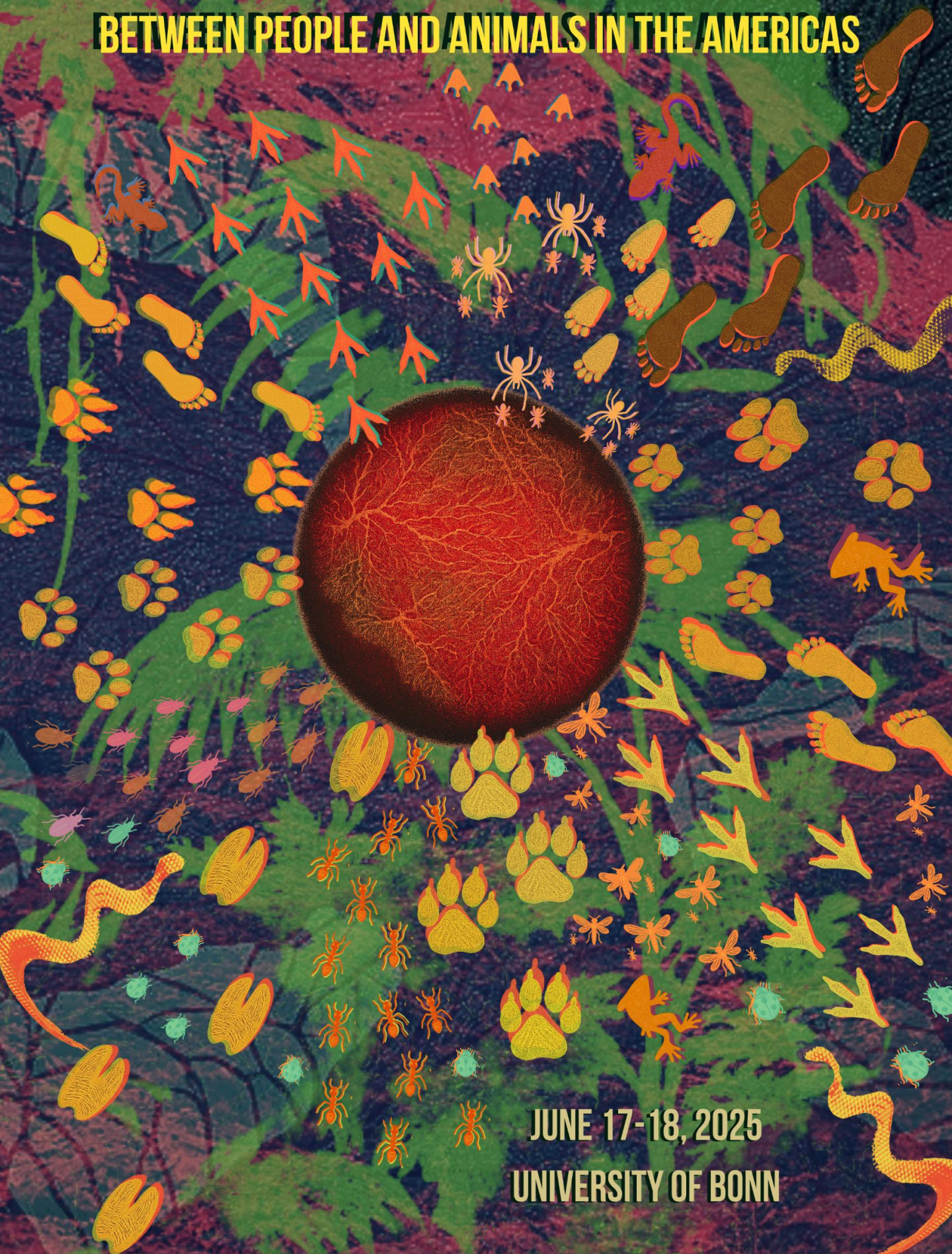


# ENTANGLED LIVES: EXPLORING THE (INTER)DEPENDENCY BETWEEN PEOPLE AND ANIMALS IN THE AMERICAS



JUNE 17-18, 2025  
UNIVERSITY OF BONN



# Concept

Humans have relied on animals to live and build societies across time and space. The (inter)dependencies inherent in these relationships, and their impact on human-human relations, have long been under-explored topics. However, this trend has been shifting over the past decade. Given the ongoing discussions surrounding the Anthropocene and current trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences, it is imperative to include ecological dynamics in the study of asymmetrical dependencies, colonization, and slavery, while promoting further dialogue on human-animal interactions.

By probing practices of familiarization, embodied knowledge, and mutual dependency, the workshop interrogates how Indigenous relationships with animals – from livestock to “wild” species – shaped and were shaped by historical processes of subjugation. The workshop is organized by the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) and the Department for the Anthropology of the Americas at the University of Bonn. Our interdisciplinary exploration will encompass the diverse cultural and ecological regions of the Americas, from the Caribbean to the Paraná Delta, bringing perspectives from Anthropology, Archaeology, and History. The panels will conclude with a round-table discussion to foster engagement among the panelists. This final session will be shaped by the inputs from the presentations, allowing panelists to interact with each other's research directly. While the round-table discussion will be open to the public, questions from the audience will be addressed during a separate final discussion.

# Entangled Lives

## Exploring the (Inter)Dependency Between People and Animals in the Americas

International Interdisciplinary Workshop  
June 17–18 2025

Impulse – House for Intellectual Innovation and Creativity  
Adenauerallee 131  
D-53113 Bonn

### Highlights

Keynote Lecture – June 17

“Taking up Company with a Beast”: Familiarization  
in Mesoamerica, 1400 – 1650

Marcy Norton

Round-Table – June 18

Rethinking Human-Animal Relations in the Americas

With

Marcy Norton (University of Pennsylvania)

Felipe Vander Velden (Federal University of São Carlos)

Denise Arnold (ILCA – Bolivia; University College London)

Miguel Astor-Aguilera (Arizona State University)

Gustavo Politis (CONICET – Argentina; University of Bonn)

Aliocha Maldavsky (University Paris-Nanterre; ESNA)

Ana Paula Motta (Kiel University)

Carla Jaimes Betancourt (University of Bonn)

Tuesday, 17 June 2025, 4:15 PM

## KEYNOTE LECTURE

Prof. Marcy Norton

### “Taking up Company with a Beast”: Familiarization in Mesoamerica, 1400 – 1650

Over the course of millennia Indigenous and European cultures profoundly diverged in how they organized their relationships with other animals. Sixteenth-century European authorities understood these differences in terms of cultural evolution and diabolism: they framed animal husbandry as a mark of civilizational advancement, and, relatedly, viewed many forms of animal subjectivity as potentially demonic. These discourses have seeped into modern scholarship and distorted or even erased the myriad ways Indigenous people interacted with and thought about other-than-human creatures. In particular, scholars have ignored or misunderstood practices of familiarization – the taming of wild animals undertaken for affective, spiritual, and political reasons. In this talk I will explore the entanglement of colonial discourses of domestication and diabolism, and familiarization practices among Nahua, Zapotec, and Mixtec communities before and after Spanish colonization.

**Prof. Marcy Norton** (University of Pennsylvania) is a historian specializing in the early modern Atlantic World, with a focus on Latin America and Spain. Her research explores the impact of colonialism on the Americas and Native America's influence on European modernity. Her work delves into the intersections of environment, embodiment, and thought, evident in her studies of food, drugs, science, and inter-species relationships. Her publications include *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (2008), the articles “Subaltern Technologies and Early Modernity in the Atlantic World” (2017), “Tasting Empire: Chocolate and the Internalization of Mesoamerican Aesthetics” (2006), and the award-winning “The Chicken or the legue: Human-Animal Relationships and the Columbian Exchange” (2015). She also co-edited *Entangled Trajectories: Indigenous and European Histories* (2017) and is the author of *The Tame and the Wild: People and Animals after 1492*, in which she explores human-animal relationships from a broad comparative perspective across the American continent and early modern Europe.



## PANEL I

### The Nature of Enslavement: Human-Animal Entanglements and the Barbadian Gully

Joseph Biggerstaff

This paper presents a deep history of the gully in the island of Barbados. A gully is a local name for a ravine, or erosion landform. During the hurricane season this otherwise dormant recession in the earth's surface can become a courier of destruction by funneling rainwater into the surrounding landscape with devastating force. In the study of American slavery, such areas of “waste” located outside plantations are usually seen as places of refuge and mobility for enslaved people, but in Barbados a more complex relationship between humans and the environment appears in the visual and written record. By drawing from the study of material culture and historical archeology, this paper foregrounds the practices of indigenous Caribbean islanders present in this geographical space prior to colonization. It then points to the ruptures in land use brought colonization and the various resistant responses by enslaved and indigenous islanders. The gully was a disruptive feature of the diverse topography where colonists carved out the first large integrated sugar plantations. Enslaved people lived and worked within the physical world as they reshaped it, both voluntarily and by violent force. During the hurricane season, gullies often flooded and wiped out this human instructure. “Gully land” was nevertheless valuable real estate and used for various industrial processes carried out by enslaved people, such as mining and lime production. This history seeks to understand gullies as inscrutable spaces in plantation societies without reducing them to commons or sites of refuge.



## PANEL I

### “Making kin out of birds”: Mebengokré–Kayapó Becoming with Parrots

Taynã Tagliati

Archaeological evidence suggests that the relationship between humans and parrots in Amazonia is deeply entrenched, with these birds serving both as “companion species” and as sources of symbolic meaning. Ethnographic studies emphasize the relational process of familiarization in human-animal interactions, which encompasses both asymmetrical relationships characterized by control and dependency, as well as love and care.

In this paper, I aim to evaluate contemporary discussions surrounding familiarization and *Psittacidae* (macaws, parrots, and parakeets), focusing on the Mebengokré–Kayapó people. I will illustrate how, in everyday life, the raising of birds as companion species (*õ krit*) and the generation of symbolic meanings are two interwoven processes in everyday life. To support my analysis, I present a case study that highlights the intimate relationship between a parrot and a shaman. This case offers insights into broader structural issues within Mebengokré–Kayapó society, such as the Becoming Macaw dance (*Kube Mút*) and the use of body ornaments made from parts of *Psittacidae* bodies. I propose that classic Amazonian discussions about subjectivity and personhood can be framed in the context of cosmopolitics, particularly in this case, termed *parrolitics*. I argue that understanding these processes as coordinated requires an appreciation of embodied knowledge and the multispecies exchange of bodily fluids and substances.



Tuesday, 17 June 2025

## PANEL I

# A Reciprocal Relationship: Fauna in Tenochtitlan and Its Role in Mexica Worldview

Israel Elizalde Mendez

The ancient city of Tenochtitlan, located in central Mexico, served as the capital of the Mexica Empire from the 14th to the 16th centuries. Its strategic position at the heart of Lake Texcoco provided not only a natural defensive structure but also an ideal environment for obtaining and maintaining animals. These animals served as everyday food sources and played significant roles in ritual practices.

Beyond their practical uses as food or raw materials, animals occupied a critical place within the Mexica worldview. They served as intermediaries between the earthly and sacred worlds. Animals featured in offerings discovered at the Templo Mayor symbolize essential dualities: hot and cold, masculine and feminine, the Sun and the Moon. This animal symbolism underscored a delicate balance between complementary opposites, explaining the natural laws governing the environment and society.

In this presentation, we examine the complex relationship between the Mexica culture and Mesoamerican fauna. Specifically, we analyze the symbolic reasons behind the acquisition, care in captivity, and eventual deposition of various animal species as offerings at the Templo Mayor. These practices formed rich religious and cosmic symbols integral to Mexica beliefs and worldview.



## PANEL II

### *Om dypo*: sobre la monstruosidad del ganado

Felipe Vander Velden

Hay un conjunto muy significativo de datos históricos y etnográficos que destacan las imágenes del ganado, introducido con la invasión europea entre numerosos pueblos nativos de las tierras bajas de Sudamérica, como criaturas monstruosas, horribles o aberrantes. A partir del análisis de relatos sobre los primeros contactos entre los Karitiana (*Yjxa*) - pueblo de lengua Tupi-Arikém del sudoeste de la Amazonia brasileña - y los bueyes exóticos que aparecieron en su territorio (probablemente a finales del siglo XIX), así como de la forma en que estos seres fueron concebidos por la lógica nativa, este artículo investiga esa “monstruosidad del buey”. Se trata de explorar un proceso, al parecer común en la región, de transición ontológica de estos seres a lo largo del tiempo, a medida que se iban haciendo cada vez más rutinarios en la vida cotidiana y en las prácticas sociales, simbólicas e incluso económicas de estos pueblos. Recibidos primero como seres extraños, monstruosos o salvajes, sólo aptos para la matanza o a la huya, se van incorporando paulatinamente y, de cierta manera, se van integrando en los paisajes de las aldeas, aunque a menudo sólo en número bastante reducido (frecuentemente uno o dos animales solamente). Mi hipótesis es que los bueyes parecen conservar algo de esta extrañeza original, funcionando como una especie de comentario sobre los no-indígenas y su ocupación violenta de gran parte de América del Sur, precisamente a través de la expansión de la ganadería y de las explotaciones ganaderas. De este modo, esta monstruosidad original del buey operaría incluso como una especie de presagio de la enorme devastación provocada por la invasión de los no indígenas en los territorios nativos, devastación que, sabemos, todavía no ha cesado. Este posicionamiento simbólico del ganado y de su crianza habría configurado, por lo tanto, diferentes estrategias indígenas para disociar a los humanos de los animales exóticos o foráneos: ganaderos que se niegan a ser ganaderos, o ganaderos que no tienen ganado.





Wednesday, 18 June 2025

## PANEL II

### Human-animal citizenship in an Andean moral economy: rethinking the interdependency between humans and animals in a Bolivian ayllu

Denise Y. Arnold

Many debates about human-animal relations in the Andes draw on ideas about the processes of animal domestication that were derived from models of animal husbandry origins in other parts of the world. More recent alternative models propose that animal domestication took a different pathway in the indigenous societies of the Americas. Ethnographic and archaeological approaches to these questions now focus on the regional terms for these processes. For example, in Aymara language, mutual rearing practices (*uywasiña*) between humans and animals, and acts of making animals into persons (*jaqichaña*), seem to have been directed instead at practices of animal “familiarization,” as in the Amazonian lowlands, rather than through conventional animal husbandry. Other new approaches, within the framework of relational ontologies, examine how the practices of camelid rearing by humans could have been directed at their becoming “companion species,” in Donna Haraway’s terms, in relations of co-personhood with humans. This talk explores instead how wider economic, ecological and political relations in the region came to characterise human-camelid interrelations not just in terms of co-personhood, but also of “co-citizenship.” I explore this possibility in the south-central Andes, where social memory proposes that the Inka past moulded these relations of co-citizenship in a mixed human-animal society. These ideas could contribute to current debates on human-animal relations through the modality of citizenship.



Wednesday, 18 June 2025

## PANEL II

### Mesoamerican Entangled Animal Ontologies: Past to Present Cosmological Embodiment

Miguel Astor-Aguilera

Exploring ancient to contemporary Indigenous affective qualities of ontological difference allows us to comprehend the relationships non-Western populations have with their environment. My ethnoarchaeological methodology emphasizes Mesoamerican ways-of-knowing and how human and other animal interactional practice interrelates humans to non-humans. Maya personhood is intersubjectively categorically surpassed where vital essences are tethered to animals and other “things.” Volition, here, is potentially granted to anything whether that be animals, plants, water, stones, etc., and how an entity behaves, visible or invisible, depends on the body/thing to which it is tethered. Because everything is cosmologically linked, and potentially sentient and power-laden, reciprocity is the name-of-the-game in the Mesoamerican holistic behavioral environment. Variable behavioral context reflects social status awareness and these differences become visible within altruistic versus hierarchical behavior.

Reciprocity anchored reverence is based on etiquette and Indigenous America, North-to-South, shares correspondences that reflect power as inherent in a holistic cosmo-politic. This observation pertains not to symbolic interpretation, but to emic insights gathered within indexical relationships, for example, per our focus, between human and non-human animals that create entangled histories from past-to-present. The Mesoamerican cosmos is dependent on performative actions; however, these acts are neither sacral, nor based on worship, and not supernaturally focused. Maya reciprocity, between human and non-human animals, is based on a social-cosmological significant, and yet practical, dialectic focused on give-and-take relationships: if one makes offerings to forest animals, for example, their strength will take care of you in allowing themselves to be utilized in contexts that may include being hunted.



Wednesday, 18 June 2025

## PANEL II

### Parrots and People in the Lower Paraná River

Gustavo G. Politis

The societies in the Lower Paraná during the Late Holocene, roughly between 2000 BP and the eighteenth century, have been conceived as an archaeological entity called Goya-Malabrigo. Although cultural differences within this entity were recognized, all variants share a basic hydrocentricity pattern, which implies a strong adaptation to the floodplains of the Paraná River. The construction of earth mounds—*cerritos*—for living, burial, and horticultural purposes in these floodplains is a foremost characteristic of Goya-Malabrigo.

These societies maintained cultural continuity - albeit not exempt from change - and their ethnographic expressions received several names from the Spaniards, being the generic *Chaná Timbú* the most common. These people had a village (*aldea*) way of life, used dugout canoes, intensively exploited clay for multiple purposes, and had an economy based on fishing, hunting swamp deer and semi-aquatic mammals (coyote, capibara, etc.), and gathering wild products. A small-scale horticulture (house garden) also complemented their subsistence pattern.

One of the outstanding characteristics of Goya-Malabrigo is the well-manufactured incised and modeled pottery in which appendages of solid modeled bird heads stand out. Among the zoomorphic displayed, parrots are heavily dominant, suggesting the central role of these birds in the cosmology and ontology of Goya-Malabrigo. Several authors have approached the relationship between parrots and humans in this archaeological entity from different perspectives in the last fifteen years (Ottalagano 2013; Cornero 2018; Bonomo, Politis et al. 2021; and Bastourre 2021). In this presentation, I will summarize and discuss these perspectives in the light of new theoretical approaches.



## PANEL III

### Resisting sheep? Imposition and reception of a “new resource” in the Andes in the 16th century

Aliocha Maldavsky

Were the sheep imposed by the Spanish, then adopted by Andean communities, a “new resource” in the Andes in the 16th century? Yet camelids, domesticated for thousands of years, were already providing meat, wool and leather in the region before Europeans arrived. Castilian sheep owe their success mainly to the mining context in Upper Peru in the last third of the 16th century, the main market for the wool and sheep meat industry. It was clearly a policy of imposition, which did not necessarily meet with the approval of the indigenous populations, at least at the beginning. This is borne out by documents reporting on the restitutions, with their insistence on the care and necessity of finding good grazing land. Resistance is confirmed by testimonies from around Lake Titicaca (1567), which explain the low regard in which the population held these new animals. What technical, social and cultural changes did these animals impose on experienced camelid breeders? What did they have to change in their practices, given the needs of European animals and the process of adaptation to the environment that had to be managed? This paper will attempt to answer some of these questions, despite the relative silence of the sources. It is part of an approach to the notion of “ecological imperialism” based on the social and situated history of the management of not entirely natural resources.





Wednesday, 18 June 2025

## PANEL III

### Walking between nature and culture: A tale of how jaguars challenged colonization in the Americas

Ana Paula Motta

Human-animal entanglements can be traced back to the very beginning of our evolutionary journey, regardless of how we define the origins of humanity. Although contemporary perspectives on animals are being challenged, the idea of humans as fundamentally distinct from all other species originates from 18th-century Enlightenment Humanism, which envisioned rationalism as the key driver of universal progress. The emergence of Posthumanism has reshaped the ways in which animals are perceived and conceptualized—yet these perspectives remain largely influenced by a colonial gaze, wherein animals are primarily viewed through economic and symbolic lenses, with little reflection on how human and animal populations co-exist, co-evolve, and become entangled.

For many Indigenous groups, humans and animals share a common origin, as reflected in various Indigenous cosmogonies. One such example is the jaguar (*Panthera onca*), which has long been—and continues to be—seen as walking across worlds, connecting the spiritual and material realms. Jaguar-human encounters have a deep history that transcends temporal, material, and physical boundaries, tracing back as far as six million years in Eurasia. Jaguars have survived some of the most devastating extinction events and have repopulated ecological areas in the aftermath of European colonization of the Americas. It is this capacity to adapt and reinvent themselves that allows us to consider jaguars as defying colonization, a theme that will be the focus of this talk.



Wednesday, 18 June 2025

## PANEL III

### Chakanas and the Interwoven Lives of Humans and Birds: Featherwork, Ritual, and Memory in the Andes

Carla Jaimes Betancourt

The relationship between humans and animals extends beyond subsistence and domestication, shaping cultural identities, ritual practices, and long-distance exchange networks. This presentation explores chakanas, featherwork objects used in Andean warrior dances, as material evidence of human-avian interdependencies in ritual and social contexts. The analysis is based on a comprehensive study of ethnographic and archaeological chakanas from the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore (MUSEF) in Bolivia. The study examines the use of Amazonian bird feathers, including those of macaws, parrots, and trogons, in highland ceremonial attire. These objects function as tangible links between ecological regions, underscoring the historical and ongoing exchanges between the Andes and Amazonia.

Chakanas serve as both a physical representation of birds in human ritual life and a conduit for memory, identity, and power. Their intricate iconography reflects colonial heraldic motifs, repurposed within Indigenous traditions, while their performative role in dances associates them with agricultural cycles and warfare. The chaîne opératoire of their production reveals the persistence of pre-Hispanic featherwork techniques, connecting contemporary artisans to ancestral knowledge. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on human-animal interdependencies in the Americas by analyzing chakanas as objects of multispecies entanglement. The analysis emphasizes the dynamic role of birds, symbolized by their vibrant feathers, in human cultural expressions, particularly in the context of status, territoriality, and resilience across time.

