

Photo Essay

Cockfighting in Venezuela

Capitalist Paroxysm within a State Controlled Economy

Henry Moncrieff

Central University of Venezuela

In 2014 in Guasipati, an agricultural and cattle town in Southeastern Venezuela, I witnessed a group of men of all generations who staged themselves through the orgasmic rite of cockfights. In Geertz's famous ethnography of cockfighting in Bali, the 'irrationality' of betting appears at first as surprising. But cockfighting is a game that dramatizes status and tests group solidarity, it is a measure of moral import and of meaning. This photographic record of masculinities at play in cockfighting builds on Geertz' interpretation. The images were taken in the *gallera* (cockpit) of Guasipati during a clandestine night. It is here that the participating men engage in a form of capitalist communication that directly questions the Bolivarian Revolution. Many are workers within socialist enterprises, and they tremendously enjoy this illegal and transgressive activity. Within this space, the patterns of exchange become competitive and inscribed in subterranean capitalist circuits, evoking a symbolism of masculine power disputes (who is a man and who not) vis-à-vis the prohibitions of socialism. It is here that illegal enrichment that serves as a source and mark of status within the state controlled economy is effectively played out. Behind the individual and collective euphoria seen in the photographs, there are even more euphoric social tensions of betting and status at work.

Geertz, C (1972) 'Deep Play: notes on the Balinese cockfight', *Daedalus* 101(1): 1-37.

Henry Moncrieff is a social anthropologist, documentary photographer and researcher affiliated with the Social Research Center CISOR (Venezuela) and the Central University of Venezuela. He holds a Master's Degree in Social Sciences from the Autonomous University of the State of Morelos (Mexico). He has published on gang violence and organized crime in Venezuela and Mexico, on social exclusion, armed conflicts, masculinities and visual research methods. Contacting author: henrymoncrieff@gmail.com



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Antonio (45) is an agricultural worker. He takes care of the roosters of the rich men of the sector.



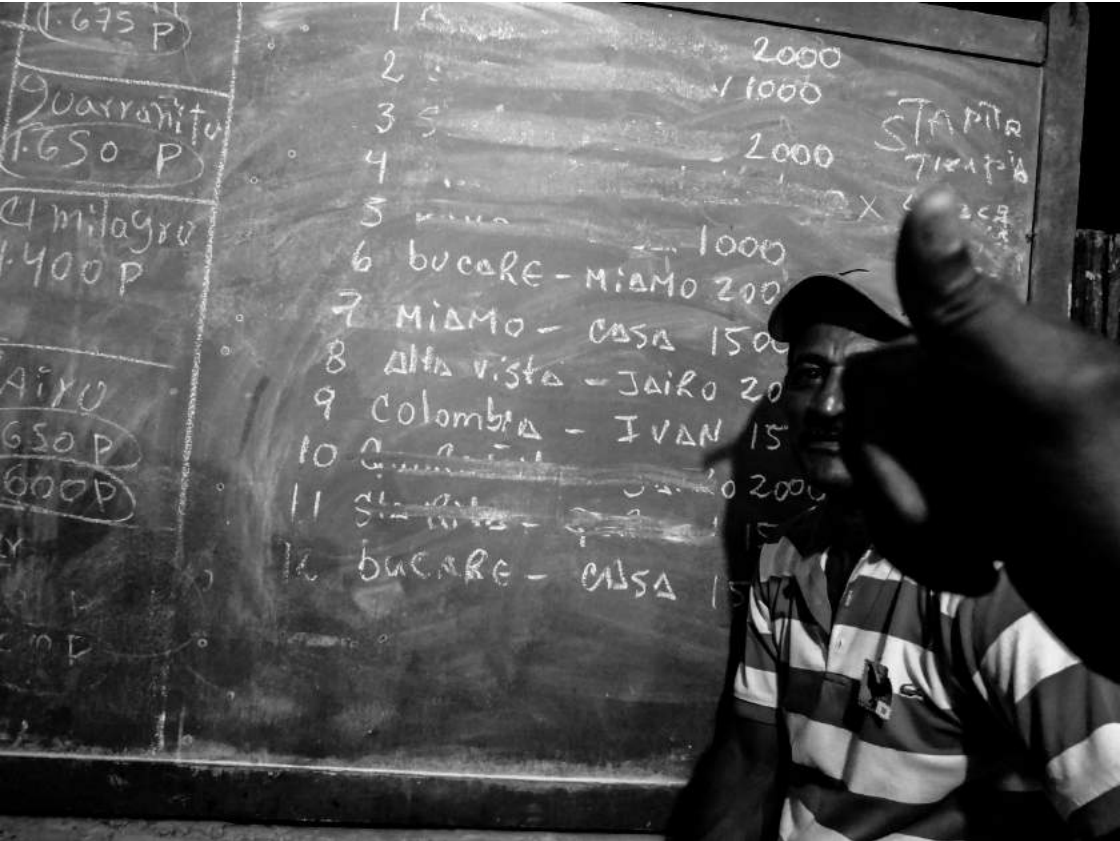
Cruz (51) has been a passionate cock player since he was fifteen. In the photograph he reveals his religious relationship to his cock.



**Andrés (17) wishes his cock good luck before the fight
with Cruz's Rooster.**



Luis (28) shows the spurs of the cocks ready for the fights.



Santiago (45) has been a bookmaker at cockfighting events since he was fifteen years old.



Manly passions, affects and emotions inside the cockpit.



Rómulo (45) is a powerful food trafficker between Venezuela and Brazil. He is whiskey lover, who is famous because his bets are the highest.



Everyone's eyes are on the fighting roosters.



A man beside himself while his cock dies.



Collective celebration of victory.