

**Konopinski, Natalie (ed.). 2014. *Doing Anthropological Research. A Practical Guide*. London, New York: Routledge. 152 pp. Pb.: £21.99. ISBN: 9780415697552.**

*Doing Anthropological Research*, edited by Natalie Konopinski, offers the reader a practical guide to doing short-term anthropological research that is specifically addressed to advanced undergraduate and graduate students. The volume covers key aspects of conducting research projects, whether these are library-based, based on secondary sources, and/or ethnographic fieldwork.

The sequence of chapters reflects the chronological progress and stages all research projects entail. Tobias Kelly's article (*Chapter 1*) begins with how to start generating ideas for research and to formulate an adequate research question and discusses criteria for selecting an appropriate field site. The last article by John Harries (*chapter 8*) focuses on fashioning a plausible argument and includes tips on planning to write and getting it done. However, in her introductory chapter, the editor emphasises that the practice of doing research is less linear because many research activities take place concurrently and cannot be completed sequentially. To address this fact, each chapter includes a series of key points to highlight the most important aspects and suggestions accompanied by questions that allow reflecting one's own experience at particular stages of the research process. These elements enable quick orientation and selective reading according to the reader's immediate requirements. In addition, the reader follows two fictional students and their respective anthropology projects throughout the chapters. In this manner, typical issues and challenges at all stages of research become vivid and tangible, and students will find themselves familiar with many of the situations described.

*Chapter 2* by Laura Jeffery and Natalie Konopinski is about designing a research proposal and planning a project more concretely. The article introduces issues such as primary and secondary research methods, ethical considerations, and language proficiency, which are discussed in detail throughout the following chapters of the book. Furthermore, the authors provide suggestions for setting up a realistic timetable and research budget (particularly if empirical data gathering will take place abroad).

Neil Thin (*Chapter 3*) highlights the importance of secondary research since secondary information informs primary research and forms a key element of ethnographic analysis. He gives advice on how to achieve an unbiased portfolio of sources and on making systematic use of secondary data.

*Chapter 4* and *5*, by Joost Fontein, are about doing ethnographic fieldwork. By discussing the work of four anthropologists, *Chapter 4* explores the broader question of how anthropological perspectives shape fieldwork methods without arguing in favour of a certain approach. Thereby, the reader shall be enabled to judge on what kind of methods a certain project will require. In contrast, *Chapter 5* addresses the practicalities of doing fieldwork, such as where and how to live, methods for data gathering and recording, and the importance of language.

Ian Harper (*Chapter 6*) examines ethical responsibilities to informants, colleagues, and to the broader public at large. In addition, ethical considerations reappear throughout the book, for example with regard to data protection and risk management

(*Chapter 2*) and the dissemination of research findings (conclusion by the editor). The authors take into account that each situation is complex and unique in some way and avoid panaceas and giving the “right” answer; instead, they encourage students to make considered and justifiable decisions.

*Chapter 7*, by Lotte Hoek, examines how to organise and analyse the data gathered in the field or library. The author argues that ‘analysis in anthropology is an idiosyncratic practice’ (p. 103), often unsystematic and creative, and focuses on interpreting qualitative data and linking them with theory.

Theoretical debates play a subordinate role since the book aims to ‘leave the lecture theatre behind’ (p. 2) and function as a guide to the practical skills and tools needed to design and conduct a research project. However, despite the fact that many anthropology projects include doing ethnographic fieldwork in postcolonial contexts and countries of the Global South, the volume fails to adequately address the emotional dimension of the fact that many fieldwork situations are entangled in the “politics” of role and resource allocation. The debate on social positioning as a part of subject production seems theoretical but may become highly relevant on a practical level when students arrive at their study site. How ethnographer and informant perceive one another influences their relationship and how anthropological knowledge is generated. Informants may produce strategic narratives according to their underlying interests and motivation to support the research project. Moreover, experiencing the politics that shape interactions while doing fieldwork can cause emotional distress, such as feeling overburdened when being faced with informants’ expectations that go far beyond the research objective although the purpose of the ethnographer’s presence has been discussed beforehand. Of course, it is difficult to prepare for situations of this kind, but students should be aware of their emotional implications and how these, in turn, influence the nature of data.

Fontein touches some of these aspects in *Chapter 4* when he points out that ‘the ethnographer him or herself is the central tool of research’ and that self-reflection is ‘the means by which fieldworkers hone their tools to suit their research projects’ (p. 60). Moreover, Hoek states concerning data analysis that ‘data is constructed, the anthropologist is positioned’ (p. 105). However, the emotional dimension of dealing with postcolonial continuities in “the field” remains largely unaddressed.

Nevertheless, the volume contains a revealing and concise compilation of issues relevant to conducting a research project and is a good companion throughout the process. Its strength lies in the authors’ experiences as teachers and supervisors of student research projects across many areas of social and cultural anthropology. Hence, the book succeeds in sketching many of the highs and lows, the dilemmas and challenges that students are likely to face while carrying out research. To conclude, it can be said that *Doing Anthropological Research* is a valuable read for students who are preparing, conducting, and writing an anthropology research project.

CLAUDIA KONRAD  
*University of Trier (Germany)*