

**Spring Term 2012**

**Research Day  
'Risky-business'?: Ethical challenges and  
opportunities**

**Thursday 15th March 2012  
Room 410, 35 Berkeley Square**

**SUMMARY:**

The Ethicnet day focuses on 'risk' as expressed in the topic under scrutiny and in the field. The speakers will offer insights into research ethics in risk zones for example sites of sensitivity or danger and topics that might challenge the nature of research and the ethical issues that it may raise.

**PROGRAMME**

**10.00-10.05 Welcome and introduction**

Frances Giampapa & Wan Ching Yee, GSOE Ethics Co-ordinators

**10.05-10.35** Marsha Henry (Gender Institute, London School of Economics).

Risk and Ethics in Research Settings: Considering Postcolonial and Feminist Perspectives for the Peacekeeping Field.

**10.35 – 10:55** Lindsey Horner (GSOE)

The (im)possibility of an ethics of uncertainty: How I made undecidable decisions in a conflict affected research context

**10:55 -11:30** Coffee

**11:30-11:50** Thomas Muhr (GSOE)

Ticking off Boxes, Crossing off Lives? Ethics vs Morals in Critical Political Ethnography

**11:50-12:10** Debby Watson (GSOE)

Not just 'a bunch of special needs': Playfulness and children with PMLD

**12:10-12:30** Q&A speaker session – debating riskyissues

**12:30-1:15** Karen Forbes (School of Clinical Sciences, University of Bristol)

Research in the Dying: pushing the frontiers or final taboo?

**13.15 - 14.15** Lunch

**14:15- 15:15** Ethical Conversations – Ethical Challenges and Opportunities in Post-Conflict

Peru: Goya Vasquez Wilson (GSOE) and Matthew Brown (facilitated by Jane Reece)

**15:15—15:30 Summary of the Day**

Frances Giampapa & Wan Ching Yee, GSOE Ethics Co-ordinators

## **Marsha Henry**

Abstract: This presentation draws on fieldwork carried out in peacekeeping missions from 2005-2007. I outline several examples of experiences that demonstrate that 'risks' in any given research context are dependent on both interpersonal and institutional politics. The ways in which 'difference' is played out in the research relationship has different consequences for the female and black researcher (and the research participants), emphasising the importance of interrogating conventional understandings of risk in research. However, the context of postconflict settings where international governance institutions are working to liberal agendas which stress what Duffield calls self-reliance rather than transformation, demonstrate that risk must also be considered beyond the micropolitics of the research encounter. Thus, the paper examines some of the challenges faced by a feminist researcher in the postconflict field and investigates the role of 'difference' in the composition of the research team, the ethnicity of researchers from minority backgrounds, and the politics of feminist positionality in the context of postconflict and global south contexts.

Biography: Marsha is Lecturer in Gender, Development and Globalisation and Co-Director of the MPhil/PhD Programme in Gender. She joined LSE in July 2009, having previously taught at University of Bristol, University of British Columbia, Canada, the Open University and Warwick University. Her research interests focus on three main research areas: gender, 'race' and health; gender, development and militarisation; and feminist, diasporic and qualitative methodologies.

## **Lindsey Horner**

Abstract: The risky nature of research ethics is amplified when conducting research on politically sensitive topics and in a context destabilised by conflict. Research can contribute to an uncontrollable and unpredictable environment, where ethical decisions need to be taken in moments of chaos with no clear guarantees, and while all ethical decisions are made in particular situations where no law can govern research in a conflict affected area crystallises this and brings it to the fore. However, when considering the issue of risk in my research I am also influenced by the theoretical framework that permeated it. A post-structural approach to ethics, born out of a post-structural theoretical framework which approaches peace as a Derridean event, highlights the inherently risky nature of making a free and ethical decision.

In this session I will briefly outline an ethics of uncertainty before describing some of the implications this has had in my own experience of trying to conduct ethical research using examples from my PhD on the translation of the event peace (and utopia peace) in the Mindanao conflict, including: the rejection of decision making technologies; putting the case for a shift from a procedural approach to ethics to a relational approach; and discussion around competing ethicalities. I conclude by evoking the idea of 'dignity of risk' used within the disability equality field, arguing that not only is risk an important part of healthy and dignified living, but also an essential and inescapable part of ethics which, as a researcher, I am learning to hold.

Biography: Lindsey K. Horner is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, where she recently completed her PhD. Her interests are in education and development, in particular peace education. Her recent PhD research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of the UK, supervised by Professor Leon Tikly and Professor Roger Dale, explores the interaction of multifarious understandings of peace as an event and

peace as utopia (pepu) in the context of the Mindanao conflict, and praxis for facilitating its translation.

### **Thomas Muhr**

Abstract: This narrative of ethics in critical political ethnography is structured around my field research since 2005 into Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution and the construction of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). I attempt to pull the audience into my spatial ethnography to draw attention to the conflict between, on the one hand, 'ethics' as legal requirements ('ticking off boxes') and 'morals as an ontological position seeking to avoid 'crossing off' lives. I attempt to show that the political ethnographer is not an a-social object delinked from the subjects studied, but a 'political animal' potentially involved in matters of life and death. That is, observing the legal principles and reducing risk for the researcher(s) does not necessarily mean that the research is moral in a wider sense.

Biography: Thomas Muhr is a Visiting Fellow in Global Development at the Centre for Globalisation, Education and Societies (GES), University of Bristol (UK). He has recently also held visiting lectureships in the Department of Politics and Development Research at Johannes Kepler University (JKU), Linz (Austria). Thomas works on the political sociology and geography of globalisation, regionalism and development, and the themes of democracy, security and education therein, with a focus on Latin America and the Caribbean and its international and global relations. He is author of the book *Venezuela and the ALBA: Counter-hegemony, Geographies of Integration and Development, and Higher Education For All* (2011), and editor of *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (ALBA) and Counter-Globalization: Resistance and the Construction of 21st Century Socialism*, forthcoming in the Routledge Series *Rethinking Globalizations*. Over the past two decades, Thomas has worked as a teacher, lecturer, researcher and consultant in diverse settings in Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe.

### **Debby Watson**

Abstract: There are an increasing number of children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) and there is evidence to suggest that they have poorer levels of well-being than most children, including other disabled children. They are routinely excluded from research, even from research that is specifically about them. Children with PMLD typically use wheelchairs or other mobility aids to get around and have their own way of communicating, which usually does not involve speech. In addition, they have severe cognitive impairment and may also have sensory loss. I will argue that it is possible, desirable and ethical to include this marginalised group of children directly in research by using a layered and multi-method approach. The approach discussed here, in a study of playfulness in young children with PMLD, has the potential to produce positive outcomes regarding their well-being.

After a brief interactive session, the following ethical issues will be discussed and illustrated from previous and forthcoming research: the nature of consent/assent with children with PMLD; methods and the balance of risk/benefit; interpretation/ triangulation; 'ethic of care', harm and power issues; the role of experience, theory, reference groups and training.

The inclusion of children with PMLD directly in research poses some ethical challenges, but also has many benefits, not least of which is the recognition that children with PMLD are first and foremost children, not just a 'bunch of special needs'. Furthermore, just like any other person, they are social actors who make choices and as such, we have an ethical duty to include them in research which is about them.

**Biography:** Debby Watson started her career as a social worker, running a short break service for children with severe physical and learning disabilities. Following this, she worked for many years as a researcher in disability, latterly as a Research Fellow at the Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol. She is now funded by the ESRC to complete a PhD on the nature of playfulness in children with PMLD.

### **Karen Forbes**

**Abstract:** It is argued widely that research cannot be done in dying patients because they are vulnerable, often incompetent, and cannot possibly benefit from the research; this is not a time to add the burden of research to dying patients' experience. However, if no research is carried out with dying people do we not condemn them to non-evidence based care, and how do we ensure the quality of the care that they receive? The ethical arguments for and against research at the end of life will be discussed along with patients' views and examples of suggested ethically justified models.

**Biography:** Karen is a Professorial Teaching Fellow at the University of Bristol. She is year 5 lead for the medical undergraduate programme, and programme director for the University's MSc in Palliative Medicine. She is also head of teaching for the School of Clinical Sciences. She fulfils these roles in half of her time; during the remainder she is a Consultant in Palliative Medicine at University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust within the Trust's advisory hospital palliative care team and so has extensive experience of looking after people with life-limiting illness, both malignant and non-malignant.

### **Jane Reece**

**Biography:** Jane Reece is a writer, researcher and teacher in higher, adult and community education. She worked in higher education and educational publishing in Zimbabwe for 15 years following independence, before returning to UK. She is currently working towards a doctorate in Narrative Inquiry at University of Bristol, exploring the use of writing as inquiry.

### **Goya Wilson**

Goya's doctoral research is titled *Troubling testimonio: radical moves in writing ethnographic inquiry*. It is an ethnographic inquiry into the process of producing *testimonio* with young people whose parents were involved in the Peruvian armed conflict. Her aim is to develop an understanding of the function of *testimonio* as political memory work. In particular she addresses the process of collective remembering and its re-presentation as *testimonio* within post-conflict societies. For this, she seeks to trouble the normative understanding of *testimonio* by re-visiting the *testimonios* at two different moments (in Cuba and later in Peru with 5 years in-between) using creative writing in order to explore the tensions that arise in the process of researching (while producing) *testimonio*.

Methodologically, the project is a collaborative endeavor with a collective of young adults, and because it is based on an *experiencia* (experiment/experience) that started 5 years ago, she has organized it in cycles of inquiry. The ethics are based on the relationships established among the inquiring community that is the backbone of this study. Safety considerations are crucial because of the political nature of this work that touches on armed struggle movements and second-generation *testimonios* for political action under a regime of state and societal repression. As a result the whole thesis will engage with on-going ethical issues and its resolutions through open dialogue within its inquiring community. Thus, sustaining ethical relationships in the inquiring community are key to the process of researching testimonial production.

**Biography:** Goya Wilson is a Nicaraguan with a Peruvian background. She studied sociology in Nicaragua and did her M.A. in development studies in The Netherlands. She has mostly

worked doing feminist research with different expressions of the women's movements and youth groups in Central America, and also in social impact evaluation for development projects.

**Matthew Brown**

Biography: Matthew Brown is a Reader in Latin American Studies in the School of Modern Languages, at the University of Bristol. His research area focuses on Latin American history from independence to the present (see his blog [bolivariantimes.blogspot.com](http://bolivariantimes.blogspot.com)). He is currently completing a collective biography of the men who fought at the Battle of El Santuario, 17 October 1829. He has completed a research database of over 3,000 foreign adventurers who took part in the Wars of Independence in Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador (the subject of his book – *Adventuring through Spanish Colonies*