

Fieldwork Lessons for Empirical Researchers: Multidisciplinary Insights

12-13 May 2023

University of Geneva (Uni Mail), M4060

and online:

<https://unige.zoom.us/j/64067470060?pwd=NWF4WGNCRjkzT2JVeUdlcG95MzZCUT09>

Meeting ID: 640 6747 0060

Passcode: 711807

Organisers:

Nataliya Borys, University of Geneva, nathborys@yahoo.fr

Dr Lea Sgier, University of Geneva, Lea.Sgier@unige.ch

Outline

Historians, contemporary historians in particular, often rely on *fieldwork*, in the form of observational methods (participant and non participant observation) and conversational methods (biographic interviews, semi-structured interviews, etc.). They have not necessarily been trained in these methods though, contrary to researchers in anthropology or sociology for instance. And even researchers who have been trained in fieldwork methodology often face many obstacles and challenges, no matter how well prepared they are.

This workshop thematises some of the challenges that “fieldworkers” typically are confronted with, and does so by deliberately “thinking outside the box”: While we rely on standard social science expertise and literature with insights from anthropologists, sociologists or political scientists, we also look *beyond*: to researchers who have engaged with particularly challenging fields (such as conflict areas); and to other professionals who are in daily close contact with human beings, often on delicate issues: mental health specialists (such as psychiatrists catering to survivors of political violence); investigative journalists; or translators (mediating between researchers and respondents; or between doctors and patients) – to name a few.

Over two days, this doctoral workshop aims to raise and discuss a number of issues that are of potential relevance to historians and qualitative social scientists while going beyond textbook advice: how to navigate the typical obstacles of fieldwork (such as: access, navigating power relations and ethical conundrums in the field, protecting oneself and the participants, etc.); how to deal with non-standard situations (such as having to rely on translators; moving

around dangerous areas); how to engage with vulnerable respondents (such as victims of violence or stigmatised groups); how to set up ethical research, etc.

Format and objectives

The workshop is structured around a series of invited speakers, each of whom will address a number of issues related to fieldwork through their own disciplinary/professional lens and experience. After each speaker, there will be time for discussion and questions.

The workshop takes place in hybrid format. The speakers will be physically present in Geneva; the participants can join in-person or via Zoom.

The workshop is open to everyone with an interest in the topic (regardless of discipline or affiliation)

Registration for the workshop is mandatory. Please register by **1st of May** in CUSO (<https://histoire.cuso.ch/contemporaine/accueil/>) or by email to nathborys@yahoo.fr

Access:

University of Geneva - **Uni Mail**

40 Boulevard Pont d'Arve

1205 Genève

Tram 15 (stop "Uni Mail"), 10 minutes from Genève Cornavin train station.

Or bus 1 (stop "Cirque", then a 5' walk).

Room M4050 is on the 4th floor to the *left* when entering the building by the main entrance (tram side).

Zoom link:

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Travel costs (train tickets) and costs for meals for registered in-person participants from CUSO institutions are offered by CUSO. Various cafeterias are available at Uni Mail and neighbouring University buildings for lunch. Microwave ovens are available on the ground floor of Uni Mail.

Tea and coffee will be available throughout the workshop in our seminar room. A closing apero will take place on Saturday afternoon, also in the seminar room.

Language

The workshop takes place in English. However, participants are welcome to express themselves in French, German, Italian, Russian or Ukrainian (we will help with translation if needed).

Preparatory work

Each participant should please send the instructors an e-mail with some details about

a) their own research (topic, stage of advancement etc.),

b) their motivation to join the workshop

c) their main current concerns and questions that they hope to elucidate during the workshop.

By **May 1, 2023** to nathborys@yahoo.fr and Lea.Sgier@unige.ch

Thank you!

PROGRAM

12 May 2023, Friday:

- 10:00-10:15 **Nataliya Borys, University of Fribourg**
Introduction. Why should we talk about fieldwork lessons? What kinds of lessons can be learnt from different disciplines?
- 10:15-11:30 **Lea Sgier, University of Geneva**
Ethics, power and methodology in fieldwork-based research: lessons learned in two decades of research, graduate teaching and supervision, and research consultancy
- 11:30 -12:00 Discussion
- 12:00-13:30 Lunch
- 13:30- 14:00 **Presentation of PhD students research topics and expectations**
- 14:00-14:30 **Ueli Steager, University of Geneva**
Fieldwork at Global South international organizations: Positionality, interviews, and „deep hanging out“
- 14:30-15:00 Discussion
- 15:00-15:15: Coffee-break

- 15:15-16:15 **Branwen Spector, LSE**
Going Ethnographic: Fieldwork Lessons for Historians about reflexivity, gender, race, class and other forms of subjective identity.
- 16:15-16:30 Discussion
- 16:30-16:45 Coffee-break
- 16:45-17:15 **Maryna Dubrovina, Ukrainian filmmaker**
Interviewing the Ukrainian Righteous (who saved the Jews during the Second World war) for the TV series. What went wrong in the interviews? How does the filmmaker cover such a topic? (screening the short extract with English subtitles). Discussion with Dubrovina (in Ukrainian with interpretation).
- 17:15-17:45 **Marta Havryshko, historian, URIS fellow, Basel University**
Interviewing the witnesses of the Holocaust in Ukraine. Gender dimensions of war and genocide.
- 17:45-18:15 Discussion
- 18:15-18:45 **Ielyzaveta Cleguer, Psychologist, HUG, Program Migrants**
Working with war migrants: psychologist's perspective
- 19:00-22:00 Dinner.

13 May 2023, Saturday:

- 09:00-09:30 **Discussion with PhD students about their research topics. Feedback from experts.**
- 09:30-10:00 **Peter Larsen (University of Geneva)**
"Other histories? 3 anthropological lessons grounded from ethnography in Vietnam"
- 10:00-10:15 Discussion
- 10:15-11:00 Coffee break
- 11:00-11:30 **Milica Garic, psychologist, CAPPI (Centre Ambulatoire de Psychiatrie et Psychothérapie Intégrée), HUG.**
Facing powerlessness in difficult interviews
- 11:30-12:00 Discussion
- 12:00-13:00 Lunch
- 13:30-14:00 **Nataliya Borys (UNIGE, UNIFR)**
Lost in Translation. Does language matter? Lessons learnt from the interpreter.
- 14:00-14:30 Discussion.

14:30-15:00 General discussion. Conclusions.
15:00 Closing apero

Biographic notices

Nataliya Borys is the coordinator of a project on cultural heritage in Ukraine at the University of Fribourg. She is the founder and editor of the research blog the Soviet History Lab.¹ She runs several cultural projects, such as Letters from Ukraine,² Post Tenebras Lux, and a film project about refugees in Switzerland. She also works as an interpreter for refugees in Geneva hospital and schools.

Marina Dubrovina is a Ukrainian filmmaker, script writer, and artist. She namely worked with the Assistant Director of the renowned Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986), who is considered one of the greatest directors in cinema history. She also made a film about Tarkovsky. After the annexation of Crimea, she gave up her film career in Russia and, at the age of 50, returned to Ukraine to start a new life. One of her films is a series about the Ukrainian Righteous who saved Jews during the Second World War. She made interviews in both Ukraine and Israel with the Righteous. The current war in Ukraine prevented her from completing the series. She is now a refugee in Geneva.

Milica Garic is a psychologist in Geneva, specialized in psychotherapy. She is interested in migration and has been working with asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors (RMNA). Nowadays she works with Ukrainian and other refugees at CAPPI (Centre Ambulatoire de Psychiatrie et Psychothérapie Intégrée).

Marta Havryshko holds a PhD in History from the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine). She is currently a Research Associate at the Department of Contemporary History of the Institute of Ukrainian Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. She has also held various fellowships in Warsaw, Hamburg, Jerusalem, the US, Vienna and elsewhere, including most recently in Basel (URIS fellow). Her research interests include the history of sexual violence in war, the history of gender and of women, the history of nationalism and feminism, the history of the Second World War and the Holocaust, oral history, and memory studies.

Peter Larsen is a Senior lecturer in environmental governance and territorial development at the University of Geneva. He has a strong interest critical theory, environmental anthropology and political ecology. His work addresses the intersection between environmental conservation and social equity concerns, including work in the fields of heritage, environmental governance, international human rights standards and sustainable development. Primary fieldwork sites include the Peruvian Amazon, Viet Nam and global level

¹ <https://acfsth.wordpress.com/>

² <https://acfsth.wordpress.com/2022/05/05/letters-from-ukraine/>

organizations and processes. He works extensively with international organizations, NGOs and community-based organizations through collaborative efforts and policy-oriented action research. As President of the [Interface Commission](#) he promotes new approaches to engaged anthropology and collaborative practice.

Lea Sgier is a political scientist with a focus on qualitative-interpretive methods. She has recently completed a research project on institutionalised elderly people's relation to politics in French speaking Switzerland (Leenaards Foundation 2017-20, with Barbara Lucas), involving 80+ interviews and participant observation. From 2010-17 she was a professor of qualitative methodology at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. Lea teaches qualitative methods for a number of graduate programmes across the world (UK, HK, Canada, MethodsNet, ECPR etc.). She also works as a consultant for methodology and research ethics, and has in the past been involved in research cooperation with the South Caucasus and the Western Balkans.

Branwen Spector is a lecturer in Anthropology at UCL in London and holds a PhD in Anthropology from LSE. She has done 36 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Occupied West Bank among Palestinian refugee and Israeli settler communities. She is the co-founder of *The New Ethnographer*, an on-line project launched in 2018 that dedicated to making fieldwork safer, healthier and more ethical for researchers around the world. She has hosted interactive fieldwork training workshops at the London School of Economics, the University of Lisbon, and the European University Institute. She is also the co-founder of the LSE Digital Ethnography Collective.

Ueli Staeger is a Research and Teaching Fellow (Maître-Assistant) at the University of Geneva. He also is an Associate Research Fellow at the United Nations University, Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies within the Regions and Cities Governance Lab Cluster (Re-LAB). He researches the dynamics of power and money at international organisations (IOs), with a focus on peace and security. His empirical focus is on the African Union's resource mobilization and partnerships. He was a visiting researcher at the Department of International Relations, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and is an associated researcher at the Global Governance Center, Geneva Graduate Institute, Geneva. He is also a member of the steering committee at the Geneva Africa Lab.