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Notes from "the Field"

Julian Jamison and Chris Blattman are in the field. Meanwhile my colleague Noompa ruminates on our use of the term "field"

I don't want to get all Heart of Darkness on you, but really, there is a subtext here: the field as the other to the developed world of an NGO's headquarters. I have been guilty of carelessly referring to trips to, and workers in, "the field" myself. We can all do better. Maybe I am just making a big deal out of nothing. But think about it this way: if you happen to be a local employee working on a project in the field, what sort of place are you being put in? Your home is the location of the other? You are the other? I am not claiming a vast neo-colonial conspiracy here...just musing on how our usage of certain terms may be creating a narrative that is worrying.

I have certainly been guilty of this, and it does make me somewhat uncomfortable, but what are the alternatives?

Also I think there is a subtle difference between "fieldwork" and being "in the field." I would say that my colleague Brooke working on a project in Oklahoma is "doing fieldwork," but would it be odd to say that she is "in the field"?

What do you think? Would love to hear especially from people in developing countries.

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