

Book review: Berit Bliesemann de Guevara / Morten Bøås (eds): Doing Fieldwork in Areas of International Intervention - A Guide to Research in Violent and Closed Contexts

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engagement in order to depoliticise struggles against contemporary exclusion, even in academia (cf. Gulio Moini, How Participation Has Become a Hegemonic Discursive Resource: Towards an Interpretivist Research Agenda. *Critical Policy Studies* 5(2), 2011, pp. 149–168). I re-echo the authors' voices amplifying calls for caring universities that must share care work in knowledge co-production. This responsibility is now disproportionately shouldered by engaged researchers.

The book calls for deeper conversations among activist scholars. Should we talk more about when risk is debilitating? When or *should* we pry open the imagined veil of privacy and better talk about how risks enter our homes? When does politically-engaged research unintentionally results in legitimacy contestation and conflict in communities (as subaltern groups are embedded within differentiated power relations and can contribute to each other's oppression)?

Global South scholar-activists must be included in these conversations. The risks they endure are often more significant, the safe spaces available to them shrinking and the privilege of sharing their struggles absent. Amid the globally rise of neoliberal fascism, engaged researchers in these spaces often continue their work without university protection and funding. Like the field researchers whose participants are their communities, they remain on the frontlines: their own homes and universities.

More than a must-read for field researchers, I hope these contributions beget more honesty and courage from similarly situated scholars, and in this way ease the sufferings and help in the struggle toward egalitarian knowledge production.

Chester Antonino C. Arcilla

BERIT BLIESEMANN DE GUEVARA / MORTEN BØÅS (EDS), *Doing Fieldwork in Areas of International Intervention: A Guide to Research in Violent and Closed Contexts*. (Spaces of Peace, Security and Development). Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020. 308 pages, €94.97. ISBN 978-1-5292-0688-3 (hb)

In contexts where there is a need for development-oriented international engagement, there is an increasing demand for complex, inter- and transdisciplinary research. The conducting of such research is frequently hampered by complicated and unexpected challenges and impediments, which are caused by differences in social, political, religious and language settings, among others (Charles et al. 2021). Fieldwork aimed at researching and diagnosing the actual bottlenecks where interventions are required is often expensive and takes longer to be completed, especially when it is necessary to collect biophysical data or carry out field experiments. There has long been a need for a publication that highlights

the issues and challenges of conducting field research in volatile contexts. However, it is difficult for one or two scholars to compile such information under diverse geographic and socio-political conditions.

Doing Fieldwork in Areas of International Intervention is a comprehensive field guide meticulously designed, written and edited by top experts in conflict, peace and intervention politics. The efforts of the editors deserve recognition, as they have managed to compile the field experiences of various scholars over three decades of monumental fieldwork carried out in different social, political and geographic settings.

This book is divided into four sections, the first focusing on the difficulties of fieldwork-based research in areas of intervention and the associated confusion and failures involving research in violent and closed settings. In the second part of the book, titled “Security and Risk”, the various contributors critically highlight the challenges of research in areas that are strictly controlled by authoritarian rulers and violent groups. The contributions highlight the dilemmas of researchers in post-conflict environments that often carry a great deal of suspicion towards researchers from different socio-cultural and political settings. This section provides convincing details about the ethical restrictions faced by academics and researchers in authoritarian states (see John Heathershaw and Parviz Mullojonov: “The Politics and Ethics of Fieldwork in Post-conflict Environments: The Dilemmas of a Vocational Approach”, pp. 93–112).

Boukary Sangaré and Jaimie Bleck (“Challenges of Research in an Active Conflict Environment”, pp. 113–126) describe the challenges they faced during their research in Mali between 2012 and 2017 amid ongoing sectarian violence, terrorist activities and the state’s incompetence in dealing with the instability and widespread public discontent. The authors critically discuss how pragmatic security concerns affect methodological rigor and transparency under such challenging conditions. Meanwhile, George M. Bob-Milliar (“Introduction: Methodologies for Researching Africa,” *African Affairs* 121(484), 2022, pp. e55–e65), in a parallel study, highlights the need for genuine research participation while using critical assessment to choose the best strategy and formulate the main research question. A similar study by Acar et al. (*Researching Peace, Conflict, and Power in the Field: Methodological Challenges and Opportunities*, Springer Nature Switzerland, 2020) examines key methodological possibilities with greater detail, especially in conflict-affected, pre-conflict and post-conflict communities.

The articles in *Doing Fieldwork in Areas of International Intervention* also highlight important issues to consider if researchers need to collect data in a conflict environment. This book’s third section covers subjects linked to studies in hostile environments from Yemen, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sudan to Myanmar. It deals with positionality, which has frequently been ignored in political science research to (allegedly) preserve the “objectivity” of the researcher. Furthermore, the authors strongly emphasise the need for a suitable

framework designed to support local researchers in interpretative research. The fourth section emphasises the importance of gender and entangled sensitivities during field research. It also highlights ethical vulnerabilities and subsequent mitigation strategies in the research design process and when presenting fieldwork findings wherever development interventions are intended. The editors, Berit Blieseemann de Guevara and Morten Bøås, highlight the challenges associated with researching the subject of sex and associated sensitivities while ignoring the difficulties field researchers face due to their own sexual orientation.

Although there are fewer examples of religious sensitivities while doing research in those societies where religion forms a vital part of everyday life as well as constitutional discussions, there are nonetheless rich examples of challenges encountered while researching in authoritarian states with gender-related sensitivities, in pre- and post-conflict environments. Unlike the compilations of Charles et al. (*Researching the Middle East: Cultural, Conceptual, Theoretical and Practical Issues*, Edinburgh University Press, 2021) and Mac Ginty et al. (*The Companion to Peace and Conflict Fieldwork*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), which focus respectively on the MENA region and Global North only, this book provides a comprehensive review of the intricacies and limitations of doing research in violent and closed environments across a wider geography. It is vital to diagnose the dos and don'ts in an environment where a research activity is being initiated. This publication offers diverse examples and assists early career researchers and graduate students in comprehending the problems of conducting research in heterogeneous violent and closed situations, helping to add value to the quality of the research by mitigating possible risks and issues.

Fazlullah Akhtar

MARJO BUITELAAR, MANJA STEPHAN-EMMRICH, VIOLA THIMM (EDS), *Muslim Women's Pilgrimage to Mecca and Beyond: Reconfiguring Gender, Religion, and Mobility*. London: Routledge, 2021. 222 pages, £36.99. ISBN 978-0-3676-2810-9

The present book investigates the topic of Muslim sacred journeys to a variety of Islamic holy places in various countries. The most notable of these pilgrimages are to sites in today's Saudi Arabia, especially the Kaaba in Mecca and the grave of the prophet Muhammad in Medina. In addition to these, the articles in this book include religious travels to a number of other shrines found around the Islamic world. The main focus is on Muslim women's mobility from Islamic countries and other parts of the globe to Mecca and other areas of the Islamic world, as well as the link between these mobilities and globalisa-