

# The Amazonian Cowboy's Ties

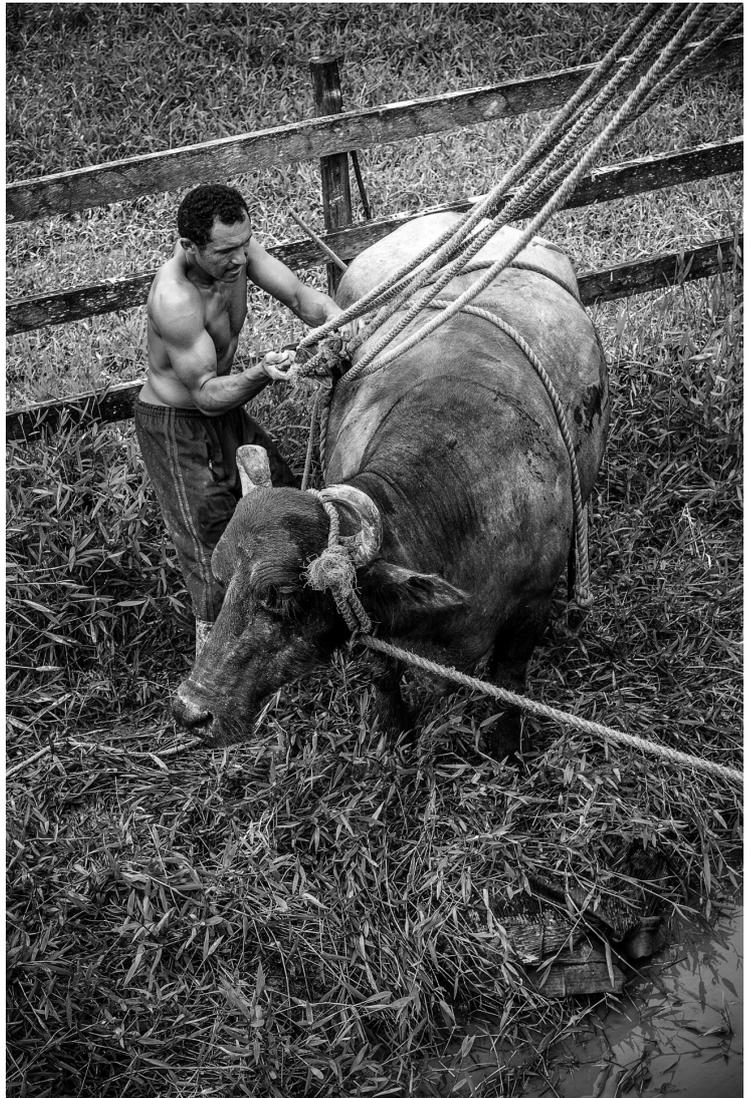
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This essay seeks to portray the different uses of the lasso in a cattle breeding context. The farms are located alongside the Araguari River, in the north-eastern part of the state of Amapá (Stoeckli, 2015). The region is marked by floodplains that are periodically flooded at certain times of the year and turn into large dry fields at others. These characteristics of the environment, added to the behaviour of the buffalo, which move as groups in search of better pastures, define the activities of the cowboys. Thus, they are daily going around different parts of the fields in order to search for and look after the cattle. Among the various technical elements that take part in the activity (Ingold, 2000), the Amazonian cowboys usually highlight the lasso as the most essential one. It is part of the cowboy's life even in the simplest activities in relation to the buffalo and horses. Thus, the lasso is used several times throughout the day of the cowboy, either to contain, to approximate, or even to control the distance of a buffalo or horse. Noteworthy, while it can keep the animals at a distance, it also connects the cowboy to the horse and the buffalo. This connection can be itself a potential danger to humans. Thus, the lasso can be understood as a form of extension of the motor action and strength of the cowboy, as well as the set formed by the cowboy and his horse. Similarly, the possibilities of action vary greatly whether the cowboy is mounted or on foot. The same can be said if the animals to be caught is cornered or in the open fields. Lastly, there is a great deal of difference between tamed animals and wilder ones.



**Photo 1**

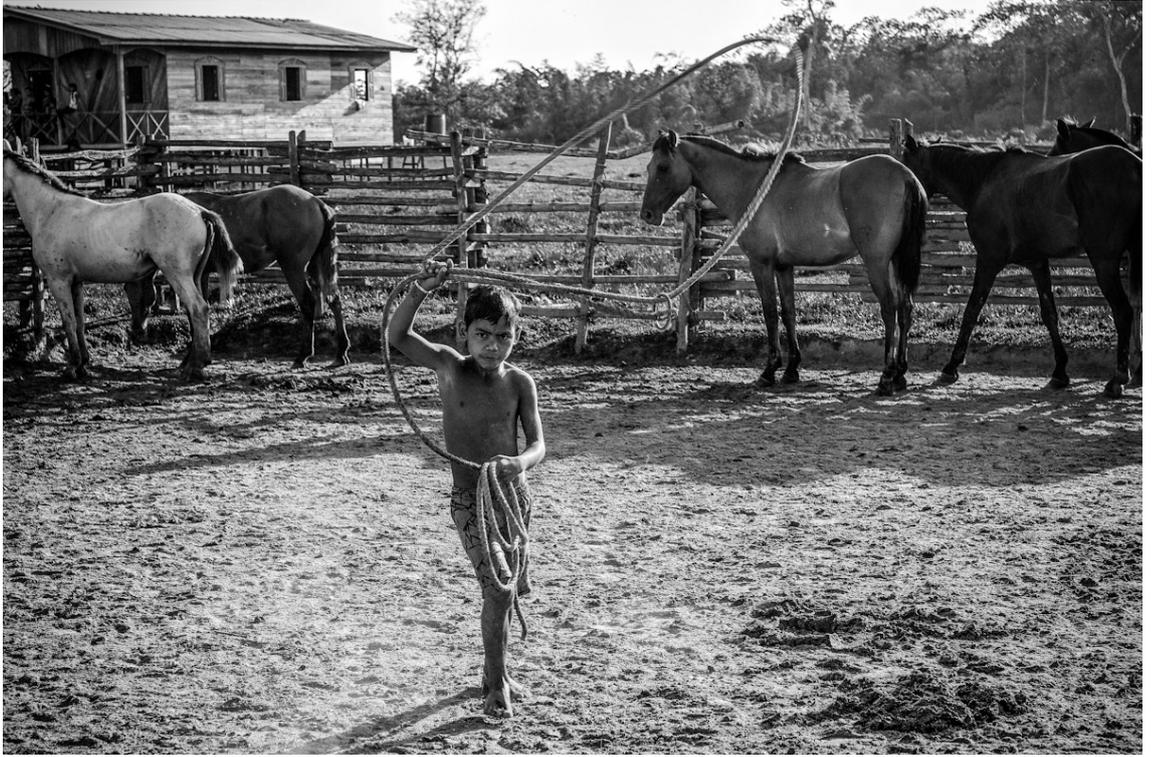


**Photo 2**



**Photo 3**

Photos 1 to 3 - Usually a rope is about 30 meters long and is braided by the cowboys themselves using the nylon of a thicker industrial rope. When dismounted and within a fenced area, the cowboy seeks to position himself in the middle of the group of animals, who move to avoid him and gradually lose their herd formation. He then rotates his lasso a few times before it and capturing the animal. In photo 1, the occasion was the boarding of buffalo on to a ferry, destined for slaughter. In the second picture, the cowboy tied a buffalo, preparing it to be hoisted into the raft. Photo 3 shows a milking situation inside a corral when the cow is tied so as not to struggle.



**Photo 4**



**Photo 5**

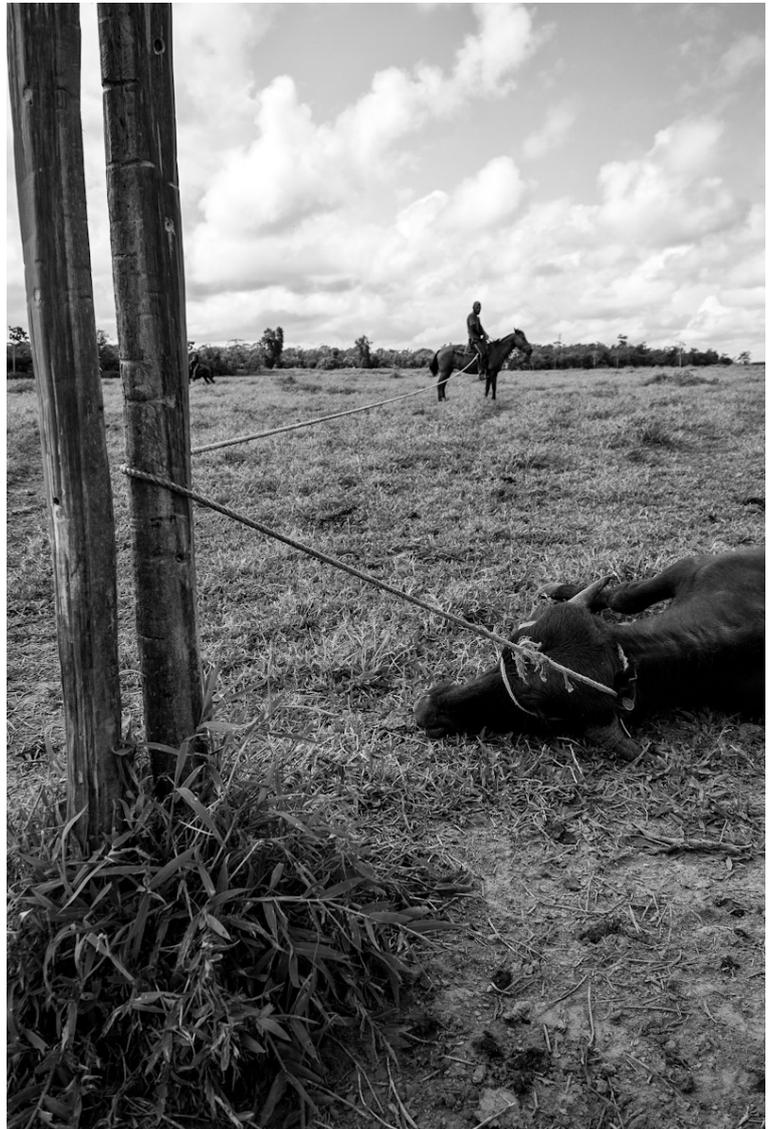


**Photo 6**

Photos 4 to 6 - When cowboys are asked how they have learned their skills, they often answer that they learned them as children by mimicking the movement of adults and practicing with smaller ties in corrals. The first exercises are to catch still objects, such as fences, or small animals. Gradually they move on to catch larger animals. Apart from the rope, Amazonian cowboys also need horses to work with cattle. The process of taming a horse is time consuming and laborious. Thus, the cowboys work with different types of ties to tame the animals.



**Photo 7**



**Photo 8**

Photos 7 and 8 - Some actions with younger buffalo, such as vaccinations and castrations, are performed in the open rather than in corrals. The dynamic is to pre-assemble the animals and group them into a large but enclosed area. Groups of two or three horse-riding cowboys are formed to pursue the cattle. They start by selecting a calf to set it apart from the others. When detached from the group, the calf runs across the field and the cowboys begin their chase on horseback. Sometimes the calf gets some advantage by making a sudden turn or braking, but the result inevitably is that the calf has no chance against the coordinated pursuit of cowboys and their horses, who chase the calves in the open field until they tire. Usually one cowboy laces the calf by its neck or horns, while the other laces it by its legs. Finally, the young buffalo is knocked down and, exhausted, offers little resistance to the cowboy who will vaccinate him.



**Photo 9**

Photo 9 - An “ox horse”, which is a buffalo selected and trained for daily work with the cowboy, mainly as a pack animal. The cowboys explain that every farm should have an ox horse for everyday tasks. The driving techniques of a trained horse ox use rings and ropes that pass through its muzzle, face and horns. For this reason, cowboys do not usually cut the horns of these animals, keeping them with what some call their “weapons.”

## References

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- INGOLD, Tim. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, dwelling and skill*. London: Routledge.

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