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No Magic! Teaching Ethnographic Writing

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Abstract

In this essay, I reflect on my experiences in teaching ethnographic writing to graduate anthropology students over the last decade. After years of experimenting with different course formats and ethnographic exercises, the anthropology department in Hamburg now offers two courses on ethnographic writing before fieldwork and one course after students have returned from the field. The first course, taken before students conduct their master's fieldwork, focuses on reading ethnographies. It draws on John van Maanen's (1988 [2011]) Tales of the Field to explore different writing styles and guides students to imitate these styles in different writing exercises. The second preparatory course introduces students to ethnographic writing through the observation of everyday interactions. Students observe, take notes, and write ethnographic narratives about visits to a playground, an elevator ride, or lunchtime in the university cafeteria. When students return from their master's fieldwork, they finally participate in the 'Ethnographic Writing Workshop'. Here students write and revise key ethnographic scenes, dialogues, and portraits derived from their fieldwork. This set of ethnographic writing courses encourages students to read (more) ethnographies, reflect on writing styles, and work on their own writing in groups and by themselves. With this essay, I want to initiate a dialogue about different approaches to teaching ethnographic writing.

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No Magic! Teaching Ethnographic Writing

Julia Pauli

Introduction

The first time I realised that it makes a difference how ethnography is told was during a conference on social networks in Charleston, North Carolina, in 1996. At the invitation of our teacher and mentor, the late Thomas Schweizer, Michael Schnegg and I gave a paper on how high school pupils in a multiethnic classroom in Cologne, Germany, viewed each other's friendship networks. I had collected the ethnographic data as part of my master's research.[1] The focus of the presentation was on the analysis of the perceived networks. To complement the graphs and tables, I described a scene I had observed whilst sitting in the classroom with the learners. This scene was not in any way unique but rather typical for classroom interactions. The fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds were divided into segments and the pupils were performing their affiliations to these groups along gender and language lines. They did so through elaborate acts of expressing boredom. Whilst the teacher stood at the blackboard, not noticing what was going on behind her back, a group of pretty, young girls combed each other's hair, some German-speaking boys sparked a lighter, and a group of learners fluent in Turkish kicked a little ball made of paper. The students gave the impression of being decidedly bored by the teacher and their classmates. At the same time, I observed how they were observing each other intensely. Obviously, this scene was nothing special. Still, I sensed that it captured an aspect of the students' social networks I could not have otherwise expressed.

In the discussion following our presentation, some questions specifically addressed the classroom scene. As an unexperienced, young researcher at her first academic conference, I was astonished that an ethnographic scene could stir such interest. Although my alma mater, the anthropology department at the University of Cologne, Germany, is well known for its focus on research methodology, during the five years of anthropological training no one had instructed me on how to write ethnography.[2] Of course, we had extensive debates on 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus 1986), but these fo-

1 I follow Kristen Ghodsee's (2016: 3) definition of ethnography as a 'qualitative method to focus on the experience of everyday life'. Ethnography is both the act of fieldwork and, based on that fieldwork, the 'written representation of culture (or selected aspects of culture)' (Van Maanen 2011: 1).

2 This has probably changed in many anthropology departments, at least for doctoral students. Many PhD anthropology colloquia now also focus on questions of writing and style.

cused on deconstructing what famous anthropologists had written before us. What was missing was concrete advice on how to move from deconstruction to construction.

Realising the importance of writing, I started searching for ethnographic role models to learn from. Reading, admiring, and imitating what I read in other anthropologists' ethnographies was how I tried to tackle writing my PhD thesis. This approach was exciting because my reading led to invigorating 'discoveries' on how to write. I was electrified, for example, when in 1997 I read Ruth Behar's *Translated Women* (1993); I had never before imagined that dialogue could play such a central role in an ethnography. Yet these discoveries were also frustrating: seeing the elegance a Ruth Behar had achieved, I doubted that my own writing attempts could have any value at all. At times, ethnographic writing appeared to me like magic, a supernatural gift that some very talented anthropologists had been granted, but not something one could learn in any anthropology courses.[3]

More than a decade later I came across John van Maanen's book *Tales of the Field* (2011). The book was an eye-opener. I realised that figuring out how to write ethnography was a problem shared by many anthropologists: 'This lack of tutoring is perhaps most telling at that still point in our studies when we have returned from the field and sit before the blank page that must eventually carry the story of what we have presumably learned' (Van Maanen 2011: xvi). Struggling like Van Maanen (2011: xvi) to 'simply "write up" what I had "discovered" in the field', I turned to other PhD students. We started reading and discussing each other's work and with time I realised how important respectful critique by academic peers is for developing one's ethnographic writing.

My next step was to move from learning how to write to teaching what I had learnt. It was a fortunate coincidence that in 2010 the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Hamburg, where I was now employed, decided to revise its master's programme. This opened up the chance to integrate ethnographic writing into the curriculum. We designed two new courses on reading and writing ethnography, the first called 'Reading and Writing Ethnographic Texts' and the second 'Ethnographic Writing Workshop'. Encouraged by their success, we later developed a third course titled 'Observing and Writing'. Whilst the first and third of these courses aimed to prepare students before they engage in their fieldwork, the second

3 In the last years, the situation has changed. Today, anthropology students can find helpful publications on ethnographic writing and the role of the anthropologist as writer (Wulff 2017; McGranahn 2020c; Waterston and Vesperi 2009). Some anthropological contributions explicitly focus on storytelling (McCormack 2000; Davidson 2019; Gottlieb 2016; Besnier and Morales 2018; Narayan 2012). A number of publications provide hands-on information on how to move from fieldwork to deskwork (Ghodsee 2016; Atkinson 2020; Gullion 2016; Nielsen and Rapport 2018).

one aimed to help them work on their own ethnographies after their return from the field.

Now, after years of teaching ethnographic writing, I am convinced that an early engagement with ethnographic writing is most helpful to students. I continue to be surprised that remarkably few publications address how to teach ethnographic writing. Taking up the writing culture critique of the mid-1980s, David Hess' (1989) contribution is an early exception.[4]

In this special issue my perspective as a teacher is juxtaposed by the contribution of graduate student Charlot Schneider who describes how she has experienced the three writing courses taught at Hamburg. I hope that our contributions will foster further dialogue on different approaches to teaching and learning ethnographic writing. In the following, I first describe the two reading and writing courses taught in Hamburg in preparation for fieldwork. I then introduce the course on ethnographic writing that we teach for those returning from fieldwork. I conclude with some general reflections on teaching ethnographic writing.

Reading ethnographies

The course 'Reading and Writing Ethnographic Texts' is taught in the first semester of our master's programme. Course participation varies between ten and fifteen students. The primary aim of the course is to encourage students to read ethnographies. Michael Lambek (2020: 63) has observed: 'Anyone trying to write – a letter, novel, dissertation, poem, or ethnography – knows that it is a skill to be cultivated and to be learned through the sheer doing. This cultivation occurs in part by means of reading' (see also Behar 2020; Gay y Blasco and Wardle 2007). At the beginning of the course, students are asked to provide lists of ethnographies they have read. Presenting the books to the group, the students reflect on their reading experience. I then ask them to compile a list of the books they would most recommend, which we then use to figure out why certain ethnographies are more popular than others.

The pleasure of reading ethnographies is further explored in another exercise. At the beginning of each course, I select ten of my favourite ethno-

4 There are a few blogs that provide advice on and syllabi for (critically) reading and writing ethnography. Erin Gould and Anne Allison host a blog for the Society for Cultural Anthropology on which they make available syllabi for teaching critical ethnography: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/syllabus-archive-critical-ethnographies [accessed: 23 July 2020]. I thank Caroline Jeannerat for the information. Carli Hansen from the University of Toronto Press hosts another interesting blog on teaching anthropology and ethnography: http://www.utpteachingculture.com/five-simple-steps-for-helping-students-write-ethnographic-papers/ [accessed: 23 July 2020]. Communication researcher Nick Trujillo (1999) provides some additional advice on teaching, practicing, and writing collective ethnography.

graphies from my bookshelf. The ethnographies are diverse in topic and style, ranging from classics (Shostak 1983; Crapanzano 1980; Behar 1993) to ethnographic community studies (Cancian 1992; Argyrou 1996) to auto-ethnographies (Greenhalgh 2001). Each week, each student picks one of these ethnographies and reads as much as possible. In the following week, they present their reading experience to each other and return the book for someone else to read. Only few ethnographies are so exciting that students will ask to borrow them again after the semester has finished (these generally include Holmes 2013; Green 1999; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Shah 2019). The book that has been the most popular ethnography throughout has been Shaylih Muehlmann's *When I Wear my Alligator Boots* (2014). In her work Muehlmann describes the lived realities of ordinary people at the margins of the drug economy in the US-Mexico borderlands. Students are deeply moved by the stories, the political economic background, and the presentation of the anthropologist's own vulnerabilities during fieldwork.

The second aim of the course is more experimental: by imitating different ethnographic styles, students experiment with writing. They learn that they have choices for how to write. Each week we read a chapter from John van Maanen's *Tales of the Field* (2011). Van Maanen distinguishes three established and a number of emerging ethnographic writing styles. More established styles are what Van Maanen classifies as realist, confessional, and impressionist tales. Emerging styles include critical, formal, literary, and jointly told tales.

After we have read the chapter on the realist tales, I ask the students to write several pages in that style.[5] Until the 1970s, realist tales were the dominant way of writing ethnography. The cultural expertise of the anthropologist lies at the core of this form of writing. The written presentation of an anthropologist's expertise and authority is achieved through folk terms, long quotes, lots of cultural details, and an 'interpretive omnipotence' (Van Maanen 2011: 51). For their imitation of this style, students are free in their choice of topic, time, or region – there are no limits to their imagination. Some students imagine themselves as being Bronislaw Malinowski, others as Margret Mead. They describe how they do research in faraway places and on exotic rituals. Others decide to stay closer to home. They choose places like senior residence homes, eco villages, or migrant communities. After we have read everyone's text, we search for the similarities and differences between them. We discuss whether some are better examples for realist tales than others. After some initial reluctance, students tend to put a lot of effort into writing these texts. Some have remarked how this exercise showed them how much power is involved in writing. Writing creates an imaginative space that did not exist before.

5 Nick Trujillo (1999: 710) describes a comparable writing exercise based on Van Maanen's tales.

The next step of the exercise is to rewrite a text. For this we read Van Maanen's chapter on confessional tales. Confessional tales focus on the researcher and his/her social positioning during fieldwork. Often these tales narrate how a fieldworker overcomes initial fieldwork troubles, turning from a stranger into a friend. When I ask students to rewrite their realist tales into texts using the confessional style, they are baffled. In our discussions they often express surprise about the different possibilities of writing. They are captivated when they realise that many ethnographies mix realist and confessional tales. When we reach the third style, the impressionist tale, students are again astonished. Impressionist tales narrate the unusual. They are dramatic stories that catch the reader's attention. By now, students have lost their fear of writing. With verve they rewrite their texts once again, imagining crucial turning points and dramatically accentuating fieldwork incidents. Their initial astonishment and apprehension have turned into excitement to try out these various styles. Playfully imitating realist, confessional, and impressionist tales helps students prepare for their own ethnographic writing. They become aware of different writing styles and learn how to mix them. This leads to more confidence about their own choices in writing.

Observing and writing

The second course that prepares students for fieldwork is titled 'Observing and Writing'. The course has been inspired by Kristen Ghodsee's *From Notes to Narratives* (2016). Ghodsee's book gives conceptual and practical advice on how to write readable ethnographies (see also Menzfeld in this special issue). One of the writing exercises she suggests is to ride in an elevator and then to describe everything that happened whilst doing so (Ghodsee 2016: 49). When students attend this course, they have not yet collected their own ethnographic data. Ethnographic exercises like the elevator ride are a good way to introduce them to observing and writing. The course's structure is twofold. Reading and discussing Ghodsee's book is complemented by three ethnographic exercises. For the first exercise, students are asked to spend half a day on a public playground and to take notes on everything they consider important. Afterwards they have to turn their notes into an ethnographic narrative of approximately four pages in length. We begin with the students discussing their narratives in small groups of three or four. They then revise their texts on the basis of this feedback. The revised texts are then discussed in the class as a whole. Students often observe that they find the mixture of critique by their peers and critique by their teacher most helpful.

The aim of the course is to encourage students to observe and write, not to make them feel insecure. It is thus essential to start all discussions of their ethnographic narratives with a respectful acknowledgement of their texts. We then concentrate on questions of style and grammar; the title; the

opening, closing, and development of the narrative; and the way the authors present themselves. We reflect on what is being emphasised in the text, what we feel is missing, and what might be superfluous. These reflections often extend into more general thoughts on fieldwork. Not all students, for example, enjoy the playground exercise, feeling rather awkward sitting there alone, watching, and taking notes. 'People thought I was stalker', a male student complained. After more than an hour of uncomfortable participant observation, he thus decided to approach everyone on the playground to explain that he was an anthropologist. Female students and students doing the exercise in pairs are generally more at ease with the situation.

The second exercise, based on Ghodsee's elevator ride, follows a similar course of action. Students ride in the elevator for approximately two hours. It is up to them to choose where they do so. Elevators in shopping malls, office buildings, train stations, airports, university buildings, banks, and even a paternoster lift in a municipal building, with its incessantly moving open compartments, have been settings for student observations. Similar to the playground exercise, some students tend to struggle with the task. They are troubled by the irritation shown by other passengers; they feel uncertain as to how much of their role they should reveal to them. Despite these challenges, the ethnographic narratives the students produce are often remarkable. In ethnographic vignettes, choreographies of avoidance become visible. People in elevators use their bodies, gazes, shopping bags, and children to prevent getting in touch with one another. The unwelcomed physical proximity produces revealing, frustrating, and funny stories. These stories comment on gender roles, rituals of consumption, place-making, and social hierarchies.

The third exercise is done as a collective. The aim is to reflect on similarities and differences of observation when people experience the same social and physical space. We all, including me, spend our lunch hour together in one of the university's cafeterias. Our task is to observe, take notes, and then write an ethnographic narrative on eating lunch in a university cafeteria.[6] University cafeterias are generally very large dining halls. When we enter one of these halls around 11 a.m., there are only a few people eating a meal. We spread out across the room, take our seats, and place our notebooks in front of us on the tables. Some might start drawing a map, others might look around, searching, and then avoiding each other's gazes. Slowly, the hall fills. By 12:30 p.m., the hall is packed, loud, and smelling of fried food. Balancing trays of steaming food, careful to avoid bumping into each other, students search for a place to sit. Around 1:00 p.m. the stream of hungry students begins to thin out. When most students have finished their lunch and left the cafeteria, at approximately 2:00 p.m., we end the exercise.

6 Anne Lamott (2020: 62–69) suggests writing about school lunches, whether from memory or observation, as this encourages reflection on human similarities and differences.

Similar to the other two exercises, each student writes an ethnographic text after the observation. Students perceive the cafeteria observation as not so difficult. No awkward feelings trouble them. Although they do not eat and only take notes, they fit in and are at ease with the situation. Yet when they get to compare their ethnographic narratives, they are nevertheless surprised. Many of them will remark on the social relevance of saltshakers: to ask for salt is the main form of interaction between strangers in a university cafeteria. In general, this brief verbal exchange does not lead to anything. But sometimes this banal request turns into a flirt, a conflict, or even an insult. Some students notice this, others, because of their position in the room or some other sort of distraction, do not. The saltshaker vignette is an example for the observational similarities and differences produced in collective ethnography (see also Pauli 2020; Trujillo 1999). Students realise that they do indeed share a social and physical space during the observation task. This sharing frames what they can write. Their own ethnographic writing has to resonate with what the other students write. At the same time, their shared perceptions are fuzzy and vary. What a student eventually writes depends in which direction they are looking, where they sit, and how attentive they are. The ethnographic variations are the result of each student's observations and also the way they craft the ethnographic writing.

All three exercises increase the students' appreciation for ethnographic details. Students who have taken the course and then started their own fieldwork observe that the course helped them to look more closely and listen more carefully. Students also realise how crucial detailed and extensive note-taking is for doing ethnography. They are more aware of the insights they can gain from drawing maps and taking photographs. Finally, they are also better prepared for the many awkward moments fieldwork brings with it.

Ethnographic writing workshop

The third MA writing course is titled 'Ethnographic Writing Workshop'. The course is mandatory for students who have finished their fieldwork and start working on their ethnographic analysis and master's thesis. The course has three goals. First, we want to help students to start writing, moving from fieldwork to deskwork. Second, we aim to encourage students to understand their ethnographic writing as cultural analysis. And third, we hope that students meet peers and form writing groups. Reading and commenting on each other's ethnographic texts helps students get through the ups and downs of writing their theses.

Since we started this curriculum in 2011, we have revised the course several times, incorporating new work on ethnographic writing (for example Ghodsee 2016; Narayan 2012; Gullion 2016; Atkinson 2020). Currently, we concentrate on three narrative forms: based on their fieldwork, students

write a key scene, a portrait, and a dialogue. We always start with the key scene. To think about ethnographic experiences in key scenes has been inspired by Sherry Ortner's (1973) work on key symbols. Ortner proposes that certain symbols are at the 'core' of cultural systems. Symbols can include metaphors, practices, rituals, events, or scenarios. The 'keyness' of a symbol, Ortner (1973: 1343) writes, depends on how the symbol relates to the cultural context. She distinguishes between summarising and elaborating key symbols. In an emotionally charged way, a summarising key symbol encapsulates and stands for the broader cultural context (see also Menzfeld in this special issue on *pars pro toto* scenes). The American flag is an example for this kind of a key symbol. Elaborating key symbols, on the other hand, derive their key status primarily by their recurrence in practices and other cultural symbols (Ortner 1973: 1340).

Building on Ortner's insight, we discuss key moments during the students' fieldwork. Most students easily remember a scene, a symbol, or an event that in one way or another was remarkable during their fieldwork. I encourage the students to narrate the scene in as much detail as possible. Most students are excited to talk about their fieldwork in this way. Discussing their key scenes helps them acknowledge how much they have actually learnt through the fieldwork. It helps them deal with the insecurities that often plague them upon their return from the field. The interest expressed by their fellow students stimulates their ethnographic self-confidence and eventually helps them to write. The key scenes described by students often capture events that were turning points for them in their fieldwork when initial confusion transformed into cultural understanding. A few years ago, a student conducted research on political authorities in Costa Rica. At a certain moment in her fieldwork she recognised cacao as a key symbol. During the course she wrote a key scene on how the *cacique*, the indigenous leader of the community, invited her to his house to drink cacao with him. By describing the scene and discussing it in class, she realised the peculiarity, almost sacredness, of cacao in the village. Going back to her fieldnotes she noticed that all political and religious events included the preparation of cacao, a practice only shamans were allowed to do. Although the student knew intuitively that drinking cacao with the *cacique* was crucial for her understanding of the local situation, only by writing, revising, and discussing it as a key scene did she begin to understand the wider cultural implications of her ethnographic observation.

After discussing in class what could be potential key scenes for each student, they write a first draft of the scenes they have chosen. They then present this draft to a small group of fellow students. They revise their drafts, send the revised texts to me and then we discuss them all together during the next class. Students can only pass or fail the course; they do not get any grades for their key scenes, portraits, or dialogues. This frees them from

anxiety about not meeting my assumed expectations for their writing. I do, however, provide them with detailed individual feedback, commenting on style, structure, development, title, opening, closing, and analytic depth of each key scene, portrait, and dialogue. I also recommend some further reading. Verlyn Klinkenborg's (2013) *Several Short Sentences about Writing*, for example, is an excellent way to think about writing sentences and is a book I often recommend at this stage. He suggests viewing each sentence as entering a stage, saying its piece, and then leaving the stage. After reading his text, students tend to be much more careful how they craft their sentences.

The second exercise is to write a portrait. The course of action is similar to writing the key scene in the first exercise and the dialogue in the third. First, we discuss how to write a portrait in class, then the students write, discuss in small groups, and revise. Finally, we meet again in class. Ghodsee (2016: 35–40) gives some suggestions on describing people (see also Gullion 2016: 83–86). Her most important advice is to characterise people not simply with adjectives but rather by describing their actions. Many students chose to describe their key informant – a Puerto Rican priest interacting with her parish in the aftermath of a hurricane, a migrant mother from The Gambia struggling to survive in Sweden, or a woman selling her products on a market in Ghana. To write about people encountered during their fieldwork helps students to analyse how social structures and individual agencies interact. Writing a portrait is an opportunity to understand how a person can or cannot change the wider circumstances in which he or she is embedded.

The third and last exercise is to write a dialogue. Ghodsee (2016: 62–70) gives some advice on writing a dialogue. She outlines options of dealing with foreign language citations and describes how to mix descriptions of people and place with dialogue. Many students nevertheless experience writing a dialogue as quite difficult. At first, writing dialogue is similar to writing a key scene. Students go through their notes, interviews, and memories to find some telling interaction they can write about. The trouble starts when students have no tape-recording of a verbal exchange. 'I am afraid of making things up', a student commented recently. This resonates with Ghodsee's (2016: 38) caution: 'Where novelists imagine, ethnographers must observe'. I encourage students to go back to their fieldnotes and any other material they might have on a particular interaction and dialogue. We discuss how to deal with the impossibility of tape-recording 'everything' during fieldwork (see Kroeker in this issue). Although there is no easy solution for how to incorporate dialogue from participant observation and field notes, students nevertheless see the value of dialogue and monologue for ethnography: 'Dialogue brings a manuscript to life, allowing your informants to directly speak to the reader' (Ghodsee 2016: 62; see also Gandelsman-Trier in this issue).

When students evaluate the course at the end of the semester, they are often enthusiastic. I believe that one reason for the students' enthusi-

asm is the course's format. It has a clear structure, but it also encourages individual experimentation and creativity. The course addresses students' need for guidance, tutoring, and advice without pressing them into the same template. There is enough room for the peculiarities of each of the students' ethnographic projects. Writing an engaging dialogue, a telling portrait, or a convincing key scene might in the end feel magical for them: it is the magic of creating a world by words, something that lies at the very heart of anthropology. To demonstrate and discuss how one might get there is not magic. It is teaching.

Conclusion

The lack of instruction on ethnographic writing strongly shaped my coming of age as an anthropologist. No anthropology course guided me. Instead, I learnt from books and peers. The reading of ethnographies gave me a sense of what was possible. Fellow students helped me analyse social life through writing. However, this approach had many shortcomings. I had no idea of the different 'tales from the field'. I admired the writing in certain ethnographies without being able to identify why the styles so impressed me. I was also completely unaware of what to consider when writing a portrait or a dialogue. The ethnographic writing courses taught in Hamburg address these needs of graduate students, helping them cope with the many questions and uncertainties of writing ethnography. The courses have been developed in line with my colleagues' and my conviction that a space to write ethnography is absolutely essential in an anthropology curriculum. We continue developing and revising the courses, closely looking at how helpful they are for the students.

My involvement with teaching ethnographic writing has opened up a number of issues that I would like to explore further with students and colleagues. In the opening chapter of her edited volume on writing in anthropology, Carole McGranahan describes a conversation she had in 2016 with novelist Lily King (McGranahan 2020b: 2–3). King is the author of *Euphoria* (2014), a novel about the fieldwork and love life of Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Reo Fortune in Papua New Guinea in the 1930s. McGranahan asks King how she managed to convince her readers that she had really been there, in Papua New Guinea. King answers that this was not her goal; her goal was rather for the reader to feel that they are there. This episode pointedly highlights some important differences between ethnography and fiction: 'Establishing credentials as a scholar differs from demonstrating skill as a writer of fiction' (McGranahan 2020b: 3). It would be worthwhile to inquire how anthropologists imagine their readers. Do they write for fellow anthropologists? Other academics? The wider public? Their supervisors? Their interlocutors? To reflect more deeply on the (imagined) readers of ethnography

and how this influences the writing is an issue that needs further exploration (see also Van Maanen 2011: 25–35; and Coe in this issue).

Another issue concerns the link between fieldwork and deskwork. Several of the contributions in this special issue (Kroeker, Luncă, Riedke, Stolz) discuss the ethical and conceptual consequences of incomplete ethnographic knowledge. Incomplete knowledge of a story, a person, or a social situation is very common in ethnographic research. Building on these insights, I suggest that a more in-depth reflection on how ethnographers listen to their interlocutors and the world around them could help to better understand some of the gaps. Marnie Jane Thomson (2020) has pointed out how important listening is for ethnographic writing. Numerous methodology books give advice on how to ask questions; how to listen, remarkably, is hardly mentioned. When I was a graduate student, I took a course on asking and listening offered by Lilo Schmitz, an anthropologist and a person-centred therapist. In her course, we applied Carl Rogers' person-centred interview technique for ethnographic questioning. Rogers' reflective listening and his technique of mirroring and summarising what an interlocutor has said worked rather well. I believe that these insights could be further developed for teaching and writing ethnography. What we write about very much depends on our ways of observing, participating, asking, and listening.

A final issue relates to the often troubling sense of loneliness and insecurity when writing. In an interview with Carole McGranahan, the exceptional writer and anthropologists Kirin Narayan says: 'Writing along with others is a wonderful way to get past the sense of one's own crushing limitations' (McGranahan 2020a: 92). Ethnographic writing courses can provide a space for this supportive writing.

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