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

Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa: The Human and Nonhuman Creatures of Nigeria, by Saheed Aderinto. Ohio University Press, Athens, 2022, ix + 321 pages.

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Over the last few years, environmental historians have been treated to a score of outstanding works on animals, empire, and colonialism. Saheed Aderinto's excellent *Animality and Colonial Subjecthood in Africa* is the latest addition to this burgeoning subfield. Focusing primarily on 20th-century colonial Nigeria, Aderinto argues that colonialism produced modern animal subjects through integrating animals into colonial legal, economic, veterinary, and conservation regimes. In this way, not only were humans colonial subjects—so too were animals—something that has been overlooked by most historians of Africa.

Aderinto's research is impressive, comprising a vast array of archives, periodicals, books, radio programs, photography, and other sources in multiple languages. Focusing primarily on the colonial period, the book outlines and analyzes both colonial and Indigenous Nigerian perspectives on animals, including their roles in commerce, religion, nationalism, politics, colonial power, public health, conservation, and nutrition. Through focusing on animals, Aderinto successfully integrates environmental history, social history, political history, visual history, food history, and the history of science and medicine in a compelling way. The book breaks new empirical and theoretical ground and is likely to become a field-defining study for Africanists with interests in animals.

The first chapter focuses on cattle and how the colonial state turned “precolonial livestock into modern beasts” (p. 34) through veterinary medicine, the enclosure of

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pasture, and the removal of animals from city centers. Chapter 2 homes in on horses and donkeys, which Aderinto refers to as “Living Machines of Imperialism” (p. 63). While horses were used for political authority and symbolic power, donkeys served as beasts of burden for the colonial economy. Chapters 3 and 5 examine dogs, animals that were ubiquitous among both Nigerians and colonists. Through a suite of colonial legislation and rabies-control regulations, dogs were also made into colonial subjects—they and their owners were “expected to conform to the ethos of a modern society in their social behaviour, bodily habits, public presence, and observable mannerisms” (p. 93). Simultaneously, dogs were racialized according to existing ethnic categories such as “Yoruba dog” and discriminated against on “racial” grounds.

Chapter 4, which examines the political cartoons of Nigerian cartoonist Akinola Lasekan, is a highlight of this book. Lasekan frequently depicted colonialism and party politics through images of animals, turning them into “symbols of national discourse” (p. 127), and creating a visual language that mediated relationships between the public and the government through the figure of the animal. Fascinatingly, Lasekan mobilized his own concept of “animalization” to show how “humans degenerate into animals through irrational behavior” (p. 126). This is a novel emic use of a concept typically associated with the colonial dehumanization of Africans.

Chapter 6 integrates the history of zoos and conservation in Nigeria, filling the major lacuna of West African histories of zoological gardens and national parks. Colonial wildlife legislation, Aderinto points out, “had the effect of turning Nigerians into poachers, even in their own communities” (p. 182), while governing flora and fauna was the “exclusive preserve of Europeans” (p. 182). Yet wildlife protection was not solely the concern of colonists. Indigenous elites protected the supply of elephants for the ivory market in precolonial times and advocated for the creation of game sanctuaries in the colonial period.

The final two chapters focus on campaigns and legislation passed against animal cruelty. Here, colonial legislation sought to enforce what colonists regarded as humane treatment of animals. Colonists were particularly paternalistic here, believing that Nigerians “could be civilized to show compassion toward the lower creatures” (p. 207). This said, Indigenous elites also took on an important role in the campaign against animal cruelty.

Aderinto’s chapters are all excellent and make many important contributions to both animal and African history. My only issue with *Animality* lies in Aderinto’s engagement with the existing historiography. At times, Aderinto overplays his originality or overlooks important related works in nonhuman history. To name one example, he concludes that his book is “the first multispecies study of animals in twentieth-century colonial Africa” (p. 250). This is untrue: many papers on the history of animals in 20th-century colonial Africa have been published, and at least four monographs cover the 20th century in detail, namely, Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga’s *The Mobile Workshop: The Tsetse Fly and African Knowledge Production* (2018), Nancy Jacobs’s *Birders of Africa: History of a Network* (2016), Karen Brown’s *Mad Dogs and Meerkats: A History of Resurgent*

Rabies in Southern Africa (2011), and Sandra Swart's *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa* (2010). Moreover, similar books in other British colonial contexts that have pioneered historiographical approaches to animals and colonial or imperial subjecthood are surprisingly neglected, such as Rohan Deb Roy's *Malarial Subjects: Empire, Medicine and Nonhumans in British India, 1820–1909* (2017), which shares a concern with nonhumans and colonial subjecthood, and Timothy Barnard's *Imperial Creatures: Humans and Other Animals in Colonial Singapore, 1819–1942* (2019), which takes a similar, multiple-animals-under-colonialism approach. Jonathan Saha's groundbreaking *Colonizing Animals: Interspecies Empire in Myanmar* (2021) is also connected with *Animality* in many ways but was likely published too late to be included.

To no fault of Aderinto, Ohio University Press has unfortunately done a poor job with the production of this book. Many of the images are low quality, pixelated and blurry, and, in some cases illegible. This is inexcusable since the visual materials are particularly rich and an important part of the argument of Chapter 4. The book is also cheaply bound against the grain of the paper, meaning that it constantly snaps shut and is frustrating to read while taking notes. Readers can and should expect better from a leading African history book series, and it is sad that such an excellent book has been marred by a bad production process.

Despite these minor reservations, this is nevertheless a groundbreaking study that will set the agenda for both African and animal history in the years to come. Some animal historians may be disappointed by the limited attention paid to animal agency in this book: Aderinto chooses to focus on human use of and relationships with animals, rather than trying to analyze animal subjectivities under colonial rule through drawing upon modern biology or posthuman theory. Nevertheless, *Animality* shows how valuable a lens animals can be for integrating disparate subfields of history and provides much detail on how they were governed under the colonial state apparatus. This book should appeal to anyone with interests in the history of Africa, animals, or colonialism generally, and deserves to be widely read by experts and students alike. ■

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