, 4 vols. (Madrid, 1601), 1: 295; William Curtis Farabee, *The Central Caribs* (Philadelphia, 1924), 47. Im Thurn describes a similar method used for non-birds as well; “Tame Animals among the Red Men of America,” 39.


79 For *iegue* and other feeding-related definitions, see n. 51 above; *aguënnëmëátina* appears in Breton, *Dictionnaire françois-caraïbe*, 20. The term for familiarized animals among the Huaraoni in Amazonian Ecuador is *queninga*, which means “it receives food from humans”; Laura M. Rival, *Treking through History: The Huaraoni of Amazonian Ecuador* (New York, 2002), 98. Naming also appears to be an important aspect of endowing a being in formation with subjectivity, as suggested by Vander Velden’s ethnography, *Inquieta companhias*, scattered ethnohistorical references (again the manatee), and Léry, who reported in *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* that a Tupinamba woman referred to her parrot as “her cherimbaue”, that is, ‘thing that I love’” (89).


81 Ruiz Blanco, *Conversion de Píritu*, 33. On Ruiz Blanco and missionary activity, see Fernando
FIGURE 3: “Histoire naturelle des Indes,” fol. 83r. The significance of animal familiarization as a central cultural activity is suggested by the author’s decision to have parrot capture represent the “Indian of Trinidad.” Shelf-mark: MA 3900. Reproduced by permission of the Morgan Library, New York City.
process less laconically: “It is the duty of the Indian women to feed the livestock belonging to the settlement . . . These are fed with cassava bread chewed by the women. Among some tribes, especially the Warrausm, the women suckle the young mammals as they would their own children.”

When Bates, the English naturalist who journeyed in the Amazon, asked what “arts” were used by a noted bird tamer, “an old Indian woman,” he was told that “she fed it with her saliva,” analogous to the practice of feeding infants pre-masticated food. Nursing and pre-masticating food brought together biological birth and, in the words of ethnographer Catherine Howard, the “social birth” of adoption. Ethnographers Carlos Fausto and Luiz Costa write that “commensality for the Kanamari is part of a continual process of making kin. It is what happens to the feeding bond between a woman and her pet who, in time, come to ‘love’ (wu) each other, and who thus see their relation of feeding veer towards commensality.”

Antonio Caulín, who was a missionary among Carib and Cumangoto groups in Venezuela in the early eighteenth century, also detected this emphasis on commensality and shared intimacies when he wrote of familiarized birds that “they eat at the table and clean [people’s teeth] with their beaks, and remove dandruff, and do a thousand other cute things.” Another aspect of the special connection between familiarized animals, feeding, and commensality is revealed by Laura Rival’s emphasis that among the Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador, “pets . . . complete the process by which longhouses are turned into feeding places that cannot be abandoned or left empty,” a connection also made in the visual materials of the sixteenth-century “Histoire naturelle des Indes” and André Thevet’s account of his time among the Tupinamba in coastal Brazil.

Another way in which wild animals—human and non-human—became iegue was through the application of the red plant dye achiote (annatto). Without this red body paint, Amerindians across the Caribbean and South America felt exposed and unfit for public presentation, and contemporary ethnographies suggest a connection be-

Arellano, *Una introducción a la Venezuela prehispánica: Culturas de las naciones indígenas venezolanas* (Caracas, 1987), 238–240.


85 Fausto and Costa, “Feeding (and Eating),” 157; see also Costa, “Alimentación e comensalidade entre os Kanamari da Amazônia Ocidental.”

86 Caulín, *Historia coro-graphica natural y evangelica de la Nueva Andalucía*, 46.

87 Rival, *Trekking through History*, 127. *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, fol. 107r, shows a monkey and two birds hanging out on the thatched roof of a hut, in front of which is a woman in labor. Thivet, *Les singularitez de la France Antarctique*, fol. 85v (a parrot on a rafter), fol. 88v (a macaw and a monkey on a rafter; see Figure 4).
tween its application and subject formation. So it makes sense that Im Thurn reported that after an animal was captured, “its face is rubbed with faroa—the red pigment used by the Indians for their own bodies—in order to show the poor victim that its captors are ‘good people and kind.’” Gilij described how dogs selected for hunting were shaved and then covered with the same red dye; the shaving was perhaps analogous to the removal of body hair among people. Familiarized birds, particularly green parrots, were treated in a similar fashion when their feathers were

88 Among the indigenous terms for achiote were *bijah* or *bichet* and *roucou*. Breton described it as their “chemise blanche,” an essential garment that protected the wearer from the sun, ocean water, and insects, as well as offering adornment. For examples, see Breton, *Dictionaire caraïbe-français*, 79; Oviedo, *HGN*, 3: 230; Rochefort, *The History of the Caribby-Islands*, 254–255; Ruiz Blanco, *Conversion de Píritu*, 32; Gumilla, *El Orinoco ilustrado y defendido*, 146–147. The connection between “painting” a newborn with achiote and his or her vitality among the Urarina today is suggested by the ceremonies and chants analyzed by Harry Walker, “Baby Hammocks and Stone Bowls: Urarina Technologies of Companionship and Subjection,” in Fernando Santos-Granero, ed., *The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood* (Tucson, Ariz., 2009), 81–102, here 84–85. Contemporary Kashinawa apply genipap (another plant dye) to infants as part of the process of making them into persons. Cecilia McCallum cited in Fausto, “Feasting on People,” 505.

89 Im Thurn, “Tame Animals among the Red Men of America,” 39–40.

plucked and the follicles treated with achiote as well as other ointments. Twentieth-century ethnographers have also remarked on familiarized animals “beautified with human adornments,” including feather headdresses and anklets of glass beads, and being sung to with anent—“magical thought songs,” a practice shared by new spouses intent on “taming” each other. And in the case of many parrot species, the familiarization process extended to teaching the birds to speak.

Once tame, the animals were for the most part treated as free agents. Witnesses accustomed to European practices were impressed with the liberty granted to the adopted animals. Of the Panamanian Cuna Indians and their macaws, Lionel Wafer wrote in the seventeenth century, “The Indians keep these Birds tame, as we do Parrots, or Mag-Pies: But after they have kept them close some time, and taught them to speak some Words in their Language, they suffer them to go abroad in the Day-time into the Woods, among the wild ones; from whence they will on their own accord return in the Evening to the Indian’s Houses or Plantations.”

Gilij, describing the animals familiarized by Orinoco Amerindians, wrote: “even though they always have their former forests before them, they never . . . abandon their love for their masters.” Philippe Descola noted that the tamed wild animals of the Achuar among whom he conducted fieldwork “roamed freely.” When we consider these observations alongside the fact that Breton recorded that the Kalinago had the term nhamácachi for animals who chose to present themselves as tame before humans, it seems that an important aspect of familiarization included the idea of volition among tamed subjects.

Not all familiarized animals spent their lives among their initial “captors.” In Gilij’s succinct statement, Amerindians familiarized animals “for their children or in order to trade with other nations.” That Europeans were the recipients of tamed animals in gift and trade exchanges from the beginning of their arrival in the Americas—for example, Columbus’s receipt of parrots upon landfall in October 1492 and Oviedo’s receipt of various tamed animals described above—attests that there were already well-developed trading networks for familiarized animals among indigenous groups.

Howard proposes that a central reason why her Waiwai hosts exchanged familiarized animals was to create “social ties” between families and villages. In a

91 Buono, “Feathered Identities and Plumed Performances,” 113–118; Im Thurn, “Tame Animals among the Red Men of America,” 28; Rivero, Historia de las misiones de los llanos de Casanare y los ríos Orinoco y Meta, 9. This process, observed among Amazonian and Orinoco Amerindians since the early colonial period, was known as tapirage and resulted in parrots producing feathers colored yellow rather than green. Most accounts of tapirage ascribe its purpose as producing beautiful yellow feathers that were then incorporated into ritual headdresses and objects. However, given that it was more or less the identical treatment—remove feather or hair, apply achiote (minus the toad extract)—applied to other iegue (human and non-human), it seems likely that it also served the familiarizing process, tameness being associated with hair removal and the application of red dye.


93 Lionel Wafer, A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America (1699; repr., Cleveland, 1903), 120. See also Thivet, Les singularitez de la France Antarctique, 92v–93v; Gumilla, El Orinoco ilustrado y defendido, 299.

94 Gilij, Ensayo de historia americana, 1: 252; Im Thurn, “Tame Animals among the Red Men of America,” 33–34. See also Alfred Russel Wallace, A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro, with an Account of the Native Tribes, and Observations on the Climate, Geology, and Natural History of the Amazon Valley (London, 1889), 251; Descola, In the Society of Nature, 90.

95 Gilij, Ensayo de historia americana, 1: 252.

96 On preexisting indigenous networks of trade that prominently featured birds (and the essential
Waiwai village, a baby bird or puppy might be offered as a gift to an unrelated family as a way of creating a relationship to be sustained over time, so that “portions of game caught by the grown dog will be given to the family who gave it away as a puppy.” The same process worked “at the broadest level of social relations,” so that “dogs and parrots are exchanged with trade partners living in different Waiwai villages, and thence to those of other groups.” “The behavior surrounding the barter of dogs and parrots is literally an exercise in international diplomacy,” explains Howard.97

In this way, the exchange of animals functioned in similar ways to marriage and traditional forms of slavery in Greater Amazonia. Neil Whitehead argues that “indigenous forms of warfare and marriage . . . are usually seen in active thought as analogous mechanisms for the exchange and flow of persons between groups.” “To make the prestation of a woman in marriage created a debt on the part of those receiving wives such that this, a fundamental social fact, became an idiom through which many forms of imperial tribute systems and their associated labor regime were understood,” according to Whitehead.98 In their investigations of indigenous “slavery,” both Santos-Granero and Whitehead emphasize that “animal pets . . . are used to picture the status of the human captive.”99 Yet “pets” were more than metaphors for captives and wives; their “prestation,” too, created bonds of reciprocal obligation. In fact, Howard noted that in negotiating the exchange of familiarized animals, her hosts made use of a formal kind of discourse, “the same that is used in marriage negotiations, sorcery charges, and work recruitment.” Likewise, “mothers would grieve over the loss of their pets in the same standardized vocabulary as they mourned the departure of their married children, who likewise left behind memories, nostalgia, and palpable absences (silence, an empty hammock space, ungrated manioc, uncaught game).”100

The exchanged animals were not commodities in the European sense. Santos-Granero and Whitehead contrast the indigenous trade in human captives with early modern European forms of servitude organized around commodification. For those participating in the European slave trade, the captive was “alienable for monetary gain,” whereas for participants in traditional Amerindian captive warfare, “that labor remained invested in the social person, because the servility of labor was enforced by kinship or ritual obligation, not the institution of law.”101 The same was true of non-human iegue—their exchange was first and foremost about creating social ties.

100 Howard, “Wrought Identities,” 249, 252. Howard emphasized that the animals are not the same as children but are important as “substitutes . . . like them but not identical . . . Pets therefore serve as ‘icons’ of children—signifiers that not only stand for their signifieds but also comment on their significance—while the transactions of pets between trade partners become ironically linked to the transaction of marriage partners between families and villages” (252).
101 Whitehead, “Indigenous Slavery in South America,” 249; see also Santos-Granero, Vital Enemies.
between groups. From initial capture to familiarization to exchange, the life cycles of non-human and human *iegue* were parallel.

The centrality of familiarization to Amerindian life is evident in the ways it mediated colonial interactions, particularly as it relates to the reception of new animal species and livestock husbandry. Across time and space in the Caribbean and South America, Amerindians responded to the poultry introduced by Europeans as *iegue*. One of the earliest descriptions of South Americans’ integration of European poultry is from Jean de Léry’s sixteenth-century account of life among the Tupinamba. First, as with adopted parrots, the local people appreciated the chickens for their plumage and treated them with achiote (“they set great store by the white ones for their feathers, which they dye red and use to adorn their bodies”). Second, they were loath to eat them or their eggs, admonishing the Europeans for their practice (“they seldom eat any of either breed . . . When they saw us eating [the eggs] instead of having the patience to let them hatch, they were astonished, and would say ‘You are too gluttonous; when you eat an egg, you are eating a hen’”). Third, they accorded them liberty and did not seek to control their reproduction: “They keep no more reckoning of their hens than of wild birds, letting them lay wherever they please; the hens most often bring their chicks from the woods and thickets where they have brooded them, so the savage women do not take the trouble that we do over here, raising turkey chicks on egg-yolks.”

These features are echoed by later accounts of assimilation of chickens. Breton’s observation of the Kalinago—“if they have chickens, they would die before eating them, not even an egg, maybe they are less disgusted by this now”—corroborates the proscription against eating familiarized animals, while also suggesting its loosening as a result of colonial interaction. The Spanish naturalist and explorer Jorge Juan commented on how the women “conceive such a fondness for [domestic fowl], that they will not even sell them” and documented the dismay (“shrieks,” “tears . . . as if it had been an only son”) he evoked when he devoured his host’s chicken while staying in a village in western Ecuador in the first half of the eighteenth century. Like the Taíno man with his companion pigs and Breton’s hosts, Ulloa’s landlady treated “domestic” animals like any another variety of animal suitable for taming.

Another difference between Europeans’ approach to chickens and that of Amerindians in this region was their attitude toward the animals’ reproduction. Similar to Léry, the French missionary Antoine Biet, who explored the region around the mouth of the Cayenne River (French Guiana) in 1652, wrote that the Carib-speaking

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102 Felipe Ferreira Vander Velden has arrived at a somewhat different interpretation of Tupinamba Indians’ reactions to poultry. He argues that they were thought to belong in an “intermediate” category between their preexisting category of tamed animals and European-style domesticated animals; Vander Velden, “As galinhas incontáveis.” While over time it seems certain that Amerindians created a wide range of creative syntheses drawing from indigenous and European conceptual categories, it is my argument that the initial response to domesticated animals relied on the category of *iegue*.

103 Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, 86.


Galibi “don’t take the trouble to make [chickens] lay eggs, but they [the hens] hatch their eggs in some hole in the woods, they incubate them there and bring back their little ones to the house.” What the European observers ascribed to laziness—the women’s lack of involvement in the chickens’ reproductive life—was more likely a product of their already developed habits and proclivities with “undomesticated” animals, which put a premium on allowing *iegue* a degree of liberty at odds with European livestock practices.

If prolonged contact with Europeans and disruption caused by colonialism eroded these cultural values, as Breton suggested, there was also notable longevity. The early-twentieth-century ethnographer William Farabee wrote that the Guiana Carib valued chickens as “song birds” and refrained from eating them, and John Gillin reported that “chickens are kept simply as luxury pets, and much time is spent in admiring and boasting of the form, color, and feathering of the bird.” Other groups responded similarly. Napoleon Chagnon, the infamous ethnographer who lived among the Yanomamö in the mid-twentieth century, noted that “Nothing disgusted [them] more than my matter-of-fact comments that we ate our domestic animals, such as cattle and sheep, and many a missionary gave up in frustration after having attempted to introduce chickens at mission posts. The Yanomamö liked the roosters because they crowed at dawn, and kept them essentially for this aesthetic reason if they kept them at all, but would refuse to kill and eat them.”

The response of groups throughout the Caribbean and South America to chickens complicates Jared Diamond’s assertion that the “rapid acceptance of Eurasian domesticates by non-Eurasian peoples” proves that “the explanation for the lack of native mammal domestication outside Eurasia lay with the locally available wild mammals themselves, not with the local peoples.” Rather, native groups assimilated domesticates such as chickens on their own terms—they appreciated them as ideal *iegue* given their lovely feathers, companionability, and labor contributions (wake-up calls). Once they were tamed, eating them would be a disturbing transgression. There was, of course, no taboo against killing animals for food, but there was one against killing an animal that one had personally raised.

The Amerindian structure of *iegue* is essential for understanding processes such as domestication and the Columbian Exchange. Domestication has for too long func-

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108 Napoleon A. Chagnon, *Yanomamö*, 6th ed. (Belmont, Calif., 2012), 108. He writes: “an animal, captured in the wild, is ‘of the forest’ but once brought into the village, it is ‘of the village’ and somehow different, for it is then part of Culture. For this reason, they do not eat their otherwise edible pets—such as monkeys, birds and rodents—it is similar to cannibalism: eating something ‘cultural’ and therefore humanlike.” See also William J. Smole, *The Yanoama Indians: A Cultural Geography* (Austin, Tex., 1976), 185. For similar sentiments among Jivaro and Tukano peoples, see Yolanda Murphy and Robert F. Murphy, *Women of the Forest*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1985), 64; Philippe Descola, “Homeostasis as a Cultural System: The Jivaro Case,” in Roosevelt, *Amazonian Indians from Prehistory to the Present*, 203–224, 207; Irving Goldman, *The Cubeo Indians of the Northwest Amazon* (Urbana, Ill., 1963), 64; Jean E. Jackson, *The Fish People: Linguistic Exogamy and Tukanoan Identity in Northwest Amazonia* (Cambridge, 1983).
tioned as a Eurocentric (or Eurasian-centric) modernization narrative. Oviedo’s disdain for the Taíno’s adoption of pigs is part of a colonial tradition that still haunts us. It “is impossible to think” about political modernity, writes Dipesh Chakrabarty, “without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe.” “Domestication” is another such concept deployed in deep-rooted genealogies of modernity. By recovering iegue, we can destabilize domestication and the narrative of teleological, Eurocentric historical progress that goes along with it.

Understanding iegue helps us historicize not only domestication but pets as well. While the capability to feel affection and form powerful bonds with other species appears to be universal (and hardly unique to humans), the contexts in which these relationships occur differ considerably among societies, just as “companionate marriage” is only one of many structures that have emerged for organizing intra-human relationships over time. “Pet” is far from a trans-historical category; as we have seen, before the nineteenth century, Europeans traveling in native America and lacking the concept of or a word for an animal “pet” referred to “tamed” or “domesticated” animals and indicated the ways in which they differed from European livestock. The first appearance of “pet” to denote “an animal (typically one which is domestic or tame) kept for pleasure or companionship” was in 1710, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, and similar terms in other modern European languages are also of recent vintage.

There are crucial differences between pets and iegue. Whereas the term “pet” is reserved for non-human animals, terms such as iegue straddle the species divide and denote human adoptees as well as familiarized non-humans. A related and essential difference concerns the animals eligible for killing and consumption. Today, the animal species most eligible for pethood—dogs and cats—are ineligible for eating; for many, not only is the idea of eating one’s own dog repellent, but so is the idea of eating any dog. However, most dog owners likely feed their dogs, as well as themselves, other animals who themselves have been fed for the purpose of killing them. In Caribbean and South American communities, the proscriptions were very different. Most types of animals—including human ones—were eligible for adoption or consumption. However, once an individual animal from any species was fed and tamed (unless that animal was specifically prepared for sacrifice), the idea of eating him or her was anathema. Europeans’ revulsion at the idea of eating a person’s flesh (human or otherwise) was matched by Amerindians’ horror at the idea of eating any tame being (human or otherwise.)

Iegue and pet may well be intrinsically linked, but not, as is so often assumed, because pet-keeping is a universal impulse. Instead, the most important connection is historical: iegue likely contributed to the etiology of the “pet” as the concept and practice emerged in the late seventeenth century. Affective relationships between humans and non-humans were not new in Europe, but the idea of a pet—an animal who is part of the familial system and whose main “purpose” is to provide...
the pleasure of affection (as opposed to the vassal horse or dog of aristocratic hunting, or the laboring oxen of animal husbandry, or even the lapdog of the royal or noble court)—was. Might not Europeans’ extensive exposure to *iegue*, as the importation of parrots and monkeys began in the fifteenth century and expanded throughout the early modern period, have contributed to its emergence alongside the other proposed catalysts (the rise of secular cosmology, the rise of domesticity) of pethood?¹¹⁴

Finally, the differences and entangled histories of *iegue* and pet open up a space to consider the ramifications of these findings for contemporary debates about non-human animals’ “rights” and “personhood”—as well as those of human animals. A dominant rationale among contemporary philosophers and legal theorists for extending “rights” or even “personhood” to animals, beginning with the nineteenth-century Jeremy Bentham and including such adversaries as Peter Singer and Gary Francione, is that, given that many of the “capacities” or “interests” on which human personhood is based are also shared with some or many non-human organisms, these other species should likewise be recognized as persons. (Whether the line should be drawn at certain cognitive or emotional capacities or at sentience is a matter of huge debate.) Either explicitly or implicitly, these theorists assume that some essential truth can be known about animals, so that once there are agreed-upon criteria, an accurate line can be drawn; they therefore turn to scientists for determining the thresholds of cognitive ability, emotional response, or sentience.¹¹⁵

A few philosophers, however, do not view personhood as the outcome of such “biological facts.” Cora Diamond believes that “the difference between human beings and animals is not to be discovered by studies of Washoe or the activities of dolphins”; nor is “the biological fact that we and dogs and rats and titmice and monkeys are all species of animal” sufficient.¹¹⁶ In different though complementary ways, she and Donna Haraway point to the notion that there can be no separation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, whether it is Diamond’s recognition of a “fellow creature” or Haraway’s interest in how humans and their “companion species” “make each other up.” The recognition of an other’s subjectivity emerges because of the act of recognizing, rather than the inherent capacities of that “other.”¹¹⁷


¹¹⁷ Haraway’s commitment to intersubjectivity is suggested in the very title of her book, as well as the emphasis on “ongoing becoming with.” She writes: “We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand . . . we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love. This love is a historical aberration and a natural-cultural legacy.” *When Species Meet*, 16, 23.
implication is that scientific studies that prove other animals’ capacities are an effect, rather than a cause, of recognizing “fellow creatures”—and that, most often, philosophers have reversed the causality. Consider Gary Steiner’s statement, for instance, that “even if the nature of the apes’ orientation on language is not the same as the human orientation . . . it is nonetheless clear that we can have meaningful interrelationships with apes.” Rather, as Haraway has made clear, it is because primatologists have meaningful interrelationships with apes that they can appreciate their linguistic abilities. History and anthropology might have more to teach us than do the biological sciences about what conditions and frameworks offer the possibility for intersubjective experiences between and among species. This emphasis on intersubjectivity, too, allows for the agency of the non-human, for this is what it means to experience the cusicusi probing his human’s nostril, the parrot talking to her human, the deer emptying out the tobacco pouch, or the animal who chooses to “come tame.” In this way, we experience their recognition, as well as our own. The Kalinago appreciated this intersubjectivity with their term for “animals who come tame before them.”

The present-day paradox of cooking some of our animals and cooking for others of them will not be resolved by discovering which ones have sufficient emotional or cognitive abilities. Rather, these findings suggest that the practices that constitute animal husbandry or experimentation on animals forestall recognition and limit intersubjective experience, whereas the practices of taming iegue, caring for pets, and perhaps even hunting wild prey foster them. They also suggest the need to disaggregate some concepts related to subjectivity (for humans as well as other beings). Namely, it is often taken for granted that as a universal precondition for one to harm or kill or enslave another, it is necessary to deny his or her subjectivity; and conversely, it is argued that the promotion of empathy is what allows for the recognition that “rights” should be extended to an expanding circle of beings. And, indeed, it might be that in the European and Euro-American context, this has often been the case. But in the system in which iegue flourished, a fellow subject could be fed, or could be made food, but the same being could not be fed and made food, as in Eurasian-originating livestock husbandry.


118 Steiner, Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents, 238.


### APPENDIX

**Animal Familiarization in the Caribbean and Lowland South America, 1492–2006**

B = birds; P = primates; M = other mammals. If a cell has been left blank, that means the information is unknown.

<table>
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Note: Full citations are in the text.