'Fields' of IR

(Epistemic) Violence, Real-Life Encounters and Methodologies

European Workshops in International Relations (EWIS) 2020 Call for Papers

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Abstract:

Everyone has three lives: a public life, a private life and a secret life, Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez once told his biographer Gerald Martin. International Relations (IR) as a discipline has long entertained a public life of its own that connects both to western imperialism and the fashioning of global politics. Against these premises, critical (poststructuralist, feminist, non-western, decolonial etc.) scholarship has emerged with the goal of confronting – and changing – the racial, gendered, and elitist power imbalances that continue to pervade the study of IR and related fields. By the same token, an increasing number of IR scholars engage in different forms of 'fieldwork' across the world, researching sites marked by similar global inequalities, violences, and dangers. In doing so, students, researchers and professors have aimed to bring the 'reality on the ground' to the forefront of their analytical work on war, peace, terrorism, globalization, commerce, migration, fragile states and the like. Despite the ethical and political difficulties of work of this kind, surprisingly little attention has been focused on the private, secret and other 'lives' of the countless individuals – researchers, brokers, assistants, informants, and organizations alike – who populate the 'fields' of IR. By concealing details of the mistakes we make, the tricks we use, the emotions we spare, and the things we learn, these 'secret' parts of fieldwork rarely, if at all, become part of the more 'public', scientific processes of publishing, presenting and teaching.

The aim of this workshop is to bring our shared expertise to bear on emerging discussions on how we research world politics: to interrogate our moral, discursive and material 'fieldwork' practices from a creative, inter-disciplinary and critical lens, and to explore novel perspectives that help bringing forward increasingly *diverse* outlooks into IR. We thus invite both junior and senior scholars from a range of disciplinary traditions, working in different regions of the world and utilizing a variety of methodological tools to address the growing interest in the practicalities, ethics, and 'sensitivities' of conducting, understanding, challenging and writing about 'fieldwork'. We strongly encourage scholars to cover topics rooted in their own *real-life* experiences as they engage critically with conflict-prone environments, societal conflict, epistemic violence, power dynamics and so on.

The workshop welcomes (but does not limit) submissions on the following questions:

- Beyond ethics, how can we develop a common research *ethos*?
- How can we engage methodological issues of defining 'the field/fieldwork' as a disciplinary-constrained, and historically-constructed process in order to tend to ethical concerns, valorization of situated and located knowledge production and violent processes of "othering"? Should we even do fieldwork at all?
- What can ethnographic, visual, writing styles and other creative methodologies bring to the study of both *real-world* (material, discursive, visual, emotional) experiences and 'grand theorizing' in IR? How may these methodologies help theorize linkages between ordinary, micro-experiences and broader, international politics?
- What practices should we nurture to ensure research brokers, assistants, and informants receive the care and respect they deserve? How do we deal with loss or trauma? Far worse: how do we deal with *causing* loss and trauma?
- How do we write about situatedness and self-reflexivity in productive ways that avoid issues of 'navel-gazing' ?