



An Ethical Approach to Research

Global Ethnographies of Parliaments, Politicians and People, funded by the European Research Council (ERC)

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Introduction

Global Ethnographies of Parliaments, Politicians and People: representation, relationships and ruptures (EoPPP) is a programme of research co-ordinated by SOAS, University of London (2019-2024). This document summarises our approach to ethics, key principles and some of the processes we will commit to as a team. We aim to supplement the ERC's requirements for ethics, which tend to focus on consent and data protection, with other aspects that we are just as concerned about, such as prevention of harm, climate change and IPR.

We propose taking 10 principles seriously as we develop and debate our ethical approach and practices. We see these processes as complex and often contradictory,

requiring debate and negotiation. For examples of contradictions, consider these: challenging hate speech may put us in danger; seeking consent might put some informants in a state of worry; one interlocutor's honesty can be falsehood for another, and so on.

We will regularly review how we are doing against these principles and report to our Ethics Advisor, Dr Gerhard Anders (University of Edinburgh), and in our reports to the European Research Council (ERC), while he reports to the ERC at regular intervals as well.

This document is a work-in-progress. We expect that through engagement with our various field sites, and in the collaborative relationships we develop with each other and our interlocutors, our understanding of what ethics means in practice will deepen, gain nuance and become firmly grounded in the relationships and knowledge that emerge over the course of the research.

It is likely that we will research and publish on some aspects of our ethics, focusing on how to work collaboratively. When writing about each other, we will seek each other's consent and get approval from team members if writing about them in publications. We will keep a copy of this document on our website not because this is a piece of scholarship but as a way of being transparent about our ethics.

The PI will take overall responsibility for the implementation, review and evaluation of ethics while all members of the team have responsibility for aspiring towards these shared principles and processes.

1. Respect for law and regulations

Various national laws or administrative regulations will influence the way our research is conducted. These laws vary by jurisdiction, so what may be acceptable in one field site may be problematic in another. As a rule of thumb, written proof of permission to research in each country is needed before we start fieldwork. However, such rules may not apply in particular instances, such as when making a very brief visit to a site to gain a general understanding rather than collecting data. Researchers will comply with all relevant national legislation. We keep in mind that these legal matters also extend to data dissemination and storage and that social research data is (for the most part) not privileged under law. While this is the case with any research, it is a particularly sensitive issue with regards to parliaments and politicians. Some steps we take to ensure that we keep in line with the laws and regulations of our respective field sites will include:

- Formally consulting the legal department *and* the Data Protection Officer (DPO) to find out about the legal basis of the research and whether the research design poses any risk of breaking the law;
- Establishing the appropriate local processes for fulfilling our legal obligations should any researcher be alerted to serious criminality or wrongdoing in the course of their work, including our safeguarding obligations and our obligation to protect our participants' confidentiality as far as is possible;
- Keeping copies of any consent forms of an institutional nature and uploading them onto our knowledge management system (Glasscubes).

These are the key bodies that offer guidance and will inform and regulate our approach to ethics in this research:

Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) [guidelines](#)

SOAS [research ethics](#)

European Research Council (ERC) [guide](#)

United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) [guidance](#)

2. Consent and privacy

This research is not only a means of discovery, but an end which requires the dissemination of information about our interlocutors. We will ensure that the physical, social and psychological well-being of those with whom we conduct our study are protected, and that their rights, interests, sensitivities and privacy are respected, other than in the most exceptional of circumstances. This will require strict rules in terms of consent, confidentiality and record keeping.

When seeking their consent, the data subject must be informed about his or her right to withdraw consent for participation at any time prior to the publication of project outputs. The withdrawal must be as easy as giving consent. General forms, and any country specific consent form plus explanation of the research, need to be kept in a folder in our knowledge management system (Glasscubes) – see annex 1 for our template form. Researchers should also keep all copies of individual consent in their own password protected devices.

For consent to be informed and specific, the data subject must be notified, in language that is comprehensible to them, of:

- the data controller's identity
- what kind of data will be processed and how it will be used, including the specific purpose(s) of the processing for which the personal data will be used

- the subject's rights as guaranteed by the GDPR and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, in particular the right to withdraw consent or access their data, the procedures to follow should they wish to do so, and the right to lodge a complaint with a supervisory authority
- information as to whether data will be shared with or transferred to third parties and for what purposes
- how long the data will be retained before they are destroyed
- what the research is about
- what their participation in the research will entail
- any risks that may be involved
-

We will also provide participants with:

- the names and contact details of the principle investigator and relevant researchers
- who is funding the research
- details of who else is involved in the project
- information on why they have been chosen to take part
- information about participation being voluntary, that participants can refuse to answer questions and that withdrawal of participation or refusal will not affect a participant's relationship with the researcher or SOAS
- information on whether the participant will be recorded, and how any recordings may be used
- information about how participant's personally identifying information will be kept confidential except when information that raises safeguarding concerns is disclosed, or if the researcher witnesses the participant committing a crime
- an opportunity to ask questions about the project

Given the open-ended and long-term nature of the fieldwork, ethical decision-making has to be undertaken repeatedly throughout the research and in response to specific circumstances. We should expect to encounter ethical dilemmas at every stage of our research, and should make good-faith efforts to identify potential ethical conflicts and be open to discuss such issues.

3. Data protection and freedom of information

It is our duty to inform the interviewee of their rights under any copyright or data protection laws of the country where research takes place. We are required to be transparent with what could happen with the data (e.g., research, educational use, publication, broadcasting etc) and this is best done at the time of the interview. Valid consent for taking data needs to be clear and affirmative (it cannot be silent or "inferred" by inactivity). As far as possible, we will involve the people from the groups

and organisations being studied in the planning and execution of research projects. We will recognise that our obligations to the participants or the host community will not end with the completion of our fieldwork or research project.

We recognise that research participants have contractual and/or legal interests and rights in data, recordings and publications, although rights will vary according to agreements and legal jurisdictions. The data will be processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures.

Each researcher will ensure that their data is either pseudonymised or anonymised from the data collection phase (for example in field-notes) to ensure that sensitive data about individuals is protected unless individuals agree to be identified. The difference between data being anonymised (so that the subject can not be identified) or pseudonymised (so that any identifying information is kept separately).

The timing of these processes is important. Any raw material containing personal data will be protected securely until the point at which they are deleted or rendered anonymous. As far as is possible we will anticipate potential threats to confidentiality and anonymity, while considering whether it is necessary even as a matter of propriety to record certain information at all. We will make sure that all our researchers are aware of these rules and implement them at all times.

To prevent unauthorised access to data the following security measures will be in place: (a) *Encryption* of all mobile devices (e.g., default encryption level for Windows 10 is BitLocker. BitLocker uses Advanced Encryption Standard to encrypt data on the drives, including individual password protected files); (b) Utilising our *knowledge management system* (Glasscubes) as a secure-GDPR compliant tool where appropriate, (c) Individual researchers in the project team are *not file sharing* raw data sets (including individualised fieldwork diaries and logs) through that platform; (d) Avoiding unsecured internet Wifi to access project data.

All data we collect will properly protected, minimised, and destroyed when no longer needed, as the failure to do so could have devastating consequences for our interlocutors. When audio-visual media is to be used, be it merely for data-gathering or for broader representational purposes such as producing ethnographic films or photographic essays, our interlocutors will be made aware of the technical capacities of these media and will be free to reject their use. Furthermore, we are aware that Subject Access Requests (SAR) by research participants can be made. If we have any doubts about the safety of sharing field notes (e.g., they could compromise the anonymity of another individual without us realising or revealing sensitive political information, we will err on the side of caution). In circumstances where difficult

judgements are required, we will seek the advice of the SOAS data protection officer with regards to such data privacy issues: dataprotection@soas.ac.uk

4. Honesty and transparency

Our compliance with fundamental ethical rules and principles will be met with an ongoing commitment, both to one another and to our interlocutors, to honestly and clearly discuss, debate and negotiate the claims we are making in our research and their relationship to ethical research practice. We believe that this commitment to honesty and transparency will mean that we all have a better chance of adhering to our principles.

We will substantiate all the claims we make in our research to ensure both academic rigour and respect for our research participants. This will call for a great deal of cooperation, as we comment on each other's work, hold one another to account, and seek to create the same opportunities with research participants. We will not put our research into the public domain without consultation within the team and, where possible, at least the key protagonists likely to be affected by our findings.

As part of this collaborative approach, we require of each other a commitment to reflexivity, which in turn relies on a struggle towards honesty and transparency about our own impact on our research and on each other. This is vitally important to this project and scholarship in general. While all of the themes outlined in these ethics guidelines weave into one another, it is honesty and transparency which are key for getting beyond rules and rhetoric.

5. Safety, wellbeing and mental and physical health

The mental and physical safety of both researchers and interlocutors is our top priority. With that in mind, we realise it is important to remember that all the sites contain their own (and often shared) risks, dangers, and threats. These include potential violence in field sites along with exposure to the COVID virus, both of which can have serious consequences for both researchers and interlocutors in unpredictable ways. While we are trained as anthropologists to be sensitive to the possible consequences of our work, and endeavour to guard against predictably harmful effects, there are always going to be risks and safety issues that we are unaware of or can't anticipate.

We will rely on the expertise of insiders who have a greater understanding of not only how to avoid such risks in fast-changing environments, but also how to mitigate them. These collaborations between our knowledgeable colleagues and interlocutors in

each field site and us as researchers will form the basis of both our risk assessments and any steps we will take to mitigate risks. These risk assessments will be revisited and revised over the course of the project.

When assessing the ethical issues arising from the research, we must also be mindful to manage the risk of discrimination, stigmatisation or political danger that we ourselves might face in the field.

It is important to note that risk and safety do not solely arise from the consequences of fieldwork or publication, but also relate to issues surrounding mental health and pressures from institutions. Certainly, the adverse effects of the pandemic (other than the physical symptoms for those infected) have yet to be fully understood. While collaboration and accountability are a separate section, we should remember that these do not exclusively relate to productive outputs, but are also important with regards to mutual support and collective responsibility. This will be put into practice through regular group and one-to-one sessions to give people the opportunity to voice any concerns or issues they may be facing.

6. Intellectual Property Rights

We aspire to recognise both the value of collaborative research and learning but also the intellectual property rights of all researchers working on EoPPP in the face of various hierarchies of power, status and knowledge. We recognise that in some traditions, especially within science, academics privilege the authorship of more senior academics when outputs are ‘co-produced’. This means they put their name on books or articles without making much contribution to the ideas or the writing. Often their name comes first rather than being alphabetical. Junior researchers are invited to collect data but then do not have their names on articles at all. For those facing exclusions within academia on the basis of their identity (gender, age, seniority, nationality, or race), resonating with wider social inequalities, it can be especially difficult to challenge these norms.

We will commit to a high standard of both collaboration and respecting IPRs in this programme, while recognising the tension, as follows:

- *Single-authorship*: where researchers are writing about their own site (Richard Axelby about Sheffield/India, Jastinder Kaur on Fiji, Cristiane Brum Bernardes on Brazil, Mitiku Gabrehiwot on Ethiopia, Emma Crewe on Westminster and the US), then we will expect our publications to be single-authored. If writing entirely from our own fieldwork data, then we will inform the team, and share drafts of our publications, but will not necessarily assume co-authorship is an

expectation. Our data from our specific site can't be used by others without our permission. When we visit each other's fieldwork sites, and want to include an insight from that place in one of our publications, then we need to check with the principal scholar of that place that we are respecting their intellectual property. Similarly when writing about someone else's theme we need to make sure we reference their work. In general, we will reference each other's work in recognition of our influence on each other.

- *Co-production*: If we write together we will negotiate the order of the authors throughout the process. The order may change in the light of how much time researchers have managed to put into that output. Anyone who has contributed to the ideas or data will be considered for inclusion as an author and we would only exclude a researcher in exceptional circumstances (e.g., security reasons, self-exclusion). When employing researchers, we will ensure that they get opportunities to publish at least as co-authors. We will not include researchers as authors if they have not contributed to that piece of work but will acknowledge their influence (e.g., in acknowledgements or in a footnote).

7. Challenging racism, misogyny and hate speech

Our field sites all suffer from increasing levels of hate, especially expressed via social media. Whilst our engagement with the process of ethical review and our compliance with relevant laws and regulations may seem to render the point somewhat moot, in the context of this increasing polarisation we feel it's important to publicly commit to avoid contributing to hate speech. To innovate in research, we need to explore differences but the process of expressing disagreement is as important as the content – often they are not separable, because a stuck, repetitive process makes it impossible for people to listen and learn from each other in ways that enable movement of thought. The symptom is polarised viewpoints expressed with minimal shifts in thinking. The indicator of a good conversation, and wider research process, is that movement of thought and expression is in evidence.

In an effective team, the key influencers will change depending on context. Although we all have areas of expertise, people asking questions from a position of relative ignorance – or not taking as much for granted and making repeated assumptions – can generate new insight. In line with the code of honesty and transparency mentioned above, expressing difference and disagreement within the team is helpful and generative. Well-facilitated conversations can lead to new insights, even (or perhaps especially) in the face of disagreement, rather than fossilise into divisive polarities. Importantly, while recognising that neutrality is not possible in any politics

domain, we see it as the duty of the researcher to not actively wade in on any moments of conflict on social media in ways that inflame any kind of hate or violence.

The exponential growth of social media has brought with it an unfortunate increase in the propagation of hate speech. Hate speech is commonly defined as any communication that disparages a person or a group on the basis of some characteristics such as race, colour, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion. Hate speech and action are also a central theme of our research so we will develop not only our understanding of politicians' and activists' roles in this but ideas about how to challenge them. There are, however, complexities with regards to knowing what belongs to the category of hate and what constitutes a robust exchange of words and ideas. If such incidents should occur, cooperative approaches involving discussions within the team will be pivotal to determine whether such speech could have potentially harmful consequences and if anticipated, what the most ethical course of action might be.

8. Protection of the environment

Our commitment to avoid damage to the environment arises from the clear evidence that human influence on the climate system is harmful, and recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history. As a result, it is important that we calculate the carbon footprint of our research, including domestic and international travel. Once this is completed, we will outline a list of all domestic and international flights taken and calculate the total carbon emissions of travel. Not only will this make us more transparency, but being observant of our carbon footprint could possibly produce an impetus to reduce it where possible.

We will endeavour to reduce our carbon footprint: as examples –

- fewer long-haul flights (for some field sites) so making less frequent trips but staying for longer
- going paperless
- actively looking for ways to recycle
- reducing meat consumption where possible
- minimizing private car and taxi use

There will undoubtedly be times during the research where such actions are not possible. They may even be counterproductive for the research (such as interlocutors offering a lift/food which could potentially be interpreted as rude or insulting if rejected). The team will continue to look for ways to reduce our carbon footprint and communicate these strategies to other research programmes.

9. Representation of interlocutors

After we have gathered data in our respective field sites, we will publish the ethnographic material into books, journal articles, blogs, films, and other media. How our interlocutors are represented in our research is one of the key considerations at the heart of the discipline of anthropology. The representation of peoples by anthropologists in their writing is never neutral, nor is it objective as understood by positivist science. Rather, we are aware that the lens of interpretation through which an image is seen is in fact part of the image itself.

This understanding does not, however, give us the license to represent our interlocutors in whatever way we wish. For ethnography to be considered ethical, the participant should feel recognised in the output of the research, except in exceptional circumstances. Depending on the subject matter, we may find ourselves critiquing interlocutors whether individuals or organisations. Since we are writing about groups and processes more than individuals, it is the taking account of plurality that makes ethnographic research hard work. And it is an anthropologist's concern with the effects of their writings on the lives of the people represented, which makes the practice of ethnography a struggle towards ethics. We do not aim for an absolutely truthful account, but the provisional truth of complexity, and an account that is as persuasive as possible at any given moment.

To produce outputs in which our interlocutors feel recognized, at least mostly, is no easy task given their diversity. Establishing robust practices of consent across the project will go some way to ensuring our interlocutors are treated respectfully. However, it is our job as anthropologists to go further, and carefully balance the protection of the physical, social and psychological well-being of those we work with, respecting their rights, interests, sensitivities and privacy as individuals, groups and organisations. To ensure the most plausible representation we can achieve, we must be open with the interlocutors as to what it is we are doing, and be sensitive to the possible consequences of our research in order to guard against predictably harmful effects.

The practices of collaboration and holding each other to account (see below), as well as our ongoing commitment to honesty and transparency in our work (see above) are the tools with which we hope to represent our interlocutors with integrity and respect, even if that may involve constructive critique on occasions. This process will call on us to be highly self-reflexive in our representation, and to recognise both our work's inherent positionality and anticipate its potential uses as far as possible.

10. Collaboration and accountability

These principles will be fruitless if we fail to engage with them in practice. We will pay attention to them as individuals, but also as a group of researchers. Accountability to both the team and our interlocutors will be improved by a shared commitment to:

- Collaborating with each other. This will include engaging in team meetings, undertaking training together to develop our skills, sharing draft outputs for comment and challenge, and committing to discussing, in an honest and transparent way: – how we are progressing, managing the pressures and pitfalls of the project, and negotiating the challenges and contradictions presented by our work;
- Collaborating with our interlocutors and research colleagues in the field. This will include making resources available to support the work of fellow researchers based in our field sites, including opportunities to publish and disseminate their work through the project network. This will also include, where possible, sharing draft outputs with the key research interlocutors and protagonists who are likely to be affected by our findings;
- Undertaking regular reviews of our ethics in light of our changing and developing understanding both of the programme as a whole and our particular fieldsites. These reviews will be conducted collectively as part of the programme of meetings that have been scheduled over the course of the project. As part of this process of reviewing and reflecting upon our ethical framework, our entanglements in the field and our research, we may produce academic outputs exploring these relationships;
- Reporting on project progress, both to our funders in accordance with the require reporting schedule, but also to our informants and the wider academic and practitioner community through considered and engaging project communication via the GRNPP website and social media channels. By putting our work in the public domain, we invite challenge and debate, and open up opportunities for further collaboration with the broader community of scholars and practitioners working to understand parliaments;
- Collectively fostering an environment within the team and in each of our field sites which invites productive challenge and opens up spaces for robust and respectful debate, even, and perhaps particularly, when this is challenging. This will call for an awareness not only of how power differentials shape all of our varied capacities to contribute and collaborate, but a developing commitment to redress inequities through the reflexive practice of our work and a willingness to look critically at our own role in maintaining and perpetuating structural inequalities.

Drafted by Niamh Collard, Emma Crewe and Amir Massoumian, agreed by the team, April 2021.

Annex 1 – Information Sheet For Ethnography of Parliaments, Politicians and People TEMPLATE

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information, so you can decide whether to participate in this study. Any questions you may have will be answered by the researcher or by the other contact persons provided below. Once you are familiar with the information on this sheet and have asked any questions you may have, you can decide whether or not to participate. If you agree, you will be asked to fill in the consent form for this study or record your consent verbally.

Research title:	A Global Comparative Ethnography of Parliaments, Politicians and People: representation, relationships and ruptures
Name and contact details of researcher	Fill as appropriate
Name and contact details of Principal Investigator	Emma Crewe, ec15@soas.ac.uk
Funders	Research programme funded by the European Research Council. They have no control over use of the research
Who else is involved with the research project?	Leeds University, Mekelle University and researchers employed in Brazil, India and Fiji

What is the research project's purposes?	This is part of an ERC research programme. We are responding to citizens' deepening hostility towards political institutions and the crisis of knowledge around the world. Five experienced researchers and their research assistants will embark on in-depth ethnographic research in Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Fiji, and the UK, to find out what is happening behind the scenes within legislatures. The focus is on how politicians interact with each other, the media and their constituents. We will disseminate findings through networks, an exhibition and conference, seminars, a book on the anthropology of parliaments, an edited volume and 10 articles.
Why have I been chosen?	Fill as appropriate
Do I have to take part?	Taking part in the research project is entirely voluntary and you can obviously discontinue participation at any time.
What will happen to me if I take part?	Fill as appropriate
Risks and Benefits of participation	Fill as appropriate
What if Something Goes Wrong?	If you have any complaints please contact the SOAS Director of Research, Andrea Cornwall.
Will I be recorded and how will the recordings be used?	Fill as appropriate

Where will information I provide be transferred to?	All information will be kept on password protected personal devices (more information on data management can be provided on request).
How will information I provide be kept secure?	Both the information on personal devices, and back ups to external hard-disks, will be password protected.
Will I be kept anonymous in this research project?	Fill as appropriate
What will happen to the results of this research project?	Fill as appropriate

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be SOAS University of London. The SOAS Data Protection Officer provides oversight of SOAS activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at dataprotection@soas.ac.uk

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this Information Sheet. The legal basis that would be used to process your personal data under data protection legislation is the performance of a task in the public interest or in our official authority as a controller. However, for ethical reasons we need your consent to take part in this research project. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this project by completing the consent form that has been provided for you or via audio recording of the information sheet and consent form content.

Your Rights

You have the right to request access under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to the information which SOAS holds about you. Further information about your rights under the Regulation and how SOAS handles personal data is available on the Data Protection pages of the SOAS website (<http://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/dpa/index.html>), and by contacting the Information Compliance Manager at the following address: Information Compliance Manager, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, United Kingdom (e-mail to: dataprotection@soas.ac.uk).

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, please contact SOAS in the first instance at dataprotection@soas.ac.uk. If you remain unsatisfied, you may wish to contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Contact details, and details of data subject rights, are available on the ICO website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/data-protection-reform/overview-of-the-gdpr/individuals-rights/>

Copyright Notice

The consent form asks you to waive copyright so that SOAS and the researcher can edit, quote, disseminate, publish (by whatever means) your contribution to this research project in the manner described to you by the researcher during the consent process.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.

Consent Form for Ethnography of Parliaments, Politicians and People

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an equivalent explanation about the research

Project Title: A Global Comparative Ethnography of Parliaments, Politicians and People: representation, relationships and ruptures

Researcher Name:

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY, or it has been read to me.		
I have been able to ask questions about the project		
I understand that potential risks of participating in this research include failure to keep data secure		
I agree to take part in the project and understand that taking part involves conversations, analysis and writing outputs together (as negotiated over time and with consent of all three of us)		
I agree that my interview is recorded (including Zoom conversations)		
I understand that I can refuse to answer questions		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the researcher/s involved and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part		
I understand that my withdrawal or refusal to take part will not affect my relationship with the researcher or SOAS		

I understand that that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the research team without my consent		
I understand information I provide will be stored securely by the researchers in password protected personal devices only		
I understand that the information I provide will be used for research outputs (open access) and made available on SOAS Research Online and on www.grnpp.org but only with my consent prior to publication		

Contact Information

Telephone No:

Email Address:

Postal Address:

Alternative contact:

Research Participant Declaration

Name of Participant [printed]

Signature

Date

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and to the best of my ability, ensured that that participant understands what they are freely consenting.

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

SOAS Consent Form Adapted From UK Data Archives Model Consent Form and licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share-Alike 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

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