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Peter Krause and Ora Szekely. *Stories from the Field: A Guide to Navigating Fieldwork in Political Science*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9780231193009 (hardcover, \$140.00); 9780231193016 (paperback, \$35.00).

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While global COVID-19 vaccination rates remain uneven and unequal, the resumption of safe and ethical in-person fieldwork has started to become possible in some parts of the world. As scholars begin considering and preparing for this, both new and seasoned field researchers would benefit from reading *Stories from the Field: A Guide to Navigating Fieldwork in Political Science*. This book compiles 42 reflections on an eclectic range of topics related to fieldwork. The eclecticism was by design, with editors Peter Krause and Ora Szekely inviting contributors to share their “best, most insightful stories and lessons” about fieldwork.¹ The result is a volume that is honest, wise, and deeply human.

Stories from the Field is categorized into eight sections, each covering a common theme. Section 1 (Welcome to the Field) explores the human experience of fieldwork, touching on the emotions and personal relationships that animate the fieldwork experience. The next four sections walk the reader through the different stages of fieldwork, from research design (Section 2 - Designing your Research and Deciding Where to Go); familiarizing oneself with the local context (Section 5 - Developing Local Knowledge); creative data collection strategies (Section 4 - Creatively Collecting Data and Evidence); and what to do when one’s meticulously arranged plans go awry (Section 3 - Make a Plan...Then Be Ready to Toss It). The last part of the book—sections 6 (Seeing and Being Seen: Identity in the Field), 7 (Being Ethically Accountable), and 8 (Staying Safe and Healthy)—cover issues that are central not just to fieldwork, but the research enterprise in its entirety: positionality, ethics, and health and safety.

The book is genuinely a joy to read and I appreciated many of the contributions. For example, when reading Zoe Mark’s chapter on cooking groundnut soup in the field to build bonds with women participants in the field² and Keith Darden’s strategy of recruiting participants by quite literally picking them up at the side of

¹ Peter Krause Ora Szekely, “Introduction: Learning through Stories,” in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field: A Guide to Navigating Fieldwork in Political Science*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 2.

² Zoe Marks, “Cooking Soup and Killing Chickens: Navigating Gender and Food-As-Fieldwork in West Africa,” in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 23-35.

the road as ride-share driver,³ I marvelled at the creativity and ingenuity of the contributors. Erica Chenoweth and Zachariah Cherian Mampilly's discussion on ethics—particularly that of funding—are similarly thought-provoking.⁴ Although I would have liked to highlight the strengths of each individual chapter, the need to keep this review a manageable length means that I am unable to do so.

As such, I will limit myself to highlighting two important contributions of the book, before identifying three areas that the editors may want to consider addressing, should a second edition become a possibility.

One of this book's aims is to demystify the research process. To this end, Krause and Szekely encourage students to read the chapters in this book alongside the published manuscripts, thereby giving readers a glimpse into "how the sausage gets made."⁵ This pedagogical aim is one of the most valuable aspects of the book. While planning is essential, field research is an inherently messy enterprise, one that is shaped by contingency and randomness. Whether it was Stathis Kalyvas's discovery of judicial documents from the Greek Civil War through a former classmate;⁶ Marc Trachtenberg's accidental receipt of documents not meant to be viewed by researchers;⁷ or Carla B. Abdo-Katsipis meeting a sympathetic interlocuter who helped her safely arrange interviews with sex traffickers,⁸ some of the most triumphant moments of fieldwork are not necessarily a product of design. On the flip side, just as serendipity is a feature of fieldwork, misfortune often features as well. Kristin Michelitch, for example, discusses how her experiment in Mali was unexpectedly halted by a coup and insurgency,⁹ and Matthew Franklin Cancian and Kristin E. Fabbe describe catching some members of their survey enumerators falsifying data.¹⁰ This view into the messiness and unpredictability of field research is pedagogically valuable because it helps prepare students for the inevitable, normalizes both

³ Keith Darden, "My Stint as a Ukrainian Taxi Driver," in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 151-155.

⁴ Erica Chenoweth, "On Research that 'Matters,'" in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 267-277; Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, "The Field is Everywhere," in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 277-285.

⁵ Krause and Szekely, "Introduction: Learning through Stories," in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 4.

⁶ Stathis Kalyvas, "Fieldwork by Decree, Not by Design," in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 49-57.

⁷ Marc Trachtenberg, "Stumbling Around in the Archives," in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 135-141.

⁸ Carla B. Abdo-Katsipis, "Your Safety and Theirs: Interviewing Sex-Traffickers," in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 327-334.

⁹ Kristin Michelitch, "Radio Gaga: Evolving Field Experiments in Mali," in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 93-101.

¹⁰ Matthew Franklin Cancian and Kristin E. Fabbe, "'You Don't Know What You're Getting Into': Dealing with Dishonesty in the Field," in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 108-114.

the highs and the lows of fieldwork, and shows how even if plans so go awry, scholars can still produce excellent work.

Another strength of the book is the emphasis of life beyond field “work,” the parts that Wendy Pearlman calls “field being” in her chapter.¹¹ Such activities include watching television, going to the market and learning how to negotiate—as per David Laitin¹²—and spending time walking, an activity promoted by Paul Staniland.¹³ In addition to being personally enriching, ‘field being’ helps scholars develop an analytical sense that aids in the interpretation of data and the discovery of meaningful questions. Daniel Posner’s chapter makes the latter point clear, as his unplanned involvement in campaigning for the Malawi opposition eventually led him to a paper comparing the country with his intended field site, Zambia.¹⁴ The contributors show that while *being* in the field is not instrumentally related to research, is not time wasted, even if it is often viewed in this way by graduate students with tight schedules and tight budgets.

While I was overall satisfied with the book, there were a few issues that could have been more directly addressed. It is important to acknowledge that Krause and Szekely are thoughtful in terms of representation. The volume reaches gender parity and achieves a fair amount of geographic representation (I will admit that as a scholar of Southeast Asia, I was disappointed that the region only briefly showed up in the Staniland chapter). Yet, I wish that certain issues had been explicitly discussed in the book. For example, a chapter on navigating fieldwork as a member of the LGBT community would have been helpful, particularly in places where being a sexual and gender minority is criminalized. Similarly, as many Ph.D. students and faculty have caregiving responsibilities, a chapter on how to navigate short-term fieldwork or accompanied fieldwork would also speak to the experiences of many of the book’s potential readers. Finally, although Ravi Perry mentions that he suffered from shingles on top of other health conditions in his chapter,¹⁵ and Amelia Hoover Green mentions disordered eating in her chapter on hating fieldwork,¹⁶ I would have liked to see some discussion of how to navigate field research as scholars struggling with chronic illnesses and other health concerns. I recognize that some of these oversights are a result of the free rein afforded to contributors by the editors, but including a wider range of experiences would help the book better speak to the challenges facing students and faculty members from marginalized groups or with less traditional backgrounds.

Perhaps related to this point is the topic of mental health, which is generally absent from this volume. Although I was happy to see a section devoted to health and safety, the chapters in section 8 solely focus on physical health and safety. Amelia Hoover Green does mention mental health in her chapter, though she

¹¹ Wendy Pearlman, “On Field-Being,” in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 183-187.

¹² David Laitin, “The Onion Principle,” in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 196-201.

¹³ Paul Staniland, “Fieldwork on Foot,” in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 188-195.

¹⁴ Daniel Posner, “Be Prepared (To Go Off Script),” in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 88-92.

¹⁵ Ravi Perry, “Shingles on the Campaign Trail,” in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 335-339.

¹⁶ Amelia Hoover Green, “Successful Fieldwork for the Fieldwork-Hater,” in Krause and Szekely, eds., *Stories from the Field*, 115-123.

mostly directs readers to her blog post on *The Duck of Minerva*.¹⁷ Mental health is especially relevant for this volume, given the number of contributors who study political violence. As such, many of the book's readers will likely be scholars of conflict. It is well documented that fieldwork can take an immense toll on the mental health of researchers. This is especially applicable to scholars studying sensitive and difficult topics such as conflict and those from marginalized communities.¹⁸ Acknowledging these risks and suggesting ways to protect one's mental health is an important component of keeping researchers healthy and safe in the field and after they return.

Finally, the question that I kept returning to is the question of when we should refrain from doing fieldwork. With the exception of Hoover Green's chapter, the underlying assumption of this volume is that field research is a net good and that it is a valuable experience for political scientists. As someone who spent 15 months in Indonesia conducting interview and archival research as a Ph.D. student, I have long been a fieldwork enthusiast. Like the volume's contributors, I believe that fieldwork not only helps scholars collect new types of data, but is also crucial for generating new questions. However, the inability to do in-person fieldwork due to COVID-19 had prompted me to reflect upon my assumptions about fieldwork, especially as the ethical concerns and consequences have become so stark.

This is particularly the case with over-researched communities such as certain refugee communities.¹⁹ Thinking back to my own research, did I need every one of the 135+ interviews that I did in Indonesia? Or were there moments where I not only wasted someone's time, but caused that person harm by asking them to retell moments of deep shame or trauma? I do not yet have answers to these questions, but it is a question that is worth asking.

Overall, however, *Stories from the Field* is a valuable resource, providing opportunities to learn from experienced field researchers and to learn to embrace the detours, obstacles, and serendipities that inevitably characterizes fieldwork. Reading it reminded me of some of my favourite memories in graduate school: listening and learning from trusted mentors. While all scholars would benefit from reading this book, it will be of particular interests to graduate students about to embark on their own field-research experience. In addition, I fully expect that this text will become a mainstay of methods syllabi in political science.

¹⁷ Amelia Hoover Green, "Academia, Mental Health, and the Cult of Productivity," 28 April 2017, *The Duck of Minerva*, <https://www.duckofminerva.com/2017/04/30702.html>.

¹⁸ Calla Hummel and Dana El Kurd, "Mental Health and Fieldwork," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 54:1 (2021): 121-125; Cyanne E. Loyle and Alicia Simoni, "Researching Under Fire: Political Science and Researcher Trauma," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50:1 (2017): 141-145; Ruth Pearce, "A Methodology for the Marginalised: Surviving Oppression and Traumatic Fieldwork in the Neoliberal Academy," *Sociology* 54:4 (2020): 806-824; Brian E. Perron and Barbara S. Hiltz, "Burnout and Secondary Trauma Among Forensic Interviewers of Abused Children," *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 23:2 (2006): 216-234; Philipp Schulz and Anne-Kathrin Kreft, "Researching Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: a Conversation between Early-Career Researchers," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 23:3 (2021): 496-504.

¹⁹ Naohiko Omata, "'Over-Researched' and 'Under-Researched' Refugee Groups: Exploring the Phenomena, Causes and Consequences," *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 12:3 (2020): 681-695.

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