



Book Reviews

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Monika Kostera and Nancy Harding, *Organizational ethnography*, Edward Edgar Publishing Limited: Gheltenham, 2020, 240 pp., ISBN: 978178643 8096

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Wednesday 24th of March, I make a cup of tea and finally find a calm moment to start reading Kostera and Harding's new book on organizational ethnography. I have been looking so much forward to this moment. I don't want to rush through. (Auto)ethnography is at the core of my existence, while both of the authors' work has been very influential in my personal development as a researcher. After the first few pages, I already start diving into a site of multiplicity, whereby different voices join a chorus to provide complementary methodological perspectives on ethnographic work. I feel home.

Organizational Ethnography, by Kostera and Harding, consists of 13 chapters written by different authors from different countries and epistemic backgrounds. In their multivocality and multiplicity, these chapters discuss different aspects and possibilities of ethnographic fieldwork, in relation to data collection and analysis through reference to techniques such as observation, note taking, interviewing, shadowing, the use of media sources in ethnographic work, as well as critical insights on autoethnography and storytelling, among others. In so doing, this book, offers, to my view, a reflexive, creative, instructive, and critical guide, to anyone interested in learning and experimenting with ethnographic methods, from master and doctoral students to early career or more experienced researchers seeking to expand the boundaries of taken-for-granted assumptions in ethnographic research.

In the first chapter, Monika Kostera and Nancy Harding invite the ensemble of the authors into a chorus to guide the reader through a comprehensive introduction of what will follow. Through summaries of the ethnographic angles discussed in the following chapters and an actual call to action enabled by empirical activities and exercises, the authors invite the reader to *walk the talk* of the different methodological approaches described in this volume. In my experience of reading this book, such an opening “gesture” successfully engages the reader into an *embodied* reading process (Cixous, 1993) that enables developing one’s own understandings of what ethnography is (and *can be*) about and how it can be conducted.

In Chapter 2, Monika Kostera and Joanna Srednicka offer a useful account of the central role of note taking in ethnographic fieldwork for bridging “worlds, roles, meanings” in a *collage* that speaks of the complex realities under study (p. 19). They explain the different steps—inscription, transcription, description—that researchers can follow to make meaningful sense of field notes across “facts” and their “impressions” of the field. Using real life examples, they discuss the central role of transcription in allowing researchers to “return to the field again” (p. 21) as well as that

of the poetic process of note creation in providing access to other senses, beyond vision, to “encapsulate the world in a few sentences . . . to cross the border of art with more confidence” (p. 23).

In Chapter 3, Monika Kostera invites us to a journey of in-depth exploration of different observational methods—participant, non-participant, and direct observation—, providing examples of seminal ethnographic studies that use each of these approaches. She explains advantages, disadvantages, challenges, and ethical considerations associated with these approaches generously sharing experiences that can help ethnographers to maintain their “anthropological frame of mind” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992: 29) regardless of their level of field engagement. Ethnography she says, is crucially about “being there,” inside and outside, observing and experiencing the interplay of all surrounding elements, including oneself, from different perspectives; a “journey beyond structure and common knowledge,” whereby “experience is evidence and evidence is experience” (p. 42).

With examples of studies using the shadowing technique to observe interactions between humans as well as between human and non-human actants, in Chapter 4, Barbara Czarniawska, introduces some basic principles of *shadowing*. She stresses that “shadowing is not only a method but also an attitude” (p. 47) involving a dialogical relationship with the studied populations as well as empathy and respect. The author also discusses the importance of chance, persistence, and emotional involvement (p. 48) in shadowing as well as moments of “physic discomfort and communicational issues,” which can be turned into resources for the study (p. 49). She concludes by acknowledging that “it is practically impossible to separate one technique of fieldwork from another” (p. 53) also offering advantages and challenges related to the *shadowing* technique.

Through a critical review of different autoethnographic genres including evocative and more analytical autoethnographic traditions and their critiques, in Chapter 5, Mark Learmonth and Mike Humphreys propose autoethnographic vignettes that is the integration of autobiographical vignettes in the autoethnographic text, as an autoethnographic approach emerging at the intersection of evocative narratives and critical analytical development. Using personal embodied narratives, they recognize the importance of developing autoethnographic prose, which without losing its lyrical evocative character retains “its commitment to theoretical analysis” (p. 62) by “giving voice to both the researcher and the researched” (p. 67).

In Chapter 6, Monika Kostera and Anna Modzelewska offer a comprehensive discussion of different types of interviews used in ethnographic research, namely open, semi-structured, and conversation analysis, also briefly introducing the case of structured interviews. Providing the main principles of, as well as tips and guidelines, for each of these approaches, the authors stress the importance of the researcher’s attitude during the interview process, encouraging researchers to be open, active, responsive, and attentive listeners, ready to “offer a listening ear that is both intensive and reflective” to build trust with the interviewees (p. 88). The authors suggest that embodying an attitude of “alertness and perceptiveness” (p. 88), while ensuring that all ethical guidelines are respected, enables researchers to focus both on *what* is said and *how* it is said to “explore the landscape of the Other” (p. 89), from different perspectives, and a deeper understanding of the studied culture.

In Chapter 7, David Calas, Katarina Ellborg, Daniel Ericsson, Elin Esperri Hallgren, and Alina Husung engage within a collective, embodied self-, and other-reflexive process around a shared doctoral qualitative methods course to propose an alternative understanding of ethnography as *inter-ethnography*. Using an untraditional writing style, which emphasizes dialogical *polyvocality* as a major enabler of collective reflexivity, the authors propose inter-ethnography as an ethnographic approach that “replaces the focus on the researcher’s [subjective] *self* with an attention to *selves*” (p. 106) putting forward the value of intersubjective interpretations of shared experiences produced from researchers’ “collective presence in becoming” (p. 107). Beyond offering a useful

alternative lens of ethnography from a *solo project* to a collective intersubjective endeavor, the authors also equip educators with invaluable insights into how to “construct pedagogical conversations” (p.104) that serve as “epistemological break[s]” (p. 103) into how knowledge is created.

In Chapter 8, Alexia Panayiotou, through an exploration of how films, music, science fiction, cartoons, and novels have been used in organizational research, invites us to explore the analytical value of media *on* and *from* organizations for ethnographic work. Departing from the principle that extraordinary meaning can be found in the ordinariness of the everyday, she discusses these as *powerful ethnographic accounts* (p. 118) with epistemological value. For, by enabling access to the cultural and social richness of organizational contexts as well as to systemic power structures in relation to questions of gender, race, and other identifiers of difference, such elements permit exploring the hidden, mundane aspects of organizational life, to unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions sustained by normative organizational discourse. She also discusses the pedagogical value of media elements for business school teaching.

In Chapter 9, Noomi Weinryb, Nils Gustafsson, and Cecilia Gullberg use a mixed methods hybrid ethnographic approach inspired by their understanding of ethnography not just as a methodology but most importantly as “an epistemological approach to research” (Gaggiotti et al., 2017) to study the use of positive emotional expressions on social media. Doing so, they argue for the importance for ethnographers to engage with hybridity to move beyond methodological “silos” in order to get access to rich information, which enables them to not only to observe behavior but also to capture the elusive meanings surrounding complex organizational phenomena.

In Chapter 10, Anna Zueva offers an autoethnographic account to discuss the reflective and analytical usefulness of myths, folk tales, and archetypes for autoethnographic research. She stresses how through their familiarity, ambiguous multiplicities, instructional character, and to an extent universality (since albeit local adaptations, characters of folk tales remain broadly similar across contexts), such “literary elements” can provide multi-faceted access to embodied subjectivity development, by positioning the researcher also as the researched, within broader cultural, social, and political contexts. Studying such archetypes through theoretical lenses—never incidentally chosen (p.162)—allows the researcher, she argues, to develop critical autoethnographic texts, with broader relevance, which counter ambitions of finality and objectivity, traditionally championing mainstream organizational research.

In Chapter 11, Hamid Foroughi discusses the value of combining the abstract features of storytelling research with the “material groundedness” (p. 174) of ethnography in order to provide deep and contextually situated access into the social and cultural experiences under study. Discussing two different but complementary types of storytelling research—ethno-narrative and ethno-story—the author proposes alternative ways in which story-telling can be integrated in the design, conduct, analysis, and write-up of ethnographic research to offer liberating and emancipating accounts, which provide access to contextual knowledge produced through various constructions of participants’ sense-making and understanding of their organizational realities.

In Chapter 12, through an informative review of the history of ethnography, presented here through Warner’s case and namely his “failed” attempt to study closed organizational contexts through anthropological ethnographic lenses, Pawel Krzyworzeka and Hugo Gaggiotti critically discuss the political underpinnings of ethnography and its suitability for studying organizations. They argue that theoretical advancements advocating the transient processual nature of organizing beyond clear organizational boundaries in rapidly changing capitalist societies, “create a favourable theoretical climate” (p. 196) making ethnography an increasingly suitable methodological lens to study the social complexity surrounding organizations.

In Chapter 13, Sarah Bloomfield offers what I see as a useful embodied autoethnographic account of her ethnographic journey in the *wood*. Sharing lived experiences of her PhD journey in

relation to the choice of topic, data generation and analysis enabled by reflective, iterative non-linear processes and a diversity of different perspectives, she explains how academic stories capable of keeping the research woods alive can emerge (p. 215). She concludes with some advice to PhD travelers inviting them to be open to the surprises of their unique research journeys, stressing that there are no prescribed paths to research.

April 10th, I have now reached the end, thinking that this was one of these books that I wish I had been given access to as a doctoral student, for all the freedom it made me feel in relation to imagining new possibilities in conducting ethnographic fieldwork. I remember the normative methodological guidelines that I was taught in my PhD; words like “body” and the “senses,” were limited in my training. I am still struggling to find ways to “legitimize” the use of these aspects in my work, as an early career researcher. Reading books, such as this one, offers, what I experience as micro-revolutions in learning. Not only do these open possibilities for learning new things but also for questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and learning anew by repositioning traditionally excluded embodied and sensuous aspects, so vital to researching, in the center of ethnographic work. It is never too late to (un)learn, I remind myself. I have already placed a request for it at my institution’s library and look forward to using it in my research seminar teaching. Enabling spaces for meaningful reflection in the classroom is my responsibility, after all, as an educator as well, beyond a researcher. I remember the chapter on inter-ethnography, for instance. This is an excellent example of how research methods can be taught to disrupt established standards in learning. I hope my students will learn and enjoy. For instance, the insights around the use of media and films in ethnography, are relevant to Maria and Nick’s theses; also well fit for engaging with ethnographic research in a (post)pandemic world, now that going “out” to the field is largely inhibited. The (post)pandemic aspect in relation to ethnography was not clearly addressed in this volume. But, I think, it could be developed by future researchers, as it seems like this pandemic is here to stay for a while, affecting our ability to engage, as before, with ethnographic fieldwork.

Through a variety of different perspectives, this volume, to my view, provides a useful guide into ethnographic research both for student learners and teacher learners, as well as for researchers at different career stages broadly, inviting them to an active, embodied reading process and engagement with ethnographic practice. It does so, by offering ways to go beyond what one “sees” in ethnography, in relation to the use of different techniques, thus making a clear point about transcending distant vision and standardized patterns traditionally dominating ethnographic methods, to engage the researcher’s ethnographic self reflexively. For students, this can be seen as an invitation to explore their embodied presences as active tools when conducting ethnographic work and to discover the reflexive potentials of such a process. For early career researchers, it might offer possibilities to thoroughly reflect and problematize learnt practices, to engage with efforts to disrupt established standards and further advocate the need for embracing epistemological breakages when engaging with ethnographic work. With such novel insights, this volume, to my view, beautifully complements much of its authors and editors’ previous work (Ericsson and Kostera, 2020; Fotaki and Harding, 2017; Harding, 2005; Kostera and Harding, 2007) as well as other methodological textbooks useful for the conduct of ethnographic research in organization studies (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019; Thanem and Knights, 2019).

I also particularly enjoyed the book’s pedagogical framing, which stands out already from Chapter 1, where the reader is invited to engage with each chapter actively by practicing the discussed concepts and techniques. Such a pedagogical positioning is, to my view, nicely complemented by pedagogical reflections provided in some of the chapters, for instance by Panayiotou and Calas et al., whereby by reference to the discussed techniques, the authors engage with a critical discussion on how such techniques can be used to promote reflexive

exchanges with students. These perspectives could be creatively adapted by educators to guide reflexively the class discussions on ethnographic methods offering opportunities not only for learning but also for *unlearning* standardized practices and learning new ones, in contrast to conventional pedagogies.

In my humble view, the volume could have potentially been reinforced by a slightly more elaborate discussion of the ethics surrounding ethnographic research, specifically how ethical considerations can be operationalized in ethnographic fieldwork. Even though such a discussion is already present in some chapters, a more elaborate debate on this would have been useful to help rethink some of the normative ethical principles traditionally surrounding ethnographic work. This might be particularly timely in an era where researchers increasingly engage with internet and media data through forms of netnography. As a researcher heavily engaging with autoethnographic approaches also exploring the potentials of writing differently in this context, I would have also loved to see a book chapter discussing more explicitly the writing aspect of (auto)ethnographic methods and its potential linkages with the rapidly developing stream on writing *differently* (Pullen et al., 2020). As mentioned by the authors, *writing* is an inherent part of *ethno-graphy* (from the Greek word γράφω—grapho- which means *write*). A more elaborate discussion on how writing can by itself stand out as an (auto)ethnographic element that can propose disruptive epistemological turns through forms of writing differently, could have been endeavoured. Mentioning these aspects relates to my own bias as an early career researcher engaging heavily with forms of (auto)ethnographic writing differently and questioning the colonial roots of ethnographic methods more broadly. I realize that it might be less relevant for researchers adopting more traditional ethnographic techniques. I offer these reflections more as potential avenues for future research than aspects that lacked from the current volume.

I encourage the readers of this short review to not limit their understanding of this volume to what this review offers, but rather to open their minds and bodies to explore the landscapes appearing in its different turns and to reflexively travel through the epistemological breakages it critically and so generously offers. These, to my view, remind us of the endless possibilities of engaging with ethnographic fieldwork, “the most human of methods” (Yanow, 2018). As this volume reminds us, such a human method is not just about observing and understanding from a distance, but most importantly about feeling, sensing, making sense, caring, and relating. Eventually, it is about living and critically reflecting through this, repositioning the researcher’s embodied and reflexive engagement as central elements in (un)learning about organizations, when engaging with ethnographic methods.

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Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian and Philip Mirowski (eds), *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism*, Verso: London, New York, NY, 2020. 368 pp.: ISBN: 9781788732550 and 9781788732536

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Nine Lives of Neoliberalism is a collection of essays premised on the idea that critical analysis all too often blames neoliberalism for contemporary social ills without analyzing neoliberalism itself. For the contributors, many critical scholars treat neoliberalism as “a collection of foregone conclusions and formulae” centered on market-based political and economic ideals and subjects (Slobodian, 2020: 71). In the wake of the 2008 financial crises, these ideas may have lost the battle for hearts and minds but neoliberalism marches on, chewing up institutions and terrorizing people. This explains why neoliberalism is often described as a zombie. It is dead but it won't die.

In contrast, the contributors to *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* treat neoliberalism as “a word with a contested definition” (Slobodian and Plehwe, 2020: 3). In fact, for them, neoliberalism is best conceived as a space in which various claims, ideals and policy objectives compete. The collection asserts that as the abstract debates about neoliberalism “happened in concrete places” (Slobodian and Plehwe, 2020: 12), we need to account for “actually existing neoliberals, their ideas, discussions, battles, projects, and legacies” (Slobodian and Plehwe, 2020: 5). It finds that actual neoliberals have demonstrated an “uncanny ability to forsake obsolete theories and models in order to produce seemingly fresh answers to the repeated crises they have encountered” (Beddeleem, 2020: 22). Hence, the Editors suggest that we replace the image of the zombie with that of a cat with nine lives.

The book itself is divided into four sections, dealing roughly with science, subjectivity, internationalism, and politics. Though the chapters span timeframes, geographies, methods, and disciplines, a single sore point in the neoliberal project emerges: “the market lives by prerequisites it cannot guarantee itself” (Slobodian and Plehwe, 2020: 6). Thus, for all their espoused support for free markets, “neoliberals are avowed interventionists of their own kind” (Slobodian and Plehwe, 2020: 6).

The key intervention covered in the book concerns the marketplace of ideas. Powerful contributions such as Mirowski's analysis of the “Nobel Prize” for economics, which, it turns out, is not a Nobel prize at all, Djelic and Mousavi on the Atlas Foundation, and Nik-Khah's exploration of George Stigler's ideas about university administration show us that neoliberals have long rigged free debates in their favor. They have justified these interventions through their belief that the market tends to “give rise to knowledge that [is] hostile to its very operation” (Nik-Khah, 2020: 49). In other words, in the marketplace of ideas, the power of distributed decision-making needs to be harnessed by key individuals and organizations to ensure it values neoliberalism.