

Foreword for *Folia Primatologica* Special Issue: Ethnographic Approaches in Primatology

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Abstract

The shared evolutionary histories and anatomical similarities between humans and nonhuman primates create dynamic interconnections between these alloprimates. In this foreword to *Folia Primatologica*'s special issue on "Ethnographic Approaches in Primatology," we review the ethnographic method and existing literature at the intersection of primatology and ethnography. We summarize, compare, and contrast the five contributions to this special issue to highlight why the human-nonhuman primate interface is a compelling area to investigate via ethnographic approaches and to encourage increased incorporation of ethnography into the discipline of primatology.

Ethnography is a valuable and increasingly popular tool with its use no longer limited to anthropological practitioners investigating traditional, non-Western peoples. Scholars from many disciplines now use ethnographic methods to investigate all members of our globalised world, including non-humans. As our closest living relatives, non-human primates (hereafter "primates") are compelling subjects and thus appear in a range of contexts within ethnographic investigations. The goal of this special issue is to highlight the trajectory of research at the intersection of primatology and ethnography and to illustrate the importance of ethnographic methods for the advancement of primatology as a discipline.

The Ethnographic Method

Ethnography is an anthropological method used to formulate patterns that enable others to understand human actions within the context of a specific time and place [Fife, 2005]. It arose in the West as way of obtaining knowledge about other, usually non-Western, cultures [Gobo, 2008]. Ethnographic research is characterised by extended, on-site research designed to gather information about people's lives through participating in their daily activities, listening, watching, and asking questions [Hammersley and Atkinson, 2003]. Key interlocutors from the community often assist ethnographers by introducing them to others and helping them become familiar with the community's basic shared cultural values [Gobo, 2008]. Methodological tools such as surveys, interviews, mapping, photography/filming, and detailed field notes can be used to quantify and qualify the ethnographer's observations about what it means to be a member of a particular cultural group. During analysis, ethnographers often follow an iterative grounded (i.e. grounded theory) approach, where they identify themes as they emerge from the data as opposed to formulating a hypothesis beforehand as happens in quantitative, hypothesis-driven research [Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lingard *et al.*, 2008].

This way of collecting and analysing data can be confusing and uncomfortable for natural scientists that are trained to seek objectivity and replicability in their results. Recently, however, scholars have begun to demystify the ethnographic method for quantitative scientists [Moon and Blackman, 2014; Setchell *et al.*, 2017] and highlight the value of dualistic quantitative and qualitative investigations [Rust *et al.*, 2017]. The ethnographic method is now wide-ranging and has varied associations and traditions within different discipline [Taylor, 2002]. It has been used by education practitioners, human geographers, sociologists, and psychologists among others [Knight, 2017]. Most relevant to a primatological audience is the

way that ethnographic engagement with local people can provide insight into the ontology and heterogeneity of their human-animal relations [Goldman *et al.*, 2010]. Such relations differ considerably across societies and among cultural contexts within societies [Milton, 2000; Watson and Huntington, 2008]. Ethnographic methods can be used to assess and expose complex, multi-faceted, and sometimes contentious environmental issues, such as those surrounding human-wildlife coexistence, and give a voice to people who are not normally heard [Knight, 2000; Pratt *et al.*, 2004; Jalais, 2010; Perlmutter, 2015].

Primates in Ethnographies and Ethnographic Approaches in Primatology

Within the ethnographic literature, primates range in consideration from peripheral members of the broader environment to integral components of coproduced ecologies. Because ethnographic research is, historically, an anthropological method, early work at the intersection of ethnography and primatology comes from sociocultural anthropologists studying peoples living within primate range areas. For example, primates feature prominently in ethnographic investigations of the subsistence patterns and symbolism of indigenous lowland South American groups [Cormier, 2006]. While cautious not to over-generalise the experiences of such a diverse array of populations, Cormier (2006) shows how in this geographic region, differences in primates' anatomical and behavioural characteristics affect their likelihood of being hunted or the subject of avoidances or taboos. In addition, she highlights the ways that "monkeyness" often serves as a reference point for defining humanity in Amazonia and beyond; primates can accentuate the continuity between humanity and animality or be used to define the line between nature and culture (Cormier 2006).

Primates' appearance in ethnographic investigations is also part of broader trends addressing the importance of human-animal relationships within sociocultural anthropology and multispecies ethnography [Shanklin, 1985; Mullin, 1999; Knight, 2000; Cassidy and Mullin, 2007; Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; Keil, 2016]. For example, Japanese macaques and their performance with "special status people" (outcastes, or people regulated to a marginal position in society) have served to define what it means to be human and what it means to be Japanese and how these perceptions have changed over time [Ohnuki-Tierney, 1987; 1993]. As part of the "species turn" in anthropology, recent ethnographies that include animals have shifted away from using human-animal relationships merely as a means to investigate other aspects of human societies, and toward understanding the human as emergent (i.e. "becoming") through its relations with other agentive beings [Ogden *et al.*, 2013]. Investigations of the interconnected lives of people and macaques at Balinese temples [Fuentes, 2010] and hunter-hunted naturecultures in the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Reserve in the Central African Republic [Jost-Robinson and Remis, 2014; Remis and Jost-Robinson, 2017] exemplify primatology's contribution to multispecies ethnography.

In 1997, sociocultural anthropologist Leslie Sponsel coined a term for a new, distinct line of research focused on the relationships between humans and primates: ethoprimateology [Sponsel, 1997]. Ethoprimateology has recently been defined as: "the combining of primatological and anthropological practice and the viewing of humans and primates as living in integrated and shared ecological and social spaces," (Fuentes 2012: 101). Despite the origin of the field and its broad definition, most individuals who self-define as "ethoprimateologists" are primatologists trained in the biological sciences. As a result, and with some exceptions [Fuentes, 2012; Jost-Robinson and Remis, 2014; Malone *et al.*, 2014; Dore, Under review], most research classified as "ethoprimateology" is not heavily

ethnographic [Loudon *et al.*, 2006; Riley, 2007b; Nyanganji *et al.*, 2010; Papworth *et al.*, 2013]. Many “ethnoprimateologists” are studying the people who interface with primates with the same tools they use to study primates, despite the fact that we are able to gather so much more information on our conspecifics. Ethnographic data collection requires *familiarisation time* (in primatological terms, *habituation time*), but also an attempt to capture the “inner dimension of intentionality” in order to understand “the *meaning* of the behaviour observed along with the physical behaviour itself” (Knight 2017: 172).

Our broad consideration of “ethnographic approaches in primatology” enables us to incorporate historical and current primatological research that includes social science or qualitative methods but is not “ethnographic” or “ethnoprimateological” *per se*. Social science methods such as questionnaires and interviews have a long history in the discipline of primatology and play a significant role in the increase in research conducted at the interface of primatology and ethnography. For example, there is a large body of literature evaluating local human perceptions of primates, particularly in areas of resource overlap and where primates consume farmers’ crops [Naughton-Treves, 1996; Gillingham and Lee, 2003; Lee and Priston, 2005; Riley, 2007a]. This work has highlighted the diverse array of factors that contribute to local peoples’ tolerance, or lack thereof, of their primate neighbours [Strum, 1987; Hill, 2004; 2005; Lee, 2010; Hill and Webber, 2010; Riley and Priston, 2010] as well as the extent to which local attitudes match primate behaviours [Naughton-Treves, 1996; Hill, 1997; Siex and Struhsaker, 1999; Arlet and Molleman, 2010; Spagnoletti *et al.*, 2016]. This research has alerted us to move away from “top down” approaches to “conflict” management and advocates for strategies that take local attitudes seriously.

The mixed-methods “biosocial approach,” which incorporates natural and social science perspectives [Ingold and Palsson, 2013; Hill *et al.*, 2017], provides additional evidence of the benefits of ethnographic approaches in primatology. Recently, Setchell *et al.* (2017) use three case studies to illustrate how ethnographic data are essential contributors to detangling the complex issues involved in primate conservation. Data on institutional and social vulnerability to crop-foraging primates, why humans engage in risky behaviours such as seeking close proximity to free-ranging gorillas, and the benefits of engaging local people in a conservation project (see Waters *et al.* this issue) could only be obtained via the incorporation of ethnographic theory, methods, and analysis [Setchell *et al.*, 2017].

Contributions to this Special Issue

This brief history of the interconnections between primatological and ethnographic research shows that these disciplines significantly benefit from the integration of each other’s analytical frameworks. Despite this fact, publishing ethnographic data in primatological and other “hard science” journals can be challenging, with some reviewers rejecting papers because they perceive the data to be “anecdotal” or not rigorously collected and statistically analysed, and thus inferior to quantitative data. Negative reviews and rejections lead to the exclusion of rich sources of qualitative data by investigators, meaning that important information for primate conservationists and managers goes unpublished and unseen. In this special issue we wanted to provide a “safe space” for scholars who are working with ethnographic methods and analysis to encourage them to publish. The contributions to this special issue, from 23 authors with data from five primate range countries, exemplify the future potential of this interdisciplinary research trajectory. In what follows, we briefly

summarise these papers and the themes that emerged within and between them as we conducted and reflected upon the editorial process.

Two main themes run prominently through every paper in this special issue: primates' liminal (neither completely animal nor human), boundary-crossing, anomalous status and how ethnographic approaches enable primatologists to better understand the nuances of these complex human-primate relations. In Morocco, despite the fact that Barbary macaques (*Macaca sylvanus*) are attributed anthropomorphic characteristics and are considered by some to be "degraded humans," Waters *et al.* find that the animals do not occupy an important position in society. The conservationists use Moroccan shepherds' relatively ambivalent perception of these animals to their advantage, as it enables them to play a role in the *development* of a positive and protective cultural construction of the animals among shepherds. In Gibraltar, Radford *et al.* show how efforts to manage the Barbary macaque population are complicated by the animals' liminal status and the diverse local cultural conceptualisations that exist on the part of locals (who simultaneously view the animals with pride and mistrust). Thach *et al.* show how slow loris' (genus *Nycticebus*) human-like, venomous, and medicinally important status complicates its place in myth and folklore both within Vietnam and across Asia, and explain how this complexity affects local peoples' willingness to engage in the trade of this exotic species. In Madagascar, the human-lemur divide blurs when people describe the animals and sometimes even when they describe humans, and this factor may play a role in the association between lemur pet ownership and wealth/status. Finally, in St. Kitts, vervet monkeys' (*Cercopithecus aethiops sabaesus*) physical and conceptual boundary-crossing means that farmers attribute them identities normally reserved for humans but negatively associate their increased crop damages and presence in

agricultural areas with national economic shifts away from agriculture. This complexity makes it challenging for the residents of this small island to reach a consensus with regard to the monkeys' fate. All of these papers highlight the importance of understanding the *meaning* of primates for people in addition to documenting the physical interconnections between these two parties (i.e. in the wild, in the garden, for sale at the market, or on a farm).

While ethnographic approaches facilitated the collection and analysis of all of these data, variation exists with regard to the specific data collection techniques employed by the authors and their research areas of interest. While four of the five papers used a grounded theory approach to the data collected, Waters *et al.* and Dore *et al.* used the techniques of participant observation and interviews, living alongside Moroccan and Kittitian people for over a year. Thach *et al.* obtained data via multiple techniques: questionnaire-based, open-ended interviews; loosely structured, in-depth key informant interviews; focus groups with participatory mapping; and thematic analysis, while Radford *et al.* conducted discourse analysis via readily available online data. While Reuter *et al.*'s analysis draws heavily from quantitative data, they highlight how unstructured interviews and participant observation are needed to expose the nuanced relationship between lemur pet ownership and the owner's wealth or status.

This broad array of techniques highlights the multiple ways in which qualitative data can be obtained and the variation in the amount of time required (or not required) collecting data in the field. These papers also reveal how less time-consuming and cost-effective techniques, such as questionnaire-based interviews and online data, can answer important questions in and of themselves, contribute to data collected via participation, and also serve as a starting point for constructing hypotheses for future research. Our collective scholarship

also illustrates how ethnographic and qualitative data can be used to advance many different, non-mutually-exclusive research approaches, with theoretical perspectives from sociology (Dore *et al.*), sociocultural anthropology (each paper), ethnoprimateology (Waters *et al.*; Radford *et al.*; Thach *et al.*; Dore *et al.*), and multispecies ethnography (Waters *et al.*; Thach *et al.*) represented among the contributions.

Another theme among the papers in this special issue is the way that ethnographic and qualitative data force us to move away from simple categorisations and dichotomies in humans' relations with other animals. Primates (and other beings) are not viewed simply as "good" or "bad" [Dore *et al.*; Waters *et al.*]; "frustrating" or "worthy of protection" (Radford *et al.*); "pets" or "not pets" (Reuter *et al.*) "food" or "not food" (Dore *et al.*; Thach *et al.*); "medicinal" or "not medicinal" [Thach *et al.*] "commensal," "symbiotic," or "pathogenic" [Radford *et al.*]; "endemic" or "invasive" [Radford *et al.*; Dore *et al.*]. While natural scientists often impose rigid categories such as these in their hypotheses and then collect data to support or deny their existence or influence, ethnographers and other social scientists let the data tell the story and embrace the messiness that is the spectrum of human cultural conceptualisations. Ethnographic methods and analyses enable primatologists to make sense of behaviours that defy Western societies' acceptable forms of human-primate relations, such as how primates can be viewed as human-like or kin but also killed without taboo (Waters *et al.*; Dore *et al.*), mistrusted or considered bad luck (Radford *et al.*; Dore *et al.*; Thach *et al.*), kept as pets (Reuter *et al.*), sold at market (Thatch *et al.*), or consumed (Dore *et al.*; Thach *et al.*).

The ethnographic and qualitative data presented in this special issue also encourage primatologists to spread out from the local and consider all of the stakeholders involved in

constructing dynamic human-primate relations. These contributions expose how global forces such as conservationism (Waters *et al.*; Radford *et al.*), tourism (Dore *et al.*; Radford *et al.*) and the pet trade (Thach *et al.*; Reuter *et al.*) directly and indirectly impact local ontologies of primates. Understanding these forces requires a consideration of all of the players involved, including the diversity of perceptions that can exist within and between groups locally as well as the role of the state, and foreign players such as tourists, animal rights activists, and potential primate pet owners.

Finally, the papers in this issue of *Folia Primatologica* contribute additional evidence that ethnographic research is essential for establishing self-sustainable and locally run primate conservation programmes (Waters *et al.*; Thach *et al.*; Reuter *et al.*), but also show how these approaches are equally relevant and important with regard to managing “problematic” human-primate entanglements (Radford *et al.*; Dore *et al.*). There is no question that diverse and creative approaches to primate conservation are needed given the endangered status of numerous primate species. The inclusion of qualitative methodologies not only provides insight into the interconnections between humans and primates, but also illustrates the many ways humans are potentially supportive of wild primate populations. Our incorporation of human perceptions’ of translocated primate populations that are not in need of conservation is equally important, however, as it pushes primatologists to move away from the overly simplistic human-animal and nature-culture dichotomies that dominate the conservation literature [Sousa *et al.*, 2017; Dore, Under review]. Given the versatility of the ethnographic methods we have described, we have shown how ethnography is an important tool for a broad spectrum of practitioners and

researchers to use in situations where dichotomies and reductionist approaches have limited application in the face of increasing local and global challenges.

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