People and Animals in Nigerian History

Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa: The Human and Nonhuman Creatures of Nigeria

By Saheed Aderinto. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2022. Pp. 340. $80.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9780821424698); $36.95, paperback (ISBN: 9780821424766); e-book (ISBN: 9780821447680).

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'For here we trace the likeness of [the] Garden of Eden,' observed M. O. Okigie in a poem on W. H. Biney's pioneering Nigerian zoo in May 1946 (197). The zoological gardens founded by Gold Coast boxing promotor and businessman Biney, serve as an apt illustration of the collision between animal and human worlds that Aderinto explores in *Animality*. His study weaves together colonial history, animal-centered cultural studies, and the historiography of fields as diverse as health and sports, to propose an original argument about the centrality of animals to people and power in Nigerian — and, by extension, African — history. Animals, Aderinto contends, were just as much products of colonial rule as humans, and subject to the same processes of demarcation, coercion, and idealization by the colonial state.

Dogs provide a clear example: around 1936, canines were serving as surrogate police in Mushin, suburban Lagos. The inhabitants' dogs, Aderinto observes wryly, 'were doing the job of the government' (117) by guarding the community against intruders. More generally, canines were subject to diverse government interventions, ranging from being taxed, subject to rabies control measures, targeted in roundups, and becoming the victims of mass dog killings. Divisions were made between 'domesticated' animals, licensed, and connected to European and elite African households, and their 'stray' counterparts, considered dangerous, 'feral', and beyond the control of the colonial state. Canine pets received treatment in the Lagos veterinary office — such as the 887 animals, mainly belonging to Europeans, treated in 1954–5 (103) — whereas strays were rounded up and sent to Lagos's own canine gas chamber (170–1). Dogs are just one among the many animals that Aderinto analyzes: one of the book's great strengths is this range, which in turn allows for broader conclusions and impact.

Aderinto's book is divided into two distinct sections, the first exploring different species, the second examining public health, animal welfare, and the development of game parks and zoological gardens. Detailed consideration is devoted to the horse, connected to an elaborate culture of durbars, the donkey, with its key role as beast of burden in colonial Nigeria's nascent capitalist economy, and the aforementioned dog. Yet a menagerie of other animals inhabits the pages of Aderinto's book, ranging from the Ibadan crocodile in Agbo'le Delesolu at the heart of Oje district (20) — an animal that, Aderinto relates, was familiar to the author from childhood, and to whom the book is partly dedicated — to baboons, gorillas, leopards, elephants, and manatees.

Aderinto chiefly focuses on the colonial era, when the government displayed a characteristically flexible, even chaotic, attitude towards Nigeria's fauna. When it came to elephants and manatees, Aderinto contends that the colonial government vacillated between protection, and culling or licensed hunting. Pest control sometimes trumped conservation: baboons that intruded on farmland in the vicinity of Bauchi district, partly due to the reduction in leopard numbers as a result of colonial policies, were poisoned with sodium arsenide by forest conservators (185).

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Animals became integral not only to colonial policymaking, but also to Nigerian politics, whether in relation to nationalist parties or the politics of northern emirates. Aderinto's reading of Akinola Lasekan's cartoons shows how his work came to feature the rooster (symbol of the NCNC, National Party of Nigeria and the Cameroons) (121), as well as drawing multiple parallels between the 'sheep' of late colonial Nigeria, including labor unions, the unemployed, and abstract categories such as 'financial insecurity', and the imagery of the predator, such as the 'wolf', as either the colonial government or the NCNC's rival, the Action Group (127). If nationalist supporters 'turned animals into symbols of national discourse' (127), then the equestrian culture of the durbar was appropriated from a spectacle of colonial power to an opportunity for northern elites to network both amongst themselves and with colonial officials. Elite Africans invested in and appropriated colonially inflected equestrian culture, with star horses such as Ajasa's Periwinkle in the 1890s and Alakija's Remembrance Day, Jubilee, and Thousand Bombers in the 1940s, enjoying public celebrity (81). Critically, horse racing became reinterpreted according to changing political events: races during the Second World War were given a war-related gloss and linked to philanthropy (231).

Given the complexity of the colonial configurations of animality unearthed by Aderinto, it must be stressed that human-animal proximities were important well before the colonial period. Aderinto draws on multiple examples of precolonial attitudes to animals and wildlife conservation, arguing that these practices presented fewer immediate environmental risks than their colonial counterparts. Hunting, for instance, 'in precolonial times' provided 'a means of regulating animal populations', and socializing younger males, rather than being focused on 'purely capitalistic' extraction (186). The horse had already come to play a key role in Sahelian polities such as the Sokoto Caliphate. More generally, fundamentally distinct conceptions existed regarding the status of animals such as horses and dogs in several areas of Nigeria, where some cultures valued the sacrifice and consumption of these animals, or their use in medical treatments (97). With preexisting human-animal relations in mind, Aderinto shows how conflicts sometimes emerged in colonial towns, where different communities had distinct ideas about the use of dogs for labor, particularly in hunting, or about whether dogs were permitted to eat human waste and garbage (96).

Although Aderinto's history is primarily concerned with the colonial period, it closes with a commentary on the way in which human-animal relations have continued in postcolonial politics. The durbar, for instance, continued to be a key and contested institution in northern Nigeria. In 2009, district heads were advised by the Governor of Kano Abdullahi Ganduje to not participate in the Emir of Kano's Salah durbar due to a personal feud between the men (257). Aderinto's analysis of postcolonial continuities in human-animal relations also extends to contemporary ethnic and political controversies, such as those surrounding the federal government's 2019 scheme for a rural grazing area settlement program (252).

Not all animals are created equal in Aderinto's account, and he favors larger mammals, with smaller creatures mentioned only very sparingly. Snakes form one exception to this, for example in the pen portrait of Lagosian cobra charmer Professor Benson (198). It would be interesting to learn of the colonial history of such significant animals as ants, spiders, frogs, scorpions, and termites, important either as threats to human habitation, sources of useful poisons and medical treatments, or as obsessions in colonial European perceptions of Africa. Marine animals and waterfowl are not a key focus, despite having complex cultural and economic roles in cultures of the southwestern coast or the Niger Delta. These choices are likely guided by the book's sources, and reflect those subjects of immediate interest to writers in the African press, the work's major source base.

Animality opens up a new field of animal-centered history in Nigeria. Aderinto's key arguments will be essential and provocative reference points for historians of Africa well beyond Nigeria, particularly his contention that dog-fancying must be understood as a key dimension of colonial modernity. The book is an inherently interdisciplinary work, and Aderinto's broader theoretical

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contention that animals were themselves agents of colonial history will interest readers far beyond history, including anthropologists, political scientists, and hopefully also those in the animal sciences.

Animality represents a major contribution to the history of colonial Africa, and one that transforms our understanding of the period. By centering animals within his account of Nigeria's colonial history, Aderinto achieves two main theoretical innovations. Firstly, he convincingly argues that animals must be understood as colonial subjects in their own right, albeit ones lacking human agency. Animals were transformed by the colonial state, and constructed afresh in social and cultural terms. Secondly, Aderinto shows why historians of colonial Africa must consider the animal world not only when writing environmental or scientific history, but also when examining the whole gamut of social experience and political language where the natural world might not conventionally be considered. The resulting book will be useful for teaching colonial Nigerian and African history, and its theoretical scope means that it will also work well in continental survey courses, interdisciplinary area studies, as well as in postgraduate seminars.

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West African Soldiers during the Colonial Era

West African Soldiers in Britain's Colonial Army, 1860–1960

By Timothy Stapleton. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2022. Pp. 400. $125.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9781648250255); $24.99, e-book (ISBN: 9781800104198).

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Britain's West African soldiers were busy during the colonial era, whether aiding British colonial conquest of West Africa; expanding, sustaining, surviving, and protecting Britain's colonial rule; assisting in the conquest of German East Africa for Britain during the First World War; contributing to Britain's success in the Second World War by fighting for Britain in East and North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia; and moving on to serve the British colonial system in several other capacities even after retiring from military service. Indeed, as Walter Rodney famously observed, 'the most important force in the conquest of West African colonies by the British was the West African Frontier Force – the soldiers being Africans and the officers British'.[1] Based on copious archival evidence from Britain and former British West African colonies, Stapleton's *West African Soldiers* explores an understudied history: the military cultures and the experiences of West Africans who served Britain through different historical periods and on various fronts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The choice to focus on British West African soldiers has been largely influenced by the fact that the unit comprised 'Britain's largest military force in colonial sub-Saharan Africa'; far more than the King's African Rifles, its British East African equivalent (1–2). Also, the British depended on their West African soldiers for the conquest of West Africa even more than their East African counterparts because the West African climate militated 'against the

[1] W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London, 1972), 226.

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