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Podcast ethnography

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the method of *podcast ethnography*. The method encompasses three general stages: to *explore* a podcast from a particular social field, to *engage* with it through careful, ethnographic reflexivity and to *examine* the podcast by developing typologies and themes expedient for analysis. Podcast ethnography is beneficial due to its spatial and temporal flexibility; observing a podcast universe can be performed on the move and in parallel with other tasks. This advantage enables a much-needed breathing space for researchers inquiring vehement milieus, such as white radical nationalism. The article uses an example from this precise milieu in Sweden – the podcast *Motgift* [Antidote] – to illustrate and flesh out the potentials and challenges of applying the method's three stages. In so doing, the article argues for inclusion of podcast ethnography into the extended family of ethnographic methods.

KEYWORDS

Online ethnography; digital ethnography; netnography; online participant observation; virtual ethnography

Introduction

The explosion of digitalised media communications has prompted a vast array of scholars to employ ethnographic methods to study these phenomena. Ethnography is typically understood as a methodology marked by explorative engagement (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). It is a 'family of methods' (O'reilly, 2012, p. 3), in the 'art and science of describing a group or culture' (Fetterman, 1998, p. 1). In recent years, ethnographic research methods have become ever more pertinent to understand digitalised and virtualised realities, in an era in which 'the Internet has increasingly become a part of us' (Hine, 2015, p. 14).

The overall notion of *digital* ethnography often serves to conceptualise ethnographic endeavours focused on, or making use of, digital technologies (Murthy, 2008). However, recent developments in this field have come to question its digital-centric approach (Morley, 2009), which is why a growing body of literature instead refers to *online* ethnography when investigating social media platforms and digital media resources (Haverinen, 2015, p. 82). Building on the observation that 'the digital has become part of the material, sensory and social worlds we inhabit' (Pink et al., 2016, p. 6), several social research methods are in fact transferable to digital contexts (Russo, 2019). Accordingly, the expanding field of online ethnography now includes research on written texts like tweets, webpages and Facebook posts (Ahuja & Shakeel, 2017; Dong, 2017; Naess, 2017), as well as visual representations like images, videos and emojis (Arya et al., 2018; García-Rapp, 2018; Kudaibergenova, 2019; Schuman et al., 2019).

A recurrent concept in this field is Robert Kozinets' influential notion of *netnography* (Kozinets, 1998, 2015), which is especially epitomised as an applied research method for marketing research and tourism studies (Bartl et al., 2016; Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019).

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This approach has been advanced by Peter Lugosi and Sarah Quinton, among others, to incorporate how algorithms and artificial intelligence play into the research itself. Lugosi & Quinton highlight more-than-human agency, how ‘technology mediates social relations’ (Lugosi & Quinton, 2018, p. 292), and stress its variances across digital contexts. For example, the algorithm as an actor is highly operative on social media networks such as Facebook and Instagram, while RSS-based functionalities – such as podcasting – are less prone to algorithmic agency.¹ The term ‘netnography’ may therefore be activating essentialist understandings of cultural phenomena that are enacted digitally; the prefix ‘net’ demarks the internet as a space separate from other spheres of social life (cf. Bluteau, 2019). In this article, we will follow another line of thought, namely Christine Hine’s (2015) understanding of the internet (or internets) in terms of extended corporeality.

The podcast is arguably a medium located at the precise intersection of the digital and non-digital. As noted by Espada (2018, p. 3), podcasts are based on three key technologies: compressed audio information (e.g., MP3-files), a global point-to-point network (the ‘internet’) and a subscription system (a ‘Really Simple Syndication’ [RSS] feed). A podcast, then, is a composition of downloadable and sequenced digital audio files available through subscription. Whereas podcasts first appeared in the early 2000s (Berry, 2016, p. 633), this particular medium has rapidly grown into a global cultural phenomenon (Chadha et al., 2012; Samuel-Azran et al., 2019). A recent international survey reports that over a third of its 75.000 respondents regularly listen to podcasts, at least once a month, on smartphones or other portable media devices (Newman et al., 2019, pp. 28, 58), which suggests that its principal consultation happens ‘on the move’ (cf. Bull, 2005). Another study indicates that podcast users tend to distinguish between digital audio mediation and analogue radio broadcasts (Tacchi, 2012), arguably reproducing a binary between old and new media types (Morley, 2009, p. 115). However, it has conversely been suggested that podcasts are rather ‘complex multimodal texts’ (Vasquez, 2013, p. 240), distinguishable from traditional radio due to the ‘hyper-intimacy’ of close and active listening to people from one’s own community or specific sphere of interest (Berry, 2016, p. 667; Carlton, 2018). Podcasts can therefore be fruitfully studied in-depth to capture how interaction between the podcast speakers (re-)produces a particular universe (Askanius 2019; Nilsson 2020).

However, the methodological discussions on the podcast phenomenon are not at all in parity with its rampant cultural impact. We will therefore, in this article, outline the podcast’s potential for social research by introducing a method we call *podcast ethnography*. For illustrative purposes, this method will be discussed in relation to our own research: thirty-four months of podcast ethnography into the white radical-nationalist podcast *Motgift* [Antidote]. In the following pages, we use this research example to flesh out what we here present as three stages of podcast ethnography.

Three stages of podcast ethnography

This article introduces podcast ethnography as a three-stage method. Using our own research as an illustrative example, we show how podcast ethnography prompts us to (i) *explore* the podcast openly and even inductively, (ii) *engage* with the podcast by reflecting upon its consultation, and finally to (iii) *examine* the podcast through applicable analytical and/or theoretical tools. The following pages outline these three stages of podcast ethnography.

Explore

First of all, we should recognise that, in this method, a podcast is not primarily a *case*, but rather a window to a wider milieu. Whereas a podcast case study would be useful to capture expressions of a given social phenomenon (Airoldi, 2018; Yin, 2009), podcast ethnography has, like its sibling approaches in the ethnographic family (O’reilly, 2012), a more explorative character. Case studies deepen our knowledge about cultural phenomena, podcast ethnography explores a particular universe. The podcast is a *field site*, the location ‘in which the social processes under study take

place' (Burrell, 2009, p. 182). This means that the podcast ethnographer initially has to ask why the particular podcast is chosen. It will be necessary to set up clear selection criteria in order to 'carve out a researchable object' (Hine, 2015, p. 13). The identified podcast must be suitable for analysis with regard to the given research problem.

Exploring the podcast also includes a detailed investigation of its metadata. How many episodes does it contain and what are their lengths? What is the total time span of the podcast? These questions assist the evaluation of whether the selected podcast fits the time available to complete the research. We find it advisable to select a podcast that has been available for some time, or has otherwise proved to be influential. In addition, one must take into account the ephemeral nature of digital media (Wrather, 2019); podcasts have short life-spans, often disappearing from the internet without being properly archived. Like online ethnography in general (Haverinen, 2015, p. 86), it is thus essential to assure that all podcast episodes are fully available and downloadable.

After registering the podcast's overall structure, the ethnographer can begin exploring its content. To become familiarised with the podcast's particular universe, we propose an initial focus on who is speaking, and with whom. This documentation illuminates ingroup and outgroup constructions (Tajfel, 1974, 1978), and provides a glimpse of the complex social networks articulated in the particular podcast universe. The podcast producers, the primary speakers, arguably 'sense that they [are] part of a community of listeners, guests, content providers, and other podcasters' (Markman, 2011, p. 557). Mapping these key relations helps explore, and later analyse, the podcast's role in a given network (Latour, 1987).

Even though a podcast is typically aired as a pre-recorded conversation between two or more people, it is also, we argue, a medium of participation. Connections are frequently made to the perceived audience, either in mentions or by inviting them as guests (Birch & Weitkamp, 2010), and sometimes also in web-forums linked to the podcast. In this regard, the *primary speakers*, the podcast host(s) and/or producers, can permit the voices of *secondary speakers*, either directly as podcast guests or indirectly by quoting the audience. This interactive aspect arguably distinguishes the podcast medium from scripted forms of recorded dialogue (e.g. audio books); the podcast is a vibrant and transformable field site, suitable for ethnographic exploration – which has been quite notable in our own research.

Exploring the podcast Motgift [Antidote]

Our study stemmed from a scholarly interest in fascism, and more specifically the development of white radical nationalism in Sweden (Lundström & Lundström, 2016). The aim of our podcast ethnography was to study fascism's ideological morphology (Freeden, 1996, 2003). We asked how fascism was negotiated and reconfigured by contemporary adherents in Sweden. From previous research we knew that digital media platforms have become crucial in this milieu (Caiani, 2018; Caiani & Parenti, 2016; Fuchs, 2017; Klein & Muis, 2019) – not least in the Swedish context (Ekman, 2017, 2018; Nilsson, 2020; Wiederer, 2013). We also knew from our previous research that podcasts are used as a platform for ideological exchange, although no previous study had, at the time, investigated the particular function of podcasts in this milieu. We therefore chose to explore the podcast *Motgift [Antidote]* as an entry point to understand the fluidity of white radical nationalism in Sweden.

At the time of our investigation, *Motgift* was, beyond doubt, the most influential podcast in this milieu. The show was published between February 2014 and March 2018. It was initiated as a communicative vehicle for the national-socialist political party *Svenskarnas parti [Party of the Swedes]*, but soon grew into a separate, extra-parliamentary, media nexus that encompassed a web-magazine, a publishing house, and a whole host of podcast shows. This vast material prompted us to delimit our study to the primary podcast, a live-show aired for two hours every Monday. We also chose to exclude all material that required paid subscription, since our ethical boundaries deterred us from making financial contributions to this organisation.

Motgift became our field site. We began learning the language of the radical-nationalists, acquiring a cultural literacy of the field. Since we had chosen to be distant observers, we did not consult the real-time show. Instead we downloaded the episodes as soon as they had been released online, to gain from the beneficial ability to pause, rewind and adjust the play-back speed. We archived those episodes we found particularly noteworthy. (Too late we realised that all should have been downloaded; in the examine-stage, we tried to download select episodes and then found that they had become inaccessible due to the closedown of the *Motgift* website).

After these initial inquiries, we began exploring the podcast by gathering information about its primary and secondary speakers. *Motgift* initially had three *primary speakers*, the host and two conversation partners (who changed over the time period). By listening to the entire podcast series, we registered useful information about these primary speakers: their previous affiliations, and conflicts, with radical-nationalist parties and organisations in Sweden. Our exploration also included documentation of the podcast's *secondary speakers*. These were to some extent included in the form of listener comments that the host had received via email or the podcast's chat room. However, the main secondary speakers, in this case, were guests that had been invited to participate in the show. Through the podcast show notes (which we fortunately had archived) we produced a list of all invited guests. The list registered the show date, name of the guest, radical-nationalist affiliation, and said country of origin.

The register of primary and secondary speakers prompted, then, our emerging analysis of *Motgift*'s ingroup/outgroup dimensions. In analytical memos, we noted that the invited speakers represented a wide range of ideological currents, which we thought might have relevance for the fluidity of fascism's morphology. We also noted that *Motgift* seemed to function as a vanguard forum for developing radical-nationalist thought in Sweden, as well as a transnational node in connecting disparate organisations from different countries. We also saw that *Motgift* contained several inter-personal tensions and hostilities, some of which were severe and even disruptive. This seemed to reflect the milieu at large, with all its organisational split-ups and ruptures, merges and assemblages (Lundström & Lundström, 2016). In conclusion, exploring the podcast *Motgift*, and especially the mapping of its primary and secondary speakers, enhanced our familiarity with the field site, which in turn led us to the stage of engaging with the podcast.

Engage

The second stage of podcast ethnography is to engage with the podcast. This includes activating an ethnographic reflexivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 15–18), a rigorous documentation of how the podcast is being consulted by the ethnographer. As suggested by Winter and Lavis (2019, p. 6), the art of *listening* here becomes a 'multisensory act that complements observation by offering a way for researchers to participate in, as well as observe, online spaces.' Over time, active listening to a select podcast naturally results in a *cultural literacy* of the milieu it partakes (cf. Hirsch, 1983). But listening to a podcast also means engagement; it is an act that produces a subjective experience to be scrutinised. Reflecting upon such experiences is arguably imperative for online ethnography (Tunçalp & Lê, 2014, p. 73), since the individualised experience of the internet(s) suggests that we need careful ethnographic reflection to explore, as Hine (2015, p. 16) puts it, 'the researcher's embodied and embedded experience as a source of methodological insight'. Hence, the reflexive mode is key when we engage with a podcast.

The traditional means for turning ethnographic engagement into empirical material is to take fieldnotes (Clifford, 1990). A key feature of the ethnographic methodology is thus to describe, to write down [*graphia*] (Bryman, 2016, p. 424). In so doing, as Geertz (1973, p. 19) has argued, the ethnographer 'inscribes' social discourse, transforming it 'from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted.' In podcast ethnography, the effort of producing high quality fieldnotes and memos is – as in any ethnographic method (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 18; Fetterman, 2010, pp. 116–120) –

imperative for subsequent steps of empirical analysis. Such written documentation cannot, and should not, cover every occurrence and interaction; ‘fieldnotes are always selective’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 142). This endeavour highlights a difference between ethnographic and text-analytical inquiries; the podcast ethnographer actively reflects upon her/his engagement with, and relation to, the field site (Emerson et al., 2011, pp. 2–5; Fetterman, 2010, p. 128).

Engagement is also a matter of time and space. In contrast to most ethnographic field sites, a podcast is a recorded medium that can be consulted in different locations and also in various temporal modes. It can be paused, listened to in various play-back speeds, and it can be returned to at the listener’s demand. This offers considerable flexibility with regard to when and where the ethnographer consults the podcast. It facilitates entries and exits of the field, and it supports part-time rather than full-time observation. These features are desirable for any ethnographer, but a more controllable distance to field site is, as we note in the following section, especially useful for research into social milieus that are morally tiresome, vehement or directly hostile.

Engaging with *Motgift*

Our podcast ethnography lasted for nearly three years. We decided to start consulting *Motgift* in the late summer of 2014, when we felt the need to familiarise with this milieu while working on another article. Our study continued much longer than planned – until the summer of 2017 – since it took quite some time before reaching a workable level of data saturation. As noted above, our podcast listening was restricted to one weekly episode, with an average playtime of two hours, since we were both working full-time on entirely different projects. In order to take collective fieldnotes, we created an online form in which we entered thoughts and impressions from our podcast listening. The form had three fields dedicated to location; *episode number*, *publishing date* and *time code*. It also had five fields of what we at this point identified as analytical themes: *protagonist*, *antagonist*, *truth claim*, *crisis* and *other*. The input to the digital form automatically generated output to a database file, accumulated as digital fieldnotes that enabled us to revisit select episodes for validation, and in-depth analysis, during the subsequent stage of examination.

Our *spatial mobility* in consulting *Motgift* was, we soon found, a tremendously useful benefit of working with this method. Podcast ethnography can easily run in parallel with other endeavours. In our case, we listened to the podcast while *not* being at the office, but as we were on the move, in motion. A considerable number of episodes were consulted while performing day-to-day household chores, or while commuting to our workplaces by bus or bicycle. The unusual mixture of performing personal routines while consulting an overtly racist podcast made it much easier, we both found, to enter and try to understand the radical-nationalist universe. Our anti-fascist impulses were somehow more deactivated by this type of aloof intimacy. We noted that this also produced conflictual feelings for both of us: listening to *Motgift* off-guard generated disarticulated indignation and rage, and a considerable amount of guilt. We continuously discussed this emotional hardship between ourselves, and reflected upon it in our fieldnotes.

From excursions into the *Motgift* web-forum, we learned that many other listeners also consulted the podcast while commuting. This too made us feel troubled: were we actually a real part of the audience? We began investigating, again through the web-forum, what other podcasts the show’s listeners consulted and found, unsurprisingly (and to us relieving), that neighbouring radical-nationalist podcasts were mainly mentioned. But we also found, which added to our emotional concern, that many people actually consulted the very same podcasts we listened to ourselves: shows from the BBC or Swedish Radio, as well as select popular science and humour podcasts. We began to realise that we were not only distant observers, but also, at least to some extent, participant observers. Not only did we consult *Motgift* in the same way as its intended audience, we also shared the possibility of interaction with the primary speakers through email or the web-forum. We also noted how we became somewhat emotionally attached to the primary speakers, their outbursts and witticisms, even their voices, which after some time brought a sense of familiarity. This became especially notable as one of the primary speakers was expelled from the show due to accusations of

having an affair with the ex-partner of another primary speaker. This dramatic omission affected not only the show, but also ourselves. After listening to this primary speaker's sarcastic, conspiracist, and aspiring remarks at least once a week, for almost three years, we had indeed established a certain kind of intimacy with that particular voice. Its absence gave a sense of lament as *Motgift's* internal dynamics were drastically altered. Impressions like these entered our written and mental fieldnotes – which we then came to examine.

Examine

The third stage of podcast ethnography is to examine the empirical material, to develop concepts, themes or typologies that reconnect with the initial research questions. However, we should remember that ethnographic analysis is typically *iterative*, alternating between different stages of the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 158–159). Hence, a grounded exploration and reflexive engagement is preferably conducted in dialogue with critical analysis and examination. As shown in the below figure, this final stage can be aided by three interrogative pronouns: why, what and how.

After spending considerable time with a podcast, the ethnographer becomes qualified to answer, on a deeper level, why the podcast is being produced. This question prompts a reading of the context in which the field site is situated (Fetterman, 2010, p. 03). Answers to this analytical question can be extracted from the fieldnotes, preferably through a systematic coding procedure. However, as empirical material in ethnography also includes documents and artefacts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 121–139), the podcast ethnographer can in this regard find useful data in the written descriptions added to the RSS-feed, show notes and web-fora, and even at the webpages or social media profile pages of the podcast producers. By reading this combined empirical material, together with previous research of the given social context, the why-question can hopefully point towards original, scientific findings.

This connects to another focus of examination; namely the question of how the speakers interact with each other, with other contributors, with guests, and with listeners. Here, we suggest that particular attention is paid to the various modes of expression; the ethnographer ought to be observant of the usage of humour, sarcasm, and ironies, as well as frustrations, anger, and rage. This deepens the data obtained in the first stage of podcast ethnography: information about the social interaction between the primary speakers, their relation towards the ingroup, secondary speakers, as well as the boundaries drawn between the ingroup and the outgroup.

Furthermore, and perhaps one of the most salient questions of podcast ethnography, is the examination of what themes are being treated in the conversations. These themes can be identified through rigorous coding (O'reilly, 2012, pp. 179–207). The empirical material – primarily fieldnotes, but potentially also forum-threads, show notes, website and social media content – can be systematically assigned with relevant *in-vivo* codes as well as descriptive or analytical codes linked to the research question. The coding procedure can also be theoretically guided; concepts and themes can be recollected from theory to enable a certain focus in the material. As we will see in the following section, we used in our research analytical concepts from narrative theory to examine the podcast *Motgift*.

Examining Motgift

In our examination, we focused primarily on two, pre-designed themes from our online fieldnote sheet: *protagonist* and *antagonist*. These were, from the very start of our project, brought in from narrative theory (Davis, 2002; Lundström, 2017; Underberg & Zorn, 2013) – in order to capture the ideological boundaries set up in *Motgift*. Identifying narrative protagonists and antagonists would, we argued, indicate how the ingroup/outgroup were constructed.

A recurrent theme in *Motgift*, and also central to the fascist ideology, was the idea of an antagonistic 'Jewish power', operating as a political force against the (protagonistic) interests of

‘Europe’, ‘the Swedes’ or, more generically, ‘the white race’. Aided by a narrative analysis, we saw that this antagonistic force represented a double threat: one *external*, supported by ideas of replacement and invasion; the other *internal*, due to ideas of political treason, endangered family values, and overall cultural degeneration. By identifying the ‘antagonist’ in the *Motgift* narrative, we also had an important lead on the why-question. *Motgift* functioned as a defence of the white race, and more specifically the Swedish people, from an alleged threat from a Jewish power with a vicious replacement strategy, implemented through liberal immigration policies. A platform for discovering, discussing and developing fascist ideas was presented as a cure for a pandemic, cultural disease, caused by a ‘Jewish poison’. *Motgift* was the antidote to this poison.

In binary opposition to the antagonistic force was the *protagonist* in *Motgift*’s narrative. The generic protagonist seems to have been the white race, which included what the primary speakers perceived as the Swedish people. This social distinction – between the ingroup of ‘racial Swedes’ and white nationalists abroad, and the outgroup of national traitors and foreign others – was a pertinent theme in *Motgift*. This became especially notable in the tonality of the unfolding conversations over the years. The podcast took the form of a conversable talk show, with topics often connected to contemporary events and news gravitating into the radical-nationalist universe. In the show, the primary speakers eloquently shifted between wittiness, sarcasm, and raged outbursts, when approaching the key themes of the antagonistic force and the protagonistic ‘we’. This ‘we’ was particularly articulated in the idea of religious faith as a protagonistic force that could serve in the defence of the white race. Quite illustratively, the episodes typically closed with a traditional Swedish hymn: ‘Under the banner of Svea/Heaven grants us victory/Then for King and Land, Honour raises its hand.’ The repeated use of this song in *Motgift* accentuated – by closing the episodes – that the white race, under a God-given, nationalist banner, will eventually unite to reclaim and rebuild the lost homelands.

Hence, in the third stage of our podcast ethnography, we examined our fieldnotes and analytic memos in order to reconnect with our research question about how fascism is negotiated and reconfigured by its contemporary adherents. Although our choice of empirical analysis and theoretical concepts could indeed have been different, it served our particular interest of studying the ideological morphology of fascism in Sweden.

Explore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Why is the podcast studied? – How many/long/accessible are the episodes? – Who are the primary and secondary speakers?
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How is the podcast consulted? – When is it consulted? – Where is it consulted?
Examine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Why is the podcast produced? – How do the speakers interact? – What themes are being treated?

Three Stages of Podcast Ethnography

Concluding discussion

In this article we have outlined podcast ethnography as a research method in three stages: *explore*, *engage*, *examine*. The first stage involves identification of a specific podcast to serve as an ethnographic field site. As shown in the figure above, this exploratory stage also includes registering how many, how long, and how accessible the chosen podcast episodes are. Furthermore, this first stage also involves documentation of the primary and secondary speakers that contribute to the podcast. The second stage of podcast ethnography answers to where, when and how the podcast has been consulted. This stage employs the sensibility and rigour that defines the art of producing ethnographic fieldnotes. In the third and final stage, to examine the podcast, the ethnographer sets out to develop concepts, themes or typologies expedient for empirical analysis.

Podcasts are publically available compositions of sequenced audio files, typically enacted as casual conversations between two or more speakers. This medium allows for a certain production of ideas that is ongoing, fluid and contested – not unlike everyday social interaction. In podcast conversations, change of tone, ironies, sarcasms, laughter, and a host of other emotional expressions, are commonplace. Understood as a framed space within a social field or subculture, approaching podcasts ethnographically arguably allows for what Clifford Geertz (1973) has called a ‘thick description’ of social fields. Hence, podcast ethnography shares with other forms of online ethnography the characteristic of comprising a field site located *primarily* online, but with vital linkages to offline communities (Postill & Pink, 2012). This particular feature provides an ability to sidestep the obstacle of ‘obtaining access to data’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 41) which, in traditional ethnography, ‘remains problematic throughout the entire period of research’ (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 22). In podcast ethnography, the field site can generally be considered as public or at least open, which requires a certain degree of stealth (Bell, 1969).

In this respect, podcast ethnography is primarily a one-sided encounter. However, there are important differences between a podcast and scripted audio dialogues (e.g. audio books): podcasts typically include some form of interaction (cf. Markman, 2011). Podcast speakers regularly comment on their listener feedback. Live podcasting can also involve, like *Motgift*, direct conversation with the speakers through a chat room. Thus, the podcast ethnographer is able to shift between an overt researcher role and that of the ‘unknown investigator’ (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, pp. 32–36). This flexibility, the shift between overt and covert entries to the field site, positions the podcast ethnographer as a ‘non-participating observer with interaction’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 437). However, this method potentially allows for a higher level of participation than we exercised in our own study of the radical-nationalist podcast; *Motgift* also had a paid membership that promised access to social interaction in terms of seminars and boot camps. Although we ourselves refrained from economically supporting *Motgift*, and thus from formally taking part in their organisation, payment would in this case have positioned us in a ‘peripheral-membership role’ (Adler & Adler, 1987, pp. 36–49) – a level of participation that obviously has advantages, but also limitations in terms of research integrity and unobtrusiveness.

Like the neighbouring methods of visual ethnography (O’reilly, 2012), internet ethnography (Beaulieu, 2004), or a ‘*netnography*’ that is ‘unobtrusive, convenient and accessible’ (Kozinets, 2002, p. 17), podcast ethnography also comes with the capability of concealing the researcher (Tunçalp & Lê, 2014, p. 73). This type of ‘distant engagement’ clearly minimises an undesirable interference with the field (Fetterman, 2010, pp. 61–68). Such an ability may in fact be imperative when studying vehement milieus – like the violent factions of white radical nationalism – in which a distant engagement can be employed to minimise security risks. It also offers an alternative to establish friendship and collaboration with the actors of this milieu (Teitelbaum, 2019). However, we should also ponder the ethical dimensions of such an ‘ethnographic lurking’, which indeed must be weighed against the expected scientific value of the study.

At the same time, we should consider the perhaps most valuable advantage of this ethnographic method: its spatial and temporal flexibility. Ethnographers have long opted for the need to exit the field once in a while to create a healthy distance for reflection (Gold, 1958). Podcast ethnography here offers the rare possibility to start and stop, to rewind, and to adjust the play-back speed – which enables reflexivity entirely upon the researcher’s demand. This brings the benefit of, as Hammersley and Atkinson has it, ‘living simultaneously in two worlds, that of participation and that of research’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 89). Moreover, in the case of working in disagreeable social fringes, such as the white radical-nationalist milieu, the podcast ethnographer has valuable opportunities to distancing and thus for coping with the ‘emotional labour’ required by this sort of field work (Askanius, 2019). Finally, we should note that podcast ethnography is a novel method that indeed needs further exploration – and a good deal of critical appraisal – in order to establish itself alongside the sibling methods of online ethnography.

Note

1. The distinction between delimiting *platforms* and empowering *tools* (the RSS-feed being the latter) was circulating in activist blog posts already in 2013 (see for instance, Carr, 2013; Fleischer, 2013).

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Notes on contributors

Markus Lundström is a social movement scholar currently focused on anarchism and fascism.

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