

# A Letter from the Editor

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Unfamiliar Edinburgh: Being and Becoming in the City

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Social anthropology can be defined as a mode of thinking that seeks to understand and articulate the social relations that define and shape our perception of the world. This, of course, is also an activity that we in our daily life as human beings are continuously involved in. This understanding of relationships and our own role within them is crucial in order to act intelligently in a shared world. If it is true, then, that ‘we are all anthropologists’, one might think that teaching anthropology should be a straightforward undertaking. However, in my own, and I admit, limited experience of teaching introductory courses to anthropology undergraduate students, I have often been left baffled by the challenge of getting students to ‘think ethnographically’ and to develop ‘ethnographically grounded’ arguments in their writing.

One of the challenges, perhaps, stems not necessarily from that students are unfamiliar with anthropology or ethnographic writing but from the lack of experience with the actualities involved in carrying out ethnographically grounded qualitative research. I do not want to claim that ethnographic sensibility cannot be developed without a practice-based familiarity with fieldwork. However, the contributions to this volume by second-year anthropology students at the University of Edinburgh, might exemplify some of the benefits of practice based exercises when teaching anthropology and ethnographic methods. On the one hand, the texts demonstrate the value of longitudinal participant observation when it comes to learning to learn to understand social phenomena. On the other hand, the students have become acutely aware of their own roles as individual interpreters and authors, making them to reflect on how their own perceptions and changing roles throughout the process have become part of and are shaping the final ethnographic texts.

This volume encompasses ethnographic snapshots of different aspects of life within Edinburgh, as perceived and presented by a selection of undergraduate students in the second-year course *Ethnography, Theory and Practice* at the University of Edinburgh. It also aims to exemplify how these anthropology students are taught to develop an ethnographic sensibility through ‘fieldwork experience’. To contextualise the volume and its individual contributions the teaching staff, John Harries, Koreen Rice and Stephen McConnachie, have written an introductory essay that explains the pedagogical rationale behind the course while reflecting on the processes of learning and knowledge-making involved in being and becoming student-ethnographers in the city of Edinburgh.

*Hakon*