

Ethics, Positionality & Activism in Social Science Research on Sensitive Topics

Abstract

As part of today's conversations around decolonization and reflexivity, questions arise around who has the right to decide over, possess and access knowledge, therefore benefiting from it through publications and research projects. Drawing on the experiences of working with local communities across Asia on projects related to the looting and trafficking of cultural and natural resources, which asks if today's social scientist automatically is – or should be – an activist when working with underrepresented voices or on sensitive topics. The seminar reflects on what it means to research these topics from a criminological perspective, placing this within the larger framework of 'ethics' as it relates to social science research. It argues for an ethics of empathy as a framework for current knowledge creation, use and reproduction. This includes visual imagery, both in research as well as through knowledge exchange. It concludes with some recommendations on responsible practices that prioritize the welfare of all stakeholders and their ecosystems.