INTRODUCTION

ETHNOGRAPHY WITH A TWIST

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Why do we need ethnography with a twist?

Ethnography aims at understanding people and their activities from their own perspectives. It is based on the researcher’s presence and participation in the daily lives of people and communities, thereby offering various possibilities for encountering and understanding different ways of life and thinking. By engaging in participant observation, the ethnographer enters everyday life and life-worlds and can have access to hidden meanings, nuances and affective realms that are not visible or understandable at first sight. Ethnography as a research method and a mode of knowledge production has its roots in anthropological and sociological studies, seeking to understand – through a Western gaze – foreign cultures and distinct communities. Ethnography has since developed into a broad research field with a wide range of methodological emphases. Today, ethnographic research methods are used in a variety of disciplines for scrutinizing human interaction and experience.

Complex political, environmental, and social developments in rapidly changing global and multicultural societies and the digitalized world have created new kinds of research environments and challenges for ethnographic research. For example, rapid communication and mediation bring to our awareness global and local humanitarian and environmental crises that call for joint action beyond established institutions. Interconnected digitalized environments can bring people from various locations and backgrounds together, offering multiple ways to express their thoughts and creativity. In order to grasp the multiplicity and agency of individual people and collectivities, ethnographers need to find ways to work with not only scholars in other fields, but also with civil organizations and activists outside of academia. These new research environments and challenges require ethnographers to think ‘outside the box’ of their methodology and its previous tradition in order to critically discuss the core of ethnography: ethics, subjectivity, and the role of the researcher in ethnographic research.
As ethnography expands into multiple fields and is applied in new contexts, scholars across disciplines have created innovative methodological tools and novel approaches to ethnographic inquiry. The volume at hand introduces discussions and examples of the new twists in multidisciplinary ethnographic research. By twists we mean both a) an intentional aim to conduct ethnographic research with novel approaches and methodological tools, and b) sensitivity to recognize and creativity to utilize different kinds of ‘twist moments’ that ethnographic research may create for the researcher. These sudden ‘twist moments’, aroused by unexpected incidents in situ and related to serendipity, unpredictability, immediacy of embodied experiences, affects or cognitive confusion, can serve to generate new insights for the ethnographer and can be turned into a means for gaining ethnographic knowledge.

In addition to new ways of conducting ethnography and producing research material, ethnographers have actively sought new ways of writing and distributing ethnographic research results. These often include collaboration with other professionals: artists, filmmakers, actors, programmers and game designers as well as non-professionals and the research participants who have an equally central role in the new twists.

**Current trends and experiments**

Even though critical, feminist and postcolonial approaches in ethnographic research have sought to deconstruct and dismantle its former ethnocentric and normative bases, various kinds of unbalanced power hierarchies, for example in economic terms, continue to pose challenges for academic researchers and their collaborations. Therefore, we need to critically evaluate the new methodological tools and their ability to tackle issues of power difference and access to resources and knowledge. One solution dealing with these challenges is the use of collaborative methods in ethnography that allow for co-production and co-creation of research material, as well as shared conceptual work and wider distribution of knowledge.

Participatory research enables ordinary people to play an active and influential part in research processes. It has been one of the methodological trends in qualitative research of the 2000s (e.g. Gubrium and Harper 2013, 29). While there is a long tradition of using participatory and collaborative practices in ethnographic research for creating intimate research relationships with individuals and communities, collaborative ethnography emphasizes deep, interactive collaboration in research design, dissemination of research results, and knowledge production (Las- siter 2005). In collaborative ethnography, the researcher invites commentaries from the studied people from the beginning of planning the research project and throughout the fieldwork and writing process. Ethnographer(s) and participants discuss the interpretations together, which are then re-integrated into fieldwork and ethnographic analysis. The results are reciprocal, co-conceived or co-written with local communities of collaborators and thus consider multiple audiences outside the
confines of academic discourse, including local constituencies (ibid.). The model of reciprocal collaborative ethnography evolved among studies of indigenous communities, minorities and other vulnerable groups. Other participatory ethnographic approaches, especially participatory action research, a method that evolved in sociology, have been applied and used, for instance, in design research (e.g. Simonsen and Robinson 2012), examinations of everyday lives in urban contexts (e.g. Suopajärvi 2016), studies of health and culture (e.g. Averill 2006) and analyses of activists and civic groups (Hemment 2007).

Traditionally, ethnography has been a relatively lonely research practice, in the sense that ethnographers have worked and written alone (Clerke and Hopwood 2014). In this volume, many texts are based on the collaboration of research teams and other academic collectives and involve reflections on the process of methodological experiments of co-creating knowledge. Along with joint fieldwork, shared conceptual work can offer ground for developing theories through sharing preliminary ideas and intuitive knowledge. Writing ethnography can be a joint creative process that happens both in situ and online. Many ethnographers think that new experimental and creative collaboration is needed that bend the conventions of academic writing and the domination of journal articles (e.g. Marcus 2007; Stavrianakis, Rabinow and Korsby 2017).

This volume also draws on other influential, but more theoretical than practical trends included in the so-called affective turn, which has brought attention to impulses, attitudes, emotions and feelings as sources of knowledge and knowledge production by acknowledging the embodied nature of sensing the world as a basis of human interaction (Ahmed 2004; Thrift 2004; Frykman and Povrazanović Frykman 2015). Ethnography is a valid method for studying the affective, as it encourages the researchers’ reflexive attitude and emphasizes the subjective experience of the ethnographer. Furthermore, ethnographic writing that draws on narrativizing the fieldwork experience and reflexivity, offers a fruitful forum for expressing and analyzing affective experiences. Despite these potentials, the study books of ethnographic methods hardly pay attention to the embodied researcher, or to the articulation of emotions, sensing atmospheres or embodied experiences in the text (see Pink 2009 for exception). Experimenting with artistic expression and visual or multimodal forms of representing research results, such as drawings, ethnographic film or theatre performances, can bring about silent and embodied forms of knowledge that would otherwise remain unspoken (ibid.). In recent years, many ethnographers have also made conscious experiments with ethnographic fiction (e.g. Cantú 2019; Silow Kallenberg and Ingridsdotter 2017). Ethnographic fiction affords the author-researcher freedom from normative academic forms of writing and offers possibilities to combine different case studies and to play with temporalities and possible scenarios. Fiction can also facilitate the exploration of sensitive and intimate issues without revealing personal information and offer a channel for articulating the researcher’s inside/emic knowledge (e.g. Pohtinen 2019).
Questions that remain: research ethics and reflexivity

Research ethics is a cornerstone of working closely with people and within the studied field. As each ethnographic research includes unique ethical questions, practices and solutions must always be negotiated case by case with regard to existing guidelines and legislation. Recently, digital realms have raised new challenges of data protection and copyrights. In addition to practical questions that have to do with consent and identification of research subjects, research ethics contain a myriad of complex moral questions about the aims and means of ethnographic research. Many of these questions have to do with understanding the basis of different ways of thinking. For example, when planning collaborative research, it is important to reflect on the issue of reciprocity from the perspective of the participants: what do participants gain when they commit to a collaborative research process? Does participation really open a space for co-production and fruitful negotiation over alternative epistemologies and different ways of knowing, or does it merely reinforce a hegemonic and/or academic theoretical framework upon the experiences of the participants? It is important to bear in mind that often the coproduction of knowledge is an ideal set by the academic community (Mosse 2007). Too often, the research agenda and the interactions with participants and communities are tied to project cycles and research funding, which makes long-term collaboration and evaluation of the impacts of the research challenging (Byrne et al. 2009).

It is often said that the ethnographer is the main tool in ethnographic research and thus, subjectivity is embedded in all ethnographic research practices (e.g. Murchison 2010, 13–14). Critical evaluation of the role of the researcher(s), her position with regard to the research field, politics and epistemologies is a fundamental part of creating validity in ethnographic research (Davies 2002, 3–4). Reflexive attitude needs to run through the whole research process, during which the researcher critically reflects on her own position and presumptions, political engagements in the research, as well as methodological choices. Critical reflection and articulation of positionality become even more crucial when developing and experimenting with new methodological tools.

Ethnography with a twist in action

This book draws together 13 chapters that reflect the great diversity of approaches, methods, and practices, as well as ethical challenges in current ethnographic research. Our contributors use ethnography to explore various cases and phenomena, which range from heritage sites to slums, and from artistic projects to researcher communities. The cases deal with people of various social backgrounds, from societal elites to migrants and refugees, and include people of different ages, ranging from young children to elderly people. The interaction between the researched and researchers in the exploration of these cases has taken place through different modes of communication and forms of expression, such as story-crafting, drawing, and participant-induced elicitation interviews.
The amalgamating factor among the diversity of topics and themes explored in the chapters stems from their contributors’ interest to rethink ways of ‘doing’ ethnography and their openness to develop new methodological practices, concepts, or tools. The chapters critically discuss keystones of ethnography; ethics, subjectivity, human interaction, the role of ethnographer and the researcher-researcher relationship in the ethnographic research process, and the translation of experiences in the procedures of ethnographic knowledge production. Through the variety of explored cases and phenomena, the book enlightens different aspects of ‘ethnography with a twist’ and demonstrates how it can be understood in action. The focus on ‘twists’ is reflected also in the ways, in which our contributors discuss and write about them in the book. Several chapters manifest the experimental and alternative take, based on creative, artistic, and narrative modes of presenting thoughts and findings.

The contributions in the volume are structured in four interlinked thematic Parts. Besides the themes of these Parts, individual chapters in each bring forth various theoretical and methodological bridges to chapters from other Parts. Part I discusses the challenges of producing ethnographic knowledge in a research team and in close interaction with other researchers. Its ‘twists’ in ethnography stem from exploring new collaborative practices, which emphasize intersubjectivity in research, the sharing of sensory experiences, and negotiating interpretations in an ethnographic research process. Part I starts with the chapter of Johanna Turunen, Viktoriaj La. Čeginskaya, Sigrid Kaasik-Krogerus, Tuuli Lähdesmäki, and Katja Mäkinen that discusses collaborative and interpretive reflexivity in doing ethnography in a research group. They describe how they implemented their ethnographic fieldwork at 11 heritage sites and how their ethnographic process included not only the sharing of data, such as interviews with various informants, but also the researchers’ own experiences through intensive dialogue and exchange of views. They claim that this kind of affective sharing of experiences among researchers goes beyond traditional conceptualizations of team ethnography. As a result of their collaborative and interpretive reflexivity, the authors developed the concept of poly-space — a concept that describes the entanglement of multiple moments and different spatial, temporal, affective, and cognitive experiences in one physical place, such as at a heritage site in their case. Instead of being neutral sites in the authors’ memos, their oral communications, exchange of experiences, and sharing of emotions turned these sites into inter-personal space, filled with emotional and affective meanings.

The second chapter in Part I continues the discussion on the role of the researchers’ experiences and emotions in ethnography. Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto and Tytti LehtoVaara scrutinize the process of doing sensory ethnography based on sensory observations and interventions in writing. The challenge of sensory ethnography stems from difficulties in documenting and cognitively transmitting the embodied knowledge, sensory experience and memory, which directs our attention, often unconsciously, and may disappear within seconds. In the chapter, this challenge is explored through experiments conducted collaboratively in a
workshop in the Ethnography with a Twist Conference at the University of Jyväskylä in 2019. The authors approach the experiences of sensory ethnography as ‘twist’ moments of ethnographic research, which transformed their understanding of doing ethnography and opened new views of engaging in reflexive ethnographic knowledge production.

The third chapter in Part I stems also from a collaborative and experimental workshop in the same conference. Matthew Cheeseman, Gautam Chakrabarti, Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch, Simon Poole, Dani Schrire, Daniella Seltzer, and Matti Tainio explore a series of walking experiments that took them outside the conference venue to experience the environment through walking in it. These walking experiments and the shared experiences created by them are approached in the chapter as a mode of collective understanding. The authors return in their text to their shared walking experiment and re-embody this moment by continuing walking together, writing together, and engaging their understanding of self and their experiences of walking. Through ethnographic and artistic responses to each-others’ walking practices, the authors open their experimentation to the reader and invite her to travel with the authors through the process of ethnographic knowledge production.

Part II discusses visual ethnography and visuality and multimodality as research methods as well as their possibilities and limits to produce ethnographic knowledge. It also explores new visual technologies and ethics related to their uses. The ‘twists’ in Part II connect to the critical exploration of the roles of images, multimodal items, practices of visualization, and the engagement of the researched and the researcher in an ethnographic research process. Riitta Hänninen opens Part II by discussing participant-induced elicitation interview in two very different contexts: Finnish lifestyle blogging and older adults using digital technology. She claims that participant-induced elicitation broadens the scope of thematic interview and enables gaining a deeper understanding of the object of research by encouraging the interviewees to actively collaborate with the researcher. Hänninen’s research on bloggers and older adults demonstrates how the use of multimodal items in interviews, such as blog posts, smartphones, and various ICT applications, may open up a new kind of methodological access to the communities and phenomena under research and provide a versatile extension to the traditional interview as a part of ethnographic field research.

Marina Everri, Maxi Heitmayer, Paulius Yamin-Slotkus, and Saadi Lahlou continue the discussion on the uses of digital technology in ethnography. Their chapter focuses on video-ethnography and qualitative research designs based on video data and examines what kinds of ethical challenges are related to these designs and data. The authors’ core concern is the lack of solid ethical regulations and guidelines for using video data in ethnographic research. The chapter provides a systematic review of current research ethics guidelines for using video data, identifies critical issues and gaps related to researcher–researched rapport, informed consent, and participants’ rights in video-ethnography, and explores the parameters of ethical research design in such studies. Based on these explorations, the authors provide
practical advice for an ‘ethical twist’ in video-ethnography by looking at the future of ethical regulations for qualitative research designs based on video data.

Multimodality in ethnography and challenges of the researcher-researched relationship are also discussed in the chapter by Pihla Maria Siim. She explores children’s experiences and understandings of mobility and describes how the challenge to research young children led her to apply alternative fieldwork methods, including story-crafting and drawing with the children. In their research, Siim and her colleague asked the researched Estonian children to tell a story of a child who moves from Estonia to Finland. The researchers wrote the story down and read it aloud to the children who then were able to correct the story for as long as was needed until they were content with the outcome. The children were also asked to draw things that they missed from Estonia and liked in Finland. The chapter explores these drawings as a dialogue between the ‘marks on paper’ and the children’s thoughts, which enables the researcher to better understand children’s experiences with mobility. Siim claims that story-crafting is a method that innovatively combines the real and the imaginable by offering both a space to negotiate experiences and a methodological tool to explore emotions related to them.

Part II ends with an experimental chapter by Marika Tervahartiala. She is a drawer, art educator, and researcher exploring autoethnographic drawing as a method in a post-structuralist framework. Her chapter focuses on discussing the complex relationships between drawing as an act, the drawer-artist, and the drawing as a result of this act. Tervahartiala also explores the ethical challenges of autoethnographic agency when the drawing is not only understood as a research object but rather as an active entity or being. This chapter combines visual, artistic and creative research to discuss how autoethnographic knowledge and understandings can be produced in the process of drawing. It challenges the established and conventional role of the visual in research and criticizes the text-based formats of academic publications.

Part III focuses on the ethnography of power dynamics in challenging contexts ranging from extreme poverty in Africa to power elites in Northern Europe. The chapters explore the power included in the interaction between the researcher and the researched and in the creation of data in ethnographic fieldwork in such contexts. Moreover, its ‘twists’ stem from various ethical challenges included in these contexts. In the first chapter, Marie Sandberg explores volunteer initiatives for refugee reception in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands after the increased refugee arrivals to Europe in 2015. Her work applies retrospective ethnography focusing on volunteers’ memories of the events in 2015 and their attempts to help the refugees. These memories are not only a result of subjective experiences but rather the effects of collaborative efforts jointly produced between volunteers and the researcher during the researcher’s field visits. Sandberg claims that retrospective ethnography should have an inbuilt sensitivity towards ‘twisting moments’ that enhance ethnographically informed knowledge production as a collaborative endeavour.

Laura Stark’s chapter explores urban poor communities in the global South and the methodological and ethical challenges included in ethnographic research of
them. In her research, Stark interviewed approximately 300 people in low-income neighbourhoods of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, some of them through Skype calls. The core challenge of her research arose from various difficulties in encountering the interviewees who struggle with their basic needs on an everyday basis. These difficulties included, for instance, understanding the expectations of people coming from a very different reality than that of the researcher, the effects of poverty and stress on participants’ memories, and several research technical issues, such as providing and receiving informed consent from people with a low education level and gathering personal data among those with meagre identity documentation. Stark proposes third-person elicitation and perceived causation as methods that can be used to circumvent some of these challenges.

Part III ends with the chapter written by Lotta Lounasmeri. Here, a twist in ethnographic research arose from the researcher’s experiences of the expression of power in terms of societal position and status in interviews of people belonging to societal elites in Finland. Moreover, Lounasmeri explores how gender plays a role in these situations and explores her experiences in a critical feminist framework. The interviewed people in her research worked as chief editors, media executives, public relations and public affairs consultants, decision-makers in the energy sector, and senior officials in the political and civil administrative sectors (if they were not already retired) – most of them were men. Lounasmeri discusses her uncomfortable feelings and her sense of vulnerability, even fear, when facing patronizing attitudes during the interviews and ponders what is the correct ethical reaction to such attitudes. As a conclusion, she suggests seeking to create mutual trust and respect but also maintaining one’s own dignity and personality and to giving space for the behaviour of others in order to make it visible and recognizable to them.

Part IV explores affect and embodiment as ethnographers’ means for gaining understanding and producing knowledge, the relationship between embodiment and language, and the challenges of wording the affective and embodied experiences and emotions. In the first chapter, Marija Dalbello and Catherine McGowan develop ‘aggregative’ reading of oral history interviews of people who arrived in America from Europe during the Great Migration at the beginning of the 20th century. The authors interpret the sensorial-affective dimensions of migration through coding from the interviews the narrations of the memories of smell, sight, sound, taste, touch, or synesthetic imagining and representation of physiological and affective issues. As the interviews have been conducted a long time ago by other researchers, Dalbello and McGowan set a goal to develop a methodology for the study of pre-elicited archives and to reflect on pre-elicited interviews as a source for historical ethnography. They also discuss how to respond to different temporal contexts in historical ethnography in order to understand the shared structure of feeling of a historical sensorium. They claim that the research of historical sensorium is both a phenomenological and epistemological project involving sensory knowing and intertwined sensoria of the interviewees and the researchers who coded and interpreted the interviews.
Sofie Strandén-Backa’s chapter continues the discussion on affective dimensions of ethnography by telling a story of her encounter with a Finnish Romany woman when washing carpets in her house’s laundry room. This unexpected moment created a relationship between the Romany women and the researcher and triggered a series of events that made Strandén-Backa an ‘involuntary ethnographer’, as she describes her position. In this position, she experienced various emotions ranging from enthusiasm to confusion. In her chapter, Strandén-Backa reflects on her experiences and emotions and explores the factors that make this case of ethnography difficult and uncomfortable. The chapter brings forth how ethnographic cases may accidentally occur and come along unexpectedly for an ethnographer – how ‘ethnography is seeking its ethnography’, as she notes. The chapter also demonstrates how ethnography can be about ‘living’ through an ethnographic process that is not linear, foreseeable, or controllable.

Part IV ends with Jessica Bradley’s chapter in which she explores how ethnographic research of creative practices may enable new understandings of communication. Her research focuses on the implementation of a street art project in Slovenia and how people participating in it draw on their communicative repertoires to produce creative work. Bradley utilizes in her exploration theories of dynamic multilingualism, applying particularly the concept of translanguaging that draws attention to multimodality and materiality in communication. Her chapter shows how language use is related to bodies, objects, and space, and how ethnographic research can be perceived as transdisciplinary dialogue between different scholarly approaches, including arts-based research and applied linguistics.

The book ends with Tom Boellstorff’s epilogue that draws together core themes and challenges examined in the chapters and discusses the state of current ethnographic research and the need for rethinking its methodological and ethical takes. Boellstorff emphasizes the importance of critical approaches in ethnography and developing its methods and conceptual understanding through various ‘twists’ discussed in this book. He adds to the book’s discussion on ‘twists’ themes and topics that were not covered by its other contributors. These themes include digital and virtual ethnography. The epilogue ends the book by discussing its methodological implications for current research and envisaging future prospects of ‘twists’ in ethnography.

This book seeks to offer new methodological and conceptual ideas and tools for the continuously evolving field of ethnography by rethinking it as a method and a mode of knowledge production. The chapters in the book demonstrate in numerous ways how ‘twisting’ the ways of thinking, practicing, and dealing with ethnography opens up new ideas, views, and understandings of the researched cases, objects of study, and most importantly, the researchers themselves and their position as knowledge producers. This book does not seek to close the discussion on ‘ethnography with a twist’ but rather stimulate further debate and conversation of its usefulness, applicability, and possibilities as well as its limitations. We hope our book also gives new insights and ideas to those who seek new angles to ethnographic methods and who teach and advise students on their way to becoming future ethnographers.
Bibliography
