

WRITING THE ETHNOGRAPHIC STORY

CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVE OUT OF NARRATIVES

Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich

“Storytelling transforms our lives by enabling us to reshape diffuse, diverse and difficult personal experiences in ways that can be shared” (Jackson 2002, 267)

My first childhood memories circle around listening to stories, being intensely interested in people and their storytelling. Having grown up in a German-Silesian refugee family network meant that storytelling was part of the daily life, especially weekends. The old Heimat, now in Poland, behind the iron curtain, was constantly invoked when members of our Silesian family would visit each other for Sunday afternoon coffee and cake sessions. I used to sit on a footstool listening to stories about the town we all came from, stories about the war, grief, hunger, angst, violence. But also just stories about the family, the ones who died, where relatives and friends had ended up after the war, how difficult and humiliating it was to be the unwelcome stranger in the West German town in which I was born. I like stories, I am used to listening and, as a child, I grew into a listener who sat at the margins; a position I am still comfortable with and hence I have a certain feeling of unease with conventional interview situations.

Assembling, telling and listening to stories are some of the oldest and most durable ways we have of understanding our lives and our worlds and of preserving those understandings; in this article I want to concentrate on the ways in which ethnographers sample and construct stories, how we listen, what we are hearing, and how we do stories. In short, it is asking how listening is turned into reading material. It tries to retrace the various steps that are taken to transfer fieldwork infused narratives into refined ethnographic storytelling for academic audiences. I argue that, by neglecting continuously to review this space, anthropology and its related disciplines will continue to struggle to define their place in the canon of the social sciences and humanities. As Geertz pointed out, the ethnographer as author and storyteller is very much at the heart of the act of storytelling (1988, 4, 6). The ever-evolving refinement of our methods towards narrative ethnography is in constant tension with our need and desire to be taken seriously as a social science; hence the production of ethnography is still overshadowed by the demand – imagined or real – to adhere to approved methods of production defined by methodologies of accountability.

Commencing such a discussion by re-reading John van Maanen's *Tales of the Field* (1988) enables us to return to a paradigm shift in anthropology occurring after the publication of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1988). In a way, this article and all the papers in this special issue on narrative analysis are still part of a post-*Writing Culture* debate in the anthropologies and ethnologies.

"Ethnographies", according to van Maanen, 'are documents that pose questions at the margins between two cultures. They necessarily decode one culture while recoding for another. This is an interpretive act that occurs with the writing of texts, and as with any form of writing certain constraints determine what is written' (1988, 4). He then goes on to determine such constraints; for example, funding constraints, intellectual fashions and academic politics, or gendered access to the field. He discusses the changed nature of fieldwork and what he calls, the "moving hand": writing styles. He asks whether "ethnography (of any sort) is more a science, modelled on standardized techniques and reporting formats, or an art, modelled on craft-like standards and style" (1988, 34).

Although van Maanen famously discussed confessional tales of ethnographers, finally declaring and explaining how they conducted fieldwork, how they constructed the field, what kind of data they collected and maybe even what went wrong, he did not discuss the process of sampling stories as such, nor did he disclose the process of actual narrative analysis. The pre-writing and post-fieldwork phase remain obscured and opaque; the same applies to Clifford Geertz's otherwise equally important interrogation of the *Anthropologist as Author* (1988). Yet, what happens during the post-fieldwork phase is first determined by how we initially construct the field. It is then determined by the decisions we make while in the field, as we try to get some order into the growing pile of data. This ordering work often happens when we are tired, have returned from participant observation and are bewildered by conflicting emotions. Finally, such ordering work and all its related anxieties, stresses and glorious moments are often deferred and then transferred to the office or home desk.

It is, therefore, as Raymond Madden points out, "uncritical to see ethnographic fieldnotes as simply 'raw data'. The data has already been partially 'cooked' by the choices the ethnographer made" (2010, 140). The methods we choose when doing fieldwork and when sampling stories determine the narrative quality of our writing; our imagination, as Davies

suggests, is framed by the stage-settings that produce the acts of discovery and listening (2010, 13-14). When we as ethnographers decide simply to nod in the direction of subjectivity and otherwise adhere to strict methods of analysis, we are turning stories into data as a product of "scientific observations gleaned not from storytellers but from 'informants'" (Taussig 2006, 62). For social scientists it is tempting to turn stories into data and devalue the act of deep listening and narrative contemplation. However, as Madden asks, "what qualitative social scientist in their right mind would want to give over the power of analysis and interpretation to 'data'?" (2010, 140). It seems therefore advisable, before ethnographers embark on writing as a method of inquiry and discovery (Richardson 2005), to try to accept and explore the messiness of ordering stories into narratives, a process that is as much guided by re-listening, intuition and note-taking as by more systematic methods of coding. There is, of course much support for claims favouring the ethnographic act of storytelling. Paul Stoller suggests that "many scholars may favour science over story, determinancy over indeterminacy and thereby refuse to accept the messiness of social relations that is so well represented in stories" (2007, 188). And Ruth Behar famously argues about the importance of "exquisite being-there-ness" (2007, 151). There is an argument to be made about leaving the well-trodden path of analysing data, instead trusting the narrative and trying our hand at telling the ethnographic story. We now have such ethnographies that border on creative writing and display an intimate narrative relationship with the field. But there are also persistent silences about how such intimacy is created and achieved; how are the stories gifted to us in the field transformed into ethnography when we have returned to our desks?

Perhaps this phase of preparing stories, of working with and through fieldwork material, means that the time during which we remain inside the realm of analysis has to be lonely work, only sometimes shared with an intimate group of trusted companions. Because this transformative work is a solitary task, it is all the more important that we explore this awkward space, in many ways a liminal one, where the stories sampled or created are transformed into a narrative by analysis. A liminal space, betwixt and between, where we choose our ingredients, chop them into bite-sized pieces, re-arrange them, cook them, spice them. Only then are they made into stories, into the ethnographic narrative. It might not be a coincidence that the discussion of narrative analysis is full of cooking metaphors and

allusions to Lévi-Strauss' famous work *The Raw and the Cooked* (1970), It is also simply linked to home work and the sense that successful cooking requires careful preparation of the raw ingredients.

From this starting point, narrative analysis¹ as such emerges as a useful tool to reflect on how we deal with stories and then how we weave the ethnographic narrative into a publishable text. I suggest that this process has its own rules and is very much governed by academic politics, expectations and conventions. We all know that it is quite normal for as much as 80 percent of data never to be used as such. We use it, as one of my colleagues keeps saying, for composting/fertilising our thoughts. So how do we do this, what happens in that intensely private and mostly undisclosed space of hard, hard work? It reminds me very much of the dark room, *die Dunkelkammer*, where undeveloped footage of film and photography used to be taken, treated with craft, patience and chemicals, and transformed into the glossy positive from which perfect visuals emerged. We like to keep quiet about this transformative work space, we like to be undisturbed when doing the hard work of dissecting, carving, weaving—whatever metaphor we might use about writing before and during writing. We want to be left alone when cooking up a storm. Or, as A.L. Kennedy writes: “[writing] one does by oneself. Even those truly, madly, deeply irritating souls who pose with their laptops in fashionable cafés aren’t actually collaborating with the baristas [...] The joy and the horror of writing are that it’s something you do by yourself—if your name’s on it, it’s your fault” (2014, 75).

It is the process of ‘cooking up stories’ that is the focus of this article. In the first part, some specific examples will help to illuminate the process of constructing stories as an ethnographer. Presenting three stories and revealing how they came into existence will provide the background to allow me to discuss how the process of sampling narratives has widened in its possibilities and therefore altered the data we deal with. This is very much about living with stories and reflecting on how stories live with us and guide our analysis of everyday life (Frank 2010, 13). In the second part, I will work with stories from a focus-group discussion in which fellow social scientists told me about their analysing and writing habits

¹ This article is related to a discussion of the narrative turn in the social sciences, but instead of focusing on the use of stories and the methods of narrative inquiry (Bönisch-Brednich 2016; Kreiswirth 1994) it discusses the way stories come into academic life, how they evolve out of ethnography and what they are before analysis sets in.

and how they construct their ethnographic narratives out of fieldwork narratives. I will then take some time discussing ethnographer's methods, habits and preferences in data analysis and how these shape our writing and the value we attribute to our narratives. This part is very much about listening, hearing and doing stories. The article ends with discussing fieldwork and its counterpart: the ordering work that comes with preparing stories to enable good ethnographic storytelling.

Creating stories for narrative analysis

Focusing on stories that have been co-created enables me to work on the ethnographic narrative and its process of coming into life through storytelling. In starting with the creation of ethnographic stories and story lines I am following an argument by Soyini D. Madison; she has criticised the tendency to avoid transparency in one's own ethnographic storytelling techniques by hiding behind the writing of others and showing off (with the theory of others) in order to give more weight to one's own ethnography while hiding possible flaws. She observes that, rather than taking guidance from and trusting the stories, instead "the researcher becomes so enamored with [...] impressing colleagues that honoring the narrative becomes less important than acrobatics of abstraction and theoretical word play" (Madison 2014, 394).

The story that will provide such transparency here is an ethnographic vignette written by a female colleague; it is a story about academic work and being a parent:

Here I am feeling guilty again. Against my initial instinct, I've decided to write out some draft ideas for this paper instead of doing my essay marking. It's Friday afternoon. This means I'll end up doing the marking after I've put my son to bed on the weekend. Which means that, while my husband will understand and leave me to do my work, at a later point there will be a comment made about us 'having no time together'. The only way I've been able to get two articles finished in the last month was to just accept that I would make people disappointed. I would feel guilty as a mother, about the zombie state in which I parented my son each morning after I stayed up till 2am trying to get my grants and articles written. I would feel guilty that I was staying in the office an hour or two after I should have, because my son was sick with winter viruses and colds for the third week in a row, and, bless the Nanny,

she is so good with him, and I only had the emotional and physical energy for a short 'witching hour' before bed. I would feel guilty as a partner. My husband, who was overseas at conferences, would wonder why I wasn't on Skype at the times he wants me to be. I would feel guilty for me and that precious idea of well-being that I ironically urge my students to cultivate, as my exercise regime goes out the window and I grab pieces of toast for dinner. As I carve out and prioritize my writing time this year with sheer bloody-mindedness, a constant state of guilt has become the norm, that I am caring less for everyone. This is how I get research done these days. (Bönisch-Brednich, Gibson & Trundle 2016)

This ethnographic reflection is part of a conference paper I co-authored with my colleagues Lorena Gibson and Catherine Trundle: 'Making Care Work: Equity and feminized academic labour in Aotearoa New Zealand' (2016) analyses the working conditions in a neoliberal university and their implications for female academic labour. I chose this ethnographic vignette as my starting point because this is one of two recent examples of how I (in this case we) use stories to create an academic and ethnographic narrative. Very much in the sense of Jean Clandinin's method of narrative inquiry the "stories are co-composed in the spaces between us as inquirers and participants" (2013, 24). My colleagues and I started with telling stories over coffee and decided to write two ethnographic vignettes each about our own working lives. We shared these stories, polished and re-wrote them, and quickly saw that they fitted perfectly into our aim of discussing much wider issues that drive our and many other universities' politics. We used a subject-centred, storytelling elicitation process to make people listen and to create narrative anchors for what came out as a political analysis of neo-colonial university policies, impossible workloads and invisible feminised labour demands. Although this particular story may read as if there is no good end to it, the writing of these vignettes and working on this piece created spaces that felt liberating. Discussing these issues also let us make decisions that freed up time and made us aware that, once expressed in this way, 'guilt' and shame could be analysed and structural violence detected and partially transformed².

² This analysing work had some very practical outcomes: we worked on ways to reduce our collective departmental teaching and marking loads and made some decisions to reduce meeting times. It also led to the

Such auto-ethnographic methods of story elicitation are now seen as useful, perfectly legitimate and very evocative. Carolyn Ellis, especially, has successfully argued for a subject-centred self-inquiry that is based on such evocative storytelling (2009). Writing ethnographic vignettes about our own working lives also got rid of some irksome problems: applying for ethics approval, lengthy interview processes, bad story telling. Although we found this a very useful and enlightening method for our project, I keep wondering whether the growing appeal of constructing auto-ethnographic vignettes has something to do with ethnographers having less and less time to go to the field while pressures for publishing are increasing. Ethics committees and their risk-averse rules also led to an increasing anxiety about giving too much identifiable voice to participants. Whole-life stories have given way to composite characters and vignettes have replaced the participant as identifiable author of her/his own story. Immediately after the *Writing Culture* debate, giving voice to participants was the ultimate goal; now the goal is to anonymise at all costs. The rise of the story has much to do with the advent of the authentic voice; auto-ethnography, then, avoids the pitfalls of ethics committees and the constraints of academic fieldwork in a postcolonial legal setting. Yet, for analysing middle-class academic life-worlds, this is a very useful tool indeed. Instead of doing initial fieldwork to prepare for writing, we wrote our stories first and then reached out to a wider audience: we shared our stories and our conference paper with a number of academic female colleagues. What came back were affirmative, overwhelming and emotional responses and many more stories. Colleagues reported crying while reading, experiencing floods of memories of dreadful times, stories shared and so on. In view of the fact that subject-focused social sciences originally evolved from feminist research, we have come full circle with the story-elicitation process we used for this project.

Another project about storytelling I started in recent years involved conducting ethnographic-writing workshops with academic migrants. Inspired by Kirin Narayan's book on ethnographic writing (Narayan 2012), I developed auto-ethnographic writing exercises to encourage migrant scholars to reflect on their migrant experiences by writing in different formats such as lists, vignettes, poetry, drama and emotional mapping. Before the workshop, everybody is asked to write a so-called 'scene' describing in vivid detail an experience connected with their

creation of collective writing spaces during a working day on campus such as 'shut-up-and-write' sessions at a communal table in the campus staff club.

academic mobility. These scenes are then shared with all participants, leading to feedback discussion at the workshop and often re-writing. From the bulk of pre-prepared stories, I develop themes and writing exercises that we address together during the workshop. The following story is such a scene describing an arrival at Copenhagen airport:

It felt like the embrace of an old friend. I remember the trip clearly. It was my return after a three months long stay in London for a secondment. There was nothing special about the flight – it was quite short - nor the day itself. What struck me about this particular trip was the feeling of relief that came over me as I came out of the plane and walked into the airport. Here I was in my current foreign land, a foreign land between other foreign lands that I had moved to for work and studies. But I felt the strange comfort of being, although momentarily, back where I belonged. I would stop moving around for a while and stay put in Copenhagen. I was looking forward to seeing my office, my desk, and my corridor at the university. I wanted to sit in my office chair, take out a cup of coffee from the percolator in the kitchen, and pick an orange from our common fruit bowl at the end of the hall. It was the first time, I realized, that I had come to acknowledge these feelings. And I realized that Copenhagen had become home – at least until the next big move (personal scene, 11/2015).

Asking workshop participants I hardly know to write such scenes, to create narratives that will be shared and worked through, is another way of composing stories. These are stories about the personal experience of academic mobility: they often tell the reader about feeling vulnerable, being sidelined, struggling with identity problems, language barriers and western stereotypes and western academic paradigms that amount to epistemological violence in the global-knowledge economy. These are also stories of challenges mastered, adventure embarked on and feeling lucky to be able to do mobility (Bönisch-Brednich 2017).

Different from interview situations, they are not direct exchanges and, although elicitation does happen, the communication is more abstract and the task of writing and polishing invites the participants to create a subject-orientated narrative that first and foremost is introspection. Although I set the exercises as such, the ethnographic author is in control; and although most of the participants were not anthropologist they were, in Linda M. Mülli's sense, "epistemic partners" (2018, in this issue) and "intellectual partners in inquiry" (Holmes and Marcus 2005, 236). These stories are written for sharing, and it is up to each participant

how much they would like to share and disclose, but it is also very much "writing as a method of inquiry" in action (Richardson 2005). Like the reflection of the first example, these stories start with very personal narratives inviting the listener and reader to focus on the person's story first before branching out into wider themes and topics.

Similar to the reaction to Gibson's, Trundle's and my sharing of our work-life vignettes with colleagues in the previous example, the stories created for these workshops on academic mobility resonated with all participants but also opened up a wider range of discussion. These scenes offered perspectives of the politics of academic mobility, the way dreams and academic aspirations are framed and constricted by upbringing, socio-economic background, white privilege or the opposite of it: racism, orientalism, colonial echoes and neocolonial tendencies in the global-knowledge economy. But the point here is that this is a different kind of fieldwork, an additional avenue into writing ethnography, very much a co-creation of narratives.

My third and last example for now is taken from an interview with an academic migrant telling me the story of his academic career; this quote is about getting his first job when he was living in New Zealand and the position was in Southern Europe:

'We want you here as soon as possible. Can you be here by the 20th October?' That was on the 10th. I was ready to say yes to anything. This is what I mean about decisions and choice. Three days before I didn't even know this thing existed, and here I had this guy on the blower saying can you get here in 10 days. I said yes I can. There was no way I wasn't going to be there in 10 days.

About the next job, an offer to teach for a year in Scandinavia: I said yes to that at 2 o'clock in the morning, [at a party]... so, it was a rational choice (laughs). It was going to look good on the CV that I'd done a year's teaching in Scandinavia to be perfectly honest. And it was one of those decisions that I don't remember ever analysing over. It was just as soon as it was put in front of me I said yes. Same as [the first job in Southern Europe]. The minute it was, snapping up a piece of candy that was strewn in front of you. But no long term reflection, no thought about future, family (interview 2012).

It is easy to see that this colleague was a very good narrator, somebody who told the story of his career as an entrepreneurial adventurer, as a series of calculated risks. The chosen quote

Commented [Office1]: Ich kriege diesen Strich nicht raus, ohne dass sich alles verschiebt.

Commented [Office2]: I also registered his well-dosed play with understatement: he is offered jobs and thus agency over his professional life, at the same time, he is careful not put himself out there as a sought-after genius. Careful handling of agency and positioning himself in a likeable manner, narrative habitus of academics!?!?

mirrors a classical interview situation. I had only met this colleague once before and have not seen him since. We had a wonderful two and a half hours together; I recorded the interview, wrote up my impressions in my fieldnotes, and transcribed and worked with it, as with the many other interviews for my project on academic mobility. Yet this is one of my favourite interviews whereas others seem flat compared to this. His narrative ability is such that he manages to underplay his ambition and huge academic talent while emphasising his adventurous spirit. For him, migration is the story, his story, of a playful skipping on stepping stones. The global knowledge economy is a liberating framework that has enabled him to pursue an international, and very successful, career. The ideology of academic mobility as an unquestioned value is transformed into a personal success story. Although he was—during the interview—charmingly in control of his own life story, I am now fitting this story into my own ethnographic narrative. I have coded it, re-read it and used it in a process of dissection to develop themes for an ethnography of academic mobility. I am using it not only in a subject-focused analysis but much more so in a thematically focused one, closer to the principles of grounded theory than narrative inquiry. When Clandinin speaks of the process of narrative inquiry as relational, arguing that "stories are co-composed in the spaces between us as inquirers and participants" (2013, 24), I feel a bit uneasy. My ethnographic narrative is co-composed in the sense that I asked for the interview and prepared questions; but for the process of analysis and interpretation? My colleague was very much in control of his career narrative during the interview; clearly he had formed and told these stories before. Many of them were "ready mades" (Keupp 1999) that he re-told for me; but only in some short moments of spontaneous reflection triggered by unexpected questions did he engage in co-creation. At least it seemed so to me. But for narrative analysis as such it is classy material for sure.

There are distinctive and important differences in the way these stories were produced, their relationship between researcher and participant and their relationship to what we call ethnography. The common thread of these stories is that they all speak to the reader and invite her/him to listen, to hang out with such stories. The distinction lies in something that David Morris has expressed in this way: "The concept of thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Thinking about stories conceives of the narratives as an object. Thinking with stories

is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as of allowing narrative to work on us" (2002, 196).

Decoding the analysing process – talking about doing ethnographic stories

The first part of this article discussed some of the present means to get ethnographic stories onto our writing desks. The actual work of constructing an ethnographic narrative happens in solitude, and for good reasons. This is hard and labour-intensive analysis and writing, and it is best done alone. The weight of responsibility on the ethnographer to get it right and the countless decisions that have to be made about writing are coupled with the unease about using the methods of inquiry and developing recipes for the cooking of stories. Therefore, during the process of writing "the last thing you want is to be discussing the ... thing that is woven up and down your arteries and in the marrow of your bones, and to find they [colleagues] don't do it the same way" (Kennedy 2014, 106).

In order to get a sense of what happens during the process of transforming stories into ethnographic narrative, I asked a group of my colleagues to answer some questions I had about working with data and writing up. Most of them agreed to attend a relaxed focus group setting and two decided to answer the questions in writing. This is what I asked them:

Some questions about writing your ethnographic narratives (from and with your data)

Is there a Who (can be a plural) who taught you writing, influenced your writing?

How would you describe the relationship between analysing your data and your writing?

How do you like to create your data?

Do you have a 'habit', a preferred way of analysing your data?

Do you use stories/narratives in your writing?

In which way do you use them? Quoting from interviews? Story-ing field notes or memories? Writing stories of your own making?

Do you 'give voice' to your participants? If you do, how do you do that?

In the end we were seven people getting together. It felt a tiny bit uncomfortable and strangely odd to talk about pre-writing habits, analysing habits or even writing habits. So, I

asked first about fieldwork and collecting data – as that seemed safe enough - whereupon one of them said:

"I don't think about it as data, I call it material", and another colleague chipped in, saying "I don't really call it something; it is all of my experience, things that are given to me and things that I collected on the way". A third remarked that she eventually decided to label all material as "text" and that this made it somehow easier to file it, sort it, label it.

There was some discussion along the lines of what Geertz has labelled as "Being There, Being Here" (1988, 135). "When you are there [in the field]" somebody in our group said, "the material finds you; well you have to truly be there of course". *Being there* indicates the presence of the embodied versus the disembodied research self. *Being there* related material is stories, evocative fieldnotes, vignettes, personal memories of taste, smell, conversations, music, angst and anger, joy and friendships, hard won familiarity and being marginal. "It is Being here, a scholar among scholars, that gets your anthropology read [...] published, reviewed, cited, taught" (1988, 130). Being there and being here are governed by academic regimes that set the norms and these are powerful guides that help and constrain us as well as making us to want to break out and try something a bit different. Being here includes constructing the ethnographic narrative: "Styles of writing", as Laurel Richardson puts it, "are neither fixed nor neutral but rather reflect the historically shifting domination of particular schools or paradigms" (2005, 960).

All of us agreed that the PhD experience was the absolutely crucial time when we all developed our analysing and writing habits and systems; we might hone and refine and extend them but our (ethnographic) academic habitus was formed during that time. I am sure I am still also deeply influenced by the very positivist methods of teaching I went through at university. I now feel embarrassed thinking about striving for objectivity, constructing a research setting that somebody else could repeat in the same way, not using the I-word. I still vividly remember reading Judith Butler and *Writing Culture* and feeling unsettled, lost, *ratlos*. But also being excited. Nowadays I am equally unsure about Laurel Richardson and Carolyn Ellis who inspire me, unsettle me but also make me feel afraid that by embracing subject and self-centred ethnography we may be moving narrative inquiry into the ivory tower and may pay for this by losing our grip on our social-critical commitment. Much of what centres on subject-oriented story-rich ethnography is by necessity about our own middle class lives as academics, possibly in conflict with our various upbringings, a theme rigorously and creatively explored by Didier Eribon in his *Returning to Reims* (2013). It pays to feel uneasy about the ways these fascinating new methods limit our grasp on the worlds we would like to explore critically.

Fieldwork

It surprised me greatly that even my younger colleagues reported being taught anthropology without doing ethnography and then later going off by themselves to have fieldwork experiences. Most of my colleagues were simply told to just go and hang out in the field in the vaguest sense. They were not taught methods, they were sent out to be in the field rather than to reflect on how they might construct it. They reported just as older and previous generations of anthropologists that they felt like drowning, of seeing all and nothing, of collecting everything and of only getting a sense what had been going on once returned to their university space. Being sent out to 'be there' was still a very lonely experience and still unsettling as the preparation for such expeditions was scanty at best.

We agreed that fieldnotes are based on choices we make before we even depart, and then again when we are 'there'. By taking fieldnotes, we agreed, we are eliminating reality that we are not seeing or comprehending at the time and that we are not interested in. We are working within our own narrative habitus, what Arthur W. Frank calls the 'knowing a corpus of stories; feeling comfortable telling and hearing certain stories (and not others)" (2010, 195). We live that unavoidable unconscious bias and return to 'being here' with material that has been produced by manifold decisions on what to leave out and on what not to ask. Therefore, what we end up organising (coding) at our desks has already been through a constant series of eliminating choices, of choosing pathways that fit our supposed needs or practicalities. In short, we are writing ethnography that fits our narrative habitus (Frank 2010, 194-195).

All my colleagues described their working through fieldwork material as intuitive, as constant listening, note-taking, also sometimes talking through with others. Their story-writing work was based on listening and ordering. But the way they dealt with the unease and anxiety that comes with doing such analysis depended very much on their subjective methodologies of ordering and listening.

Lorena Gibson developed a strict system of keeping computer-written fieldnotes and ended up writing a very popular blogpost about her writing of fieldnotes (2013). She divided the page and developed codes and also a strict filing system for all her other data. Two other colleagues started using NVivo very early on in their analysing process. They use it as a storage facility for all their material: filed notes, interview recordings, transcriptions and coding, films, photography and media clips. Another colleague always starts decorating the walls of her office when analysing for a new project. She pins and glues visual markers for herself that look tidy and do not connect to anything particular for the uninitiated visitor. But for her the photographs, clips and sometimes small text fields serve as a visual reminder of the narrative she is aiming for or just of what she intends to remind herself about. Another colleague told us that he lived in a one-room studio apartment during his fieldwork in Southeast Asia and that he filled all walls with 'stuff': "I pinned photographs of and information about my participants on the wall. I mapped their relationships with each other on that wall; I pinned quotes and maps and field entries alongside it; I even started writing

on that wall. It looked as if a crazy person was living there. But it helped me; somehow the confusion was on the wall and had left my head much better organised". Going on to his writing of ethnography, "'they' told me to do indexing", he said of his supervisors. "But I did not connect to that, it does not work for me. I need to walk along my wall and my shelf touch things, re-arrange them, look at them again and think about it" (focus group September 2016). Like most people, for me ordering of my own data is a pre-requisite for writing the ethnographic narrative; but such ordering is messy. I work with paper, pens and pencils, scissors and glue; pile and order, re-order, copy, paste and paste again, writing bubbles of linking thoughts into the texts, getting lost, getting un-lost. I also do a lot of staring, looking out of the window, listening to stories in my head, remembering, contemplating. I normally keep a log of impressions and one in which I write about every single person I interviewed. Parallel to that I annotate the transcripts and develop a map of themes.

Three of my colleagues declared how important it is for them to continue to write stories while analysing. They talked about constantly conceptualising the 'final text', the real narrative, and then repeatedly abandoning those drafts. One of them stated that she is very much influenced by Laurel Richardson's methods of *Writing as a Method of Inquiry* (2005). A second colleague also referred to Richardson but was much influenced by Kirin Narayan's methods of crafting ethnography (2012); she attended one of Narayan's three-day ethnographic-writing workshops and developed her writing habits from Narayan's teaching. She likes to frame her themes and topics by conceptualising narratives: "For me writing is a crucial part of the data analysis. When writing a paper or chapter I start with a core topic and a central theoretical point. I then get my ethnographic findings and basic theoretical argument down on the page. But as I write and redraft ... I layer more and more interpretation, or analysis, into that ethnographic narrative I think storytelling has a huge power to convey the messages we want to get across. Concrete details resonate for readers" (email 6 September 2016).

Research and analysis is like a recursive spiral for some: you cycle backwards and forwards and around. For most of us it is a dialectical-methodological chain. From sharing our habits we started a discussion on the origins of habits and more importantly the perceived validity of analysing methods. The unease we felt when beginning our sharing of 'cooking stories', we all agreed, was due to the fact that we felt we were engaging in a lot of soft analytic practices that would be frowned upon by hard-core social scientists, frowned upon even by qualitative researchers with very strict views on coding. The reality, however, is that most of us simply try to hang out with our data, and even co-create it by writing ethnographic vignettes and even poetry, by exploring the boundaries of ethnography, non-fiction and even fiction.

One of us described his anthropological upbringing as marked by a sense of the "late methodological shame" of his supervisors who had lived through the paradigm shift of the

Writing Culture debate. Some were simply told to 'write up' their field experiences, get the story out. "There were a lot of silences and uneasiness on how to deal with the Clifford/Marcus assault," he said.

It was also surprising that all of us, across a significant range of ages and nationalities, reported that narrative analysis of ethnographic material was rarely discussed at our universities and never really taught. Although we do teach it now, we do so with a sense of unease. NVivo coding is very popular among our PhD students and it seems that a certain type of dissected analysis comes out of such analysing programmes, one that relies on interview quotes to support the argument. Fieldnotes, impressions and memories are often silenced during the ordering phase and the more 'reliable' data is privileged during the process of writing. It seems that, during such a (computer-) guided translation process, much energy, inspiration and courage gets lost and traded for a feeling of security and reliability. Going back to van Maanen's encouragement to tell the tales of the field, I keep wondering to what extent we are still giving our students the message to try and de-subjectivise and obscure the analysing process.

It transpired that most of us do a bit of everything: hanging out and listening, trying to hear, trying slowly to develop a sense of the major themes and narratives that emerge from that listening process. And while doing it, or before or after, most of us also work on some serious coding as suggested by Sykes et al. (2017). Some of us increasingly feel that dissecting the data through coding is doing the process of creating stories a disservice. On the other hand, this task of ordering also creates a sense of safety; filing and especially coding evokes a sense of control we may feel we do not otherwise have. It is a safety net—we are doing something with our data, something that is acknowledged as valid and we are getting things out of it. The assumption of control induces a sense of methodological balance.

The process of coding we discussed very much in the context of a set of official legitimising practises in qualitative work. We saw this practice as legitimising ethnography by giving it a serious and accepted framework of analysis. The price we pay for such legitimising work seems increasingly high, maybe even too high. Although coding helps us to check ourselves for biases and helps us to discover silences, different perspectives and, often, gendered approaches, it is counterproductive for a subject-centred narrative inquiry and certainly to a deep listening.

Intuitive analysing, however, requires note-taking, reading, deep listening, co-creating and even creative ethnographic writing; in short, creating ethnographic narratives from narratives seems too personal, too subjective to be entirely comfortable for many. Writing that emerges from such intuitive processes requires surrendering control; if we really do, as Morris suggests, let the stories speak to us (2002), we need to wait until we hear and understand. If we intend to write ethnographic vignettes, we need to wait until the story that wants to be written pops up into vision.

Narrative analysis, then, seemed to us to be that process of juggling disciplinary boundaries and established rules of how to work within a qualitative paradigm. On the one hand, we are still dealing with echoes of post-*Writing Culture* and the resulting methodological shame, which pushes us to explore new subject-centred methodologies and develop a routine of researching and writing inside the narrative turn; on the other hand, we need that sense of ordering and accountability. In order to feel 'safe' and structured with our narratives, we feel pressured to adhere to the values of a wider academic readership, to expectations of what counts as good and sound qualitative analysis, and we want to fence off any unconscious biases and assumed laziness. In order to be able to let ideas and themes float up and become visible you have to do both: surrendering control of that process by just hanging out with your data (talking about it, listening to stuff, looking at photos, remembering conversations and scenes, writing scenes, rereading, re-listening) as well as ordering your data.

Legitimising practises are for legitimising the qualitative methods in the social sciences as being part of the sciences; they are for legitimising our discipline, making qualitative work count as quality work. It is also making sure for ourselves and the readership that we have a grip on this stuff that is called data, that—with all our narratives—we still maintain the border between fiction and ethnography.

To come back to van Maanen's questions about whether ethnographic writing is either science or art, it clearly is a mixture of both. The sense of where ethnographic writing sits on the spectrum between either of these options, however, has been and still is in constant flux. When I look back at a 1973 text by Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss on a *Strategy for Analyzing*, they warningly and strictly wrote that "some researchers are satisfied to deal with uncodified, anecdotal data and depend almost entirely upon the fortuitous development of insight; at the other end of the spectrum are those who laboriously codify their data and apply more systematic analytic techniques, including statistical ones, to arrive at social theory (2005 [1973], 3f).

There have been huge shifts towards 'insight', especially in narrative analysis and inquiry: as Elizabeth Adam St. Pierre wrote much more recently, she "used writing as a method of data using writing to think; that is I wrote my way into particular spaces I could not have occupied by sorting data with a computer program or by analytic deduction" (2005, 970).

Such "assault to the structure" (Adam St. Pierre 2005, 970), resonated with the discussion we had over our coffee-infused focus group in Wellington. Most of my colleagues work with their whole body: they write, attach post-its, glue, scribble, map, colour in. And all but one referred to cooking metaphors and cooking analogies when it came to discussing the actual writing of the ethnographic narratives. One of them asked, "When is a soup a soup and when is it still a collection of vegetables and fluids? You eventually just know when it's ready, you know because you have practised it many times and you have the embodied knowledge when it's ready to be served". Another used the metaphor of baking: "I think I

start baking this cake; then I get the ingredients, look at them, re-order them, line them up, contemplate, start baking and eventually realise that the cake changed its texture, its form, its taste and that I may even bake it for a different set of guests". This haphazard-baking analogy points to something important in narrative analysis as an intuition-guided process of inquiry. Stories have a life of their own; as an ethnographer you are part of that life: they are inside you and then they come out again and they are mixed up with you, your academic knowledge, your readings and your personality. And we do re-tell and shape new stories we find interesting and telling; others get discarded and forgotten, or only hinted at.

That such ordering work and the actual task of writing are done alone in conversation with our own ideas, readings, listenings and social backgrounds, that it is hardly shared or talked about, may be explained by the feelings that come with this. Apart from the occasional flow and the occasional joy of discovery, this is an emotional rollercoaster ride for most of us. It comes with a feeling of being lost, wading in marshmallows, losing balance and direction; the most-used metaphor that springs to mind is drowning and disorientation, feeling ghastly and utterly alone. The responsibility for getting the ethnographic narrative right, despite or because of our chosen methods of analysis, is weighing on us. Most of our efforts of co-creating stop at the desk and we as authors have to make the final decision about which stories are going to be told and the decision about the narrative frame in which they are going to be embedded. Eventually, as A.L. Kennedy writes, "the author is alone with the text: every word an opportunity, every word a responsibility, every word another chance" (2014, 76).

Summary

In this article I have interrogated some elements of the process of doing stories as ethnographers that are rarely discussed and yet are essential to the reflective process of how we deal with stories and how stories are then turned into narrative analysis. To be transparent about the tales of the field, we need to halt from time to time and review our story-gathering practices, the changing methods of constructing the field in order to work with stories. 'Storying work' can be the result of co-composing or of more-established methods like interviewing, and it increasingly opens up avenues of auto-ethnographic writing. While the actual gathering of stories is mostly disclosed, their ordering and writing up, the actual narrative analysis and narrative ethnography, are mostly hidden from methodological self-declaration. Ordering work is messy, lonely and tormented by an unease about methodological shame and uncertainty. Narrative ethnography still is a focus method of social scientists but borders on non-fiction writing in the humanities. Hence, ordering work is a contested territory between analytical coding and intuitive listening. The repertoires available for ethnographic storytelling have been growing and, therefore, so have the options for constructing a good story. Doing stories, then, is now a legitimised

genre of writing, but one that now demands a visible author: an author who acknowledges that she/he is also a gatherer, a constructor, an analyser and a baker of stories.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Graeme Whimp, Rolf W. Brednich and Silke Meyer for their careful reading of draft versions of this article and their generous sharing of ideas to improve it. A huge thank you goes to my colleagues at Victoria University's Cultural Anthropology Programme for sharing their stories about their narrative work. Academic storytelling in this instance was very much collective work; thank you all for trusting me to bake this into shape.

References

- Adam St. Pierre, Elizabeth: Writing as a Method of Nomadic Inquiry. Part two of chapter 38: Writing. A Method of Inquiry. In: Denzin, Norman K./ Lincoln, Yvonne S. (eds.): The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks/ London/ New Dehli ³2005, 967-978.
- Behar, Ruth: Ethnography in a Time of Blurred Genres. In Anthropology and Humanism 32:2 2007, 145-155.
- Bönisch-Brednich, Brigitte: What to do With Stories? Exploring the Links between Folklore Research and Narrative Analysis. In: Fabula 57, 3-4 2016, 195-215.
- Bönisch-Brednich, Brigitte: An Ethnographic Writing Workshop on Academic Mobility. In: Balaban, Corina / Wright, Susan (eds.): Policies and Experiences of Mobility. In: Doctoral Education UNIKE Notes on Doctoral Education 5 2017 (www.unike.au.dk/publications/unikenotes).
- Clandinin, D. Jean: Engaging in Narrative Inquiry. Walnut Creek 2013.
- Clifford, James / Marcus, George E.: Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley, CA 1986
- Davies, James: Emotions in the Field. In: Davies, James / Spencer, Dimitrina (eds.): Emotions the Field. The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience. Stanford, CA 2010, 1-13.
- Ellis, Carolyn: Revision. Autoethnographic Reflections on Life and Work. Walnut Creek, CA. 2009.
- Eribon, Didier: Returning to Reims. South Pasadena, CA 2013 [2009].

Frank, Arthur W.: *Letting Stories Breathe. A Socio-Narratology*. Chicago 2010.

Geertz, Clifford: *Works and Lives. The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford, CA 1988.

Gibson, Lorena (2013) A template for writing fieldnotes. <https://anthropod.net/2013/08/14/a-template-for-writing-fieldnotes/>. Last accessed 12 September 2017

Holmes, Douglas / R. Marcus, George E.: (2005) *Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward the Re-Functioning of Ethnography*. In: Ong, Aihwa / Collier, Stephen J. (eds.): *Global Assemblages. Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Blackwell, MA / Oxford / Carlton, AU 2005, 235-252.

Jackson, Michael: *The Politics of Storytelling. Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen 2002.

Kennedy, A. L.: *On Writing*. London 2014.

Keupp, Heiner: *Identitätskonstruktionen. Das Patchwork der Identitäten in der Spätmoderne*. Hamburg 1999.

Kreiwirth, Martin: *Tell me a Story: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences*. In: Kreiwirth, Martin / Carmichael, Thomas (eds.): *Constructivist Criticism: The Human Sciences in the Age of Theory*. Toronto 1994, 61-87.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *The Raw and the Cooked*. London 1970 [1964].

Maanen, John Van: *Tales of the Field. On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago/ London 1988.

Madden, Raymond: *Being Ethnographic. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Ethnography*. Los Angeles / London/New Dehli / Singapore/ Washington, DC 2010.

Madison, Soyini D.: *Narrative Poetics and Performative Interventions*. In: Denzin, Norman D. / Lincoln, Yvonna S. / Smith, Linda Tuhiwai: *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. Los Angeles / London et al. 2008, 391-406.

Morris, David: *Narrative, Ethics, and Pain: Thinking with Stories*. In: Charon, R. / Montello, M. (eds.): *Stories Matter: the Role of Narratives in Medical Ethics*. New York 2002, 200-221.

Müllli, Linda Martina: *Epistemic Partners? Exploring Para-Ethnographic Insights and Narration Strategies of Self-Aware Interviewees*. In: *Fabula* 59 2018, forthcoming.

Narayan, Kiri: *Alive in the Writing. Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekov*. Chicago 2012.

Richardson, Laurel: Writing: A Method of Inquiry. Part one of chapter 38: In: Denzin, Norman K./ Lincoln, Yvonne S. (eds.): The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks/ London/ New Dehli ³ 2005, 959-967.

Schatzman, Leonard / Strauss, Anselm: Strategy for Analyzing. In: Pole, Christofer (ed.): Fieldwork vol IV: Analysis, Outcomes and Reflections. London [1973] 2005, 3-21.

Stoller, Paul: Ethnography / Memoir / Imagination / Story. In: Anthropology and Humanism 32:2 2007, 178-191.

Sykes, Bryan L. / Verma, Anjali / Hancock, Black Hawk (2017): Aligning Sampling and Case Selection in Quantitative-Qualitative Research Designs: Establishing Generalizability Limits in Mixed-Methods Studies. In: Ethnography 18:4 2017, forthcoming.

Taussig, Michael: Walter Benjamin's Grave. Chicago 2006.