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Biography and International Relations

Thursday 4 June 2026 15:00 (1h 30m)

Biography has long been central to political and historical scholarship, but its presence in International Relations (IR) has been more muted and uneven. IR has seldom treated biography as a self-conscious method with distinct evidentiary standards, analytic benefits, and implications for disciplinary history. This panel explores the significance of biography for IR, arguing that biographical approaches offer crucial insights into how individuals shape, inhabit, and contest global political orders. While IR has traditionally marginalized the individual, privileging structural or systemic explanations, a growing body of scholarship in foreign policy analysis, histories of international thought, affect theory, and feminist and postcolonial theory have reintroduced lived experience to the field. Could IR scholars not only be consumers of biography but also producers—biographers who write lives that traverse intellectual, political, and disciplinary borders? This panel advances the proposition that biography can constitute a distinct mode of inquiry in IR rather than a supplementary narrative device.

Track Classification: Contemporary Research on International Political Theory Working Group