Ethics and Animal Ethnography Working Paper

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Fall 2020
(in collaboration with a working group convened with support from the
Brooks Institute for Animal Rights Law and Policy*)

In order to design and conduct ethical research with animals, the animals should be recognized as subjects and as co-participants in the project of knowledge production. This is important both because it is impossible to identify all the ethical issues related to animals' interests without first seeing them as subjects capable of having interests and because a failure to recognize the unique subjectivities of animals will lead to an impoverished, incomplete, and anthropocentric understanding of whatever interspecies social contexts a researcher seeks to investigate. For these reasons, human-animal immersive research should treat animal participants regardless of species as persons with interests and capacities for agency.

Animals as Ethnographic "Objects"

Anthropology, and other disciplines that employ ethnographic methods, have long focused on the social effects of human-animal interactions. Early ethnographic work examined the ways that humans relate to animals at either symbolic or material levels. Structural-functionalist and symbolic analyses of totemism, for example, emphasized the significance of animals in cultural or cosmological realms. Claude Lévi-Strauss, perhaps the most influential ethnographer working in this vein, argued that animals were chosen as totems because of their symbolic utility in providing "conceptual support for social differentiation." (1963: 101). In another quintessential example of the reduction of animals to pure symbol – "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" – Clifford Geertz treats the practice of cockfighting in Bali as a cultural text that symbolically reveals tensions around masculinity and struggles over status between different social groups, while the roosters themselves and the violence they experience are treated as background (1973). Cultural ecology, on the other hand, employed an instrumental approach that treated economic and environmental factors as the primary determinants of animal-related cultural practices. Roy Rappaport, for example, saw the ritual beliefs and practices of the Tsembaga people in New Guinea as mechanisms for regulating an ecological balance between humans and pigs, which was dependent on the caloric input and output of their horticulture practices (1968). Although they paid significant attention to animals as material resources, cultural ecologists – sometimes half-jokingly referred to as "calorie counters" by contemporary ethnographers – largely ignored the experiences of the non-human

animals in their research. Lévi- Strauss highlights the contrast between these symbolic and materialist analytical frames for interpreting animals as objects of human use in his famous observation that animals make good totems because they are "good to think" with, as opposed to being "good to eat" (1963: 89). Notably absent in this observation is any acknowledgement of animals' own good and the ways that various human-animal relations may negatively impact their well-being.

Later ethnographic work bridged these approaches to consider how human-animal relations simultaneously shape, and are shaped by, cultural and material dimensions, but it continued to frame animals as objects of use rather than subjects of their own lives. In her book *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals,* ecofeminist anthropologist Barbara Noske highlights this century-long failure of ethnographic researchers to recognize animals as participants, although often unwilling, in their relationships with humans (1997; see also Mullin 1999). Despite Noske's call for a shift in ethnographic research involving animals that explicitly considers animals' subjectivities and agencies as well as the role these play in human-animal relations, there has only been modest progress in this regard in the twenty-five years since her book was published.

Animals as Subjects, Participants, and People

Researchers in the relatively new area of multispecies ethnography have sought to turn their ethnographic lens on the "legibly biographical and political lives" of a whole array of non-human species, including animals, plants, fungi, microbes, and viruses (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010: 545, see also Ogden, *et al.* 2013). These different kinds of beings have their own forms of agency, which are certainly worthy of further understanding and appreciation. But specifically centering animals as subjects, as Noske implores, raises unique challenges with which current human-animal-centered researchers need to contend. As she argues, a failure to account for animal subjectivity throughout much of the history of the natural sciences led to a rigid behaviorist approach in which animals' subjective experiences were defined out of existence through a complete dismissal of animal feelings and thought rather than a recognition of animals as "total beings whose relations with their physical and social environment are of vital importance" (18). This erasure is an impediment to any efforts to accurately understand the psychological and emotional worlds of animals.

Starting research with a foundational recognition of animals as subjects opens the door to possibilities for understanding animal lives and human lives that are precluded by more traditional approaches. However, in attempting to understand and speak for animals, human researchers run the risk that they may – indeed, are likely to – misrepresent to varying degrees the subjectivities of animals in their efforts to articulate what they infer them to be. Expanding on Arjun Appadurai's call for constant examination of ethnography's claim to capture other voices through its "special brand of ventriloquism" (1988:20), Kirksey and Helmreich argue that "reflexive examination should be redoubled when [ethnographers] speak with biologists, nature lovers, or land managers – and for the species that these agents, along with [ethnographers], represent" (554). But of course, it is insufficient for researchers, in seeking to be interlocutors for other animals, to glean their understandings of those animals solely from other human interlocutors; they must also learn directly from the animals about whom they wish to produce knowledge. And while researchers should certainly exercise self-reflexive examination in evaluating the accuracy of their interpretations of animal feelings, motivations, intentions, desires, and fears, such examination should also be informed by the recognition that, despite the limitations of interspecies communication and understanding, animal subjects are as much participants in the co-production of knowledge as

human participants are. This approach to research thus enables researchers to be attentive to the interspecies power dynamics that structure the human-animal relations under study as well as – and just as important – the ones between the researchers and their participants.

More than just subjects and participants, animals in human-animal immersive research encounters can and should also be recognized as persons. As ethnoprimatologist and anthropologist Agustín Fuentes observes, there is an ample precedent in cultures around the globe for understanding and relating to non-human animal as persons: "In a range of human societies across the planet, multiple ontologies arise that produce different landscapes and basal assumptions for encounters and relations between humans and other animals, fundamentally expanding and altering understandings of self-hood, personhood, nature, and culture" (2020: 39). Indeed, much contemporary research focused on human-animal interactions within the context of indigenous cultures (a body of ethnographic work that has been dubbed "the ontological turn") is explicitly concerned with indigenous ontological perspectives that, counter to the Euro-American epistemological distinction between humans and nonhumans, recognize "human and animal categories are themselves continuous rather than discrete" (Brightman 1993: 3). Rather than being "predicated upon the divide between nature and culture (or subject and object) that plays a foundational role in the modern Western tradition. . . animals, plants, gods, and spirits are also potentially persons and can occupy subject positions in their dealings with humans" (Fausto 2007: 497; see also Vivieros De Castro 1998).

Recognizing other animals as persons in the research context can help ensure that researchers are ethically attentive to animals' needs and interests just as we are to human persons. As Fuentes argues, "it is both a scientifically and culturally valid perspective to include the possibility of other animals as persons in the assessments of our obligations to them in regards to their" roles in research (39). And it also enables us to produce richer knowledge and deeper insights into human-animal dynamics. Many humans outside of indigenous contexts, including those who ascribe to Euro-American epistemologies, relate to and understand animals as persons, even if that is not the term they would use (see for example Boglioli 2009:46; Shir-Vertesh 2003). Recognizing and treating them as such is as important to understanding and respecting the worldviews of humans in these contexts as it is in indigenous ones.

Beyond providing ethical guidance to researchers and potential insight into the perspectives of the humans involved, recognizing both human and non-human animals as persons helps researchers to keep animal subjectivity centered even when the human participants see other animals only as objects: in human-centered research, we would endeavor not to reproduce the objectification of certain human subjects by others because we understand that all humans are people. Extending this framework to other animals as well can help us to produce new knowledge about human-animal relations that centers animal subjects as well as human subjects. Further, it enables us to recognize when humans or animals may play a central role in a particular context that requires a greater focus one group of participants or the other, while avoiding the objectification of either.

Ethnographic practices of engagement in research with other animals

Ethnography is the core methodology of cultural anthropology, but it is also employed to varying degrees in a range of other social sciences, including sociology, political science, and geography. It is a method of qualitative research that typically involves sustained engagement between researchers and research subjects over extended periods of time within the research

subjects' own environments. What constitutes subjects and their environments, and how long is "sustained" or "extended" are issues that have been addressed in varying ways throughout the history of ethnographic practice, but they can be loosely generalized. Subjects of ethnographic inquiry are typically groups of human people with shared socio-cultural practices and beliefs, such as a community, tribe, or clan, but they are frequently narrowed to more specific categories, such as scientists, refugees, evangelicals, or sex workers. Ethnographic researchers collect data about these subjects in the places where they live, work, play, rest, or otherwise live their lives. In other words, most ethnographic research is conducted *in situ*, as opposed to the laboratory-based research of a psychological experiment, for example.

Importantly, ethnography is also the result of ongoing, direct engagement between researchers and subjects over a significant period of time. This engagement primarily consists of participant observation, or as Clifford Geertz described it, "deep hanging out" (Geertz 1998). Put simply, participant observation is the practice of spending time with research subjects in order to observe and record their daily activities, their thoughts and feelings about things, and the ways they interact with others and their environments. Ethnographers engaged in participant observation typically join their subjects in whatever activities they're engaged in, especially if those activities are directly relevant to what the researchers want to learn about their subjects. There is not a set length of time by which one can assess whether this kind of engaged research qualifies as ethnography, but it must be both long enough and full of enough meaningful engagement for a researcher to be able to make responsible truth claims about their subjects and their subjects' practices, values, and beliefs. For this reason, ethnography cannot be the product of a single site visit or a few short interviews, although such methods may also produce useful data.

There is also more to ethnographic research than the long-term observation of subjects. Reflecting on how COVID-19 may change practices of ethnography during the need for social distancing, Danilyn Rutherford, president of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, discusses how the focus of ethnographic inquiry can be further divided into the "object of observation" and the "object of study" (2020).[1] She explains:

> The object of observation directs us to the stuff of our research: the court transcripts we read through, the church services we sit through, the time we spend following scientists around in their labs. It's the field in which we exercise what Anna Tsing (2015) calls the "arts of noticing" (see also Kim 2017). . . . But it's noticing on a mission. It's noticing that allows a researcher to say something general about an object of study: capitalism, ruination, and survival; class identity and the anxieties associated with animality; sovereignty, Blackness, and how to bear witness in the plantation's wake. . . . Objects of study name patterns, processes, and paradoxes discernible in the flow of particular happenings: on a trail, in a farmyard, on a barricaded street, witnessed directly or related in stories told after the fact. (ibid.)

While Rutherford also notes that one of the admirable things about anthropology in recent years – and, one could add, ethnography across disciplines – is how it has "seized upon new and charismatic objects of observation" (ibid). One of the oldest ethnographic objects of observation, however, is non-human animals. Since the first ethnographies of early twentieth century colonial anthropology,

[1] Rutherford got this distinction from her former colleague Mayanthi Fernando, who "draws on a distinction she learned from the late Michel-Rolph Trouillot when she was helping graduate students develop dissertation projects" (2020, see Fernando 2014).

animals have been virtually omnipresent as objects of observation. Likewise, the ways human-animal interactions shape systems of subsistence, wealth, value, and symbolic meaning have long been objects of study. Yet, despite playing a central role as both objects of observation and study in over a century of ethnographic practice, animals have rarely been *subjects* of study.

With the recent turn in the last decade to take animals seriously as ethnographic subjects in their own right, it is important that researchers conducting ethnographic research that involves other animals apply the same practices of engagement to those animals as they would to human subjects. To borrow again from Rutherford's discussion of ethnography in the time of COVID-19, they "need to approach the task with the high degree of self-awareness that gives our claims empirical power (Rutherford 2018). The worlds we engage, and the assumptions we bring to this engagement, have histories. More than ever, we're going to have to be ready to follow these threads" (ibid.). But to trace these threads as they weave through the lives of other animals with the responsibility of self-awareness Rutherford rightly points out all ethnographers bear, they must be attentive to the methodological, theoretical, and epistemological dimensions of their ethnographic research, as well as the implicit anthropocentric assumptions that may animate their research.

To do this, data collection methods must be appropriate to animal subjects. This means they may need to diverge, sometimes quite significantly, from the methods used to learn about human subjects. Take the issue of language for example. Anthropologists and other ethnographers typically speak the language of the people they study. Aside from the daily verbal exchanges of participant observation, ethnographers conduct formal and informal interviews, consume local media, and analyze various forms of text written by their interlocutors. These forms of human communication will obviously not be possible with other animals. The cross-species communication barrier limits our ability to understand the inner lives of other animals, but that does not mean it is impossible to understand them at all. Learning the communication patterns of animals that ethnographers engage in research, such as their calls, gestures, facial expressions, and postures can provide insights into their interactions that would otherwise be missed if researchers were ignorant of these patterns. Just as ethnographers of humans learn their native languages, ethnographers who engage with animals can and should inform their research method design with knowledge about the communication patterns of the animals they study, as well as their unique species characteristics, preferences, needs, and social patterns. Aside from forms of communication, there may be other objects of observation unique to particular species or even individual animals that researchers will need to consider when engaging with animals. Pigs at an animal sanctuary, for example, may not have the kinds of relevant objects Rutherford lists, such as court records to analyze or church services to attend, but they may have routines that can be followed or understood, and that may be altered in response to human activities in ways that would allow a researcher to observe how the pigs react to those activities and even potentially infer pigs' preferences in those contexts. And of course, such observations would only be possible if a researcher both identified objects of observation unique to sanctuary pigs and participated in enough sustained engagement over extended periods of time to observe them.

In addition, our theoretical frameworks must be appropriate to animal subjects. Qualitative data is not often very useful without a theoretical lens through which to interpret it. And that data will remain fairly useless if we try to force it through the wrong lens. The recognition that animals are subjects necessitates the use of theory that also recognizes this fundamental fact. To take an obvious (though unlikely) example, employing a neo-Cartesian lens to interpret ethnographic data about animals would do as much symbolic violence to the data as the early followers of Descartes did actual violence to live animals. On the other hand, eco-feminist theory that takes the subjectivity

of animals as axiomatic could provide a fertile theoretical foundation for cultivating new insights into the lives of animal subjects from the seeds of ethnographic data. The theoretical tools that could enable such flights of analysis and the anthropocentric ones that would stymy them are both numerous and varied, and it is up to the researcher to determine which ones best suit their research. But if animal subjectivity is the starting point for methodological design, it must also be the starting point for theoretical analysis.

The knowledge ethnographers produce, as it is expressed in the ethnographic monograph, article, film, or audio recording, should also recognize and communicate information about the subjectivity of animals. Just as ethnographers would not write an ethnography about humans that conceptualized them solely as objects used as material or symbolic resources, they must endeavor to avoid doing that with animals. Although it is hard to imagine a researcher who has decided to engage with animal subjects, designed a research plan with them in mind, and employed a theoretical framework premised on their subjectivity, would then produce a final product that re-inscribes them as objects of observation all over again, there are ethnographic pitfalls to be cautious about regardless of the species of the research subject. As Rutherford emphasizes, an important component of an ethnographic researcher's self-awareness is the recognition that the worlds they engage and the assumptions they bring to them have histories. Ahistoricism was a flaw running through much early ethnography, as was its twin difference-flattener, overgeneralization. The danger of overgeneralization, as anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod notes about the idea of cultures as distinct, homogenous entities, is that the "appearance of a lack of internal differentiation makes it easier to conceive of groups as discrete, bounded entities . . . populated by generic cultural beings who do this or that and believe such and such" (2008, 9). For this reason, Abu-Lughod argues there are "good reasons to consider such entities dangerous fictions" (ibid.). To avoid reproducing dangerous ethnographic fictions about both humans and other animals, we must consider how the histories of the worlds we engage and the range of differences between both species and individuals factor into the knowledge we produce.

There is plenty of space for animal subjects in the practice of ethnography, and there is much that ethnographic methods can tell us about those subjects as well as their interactions and relationships with human subjects. But if ethnographers want to be able to provide new insight into such objects of study, they need to be able to recognize and identify the objects of observation unique to animal subjects, employ the kinds of anti-anthropocentric theory that will enable us to better understand those subjects, and meet the demands of their responsibility as ethnographers to produce knowledge that situates animal subjectivities in both their complex histories and infinite diversities.

Ethical Oversight Frameworks

Ethnographic research has internal ethical orientations for engagements with other humans, but that wasn't always the case. Significant harms to human subjects, many of whom were quite vulnerable, resulted from anthropological, psychological, and biomedical research in the first half of the 20th century.[2] In response, the US Congress held hearings that led to the formation of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. In 1976, the Commission produced the *Belmont Report* that provides protections for

[2] For example, the Tuskeege experiments, the Milgram experiments, and the experiments done at Willowbrook.

human subjects, emphasizing the importance of respecting persons by requiring informed consent, minimizing risks to subjects, avoiding coercion and conflicts of interest, and requiring heightened scrutiny for any research on vulnerable populations. Three values were at the core of the report – respect for the autonomy of human subjects, beneficence -- the well-being of the participants must be attended to and promoted, and justice --the benefits and burdens of research should be fairly distributed.

The American Anthropological Association's (AAA) "code of ethics" embraces and builds on these values. Expressed as "principles" the code is "a structure for communicating ethical precepts in anthropology to students, other colleagues, and outside audiences …these principles are intended to foster discussion, guide anthropologists in making responsible decisions, and educate." These principles are 1) Do No Harm; 2) Be Open and Honest Regarding Your Work; 3) Obtain Informed Consent and Necessary Permissions; 4) Weigh Competing Ethical Obligations Due Collaborators and Affected Parties; 5) Make Your Results Accessible; 6) Protect and Preserve Your Records; and 7) Maintain Respectful and Ethical Professional Relationships.[3]

Researchers and students engaged in ethnographic work, whether anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, or others usually are asked to consider the ethics of their work before they begin when they seek oversight approval through an Institutional Review Board. IRBs emerged as a codification of the values identified in the Belmont Report, with particular attention to informed consent and protections for vulnerable groups. However, some of the most vulnerable, the animal subjects, aren't covered by IRBs.

Usually animals used for research in higher education settings are not considered subjects, but objects in invasive experimentation. For this sort of research, the Animal Welfare Act requires that there be Institutional Care and Use Committees (IACUCs) that serve as an oversight body to approve proposed research. The original AWA set minimum standards for the handling, sale, and transport of cats, dogs, non-human primates, rabbits, hamsters, and guinea pigs held by animal dealers. In order to prevent laboratories from experimenting on someone's companion animal, the law also required that dog and cat dealers who transported animals over state lines and laboratories that received federal money be licensed and provide identification records for the animals to ensure that they were not stolen. While this was a good start, as the public became more informed about the use of animals in laboratories, there was increased pressure to improve the 1966 AWA. The Act has been subsequently amended multiple times, in 1970, 1976, 1985, 1990, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2013 and will, undoubtedly, be further refined. The 1985 amendment to the AWA, established the IACUCs at all research facilities. These committees are supposed to be made up of members of the research facility, attending veterinarians, and representatives of the public concerned for the animals' welfare, and their role is to review proposed research protocols to ensure that animal use was appropriate and that alternatives to the use of animals were explored. There have always been questions about the adequacy of these committees for taking into account the welfare of the animals.

Questions about the adequacy of IACUCs have led some to argue for a Belmont Report for animals that would include provisions for a human to serve as a spokesperson for the animals, much the way that a parent or guardian would serve that role for a non-verbal human. Guidelines could

[3] http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/

also be established that ensured that individual animals would potentially benefit from the experimental treatments. And non-invasive, observational research would be emphasized. But what should be the ethical guide posts for non-invasive, ethnographic research? Field primatologists have been the first to systematically raise ethical questions and produce guidelines for managing the myriad of ethical issues that arise in field research with primates, both human and non (Riley, Fuentes). Beyond this, we aren't aware of any institutional or organizational guides for ethically engaging in ethnographic or immersive human-animal research. Here we aren't interested in proposing another formal review, nor are we interested in developing a "code of ethics" but rather we would like to illuminate additional key values (beyond "do no harm") that should be carefully reflected upon before embarking on ethnographic research with animal subjects.

Key Values for Animal Ethnographies

Trust. Ethical guidelines for conducting work with human subjects typically focus on transparency and honesty on the part of the researcher. For example, the AAA principles state that:

> Researchers who mislead participants about the nature of the research and/or its sponsors; who omit significant information that might bear on a participant's decision to engage in the research; or who otherwise engage in clandestine or secretive research that manipulates or deceives research participants about the sponsorship, purpose, goals or implications of the research, do not satisfy ethical requirements for openness, honesty, transparency and fully informed consent.[4]

However, there are three important challenges when it comes to building trust while engaged in ethical animal ethnographic work.

1. Some might suggest that under deceptive conditions, research is not conducted in "good faith." However, "covert" or "concealed" research may be justifiable. For example, political, economic, and social conditions are such that commodified animal use, injury and destruction are normalized to such an extent that research designed to understand and challenge this status would not be permitted without potential duplicity on the part of the researcher. Though transparency and consent may not always be sought from humans when research on institutions of animal use is done, there are other ways to ensure that the ethnographic work is ethical, for example, regularly discussing the complexities with colleagues, teachers, and others who are thinking about ethical engagement in their research.

2. Building trust with nonhuman subjects requires a different set of concerns than "transparency" of the research and "full informed consent" of the participant given that neither of these are, presumably, of interest to the animal subjects. If the animals have care takers who can serve a "guardian" role, then they may be able to agree, however if the guardians are also participants there may be a conflict of interests. One way to build trust with the nonhumans being studied is for the researcher to learn to "read" the animals in question: studying their behaviors, their vocalizations, their social relations before beginning immersive research will help.

[4] http://ethics.americananthro.org/ethics-statement-2-be-open-and-honest-regarding-your-work/

3. For some human-animal ethnographies, the animal subjects will be slaughtered or killed either during or after the study period. This is obviously bad for the animal subjects, assuming they are not otherwise immediately facing death, but can also be very challenging for the researcher. and trust under such conditions can be quite difficult to foster.

Despite the issues that make the process of developing trust with non-human subjects challenging, working to be a trustworthy interpreter of an animal's experiences is a key value of human-animal ethnography.

Compassion/Empathy. Some of the ways to work toward being a trustworthy animal ethnographer is to self-reflectively commit to and develop compassion and entangled empathy (Gruen 2015). Compassion and entangled empathy aren't just feelings for a subject, but are practices of care that involve developing one's sensibilities and attention to the experiences of others. They involve a process of attention, reflection, attunement, and correction aimed at acknowledging, and when possible, relieving hardship. In addition to expressing an attitude of care toward the subject, this process is also one that will help ethnographers better illuminate the lived worlds of the animals. In the case of subjects who are going to be slaughtered or who have been killed, the ethical researcher won't shy away from thinking, and writing from a place that acknowledges grief (as we discuss below). Importantly, this type of empathetic attention needn't pull the researcher into suffering, but rather can enliven their discussion of killing with urgency and purpose to reveal cruel, normalized social practices of violence.

Humility. Writing an ethnography that includes a being whose umwelt (von Euxkull) is unfamiliar and whose senses are potentially much different than our own requires leaps of imagination, aided by compassion and empathy. Researchers engaging in cross-species interpretations will benefit from exercising intellectual humility, that is, they will work with an awareness that what they think they can say about a different being may be a misinterpretation, a projection, or only a small part of a larger story. The people who work with other animals often will express, overtly or not, their expertise and that too needs to be approached with humility. Often those who care for animals at one institution will have very different ideas about the interests, needs, and personalities of the animals they work with from care-givers at another institution. We bring in all sorts of biases in our attempts to understand other animals, whether we are caring for them or studying them. Approaching one's narrative about these lives with humility will help to mitigate these biases.

Interrogating anthropocentric bias. Perhaps the most pernicious biases are those that inadvertently impose human norms onto other animals. Often this is done without too much thought as when all male groups of gorillas are refered to as "bachelor" groups. Or when one is generalizing about the capacities of particular types of animal by comparing them to humans, e.g. chimps are as smart as three year old children. These are examples of what has been called "pernicious anthropocentrism" or "arrogant anthropocentrism" -- views that fail to recognize perspectives and social relationships that are distinctly different from human perspectives and sociality (Probyn-Rapsey 2018). Arrogant anthropocentrism often is manifest through the god-trick, a form of detachment that allows a researcher to pretend not to have a perspective (see, for example, Haraway 1988). To avoid this pretense of objectivity, reflexively situating oneself in the narrative is useful.

Of course, we are always limited by our own perspectives and the concepts we use to make sense of the world. This sort of "inevitable" anthropocentrism is part of every human endeavor but being mindful of the potential distortions brought about by our own, often idiosyncratic, perspectives can help. Recognizing and respecting an animals' different perspective, and trying to understand, as best one can, that perspective will be crucial. In speaking of how to theorize across difference, the late philosopher Maria Lugones suggested that there are a series of questions that we should ask: "What are the things we need to know about others, and about ourselves, in order to speak intelligently, intelligibly, sensitively, and helpfully about their lives?. … When we speak, write, and publish our theories, to whom do we think we are accountable?" (Lugones and Spelman 1983, 579-80).

Being accountable to the animal subjects of one's research involves, in part, reflecting on what it means to "speak for" animals who aren't generally part of the conversation and to do so without merely engaging in anthropocentric ventriloquism. As Linda Alcoff has suggested, again in the human context, "to whom one is accountable is a political/epistemological choice contestable, contingent, and … constructed through the process of discursive action. What this entails in practice is a serious and sincere commitment to remain open to criticism and to attempt actively, attentively, and sensitively to "hear" (understand) the criticism." (Alcoff 1992: 25-26). Given that the animals aren't part of "the process of discursive action" creating a community of interlocutors to challenge interpretations may help in keeping researchers accountable to their subjects and avoiding the more dangerous forms of anthropocentrism.

Research Contexts

There are a range of contexts in which researchers may engage in human-animal immersive research, each with its own unique considerations for how the key values outlined above could shape practices of engagement with animal subjects (including other humans). Although new and unique contexts will undoubtedly be identified as researchers turn their attention to novel human-animal milieus, we will explore four general contexts in which most ethnographic human-animal research has so far been grounded: wild animal encounters, captive animal encounters, liminal animal encounters, and explicitly violent contexts of animal use such as animal agriculture.

Wild Animal Encounters

As a multi-field discipline, anthropology already has some ethical guidelines to draw on for wild animal encounters as a result of primatology's influence on the biological anthropology subfield.[5] These guidelines are based on the assumption that researchers "should be held accountable for [their] actions as educators and scientists, strive to engage in rigorous research that entails well-considered conservation outcomes, and engage in practices that benefit primate populations, local human communities, and their ecosystems" (Riley and Bezanson 2018:498). Proceeding from the perspective that primate research is a privilege rather than a right, "primatologists are better situated to consider and address the key principles and ethical practices in primate fieldwork," including their multiple and overlapping responsibilities to scientific integrity and rigor, to "the animals [they] study, to the people who are involved in and impacted by the

[5] For example, the American Society of Primatologists (ASP) and the International Primatological Society (IPS) jointly adopted the Code of Best Practices for Field Primatology (Riley et al. 2014).

research [they] do, and to the ecosystems in which these groups live" (ibid.). Although formulated in response to the specifics concerns of primatological research, these guiding principles and values are broadly applicable to research that involves other wild animals as well. One especially salient consideration for researchers engaging with wild animals is the need for and impact of habituation. Habituation – defined as "the process by which wild animals accept human observers as a neutral element in their environment" (Hanson and Riley 2018: 853; see Tutin and Fernandez 1991) -- has long been seen a prerequisite for research on wild animals: if animals are not habituated to the presence of human researchers, then the only data that can be accurately collected is how animals respond to the presence of humans, drastically curtailing the ability of researchers to observe and learn about animal behavior and interactions. Given that habituation – as a process that "actively engages both the researcher and the study group, transforming both in the process" – is perhaps best "characterized as a flexible, context-dependent spectrum of heightened observer tolerance" (Hanson and Riley 2018: 874), there are many potentially negative impacts on animals to consider and endeavor to avoid when habituating wild animals, including stress and altered behavior patterns that can put animals at risk of danger from predators, conflict with conspecifics or humans, reduced access to food, water, and shelter, and exposure to disease (see Riley and Bezanson 2018: 499). Speaking of human-animal conflicts, "researchers should also consider the impacts that the research methods and results, and any conservation outcomes generated, may have on the community" (503). For example, if primates or other animals lose their fear of humans as a result of habituation, "it may result in aggression directed toward the people they encounter in crop lands or in the forest" producing negative attitudes toward the animals "that can, in turn, result in retaliatory measures and reduce support for conservation initiatives" (ibid.).

Captive Animal Encounters

While some of the basic principles related to wild animal research are applicable to encounters with animals in any context, captivity raises additional considerations for research. Since the institution of captivity itself raises many ethical concerns related to the treatment and care of animals (see Gruen 2014), conducting research in this space adds a new a dimension of complexity to the ethics of captivity. Captive animals necessarily face constraints on their agency and freedom, and their ability to consent to engaging with researchers is almost as curtailed as their ability to consent to captivity in the first place. Just as some animal sanctuaries endeavor to make animals "as free as possible" within the bounds of their captivity (Jones 2014), researchers can endeavor to afford animals as much freedom as possible to avoid being subjects of their research. For example, an ethnographer could respect animals' efforts to move away from humans and avoid contact, giving the animals privacy from their observational gaze if not from the unavoidable infringement on privacy that captivity imposes. But researchers working in a captive context with less respect for animal autonomy, such as a zoo or aquarium, may find it difficult to afford animals this option of "opting out." Another challenge facing researchers is that practices of care in captive spaces may entail forms of violence or harm against particular animals, even in spaces that are dedicated to animal care and rehabilitation.[6] Geographer Rosemary-Claire Collard, for example, found that engaging in participant observation at a Guatemalan rehabilitation center for wild-caught animals rescued from the exotic pet trade entailed participating in aggressive acts toward the animals – such as making scary noises or spraying them with water – that were intended to break their trust of humans in order to dismantle their existence as commodities and put them back together as wild

[6] On practices that could be considered violent or harmful care, see also Collard 2014; Parreñas 2018; Srinivasan 2014; van Dooren 2014.

animals (2014). While this is more a form of psychological violence than physical violence, one of the authors of this report conducted research at a sanctuary with a "predatory control plan" that involved catching wild mongooses in cages and killing them with a pellet gun. He felt morally conflicted about facilitating the practice even though it was intended to keep sanctuary animals safe from predation. When he discovered a mongoose that had been trapped near a bird enclosure, he decided to set it free rather than report its presence so it could be shot. He ultimately found that liberating the mongoose gave him valuable insight into the complicated balancing of competing animal interests at the sanctuary, but he also put vulnerable sanctuary animals at risk – the ethically correct action, or whether there even was one correct action, remains unclear (Abrell 2019). Indeed, the correct course of action in both these cases – whether to unmake animal commodities through arguably violent means or to liberate a potentially dangerous predator – is not something that could be prescribed in advance; both researchers had to assess the specific impacts of captivity and their complicity in perpetuating those impacts through the ethical lens of values like trust, good faith, empathy, care, humility, and a critical awareness of their anthropocentric bias in determining how to navigate their research dilemmas.

Liminal Animals

A third category of animals that have been subjects of ethnographic research are liminal animals, non-domesticated wild animals that have adapted to living in close proximity to human-built environment as co-residents of urban and suburban spaces (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011: 16). This category includes synanthropes like rats, mice, squirrels, and pigeons, as well as animals whose habitats have been eroded by human encroachment, like deer, coyotes, raccoons, and bears. Sociologist Colin Jerolmack, for example, confronted a variety of ethical considerations when conducting research for his ethnography of urban human-pigeon relations, *The Global Pigeon* (2013). Prior to starting fieldwork, he decided that he would not restrict the movement of pigeons, including domesticated pigeons that were kept as pets by his human subjects. If pigeons initiated contact, he considered that an ethical form of physical engagement, but he would not initiate contact himself. He also decided not to breed his own pigeons, even though this may have given him additional insight into the experiences of pigeon breeders he studied. Further, he felt that attempting to do no harm was not sufficient to meet his responsibilities to his animal research subjects, so he sought ways that he could help pigeons. In addition to help a human informant rescue an injured pigeon, he also tried to remove string and hair from the feet of wild pigeons when possible and tried to capture video recordings of people who were capturing New York City pigeons to use in Pennsylvania gun club pigeon shoots. Researchers engaging with liminal animal subjects should be aware that, since many are perceived as pests or "problem animals" by humans, they are likely to be at increased risk of extermination or other forms of violence. At the very least, their interests and wellbeing are often disregarded by humans and overlooked in policy decisions. Researchers should anticipate the need to navigate dilemmas in which human-animal conflicts pose a threat to these animals.

Violent Contexts of Use

The vast majority of human-animal interactions in the world are shaped by systems of violence. The global animal industrial complex (Noske 1997, also see Twine 2012, Wadiwel 2015) – made up of factory farms, industrial slaughterhouses, the fishing industry, rendering plants, and biomedical research labs – is responsible for billions of animal deaths per year. Research conducted in these spaces will necessarily involve contending with acts of violence against animals that the researcher will likely be powerless to stop or disrupt. Geographers Kathryn Gillespie and Patricia J.

Lopez describe one such encounter they experienced while conducting research at a cattle auction yard: "we witnessed cows raised for dairy collapse in the auction ring and holding pens; cows and their calves sold separately, bellowing to each other across the pens; day-old calves with their umbilical cords still dangling from their bellies who were sold for veal production and were attempting to nuzzle the auctioneer; and cows being beaten and shocked with electric prods" (2019: 2). As Gillespie and Lopez observe, these routine features of animal agriculture "are so thoroughly normalized that they are not viewed as violence against the animals. Farmed animals' lives and deaths are routinely rendered ungrievable through the normalization of violence against them" (ibid.). Unable to intervene, Gillespie and Lopez actively engaged with their experiences of grief at the auction yard to explore its role in conducting fieldwork in such contexts of violence. Researchers working in similar contexts should likewise anticipate difficult encounters in which grief may be the only recourse available to them in moments of violence. However, even as witnesses of violent exploitation, researchers can still reflect on the key values for ethnographic research with animals outlined above, especially how those values shape researchers' responsibilities to produce knowledge that enables others to bear witness to the violence inflicted on animals and support advocacy on their behalf.

Witnessing and Advocacy

Because the vast majority of animals on the planet are entangled with anthropogenic systems of exploitation and violence, it is virtually impossible that researchers will encounter animals whose lives are not touched in some way by these systems. Understanding these lives and telling their stories thus often necessitates witnessing the harmful impacts of human actions on other animals. This necessity raises an important question: what responsibility do researchers have to advocate for animal research subjects? Further, as anthropologist Helen Kopnina writes, "while anthropological advocacy of disadvantaged groups is well-established, one of the difficulties is that the subjects the researcher speaks for could – and should – speak for themselves (Cohen, 1985). But can anthropological advocacy be applied to the case of nonhumans, who can never speak for themselves?" (2017: 335). Kopnina persuasively concludes that if ethnographic researchers wish to challenge the quotidian and pervasive acceptance of animal suffering, they must bring the immensity of "global nonhuman abuse" into the scope of politically engaged research through an active commitment to advocacy of ecological justice and animal rights (351). Indeed, drawing on research to advocate on behalf of human research subjects is a common practice across the social sciences. It wold be entirely consistent to apply this practice to animal subjects as well.

Even for researchers who are uncomfortable with an explicity advocacy-oriented role, however, it is useful to consider how witnessing and communicating what it witnessed can be their own form of advocacy, or at least political intervention. Kathryn Gillespie observes that the "lives of other animals are routinely rendered killable and ungrievable in varying degrees based on species membership, geographic context, and their usefulness to humans. . . . Economic logics govern many animals' lives and deaths, enacting violence for the extraction, production, and circulation of commodities, and deepening their killability under capitalism. . . . Indeed, these logics are so ubiquitous that 'animal death becomes the background noise of everyday life: routinised, normalised, mechanised, and sped up' (Probyn-Rapsey and Johnston xvi)" (2020: 2). Whether it's the politics of pigeon management in city spaces (Jerolmack 2013). the care of endangered orangutans in Borneo rehabilitation centers (Juno 2018), or the politics of sight in a industrialized slaughterhouse for cattle (Pachirat 2013), witnessing the animal lived experience of these logics anf enabling others to bear witness through ethnographic writings enables researchers to bring the punctuated rhythms of that

background noices into sharp relief. Through this kind of work, guided by the values outlined above, researchers can render animals grievable again and lay important groundwork for future advocacy work by themselves or others.

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