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1 Introducing qualitative longitudinal research

Introduction

At a time when social forces are making instability a way of life, researchers are developing new modes of enquiry that take account of the dynamic nature of people's lives. Approaches to 'thinking dynamically' have triggered the beginning of an intellectual revolution, one that blends insights from across the social sciences, merges quantitative and qualitative methodologies, combines macro and micro views of society and exploits the power of international comparison. (Leisering and Walker 1998, xiv)

Qualitative Longitudinal research (QL research, QLR or QPR) is a rich and evolving methodology for exploring the dynamic nature of people's lives. It has developed in piecemeal fashion across different research traditions, a process reflected in the varied labels used to describe it (from Longitudinal Ethnography to Qualitative Panel Studies). As the quotation above suggests, QL research is part of a broad 'temporal turn' in social enquiry that has emerged gradually over the past decades. With its dual identity (both longitudinal and qualitative), QL research spans two established methodological traditions. As a small but vital component of the longitudinal canon, it seeks to follow the same individuals or small collectives (households or varied forms of organization) prospectively, in 'real' time, as lives unfold. As part of the rich field of qualitative temporal studies, QL research explores dynamic processes through an in-depth, qualitative lens. This gives insights into how people narrate, understand and shape their unfolding lives and the evolving world of which they are a part. QL research is conducted *through* time; but it also engages with the temporal dimensions of experience, opening up the potential to 'think

dynamically' in creative, flexible and innovative ways. These features of QL research suggest it is part of a developing theoretical orientation, an emerging paradigm for social research that offers new and exciting ways to know and understand the social world.

Thinking through time

The importance of time has long been recognized in social scientific research, but, as the introductory quotation shows, it has taken on new significance with the recognition of rapid social change in the contemporary world. Time is the lynchpin for understanding the essentially dynamic nature of lived experiences, and the relationship between personal lives and wider historical processes (Mills 1959). It is *through time* that we can begin to grasp the nature of social change and continuity, the mechanisms through which these processes unfold, and the ways in which structural forces shape the lives of individuals and groups and, in turn, are shaped by them. Indeed, it is *only* through time that we can gain a better appreciation of how agency and structure, the micro and macro dimensions of experience, are interconnected and how they come to be transformed (Neale and Flowerdew 2003). In all forms of temporal research time is the driving force for research design and practice. It is the medium through which QL research is conducted. But it is also a rich theoretical construct and topic of enquiry that feeds into the generation and analysis of data.

One of the distinctive features of QL research is its capacity for a rich and flexible engagement with time. Yet this gives rise to a number of questions. How exactly do QL researchers engage with time? How does time as a social construct feed into research design, practice, ethics and analysis? Underpinning these questions is another: how is time itself conceptualized and understood? More broadly, what is the place of QL research within the established fields of temporal research that engage longitudinally and/or qualitatively with time? These basic questions about temporal theory, design and practice are explored and addressed in this volume.

An evolving methodology

QL enquiry is rooted in a long-established tradition of qualitative temporal research that has evolved over the past century. What is relatively new, however, is the growing reflexivity of researchers as they have begun

to delineate and document this approach and explore its theoretical underpinnings.¹ This, in turn, has fuelled a growing interest in and rapid uptake of QL research over the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Studies range from the lived experience of welfare reform and the dynamics of transport, to the temporalities of legal regulation and the delivery and impact of new health and social care interventions. Researchers from a wide range of disciplines in the arts, humanities and the social and natural sciences are routinely seeking to incorporate QL methods into their research designs. These developments have global reach and influence. Beyond the UK, studies are flourishing across Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States, and beginning to appear in sub-Saharan Africa. Funding has been provided by the UK central and devolved governments, British and international funding councils, independent research organizations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and global agencies such as the World Health Organization. In a parallel development, long-running TV documentaries that trace unfolding biographies, for example, the *Seven Up* series and *Child of our Time*, have popularized this approach and demonstrated its enduring appeal for global audiences.

Amid this rapid expansion, there have been calls for more guidance on the conduct of QL research and for some standardization of methodological techniques (Calman, Brunton and Molassiotis 2013). A narrowly prescriptive approach would clearly be counterproductive, given the exploratory, flexible, creative and porous nature of this methodology (Thomson and McLeod 2015). Nevertheless, crafting a QL study requires an adequate grounding in temporal theory, methods and ethics. This introductory text seeks to provide an overview of these features, from theoretical underpinnings to research practice.

Each chapter is designed to take the reader on a short research journey. In this introductory chapter, the historical development of QL enquiry is traced, and its place within the broad canon of temporal studies is explored. Chapter 2 ('Conceptual Foundations') takes the reader on a short journey through time. It considers how theoretical understandings of time can

¹ Edited collections within a burgeoning literature include Foster, Scudder, Colson and Kemper (1979), Huber and Van de Ven (1995), Kemper and Peterson Royce (2002), Thomson, Plumridge and Holland (2003), Millar (2007), Neale, Henwood and Holland (2012), Howell and Talle (2012), and Thomson and McLeod (2015). To date, Saldana (2003) stands out as a dedicated methods text.

be used to enrich empirical studies, and explores how the life course can be understood through varied temporal registers. Chapter 3 ('Crafting Qualitative Longitudinal Research') explores how time can be used empirically to build the longitudinal frame for a study, and to determine a sampling strategy. Chapter 4 ('Walking Alongside') considers the journeys that researchers take with their participants: how they are recruited into a study and their involvement sustained, and the ethical terrain within which these processes occur. Chapter 5 ('Journeys with Data') explores the rich range of tools and techniques used to generate and analyse temporal data. Throughout the text, readers are directed to key empirical sources and illustrative material that will help to flesh out the picture. A short concluding chapter ('Looking Back, Looking Forwards') sums up of the key themes of the book and assesses the strengths and challenges of QL enquiry. It also highlights a number of areas for future development (e.g. mixed longitudinal approaches, digital and arts-based methodologies and the reuse of existing data) that are touched upon only briefly in this volume.

Mapping the field

The discussion below considers the place of QL methodology within the broad canon of temporal studies and traces its development over a century of scholarship. We start with longitudinal and life course research, and go on to consider a range of studies that make up the field of qualitative temporal research. In the process, the commonalities and differences between these varied approaches are explored and the distinctive features of QL research are illuminated. As the discussion below will show, the differences between these fields of enquiry are often a matter of disciplinary tradition rather than strict methodological divisions, giving scope for a productive blending of methods as these fields develop. Before mapping these fields, two basic dimensions of temporal engagement are introduced and clarified here. The ensuing discussion illustrates how these dimensions of time feed into research design.

Engaging with time: Key dimensions

All temporal research constructs a moving picture of change and continuity in the social world. In each case a 'snap-shot' of social life is turned into a 'movie' (Leisering and Walker 1998: 265; Giele and Elder 1998; Berthoud

2000). While a snap-shot is created *synchronously*, in the moment, a movie develops *diachronically*, telling an unfolding story through time. However, temporal movies can be created in a rich variety of ways. How they are produced and what they tell us about social processes varies across different methodological traditions. Their similarities and differences rest on how they engage with two planes or flows of time:

Prospective–retrospective (looking forwards, looking back). This plane of time is concerned with how we orient ourselves to the past, present and future: prospectively (looking forwards), retrospectively (looking backwards) or both. In its purest form, longitudinal research is *prospective*: it follows the same people in ‘real time’ capturing changes and continuities as they occur and anticipating them in the future. A *retrospective* approach, on the other hand, explores dynamic processes through hindsight, a gaze backwards in time from the vantage point of the present day. In QL research, the temporal gaze may be directed forwards and backwards, oscillating between the two.

Intensive–extensive (time frames and tempos). This plane of time is concerned with the duration of temporal processes and the tempo of events: their spacing and regularity. For our purposes in this volume, the *time frame* of a QL study reflects the overall time span through which it is conducted, while its *tempo* reflects the number, duration and frequency of visits to the field. Taken together, time frames and tempos constitute the *longitudinal frame* of a QL study. A spectrum of approaches can be discerned: cases may be traced *intensively* via frequent or continuous visits to the field; or they may be traced *extensively* through regular, occasional or ‘punctuated’ revisits (Burawoy 2003) over many years or decades. In QL research, these two tempos may be combined as a study evolves.

These two flows of time form core elements in a framework for mapping time, which is set out in Chapter 2. They can be designed into QL research in flexible and creative ways, as Chapter 3 will show. QL researchers are likely to gaze both forwards and backwards in time, and may combine

intensive and extensive tempos in their research designs. The discussion that follows outlines how these dimensions of time are used by researchers in their research designs. A third plane of time, the micro–macro plane, is also introduced below (and discussed further in Chapter 2). The mapping exercise begins with a consideration of longitudinal and life course research, before going on to consider the broader field of qualitative temporal enquiry.

Longitudinal and life course research

Longitudinal research, whether quantitative or qualitative, is essentially prospective: it produces ‘movies’ that unfold in ‘real’ time, charting dynamic processes as they occur. While the focus of enquiry may straddle individuals, families, institutions or societies, the starting point for these studies is a micro-dynamic one; the same individuals, households or other collectives (known as a longitudinal ‘panel’ of participants) are tracked over the same periods of time. A panel study is synonymous with, and a good short hand for, a prospective longitudinal study. In discerning ‘change in the making’ (Mills 1959), these prospective designs are generally regarded as the purest form of longitudinal research (Ruspini 2002: 4).² They offer unique insights into dynamic processes, changes and continuities within the life course, between generations, and through history (Elliott 2005; Neale, Henwood and Holland 2012). Longitudinal studies commonly combine prospective tracking with a retrospective gathering of data on past times (Scott and Alwin 1998).

The life course provides a central organizing framework for the conduct of longitudinal panel studies. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 2, but some salient points are drawn out here. As the name implies, the focus is on how the course of a life unfolds through time. This can be understood *biologically* (an age-related process from birth to death), and/or *biographically* (how a life is individually crafted and socially constructed from cradle to grave). It can also be understood *collectively* (how lives are

² In contrast to panel designs, repeated or recurrent cross-sectional designs gather and analyse group or population level data at each fieldwork visit (Ruspini 2002: 4; Grossoehme and Lipstein 2016). Since these designs do not follow the same samples they cannot discern changes in individual or collective biographies. However, the recruitment of different community, organizational or population samples at each wave enables an understanding of clusters of change in the social fabric. In some longitudinal studies, recurrent cross-sectional and panel designs are combined (see, for example, Loumidis and colleagues 2001).

shaped socially and institutionally within and across the generations), *historically* (the chronological times into which people are born and live out their lives), and *geographically* (the places and local cultures that give shape and form to unfolding lives). In other words, while individual biography is integral to life course research, so too is a concern with how lives unfold collectively, and how individual and collective lives shape and, in turn, are shaped by wider social processes (Elder 1994; Elder and Giele 2009).

The life course is a vital lynchpin for discerning the links between biography and history. The impetus for exploring these dual processes and their complex intersections was provided by Mills (1959), who saw this as the central challenge of the sociological imagination. His concern was to translate the personal troubles of biography into public issues of history and society:

We cannot hope to understand society unless we have a prior understanding of the relationship between biography and history ... [the task is to] continually work out and revise your views on the problems of history, the problems of biography and the problems of social structure in which biography and history intersect. (Mills 1959: 225)

It is generally accepted among life course researchers that the complex intersection of these factors is best understood through a longitudinal lens. Yet, teasing out the varied factors that shape an unfolding life across the micro–macro plane is also a perennial challenge (see Chapter 2). How life course research is approached depends on how these domains of change are understood, and the relative priority accorded to them, creating a diverse and amorphous field of study (Neale 2015).

Quantitative longitudinal research

Thus far our discussion has focused on the features that are common to longitudinal research, whether quantitative or qualitative. While both are prospective in their orientation to time, they operate at different scales of enquiry. This produces different kinds of movie, shaped by distinctive time frames and tempos. Quantitative longitudinal survey, cohort and panel studies began to develop in the United States in the late 1920s, primarily in the fields of medicine and child development, although on a smaller scale than contemporary studies (for overviews of developments see Phelps, Furstenberg and Colby 2002, and Ruspini 2002). These large-scale studies

chart changes in patterns of social behaviour through the generation of big 'thin' data that can be analysed statistically, using event history modelling and other techniques (Elliott, Holland and Thomson 2008). The scale of these studies varies: a community-based study will recruit many hundreds of participants (e.g. the *Longitudinal Harlem Adolescent Health Study*, Brunswick 2002), while a nationally representative study (e.g. the 1958 cohort of the *National Child Development Study*) will recruit many thousands. Either way, these studies illuminate large-scale patterns of change based on very large datasets. Panel members are likely to be asked a series of semi-structured questions at regular intervals (typically every year for a longitudinal panel study, and five years for a birth cohort study, Ruspini 2002: 4). In general, then, tempos tend to be well regulated and extensive, with time frames stretching over several decades of change.

Given the scale of these studies, the focus tends to be on what changes, for whom, on the direction and extent of change and on where, when and how often change occurs. Data on the spells of time that people spend in particular states, for example, in the states of poverty or cohabitation, produce a broad, chronological picture of change across a study population (Leisering and Walker 1998). This creates a bird's-eye view of the social world, a 'long shot' that is panoramic in scope. The result is an *epic movie*, a highly valuable 'surface' picture of social dynamics. However, it is a movie in which the intricacies of the plot and the fluid twists and turns in the story line are hidden from view (Neale and Flowerdew 2003).

Qualitative longitudinal research

QL research, in contrast, is located within the qualitative, interpretivist tradition (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). It has an equally venerable history. Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) was one of the earliest dynamic thinkers. In *The Rites of Passage* he conducted a secondary analysis of comparative data on the ritualized processes of birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage and death. This enabled him to develop insights into life course transitions that were in tune with local meanings and mechanisms of change. He was also one of the first anthropologists to establish the complex co-existence of continuity and change in the way lives unfold. A different kind of dynamic insight emerged from one of the earliest prospective QL studies, commissioned by the Fabian Society and set in Lambeth in London (Pember Reeves 2008 [1913]). In a study full of perceptive humanity, the researchers visited forty-two low-income working families on a weekly basis over the space of

a year, documenting their budgets, diets, household conditions and health to reveal their changing family fortunes and precarious life chances.

In the mould of Pember Reeves's pioneering study, QL research typically takes the form of small-scale, in-depth studies of individuals or small collectives, tracking them intensively over relatively modest time frames to generate rich, situated, biographical data. The tempo for a QL study tends to be more intensive and flexible than its large-scale cousin: patterns of revisits vary, and each wave of data generation is used to inform the next (Smith 2003). A micro-dynamic focus is more deeply embedded in this form of longitudinal enquiry. Working from the individual or small collective 'upwards', the concern is not simply with those concrete events, changes and transitions that can be measured in precise ways, but with the agency of individuals in crafting these processes, the sensibilities and moral reasoning that underpin them, the strategies that people use to make sense of the past and navigate the future, and the local cultures which give shape to these processes.

In these ways, time is harnessed to the immediacy and vitality of human experience. QL research engages with human hearts and minds: it provides access to the 'interior logic' of lives, discerning how change is created, negotiated, lived and experienced. At the heart of this approach lies a concern with the dynamics of human agency – the capacity to act, to interact, to make choices, to influence the shape of one's life and the lives of others. Of equal importance is the dynamics of human subjectivity: the shifting meanings that events, circumstances and social processes hold for those who experience them (and, at the same time, acknowledging and engaging with the shifting subjectivities of researchers in their interpretations) (Thomson and colleagues 2002; McLeod and Thomson 2009). Midgely (2014) reminds us that these subjective facets of human experience are just as important for our verifications of the social world as any objectively defined fact or process. Subjective accounts are not fixed and the past is 'reworked' as people overwrite their biographies and strive for narrative coherence in their life stories (Kohli 1981; Halbwachs 1992; Neale and Flowerdew 2003; Cohler and Hostetler 2004; Holland and Thomson 2009).

By their very nature, then, agency and subjectivity are dynamic concepts, affording opportunities to discern changing perceptions, values, aspirations and strategies over time, alongside and in relation to concrete changes in events or circumstances. With its responsive tempo and sensibilities, QL

research has been likened to the process of ‘walking alongside’ people as their lives unfold (Neale and Flowerdew 2003). Returning once more to the movie metaphor, QL research offers us an up-close-and-personal or *intimate movie*, providing insights into *how and why* the social world unfolds in varied ways, for specific individuals and collectives, in particular settings of change (Neale and Flowerdew 2003; Neale 2015). Being ‘up close and personal’ does entail some limitations. The depth of QL enquiry, the small sample sizes and the relatively modest time frames are likely to constrain the breadth of evidence and findings. And the longitudinal frame may not match or capture the momentum of a participant’s life. Caveats may therefore be needed about the limited longitudinal reach of a study, and about how much it can reveal, particularly about longer-term trajectories and broader social processes of change.

The different kinds of longitudinal ‘movie’ outlined above have complementary strengths and weaknesses. Quantitative longitudinal research powerfully reveals the wholesale movement of study populations from one circumstance to another (e.g. into or out of the states of poverty, migration, marriage or ill health). QL research, in turn, has the potential to reveal why such journeys are undertaken, the factors that shape the journey, and how they are managed and experienced. Are continued states bound up with stability, inertia or stagnation? How do transitions and trajectories unfold (upward or downward, stable or volatile, running in parallel or inter-connecting)? How and why do these pathways converge or diverge across the cases in a sample? Is a journey planned or sudden, prescribed or imposed, joyous or traumatic? Is a transition a smooth and positive one, or are there detours and setbacks along with way? QL research has the capacity to address these intricate dynamic questions and to produce plausible accounts of the generative mechanisms and processes through which changes occur (Elliott 2005). Much like Homer’s *Odyssey*, the nature and meaning of the journey assumes just as much importance as the destination reached (Neale 2015).

Some of the most perceptive insights on the value of QL research come from life course researchers whose work straddles both traditions:

While demographic surveys show the magnitude and distribution of migration in entire populations ... only individual or family histories can reveal why one individual moves and another stays put. (Giele 2009: 236)

Although quantitative longitudinal research has the potential to provide very detailed information about individuals, what is lost in this approach ... are the narratives that individuals tell about their own lives. ... The narrative approach allows for a more active, processual view of identity that shifts over time and is more context dependent. ... Quantitative research can never provide access to the reflexive individual. ... Without this element there is a danger that people are merely seen as making decisions and acting within a predefined and structurally determined field of social relations, rather than contributing to both the maintenance and metamorphosis of the culture and community in which they live. (Elliott 2005: 131)

Perhaps the most compelling evidence in support of these statements comes from individuals who have participated in both forms of enquiry. The following reflections are from panel members in the large-scale *National Child Development Study (NCDS 1958 Cohort)* who, at the age of fifty, took part in an innovative qualitative wave of the research (Elliott 2010a: 3–4):

The researcher comes, and they take the information from you. Sometimes it's just a question of a yes or no ... and I might want to put a maybe there ... or something. And there's sort of areas where you think, 'oh, but they don't ask me that'. And, I think, 'they should know that' ... so this [life interview] for me is good 'cause I've been able to sort of say to you things that have gone on in my life that perhaps the NCDS haven't known about.

I have been quite open and [said] things ... to you that I probably haven't told a lot of other people. But you've probably got a picture now of what ... sort of person I'm like from that, and if you got somebody coming to your home every few years and ... asking some questions and going again, they're not getting to know the real person.

Bridging the gap

Quantitatively-led longitudinal studies have traditionally been seen as the 'gold standard' of life course research, while QL research has been cast in a more peripheral role: as a useful supplement to the broader studies that 'resides on the margins of mainstream life course research' (Heinz

2003: 75; Elder and Giele 2009: vii–viii). Among life course researchers, particularly in the United States, knowledge of the growing corpus of QL research remains limited; and it continues to be cast as a fledgling approach that lacks clear definition or any grounding in established methodological traditions (see, for example, Hermanowicz 2016). Nonetheless, it is increasingly recognized that these two forms of longitudinal enquiry create equally valuable and complementary visions of the social world. Many of the issues faced by longitudinal researchers are common to those working in both traditions, creating a forum for a productive cross-fertilization of ideas and insights (Phelps, Furstenberg and Colby 2002; Elliott, Holland and Thomson 2008). There is, too, a growing interest in ways to bridge the gap between them. Scaled-down community level surveys are developing that are no longer driven by the search for elusive, nationally representative samples (Rothman, Gallacher and Hatch 2013). Mixed longitudinal methodologies are being refined (Laub and Sampson 1998; Heinz 2003), while QL methods are increasingly nested within or used to complement larger scale studies (e.g. Entwisle, Alexander and Olson 2002; Farrell and colleagues 2006; Elliott, Miles, Parsons and Savage 2010; Morrow and Crivello 2015). The potential to work across these traditions in a narrative approach to social enquiry also represents a significant advance (Cohler and Hostetler 2004; Elliott 2005).

In a parallel development, while QL research is traditionally equated with small-scale, situated enquiries, recent initiatives have seen a 'scaling up' of QL research in ways that can enhance the evidence base and combine depth with breadth of data and analysis. One line of development involves revisiting and combining existing data drawn from varied QL or mixed longitudinal datasets (Lindsey, Metcalfe and Edwards 2015). This was one of the aims of the *Timescapes Study*, which brought together and archived seven QL projects to facilitate their collective reuse (Bishop and Neale 2010; Neale and Bishop 2012; Irwin, Bornat and Winterton 2012; Irwin and Winterton 2014; www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk).

The development of Qualitative Panel Research (QPR or QPS) represents another way to extend the scope of a QL study (Burton, Purvin and Garrett-Peters 2009; Morrow and Crivello 2015; the Welfare Conditionality Study www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk). These studies are by no means small-scale in terms of sample size, geographical coverage, team composition and/or historical reach. In effect, they represent a third kind of movie, *intimate epics*, which are grounded in big 'rich' data and evidence, yet,

crucially, retain their depth and explanatory power (Neale 2015). These attempts to bridge the gap between these two longitudinal traditions are relatively new developments, but they suggest the rise of a new and enriched methodological infrastructure within which longitudinal and life course research can advance and flourish.

Mapping developments in qualitative temporal research

Our discussion now turns to a consideration of qualitative temporal studies. We begin with social anthropological field research and go on to consider sociological re-studies, and biographical, oral historical and narrative forms of research. The aim here is to tease out the ways that these established fields of scholarship engage with time, and to discern the place of QL enquiry within them. It is worth noting that the common threads within these fields of study tend to outweigh their differences; there are many parallel developments across these fields and a significant cross-fertilization of methodological ideas and insights.

Longitudinal ethnography

Social anthropologists have been conducting ethnographic research in small-scale, agrarian communities since the early twentieth century (Foster and colleagues 1979; Peterson Royce and Kemper 2002). Many such studies are conducted longitudinally. The approach typically involves continuous, intensive ethnographic immersion (a mixture of participant-observation and interviews), followed by a more extensive engagement, sometimes over many decades of revisits, by the same researcher (and, often, thereafter, by new generations of researchers who 'inherit' a particular field site). This produces a distinctive longitudinal frame. In the tradition of Marcel Mauss, Howell (2012: 156) likens the process to dipping 'different nets in a teeming ocean, each time producing a different catch'. She stresses, too, that the constituent elements of the ocean are transformed over time, and that informed ethnographers throw their metaphorical nets purposively rather than randomly, based on informed understandings of shifting local terrains (2012: 157).

Longitudinal ethnographies are essentially prospective in nature, with revisits anticipated and planned for. But they also entail a constant retrospective gaze, made possible through the longer-term historical

reach of the studies. The combination of ethnography with an extensive historical reach is, perhaps, the most distinctive and impressive feature of these studies when compared to the more modest time frames that usually characterize QL studies. Longitudinal ethnographers are able to explore how lives are being *lived* as well as narrated, and how both lived and narrated lives change through time. Serial re-studies in these evolving communities, conducted by the same or a different researcher after a lapse of many years, are also common (reviewed in Burawoy 2003). Whether anthropological field research is 'truly' longitudinal (i.e. involving a continuous or regular field engagement) or a re-study (after a gap of many years), the focus tends to be on the changing community itself rather than individuals or small collectives within. Nevertheless, the small scale of traditional communities and the intensive engagement means that anthropologists develop a micro-dynamic knowledge of the lives of community members, particularly of their key informants, with whom they often develop close and enduring ties.

Research carried out by Foster (1979, 2002) in the Mexican village of Tzintzuntzan is a prime example. The baseline phase of fieldwork, conducted in 1945–6, comprised six months of continuous ethnography, followed by monthly visits each lasting a week. Twelve years later, in 1957, Foster revisited the community once again, and thereafter became committed to a life-time of regular revisits (once or twice a year) that spanned half a century of change (Foster 1979, 2002). As Foster notes, his study bridges the gap between a continuous longitudinal field engagement and a more punctuated re-study, and he was able to look forwards and backwards in time to discern the impact of historical developments on the lives of the villagers. Like many long-term anthropologists, Foster developed an enduring commitment to the community he revisited, and, upon his retirement, 'passed the mantle' to a new generation of researchers (Foster 1979, 2002; Peterson Royce and Kemper 2002).

The power to discern dynamic processes through longitudinal ethnography was initially slow to develop. While early empiricists visited the field on numerous occasions, they produced a series of snap-shots that had no temporal connection (Foster and colleagues 1979; Burawoy 2003; Howell and Talle 2012). The concern was to document bounded, 'traditional' societies, through an extended 'ethnographic present'. This was so much taken for granted that the historical moment when data were gathered was deemed irrelevant and the dates rarely recorded

(Foster and colleagues 1979: 4; Fabian 1983; Peterson Royce and Kemper 2002).

This began to change in the post-war years in response to a growing awareness that 'models of society that leave out time are inadequate ... our concern is not *whether* to study change, but *how* to study it' (Wilson 1977: 21). There was a growing need to acknowledge the dynamic and open-ended nature of social systems and to develop methodologies that could capture these processes (Firth 1959; Foster and colleagues 1979). From the late 1970s, longitudinal ethnography began to advance through a series of edited collections that explored how lives could be studied 'through the stream of time' (Kemper and Peterson Royce, 2002: xv). There is an enduring appeal in the use of longitudinal ethnography, or what Grandia (2015) has recently called 'slow' ethnography, for in combining qualitative depth with historical reach it represents one of the most powerful forms of QL enquiry. The foundations of QL research lie predominantly in the pioneering work of longitudinal ethnographers, who have laid the groundwork for its advancement in recent decades.

Sociological re-studies

The ethnographic tradition described above fed directly into the development of sociological re-studies in industrial societies. These began to appear in varied community settings in the first half of the twentieth century. As the name implies, a re-study involves revisiting and updating an earlier study to discover new insights about the past in relation to the present day. Newly generated data are brought into dialogue with the findings and data from an earlier study, creating the means for a direct comparison between the two (for comprehensive reviews see Bell and Newby 1971; Crow 2002, 2012; Charles and Crow 2012). Duncan (2012: 313) describes these studies as a 'sort of comparative research, but using comparisons over time, instead of over space'.

It is possible to trace a long line of re-study scholarship, from the serial studies of 'Middletown' (the American city of Muncie), to contemporary re-studies in the town of Swansea (Lynd and Lynd 1929, 1937; Lassiter 2012; Rosser and Harris 1965; Charles, Davies and Harris 2008). In what was seen as a productive fusion of anthropological and sociological methods, the earlier studies often included researchers from both traditions, used a mixture of ethnographic and interview-based methods, and focused on communities as the unit of study. At the same time, they were pioneering

a particular form of historical sociology that was being promoted more broadly within the social sciences (Mills 1959; Gergen 1973; Abrams 1982):

Sociology without history resembles a Hollywood set: great scenes, sometimes brilliantly painted, with nothing and nobody behind them. (Tilly, cited in Miller 2000: 21)

From the outset, there was an overriding concern with the intersecting processes of social change and continuity (the latter often framed at that time in terms of 'tradition'). This concern was not confined to the re-studies themselves but was also a preoccupation of the original researchers (see, for example, Stacey 1960).

The particular way in which early re-studies engaged with time has given this field a distinctive character. Firstly, re-studies rarely seek to build understandings prospectively, tracing dynamic processes as they occur. While longitudinal ethnographies combine a prospective and retrospective gaze, here the gaze is retrospective, looking backwards to compare two snap-shots in time, the past and the present day. Secondly, unlike longitudinal ethnographies, which may combine intensive and extensive tempos, re-studies are extensive. The original study and the re-study are typically separated by many years (at least a decade), creating significant historical reach. The backward gaze, the extensive reach over time and the community focus of these studies means that the same individuals are rarely followed. This limits the scope to discern how lives are unfolding biographically, or how biographical and historical processes intersect.³ Overall, these studies have traditionally been marked by a pronounced break in continuity between the original research and the re-study. This tends to be reinforced where anthropological or sociological re-studies are carried out by second-generation researchers, who enter the field armed with a fresh, untrammelled vision (although, where possible, there will be some collaboration or at least consultation with the original researchers; see, for example, Lewis 1951 and Charles, Davies and Harris 2008).

Overall, the particular strength of re-studies lies in their extensive tempo, bringing macro-historical processes into sharp relief, and enabling

³ Although researchers may well attempt to trace the original participants where these are known (see, for example, Stacey, Batstone, Bell and Murcott 1975; and further studies reviewed in Crow 2012).

these processes to be re-visioned through a reflexive, retrospective gaze. However, re-studies carried out in this way cannot create the processual understanding that a prospective longitudinal frame would allow. Linked to this, there is less scope to follow the same individuals and thereby build a biographical understanding of change into the picture. In these dimensions of temporal design, re-studies and QL studies tend to have different strengths and weaknesses.

However, the way re-studies engage with time is not set in stone. The potential to fuse re-study methodology with elements of QL enquiry is ripe for development, and is nicely illustrated in the historical/sociological comparative research of O'Connor and Goodwin (2010, 2012) and Goodwin and O'Connor (2015). Since 2001, these researchers have been re-studying the *Leicester Young Workers Study*, which had been conducted by Norbert Elias and his colleagues in the early 1960s. A rich dataset had been generated, based on an interview-based survey with nearly 900 young adults, and including contact details of the participants. Unfortunately, the research was never completed. For some forty years, this treasure trove of data languished in a large number of box files in an attic storeroom in the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester, before it was re-discovered, reconstituted and re-purposed. The researchers were able to 'read' the data from the earlier study in new ways, and shed fresh light on the precarious employment experiences of young people in the 1960s, thereby filling a major gap in our knowledge of youth employment and unemployment in post-war Britain (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). They also used the original study as a baseline for a new study of youth transitions and employment in Leicester, generating fresh insights on changing practices and circumstances over historical time.

Of particular significance for our discussion here, the researchers were also able to trace, re-interview and reconstruct the biographies of a hundred people from the original sample, retrospectively building a more processual understanding of the employment trajectories of their participants over four decades. This micro-dynamic data not only afforded some continuity from past to present, but enabled historical processes to be anchored in and understood through the changing personal lives of the participants (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015). In this way, a synchronic dataset, generated at a particular historical moment, was turned into an extensive, QL dataset spanning a period of forty years (O'Connor and Goodwin 2010, 2012: 486). As the authors note, there is huge and as yet untapped potential to build QL re-studies in the future. This would require a greater focus on

the unfolding lives of individuals and, more pragmatically, the ability to identify and trace the original participants in a study. In turn, this relies on a commitment to preserve and archive the original unabridged datasets, complete with participant contact details, for the use of future generations of researchers.

Biographical, oral history and narrative research

Our mapping exercise concludes with a consideration of a group of cognate disciplines that are centrally concerned with the unfolding biographies of individuals or small collectives. In this, they share a common endeavour with life course research, albeit their methods for engaging with time tend to differ. Bornat (2004: 34) usefully observes,

The turn to biography in social science ... coupled with a ... grudging acceptance of the contribution of memory in historical research, has resulted in a proliferation of terms, schools, and groupings, often used interchangeably, some with a disciplinary base, others attempting to carve out new territory between disciplines. Labels such as oral history, biography, life story, life history, narrative analysis, reminiscence and life review jostle and compete for attention. What is common to all is a focus on recording and interpreting ... the life experiences of individuals. (Bornat 2004: 34)

Biographical research evolved within the sociology of industrial societies, notably the Chicago school in the 1920s and 1930s (Thomas and Znaniecki, (1958) [1918–21]; Shaw 1966 [1930]). Thereafter it fell quickly into decline, but was subsequently revived in the post-war years. Since that time it has gradually coalesced into a recognized field of qualitative research, with global reach and influence. While precise methods vary, the approach involves the biographical and narrative construction and analysis of individual lives (or significant dimensions of these lives), which are then placed within a nexus of micro-social connections, historical events and processes, and life experiences (Miller 2000).⁴ While these studies use a rich fusion of sociology and history, this is history ‘from below’ (Perks and

⁴ Key texts include Thompson (2000), Bertaux (1981), Denzin (1989), Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf (2000), Miller (2000), Plummer (2001), Roberts (2002), Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2008) and O’Neill et al. (2015).

Thomson 2016). The aim is to encourage the creative, interpretive storytelling of lives in ways that remain close to the experiences of those under study, and that views socio-historical processes from their perspective (Roberts 2002; Andrews 2008). These developments in the post-war years were driven by a desire to counter the growing dominance of positivist social survey research in the social sciences, which, in its concern with broad patterns of human behaviour, simply erased individuals from the historical record (Bertaux 1981). Thomas and Znaniecki (1958 [1918–21]) were, perhaps, the first to establish the value of subjective accounts as a source of meaning and insight, but the message has been reinforced by each new generation of researchers (see, for example, Portelli 2016 [1979]).

At the same time, and taking their lead from Mills (1959), these studies share with life course research a strong focus on the intersection of micro- and macro-historical processes, moving from the particular to the general, and maintaining the integrity of the former while elaborating on the latter (Bertaux 1981; Denzin 1989; Miller 2000; Andrews 2007). As Miller (2000: 22) notes, life stories cannot be told without a constant reference to historical change. Such studies often draw together a range of documentary and archival sources, generated at different historical moments, to create a more holistic picture. Thomas and Znaniecki (1958 [1918–21]), for example, drew on letters, newspaper reports and autobiographical records that were solicited by the researchers for their pioneering study of Polish immigrants. This tradition continues today in the work of the Mass Observation Archive, which has for many years commissioned personal accounts on varied aspects of life from a panel of volunteer reporters (www.massobs.org.uk see, for example, Broad and Fleming 1981). Thompson (1981: 290) observes that social biographers and oral historians are ‘jackdaws’ rather than methodological purists, ‘bricoleurs’ who are adept at teasing out a variety of evidence to piece together a richer, composite picture of lives and times.⁵ The agenda, then, has been to create a people’s history through oral testimony (Thompson 1981); to bring subjective life histories to bear on an understanding of socio-historical processes (Bertaux 1981; Hareven 2000);

⁵ The idea of bricolage was first introduced by Levi-Strauss (1966) and is perfectly suited to these biographical fields of study. It is the skill of using whatever materials are at hand and re-combining them in a patchwork or montage of evidence to create new insights (Yardley 2008: 12).

and to establish and validate a humanistic, processual approach to social science enquiry (Plummer 2001).

While these fields of biographical research have different methodological inflections, they tend to engage with time in similar ways. Firstly, they tend to reconstruct life histories through a retrospective gaze rather than prospectively tracing lives through time. The personal accounts of individuals are used to anchor researcher reconstructions of the past. Linked to this retrospective gaze, temporal data are usually gathered synchronically, through a single visit to the field, rather than diachronically, through time (Miller 2000: 40). This makes design easier and cheaper to manage, and it perhaps also explains the preoccupation with capturing lives through life history or narrative styles of interviewing. Yet it does not allow for a processual understanding of dynamic processes as they evolve. The way time has been utilized within these studies creates a divergence with QL enquiry. But, as we have seen for re-studies, these differences are not set in stone. Like all qualitative temporal researchers, social biographers and oral historians are creative and adaptable. The field has evolved to become, 'a vast and constantly changing and expanding ferment of creative work ... [that] thrives on invention' (Bornat 2008: 344). This has resulted in some exciting fusions of biographical, oral historical and QL designs, and the development of what has recently been called *longitudinal biography* (King and Roberts 2015). For example, working as part of the *Timescapes Study*, Bornat and Bytheway developed a panel design for *The Oldest Generation Study* (Bornat and Bytheway 2008, 2010, Bytheway 2011). The researchers were able to explore biographies prospectively, looking forwards as well as backwards in time, and they rose to the challenge of discerning how those living in deep old age both perceive and 'live out' the future for themselves and their families.

Concluding reflections

In this introductory chapter, the place of QL enquiry has been explored in relation to the established canons of longitudinal and life course research, and the key disciplines that make up the field of qualitative temporal research. In the process, some of its distinctive features have been sharpened, not least its capacity to discern how biographies unfold in 'real' time, through a rich, prospective, qualitative lens. An appreciation

of these features has grown rapidly over the past two decades, enabling QL research to take a more established place within the temporal canon. There is evidence too of some creative synergies between these different fields of enquiry. As we have seen, in longitudinal research there is an emerging interest in working across and bridging the divide between large- and smaller-scale studies. At the same time, researchers conducting sociological re-studies and biographical research are exploring the interface of their own disciplinary traditions and QL research, and consciously engaging with the latter as a way to frame their enquiries (see, for example, O'Reilly 2012; O'Connor and Goodwin 2010, 2012; Stanley 2013, 2015; King and Roberts 2015).

Mapping the fields of longitudinal and temporal research in this chapter has illustrated some of the subtle differences and commonalities that exist between varied modes of temporal enquiry. The discussion suggests the value of working across the spectrum, blending different methodological traditions in a creative approach to research design. These are porous fields of research, with a great deal of cross-fertilization between them, and scope for much more. In this respect, QL research defies prescriptive labelling and neat categorization. QL researchers are consummate bricoleurs. They borrow liberally from the longitudinal and re-study fields to fashion the designs and tempos for their research, and adopt ethnographic, biographical and narrative approaches to generating data in order to create the necessary depth of temporal understanding. While QL research requires rigour, it is also a craft, involving the application of a repertoire of strategies to fashion a bespoke design (Saldana 2003). This theme is developed further in Chapter 3, but, before this, our exploration of QL research takes us on a journey through time.