

## MM12 Methods

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### [3] Ethnography

This will look at ethnography as a particular strand of qualitative research in getting to the bottom of the intercultural. Autoethnography and creative non-fiction will be considered as a means by which the researcher can interrogate their own subjective positionality in the intercultural process.

Readings for the seminar: Badwan (2020), Holliday (2021)

#### **Beginnings**

Validity of in-depth, disciplined descriptions of social events

Basic principles of qualitative research

**Disciplines:** making the familiar strange, allowing the unexpected to emerge, thick description (building complex pictures from instances) instead of triangulation

No less subjective than collecting, arranging and interpreting interview data

Transcripts only show a small part of what is going on

Can be interspersed with other forms of data

e.g. interconnecting descriptions of meetings with policy documents and interviews

Looking at all aspects of social life - full range of possible data - everything that can be seen and heard - rich and many-faceted

The contrast is between the breakdown of questionnaire responses of 472 married women respondents who have had affairs with men other than their husbands and the novel, *Madame Bovary*. The novel relies heavily on that appeal to judgment which is appraisal of credibility in the light of the reader's experience. You cannot base much appeal to judgment on the statistics of survey. (Stenhouse 1985: 31)

#### **Controversies**

Has been an instrument of colonialism - describing the indolent non-Western Other (Clifford 1986; Comaroff & Comaroff 1992; Nzimiro 1979)

Same critique as for positivism and the 'distant, rational researcher'

#### **Evocative vs. analytical**

**Novelistic**, seamless description - evocative immersion (Bignold 2011; Cherrington 2015) - 'kinetic understanding of other cultures' (Tedlock 2011: 333)

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I began to see the *goka* [praise singer] and the corpse tied together in the undulating rhythms of the singing, the beating of the iron hoes, and the movement of feet and bodies. Then I saw the corpse jolt and occasionally pulsate, in a counterpoint to the motions of the *goka*. At first I thought that my mind was playing tricks with my eyes, so I cannot say when the experience first occurred; but it began with moments of anticipation and terror, as though I knew something unthinkable was about to happen. The anticipation left me breathless, gasping for air. In the pit of my stomach I felt a jolting and tightening sensation, which corresponded to moments of heightened visual awareness. (Grindal 1983: 68, taken from Tedlock 2011: 332)

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Data that can be analysed through a **separated** authorial voice (e.g. Anderson 2006; Atkinson 2006; Holman Jones 2005)

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These students demonstrate a richness in their multilingual abilities:

Eva uses Berber with her family when she speaks on the phone. She has some French housemates, so she sometimes uses French to communicate with them. Eva speaks Arabic with her co-national friends and colleagues. She usually uses English to communicate in the academic setting, and with her multi-national friends. (Fieldnotes)

This is not just switching codes, but another means for negotiating the multiple facets of her identity, depending on the topic and the people with whom she interacts:

For instance, when she spoke with her parents, she was calm and talked about herself and the events that happened in her life. Whereas, when she was with her female kitchen-mates, who are very cheerful girls, she was quite like them, high-spirited and zestful. While, at university, she used English to communicate with her supervisor and other fellow colleagues. (Fieldnotes)

(Sadoudi & Holliday 2022: 6-7)

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This fieldnote data is interpreted with interviews

### ***Autoethnography***

Analysis of your own experience:

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My associating this difficulty with eye contact and body language connects with a second memory of just being in the street:

At about the same time of suddenly getting served in the shop, my physical presence in the street became easier. For the first six months I had difficulty walking among other people. They did not sense my presence when I walked up behind them, making it hard for me to get past. I was constantly bumping into people. I also had difficulty crossing busy roads. It was the norm to walk amongst the traffic while crossing; but it took me a long time to work out how to do this. I eventually learnt that the key was to make eye contact with oncoming drivers; but it was also a lot to do with body language - small hand signals to the drivers. ...

This description represents a strong awareness that I had at the time and which I recall vividly. However, I do not think that body language here is about what has been referred to as kinesics ...

(Holliday 2022a: 67)

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### ***Reconstructed ethnographic accounts - creative non-fiction***

Fictionalised descriptions based on multiple forms of data, professional or personal experience (Agar 1990; Holliday 2022b)

The need to anonymise, lack of formal permission, lack of formally-collected data

Meanings that cannot be captured in formally-collected data

3rd-person descriptions, multiple characters to capture diverse and conflicting viewpoints

### ***Exploring a moment of attack in an intercultural event***

A fictionalised reconstruction of an intercultural conflict (Amadasi & Holliday submitted for publication)

School setting. A workshop where teenage migrants are asked to recall aspects of their cultural pasts as resources for hybrid integration. The female facilitator (Nadia), who has inadvertently revealed she is a mother without being married. Feels attacked when one of the male teenage migrants (Jahan) accuses and instructs her regarding morality.

Describes the event and subsequent conversations between Nadia and two colleagues who represent essentialist and non-essentialist advice.

Henrik advises her not to reveal such personal details to the migrant teenagers

Marta accuses Henrik of being patriarchal and sexist

Nadia recalls how members of her own family would prefer her to be married

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Nadia then talks to two colleagues, Henrik and Marta, who each bring a different point of view which helps her to continue to position herself. First, she has coffee with Henrik.

She finds Henrik both helpful and unhelpful. He does respond to her need to know what the established procedures should be. He tells her that she has to be more careful in calculating what aspects of her personal story she should reveal as part of her professional approach - as part of the explicit baggage of her facilitator role.

... When Henrik tried to change the subject by referring to how inspiring it was to see the two migrant women sitting in front of the mediaeval church at the other side of the square, Nadia wondered, as he elaborated, if there might be something a bit too idealised in his picturing of some sort of idyllic scene of women in 'traditional ethnic' dress. But before she could explore this with him, it was time to go.

When she told her colleague, Marta, what Henrik said, Marta suggested he was just being Orientalist.

... Finally, a conversation with one of the participants in the facilitation event brings a final and unexpected turn.

... Marta ... described how she had met a young migrant, Shahin, who's name she remembered because it was said it to her with such a clear energy. Shahin had asked her if she realised what huge 'power' the various agencies that helped them 'wielded'. Shahin had gone on to say that ... most of them in the sessions didn't in any way agree with the patriarchal discourse that Jahan expressed, and felt it gave a very bad and inaccurate image of where they came from. However, they appreciated it as 'a source of capital' to oppose this power. Marta said that she was so impressed at the depth of thinking these young people engaged with to make sense of the awful shifting realities of their lives.

Nadia left the conversation quite inspired - with completely renewed ideas. She felt that she could be far more courageous in her work. It certainly didn't mean that she should patronise Jahan by somehow excusing what he had said 'because of his culture', but that these kinds of events can provide professional insights on how narratives can impact the interactional process.

Here, Marta's and Shahin's broader contextualisation reveals a deeper complexity in Jahan's positionality than the dominant blocking narrative expressed by Henrik. This also resonates with what Nadia already knows about the contradicting discourses in her own personal cultural trajectory and leads her to a degree of resolution regarding her professional response to Jahan.

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