

Reflexivity, Responsibility and Reciprocity

Guiding Principles for Ethical Peace Research*

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Abstract

The application of peace research to settings of violent conflict requires careful attention to the ethical dimensions of scholarship; yet, discussions about the ethics of peace research remain underdeveloped. This article addresses a critical gap in the literature, outlining a framework for ethical peace research broadly encompassed in three guiding principles: responsibility, reciprocity and reflexivity. The first section provides an overview of the ethics of peace action and research, introducing key contributions that practitioner-scholars have made to the ethics of peacebuilding. In the second section, I explore how the guiding principles of reflexivity, responsibility and reciprocity offer a flexible framework for engaging in everyday ethical research practices. I conclude with preliminary recommendations to encourage further conversation about the ethics of peace research, offering ideas for future action.

Keywords: ethics, peace research, peacebuilding practice, research methodology, reflexivity.

1 Introduction

In 1990, Philippe Bourgois published a contentious article on the ethical failings of anthropology in the *Journal of Peace Research*. Caught in the crossfire of a military-led massacre against the *campesino* community at the centre of his ethnographic research in El Salvador, Bourgois (1990: 50) exposed the military's human

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rights violations to international journalists, policy makers, and governmental and nongovernmental organizations. His decision to publicly denounce gross human rights violations, however, conflicted with the American Anthropological Association's ethics code that guaranteed complete confidentiality and privacy to Bourgois' research subjects, some of whom were perpetrators of human rights abuses. Consequently, Bourgois' public testimony nearly ended his career. Caught in the crossfire of legalistic procedures and the moral imperative to uphold human rights and dignity, Bourgois questioned formulaic approaches to ethics:

The problem with contemporary anthropological ethics is not merely that the boundaries of what is defined as ethical are too narrowly drawn, but more importantly, that ethics can be subject to rigid, righteous interpretations which place them at loggerheads with overarching human rights concerns. (Bourgois, 1990: 45)

While Bourgois' article touched off a renewed debate about the ethical dimensions of anthropology, leading to important improvements in anthropological practice, the article did little to provoke reflection within the primary readership of the *Journal of Peace Research*: peace researchers. The applied nature of peace scholarship to settings of violent conflict requires heightened attention to the distinctive ethical dimensions of peace research; yet, surprisingly, over two decades after Bourgois' article first emerged in one of the top peace research journals, an articulation of the ethics particular to peace research remains underdeveloped.

In July 2000, the *Journal of Peace Research* published a special issue on the 'Ethics of War and Peace'. The issue highlighted important ethical dilemmas in the practice of intervention, peacebuilding and humanitarian aid, but did not include a single contribution on the ethics of peace research (Syse and Reichberg, 2000). The failure of an entire series dedicated to the ethics of peace to reflect back upon the particular ethical dimensions of research practices underscores a critical gap within the field of peace and conflict studies. Indeed, despite continued calls for inter- and trans-disciplinary research, the humanities and humanistic sciences, which engage in rigorous scholarly exploration of ethics and moral philosophy, remain under-represented and largely absent in top-tier peace research journals.

Moreover, the diverse methodological and disciplinary traditions encompassed within peace studies have led to an over-reliance on disciplinary guidelines at the expense of developing a shared set of guiding principles and ethical practices relevant to peace researchers.¹ Unfortunately, many disciplinary ethics standards are limited to professional codes of conduct or employ limited, outcome-oriented procedural frameworks (American Historical Association [AHA], 2011; American Political Science Association [APSA], 2012; American Psychological Association [APA], 2010; American Sociological Association [ASA], 1999; Society

1 To date, none of the major peace studies associations offer ethical guidelines for peace research (International Peace Research Association [IPRA]; Peace and Justice Studies Association [PJSA]; International Studies Association Peace Studies Section [PEACE]).

of Christian Ethics [SCE], 2009). While ethics boards and professional codes may offer a starting point for ethical research practices within peace studies, they simply fail to sufficiently engage “all the different ethical issues that should be considered” in peace research (Hoglund and Oberg, 2011b: 195).² Furthermore, the diverse approaches to ethics codes developed within narrow, disciplinary boundaries undermine the construction of a shared foundation for reflection and deliberation on ethical research practices across the interdisciplinary field of peace research. Indeed, whether analysing large databases, employing survey methods, sifting through archival research, engaging in theological exegesis, conducting interviews or carrying out extensive participant–observation peace research is infused with ethical decision making.

Regrettably, the majority of publications that do specifically address the ethics of peace research focus almost exclusively on the particular dilemmas of research conducted with human subjects (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995; Pottier *et al.*, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Smyth and Robinson, 2001). While the distinct dilemmas that qualitative researchers face when conducting research are certainly significant, scholars engaged in research on violent conflict have expressed frustration for the lack of a comprehensive ethical framework inclusive of multiple methodologies and disciplinary practices (Fujii, 2012; Hoglund and Oberg, 2011; Pottier *et al.*, 2011). Founded on an ethos of interdisciplinarity, the field of peace and conflict studies has the distinct opportunity to innovate sorely needed ethical research practices relevant for multiple methodological and disciplinary traditions. Peace studies is uniquely situated to convene scholars and practitioners across diverse disciplines to engage in a dialogue about the ethical dilemmas and challenges inherent in the practices of researching violence, conflict and peacebuilding.

Indeed, the continued professionalization and expansion of peace and conflict studies programmes, including stand-alone master’s and doctoral programmes, demand as much (Wallenstein, 2011). There are no researchers who are exempt from the ethical dimensions of peace studies, which “raises important ethical dilemmas through its very focus” (Hoglund and Oberg, 2011: 9). Unfortunately, despite the growth of peace studies programmes in higher education, none of the peace studies associations or journals provides comprehensive ethical guidelines for peace research.

The ethics of peace research emerges time and again in the contributions to this special series. Indigenous scholars seek to unsettle dominant epistemological frameworks privileged in Western scholarship; feminist theorists insist that the ways in which knowledge is produced and valued can reinforce patterns of historical marginalization and inequality; filmmakers struggle over the complicated ethics of representation (Fulmer; James; Townsend and Niraula, 2016). For these scholar-practitioners, careful attention to the ways in which scholarship operates

2 In fact, Corinne Davis Rodrigues (2014) has outlined how the strict guidelines of ethics boards, such as the IRB, can undermine the protection of research subjects in volatile settings of violent conflict and social unrest. In her article, Rodrigues offers strategies for negotiating the demands of ethics committees while still upholding a commitment to ‘do no harm’.

in a field of power relations blurs the dichotomy between research and activism and raises significant questions about the ethics of peace research: How are data on violent conflict and its consequences collected? How do peace researchers navigate the competing demands of the multiple stakeholders – from funding sources to universities to research participants – involved in the research process? What are the ethics of representation involved in peace research and writing?

In this article, I offer a thought-piece – an initial starting point to provoke further conversation about the challenges and possibilities for the development of ethical guidelines specific to peace research. I contend that exploring the ethics of peace research further problematizes the limited binary of ‘scholar-practitioner’ by situating peace research as a particular *practice* within the field of peace studies. Indeed, the dichotomy constructed between scholarship and practice obfuscates the impact of research on people’s lives, situating scholarship as an external and unmarked process, rather than exploring the particular practices of research that act and interact within real-world contexts. Such an understanding of research as a “view from nowhere” further elides the ways in which daily research practices are infused with ethical decision making (Nagel, 1986). Here, I take knowledge as socially constructed within particular historical, political and cultural contexts as the central starting point of this article.

In this essay, I advocate for an understanding of knowledge production as multivocal, dialogical and dynamic, emerging and interacting across the multiple and shifting fields of relations that comprise peace studies (Bakhtin, 1941[1981]; Rutherford, 2012). I contend that critical and reflexive analysis of knowledge production and its value not only brings into sharp relief the ethical dimensions of peace research but also reveals the “dynamic feedback between *research and action*” that Lederach and Lopez assert as constitutive of peace and conflict studies in the Editorial of this issue (pp. 3-12). I place ethical analysis of the practices of peace *action* in conversation with the ethical dilemmas that emerge from within the practices of peace *research*. While those working in peace research and peace action engage divergent methodological and analytical tools, an elevated awareness of the moral frameworks that undergird the decisions and actions of practitioners across the spectrum of social locations within peace studies reveals the “dynamic interdependences of peace practice and scholarship”. I argue that peace studies is uniquely positioned to innovate ethical research practices precisely because of the interdependencies between research, action and education in the field of peace studies. I develop a flexible framework, built on the guiding principles of reflexivity, responsibility and reciprocity, to elevate the ethical into the everyday practices of peace research.

2 The Ethics of Peace Action: Key Lessons

In recent years, scholar-practitioners have contributed insights into the ethics of peacebuilding (Anderson, 1999; Association for Conflict Resolution, 2005; Cohen, 2001; Fast *et al.*, 2002; Lederach and Jenner, 2002). Of particular note is Mary B. Anderson’s groundbreaking work, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or*

War, which significantly improved the ethics of humanitarian assistance (1999). In 2002, Larissa A. Fast, Reina C. Neufeldt and Lisa Schirch developed a framework for ethical peacebuilding practices, arguing that foregrounding ethics into the everyday work of peacebuilding makes conflict intervention “more credible, respectable, and socially responsible” (2002: 186). Fast *et al.* (2002: 188) established human dignity, community-defined common good and authentic relationships as the core principles for ethical peacebuilding. Scholar-practitioners widely agree that the personal, relational and structural dimensions of the ethics of peacebuilding must be taken into consideration, underscoring the importance of self-reflective processes capable of addressing the common occurrence of practitioner burnout and secondary trauma (Anderson, 1999; Autesserre, 2014; Cohen, 2001; Fast *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, the literature suggests that ethical peacebuilding practices rely on cultivating relationships that elicit and build on local knowledge systems (Anderson, 1999; Cohen, 2001; Fast *et al.*, 2002). In her micro-level analysis of international peacebuilding interventions, Severine Autesserre (2014) reveals how a climate of distrust is constructed through the isolation of international peacebuilders from local communities, resulting in unreliable and inaccurate data collection practices. Disregard for the ethical principle of authentic relationships – as identified by Fast *et al.* – ultimately leads to ineffective policy-making, counterproductive interventions and an increased potential for harm of local communities and peacebuilders alike (Autesserre, 2014).

Autesserre (2014) and Fast *et al.* (2002) share the assertion that a process-oriented, rather than an outcome-oriented approach to ethics is necessary for practitioners working in unpredictable settings of social unrest and violence, advocating for greater attention to the *everyday* practices of peacebuilders. “While empowering people to build peace is an ethical ‘end’”, Fast *et al.* write, “the means or methods used to achieve this goal are often not measured by an ethical yardstick” (2002: 186). Here, Fast *et al.* depart from the narrow focus offered by a consequentialist moral framework that focuses on the ends, articulating an understanding of ethics that emphasizes everyday practices, which shape and are shaped by moral frameworks embedded in particular and changing social contexts (Das, 2007; Lambek, 2015; Robinson, 2011). Such an approach is resonant with the traditions of virtue ethics as well as feminist ethics of care (Das, 2007; Lambek, 2015; Robinson, 2011). Fiona Robinson (2011) contends that by employing an understanding of identity as relationally constituted and dynamic, with an emphasis on mutual vulnerability as well as the creative potential found in difference, feminist care ethicists offer significant contributions to sustainable peacebuilding. Similarly, greater engagement with and self-conscious reflection on the diverse moral philosophical traditions that undergird frameworks for research ethics also serve to expand and deepen the extant literature on the ethics of peace research.

In 1984, Bengt Gustafsson, Lars Rydén, Gunnar Tibell and Peter Wallensteen published *The Uppsala Code of Ethics for Scientists*, one of the first systematic attempts to identify the ethical responsibilities that all scientists share. In their broad appeal to natural scientists, medical scientists, social scientists, theologians and legal scholars, the authors offered a *negative* set of principles, focusing on

what research should *not* do. They ultimately concluded that individual scientists have a responsibility to discontinue their research should they judge their findings to be significantly harmful to human and ecological security (Gustafsson *et al.*, 1984: 312). While the *Uppsala Code* offers an important starting point and example for the development of an ethical framework responsive to interdisciplinary concerns, a solely consequentialist approach to ethics inhibits the capacity to cultivate and infuse ethics into the everyday practices of peace research. Kristine Hoglund and Magnus Oberg (2011a) expand the *Uppsala Code*, integrating consideration of ethics alongside methods in their edited volume, *Understanding Peace Research*. Hoglund and Oberg (2011a) provide an important example for the development of peace research methodologies that infuse ethics as a normative part of the practice. However, their contribution does not explicitly explore the multiple philosophical frameworks and traditions that undergird moral judgement and action within peace studies.

Here, I build on the work of Hoglund and Oberg (2011a) to apply and analyse the possibilities and limitations of virtue ethics, feminist ethics of care and consequentialist reasoning with the explicit intent to articulate a shared ethical framework for peace research. I contend that with the increased growth of undergraduate as well as graduate programming in peace studies as well as the particular ethical dilemmas that infuse everyday practices of peace research, the development and adoption of guiding principles relevant across the diverse disciplinary, epistemological and methodological traditions housed within peace studies is necessary for rigorous peace research. In particular, the resources of a feminist ethics of care as well as virtue ethics offer significant contributions to ethical research practices that move beyond the limitations of consequentialist reasoning (Das, 2007; Lambek, 2015; Robinson, 2011).³ By emphasizing the need to cultivate ethical research through everyday habits, dispositions, narratives and practices, these traditions underscore the ways in which ethical judgement and action are embedded in social relations that emerge from and are shaped by particular historical, political and social contexts (Das, 2007; Lambek, 2015; Robinson, 2011). In this way, ethics cannot be judged from a “transcendent or external standpoint” but, rather, ethical judgement requires attention to ordinary, everyday life (Robinson, 2011: 28).

Feminist care ethicists, in particular, do not advocate for a universal framework of what *ought* to be, but rather understand ethics as continuously forged through everyday practices, asserting that moral claims are always produced in particular contexts “subject to revision and reconfirmation” (Robinson 2011, 28). Furthermore, the emphasis that feminist care ethicists place on an understanding of self as relational also creates a generative space for self-conscious engagement and collaboration between practitioners located across the social spheres of

3 While I offer a critique of consequentialism here, I want to be clear that I understand the assessment of harm and identification of possible consequences as key practices of ethical research. My critique, therefore, is not of consequentialism in and of itself, but rather of ethical frameworks that are limited to *only* consequentialist reasoning. I advocate, instead, for attention to the multitude of ethical practices that emerge from diverse traditions and frameworks found within moral philosophy.

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research, action and education that comprise peace studies. Such an approach requires peace researchers to engage in what anthropologist Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban calls “ethically-conscious” scholarship that “admonishes the researcher to think about ethics as a regular, normative part of the practice” (2013: 168).

Ethically conscious research foregrounds ethical considerations into the research questions peace researchers ask, the funding they accept, the data they select to use and the critical decisions they make to disseminate research findings as well as their responses to the unintended consequences of that dissemination. I contend that developing guiding principles that highlight ethical practices within peace studies, rather than establishing a strict professional code of ethics, would create a shared foundation around which conversations about ethical peace research practices and dilemmas can cohere. Furthermore, I contend that the creation of guiding principles also creates a shared framework for more robust discussions across the social locations of those engaged in peace studies, creating a productive space for innovation and ethical reflection across the spectrum of practice and scholarship.

For example, John Paul Lederach’s (2010) poem, *The Parasite*, raises significant questions about the ethical obligations relevant to peace studies practitioners working across the social spheres of research, education and action:

*I have
Traveled
Most of the
Globe
On the
Backs
Of people
Whose
Lives
Are
Held
Together
By the
Wars
They fight.*

This short reflection, which emerges primarily from grounded practice, raises significant questions for peace researchers: What responsibility do peace studies scholars have to the communities and individuals upon whose lives their careers have been built? How can we elevate peace studies from academic work to the larger purpose of the profession in a way that infuses compassion for those who participate in our research as well as one’s self and learning community? There are no easy solutions to these questions, nor is there a singular, unambiguous code of conduct capable of responding to the complex challenges that scholars face. Instead, these questions require ongoing and intentional conversation about the ethical dimensions and dilemmas of peace research. Creating a shared founda-

tion that enables collaborative engagement centred on the ethical dilemmas that those engaged in peace research, action and education face offers an opportunity to innovate ethical peace practices resonant with the larger purpose of our profession. Such an endeavour requires a multidimensional framework that attends to the multiple stakeholders involved in the complex ethical landscape of peace research. Drawing on Fast *et al.*'s (2002: 190-192) framework of accountability, I similarly argue that the principles of reflexivity, responsibility and reciprocity must be attentive to the multiple and shifting stakeholders involved in the research process, including research participants, communities impacted by research findings, peace researcher/self, the academic community, donor communities and the wider peace studies community.

3 Reflexivity, Responsibility and Reciprocity: Guiding Principles for Ethical Peace Research

3.1 Reflexivity

The principle of reflexivity increases transparency in the research process and allows researchers to explicitly interrogate the value systems, commitments and identities that undergird research agendas. Critical reflexivity includes everyday reflection on “self, process, and representation”, enabling researchers to critically examine “power relations and politics in the research process, and researcher accountability in data collection and interpretation” (Sultana, 2007: 376). Through critically reflexive research practices, scholars ask: Who am I? What values and commitments do I bring to this research project? What impact do I have on the research? What impact does the research have on me?

Furthermore, critical reflexivity asks the researcher to situate herself and the research within particular historical, cultural and socio-political contexts, making explicit the too-often implicit power differentials that drive the production of knowledge (Pillow, 2003; Rothman, 2014). While much attention has been given to cultivating *reflective practice*, there is little recognition for the parallel need to cultivate *reflexive scholarship*, which asks scholars to engage in self-conscious meta-analysis of knowledge production (Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003).⁴ Linda Finlay offers a typology of reflexive practices, outlining the *multiple* practices of critical reflexivity, which include “introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction” (2002: 212). Within Finlay's framework, the practices of critical reflexivity find deep resonance with a conflict transformation framework, which asks practitioners to attend, simultaneously, to the personal, relational, cultural and structural dimensions of their work (Lederach, 2003).

4 The primary distinctions made between *reflective* and *reflexive* practices include the relational and dialogical nature of reflexive practices that are continuous (as opposed to the possibility for solely engaging in personal introspection) as well as the self-conscious meta-analysis that reflexivity requires in order to sufficiently interrogate how knowledge is produced while explicitly situating one's positionality within knowledge production (Pillow, 2003; Finlay 2002).

Wanda Pillow (2003) contends that practices of reflexivity require full immersion into the complicated and irresolvable ethical dilemmas that infuse the production of knowledge. Rather than seek resolution, Pillow advocates for “reflexivities of discomfort” that require scholars to continuously interrogate, analyse and remain alert to the messy realities and dilemmas replete in doing research. By re-inscribing ethics into the research process and continuously exposing the operations of power in the production of knowledge, Pillow (2003: 188) contends that the uncomfortable practices of reflexivity exceed the “the boundaries of ideological theory and practice”. In this way, both Finlay (2002) and Pillow (2003) advocate for a nonlinear and ongoing approach to critical reflexivity, asking scholars to continuously foreground questions of knowledge production in their daily work: How is the research design and implementation complicit in structures of inequality? How can the research design, implementation and dissemination process contribute to the transformation of those same structures of inequality?

A heightened sensitivity to the potential impact of the research process also feeds back and reflects on the researcher herself. Drawing on the work of feminist care ethicists, identity is understood, here, as multiple, contingent and dynamic, requiring persistent and everyday practices of reflexivity in turn. Through the critical reflexive practices of introspection as well as mutual collaboration, scholars alongside their research partners and colleagues, must continuously interrogate the identities, value systems and commitments that emerge, interact and influence the research process. This approach also prevents destructive and disembodied research practices that falsely assume scholars remove themselves from the physical, emotional and psychological impact of their research.

In recent years, attention to the health of scholars who research violence has increased (Hoglund and Oberg, 2011; Loyle and Simoni, 2014; Nordstrom and Robben, 1995; Theidon, 2014; Wood, 2006). Although the literature continues to focus almost exclusively on qualitative and field-based research (Felbab-Brown, 2014; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000), scholars engaged in sustained research on violence and suffering, whether qualitative or quantitative, can exhibit and experience signs of secondary trauma, burnout and withdrawal (Hoglund and Oberg, 2011; Loyle and Simoni, 2014; Theidon, 2014; Wood, 2006). Physical, emotional and psychological care for researchers is important not only for the researcher’s well-being but also for producing more reliable and ethical research. Insufficient attention to the emotional well-being of researchers can lead to impaired judgement that not only increases the potential to harm research collaborators but also decreases the reliability of data gathering and analysis (Auteserre, 2014; Hoglund and Oberg, 2011; Loyle and Simoni, 2014; Wood, 2006).

Reflexivity enables researchers to identify signs of burnout, secondary trauma as well as concrete mechanisms for self-care to utilize throughout the research process. The principle of reflexivity encourages improved institutional support and preparation that takes seriously the inner and outer lives of peace researchers and students as whole people. The principle of reflexivity upholds the dignity of research collaborators as well as oneself through reflexive scholarship. To build relationships with the multiple stakeholders involved in the research

process requires knowing oneself, an understanding of context and attentiveness to one's positionality. In this way, reflexivity forms the necessary foundation from which the principles of responsibility and reciprocity emerge.

3.2 Responsibility

The principle of responsibility is often understood within the framework of 'do no harm' that understands responsibility as responsibility *for*. Within this framing of responsibility, scholars must identify the risks and consequences of research, weighing the potential benefits against the potential harms. But, how is harm measured and the potential consequences of research judged? Who contributes to this ongoing assessment? How can scholars navigate the multiple – and at times – competing needs of diverse stakeholders?

The initiation of the Human Terrain System (HTS) has recently forced social scientists to address the particular ethical dilemmas of conducting research for the military (Fluehr-Lobban, 2013; Pottier *et al.*, 2011). HTS has set off heated debates in multiple disciplines, of which peace studies should not be immune. Johan Pottier, Laura Hammond and Christopher Cramer assert that debates about the HTS are inherently ethical conversations that “hinge at least in part around the question of whether the researcher can control the use of their data and analysis so as to prevent any harm” (2011: 16). More recently, the controversy surrounding the participation of American psychologists in the development of interrogation techniques has created renewed debates about the competing ethical obligations of scholars who choose to work in direct collaboration with and under the authority of national military and intelligence agendas (Bartlett, 2015).

Here, intersubjective and collaborative practices of critical reflexivity that emerge from within the tradition of feminist ethics of care enable a much more comprehensive assessment of harm and the subsequent identification of scholarly responsibilities to include the analysis of power in ethical judgement. As Robinson writes, “A fully feminist ethics of care that is attuned to historical and contemporary relations of interdependence disrupts and challenges conventional understandings of domination and dependence” (2011: 121). Robinson argues that by situating ethical analysis within a web of historical and contemporary relations, a critical, feminist ethics of care admonishes peace practitioners to “recognize themselves not as external to the conflict and postconflict situations but enmeshed in them through historically and spatially expansive relations” (2011: 115).

Drawing on Robinson, I contend that the larger purpose of peace studies, with a commitment to reduce human suffering and increase justice, demands ethical judgement to be read through the lens of power analysis, attentive to current and historical political and social contexts. Within the dynamic contexts of social upheaval and violence, individual researchers simply cannot effectively assess harm in isolation. Peacebuilding practitioner-scholars widely agree that limiting the potential for harm requires direct and sincere partnerships with local communities whose experience and contextual knowledge are critical for effectively assessing the potential risks and mitigating the unintended consequences of

peacebuilding programming (Anderson, 1999; Autesserre, 2014; Cohen, 2001; Fast *et al.*, 2002; Lederach and Jenner, 2002). For example, practitioner-scholar Hizkias Assefa recalled an experience he had with a recent graduate trained at a prestigious university in North America who came to a “war-torn African country...with very strong views about how to end the civil war there” (Assefa, 2002: 285). Assefa, a native of Ethiopia with extensive peacebuilding engagement throughout the continent, had strong reservations about the potential negative consequences of this young man’s actions, writing, “from what I knew of the local situation, it seemed clear that his option would most likely increase deaths and destruction in that society” (2002: 285). The critical reflexivity practices of mutual collaboration and intersubjective reflection, which build upon the expertise of local partners, mitigate against harmful practices that may be invisible to external actors (Ramírez, 2014).⁵ In this way, the principle of reflexivity works alongside the principle of responsibility to improve ethical peace research practices, cultivating a generative space for convergence between practitioners and scholars.

Ethically conscious research asks the researcher to imagine herself in relationship with research participants regardless of the methodological approaches used. Quantitative researchers and those who conduct analyses of secondary data (texts, archives, data sets) as well as qualitative researchers must also uphold the principle of responsibility (Fujii, 2012; Odysseos, 2002; Osorio, 2014; Pottier *et al.*, 2011). The everyday decisions that scholars make are infused with ethical choices. The research questions pursued, the funding used, the ways in which data are secured and managed, as well as the form and content of publications all raise ethical questions: What ethical criteria are used in the selection of secondary data? Whose voices are foregrounded and whose voices are obscured? What obligations and priorities have donors structured and how do those impact research priorities? Who has intellectual property rights over sensitive data? What are the potential consequences and uses of research findings? For example, how might findings on the efficacy of torture or taxonomies of strategies used to undermine state repression also contribute to violence and social suffering – and how should researchers respond to the unforeseen impact of their findings? These questions have no clear-cut, unambiguous or singular answers, but, instead, require ongoing critical reflection and deliberation.

When research is deemed harmful to participants, scholars may need to make the difficult decision to refrain from publication or terminate ongoing research. Indeed, multiple scholars working in settings of high social risk and volatility have chosen to abort their research or refrain from publication (Bourgeois, 1990; Wood, 2006). Elisabeth Wood waited several years to publish her research findings as a result of the fragility of the Salvadoran peace process; however, she did disseminate her findings to trusted, partner organizations equally sensitive to the volatile social-political context (2006: 380). Here, Wood provides an example of

5 While building collaborative relationships with local partners is particularly important for external researchers, María Clemencia Ramírez (2014) underscores how collaborative reflection with people who have deep contextual knowledge is also necessary for local researchers.

the innovative ways scholars can ethically respond to urgent crises without exacerbating violent conflict.

The Uppsala Code of Ethics for Scientists asserts that institutions need to better address the stigmatization that researchers too often face when they decide to refrain from publication or terminate their research projects (Gustafsson *et al.*, 1984: 315). Ethical decisions require institutional recognition for the ways in which ethics is constitutive of rigorous scholarship. Unfortunately, the decision to refrain from publication in politically sensitive contexts can produce tensions between peace researchers, donors and academic institutions that do not sufficiently attend to the ethical dimensions of research. Today, academic journals increasingly demand scholars to publicly release all data – including highly sensitive and confidential interview transcripts – placing the guarantee of confidentiality in conflict with narrow understandings of research transparency (Data Access and Research Transparency [DA-RT], 2015).

While exercises that encourage a reflection on all potential consequences of research are certainly important for ensuring ethical practices, the consequentialist framework that undergirds an understanding of responsibility as ‘responsibility *for*’ is limited and insufficient on its own. The unpredictable and rapidly changing dynamics of violent conflict makes the task of anticipating all potential consequences of research impossible (Fujii, 2012; Hoglund and Oberg, 2011; Nordstrom and Robben, 1995; Pottier *et al.*, 2011; Smyth and Robinson, 2001; Wood, 2006). Furthermore, the processes of obtaining written and informed consent – often grounded in country-specific legal frameworks – do not always translate easily across diverse contexts (Coy, 2001; Metro, 2014).

Judith Butler (2005) similarly challenges the assumption that people have the full capacity to predict the outcomes and consequences of their actions. Instead, she argues that the vulnerability found in human limitation is precisely what grounds responsibility in relationship. As Butler writes,

...None of us is fully bounded, utterly separate, but rather, we are in our skins, given over, in each other’s hands, at each other’s mercy. This is situation...forms the horizon of choice, and it grounds our responsibility. In this sense, we are not responsible for it, but it creates the conditions under which we assume responsibility. (Butler, 2005: 101)

Butler (2005) argues that the meaning of responsibility must be radically reformulated in order to move away from an understanding of responsibility as ‘responsibility *for*’, which reifies the paternalistic binary of researcher as *protector* of research *subject*. Butler offers a more capacious understanding of responsibility as a dynamic “responsiveness to others” (Butler, 2005: 88). Butler’s articulation of responsibility emerges from an understanding of self as always extending from

and constituted by others in a dynamic field of social relations.⁶ For Butler, relationship with others is the “precondition of ethical responsiveness” (2005: 135).

Fiona Robinson (2011) echoes Butler in her application of a critical feminist ethics of care to conceptions of human security, situating the definition of responsibility firmly within a relational ontology. For Robinson, critical feminist care ethics enables an understanding of responsibility that overcomes problematic and paternalistic hierarchies by emphasizing, instead, long-term, ongoing practices of care that are mutually constituted through relationship. Robinson contends that critical care ethicists challenge static categories of victimhood and ‘vulnerable groups’ operative in consequentialist definitions of responsibility as responsibility *for*. In reorienting the definition of responsibility to emphasize “human interdependence and vulnerability”, feminist ethics of care “overcomes the dichotomies between the needy and the strong, victims and agents, and objects and subjects in the construction of categories of human intervention” (Robinson, 2011: 18).

A feminist ethics of care also includes and situates the researcher as an acting subject in the research process, which requires attentiveness to practices of care capable of addressing burnout and secondary trauma. The principle of responsibility elevates attentiveness to researcher health within peace studies institutions, which continues to lack systematic and robust support (Pottier *et al.*, 2011: 17). Here, the principle of responsibility asks institutions to create welcoming spaces where scholars can more honestly reflect on the emotional toll of their research and seek adequate resources to address the effects of their work (Loyle and Simoni, 2014).

The principle of responsibility asks scholars to nurture the capacity for dynamic ethical responsiveness to others, finding ways to creatively *respond* to the unforeseen impacts of research through ongoing relationships founded on mutuality. This articulation of responsibility also finds close proximity to the crisis-responsive and relationally grounded framework of conflict transformation (Lederach, 2003). As a result, the principle of responsibility creates a productive convergence for collaboration between scholars and practitioners (Fluehr-Lobban, 2013; Høglund, 2011; Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000; Pottier *et al.*, 2011; Smyth and Robinson, 2001; Wood, 2006). A relationally grounded understanding of responsibility articulates and connects with the principle of reciprocity, which asks scholars to also *do good* lest we “forget that our ‘informants’ continue to be crucified” (Bourgeois, 1990: 53).

3.3 Reciprocity

The principle of reciprocity moves beyond ethical research practices that seek solely to minimize harm towards everyday research practices that also seek to ‘do good’. The principle of reciprocity embraces peace as “the *explicit value* and focus of study”, consistent with the foundations and normative commitments that

6 Butler writes, “to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community” (2005: 83).

define the field of peace studies (Galtung, 1985). The call to 'do good' is not limited to peace studies. *The Belmont Report*, developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), includes 'beneficence' as a fundamental principle for ethical research. The principle of beneficence requires scholars to contribute not only to academic communities and donors but also to their research participants (USDHHS, 1979). The National Committees for Research Ethics in Norway also recognizes the significance of the principle of reciprocity,

Informants give something of themselves to researchers and are entitled to get something back. Informants should have an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings if possible...Researchers should adapt the results so that key findings and insights are conveyed in a manner can be understood by the recipients. (2006: 35)

Here, the principle of reciprocity works against research fatigue in contexts that grow weary of the cycles of researchers who study their communities and leave. Research fatigue is particularly acute in settings of violent conflict where people have lived through waves of journalists, short-term NGO workers and academic scholars (Hoglund, 2011: 123). The need to mitigate the harm of research fatigue is significant not only for the well-being of research participants but also to ensure the possibility of continued scholarly endeavours. To this end, the principle of reciprocity places value on multiple writing and dissemination approaches in order to ensure that research findings are accessible and useful for research participants as well as communities most impacted by the research findings. For peace researchers, the need to disseminate research findings in a relevant- and often-time sensitive manner is acute (Bourgois, 1990; Miller and Scollon, 2011). Peace researchers must navigate the tension between the urgency of responding to the dynamic contexts of violent conflict and the slow and lengthy research and publication process. "The production and consumption of the academy", Todd Whitmore, an ethicist and peace studies scholar, warns is "too narrow to measure the practice of an excellence in a life worth living" (2010: 15).

The principle of reciprocity, when coupled with reflexivity and responsibility, challenges the exploitation of "marginal regions of the world" as "producers of data for the theory mills of the North" and encourages scholars to participate in what Arjun Appadurai calls the "democratization of research" (2000: 5). Here, the principle of reciprocity requires a continuous and critical awareness of the multiple stakeholders and relationships that emerge in and through the research process. By embracing difference as generative, democratic research practices find deep resonance in the field of peacebuilding where scholar-practitioners have long advocated for robust dialogue across the multiple sectors and actors committed to building a more just and peaceful world (Lederach, 1997; Lederach and Appleby, 2010; Ricigliano, 2012). Returning to the framework offered by Fast *et al.* (2002), authentic relationships with local partners cultivate a sense of mutual responsibility that enable more robust assessments of security risks as well as nurture a capacity to respond to unforeseen challenges and crises that emerge throughout the research process. For Charles Hale, collaborative research practi-

ces not only limit potential harm but also “generate insight that otherwise would be impossible to achieve” (2006: 98). Wanda Pillow contends that “developing reciprocity with research subjects” by “doing research ‘with’ instead of ‘on’” elevates the multiple voices and identities within the research process in a way that can lead to a more equitable research relationship (2003: 179). Indeed, to study suffering in a way that does not contribute to – but rather interrupts – violence requires long-term equitable relationships.

4 Towards Ethically Conscious Peace Research

At the end of his reflection on over 25 years of peace research, Johan Galtung expressed his hope that the future contributions of peace studies would result not only “in an enormous amount of lectures and talks, in articles and books, but also in less violence, more peace” (1985: 156). Over 25 years later, peace studies has continued to expand, professionalize and contribute to both the theory and practice of building lasting peace. I have argued in this article that ethics is a constitutive part of the profession, motivating the field’s commitment to reduce human suffering and increase lasting peace and justice. Yet, discussions about the ethics of peacebuilding rarely include attention to the ethics of peace research practices.

With the increased expansion of peace studies programmes, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels throughout the world, comes increased responsibility. Ethically conscious peace research requires an integration of the critical questions, considerations, dilemmas and commitments of peace research into peace education curricula and training programmes, especially at the graduate level. Furthermore, the metrics of evaluation used in academic programmes must recognize not only *methodological* rigour but also *ethical* rigour as central to scholarly excellence.

The capacity to build “democratic research communities” responsive to the challenges of a globalized world requires a renewed “academic imagination” (Appadurai, 2000: 4-6). The substantial growth of peace studies programmes in settings of violent conflict provides an opportunity for peace studies to nurture innovative democratic learning communities. Such learning communities offer new opportunities for peace researchers to reflect, earnestly, on the structures of inequality – and the possibilities for their transformation – at play within the production of knowledge. Collaborative engagements also introduce a level of rigour and theory testing that improves the validity and verifiability of research findings (Fluehr-Lobban, 2013: 163; Low and Merry, 2010: S209).

The normative commitments espoused by peace studies as well as a commitment to inter- and trans-disciplinary collaboration offer the distinct opportunity for the field to pave new and innovative paths towards ethical research practices in the pursuit of scholarly excellence capable of doing *good*. There is widespread recognition for the difficult, yet necessary, task of identifying guidelines for the diverse (and, at times, competing) methodological and epistemological approaches to research focused on social conflict, peace and violence. A more systematic and robust discussion about the ethics of peace research would improve

research practices, increase professional credibility and contribute to the highest aspirations of the profession.

In this article, I have outlined three guiding principles central to ethical peace research: reflexivity, responsibility and reciprocity. I have offered a flexible framework, rather than a strict code of conduct, for thinking about the complex ethical dilemmas that peace researchers face. Furthermore, I have built on the work of scholar-practitioners to develop a multidimensional framework that navigates between the multiple stakeholders involved in the research process. For peace studies institutions, this framework asks for a creative reformulation of tenure and promotion metrics that include attention to how scholarly practices attend to the principles of reflexivity, responsibility and reciprocity. For donors and grantors, these guiding principles elevate research projects that couple the “ethical and the empirical” demand an attentiveness to relationship, illuminating the generative capacity of collaborative research designs (Rutherford, 2012: 469). For peace studies scholars, the development of guiding principles that moves beyond the analysis of potential consequences towards ongoing, self-conscious engagement with ethical dilemmas and decisions that emerge throughout the research process aids in the cultivation of daily habits and practices that include robust attention to ethics in everyday research practices.

The development of a shared, yet flexible ethical framework for peace research is necessary for peace scholars as they negotiate the complex ethical dimensions of their work. This essay is only a starting point, an attempt to provoke more substantial conversations about the ethics of peace research. It is my sincere belief that integrating daily reflections on the ethical dimensions of peace research will not only improve scholarship but ultimately result in “less violence, more peace” (Galtung, 1985: 156).

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