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Autobiographical International Relations (IR) is arguably becoming a burgeoning field, and it is inhabited especially but not exclusively by scholars performing fieldwork in political science and international relations. The autobiographic accounts range from a semi-fictional autobiographical narrative (Dauphinee 2013) and stories of becoming an IR researcher (e.g., Inayatullah 2011) to elucidation of what it takes to do fieldwork (Krause – Szekely 2020). Three different layers can be discerned in the autobiographical texts. The first layer is concerned with methodology. The authors are sharing the good and the bad of fieldwork with their fellow researchers, offering practical advice or warning against making some common mistakes. They explain how to navigate both in the field and while translating the mosaic of fieldwork notes, fleeting images and hard-won emotions into coherent academic writing back in the safety of the university. The second layer is supposed to unveil the magic process of discovery, how the authors arrived at their knowledge and arguments, and how the circumstances of the fieldwork transformed both the research design and the preconceptions of the researcher. And the third layer is attempting to bring the researcher into the text. Whereas in mainstream academic texts, *"the writer presents herself/himself as absent, as distant, and as indifferent to the writing and ideas"* (Inayatullah 2011: 5), autobiographical, narrative and reflexive works attempt to include the researcher not only as an inherent part of the research process but also as an inextricable element of the final manuscripts. The reviewed volume clearly accentuates the third layer, the personalities of the researchers and their bodies and souls involved in the fieldwork. As the title indicates, the central topic in navigating the collected texts was the concept of failure while doing fieldwork. Therefore, the goal of the book is to unravel to what extent fieldwork can be understood as a mechanical data gathering and to what extent it is contingent on factors susceptible to accidents, emotions and (human) errors. That can be considered as a bold move. Writing about failure in doing academic work is uncommon, as it is usually the success that gets published. Moreover, the failures that are the subjects of the chapters are reflected upon on a very intimate level.

This collection of deeply personal testimonies is edited by Katarina Kušić and Jakub Záhora, who, at the time of conceiving the idea of the book, were in the early stages of their scholarly careers. Katarina Kušić studied International Politics at Aberystwyth and is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Advanced Studies — Southeast Europe (University

of Rijeka), a co-convener of the BISA South East Europe Working Group, and the Communications Officer for the *Journal of International Relations and Development*. Jakub Záhora read International Relations at SOAS in London and Charles University in Prague and is currently a visiting Ernst Mach Fellow at the Austrian Institute of International Affairs. Most of the contributors of the individual chapters can be similarly considered as early career researchers.

Following the introduction by the two editors, the book is divided into four sections and concluded by a reflecting chapter. The first section, titled "Successfully Making the Researcher," includes three chapters and explores the meaning of being a researcher – both for the scholars themselves and for their interlocutors. All three of the treatises in this section underline the importance of the researchers' bodies being present in their fieldwork, albeit from different perspectives. Jan Daniel and Sezer Idil Göğüş in their respective chapters stress the intersubjectivity of the fieldwork encounters and the expectations of the researcher(s) and interlocutor(s), which may either create an atmosphere of trust, openness and sharing or, on the contrary, remain on the level of rejection, reluctance or hostility. Both authors stress that many of the perceptions and expectations of the interlocutors are exogenous to the research encounters and therefore outside of the control of the researchers themselves. Therefore, despite careful preparations, interviews may go wrong because the researcher is not considered soldierly or laddish enough (pp. 18–19) or because they wear glasses (pp. 32–33). Yet at other times, if the researcher shows distress and weakness, it invites the empathy of the interlocutors and helps to create a welcoming setting for the collaboration (pp. 23–24). The body or rather the soul of the researcher is also highlighted in the very intimate chapter by Jakub Záhora. By sharing his (field)notes from his periods of serious depression, he draws attention to both the emotional strenuousness of fieldwork, especially in areas hit by conflicts, and the lack of institutional support for maintaining the mental health of scholars. His revelations of how his illness helped him to grasp his alterity are illuminating. As other chapters in the volume show (e.g. those by Emma McCluskey and Ewa Maczynska), researchers may find themselves in a situation where they feel resentment or incomprehension towards their interlocutors. It was the distance and incommensurability between his two different selves (the self-in-the-extremely-serious-mental-health-condition and the-relatively-improved-self)

that enabled Jakub Záhora *"to harness empathy"* (p. 44) for groups he had previously had to work hard to comprehend.

The second section bears the title "Situating Knowledge" and similarly contains three chapters, though they are rather disparate. The first one (Chapter 4 in the book) is in the form of a *"stylised conversation"* (p. 50) between Johannes Gunesch and Amina Nolte. In their conversation they attempt both to conceptualise and to deconstruct failure as they contemplate many different aspects of failing in fieldwork and in academic research in general. It helps greatly to maintain the dynamic of the chapter that the two authors come from different disciplines (Political Science and Sociology/ Anthropology). Arguably, this chapter is so rich in the topics it addresses that it would deserve a more prominent position within the book, either as one of the introductory chapters or as a concluding one. The second chapter of the second section (Chapter 5) is written by Holger Niemann, who discusses the positionality of the researcher and the resulting (often obtained) partiality. While doing his fieldwork at the United Nations, he gained access to the UN as a civil society representative. That particular status enabled him to enter the UN premises, hold interviews with various interlocutors and take part in official meetings. But the civil society representative status also restricted his access to certain places, compelling him to take assigned routes or elevators within the UN buildings, and it forced him to be only a distant observer of the Security Council negotiations. Therefore through his status he could discover only certain aspects of the UN, and his research was doomed to a degree of partiality, though it was not necessarily to the detriment of his final manuscript. In Chapter 6 Lydia C. Cole explores instances of affective responses that *"run contra to myths of an unencumbered, unemotional researcher"* (p. 78). She discusses her two fieldwork encounters where real or perceived emotions that she, as the researcher, took note of changed the dynamic of the interview and opened a different perspective through which she could understand the substance of what she was investigating. In this way she argues that affective responses should not be regarded as research failures but as a *"potential site for learning and unlearning our preconceptions, experiences, and training"* (p. 88).

The third section, "Understanding and Connecting," is opened by Emma McCluskey and her fitting reflection on the (im)possibility of

understanding and connecting with interlocutors invariably, notwithstanding the possible reciprocal distrust or even aversion between the interviewer and the interviewees. McCluskey poses a troubling question: whether overhauling the research design in order to be able to interrogate more approachable social groups can be considered a research failure. Perhaps an even more disquieting topic, which is highlighted in this chapter, concerns the researcher's dilemma of whether to exclude some fieldwork experience and findings from the final text. What should be done with evidence that may contradict the desired outcome of a project, especially a project that is not strictly academic, but more practice-oriented like the one performed by McCluskey that aimed to re-humanise migrants? She saw the danger of encouraging the far-right narrative of undeserving migrants by including some of the events she witnessed in a refugee camp in her report, and decided against it, supported by her peers. Another issue that appears in her chapter is taken on by Desirée Poets, the author of chapter 8 – the question of commodification of knowledge production and of making a living from the failings and sufferings of others. Poets perhaps reverses that problem by reflecting on her failure to make her research meaningful and relevant to both academia and the communities where she performed her fieldwork. In her second fieldwork vignette, Poets underlines the difficulty of dealing with sexual harassment during fieldwork, emphasising the lack of institutional support for researchers in this regard. The third chapter of this section questions the process of reflexivity. Ewa Maczynska blames her own attempt at maximum reflexivity for her not being *"able to make sense of where [she] failed without running the risk of reproducing the very dynamics that led [her] to fail in the first place"* (p. 116). She argues that the reflexivity that (white, European) researchers apply when dealing with the marginalised (persons of colour, Muslims, immigrants) may in fact result in reproducing the European gaze, while disrespecting the *"multiple and complex axes of privilege and oppression"* of each individual stakeholder of the fieldwork project. Danielle House, in Chapter 10, communicates to a great extent with Desirée Poets as they both attempt to reconcile the requirements of the academic environment and the needs of the communities where the field research is conducted. House was perhaps more successful in her collaboration with the communities she researched, which she skilfully portrays; however, it was to the detriment of her advancement in academia.

The fourth section, "Writing as Translation," consists of two chapters. In the first one, Renata Summa elaborates on the issue of legitimacy of a researcher from several perspectives. On the one hand, young scholars must defend their belonging in a scholarly community. Therefore, doing fieldwork becomes a legitimising experience for them vis-à-vis their academic peers. However, at the same time, the scholar becomes scrutinised in the field itself regarding their legitimacy. Moving on to the next chapter, being Brazilian and doing fieldwork in Sarajevo, Renata Summa repeatedly faced the question of *"why would anyone from Brazil be interested in Bosnia?"* (p. 141). Referring back to the first two chapters, the Brazilian identity of the researcher, something she could not change, became an inherent part of the research project, for better or worse. Another theme appearing in this chapter is the (im)possibility of transferring the multi-layered knowledge gained during fieldwork into a coherent, levelled text. Katarina Kušić follows this up in the next chapter by contemplating including herself in the final version of her Ph.D. thesis. She initially decides against it for her fear of the thesis not being accepted by the examiners and also of the thesis being perceived as not objective enough. However, she excludes herself from the text also to avoid her personal stories being turned *"into something to be consumed"* (p. 157), given the trend of commodification of success in neoliberal academia.

Chapter 13 is the only one in the last section, titled "Concluding Reflections," and is authored by Berit Bliesemann de Guevara and Xymena Kurowska. After a short vignette from the field, which describes how an initial failure turned into a successful project delivery, the authors conceptualise four socio-political facets of fieldwork failure: (1) structural conditions and epistemological script, (2) contingency, or circumstances, (3) anxiety and (4) privilege, and they argue for reinscribing fieldwork failure through several strategies – micro-tactics, exposure, and the capacity of surprise and reflexivity through positionality (p. 171), strategies that were amply applied by all the contributors to the volume.

Most of the chapters touch on more than one aspect of fieldwork failure and that is why it must have been difficult to structure the book into the sections. Some chapters pursue similar topics and yet are in different sections: Sezer Idil Göğüş and Renata Summa both deal with the foreignness of the researcher, Desirée Poets and Danielle House both examine the

impact on researched communities, and Jan Daniel, Emma McCluskey and Ewa Maczynska all discuss their (in)ability to bond with their interlocutors. But the question of order does not in any sense reduce the depth and breadth of the fieldwork failure investigation put forward by this volume. All the authors deserve respect for sharing intimate experiences and their reflections of their perceived failures. Some, if not most of these failures are not necessarily connected to fieldwork only but are familiar to those doing social science, though perhaps in different settings. It is applaudable that by disclosing their supposed failures, most of the authors refrain from the temptation to turn these defeats into victories, though most of the final results of their fieldwork could be considered successes (= publication). Though it is disquieting, by disclosing their failures and treating them as failures, the authors together created a poignant volume to be shared with fellow researchers.

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