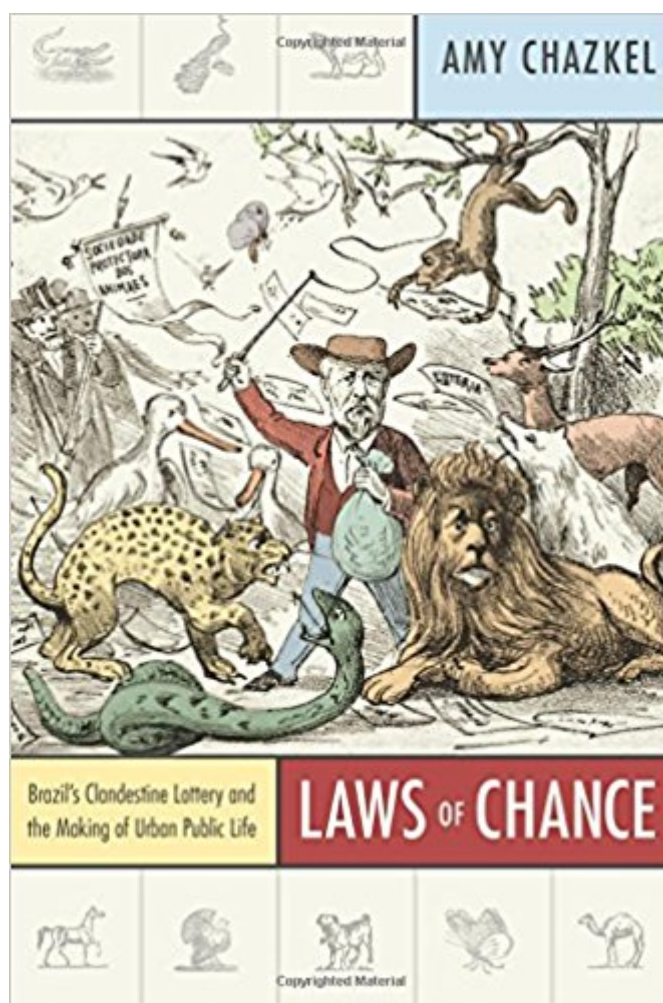


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# Laws Of Chance: Brazil's Clandestine Lottery And The Making Of Urban Public Life (Radical Perspectives)



## Synopsis

The lottery called the jogo do bicho, or “animal game,” originated as a raffle at a zoo in Rio de Janeiro in 1892. During the next decade, it became a cultural phenomenon all over Brazil, where it remains popular today. *Laws of Chance* chronicles the game’s early history, as booking agents, dealers, and players spread throughout Rio and the lottery was outlawed and driven underground. Analyzing the game’s popularity, its persistence despite bouts of state repression, and its sociocultural meanings, Amy Chazkel unearths a rich history of popular participation in urban public life in the decades after the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the establishment of the Brazilian republic in 1889. Contending that the jogo do bicho was a precursor to the massive informal economies that developed later in the twentieth century, she sheds new light on the roots of the informal trade that is central to daily life in urban Latin America. The jogo do bicho operated as a form of unlicensed petty commerce in the vast gray area between the legal and the illegal. Police records show that players and ticket sellers were often arrested but rarely prosecuted. Chazkel argues that the animal game developed in dialogue with the official judicial system. Ticket sellers, corrupt police, and lenient judges worked out a system of everyday justice that would characterize public life in Brazil throughout the twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Focusing on a fascinating place and time, Amy Chazkel casts unprecedented light on the

tangled relations among gambling, market culture, and the modern state. She also tells a lot of good stories. *Laws of Chance* is a delight to read, as well as a major work of imaginative historical scholarship.

• Jackson Lears, author of *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* “Taking the origins and evolution of a seemingly innocuous and commonplace informal lottery—the Brazilian animal game—as a foundation, this study builds concentric rings of information and analysis to explore relationships between law and practice, state and society, formal institutions and everyday life. The result is an illuminating essay on modernity and urban culture more broadly.

• Thomas Holloway, University of California, Davis “Carefully crafted and theoretically informed, Chazkel’s thought-provoking book joins recent works by Brodwyn Fischer and Janice Perlman to deepen our understanding of lower-class life in twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro and the important, if often misinterpreted, relationship between state and society. . . . Her account of the complex interaction between state and society moves us far beyond superficial understandings based on models of repression and resistance and deepens our understanding of Latin America’s urban modernity.

(Hendrik Kraay *The Americas*) “This intriguing study carefully considers the game from its modest beginnings up through its florescence as a virtual “culture industry” in Brazil.

(Andrew Grant Wood *American Historical Review*) “*Laws of Chance* is well written, and a joy to read. Methodologically, Chazkel offers a deft interweaving of social and jurisprudential theory with a detailed examination of historical experience|.

• *Laws of Chance* exposes a fascinating and hitherto unexplored segment of turn-of-the-twentieth-century business and city life in Rio de Janeiro to the light of day. The book also offers an excellent example of the ways in which business and cultural history intersect and can reinforce each other.

(Gail Triner, *Business History Review*) “*Laws of Chance* is that rare monograph that truly delivers on the promise of its subtitle...Chazkel’s study rises to the forefront of the new wave of social history that has succeeded in pushing well beyond the tired binaries of repression/resistance and agency/subjugation.

• (Zephyr Frank *Journal of Social History*) “*Laws of Chance* is well-written and free of jargon, effectively weaving description and analysis with great historical imagination and theoretical relevance. The book is appropriate for undergraduate and graduate courses focusing on urban studies, modern Latin American state-society relations, postabolition citizenship, and the development of informal economies. Its importance to all these fields reflects how the book, by historicizing the *jogo do bicho* and the ambiguous, informal world it inhabited, advances important disciplinary and interdisciplinary arguments about extralegality, citizenship, and urban development.

(Patricia Acerbi

Hispanic American Historical Review)"Chazkel's book is insightful and well crafted, providing an in-depth look at one of the practices most commonly associated with the origins of Brazil's current corruption." (Manuel Balan Latin American Research Review)

"Amy Chazkel is Associate Professor of History at the City University of New York, Queens College and the Graduate Center."

The Jogo do Bicho, a number game based on animal figures, has often been described as Brazil's national vice. It is part of the local urban landscape, just as pachinko defines Japan's popular culture or PMU is a component of Parisian café life. The difference is that whereas pachinko parlors and PMU counters operate under the law, the Jogo do Bicho is a clandestine lottery that takes place in the shadow of the informal economy. Born on the outskirts of the zoo in Rio de Janeiro around 1890, it has thrived in a gray area between the legal and the illegal, and has been pushed into clandestinity by police repression. Understanding how this great partake between the lawful and the unlawful was made, and chronicling Brazilian citizen's engagement with the state by way of an illegal activity, is the subject of *Laws of Chance*, a fine piece of scholarship published in the Radical History Review Book Series at Duke University Press. The Jogo do Bicho has already attracted quite a deal of scholarly interest. Rudyard Kipling, visiting Rio in the 1920s, wrote of seeing bookies wandering the streets carrying placards with colorful pictures of animals. Roger Caillois, a French public intellectual, showed that the game was bound to a system of forecasting the future through dream interpretation, with its own code, classics, and expert interpreters. Gilberto Freyre, probably the most famous of all Brazilian sociologists, described the Jogo do Bicho as a holdover from Brazil's indigenous and African totemic past. A common tendency of these authors has been to link the game to irrational forces: dream, superstition, fetishism, paganism. The Jogo do Bicho is seen either as a relic of the past or as a way by which tradition encrusts itself upon the modern. By contrast, Amy Chazkel shows the Jogo do Bicho as a thoroughly modern and rational phenomenon. It became popular at just the moment urbanization and consumer capitalism took hold, and must be interpreted as the product of modernity rather than a refuge from it. It is based on numbers, with elaborate combinations that require the skills of a mathematician as much as the intuition of a dream interpreter. It is part of the money economy, and can be seen as an alternative to saving or insuring against future events. More generally, Amy Chazkel distances herself from macro explanations such as invocations to culture, psychology, societal laws, or tradition. To invoke such determining factors is to lose the specificity of historical causality. The Jogo do Bicho has to be

studied at close range, without imposing anachronistic analytical categories, and by paying attention to the few traces the game left in the archives: police records of the arrests of buyers and sellers, judicial cases when these convicts were brought to justice, references to the game in popular culture and in legislation. Most commentators on Brazilian culture have marveled at the reliability of the clandestine lottery. “In the Jogo do Bicho, what’s written down counts,” says a local proverb, and the game has sometimes been described as Brazil’s only reliable institution. In his classic work on the sociology of games and play, Roger Caillois comments on the “scrupulous honesty” of the bicheiro, the lottery dealer. Writing in the late 1930s, Stefan Zweig also testified to the reliability of these underworld figures: “In order to avoid the police checking up on the jogo do bicho they played on agreement. The bookmaker didn’t supply his clients with tickets, but he has never been known not to pay up.” Amy Chazkel exposes the scrupulous honesty of the bicheiro as part truth and part fiction. The lottery dealer lived by his word: no legal recourse was available if he refused to pay for the winning number. The internal logic of the game and its code of ethics surpassed, in the eyes of ordinary Brazilians, the legitimacy and reliability of the judicial system that censured it. But there were cases where the bicheiro and the banqueiro who backed him refused to pay, either due to turf wars and petty infighting, or because a fortuitous event (say, the death of the elephant in the zoo) had induced a large number of ticket buyers to play the winning animal. Popular writings on the Jogo do Bicho have long underscored its longevity and popularity in the face of police repression. For sociologists of deviance, it is the law that creates crime. The Jogo do Bicho did not begin as a unitary, distinct practice operating outside the law. Its criminalization brought it into existence by both joining disparate, informal lotteries under a single criminal nomenclature and creating an illicit source of income for police through paybacks and corruption. Yet reversing the causal arrow between criminality and policing does not give full justice to the way the Jogo do Bicho operated. It posits the existence of a clear dividing line between the legal and the illegal, whereas this distinction is precisely the result of negotiated compromises and mutual encroachments. According to Amy Chazkel, “law is, in both form and function, an integral part of society, not something outside it.” She uses the informal lottery as an example of how law and society constitute and interact with each other. Likewise, state and state actors have to be included in the realm of the informal and unofficial which they contribute to create and sustain. The Baron de Drummond is commonly credited with creating the game as a marketing tool for promoting the zoological garden that he had created in the new urban settlement of Vila Isabel at the periphery of Rio de Janeiro. Drummond requested a concession from the city

government to operate a game that, it was hoped, would raise the zoo out of insolvency without depleting the city's coffers. Every ticket to the zoo bore the image of an animal, and early each day the baron himself would randomly select one of the twenty-five animals printed on the tickets.

Tickets were soon being sold by independent bookmakers or

“bicheiros” to those who hadn't even visited the zoo. By 1895 lottery “bankers, or banqueiros, unaffiliated with Drummond were taking bets of their own on the outcome of the drawing at the zoo and paying winners out of their own earnings. It did not take authorities long to notice the Jogo do Bicho and remark on its patent illegality. Within months, the municipal government made its first attempt to shut down the game. The animal lottery simply shifted to a new habitat in the city centre, an environment in which it has thrived ever since. Once dissociated from the zoo, it took the outcome of the licit lottery to determine the winning number associated with one of the twenty-five animal series. Jogo do Bicho tickets began to appear among the merchandise offered for sale in kiosks that sold snacks and coffee on street corners. The “animal game” had escaped from the zoo, and would develop in conjunction with police repression and legal jurisdiction. City authorities who banned the game stated that “games of chance depending upon luck... are prohibited in all times in Roman law and in our own Penal Code.” Yet entrepreneurs like Drummond who set up lotteries at first operated legally, and there was a National Lottery that brought revenue to the public coffers. Indeed the Jogo do Bicho challenged the legal lottery concessionaires with unwanted competition, and they actively petitioned the city government to suppress it. It was only in 1946 that all forms of gambling in Brazil were legally banned, after repression had taken an increasingly moralistic tone. It is no coincidence that the Jogo do Bicho emerged amid Rio's social upheavals and alteration in its urban environment in the early First Republic, at just the moment it became urgent to demarcate the formal from the informal in myriad realms of urban society. The state attempted to modernize the city by signing concession contracts with large companies to provide the city with public work and infrastructure, including docks, public lighting and other utilities, roads, and civil construction, as well as entertainment and retail commerce. Corruption occurred regularly not only in determining who could win contracts and sinecures, but also in the complicity of public officials with monopoly-seeking concessionaires wishing to suppress competition by making spurious accusations of illegal practices. Amy Chazkel describes this privatization of urban space as a process of enclosure akin to the “enclosure of the commons” that marked the transition from medieval agrarian societies to modern capitalist economies. Alternatively, she uses the expression

“criminalization of everyday life” to describe how some parts of the public domain formerly outside the state’s purview came to be associated with public disorder and criminal activity. Jogo de Bicho dealers, unlicensed street vendors, and other participants in Rio’s nascent informal economy were entangled in a struggle over de facto rights and access to resources and became part of the way both the state and the market operated. There was a subtext of moral panic behind urban modernizers’ battle cry of “Ordem e Progresso”. Practices common in the poor and working classes such as gambling, vagrancy, begging, prostitution, and drinking, as well as the martial art called capoeira, were criminalized as part of the authoritarian politics of “enlightened intolerance” that accompanied urban modernization. The issue of public order in Rio and other cities was made more pressing by the explosive growth of the urban population and the flood of immigrants from southern Europe, as well as by racial anxieties following the abolition of slavery. The criminalization of the Jogo do Bicho was always ambivalent and contested. Compelling evidence shows a lack of consensus within Brazilian society as to whether the state should permit and regulate the game or outlaw it and punish its participants as criminals. During the period from the game’s origin to around 1917 it appears that virtually no one who was arrested for playing the Jogo do Bicho was ever convicted, fined, or handed a prison sentence. The unusually high rate of acquittal in cases of illicit gambling resulted from the wide discretionary power judges and police exercised, but also from the shared belief that “this was only a game”. Above all, men and women of all socioeconomic backgrounds showed their approval of the game simply by buying and selling chances to win. It doesn’t mean the law was ineffective: it protected the interests of the legal lottery concessionaires, and it gave the police a blanket authorization to intrude into the lives of the working classes. For the poor urban population, most daily interactions with the state occurred at the level of the street police. The policeman was, in effect, the state, and his authority to control and arrest manifested the state’s coercive power over the everyday life of citizens. I read *Laws of Chance* as part of a survey of modern anthropological writings, many of which are published by Duke University Press. I would recommend it not only to historians of Brazil and Latin America, but also to anthropologists or sociologists working on contemporary terrains and to scholars engaged in critical studies. This book is proof that you can conduct anthropological work without resorting to participant observation. Familiarity with the archive and especially with menial, obscure texts and artefacts that have so far escaped the purview of historians gives a unique perspective into the life-world of ordinary people. Although the topic of a clandestine lottery in early twentieth-century Brazil may

appear as mundane and recondite, it allows for a gripping narrative, full of twists and turns as well as theoretical developments. The informal, the illegal and the marginal appear not as residues of a bygone era that are bound to disappear with the advent of the modern economy, but as constitutive concepts that stand at the center of our modernity. The history of the Jogo do Bicho brings a fresh view on the relationship between the state and society in Brazil in the first decades of the twentieth century. As a reader comments, it is a delight to read, as well as a major work of imaginative historical scholarship.

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