

**Chazkel, Amy. *Laws of Chance: Brazil's Clandestine Lottery and the Making of Urban Public Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.**

In this dense historical analysis of the *jogo do bicho*, Amy Chazkel unearths the social, economic, juridical and criminal processes that both contested and helped to reinforce the popularity of illicit games of chance during Brazil's First Republic. She supplies the reader with a deeply detailed deconstruction of the myriad processes that influenced the evolution of the game—and of modern urban society itself—in the capital city at the turn of the twentieth century. What is most impressive—and, at times, overwhelming—about Chazkel's project is its persistence in tracing multiple “players” (literally and figuratively) through the various interconnected layers of social and legal infrastructure that were unfolding at the end of the Empire, and showing how games of chance were intrinsically linked to the growth of consumer capitalism in the rapidly modernizing and urbanizing Brazilian nation of the 1890s to the 1900s.

She begins by tracing the invention of the animal raffle game to 1892 as a state-approved scheme to save the Vila Isabel Jardim Zoológico (established in 1888 by the Baron of Drummond) from financial insolvency. Chazkel notes, however, that almost immediately, “the animal game... escaped from the zoo” (37). Indeed, she argues, the *jogo do bicho* is a creation not of one wealthy entrepreneur but of an enterprising cast of hundreds, and its evolution hinges on the interaction of the legal apparatus of an authoritarian state and the oppressed masses who re-appropriated the game for their own uses.

Next she examines the impact of state officials and the juridical context in which the *jogo do bicho* operated on the criminalization of the game. Here Chazkel underscores the gap between code and practice and the space for improvisation within criminal law. Indeed, regardless of the moral outcry against games of chance and often in spite of obvious evidence of guilt, the period from 1892-1917 shows that of the suspects arrested for participating in the *jogo do bicho*, virtually no one was ever convicted. By citing procedural technicalities, judges generally acquitted *bicheiros*, thus using their power within an ambiguous legal system to protest police abuses of power.

The following section examines the world of petty commerce in which the *jogo do bicho* developed. Already in the late Empire, Brazil's urban economies began a transition toward privatization and increased regulation, handing control of small-time enterprises over to large concessionaires. At the same time, popular practice often sought to circumvent these rules. Here Chazkel investigates the informal economy and demonstrates how *cariocas* of the period improvised a living—as well as their predilection for the *jogo do bicho*—between the lines of what was considered licit and illicit.

Chazkel then outlines the drastic economic changes that were at play during the first years of the Republic and the development of new cultural attitudes toward money, evidenced in part by the intense financial speculation of the *Encilhamento* (1889-91). Here she examines the artificial division between *play* and *business*, and between elite and popular forms of playing with money.

“Lives of the Players” is a particularly interesting section that focuses on the individuals involved in the *jogo do bicho*. This portion of her work gives us a more personal portrait of what fueled players to engage in the *jogo*, how they came to bet on certain animals, and perhaps most intriguing, *who* played and how.

The title of Chapter Six, “Vale o Escrito,” plays on the popular concept that “the *jogo do bicho* was both more reliable and more legitimate than the judicial system that censured it” (206). Indeed, this section examines the role of police officers in controlling but also enabling and profiting from the *jogo do bicho*. *Bicheiros* themselves were notoriously honest in repartitioning profits from the lottery, a trait which contrasted with the widely-held image of the corrupt criminal justice system.

One of the nicest touches of the final chapter is the anecdotal opening describing a surveillance photograph taken in 1971, near or on the old location of the Jardim Zoológico where the *jogo do bicho* began nearly a century earlier. Indeed, the anecdotes she offers throughout help to personalize her extensive archival research, and her attention to geographical detail of various arrests and photos underscore the importance of dynamic spatial relationships in and around the city. Also of note is her comfort outside of the traditional dualities so often used to describe Brazil, particularly in this époque and cultural milieu. Chazkel takes care to avoid reductionism and instead accentuate the

multifarious relationships operating on every level. A final aspect to her work that deserves praise is the breadth of sources she cites. In addition to juridical archives and contemporary newspaper reports and pamphlets, she references the *crônicas* of João do Rio, Lima Barreto, and Machado de Assis.

Chazkel's argument might have incorporated more direct comparisons to cultural/political/economic life in Rio today, as many of the processes she describes at their conception at the turn of the twentieth century continue unabated today. The organization of her chapters, while clearly divided into themes, might also have been enhanced by a more predictable scheme; some chapters begin with an illustrative anecdote while others commence with a more academic summary of the section's main points. Both approaches have clear advantages and her book could be strengthened by incorporating both into each section. Finally, she mentions other lotteries and games of chance but never gives us a complete understanding of how they fit into the picture she paints of the *jogo do bicho* and its evolution; readers might benefit from additional depth in descriptions of other contemporary games.

These few constructive criticisms should not, however, take away any of the richness of this book. In *Laws of Chance*, Chazkel calls for a revising of the conventional chronology of the *jogo do bicho*, and her book concludes with an insistence that the mid-twentieth-century crack-down on gambling simply marks the continuation of a process that started immediately upon the game's invention in the 1890s. This massive historical narrative that systematically connects the dots between the *jogo do bicho* and diverse elements of the first years of the Republic is an excellent contribution to our understanding of the crossroads of popular culture and Brazil's nascent legal, economic and social structures.

**Megwen Loveless**

*Princeton University*