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# Researching 'the most dangerous of all sources': Egodocuments

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## Researching 'The most dangerous of all sources': Egodocuments

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Samuel Hynes *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, New York: Penguin.1997

In *The Soldiers' Tale*, Samuel Hynes examines English-language journals, memoirs, novels and letters of mainly middle class men, the literary, civilian-soldiers who fought in the two World Wars and in Vietnam. The book is often praised for its well written and jargon free style. It merges autobiography, history and literature to describe and analyze the themes of war – fear, comradeship, courage, cowardice, confusion and the persistent will to survive.

As all egodocument researchers, Hynes had to face three main methodological challenges: scoping, collecting and choice of method. In the prologue of his book, which does not have a methodology chapter, he explicitly describes his scoping choices, while his solutions to the other challenges of collecting and choice of method remain implicit.

When it comes to scoping, his starting point is that to he wants to really understand what it is like to be 'there, where the actual killing was done' (xvi), therefore he focuses mainly on the combatants and excludes the memoirs of generals and other senior officers as they 'don't usually do the fighting, or live with their troops, or get themselves shot at' (xv). As for timing, he looks at the 20<sup>th</sup> century 'because their wars are still our wars [...] and also because this has been the century of personal narratives of war' (xiii). He chooses three different wars to

examine: WWI, WWII and Vietnam that seem to him 'the crucial points of change in our century's war story' as they are the wars 'that have been most remembered and most recorded' (xiv).

He does not explain how he collected the books, only that he went for books and reports 'with a voice that is stubbornly distinct' (xv), indicating that he dismissed books that were not a good read, thereby focussing only on a limited selection.

Although he also does not explicitly account for his choice of method, the method he chooses is clear, as *The Soldiers' Tale* is a typical qualitative study in the sense that the main argument is built up supported by extensive quotes from the books researched, and it is multi-disciplinary as it uses theories to support his arguments from fields that differ from psychology and sociology to history.

He concludes that these egodocuments are paradoxical: they are true but not truthful in a historical sense, neither travel writing nor autobiography, nor history (16). War is an almost alien experience that is hard to describe, and what it describes is not usually what happened, as memoirs are 'filtered reality, what memory preserves' (23).

Hynes shows that each war has its own stories and myths. In the First World War, the notion of a romantic war in which the British soldier could become a hero was lost in the trenches, although it remained in the air war where aces were still heroes. WWI is a war of disillusionment. '[A] generation of innocent young men [...] went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences' (101).

However, that did not stop the young men in the Second World War to enlist enthusiastically. Hynes concludes that every new generation is lured by the seduction of war. 'Every generation, it seems, must learn its own lessons from its own war, because every war is different and is fought by different ignorant young men' (111). And this was a new war, with

another myth: That of the Good War. The men were still frustrated by the ways in which it was fought, 'but they didn't regret their service' (173).

The next large war, Vietnam, however, was not a Good War, but a Bad War; a war fought 'for political reasons, and wrong ones' (178). It was to the US what the First World War was to Britain: 'a war of national disillusionment that changed the way a generation thought about its country, its leaders and war itself' (179).

In his epilogue, Hynes concludes that storytelling is a primal need. For the teller to order a disordered experience and thereby give it meaning, and for the listener to give a human face and voice to historical events.

Although the results presented in this seminal study are interesting and convincing, the study itself suffers from a problem that many qualitative studies suffer from: a lack of methodological foundations and methodological guidance.

Sometimes it's hard to study the military. In her article *Studying the Military Comparatively*, Deschaux-Baume concludes that the military are a fairly inaccessible social field for outsiders: internal documents are difficult to access, senior officers may have internalized censorship and participant observation is 'far from being welcome and facilitated' (Deschaux-Baume 2013: 138). However, there is a rich source on the military that is readily available for every researcher: military egodocuments.

This chapter delves deeper into this source to discover what they have to offer the military researcher, and what kind of challenges they bring. It starts by looking at what egodocuments are, then it focuses on their advantages and drawbacks and how they can be studied. The

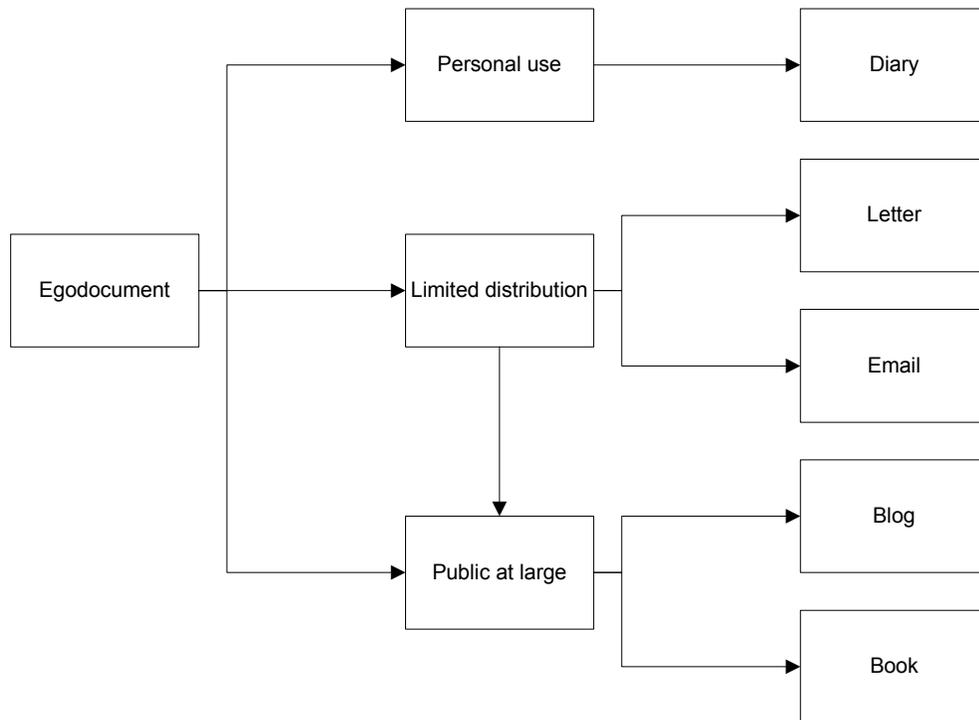
chapter concludes with the three main challenges that studying egodocuments brings: scoping, collecting and analysis.

## **Egodocuments**

The term 'egodocument' refers to 'a text in which an author writes about his or her own acts, thoughts and feelings' (Dekker 2002: 14). Until the middle of the 20th century, egodocuments as source were regarded by historians as 'extremely unreliable' and 'simply useless' (Dekker 2002: 21). Dutch historian Romein even dubbed them 'the most dangerous of all sources' (Romein in: Dekker 2002: 19). However, with a changing, postmodern orientation, the research emphasis changed to the social construction of facts instead of the facts themselves. French autobiography researcher Lejeune stresses that autobiographies should not be seen as sources of historical information, but 'rather as primary social *facts* in their own right' (Lejeune 1989: xx). Based on memory research, Krassnitzer concludes that it is not a personal truth that can be read in autobiographies, but an experience of how social collectives ('Erinnerungskollektive') interpret and remember events (Krassnitzer 2006: 214). And that is what makes egodocument research so interesting: they are not just personal stories, but manifestations of (military) culture.

As can be seen in Figure 1, egodocuments can be broadly divided into three categories based on the intended public (Epkenhans, Förster, and Hagemann 2006: xiii).

**Figure 1 Examples of Egodocuments**



First, egodocuments can be written for personal use. Diaries for example are often used to order and reconstruct thought, feelings and memories (Baggerman 2010: 65), without any intention of other people reading them: diaries can be purchased with a lock on the cover to protect them from being read by others. Second, egodocuments can be specifically produced for a limited distribution. Traditionally, military personnel communicated with the home-front using letters and nowadays they do the same using emails. These mail exchanges are egodocuments intended for one or more persons to read, but are not expected to be widely read outside the limited circle of friends and family. The third option is writing egodocuments specifically aimed at the public at large. Internet blogs and books are examples of egodocuments aimed at a broad public.

The kind of egodocument does not, however, dictate its audience. Some diaries were kept with the specific purpose of being published in book form, such as the Anne Frank diary (Frank 2007/1952) and internet blogs can be screened off so that only people who have been invited can see the content of the blogs, thereby making them limited distribution only.

Hynes, the author of this chapter's illustrative study, *The Soldiers' Tale*, uses different kinds of egodocuments for his research. The majority of the personal narratives he uses are memoirs, but he also includes 'journals and diaries and letters' (Hynes 1997: xiv).

### **Why study egodocuments?**

Egodocuments are such rich sources that their content is applicable to military researchers with every conceivable background. A medical researcher uses military egodocuments to study post traumatic stress disorder and smoking in military personnel (Robinson 2012), a sociologist to study the role and positions of interpreters in military operations (Van Dijk 2014), and a historian to look at changing ideas about the relationship between body and mind (Harari 2008).

It is not only the rich content that makes egodocuments attractive to all sorts of military researchers, but also the fact that studying texts is suitable for scientists from every methodological background: 'Positivists can tag text and can study regularities across the tags [...], interpretivists can study meaning' (Bernard 1996: 9). And working with what H. Russel Bernard calls 'found texts' such as egodocuments as opposed to 'created texts' such as interviews also means working with unobtrusive material as the researcher cannot influence the text produced.

That brings us to one of the disadvantages of studying egodocuments: as there is no direct contact between the author of the text and the researcher, a detailed probing of the narrative is not possible (Woodward 2008: 380). Of course, content analysis could be complemented by other research methods such as interviews, but getting in touch with book authors and publishing houses is not always easy. In my study of Afghanistan memoirs published between 2001 and 2010 (Kleinreesink 2014), I found that a lot of soldier-authors did not mention their age in their books. When trying to contact them, a substantial portion of them did not respond to any kind of enquiry. In my database, the variable 'age' is therefore missing in 20% of the cases.

Another drawback, that was touched upon earlier, is that the historical truth of egodocuments is not guaranteed. As Hynes puts it: 'As history they are unsatisfactory: restricted, biased, afflicted by emotion, and full of errors' (Hynes 1997: 15). And bias and emotion are not the only psychological reasons that affect the content of egodocuments. Fussell, in his classical study *The Great War and Modern Memory*, concludes that in letters and postcards home, World War I soldiers wrote only about socially desirable subjects in an effort to spare the feelings of the recipient (Fussell 1975: 182) .

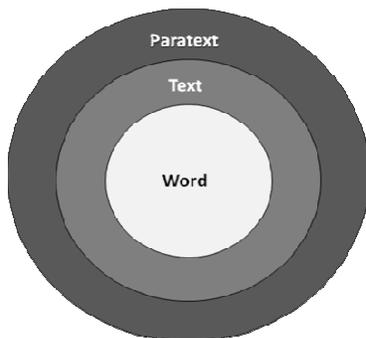
It is not just social desirability that causes this self-censorship; it is also caused by an organisational constraint that in Western countries is specific to the military: official censorship. In order to preserve operational security, some egodocuments are checked by the military before being distributed. In both World Wars it was common practice to censor letters written by military personnel to the home-front (Fussell 1975: 182). Although nowadays letters home or blogs are no longer actively censored, they are bound by operational security rules and books written by military personnel are still checked before publication by the military for security problems.

A final drawback to mention is that the representativeness of these authors is unclear: can they be considered a proxy of the average soldier, or are military authors a separate breed? As most studies into military egodocument only look at specific groups (Vernon 2005: 3) using them to draw conclusions about the military in general is tricky at best.

### **What to study in egodocuments?**

Having discussed the advantages and disadvantages of studying egodocuments in general, let's now look at three main text elements of egodocuments that can be studied (see Figure 2): paratext, text, and the words that make up the text.

**Figure 1 Three Text Elements**



The first element to be considered for study is paratext. The term 'paratext' (Genette 1997) refers to all those elements that surround a text: from book covers, forewords and acknowledgments in the narrow sense to book reviews and interviews with the author in the broader sense. Paratext is especially interesting for studying the relationship of the author with his or her public; for example, in the preface of a memoir an author's writing motivation is made explicit, the book cover establishes what kind of audience is sought and book reviews (or the absence thereof) give an indication of the book's impact.

Images are a special case of paratext. Military egodocuments, whether they are memoirs, blogs or emails, are nowadays often accompanied by photographs. 94 per cent of contemporary Afghanistan memoirs have photographs and/or other images such as maps in them, on average taking up almost 10 per cent (about 25 pages) of the books (Kleinreesink 2014). So far, however, hardly any research has been conducted into military images. Most of this research deals with images *of* the military (e.g. Griffin 2010) whereas it would be equally interesting to look at images *by* the military: what is it they find important to show others or to remember?

The second main element to study is the general text itself, like its main themes or the plot. Classical military egodocument studies such as Hynes' *The Soldiers' Tale*, and Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* delve deeper into the main themes that military authors write about, such as fear, comradeship, honour and disillusionment. As these are universal military themes, they are a good and recognisable starting point for comparative studies between, for instance, countries or time periods.

Plot is another global text element. Most Western stories are told and written in the form of an Aristotelian plot: in a limited time frame the hero of the story makes a journey in which he overcomes obstacles and thereby could changes the world and/or himself (Aristotle, 2004/ca 330 BC: VII 51a6). There are quite a few theories that can be used to study plot structure, from plotting the positive or negative value of the story in time (Gergen and Gergen 1988), to Friedman's highly structured and detailed, but easy to use fourteen basic plot types (Friedman 1955).

A level deeper, the words that make up the text can also be studied. With the advent of digital documents and improved optical character recognition software, it has become possible to

study texts on the level of words. Qualitative data analysis software, such as ATLAS.ti and NVivo, have standard word frequency query options available, which can be used for instance to identify important themes or concepts. But there is also specialised word counting software available (LIWC, which stands for Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) that makes it possible to study emotional, cognitive, and structural word usage in texts from a psychological point of view (Pennebaker and Seagal 1999).

### **Three Challenges**

Now that it is clear what egodocuments are and what can be studied in them, it is time to delve deeper into the characteristic challenges that come with studying egodocument. Three challenges will be explored: scoping, collecting and analysis.

#### ***Challenge 1: Scoping***

The first challenge is how to scope: to define what is and what is not part of the study. Scoping will be particularly challenging for the egodocument researcher as there is a plethora of material available. The first choice to make is the time period researched, i.e. whether to look at historical egodocuments or contemporary ones. This chapter's classical author, Hynes, chose egodocuments from three different wars for his research: both World Wars and Vietnam and explicitly excluded Korea because it 'came and went without glory, and left no mark on American imaginations' (Hynes 1997: xiii).

A second aspect of time is the timing of the egodocuments themselves. Three distinct types of narratives can be distinguished when looking at the time factor (see Figure 3).

**Figure 2 Three Types of Narratives**



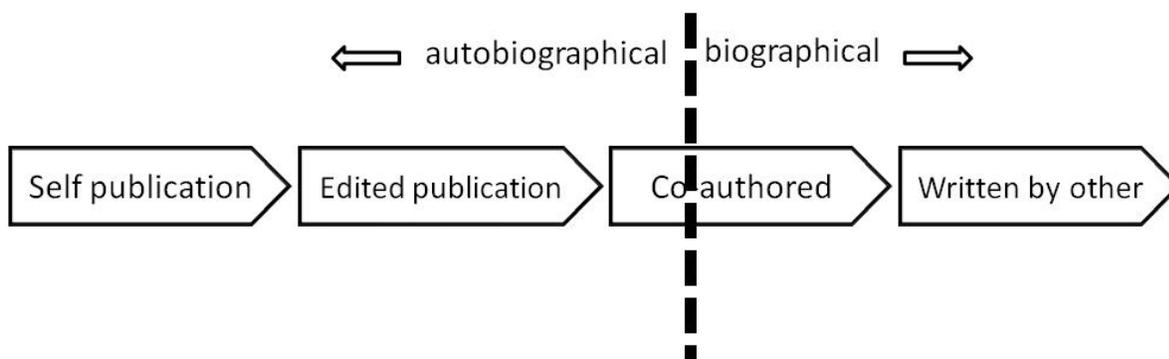
The first are those narratives that are written on the spot, as the writer is still in theatre, such as diaries, emails and blogs. Then there are memoirs that are written while the war is still going on, or immediately after a war, which Hynes calls immediate memoirs (Hynes 1997: 4). Finally, there are retrospective memoirs (Hynes 1997: 4), memoirs written long after the war itself. They all come with their own advantages and disadvantages. Some are easier to collect than others (see challenge two). Some are easier to read than others. A retrospective memoir is generally of another quality than a blog written on the spot, and a handwritten diary found in an archive is not as comfortable a read as a diary that has been reworked into a book published by a regular publisher. Hynes specifically selected documents that were a good read, and he is not the only one as 'most critics instinctively gravitate to the study of literary masterworks' (Eakin 1989: xx).

The next choice is whether to research all egodocuments available, or only look at texts from authors with a certain background. A common limitation is to include only narratives by those who have fought, which is what Hynes does. But as the tooth-to-tail ratio (the number of combatants – e.g. infantry, fighter pilots - versus the number of combat supporters – e.g. logisticians, air traffic controllers -) in modern military organisations lowers, the combatants are nowadays a minority (Vernon 2005: 3). Another common limitation in research is looking at specific minority groups, such as Afro Americans, or women, to such an extent that Vernon points out that 'personal narratives by male noncombatant military persons – white males especially – are easily the most neglected of all military life writings in Anglo American criticism' (Vernon 2005: 3). Another often used scoping mechanism is choosing country or language specific texts, as multi-language research is quite rare. Hynes for example limits his research to combatants who write in English both from Great Britain and the US. These kinds of scoping

decisions have to do with the researcher's language skills and preferences, which are always a good starting point for any research.

When choosing books as the preferred medium, one of the classical discussions (Lejeune 1989: 3) the researcher has to deal with is where the autobiography ends and the biography starts. Books are never only written by the author himself or herself, instead there is a (auto)biographical continuum ranging from entirely self written to written by others, see Figure 4.

**Figure 3 Autobiographical Continuum**



Self publishers (publishing companies that publish books at the risk and cost of the author) generally contribute little to nothing to the content of the book; at most they edit the manuscript for mistakes after payment by the author. Regular publishers (who publish books at their own risk and cost), in contrast, always have an editing process that normally also includes changes in style and content and they often give general indications to their writers of the content required to fit their target audience. Sometimes regular publishers even offer an inexperienced author a co-author: an experienced writer or journalist who will help to write the book; this is where the change from autobiographical to biographical book happens. As the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* puts it: 'the most perplexing texts in terms of authenticity are collaborative

autobiographies, because of their virtually oxymoronic nature. [...] collaborative autobiography disrupts the single identity of author cum narrator cum subject that is the constituting feature of the genre' (Couser 2001: 72).

A co-author who thoroughly adapts the texts of the original author might still be seen as producing an autobiography, a co-author who interviews the original author and does the writing herself, produces in effect a biography.

### ***Challenge 2: Collecting the documents.***

When the research scope has been established, the documents that fall under this scope have to be collected, and that can be more difficult and time consuming than initially thought. The kind of document dictates to a certain extent the collection method. In the next section, five different types of egodocuments (emails, letters, diaries, blogs and books) that can be collected will be discussed, including the form in which to collect them.

The first three document types, emails, letters and diaries, are mainly intended for personal use and limited distribution. That means that in order to get hold of these documents, the researcher will often have to ask people personally to share them. One way of doing that is by using the researcher's own network of military personnel. That existing network can then be extended by snowballing: asking person A to provide introductions to two or more other people who might also be willing to share their egodocuments. Another way of getting in touch with (former) military personnel is by placing adverts asking for egodocuments in military media such as veterans' magazines and military blogs. That does not have to be expensive, as many military magazines offer announcement opportunities for free.

For those researchers interested in historical egodocuments of these types, there is also a third option: the archives. In many European countries, egodocument cataloguing projects have been

set up that identify egodocuments available in public archives, libraries and museums. These projects are often followed by publication series in which the most interesting texts are published. For an overview of these projects, see Dekker (2002: 28-30). Military personnel are excellent contributors to public archives. The Dutch project showed that between 1500 and 1900 the most prolific authors of egodocuments found in these archives were clergymen and military personnel (J. Blaak in: Baggerman 2010: 68-69).

For egodocuments that are made limited accessible on the internet, the same personal approach to getting access to the sites will be necessary as for emails, letters and diaries. However, as many blogs and websites are in the public domain, finding these may be easier. Holding on to them is more difficult, though. They disappear quite quickly, so in order to work with them, an appropriate archival strategy has to be chosen, which can vary from printing them out, to using specialised web archiving software.

The disadvantage for all four types of documents mentioned above is that they are always part of a sample of the total number of documents available, but that the size of the total is unknown, and therefore it is also unknown how biased the sample is. Books, however, do offer the opportunity to take a sample that is close to 100%, both because they are not so numerous if rightly scoped, and because their existence is documented in various ways. Woodward & Jenkins for example study all 150+ British military memoirs from 1980 to present (Woodward and Jenkins 2012: 351), my own research deals with all 54 Afghanistan memoirs published between 2001 and 2010 in the US, the UK, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands. Even though theoretically it is possible to collect all of them, it does take a lot of time and effort.

Several techniques can be used to reach a saturation point. A classical starting point for finding books is the library, and specialised national military libraries will be most helpful in this, as they tend to have the most extensive collections of military books. Internet book sites offer an

effective new way of searching: snowballing. Starting with one relevant book, these sites offer advice about similar books ('Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought...') which will lead to other similar books, and so on. All in all, this quickly leads to a good overview of available books in the geographical market that the book site covers. And, finally, memoir researchers also browse (second hand) bookshops (Dijk 2013; Woodward and Jenkins 2012: 352) to find books.

As an example, in order to find all Afghanistan memoirs published between 2001 and 2010 for my research, I started by looking in military library catalogues, but I also solicited reading lists from military historical societies, looked at internet lists on military memoirs, such as the almost 300 Listmania! lists from Amazon.com that come up when searching on the word combination Afghanistan + war, and browsed book review pages of veterans' magazines. All the books that showed up in these searches were then fed into the main book websites of the countries researched, such as Amazon.co.uk for the UK and Bol.com for the Netherlands, to start the snowballing process. This process took place over several months, but left me with the feeling that the chances of having missed a book were very low.

Depending on the research method chosen (see challenge three below) it might be interesting to look at the digital availability of the texts. The advantage of working with blogs and websites is that they are by nature digitally available. Books also exist in digital form, but my personal experience is that acquiring a digital copy in a format that can be used in analysis software can be difficult. Not all publishers, especially not the larger ones, are willing to provide a digital copy for research. And digitalizing them yourself, by scanning them on a copying machine with OCR (object character recognition) is not straightforward, as commercially available OCR techniques still require manual text correction.

### **Challenge 3: Analysis**

As discussed in the section ‘Why study egodocuments?’, working with texts is extremely versatile, and makes it possible to do all different types of research. Therefore, one of the challenges it brings, is the choice of research method. The first choice is whether the research will be multidisciplinary or not. Hynes is a literature professor, but his book combines literature, psychology, sociology and history with apparent ease.

The second choice is whether to use qualitative analysis or quantitative analysis. The traditional approach for studying texts is the qualitative approach that Hynes choose. He looks at the main themes that come up while reading and analysing the egodocuments and substantiates his findings with fitting quotes from the texts. Exactly what analytic method he uses does not become clear, but there are several possible methods. Here, three often used ones will be discussed: the historical method, grounded theory and content analysis.

The first one -the historical method- mainly takes place in the mind of the historian/scientist. Carr (quoting writer L. Paul) describes it in this book *What is History?* as ‘rummaging in the ragbag of observed “facts”, selects, pieces and patterns the *relevant* observed facts together, rejecting the *irrelevant*, until it has sewn together a logical and rational quilt of “knowledge”.’ (Carr 1975: 104). This is probably the method Hynes loosely used.

In the sixties, Strauss and Glaser devised a general methodology called *grounded theory* ‘for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed’ (Strauss and Corbin 1994: 273). It substantiated the rummaging-the-ragbag-method with an inductive method, whereby the researcher continues to switch between data collection and analysis,

helped by coding techniques. Nowadays, grounded theory may well be 'the most commonly used qualitative research method' (Morse 2009: 13).

Also, other approaches were developed specifically for qualitative data analysis. Miles and Huberman have collected all sorts of techniques for qualitative analysis in their source book (Miles and Huberman 1994), as did Krippendorff for an approach specifically aimed at analysing text in the context of its use called *content analysis* (Krippendorff 2004). What they all have in common is that formal coding techniques are used to aid the analysis: codes are assigned to parts of the text that are in one way or another deemed interesting to the researcher. Computer-aided qualitative data analysis software programmes (CAQDAS) have been developed that support these practices, such as ATLAS.ti and NVivo. These programmes do not analyse the data themselves, but support the researcher during the analysis phase.

I used grounded theory in my research when analysing writing motives. Instead of starting with a preconceived theory on writing motivation, I simply started by writing down every relevant quotation from each book analysed. These quotations were then fed into ATLAS.ti and given a code that I made up on the fly, a process called open coding. This resulted in almost 60 different codes. These codes were then clustered and related to each other by theoretical coding (Strauss and Corbin 1994: 277), resulting in five main categories and a theory that explains why soldier-authors say they write books.

Studying egodocuments does not have to stop at qualitative methods, however, concludes H. Russell Bernard in his article *Qualitative Data, Quantitative Analysis*, as '[c]oding turns qualitative data (texts) into quantitative data (codes)' (Bernard 1996: 10). The coding makes it possible to search for patterns. CAQDAS programmes usually offer the possibility to export the

results into SPSS format, thereby providing the opportunity to perform statistical analyses on the data. I used this option to note whether a specific book/author did or did not mention specific writing motives. The coding of motives was done in ATLAS.ti but the resulting dichotomous results (book mentions this motive: yes/no) were exported into SPSS.

It is also possible to code variables directly into SPSS, as I did in my Afghanistan research to answer questions related to the authors and the plots they write. I considered each book a separate case (a row in SPSS) for which variables (columns in SPSS) were noted down. Coding the books was done by indicating the variables in SPSS such as nationality, age, whether the author is a reservist or a professional, or whether it was published by a traditional publisher or via self publishing. Combining these results (and the dichotomous writing motives that were imported from ATLAS.ti) by means of, for instance, a crosstabs analysis, or a t-test shows whether the combination is significantly different statistically or not. In this way, the research shows for example that independent of country, a professional soldier is almost eight times more likely to get published by a traditional publisher than a reservist<sup>1</sup>.

When there are only a small number of egodocuments in the research, however, only a limited range of statistical analyses is possible. In these cases, Ragin's Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), a method of Boolean analysis very well suited for social scientists, can be an interesting option to help look for patterns (Ragin 2008). Several freeware programmes are available to support QCA, such as Ragin's own *fs/QCA*.

Some researchers, such as Scott c.s. with their research into post-deployment of US soldiers, do not even choose between qualitative and quantitative method. They consciously use a mixed

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<sup>1</sup>  $\chi^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 54) = 10.99, p = .002$

methods approach combining the two methodologies 'to achieve a product that is more than the sum of its parts' (Scott, McCone, Sayegh, Looney, and Jackson 2011: 275). So even in the choice of method, egodocuments offer a wide range of possibilities.

## **Conclusion**

Egodocuments offer such a rich source of data, with great research opportunities for any researcher whatever their discipline or methodological background, that it is surprising that it is not used more often by military researchers. If you really want to understand the person behind the soldier, egodocuments are a source that cannot be missed, as they provide deep insight into the people who write them, the culture they live and work in, and the discourses they take part in. These insights go much deeper than surveys or interviews can provide. Norwegian autobiography researcher Marianne Gullestad even concludes to her surprise that "[m]any of the written texts offer the reader a rapport and an intimacy of a kind that an anthropological fieldworker develops only after a long period of time with a few people" (Gullestad 1996: 36). Studying auto-narratives is a great way to gain more insights into operations and the wellbeing of the people who carry them out. They also offer an attractive and easy starting place for those researchers interested in doing cross-cultural research. And as military researcher Abel Esterhuysen concludes in his historiographical overview on South African counterinsurgency, sometimes egodocuments are even the only available source (Esterhuysen 2012: 355).

In short: egodocument research is definitely worth considering for any military researcher.

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## **Abstract**

Egodocuments are texts in which an author writes about his or her own acts, thoughts and feelings, such as diaries, blogs, and memoirs. This chapter looks at how egodocuments can be (and are) used by military researchers. It concludes that it offers great research opportunities for any researcher despite scientific discipline or methodological background. All sorts of elements can be researched from paratext, theme and plot, to the psychology behind word usage, and both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used. Careful scoping and time and patience to collect the documents involved are essential ingredients for the successful military egodocument researcher who is looking for well-accessible, rich sources on the military.

## **Bio**

Lieutenant-colonel Esmeralda Kleinreesink currently works as an assistant professor of Defence Economics at the Netherlands Defence Academy. She is also a PhD candidate at Erasmus University Rotterdam, researching all military memoirs on Afghanistan published between 2001 and 2010 in five countries (the US, the UK, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands) to discover who these soldier-authors are, what they write about and why they say they write. In 2012, her own Afghanistan autobiography *Officier in Afghanistan* was published by Dutch publisher Meulenhoff.