

Research Ethics: Between protocol and practice in Central Asia

Madeleine Reeves
Social Anthropology
University of Manchester

Speaking personally....

- ... as a social anthropologist
 - Doing ethnographic and interview research in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Russia
 - Based at at UK university
 - Affiliated with a Kyrgyz University and Research Centre
 - Funded by UK research councils and funding bodies...
- General ethical principles; but specificity of research projects and contexts

Two discussions of “ethics”

- 2003
 - “Have you thought about ethics?”
 - Do you know how to come home in an emergency?
- 2008
 - Give us an exact list of all the questions you will ask
 - “How will you get your data home safely if there is no DHL?”
 - Protocol designed for medical studies

Lederman: “virtual” vs. “real” ethics

“Participant observation-based field research involves the long-term cultivation of social relationships as both the medium and the substantive content of that work: relationships in and through which the IRB mandated concern with “informed consent” comes to make local sense. What is more, ... the cultivation of social relationships must proceed in critical respects on ones *informants*’ terms—not on the researcher’s terms and under his or her control (as is the case in interview-based and experimental social science). Because participant observers aren’t in control of the research process, the ethical challenges that they face in their projects cannot be known in advance except in vague and inaccurate ways.

Because participant observation is a necessarily non-methodical method... IRBs’ mandated insistence on *prospective* reviews of research set anthropologists up to fudge, circumlocute, and fake their descriptions of project “design”, “subject selection”, “informed consent”, and the rest.” (Rena Lederman, *Educate your IRB*)

1) “Ethical clearance” as a starting-point, not an end point

- In Batken/Sokh
 - Living with a family, becoming “enfielded”
 - Initial focus on border guarding changed
 - Anonymity ≠ confidentiality
 - “Please tell the world” ...

2) Research as a negotiated exchange

- In Batken/Moscow:
 - Can you help me get to Britain to work?
 - How will this research help us?
 - To interview in places of work, or not?
 - Dealing with flexible legalities..

3) Between mascot and spy: research in authoritarian political contexts

- “Karimov is a goat”
- “Who sent you here?”
- Commitments to multiple communities of research

States of Conflict: Gender, x Support Services for Asylum x www.theasa.org/ethics/Ethi x New laws that cast NGOs as: x

blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2012/11/09/russia-academic-threat/

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For the peace process in the Basque Country to be successful, it is vital that authorities understand the discourses which have been used to legitimise ETA's political violence.

Brussels: blog round up for 3 – 9 November: UK pushes for EU budget cut, nearly 5 million unemployed in Spain, and will Obama bring EU & US closer together?

Nov 9 2012

New laws that cast NGOs as “foreign agents” illustrate the threat to academic collaboration in Russia.

Blog Admin

*In July, the Russian government passed a law forcing foreign funded NGOs to register as “foreign agents”. **Elena Omelchenko** and **Anna Zheina** write that this law is part of a trend for Russian authorities to attack social scientists that collaborate outside of the country and are funded by “western money”. This attitude threatens to seriously undermine the development of the social sciences in Russia.*

There can be no overstatement of the current threat posed to Sociology and sociologists in Russia today. Our concern arises, on the one hand, from a recent anonymous publication that appeared on one of the regional news portals which, at first glance, might be treated with a pinch of salt rather than viewed as the start of some wider campaign against academia. On the other hand, however, the confidence with which this self-same denunciation is written and the relative depth of knowledge of the author (evident from the extensive use of quotations and references), as well as the willingness of the portal to allow itself to be linked to such a document, is clear evidence that such texts

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Dilemmas...

- What really constitutes “informed” consent?
- How often should consent be repeated?
- To create a paper trail, or not?
- What if somebody does not want to remain anonymous?
- Anonymize names of places as well as people?
- Which narratives to include and exclude?

“Ethical and legal dilemmas occur at all stages of research - in the selection of topic, area or population, choice of sponsor and source of funding, in negotiating access, making 'research bargains' and during the research itself conducting fieldwork, in the interpretation and analysis of results and in the publication of findings and the disposal of data.” (ASA Ethical Guidelines)

References

- ASA Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice (http://www.theasa.org/ethics/Ethical_guidelines.pdf)
- Laura Adams, “The Mascot Researcher: Identity, Power and Knowledge in Fieldwork”. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* **August 1999** vol. 28 no. 4 **331-363**
- Rena Lederman, “Educate your IRB: An Experiment in Cross-Disciplinary Communication”. *Anthropology News* 48 (6): 33-4.