Dialoguing events: an audiovisual toolkit for extended participatory observation

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DIALOGUING EVENTS

An audiovisual toolkit for extended participatory observation

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Exploring the unknown

Participatory observation, the research method that is central to ethnography, foregrounds presence and experience, assuming that "being there" can generate insights into ideas, values, emotions and sensations of one's research interlocutors that cannot otherwise be obtained (Hannerz 2012, 399). "Being there" results in jointly attending or witnessing events that bring people together, sharing place and time. Yet events are fleeting, rendering observation, listening and sensing transient. Early on in the inception of anthropology as an academic discipline, anthropologists eyed the potential of photography and, notably, film (moving images, once technically feasible in combination with sound) for "archiving" social events (Griffiths 1996; Mead 2012; Gerbrands 1971). In addition, decades ago ethnographic filmmakers such as Robert Flaherty (Rotha 1980, 43) and Jean Rouch (2012) had already tried to tap into the potential of film for the elicitation of culturally specific interpretations that are key to the analysis of the life worlds that the ethnographic endeavour focuses on. Until about 20 years ago, audiovisual technology was cumbersome and expensive, but more recent developments have radically brought costs down and made it easier to handle. At the same time, more than ever before, ethnographers have come to foreground reflexivity and multivocality. In this chapter, I explore the opportunities which using audiovisual technology currently offer, and argue for an ethnographic learning process embedded in an event-based research methodology.

Ethnography, as a research method, aims at gaining an understanding of the point of view of the people being studied, as Malinowski (1922, 25) famously stated. This presumes, more or less by definition, that their life worlds differ from that of the ethnographer. More recently, anthropologists have taken this further, to think of ethnography as requiring "immersion" in the "ongoing everyday activities of

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the designated community for the purpose of describing the social context, relationships, and processes relevant for the topic under consideration" (American Anthropological Association 2004). At the same time, ethnography has been reimagined as "sensorial," which, rather than perceiving the anthropologist as a somewhat distanced (participant) observer, foregrounds how doing ethnography is a process that requires an "active social, rather than a passive or a purely psychophysical" process (Howes 2019, 18). What remains is that ethnography sets out to experience, describe and question cultural notions that are unknown to the researcher at the outset of the research: "a pragmatic inquiry into conceptual disjunctures" (Da Col and Graeber 2011, vii). In order to be truly explorative, the ethnographer needs to open up to a learning process that takes him or her necessarily outside his or her everyday frame of reference, querying and reflecting on the concepts, skills, categories, ideas, values and interpretations of the interlocutors.

In this chapter, I explore this learning process with reference to the ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted about 20 years ago on funerals in the Garo Hills of India.[1] There, funerals were (and still are) a prime ground for staging, affirming and redefining social relationships. Funerals are frequently extensive celebrations, creating an occasion for dozens of people to interact with one another, with the dead, as well as with super-human entities. Such interactions are either a response to preceding ones, or are initiated with the expectation of these being reciprocated later. My observations were participatory in the sense that I attended funerals, and made video recordings, in order to then use these to extend, refine and review my observations and interpretations in the weeks, months and years that followed. The video recordings enabled close reading of the events attended, exploring these in conversations with a variety of interlocutors. This allowed segments of the events filmed to develop into dense ethnographic cases, which became central to my writing on society, religion and resources among Garo (de Maaker 2021). The video recordings allowed my learning process to be extended over a prolonged period of time, refining and rethinking insights with respect to ideas, values, emotions and sensations of my interlocutors. Below, providing 'thick' narratives of my field observations, I discuss the different steps which the methodology that I argue for entails. Several text-boxes allow for more in-depth discussion of some of the stages mentioned. I then summarise my method as a toolkit and, dwelling on the interrelatedness of the various stages, show how it can apply to ethnographic research more generally. In my conclusion, I discuss how the methodology outlined herein can contribute to resolving some of the fundamental challenges which ethnographic research poses.

The funeral of Nangseng: confusion, clarity and contradiction

The secure pace of Asing, a cheerful man in his thirties, revealed that he had a clear aim. He swiftly stepped onto the short bamboo ladder that bridged the distance between the adobe coloured beaten earth around the house and its raised bamboo floor. I walked about ten feet behind him, the eye-piece of the video camera I was

holding pressed to my right eye. Next to me, connected by a thick black cable, was Sengjrang, a young graduate from the Department of Garo of the North Eastern Hill University. Sengjrang held a short sound boom with a 1-foot long blimp on top of it, covered by a furry windjammer. The short ladder led to a spacious living room, the bamboo weave of the floor bending slightly under our weight. It was dark inside and I switched on the small video light on top of the camera. The bright light showed Asing gesticulating, scuffling and playfully arguing with a man (Junan) who sat on a low stool in a corner of the room. Asing held a folded banknote in his right hand, which he tried to slip into the shirt pocket of Junan. As a joke, Junan said: "Will this be enough for me, will it be sufficient?" (*Iaa angnaa, chu'ungalnauama-gilgipalnauama?*), theatrically warding off Asing's attempts to hand it over. The men laughed, clearly enjoying themselves. Eventually, Asing succeeded in sliding the folded note into Junan's shirt pocket. Their playing around drew spontaneous laughter from the four or five women also present in the room, who were greatly amused by the performance of the men. One of the women, referring to me, cheerfully remarked: "He likes to shoot, when there is scuffling like this!" (*Indake sikbilrimrimarangko, sutting ka'naha am'onga ia!*).

Asing left the house once he had managed to hand over the money. Sengjrang and I stayed on in the room, and, with the camera still running, I asked Junan, in my rather broken Garo, "What did you take?" (*Mai na'a ra'bajok?*). Junan answered: "From them? Money. It was given by my relatives" (*Bisongma? Dangga. Ua maharini gita on'etengamingaro*). I asked: "What money is it?" (*Mai tangka ong'a?*). Junan took the folded-up banknote out of his pocket, examined it quickly and said: "They gave me 50 rupees" (*Tangka sotbonga on'enganaro*). Slightly frustrated by my own inability to express myself more clearly in Garo, I said: "Oh no, no, was it *ma'gual* or *okam*?" (*Oh, ong'ja ong'ja ma'gual-okam, mai?*). *Ma'gual* and *o'kam* – also spelled *ukam* – are different kinds of gifts, and their acceptance demands very distinct forms of reciprocation. Junan said: "*Ma'gual*." He added, after another interjection from my side: "They gave *ma'gual* money" (*Ma'gual on'engachimna o'e*). A little later, Sengjrang and I left the house and found Asing outside, talking to two other men. In my eagerness to make sense of what we had just seen, I asked him, with the camera running: "Asing?" He responded cheerfully: "What? What?" (*Mai mai?*). I said: "Your uncle from Megonggre…" (*Nang'ni Me'gonggrini mama?*), Megonggre being the village in which Junan lived. Asing replied: "Has been given!" (*On'jok!*). To which I asked: "What money did you give him?" (*Mai, mai tangka on'jok?*). Glancing at me mischievously, Asing said: "*Okam*, one hundred" (*Okam ritchasa*). I was a bit taken aback, since both the amount and the kind of gift were different from what Junan had told (and shown) us just a minute ago. Sengjrang, who, during our stay in the village, had made friends with Asing, intervened: "He said that it was *ma'gual*!" (*Ma'gual ineha aganade!*). Asing responded with a combination of embarrassment and anger: "I told him it was *ukam*! […] Can't he listen?" (*Okam iniha aganaba anga. […] Nachila dongjani ia?*). Wilson, an elderly man standing next to Asing, tried to smooth over the issue, and (referring to Junan) said: "He might have misunderstood …" (*Gualen ong'aigenokba …*). This suggestion irritated Asing, and with quite a bit

of anger in his voice he reiterated what he (according to him) had said to Junan. But neither Sengjrang nor I had heard him say that, and we had been present throughout the event.

In many ways, the occasion was not a very cheerful one. The day before, Asing's stepfather had died, and all this took place at his funeral. A large number of people had come over, one of which was Junan, who lived in a neighbouring village. Asing had been entrusted with the task of providing many of these men (and, to a lesser degree, women) with customary gifts, as is mandatory for close kin of the one who died. We were in rural West Garo Hills, in India, about 100 km north of the Bangladesh border. It was nearly a year since I had moved here to conduct ethnographic research on changing interpretations of relatedness, religion and their bearing on (among others) land use. Given this query, with funerals being a primary staging ground for the profiling of social relationships, exploring how people engaged with one another in such settings was highly relevant. Yet funerals typically involved large numbers of people, and trying to understand who was who, what they said and did, and how that might matter led me to use video to create recordings that allowed me to extend the observation and analysis of these events from the moment of their occurrence into later moments of time.

The funeral of Nangseng reflected cultural expectations which, at the time, I had learnt to recognise in rather general terms. The ways in which people adjusted, reinterpreted and strategised with respect to these reflected the challenges which a death created for their social network. I came across many people who were willing to explain to me how 'custom' (*niam*) operated in a general sense, which is also how it is written about in much of the literature. It is not uncommon to provide rather formulaic and ideal typical representations of custom (Costa 1954; Chattopadhyay and Sangma 1989; Marak 2000 [1986]). Whereas these reflect the 'models of society' that interlocutors have (Geertz 2008, 70), answering the questions I was probing demanded foregrounding events and interactions, and how people shaped and interpreted these. The video recordings I made have allowed me to extend my observation, participation and reflection from the day that the actual events took place to the months and years to follow. The existence of these recordings creates an engagement that continues to the present day, and also helped me to write the vignette provided above, some 20 years after.

When Sengjrang and I filmed Asing and Junan, both he and I had only a rather general idea of what gift giving at Garo funerals entailed. Whereas the existing ethnography did mention both *ma'gual* and *ukam*, and how these were different from one another (Burling 1997 [1963], 199), it did not clarify how the two might be confused, and how such confusion could be consequential for the people it related to. Filming the event created a recording which – after the fact – allowed for scrutiny of the words spoken, the gestures made, the amount of money handed over, as well as of the excited reactions of the other people in the room. Sengjrang and I were obviously very present in that room as well, with a sound boom and a video camera with a light on top, and both Asing and Junan reacted noticeably to the presence of the camera. Asing was happy to have his performance filmed, and was

clearly performing at his boisterous best when he doubled the amount he claimed to have handed to Junan. It is not uncommon to give inflated quotes for amounts of money handed out at occasions like this, and even the briskness with which the money given was labelled as either *ma'gual* or *ukam* may have been strengthened by our presence. This rendered the recorded event highly informative, with respect to both the labelling of the gift and to the kind of behaviour that people are expected to display at a funeral for a man as important as Nangseng. Junan would later return the 50 rupees to Asing, since he felt that it was inappropriate for him to accept it. Asing most probably anticipated him doing so, but that did not take much away from his success in publicly forcing a gift onto Junan, corroborating that Junan was close kin of the deceased Nangseng.

Exploring, expanding and reflecting on the event filmed, jointly with my interlocutors, allowed it to serve as a building block for extended participatory observation. The video recordings made at the funeral of Nangseng brought forth many such sequences. Making, analysing and interpreting video recordings could therefore become a core element of a much more encompassing methodological trajectory. In the remainder of this chapter I discuss the various stages which this trajectory encompasses with reference to the fieldwork conducted in Garo Hills. I then summarise this learning process in a six-step methodological toolkit. I first discuss the challenges which participatory observation creates, and how the methodology argued for can engage with these.

Multiple observations, multiple interpretations

A principle challenge created by participatory observation, as the main ethnographic research method, is that it requires the researcher to engage with the interlocutors, as far as is possible and desirable. Such engagement, delimited by the location at which fieldwork takes place (even if in digital space), as well as in terms of the time available, should allow the ethnographer to grasp what was (previously) unknown to her or him. Participatory observation has typically been theorised as a process that takes time: the weeks, months or even years that ethnographic fieldwork demands (DeWalt 2011, 5). Time is required, since the ethnographer in his quest needs to 'learn' to see, to listen, to feel, to smell and to taste, as sensorial ethnography has made clear. Or, according to the West African proverb cited by Dirk Nijland, "A stranger's eyes are wide open, but he only sees what he is familiar with" (translated by the author) (*Les yeux d'un étranger sont grand ouverts, mais il ne voit que ce qu'il sait*) (Nijland 1989, 19). This is an issue which plays out in any ethnographic context, irrespective of whether research is being done close to one's comfort zone or far removed from it. And learning takes time, since it typically involves developing the skill to see (Grasseni 2007), as well as to feel and, not least – language being our prime means of communication – to listen. This learning process becomes particularly vulnerable if research focuses on events, processes and interactions that demand more scrutiny and reflection than the ethnographer can arrive at within the spatial and temporal confines given.

Filming events, and using the moving images and sound recorded to analyse these, was pioneered by Robert Flaherty, who in the 1920s reputedly showed unedited sections of *Nanook of the North* to the protagonist of the film in order to get a better understanding of Inuit life (Rotha 1980, 44). Jean Rouch made such "feedback screenings" integral to his ethnographic practice, perceiving these in terms of an "audiovisual countergift" which was crucial to the development of "mutual understanding between the observer and the observed" (Henley 2009, 316). In the late 1960s, Leiden anthropologist Adrian Gerbrands, focusing on material culture, experimented with more systematic use of such screenings (Gerbrands 1971, 28). Studying material culture and ritual in Oceania, he argued that film (moving images and sound) constituted an essential tool for ethnographers since it allowed for 'archiving'[2] the circumstances in which objects were used. In addition, following Collier's perspectives on photography, he argued for the potential of film registrations in terms of "projective interpretation" since their screening for the research interlocutors led these to volunteer insights which were highly relevant from an ethnographic perspective (Collier and Collier 1967, in Gerbrands 1971, 32). The possibilities which Gerbrands foresaw were further developed by Dirk Nijland, who used film to elicit the intricacies of a marriage ritual of Halmahera (Nijland 1994, 142). Nijland, focusing primarily on the visual (referred to by him as the 'non-verbal' dimensions of social interaction) emphasised the importance of the possibility for filmed registrations to be interpreted very differently by researchers and interlocutors, while at the same time constituting a visually or auditively shared point of reference. This provided film, when projected, with the capacity to trigger memories in the interlocutors, and to be meaningful in other ways that had not necessarily been anticipated by the researcher. In other words, it could inspire interlocutors to make spontaneous comments, creating what were (to the researcher) original insights. The film *Tobelo Marriage* (Nijland and Platenkamp 1985) builds on extensive ethnographic research which had earlier been conducted by Jos Platenkamp (1988), another Leiden anthropologist. This rendered it all the more revealing that the elicitation research conducted with the film by Nijland resulted in insights which Platenkamp's more conventional ethnographic methods had not touched upon. For example, an important scene in *Tobelo Marriage* shows how a spear and a sword are given to close relatives of the groom, which the film's narration refers to as 'weapons' (*senjata-senjata*). During a screening of the film, for which the original English narration had been translated into the Indonesian language, some of the men who were in the film pointed out that these could at that moment not be considered a such, since the gift was meant to neutralise any aggression. Rather, in their readings, the sword and spear had the potential to at some moment in future become weapons – in their opinion, a crucial difference from the explanation provided by the narrative of the film (Nijland 1994, 151).

Research along similar lines was conducted in the late 1980s by Timothy Ash, Patsy Ash and Linda Connor in Bali (Connor et al. 1986), as well as by the Ashes with E. Douglas Lewis on Flores (Lewis 2004). With reference to the research conducted, Lewis noted what had already been stated by Gerbrands and Nijland, which is that

recorded images and sounds, which he referred to as a "photographic text," will typically exceed the frame of reference of the anthropologist: "The camera records more than just the recordist's intended object, the photographic text frequently contains not only information about that object but also further latent and discoverable information" (Lewis 2004, 118). This unintended information included, for instance, the – for Lewis, unexpected – dancing of Sina, an elderly man, in the filmed Gren Ma'he festival (Lewis 1989, 188). While Lewis did acknowledge that filmed records could contain "facets of an ethnographer's subject or focus" that were "unexpected," he also concluded – seemingly in contradiction – that "the cinematic record is no less selective in its origins than are the ethnographer's fieldnotes," which seems to suggest that the ethnographer is aware of what is captured within a shot (Lewis 2004, 120). Relevant to the methodology presented in this chapter, I follow up on the much more radical position opted for by Nijland, who, as stated, emphasised that the strength of film is that it can provide both the researcher and the interlocutors with shared visual and sonic points of reference, although they are likely to 'read' and interpret these images and sounds rather differently (Nijland 2006, 70). In other words, video registrations are selective, but at the time of their recording the ethnographer is unlikely to fully grasp what this selection entails, at least from the perspective of the interlocutors.

The ethnographic learning method I propose here foregrounds an openness to multiple interpretations emphasised by Nijland. Yet the methodology was innovative in three ways. First, it treated images and sounds at par, not foregrounding the one over the other. In events researched, speech is an essential element of acting, rendering the two almost indivisible (also see Littlejohn, this volume). Second, facilitated by the use of video, I had the opportunity to make extensive and explorative recordings of events which might or might not end up being relevant to the research. Third, I worked extensively on the video recordings with the people who were involved in the shooting, or who had the kind of cultural knowledge that could help with their analysis. This allowed me to prolong my engagement with the events filmed beyond the normal confines of space and time. Writing this text had me replay some of the shots made long ago and reread the translations and fieldnotes made at the time, triggering memories that induced further reflection on the methodology practiced.

Today, with every smartphone capable of recording video, audiovisual technology is omnipresent. While this marks a significant departure from the situation before (roughly) the 2010s, when recording video always required a costly dedicated device, this has so far not resulted in widespread adoption of the methodology outlined in this chapter, leaving a potentially extremely valuable toolset underutilised. Video registrations, used to extend observations and experiences, have become common research tools of psychologists, medical practitioners, in teacher training and so on (Rosenstein 2002, 29; Li and Ho 2019, 1), but are only rarely used by anthropologists in that capacity. Therefore, in this chapter I am arguing for a methodological toolkit aimed at conducting ethnographic research centred on the use of video registrations. Participatory observation can then result in dense, multifaceted readings of events, based on which ethnographic theory can be crafted.

A first condition for such research is to build the kind of relationships which are supportive of such an ethnographic endeavour.

Engaging, participating, learning in Garo Hills

Doing ethnographic research that centred on the analysis of socially highly charged events (such as funerals), videotaping these and then analysing them, shaped my fieldwork experiences.[3] For about two years, I lived in a largish village in West Garo Hills, where I had been 'adopted' into one of the village wards. This resulted in my being able join 'relatives' when these attended functions such as meetings, marriages and funerals. In the given context, funerals often demand the involvement of large numbers of people, rendering them, in certain respects, public events. As the adoptive son of a woman who was well respected, I could attend funerals, while she would also help me to get permission from close kin of the one who died. I tried to explain myself to my interlocutors, saying that I wanted to learn about 'custom and culture' (*niam aro dakbewal*). In any setting, I would ask them if they minded me making video recordings, and once people granted permission I tried to be sensitive in my assessment of what to record and what to leave out. The latter would vary from situation to situation, and depended to a good degree on the relationships which I maintained with the people involved. If I was unsure, I would again ask if people minded me recording them. In addition, when analysing the video material afterwards, presuming that some recordings were not meant to be seen by just anyone, I was quite selective about what would be seen by whom. I tried to be as transparent as possible about my research, and the doors and windows of our house were always open. People felt free to come in, also as they really liked to chat with my Garo field assistants, and on a typical day many people would drop by. We would always be open to chat and, if possible, offer them a cup of tea. This also gave us the opportunity to engage them in conversation regarding the cases that we were working on at any given moment. The people who dropped by were often quite willing to talk. After all, it was their decision to stop by, and they often deliberately opted to come to us, which meant that much of the initiative was on their side. It was also common for people to engage in casual early-morning and late-night visits, and I often managed to make my questions part of the conversation that developed on such occasions. In Box 5.1 I elaborate on the importance of informal conversations.

Our openness in working with the video material, and many people volunteering to contribute to our research efforts, prompted an atmosphere of co-creation. At the same time, there was video material which I knew should not be freely shared with just anyone, such as when an old man was beaten up by his own relatives during a kin trail. Doing so would have been very hurtful for him, which rendered it unavoidable to be selective about what was shared, and with who.

The death of Nangseng had been expected (de Maaker 2007). One of his sons lived close to us, and every now and then we would meet and chat. One day, the young man told me about his father being severely ill, with his stomach turning "as hard as rock." Obviously, his close kin tried to cure him. They arranged for

BOX 5.1 INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS

Informal conversations, either at our own house, with people we met on the way or who we met as part of an important event such as a funeral, were almost always of great relevance to the research (Spradley 1979). In rural Garo Hills, taking the time to chat is an important part of social etiquette, and was something people genuinely made time for. As the fieldwork took off, I had more and more questions, and informal conversations were often excellent occasions to float these. At times conversations were very mundane, but they could also reveal completely new insights. To give an example: three months after the funeral of Nangseng, my adoptive mother suddenly, and rather matter of factly, remarked that Nangseng had had the ability to transform into a python in his sleep. From the conversation that followed, it became apparent that locally this was a well-known fact, but at the same time it was not information that anyone had volunteered thus far. In the local cultural context most people consider the occurrence of shapeshifting highly plausible, and many humans are known to transform into animals in their sleep. We later followed up on this conversation, in which my adoptive mother explained that shapeshifting also explained Nangseng's death – rather than the biomedical illness which had previously been mentioned as the cause of his death. In the form of a python, Nangseng would have swallowed a deer, subsequently choking on it. After his death, when the body was kept in state, people had seen a bump on either side of his throat, showing the antlers of the deer. Since neither I nor the field assistants had known about this, we would never have been aware of this if my adoptive mother hadn't mentioned it in an informal conversation.

locally made herbal medicines and, days before his death, they took him by van to the nearest hospital. This was located at about 50 km from where he lived, requiring an arduous two-hour journey over narrow and severely potholed hill roads. Unfortunately, the doctors there told them that it was a late stage of cancer, and they couldn't do anything for him. Nangseng had lived a good life, and in many ways those close to him appeared somewhat resigned to his passing away. Given the severity of his illness, there was unfortunately little anyone could do.

Nangseng's funeral lasted two days, with the burial taking place on the afternoon of the second day.[4] Nangseng had been born, and had grown up, in a neighbouring village, from where dozens of people came for the funeral. Also, scores of people from his wife's side attended, who were from the locality in which he had spent most of his life. All these people brought gifts for the deceased Nangseng, while his close kin needed to offer them counter gifts as well as food, redefining or confirming the relationships traced. Most of this served to reach consent among the relatives of Nangseng and his wife on who would be his successor, and thus inherit his place

among relatives. Junan would play an important role in this respect, which is why it mattered quite a bit what he received in terms of gifts.

Once the news reached me that Nangseng had died, we readied the video equipment.[5] When we reached his house, I asked Rajen, his closest son-in-law, if he would allow us to make video recordings at the funeral. Rajen and his wife Netjak lived next to Nangseng. Since their house was large, Nangseng would be kept in state there. I approached Rajen, knowing that any decisions he took would require the consent of his wife, of his brothers and sisters, as well as of other people closely involved with staging the funeral. Rajen was familiar with me making video recordings, since he had seen me doing so on previous occasions, and he also knew how we would subsequently work with these. He readily agreed, and I was obviously very grateful for the consent given. At the same time, it was clear to me that during the funeral, as well as afterwards, I would need to continue to consider what the consent given implied, taking into account his position and that of his wife, as well as of the other people attending the funeral, as explained in Box 5.2.

In the given setting, funerals easily encompass one and a half to two days, wherein a large number of people interact with one another across various houses and outside spaces. Given this multiplicity of interactions, my 'being there' would necessarily be selective. Moreover, we only had a limited number of video tapes.

BOX 5.2 INTERPRETING CONSENT

Making video recordings can be intrusive, with face-to-face interaction being hindered by the presence of the equipment. Moreover, people whose actions and speech are being recorded may feel restricted in expressing themselves, aware that they say and do can later be played back, reviewed and scrutinised by others. In the particular setting in which the research took place, people had seen me working with video, and many had seen themselves on video. People there knew that I came from abroad, and whereas they could somehow imagine 'the West,' I am convinced that that did not hold for the academic settings in which I would present my research outcomes.[6] This held for the sharing of excerpts of the video recordings made, to the articles and other texts I would write based on what I had learnt. Most of these would be aimed at non-Garo academic audiences, demanding analytical approaches which they almost certainly would not be able to relate to. The permission which Rajen gave me, with the support of his wife, Nangseng's sons, and others responsible for the funeral, therefore did not relieve me of the responsibility to continue to assess which images and dialogues to share, with whom, and in which contexts. Gaining consent is never restricted to a one-off incident, but rather is subject to reconsideration and reassessment for as long as a researcher is working with the data obtained (Dilger et al. 2019, 4) (also see Chapter 9, this volume).

Also, the more video we recorded, the more time would be required for its translation and analysis, which also made me want to restrict the length of the recordings. Since I had a general idea of how the funeral might unfold, and who would be the key people, prior to the event I could shortlist those aspects of interaction and those activities which I was particularly curious about. On the first day I decided to focus on the wake, with many people sitting around the corpse, and on the many visitors who brought cattle for the deceased. It was a long day, but I held back and we recorded just 40 minutes of video. The second day started early, with more and more relatives from neighbouring villages pouring in. As a son of the deceased, Asing was granted the responsibility of offering the attendees various customary gifts. Immediately after the disposal of Nangsang's dead body in the local graveyard, a short but important meeting took place in a cramped annex of the main house. In this meeting, which was attended by Nangseng's widow Jengda, his daughter Netjak and his son-in-law Rajen, as well as many of the kin seniors who mattered in the given context, the succession of Nangseng was decided. Rajen was to be his heir, which committed Rajen and Netjak to 'look after' (*mittangen*) the widowed Jengda. This successful meeting was followed by more money, as well as hinds of beef, being offered to the visitors. On the second day, we recorded 126 minutes of video. This time, we mostly focused on the gift giving, recording, among other incidents, the aforementioned mock-argument involving Asing and Junan. In the end, the total video recordings made at Nangseng's funeral came to about two and a half hours, and it took several months to analyse them.

When recording the footage, I tried to approach events as sequences: units of interaction delimited in terms of time and place. When deciding on specific shots, I went by insights that I had gained earlier in the fieldwork, the hints which Sengjrang gave me, as well my experience as an ethnographic filmmaker (de Maaker 1998; Geirnaert-Martin et al. 2007). I framed shots so that these encompassed people and objects that appeared relevant to me. Whenever people spoke, I tried to capture the person speaking. Framing shots means directing the viewers' attention, and I tried to choose frames wide enough that they encompassed people, objects and spaces that seemed relevant, while also including close-ups, where possible. As mentioned, I had basic proficiency in Garo, and whilst I understood enough to grasp what people were talking about, I could not understand (or 'place') everything that was being said. Sengjrang was a native speaker (and listener) of Garo, and was particularly familiar with the Ambeng dialect of Garo spoken here, but even he often failed to grasp the meaning of what was being said. People sometimes used words, and even grammatical constructions, in reference to concepts unknown to him. Obviously, Sengjrang had been raised and educated in a different (more urbanised) environment, where to some degree different cultural conventions applied, resulting in him also having only a partial understanding of what people were talking about. As a consequence, I recorded video of events which, at the time that I attended them, I only partially understood. I distil the recording strategy which I followed to cope with this in Box 5.3.

BOX 5.3 RECORDING STRATEGY

Recording video implies choices in terms of framing, positioning and length of recording time. This means deciding who and what to include, and what audio to record. A shot in wide angle can include many actors, yet depending on the definition of the video signal and the size of the screen on which it is projected, it may not allow for discerning many details. A close-up does provide details, but cannot at the same time contextualise these. Both are required for video recordings to, on the one hand, be articulate and, on the other hand, provide contextualisation. To include wide frames, medium frames and close-ups, while ensuring continuity in terms of sound (and thus dialogues) recorded, I made use of what Jean Rouch called a *plan sequence*, or 'sequence shot.' This is a "prolonged, unbroken shot, in which one moves around with the camera, responding to the action within the frame" (Henley 2009, 141). Since a 'sequence shot' encompasses successive frames and camera positions, it allows for visual and auditive exploration of an event while filming. The continuing recording of sound which this allowed for, we used to focus first and foremost on capturing the dialogues involving the people being filmed. This recording strategy, foregrounding the 'sequence shot,' had the added advantage that even though shots are not made primarily to anticipate their suitability in editing, it may still be possible to use them in short edited clips. I produced such edited clips for the ethnographic DVD *An Untimely Death*, which was a companion to my PhD thesis (de Maaker 2006b).

Once the funeral was over and we had recovered from the lack of sleep over the preceding days, I first wrote my fieldnotes. During the funeral, I had engaged in informal conversations with a variety of people, and many of these yielded insights that were of relevance to the research. During these conversations, or sometimes immediately afterwards, I would scribble notes on a small notepad, which I kept with me at all times. Such notes contained keywords relating to conversations, names of people or simply my own thoughts and reflections. Whenever someone said something which I thought was important to catch literally, I would try to scribble down the actual Garo phrases as well. Writing fieldnotes meant translating these scribbles, and whatever associations they brought up, into narrative paragraphs. Sitting at my laptop, I allowed the notes to trigger my memory, and then typed them out as completely and contextually richly as possible. I wrote these notes chronologically, day by day, dedicating a separate paragraph to each topic. Writing fieldnotes was demanding in that it typically took me several hours, and I really had to discipline myself to 'make' the time do so. Since I wrote my notes on a laptop they were searchable, rendering it relatively easy to collate all the passages of the fieldwork dairy that related to a given topic. Where the fieldnotes had accounts of conversations and observations, the associated video recordings

served as the basis for more detailed log files, which centred on annotated translation of the dialogues these entailed.

Dialoguing events

My analysis of the funeral of Nangseng proceeded from the video recordings, allowing these to act as an intermediary between me, my field assistants Henysingh and Nixon (who had joined me as Sengjrang had accepted a job as a teacher at a college) and, most significantly, a variety of interlocutors. Working from our house in the village, I first made a copy of the original video tapes to safeguard the originals. The copies visually displayed the timecode of the original video tape. Then, with reference to that time code, I made a shot description of the video, which briefly mentioned what the shot was about and who it included. Where relevant – for instance, to identify a specific person or a specific object – I would add additional time code references to the shot description. As we worked with the recordings, I continued to refine this shot description, adding details with reference to the people included and the social relationships they traced to one another.

Once the preliminary shot description had been made, one of the field assistants listened to and then transcribed the spoken Garo. My Garo was nowhere near good enough to write such transcriptions consistently. Garo is written in the roman script, and for non-native speakers the match between speech and the conventions of writing is not always obvious. This notably held for the Ambeng Garo spoken in the region where I conducted fieldwork, which, according to many educated Garo, constitutes a rustic dialect, as compared to 'proper' A'we Garo (the Garo that is taught in schools and colleges). Ambeng has a lot of overlap with A'we, but there are differences in pronunciation, as well as in terms of vocabulary. Luckily, Henysing (one of the field assistants) was fluent in Ambeng, and could capture most of the dialogues recorded. If he couldn't, as sometimes happened, and someone dropped in who might be able to help him, he would ask that person to listen. Sometimes this also resulted in adding annotations to the transcript, easing the translation to English that was about to follow. In Box 5.4, I elaborate on the importance of a detailed log file, as well as full transliteration of the spoken word, to access the potential of video recordings for event analysis.

Henysing wrote the transcripts with pen in a notebook. He did not like typing, and we only had one laptop. The typing was done by John, a civil servant who was interested in my research and was willing to help us. His office was located in a small town, some 15 km from where we lived. I had befriended the head of the local administration, the Sub-Divisional Officer, who agreed to support the research effort. Many of the civil servants posted to the small town refused to stay there, opting instead for the nearly two-hour daily commute to the district capital where most of them lived. As a consequence, many of the homes meant for these officers remained empty, and thus I could rent one at a nominal rate. In this small house I kept a computer, which John used in his free time to type up Henysing's handwritten transcripts.

BOX 5.4 MAKING LOG FILES

Video recordings of social interactions typically have very high information density. One way to 'open up' the combination of moving images and sound, to allow for their analysis and exploration, is by creating a log file which allows for the identification of places, people, objects and so on. Such a log file can continue to expand and evolve as the exploration progresses. A prime element of such a log file is the transcription of all the spoken word. Transcribing dialogue is tedious and time consuming, but it is the only way that one can truly gain an overview of a body of speech. Since acting and speaking are typically closely interwoven, this allows for close reading of the events captured, 'spacing out' what people did as they spoke. Transcription also allows for minute translation (if needed) and annotation of the spoken word. The log file is also important as it creates random access to the video file. Video, when played, shows linearly. A log file allows for easy flipping back and forth, searching through shots and dialogues. The log file complements the fieldwork diary, as well as other relevant files compiled during the fieldwork.

Once typed, I copied the Garo transcript into the log file that had the shot descriptions, doing a quick check on the spoken Garo and adding time codes for each of the sentences. After some experimenting, we found that making direct translations of Garo to English easily resulted in misinterpretation, often missing the gist of what was being said. Therefore, to translate the Garo to English, we decided on a two-step approach. First, in the column next to the transcript, for each (time-coded) sentence spoken, one of the field assistants wrote a word-for-word translation. This translation had all the words that each sentence contained, but did not attempt to link these. Rather, it had these words written separately, separated by hyphens, instead of writen as full sentences. In addition, in another column, the field assistants wrote a preliminary translation for each full sentence. John would type both these translations into the file. Only once all of this preparatory work had been done did we start to work with the video recordings and the log file in earnest.

I was lucky that an elderly man, Biki, who had lived in the village all his life and had amazing genealogical knowledge, agreed to spend a few days with us. Other people would also drop by and volunteer an hour of their time, or even longer, to explain to us some of the intricacies we probed. Together, we would watch the video and listen to the spoken Garo. Sentence after sentence, we went through the transcripts and the rough translations, interpreting and reformulating the English of each successive sentence. As we created a precise translation, the events that we had recorded came to life. Frequently, the translation ended up being annotated to explain the meanings or implications of certain passages or actions. We also came to gradually identify more of the people involved, adding their names to the log file, as well as to a separate kinship file. In the Garo cultural context, kin relations are

31:59:15	Medium Wilson, Rajeng, Asing going into the house, and walk towards the bedroom. A gong is lying on the bed. Three gongs are discussed. Asing takes one gong, and goes into the main room. Get's back into the room, he collects another gong, and gives it to another women, sitting next to de deceased. Takes the gong up, and back into the bedroom. Discussion beetween the gong givers follows. Asing takes one gong, walks over to the other bedroom, and puts the gong into a sara. He then collects a second gong, and puts it behind a women sitting next to the deceased, he also gave to earlier. Money giving starts then. Asing walks to the kitchen. Camera has problems with the changes in light. Follows, and catches part of the money giving. Then Asing walks back into the house, and camera follows. At 34:16:16 the rang examined by Asing holds is an Anggar Anjong or Banggal Sku. The rang examined by Asing at 34:21:21 is a Anggar Gitcham.	33:21:14.Bako on•etnaua, amaha a•aigen. 33:25:20.Haiwa. 33:26:00.Aiwakona. 33:28:03.Na•onghana a•aigen, angade a•aija. 33:30:02.Iade ini bajuinde ia. 33:32:20.Nibuda, nibuda aiwako. 33:34:08.Ian nama ia ini baju ong•ode. 33:38:00.Ia iku…… 33:39:05.On•chenge ni. 33:51:00.Ia Anggalma? 33:54:17.Iku Ta•jakongna ? 33:56:03.Hi•ing. 33:56:15.Bindaakonde. 34:00:00.Iku Ta•jakongna, ambiongna on•e nichengbo. 34:02:10.Hat iku…….. 34:03:10.Ikuha. 34:05:10.Ia ambiongna on•e nichengoba ong•aigenba ia. 34:09:03.On•etaribuda. 34:10:01.Ikude Tomni amana. 34:12:19.Hi•ing. 34:15:02.Inaha on•chengbuda. 34:15:22.Binaha on•chengbu. 34:17:10.Ta•jakna ? 34:18:00.Hi•ing.	33:21:14 Which one - given will be, mother only - know will. 33:25:20 That. 33:26:00 That one. 33:28:03 You all - know will, I don't know. 33:30:02 This is - it's - pair of - this. 33:32:20 See, see, that one. 33:34:08 This is - better - this is - it's pair (other one of same pair) - is if. 33:38:00 This - this one…… 33:39:05 Give first - try. 33:51:00 This is - Anggal (type of rang)? 33:54:17 This is - Ta•jaks' for? 33:56:03 Yes. 33:56:15 Mixed might be. 34:00:00 This is -Ta•jak's for, grandmothers for - give - try first. 34:02:10 Hat - this one…….. 34:03:10 This is the one. 34:05:10 This - grandmother for - give - try first - alright - it. 34:09:03 Give just. 34:10:01. This is - Tom's mother. 34:12:19 Yes. 34:15:02 Her for - give first. 34:15:22 Her for - give first. 34:17:10 Ta•jak for ? 34:18:00 Yes.	33:21:14 Gaseng: Mother only knows which one should be given. (means Jeng•da) 33:25:20 That. 33:26:00 That one. 33:28:03 You all will know, I don't know. 33:30:02 Wilson: This is one of a pair. 33:32:20 Look, look, that one. 33:34:08 This one is better, if it is of the same pair. 33:38:00 This, this one…… 33:39:05 Try giving first. 33:51:00 Is this an Anggal? 33:54:17 Is this for Ta•jaks'? 33:56:03 Yes. 33:56:15 They might be mixed up. (the rangs) 34:00:00 This is for Ta•jaks', first try giving it to grandmother. (grandma is Tajak herself) 34:02:10 Hat, this one…….. 34:03:10 This is the one. 34:05:10 It will alright to first try giving it to grandmother. 34:09:03 Just give it. 34:10:01 This is for Tom's mother. 34:12:19 Yes. 34:15:02 First give to her. 34:15:22 First give to her. 34:17:10 For Ta•jak? 34:18:00 Yes.

FIGURE 5.1 An excerpt of the log file relating to the funeral of Nangseng. From left to right: shot description, full transcript of the spoken Garo; word to word translation; full translation into English. The contents of the shot mentioned are discussed below.

very important, and in order to develop an understanding of these I made it a habit to compile kinship data in a separate file. For any given setting I was familiar with some of the relationships traced, but time and again new relevant ties came to the fore when we were working with the video material (Figure 5.1).

Transcribing, translating and annotating the 146 minutes of video shot at Nangseng's funeral was a lengthy process. It took several weeks, but this allowed me to scrutinise the recordings and identify those elements which seemed essential to my research. I listed any questions that came up, trying to analyse the interactions between the people involved. Then, I asked Asing to spend some time with me, showing him those parts of the video which I sought his reflection on. Of course, when screening the video, I gave him ample time to react before asking my questions, but, knowing that I had spent a lot of time in trying to get an understanding of the recordings, he also asked me to bring up those issues which I was particularly interested in. Focusing on what had been recorded, my questions could be quite specific. I arranged for similar screenings with some of the other people who had been involved. Jengda (Nangseng's widow) also dropped by to offer her help, and she told me that she wanted to see some of the video we had shot. My adoptive mother took me aside and warned me not to agree to this, since it could cause grief to the widow. This felt uncomfortable to me: if she wanted to see the funeral, and her deceased husband, who was I to keep her from doing so? To resolve this dilemma, I told her about my adoptive mother's concerns. However, Jengda insisted

on seeing the video, which I then acceded to. It was emotional for her, but she also took the time to give me her perspective on the events I had shot. In addition, I continued to have informal conversations with people about what I had learnt about the funeral, without necessarily showing the video to them.

I will now briefly dwell on one of the micro events which the analysis of the video recordings made at Nangseng's funeral revealed. This relates to the unfolding of a discussion among close relatives of Nangseng about the distribution of valuable brass heirloom gongs. In the given context, such gongs mattered a lot as these were considered as a symbolic representation of the bones (i.e. a non-perishable part) of the deceased person. Whereas people, when asked, would claim that handing out such gongs is solely the responsibility of the sons, the analysis indicates that, on this occasion at least, the opinion of the widow was decisive.

On the morning of the first day of the funeral, Nangseng's widow Jengda, one of her sons, a son-in-law and two of her brothers gathered in a small bedroom that was not occupied by funeral attendees. There, they discussed what gong was to be given to Tajak (a classificatory mother of Nangseng), and which to Balmoni (a classificatory grandmother of Nangseng). They had to decide between two gongs, one of which was more expensive than the other. Sengjrang and I followed Asing (the younger brother of Jengda), since he was actively handing out gifts. I could barely find a place to stand in the narrow and dark bedroom, and many of the images shot were out of focus; luckily, the sound recording was clear enough. First, Wilson (elder brother of Jengda) placed a large brass gong on a bed. It was an *anggar angjong* ('younger charcoal brother'). My rather tightly framed shot included Wilson and Asing, but Gaseng (son) remained hidden behind Asing. The men talked in hushed voices, nearly whispering, presumably since they did not want the people gathered for the wake in the main room of the house to hear them. Gaseng said: "Only mother [Jengda] knows which one should be given" (*Bako on'etnaua, amaha a'aigen*). Jengda responded: "You all know, I don't know" (*Na'onghana a'aigen, angade a'aija*). Upon hearing her speak, I presume, I tracked backward, to include Jengda in the frame. She instead moved forwards, and the camera followed her hand as she pointed to the side of the bed. Her son took up the *anggar angjong*, and examined it carefully. He said: "This one is for Tajak, but first try to give one to grandmother [Balmoni]" (*Iku Tajakongna, ambiongna on'e nichengbo*). Wilson took a more valuable *anggar gitcham* ('old charcoal') from the same corner, and placed it onto the bed as well. To me, the two large brass gongs looked identical, but this was not the case for the relatives of Nangseng. While tapping with his finger on the *anggar angjong*, the son said: "First, try to give this one to grandmother [Balmoni]" (*Ia ambiongna on'e nichengoba*). The son-in-law, barely visible in the shot, but clearly audible, said: "It will do for her [Balmoni]" (*Ong'aigenba ia*). I tried to point the camera at whoever was speaking, resulting in it swinging back and forth between the men and the widow. Asing took up the more valuable *anggar gitcham* and asked: "Is this one for Tom's mother [Balmoni]?" (*Ikude Tomni amana?*). Off screen, but luckily picked up by the microphone, this led the widow to say (referring to the *anggar angjong*): "First give that to her [Tajak]" (*Inaha on'chengbuda*). Pointing at the *anggar angjong* as

	Gaseng (son)	Wilson (elder brother of the widow)	Rajeng (son-in-law)	Asing (younger brother of the widow)	Jengda (widow)	Wilson (elder brother of the widow)
anggar angjong gong (least precious)	Tajak	Balmoni	Balmoni	(Tajak)	Tajak	Tajak
anggar gitcham gong (most precious)	(Balmoni)	(Tajak)	(Tajak)	Balmoni?	(Balmoni)	(Balmoni)
>>>> Development of the discussion in time >>>>						

FIGURE 5.2 Deciding on gongs for Tajak and Balmoni. The implications of the preferences voiced are given between brackets (adapted from Figure 17, de Maaker 2006a: 135).

well, Wilson agreed: "First give this to her [Tajak]" (*Binaha on'chengbu*). The camera now stayed with the *anggar angjong*, with Asing and with the son. Asing replied, as if to confirm the decision made: "To Tajak?" (*Tajakna?*). Jengda: "For the mother and heir [Tajak]" (*Amani nokgipanaha*). With this, everyone had agreed to offer the least valuable of the two gongs to Tajak, the mother of Nangseng, and the most valuable one to his grandmother, Balmoni (Figure 5.2).

The whole discussion had taken less than a minute, and what is given above is a greatly condensed and reduced account of the interaction between the five persons in the corner of the bedroom. It was only in discussing this passage with some of the people who had been present that it became clear how much of a say widow Jengda, in appearance a rather fragile old lady, had in the matter. As schematised in Figure 5.2, at the outset of the discussion, the son authorised the widow. She was reluctant to take this role, but the men would follow up on her word. Initially, her son suggested giving the least valuable *anggar angjong* to Nangseng's mother. Wilson and the heir disagreed. Questioning their suggestion, Asing reverted to what the son had earlier proposed. When Nangseng's widow supported him, Wilson changed his mind (de Maaker 2006a, 133–134). In the given cultural context, the commonly held assumption would be that a man like Wilson would decide, since he would be the custodian of the assets of his sister (and her deceased husband). In practice, as the event analysis based on the video recordings revealed, here the widow did have a considerable – if not decisive – say in the matter.

Video elicitation also created the opportunity to discuss the gift being offered by Asing to Junan, discussed earlier in this chapter. Screening the video recordings, and then discussing them with Biki, Asing and several others, suggested that given his relationship to Nangseng, Junan could indeed have expected to be handed *ma'gual*, rather than *ukam* (gifts demanding very different forms of reciprocation, as mentioned in the second section). In Box 5.5, I expand on how video elicitation can deepen event analysis.

BOX 5.5 VIDEO ELICITATION

The video recordings proved invaluable for their capacity to reproduce moving images and sound relating to the events that took place at the funeral of Nangseng. We captured on video many interactions and dialogues that we were not aware of at the time of the recording. The research made full use of the video being interpreted by the interlocutors, and led them to explain how certain actions and things that were said mattered in a particular way. The cues were given, often, by the video which I showed them, rather than as a response to questions asked by me as a researcher. In the conversations that ensued, I would follow up on their remarks. Video elicitation also created scope for multivocality, as it demanded that interlocutors would provide dedicated interpretations. Watching the video together with a man like Asing, I also learnt more about how body movements, gestures and facial expressions were integral to the dialogues filmed. These may otherwise be spheres that are difficult to access, which video elicitation can, however rather straightforwardly, reveal, creating valuable ethnographic learning opportunities.

The thesis that I wrote based on what I learnt about Garo interpretations of custom, *Negotiating Life: Garo Death Rituals and the Transformation of Society* (de Maaker 2006a), is built on a large number of such cases. Extending these case studies towards other contexts in which the people involved interacted with one another allowed me to construct theory out of participatory observation (Burawoy et al. 1992, 271). On the one hand, I could relate normative statements to what people actually did. On the other hand, the various cases that emerged created a comparative perspective, revealing cultural logic as well as the challenges and dissonances this created. This allowed me to formulate an argument about the continuing reinterpretation of cultural traditions, rooted in interpretations of practice that would feed into my monograph *Reworking Culture: Relatedness, Rites and Resources in Garo Hills, North-East India* (de Maaker 2021).

A toolkit for extended participatory observation

Creating case studies to which video registrations are integral fits into a workflow in which the gradual deepening of ethnographic knowledge is conditional for the next steps of enquiry. An event such as Nangseng's funeral can be integrated in a workflow which encompasses at least six stages.

1) Connect: Create a social network which is relevant to the research to be conducted. This implies meeting people informally, and explaining – even if in very general terms – the kind of research effort envisaged. This phase of the research involves the development of mutual relationships. Mutuality allows the interlocutors to trust the researcher, and is also essential for the researcher to feel at least to some

degree accepted among the interlocutors. If research is intended which involves audiovisual registrations, this implies making oneself known as someone who records video. Mutuality is also mandatory to obtain consent. Typically, consent to make video recordings can be granted by someone in charge. Since this may not reflect the opinions of everyone present, remain sensitive to people who are not comfortable being filmed. Research interlocutors often not so much consent to a given project, but rather agree since they relate positively to the researcher(s) involved. As a consequence, and also since one's interlocutors are seldom able to anticipate how the ethnographic data gathered will be analysed, circulated and disseminated, the researcher needs to continue interpreting the consent granted against the interests and commitments of the research interlocutors.

2) Record: Making video recordings with easy-to-handle and omnipresent devices such as smart phones is common practice, but in a research context such as is discussed in this chapter, the best results will be obtained with a dedicated video camera that allows for the recording of sound with a high-end directional microphone. Ideally, to get good-quality recordings, such a microphone should be handled by a sound recordist, rather than mounted on the camera. Develop a shooting strategy based on a general list of themes: identify persons, objects and situations which at the given stage of the research appear relevant, but continue to revise and reinterpret that list. Ensure that, as much as possible, shots capture dialogues in full, which may frequently increase the average shot length well beyond what feels acceptable in regular filmmaking. Frame shots so that these allow for the inclusion of what appear to be relevant people, objects and spaces, creating sequence shots that alternate between medium, close-up and wide-angle frames within a single shot. Follow your curiosity, and be sensitive to cues given by others present who are trying to help you (Figure 5.3).

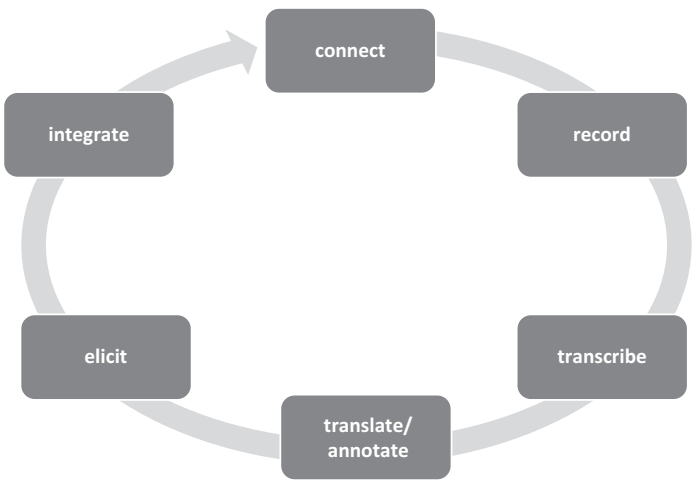

FIGURE 5.3 Iterative workflow, generating ethnographic knowledge. Gaining consent is not mentioned in this scheme, since it is integral to each of the stages of the workflow.

3) Transcribe: Create a log file that is expanded and revised as the exploration of the video recordings progresses. Use the video timecode linked to the original recordings to create references for actions, people and dialogues. Meticulously transcribe all dialogues for those sections of the video recordings where these really seem to matter. Transcribing dialogues can be time consuming, so try to be strategic in your time investment. Consider not prioritising or even leaving out sections which do not appear relevant.
4) Translate and annotate: If the researcher has only limited familiarity with the language used by the interlocutors, making a detailed translation is required. Ideally, this translation should be made into the language which will later on be used for the publications intended to ensue from the project. When translating, make sure to ascertain the meaning of key terms, and be wary of dictionary definitions. The meaning of most words is highly context dependent, and dictionary interpretations may not suffice. If the researcher has only limited familiarity with the language spoken, translation ideally involves a three-way conversation between the interlocutors, the field assistant and the researcher. Key terms should be explored and annotated as extensively as possible since these can provide important entry points for theorising the ethnography. Where the researcher shares the language of the interlocutors, the latter may still contextualise words in ways which the researcher is not familiar with. In such a case key terms should be annotated, based on the interpretations volunteered by the interlocutors.
5) Elicit: Video recordings, moving images and sound can act as a powerful stimulus to one's interlocutors. For people who have been present at the time of their recording, the images and sounds may have a strong mnemonic quality. As a consequence, screening the recordings may evoke reactions from the interlocutors. Such reactions may be spontaneous, or may be triggered by dedicated queries formulated by the researcher. Watching (unedited) research footage can be taxing for your interlocutors, and it is therefore best to focus on specific, not-too-lengthy sections that appear relevant to the research. You can consider recording these conversations if your interlocutors are so much at ease that it does not hinder their reactions.
6) Integrate: Use the insights gathered to generate additional questions. Identify ethnographically rich (mini-) cases, and theorise the insights gained. Use the leads this provides to adjust the focus of the research and decide on next steps in the fieldwork. Try to use the strongest of these case studies to shape the argument that the ethnography produces.

Conclusions: co-creating ethnographic interpretations

Ethnographic insights emerge in communicative contexts (Fabian 1971, 20) which involve the researcher as well his or her interlocutors. Such an effort is typically initiated by the ethnographer, who wants to gain insights from his/her respondents which are of relevance to the ideas and moralities that define their outlook. These

insights then translate into output in the form of written material, audiovisual material, or one or another hybrid format, aimed primarily at a scholarly audience of peers, and to a lesser degree for anyone else with an interest in the kind of scholarly argument advanced. Since this audience is located outside the group of interlocutors which the ethnography engages with, writing ethnography requires the researcher to engage in what might be called a 'translation effort,' by which s/he makes the insights obtained from the interlocutors accessible to external audiences. Translation involves theorising ethnography in ways that exceed local conceptual frameworks, rendering it conceptually accessible to – ideally – a global audience. But translation here also quite literally relates to language, given that the dominant publishers of anthropology are in the anglophone world, with English subsequently being the dominant language for publication.

The cultural turn of the 1980s emphasised that the qualitative methods central to ethnography produce insights that are always dependent on the receptive and interpretative framework of the ethnographer. Acknowledging the subjective nature of the insights gained, ethnographers have made it a rule to explicitly make themselves 'seen' (in writing, notably), thus clarifying their role as the ones experiencing, learning, analysing and reporting. In addition, as an obvious outcome of the realisation that experiences are always situational, ethnographers also came to acknowledge that the interlocutors they engaged with did not necessarily share the same opinions or interests. People may find themselves in a single cultural realm, but that doesn't mean that their experiences are similar. Rather, it is a given that differences in perspective and interpretation exist in any social context, and bringing these out is among the major contributions that qualitative research can yield. From a sociological perspective, such differences can often be explained with reference to categories such as gender, economic interests, generational differences, ethnicity, religion and so on. This has fundamentally challenged the ability of ethnography to portray consolidated 'cultures,' or 'peoples,' resulting in alternative approaches to culture in terms of, for example, flows (Appadurai 1996), scales (Tsing 2005) and styles (Ferguson 1999). The latter foreground situationality and multivocality, emphasising that cultural normativities and cultural practices always depend on whoever enacts them.

Qualitative research in face-to-face contexts where conflicts of interest play out can be complicated, since people may not feel free to publicly voice conflicting opinions as this might easily tear a delicate social fabric. Participatory observation, extended in time and space by audiovisual registrations, makes exploration of differences of opinion, conflicts of interest and even taboos much more feasible. As shown above, analysis of video recordings takes time. If this is done in physical proximity to the research interlocutors, this can create ample opportunities for people to reflect on the events filmed, and give their reading, without these readings immediately becoming subject to scrutiny by others.

The ethnographic insights that emerge are dependent on the relationship of the researcher with the interlocutors, and the degree of trust these entail. After all, the researcher will not gain insights into motivations, observations and emotions unless

the interlocutors are willing to share these. Ethnographic knowledge, given that it is subject to these relationships, is dependent on co-creative processes encompassing the researcher and the interlocutors, and thus also the various agendas, attitudes and moralities these foster. In ethnographic research proceeding from the analysis of video recordings of events, this co-creative process is even more explicit. Such a recording reflects (part of) what the researcher could see and hear, including the responses of the interlocutors to the researcher-with-camera (as is obvious from the vignette in the second section of this chapter). Dependent on how the interlocutors experience being filmed, and how they anticipate who will later on get to see the recordings, the camera can act as a "catalyst," "provoking" the interlocutors (Henley 2009, 340).[6] This dialogic and co-creative process can be continued in subsequent learning with the recordings, which can extend over the weeks, months and years to follow.

In this chapter, I have addressed one of the main challenges of ethnography – namely, to systematise, deepen and extend participatory observation as an experiential learning process. This is challenging, since the ethnographer's experiencing and understanding are necessarily skewed towards recognition, towards what is already known and hence already included in his or her conceptual framework. Ethnographic research proceeding from the analysis of video recordings can foreground events as enacted and interpreted, and be conducive towards 'opening' hitherto unknown spheres of social interaction, and the moralities and ideas that shape these. Moreover, embedding video recordings in a methodological framework that encompasses an extended period of time allows both the researcher and the interlocutors to reflect on the events observed and filmed, creating room for scrutiny, reflection and hence deep and dense ethnographic readings.

Notes

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2 Gerbrands writes that behaviour that has been filmed has been "visually preserved" (in Dutch: "visueel […] geconserveerd").

3 Working with video in rural Garo Hills created specific technical challenges. West Garo Hills has intense rain for five to six months a year, which, when combined with tropical heat, results in very high humidity. This meant that electronic equipment, when not in use, had to be stored in plastic bags with lots of silica gel as a drying agent. The silica gel we used showed blue when dry, red when saturated. Checking the colour of the silica gel, taking it out of the cotton bags when it had turned red, drying it over a fire and then putting it back were important and time-consuming chores.

4 Nangseng A. Sangma died on 26 May 2000. His funeral was held over 26 and 27 May, 2000.

5 We used a Sony DCR-VX1000E digital video camcorder with a Vivanco wide-angle adapter VC 95W 0,5x SQL, and a Sennheiser MKH 416P 48 U3 phantom fed

microphone with an Audio Developments AD 160 ENG mixer. This mixer allowed for the manual adjustment of the sound recorded, which was important to clearly capture the spoken word.

6 According to Henley, for Jean Rouch the camera was not "a passive recording device," but rather "a catalytic instrument, one whose mere presence could provoke the subjects into producing a performance that revealed the beliefs, sentiments, attitudes and dreams that lay beneath the everyday surface of things and that, in the last analysis, were of primary importance in explaining the more visible forms of social behavior" (Henley 2009, 340–341).

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