

CALL FOR PAPERS

A Conversation between IR Theory and STS: Knowledge Production and the Role of Networked Technology

Early Career Researchers Workshop for PhD students and post-doctoral researchers
EISA Pan-European Conference in Malta, 15th September 2020

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Keynote dialogue between Dr. Ole Jacob Sending (Research Director, NUPI) and Prof. Annalisa Pelizza (Professor of Science and Technology Studies, Università di Bologna)

Workshop description

Emerging technologies today do not only facilitate and accelerate data generation, analysis and dissemination but also enable new ways of determining risks and recognising threats. Both state agencies as well as non-state actors increasingly make use of technologies to assess, manage, and avert security threats, ranging from financial crashes, to climate crisis, conflict escalation or cyber-attacks. Socio-technological imaginaries emerge where knowledge production processes of state agencies and non-state actors intersect with technological developments and manifest as political assemblages of code, data points, algorithms, interveners, attackers and protectors impacting global politics.

This workshop invites early-career scholars to explore knowledge production at the intersection between IR theory and Science and Technology Studies through posing questions such as: How is in/security made known to key actors through epistemic constellations that may include technologies, artefacts, individuals, organisations and/or states? And inversely, how do we 'know' digital technology, a concept that is marked by complexity, ambiguity and secrecy? How does the use of algorithms, machine-learning or artificial intelligence in the analysis and interpretation of data affect the conception of international in/security? Where do we find power and agency in processes of knowledge co-constitution through technologies, indicators, algorithms, codes, measures, models and datasets? And finally, what methodologies can we as social scientists use to research this socio-technical co-production of knowledge? The workshop is kicked off with a keynote dialogue, and proceeds with three interrelated panels. The first panel looks into the origins of socio-technical ideas, the second reflects on its assembly, and the third on the ways in which they shape and challenge international governance.

Panel 1 – Black boxes and open secrets: Tracing the epistemological origins of (in)securities:

This panel focuses on the trajectories of certain security issues through organisations and enquires into their origins. How are certain ‘threats’ detected through, or under the guise of, technologies? What do we find if we open the ‘black box’ of codes, algorithms and chains of detection? Is there a ‘black box’ at all, and what does it mean if not?

Panel 2 – Webs of knowledge: Researching the co-production of socio-technical ideas:

This panel looks into the co-production of socio-technical ideas. How do assemblages co-produce risks and threats, and how do they manifest? What role do algorithms, codes and models play in the politics of knowledge production? What does it mean if systems and analysts co-produce ‘threats’, bringing them into existence in the first place, for the security produced? How do dynamics of competition in the global ‘market’ of knowledge production shape conceptions of risk and threats?

Panel 3 – Technical solutions for the digital era?

Socio-technical imaginaries and their ramifications for international politics

This panel looks into how socio-technical visions shape and challenge international institutions. How are technological ideas of security and security governance different from international markets and institutions? How are they promoted and who advocates for them? How do ideas of ‘technology’ influence states’ security behaviour? How do they enable, limit, include or exclude? What implications for the future can we foresee with development of technological tools at the disposal of international actors?

Submission: We invite PhDs and junior post-docs to send an abstract (250 words) and short bio (150 words) by 31 March 2020. Participants are asked to submit a short piece of 1500-2000 words by 1 September 2020. As the workshop will take place prior to, and is part of, the EISA PEC, all participants are required to register for the EISA 2020 conference.

Funding information: Limited funding is available for travel costs (up to €200 per participant) and accommodation costs for up to two nights to cover the early arrival at the EISA conference, insofar as these are not covered by the participant’s home institution. Please submit a statement of motivation and a preliminary budget if you would like to be reimbursed for travel costs.

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