Qualitative Transparency Deliberations

hosted by the Social Science Research Institute at Duke University on behalf of the APSA Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research
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Good examples and best practices?

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Good examples and best practices?

Posted: **Wed Sep 14, 2016 2:03 pm**
by **SheenaGreitens**
What are good examples of work where a researcher has been sufficiently transparent in research in authoritarian settings? What are innovative and useful practices that researchers in this field might adopt?

Re: Good examples and best practices?

Posted: **Tue Nov 01, 2016 4:55 pm**
by **ebellin**
What follows is a comment submitted by Sheila Carapico, University of Richmond:

I would insist that whenever and however possible researchers rely on public transcripts: writings, speeches, performances, documentaries, and so forth. Our field (Middle East political science) fetishizes the interview as especially authentic and original. Many researchers interview 'subjects' rather than citing their publications – this is the case with activists working for organizations that publish written reports, for instance, or hold press conferences. This is burdensome for interviewees, and it privileges "our" questions over what they want to make public. Of course, 'triangulation' is also essential, to verify information; the most vulgar form of interview fetish treats any 'native informant' as an expert. Newspapers and broadcasters vary widely in their coverage and reliability, but are worth studying carefully. Moreover, nowadays the availability of blogs, twitter-feeds, and so forth makes it possible to do 'fieldwork' from afar – as more and more places become increasingly dangerous for both scholars and their human sources, these techniques need to be elevated and refined. Again, multiple sources, and heavy reliance on public domain materials are good practices.
And credit, via proper citations, to 'local' scholars' or journalists' research is mandatory.

Re: Good examples and best practices?

Posted: **Tue Nov 01, 2016 5:02 pm**
by **ebellin**
What follows is a comment submitted by Jill Crystal, Auburn University:

It's bad enough that people can't work in much of the Middle East as it is. (Flying back from Qatar last year - which typically means Iraq-Syria-Turkey I noticed we just flew over Iran and turned left - so the places we study are now too dangerous to *fly over*)

Even when times were better most of my interviews I just did as background. Once I figured out what was going on, I found public sources that would demonstrate what I'd figured out privately.

I think we're already seeing a shift to looking at social media, texts, GIS, anything you can do from here. I don't know that I would feel right encouraging a graduate student to go to more than a handful of places.

One thing I did when researching police was (and you had to even in places like Kuwait) get permission from the Interior Ministry and cast it as criminal justice, rather than policing.

Re: Good examples and best practices?

Posted: **Tue Nov 01, 2016 5:11 pm**
by **ebellin**
What follows is a comment submitted by Charles Kurzman, UNC:

I am less worried about the reliability of the research product than its validity. If we do not trust researchers to report faithfully on their findings, then all is lost. Many insights cannot be reproduced with non-human sources of information. My view is that academia is a guild, and that social interaction with patrons and colleagues is the best deterrent (and occasionally alarm system) for scholarly malfeasance. If somebody is making something up, or exaggerating, or ignoring important evidence, we are more likely to detect it through social conversations than through formal rules.

That said, I think it is best practice to leave one's research notes for posterity, to the extent that our respondents will allow. It is so sad to me that valuable notes disappear when researchers retire. File cabinets -- and now hard disks -- full of fascinating material are lost to future research! Even if we cannot be transparent to our readers now, surely we can devise ways of being transparent to the future. I like the idea of depositing our research materials in a data archive, perhaps with an embargo of 25 years or more, so that we preserve a greater proportion of the materials we worked so hard to collect.

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