Regulatory Ethics Versus Ethics of Truth: Exploring Procedures and Methodological Outcomes of Accountability Systems in Fieldwork Research

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This article critically examines principles and procedures of research ethics and academic accountability relevant to fieldwork research employing materialist critiques of post-modern though. Academic systems of governance based on accountability have been questioned on ethical grounds. This study calls into question the theoretical assumptions of mainstream ethics seeking an alternative approach. First, it delineates a genealogy of critical methods following the emancipatory epistemologies of Bourdieu, Gramsci and Burawoy. Then, ethnographic research in post-soviet workplaces is used to investigate moral issues in fieldwork. The accountability failures of academics involved in Russia's 1990s mass privatization make post-Soviet Russia a significant testing ground for the moral practice of ethnography. Confronting an unethical world, the researcher must resort to stratagems which, in retrospect, appear to violate ethics procedures. We ask whether an alternative approach can be identified without surrendering to mere instrumentalism. Our research identifies a morality that responds to the social context of research with participation and commitment. Research ethics inspired by Badiou's *ethics of truth* recognize reflexivity, engagement, and emancipation as central to research's moral integrity as they are to its scientific validity. An approach that can guide the researcher across the murky politics of fieldwork ultimately demands loyalty to emancipation struggles and those involved in it.

Keywords: Accountability, Ethics, Post-socialism, Qualitative research, Ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Research ethics has become a central concern in the social sciences, particularly in relation to fieldwork conducted in contexts marked by political conflict, structural inequality, and moral ambiguity (Scheytt & Pflüger, 2024a). Over the past decades, ethical regulation has increasingly been formalized through institutional review boards, ethical committees, and standardized procedures aimed at ensuring accountability, neutrality, and the protection of research participants (Foucault, 1975; Wacquant, 2009). These frameworks—variously referred to as procedural, regulatory, or accountability ethics—are now widely taken for granted as the appropriate foundation for ethical research conduct.

While such approaches are assumed to play an important role in limiting harm and formalizing responsibility, their underlying assumptions have been increasingly questioned.

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Accountability demands and ethical scrutiny enforced through regulatory ethics sustain the increasing subjection of academic work to standardized rules of conduct. Critics question such scrutiny for stifling bureaucratic controls, the alienation of performance-obsessed academics and its constraints on qualitative research (Roberts, 2009; Struwig, 2025; Zou, 2021).

Procedural ethics tends to presuppose relatively stable social settings, clear distinctions between researcher and researched, and the requirement of political neutrality (Bourdieu, 2004; Burawoy, 2005). Yet many contemporary research contexts, ranging from post-socialist transformations and authoritarian regimes to sites of forced labor, migration control, and informal economies, are characterized precisely by instability, asymmetrical power relations, and systemic ethical violations (Lee, 2009; Mezzadri, 2016). In these settings, strict adherence to procedural rules may offer little guidance for navigating concrete moral dilemmas and, in some cases, may even contribute to forms of ethical evasion rather than ethical responsibility (Bell & Bryman, 2007; Dougherty & Atkinson, 2006). Calls for ethics in education and research which can inform participatory methods supporting socially just and inclusive practices have now extended well beyond the social sciences (Martin et al., 2023).

This article argues that dominant models of procedural or regulatory ethics are insufficient for addressing the ethical challenges that arise in politically charged fieldwork. In response, it proposes an alternative ethical orientation grounded in what Alain Badiou conceptualizes as an "ethics of truth" (Badiou, 2001, 2005). Rather than focusing on compliance with external rules or abstract principles of neutrality, an ethics of truth emphasizes situated judgment, reflexivity, and a commitment to producing truthful knowledge in contexts where power, domination, and conflict cannot be bracketed out of the research process. Thanks to Badiou (2019), we indeed discover that such situations are not only less uncommon than normally assumed but they represent the point where truth can emerge whenever conflict produces an eventful break in their established order, making engaged research in politically charged contexts a primary path to knowledge production. This perspective does not reject accountability but redefines it as a relational and politically informed practice rather than a purely bureaucratic one.

The argument developed here draws on insights from critical social theory, particularly the work of Badiou, Bourdieu, Gramsci, and Burawoy, to conceptualize ethics as immanent to the research process itself rather than external to it. These perspectives share a concern with the social conditions of knowledge production, the positionality of the researcher, and the inseparability of epistemological and political questions in fieldwork (Bourdieu, 2004; Burawoy, 1998; Gramsci, 2007). By engaging these traditions, the article situates the ethics of truth within a broader critical approach to social research that foregrounds power relations, historical specificity, and reflexive accountability.

Empirically, the paper is informed by extensive ethnographic research (1996-2013) which explored and analyzed the attempted transition from Socialism to Capitalism in the former Soviet Union as part of wider Warwick University Russian projects (Clarke, 2007; Morrison et al., 2023). This period was marked by widespread dispossession, radical institutional change, and the normalization of ethically questionable practices (Clarke, 2007; Kagarlitsky, 1995; Vanke, 2024). Post-Soviet transition approximates a Badiousian event promising truth but also its potential *evils* (Badiou, 2019). Misrepresentation and moral hazards engulfed Western economists' ill-fated involvement with Russian pro-market reformers undermining notions of academic accountability solely assumed on autonomy and scientific rigor (Kogut & Spicer, 2005). In such a context, the assumption of researcher neutrality is repeatedly challenged, and procedural ethics prove inadequate for guiding ethical decision-making in the field. While this case study is historically specific, it is not treated as exceptional. Instead, it is used as a heuristic device to illuminate ethical dilemmas that increasingly characterize contemporary research environments shaped by crisis, inequality, and contested forms of governance (Massey, 1984; Scheytt & Pflüger, 2024b).

By revisiting the relationship between research ethics, truth, and political responsibility, this article seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on ethical reflexivity in the social sciences. It argues that ethics of truth offers a

productive framework for understanding how researchers can act responsibly when established ethical procedures fail to account for the realities of the field. In doing so, the paper aims to extend discussions of research ethics beyond formal compliance, towards a more substantive engagement with the conditions under which social knowledge is produced today.

THEORY BACKGROUND

Ethics and accountability in academic research

Over the last three decades, ethics has become a central organizing principle of academic research governance. Across national contexts, ethical regulation has increasingly been formalised through institutional review boards, ethics committees, and accountability frameworks that emphasise transparency, responsibility, and risk management. Within this configuration, ethics operates not only as a moral discourse but also as a set of bureaucratic and accounting technologies aimed at regulating professional conduct and rendering research practices auditable (Pels, 2000; Roberts, 2009; Sheper-Hughes, 1995; Strathern, 2000; Wolf, 1996).

In the social sciences, this institutionalisation of ethics has reshaped the conditions under which fieldwork is conducted. In many contexts, particularly in Anglo-Saxon academic systems, research involving human subjects is now subject to standardised ethical scrutiny, often carried out by centralised committees detached from the specificities of research settings (ESRC, 2010; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). While these frameworks are allegedly designed to protect research participants and ensure professional accountability, they tend to abstract ethical decision-making from the concrete social relations in which research unfolds.

Critical scholarship has highlighted how such procedural ethics generate forms of ethical governance that prioritise formal compliance over substantive ethical engagement (Strathern, 2000). Standardised procedures reduce complex social interactions to anonymised data points, disconnecting knowledge production from the relational and political dimensions of fieldwork (Dilger et al., 2019). Transparency and monitoring practices, rather than fostering ethical responsibility, may instead produce alienated academic subjects oriented towards performance, risk avoidance, and reputational management (Roberts, 2009).

Within qualitative and ethnographic research, these developments have intensified long-standing epistemological tensions. Ethnographers have long grappled with the paradox of being simultaneously subjects and objects of representation, deeply embedded in social worlds they seek to analyse (Argyrou, 2000). Procedural ethics, however, offers limited resources for addressing this paradox. By presuming a neutral researcher operating in a morally stable environment, it struggles to account for contexts marked by antagonism, domination, and structural violence. As a result, ethical responsibility is often reduced to the avoidance of harm rather than engagement with the conditions that produce harm in the first place (Haynes, 2017).

Attempts to overcome these limitations have taken different directions. Some scholars advocate rethinking accountability through virtues such as humility, generosity, and trust, emphasising dialogical relationships over top-down monitoring (Roberts, 2009). Others adopt confessional or narrative methodologies that foreground reflexivity and positionality. Yet these approaches frequently displace the question of truth, reducing validity to an act of interpretive sincerity and leaving unresolved how knowledge can critically engage with objective structures of domination (Pels, 2000).

From a realist perspective, this represents a fundamental limitation. As Armstrong (2015a, b) argues, many post-structuralist and Foucauldian accounts of power and ethics risk evacuating human agency and obscuring the causal mechanisms that shape lived experiences of domination. Emancipation, in this view, cannot be grounded solely in ethical sensitivity or interpretive openness, but requires an analysis of objective social relations and collective agency embedded in material power structures (Ackroyd, 2004; Edwards, 2015; Elger, 2002; Thompson & Smith, 2001).

This article builds on these realist critiques to argue for an alternative ethical framework that reconnects ethics, truth, and social structure. Rather than abandoning claims to truth in favour of interpretive relativism, a realist ethics insists on the possibility, and necessity, of producing situated yet analytically robust knowledge about social domination. This perspective provides the epistemological foundation for engaging with Alain Badiou's ethics of truth (201, 2019), which offers a conceptual vocabulary for rethinking ethics as fidelity to transformative processes rather than adherence to universalised moral norms.

Realist Critiques of Procedural Ethics

Debates within qualitative research have consistently pointed out that procedural ethics are often too abstract, generic, and detached from the realities of fieldwork. Researchers report that ethical codes constrain research autonomy while offering little guidance for navigating concrete moral dilemmas encountered in practice (Bell & Bryman, 2007; Dougherty & Atkinson, 2006). This disjunction creates a risk of instrumental compliance, whereby ethical approval becomes a formal requirement rather than a meaningful ethical engagement (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). A vast literature as to date developed to reflect and debate on the challenges of implementing established ethical principles, such as informed consent, voluntary participation, avoiding harm, anonymization, and confidentiality as well as key issues like researcher-participant relationship, power asymmetries, and other fieldwork related risks which exceed procedural ethics coverage (Scheytt & Pflüger, 2024a: 1).

These limitations are not merely institutional but ideological. As several critical theorists argue, the contemporary expansion of ethical regulation is embedded in a broader globalisation of ethics that reflects post-political modes of governance (Badiou, 2019; Bell & Bryman, 2007; Harris, 2000). Within this framework, ethics is grounded in universalised notions of human vulnerability and harm, privileging the protection of "bare life" over the analysis of social and political agency (Brennan, 2006).

Badiou (2001) provides one of the most systematic critiques of this ethical paradigm. He argues that ethics grounded in abstract conceptions of humanity necessarily operates at a distance from concrete situations, imposing normative limits on action in the name of universal moral goods. Such ethics presupposes a subject defined primarily by its capacity to suffer, rather than by its capacity to resist and transform social relations. As a result, ethical regulation becomes inherently conservative, oriented towards maintaining existing orders rather than challenging them.

From a realist standpoint, this ethical orientation is deeply problematic. By prioritising protection over explanation, procedural ethics tends to privilege contemplation over investigation, allowing researchers to make moral claims without engaging with the causal structures that generate injustice (Armstrong, 2017). Moreover, the focus on cultural difference and respect for the "Other" can paradoxically legitimise forms of symbolic and material violence, as exemplified by humanitarian interventionism and technocratic governance (Badiou, 2019; Žižek, 2003).

These dynamics are particularly evident in scholarly representations of post-socialist transformation. Dominant narratives often frame Eastern Europe and the FSU through residual Cold War imaginaries, depicting them as lagging behind a normative Western trajectory of capitalism and democracy (Morrison et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Pose & Storper, 2006). The social costs of transition are frequently rendered as cultural pathologies or subaltern suffering, obscuring the political and economic forces driving dispossession (Brennan, 2006; Vanke, 2024).

Against this background, the limits of procedural ethics become clear. An ethical framework centred on harm avoidance and neutrality is ill-equipped to address research contexts characterised by structural violence, antagonistic interests, and contested truths. What is required instead is an ethics capable of engaging with conflict, power, and the possibility of emancipation.

Procedural Ethics and Ethics of Truth

Badiou's ethics of truth (2001, 2005, 2019) offers such a framework by reorienting ethics away from universal norms and towards fidelity to transformative processes. Whereas procedural ethics evaluates actions according to pre-defined rules and risk assessments, an ethics of truth is situational and processual (see Table 1). Truth emerges not as correspondence or consensus, but through events that disrupt established orders and open possibilities for change.

In this perspective, ethics is inseparable from political commitment. Truth is produced through sustained engagement with situations of rupture, whether workplace conflicts, crises, or broader social transformations, and through loyalty to the consequences of those events. Evil, in Badiou's terms, consists not in causing harm per se, but in betrayal: the abandonment or distortion of transformative possibilities once they emerge.

Importantly, this conception of ethics does not imply subjectivism or moral voluntarism. On the contrary, it requires rigorous engagement with social reality. Realist approaches help operationalise this insight by distinguishing between the empirical - what is observed - and the real - the underlying structures and relations that generate observable phenomena (Fleetwood, 2005). Truth emerges through dialogical engagements that challenge both researcher and respondent assumptions, bringing subjective experiences into relation with objective social determinants (Bourdieu et al., 2002).

Methodologically, this implies rejecting the ideal of standardised procedures in favour of a research craft oriented towards truth-seeking (see Table 2).

Ethical responsibility is enacted through embeddedness, continuity, and reflexive engagement rather than through legalistic artefacts such as consent forms alone. Such engagements are inherently fragile and sometimes painful, but they offer the possibility of genuine encounters capable of producing both subjective and objective truths.

Emancipatory epistemologies and research approaches to post-socialism and advanced capitalism

The post-socialist context provides a particularly revealing terrain for examining these ethical and epistemological questions. Drawing on Gramsci, Bourdieu, and Burawoy, this article situates post-Soviet fieldwork within a tradition of critical sociology concerned with the conditions of emancipatory dialogue under different regimes of domination.

Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual foregrounds the possibility of knowledge emerging through active affiliation with subaltern groups, grounded in what he termed good sense - the immanent critical capacity

Table 1. Procedural Ethics and Ethics of Truth: Key Differences

Type	Procedural Ethics	Ethics of Truth
Approach	A priori/universal	Situational/context-specific
Aim	Avoiding harm/risk, protecting "bare life"	Emancipatory/enhancing social and political life
Subject	Neutral subject/victim	Historical subject/social agent
Context	Neutral	Socio-political
Tools	Bureaucratic Standard Procedures	Researcher's craft

Table 2. Procedural Ethics and Ethics of Truth: Methodological Outcomes

Type	Procedural Ethics	Ethics of Truth
Relies on	Correct procedures, Legalistic artefacts (consent forms, committee approval)	Engagement, embeddedness, continuity
Promotes	Distance, passivity, neutrality	Trust, loyalty, con-participation
Delivers	Data, opinions	Subjective and objective truths

embedded in everyday experience (Gramsci, 2007; Sousa, 2022). Gramsci's method introduces practices of "con-participation" and "con-passionality" which reduce knowledge asymmetry by relying on embeddedness in research communities, breaking away from over-rationalized misconceptions (Burgio, 2014: 50–54). Bourdieu also employs empathic interactions to extract the truth (Bourdieu et al., 2002: 621). His conception of the engaged intellectual similarly emphasised the role of empathic yet analytically rigorous engagements in uncovering the subjective experience of exploitation, though his concept of habitus has been criticised for underestimating actors' access to truth and reintroducing power distance (Brook & Darlington, 2013).

Burawoy's comparative ethnography further develops this methodological framework. His analysis of workplace regimes in advanced capitalism and state socialism highlights how different forms of domination shape the possibilities for critical dialogue. In state socialist contexts, the transparency and instability of domination created openings for immanent critique that were often absent in hegemonic capitalist settings (Burawoy, 1997, 2012). Burawoy's recognition of ethnographic fallacies (2013) however, suggests that Capitalism's stability is exaggerated. The methodological radicalism of *inchiesta operaia* (workers' enquiry), championed by Italian workerism (Tronti, 2013), shows that crisis in capitalist hegemony can produce breaks with the common sense of capitalist domination.

Conversely, post-Soviet transformation has displayed greater obstacles to immanent critiques than originally predicted (Arnot, 1988; Clarke, 1993; Filtzer, 1994; Schwartz & McCann, 2007). While the collapse of state socialism generated widespread estrangement and contestation, it also produced new forms of mystification (Clarke, 2007; Morrison, 2003), informal power (Polese, 2013), and autocratic governance (Dixon et al., 2014). Fieldwork in this context reveals both obstacles to engagement and moments of ethical rupture, what Badiou would term events, that force researchers to confront dilemmas of loyalty, betrayal, and truth.

It is within these fractured and unstable conditions that the limits of procedural ethics become most visible and the need for an ethics of truth most pressing. The strategies adopted to navigate these dilemmas, and the ethical tensions they generated, are examined in the following section.

Misinterpretation and accountability in Transition

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in late 1991 represent, for many, a point of no-return for real socialism (Åslund, 2007). Thereafter successor states and societies have engaged in transitions to liberal democracy and market economy with varying degrees of conviction and practical success (Grancelli, 2012; Stark & Bruszt, 1998). The social and economic processes behind such events, their perception by those directly involved are less obvious, particularly in the former Soviet Union (Crowley & Ost, 2001; Kagarlitsky, 1995; Vanke, 2024). To start, nomenklatura de-facto privatization and the rise of the informal economy had been steadily developing since the economy reached stagnation in 1970. Gorbachev's reforms in the late 1980s, following West sponsored neo-liberal recipes, supported these processes, expecting that freedom of initiative would revive the economy while consolidating the regime. It was only in 1993 that full privatization was imposed after Yeltsin's coup d'état dispatched the last remnants of Soviet institutions. Even then, the result was simply to increase autarchic tendencies by enterprises battling for survival in a volatile economic environment monopolized by ex-Soviet bureaucrats, marketers and organized crime (Hendley, 1998; Johnson, 1997).

The region where our research started in 1997 had only started to plan restructuring when the 1998 crisis struck, leading to state default and large-scale enterprise bankruptcies. By then, a new force had emerged – oligarchs. Supported by the new authorities in Moscow, they engaged in a struggle for control with management. Their success in the post-1998 scenario brought stability but very little restructuring (Clarke, 2014). Elsewhere in the Baltics (Sommers & Woolfson, 2014) and in new EU member-states (Meardi, 2013) FDI and foreign intervention engender neo-liberal restructuring but change in social relations has destabilizing consequences: rise in turnover, emigration, socio-political conflict alongside work informalization and labor degradation. This explains why post-

Soviet authorities and employers try to retain crucial aspects of the old order and, equally, why respondents and researchers struggle to comprehend such contradictory processes.

Misinterpretation relates to accountability failures by western academics who legitimized Russian reforms without taking responsibility for their failures; specifically, a conflict of interest involving economists gravitating around the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID) (Kogut & Spicer, 2005). At any point in the process, they acted as ideologues advocating market reforms, consultants to western agencies channeling funding to reformers and political advisors to a specific group of reformers benefitting from them. They, therefore, embodied the paradox of being sole narrators of the transition story while being involved in its very making. Kogut and Spicer identify the accountability failure in the gap between the "codified knowledge to which science aspires", built on non-partisan commitment, and the "tacit knowledge that an academic learns in the practice of his or her craft" which remains unaccounted for (2005: 3). Further, we show how such craft can be used differently to fill this gap enhancing ethics and accountability.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on an ethnographic research experience conducted during the process of mass privatisation in post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s. Rather than presenting a conventional empirical study aimed at hypothesis testing or representativeness, the methodology adopted here is reflexive and analytical in nature. The empirical material serves as a site through which ethical tensions in fieldwork are examined, rather than as a dataset from which generalisable causal claims are derived.

The research involved prolonged immersion in a highly politicised and morally charged social context, characterised by rapid institutional transformation, widespread dispossession, and contested forms of legality and legitimacy. Data were generated through participant observation, informal conversations, and repeated interactions with a range of actors involved in or affected by the privatisation process. As in many forms of critical ethnography, the boundaries between observation, participation, and ethical positioning were fluid and continuously renegotiated in the field (Burawoy, 1998, 2009).

Importantly, the methodological focus of this article is not on the empirical reconstruction of post-Soviet privatisation per se, but on the ethical dilemmas that emerged in the course of conducting research under such conditions. Decisions concerning positionality, disclosure, political alignment, and the production of knowledge could not be resolved through reference to pre-defined procedural rules or institutional ethical guidelines. Instead, ethical judgment unfolded situationally, in relation to concrete interactions, power asymmetries, and the broader political economy of the field. This methodological stance is consistent with traditions of reflexive sociology and extended case methodology, which emphasise the inseparability of epistemological, ethical, and political questions in social research (Bourdieu, 2004; Burawoy, 1998).

From this perspective, methodology is understood not as a neutral set of techniques, but as a practice embedded in social relations and historical conditions. The researcher's position is neither external nor purely observational but relationally constituted within the field itself. This implies a form of accountability that is not exhausted by compliance with institutional procedures but instead requires continuous reflexive engagement with the consequences of knowledge production (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

While the empirical material discussed here is drawn from a historically specific context, the methodological and ethical issues it raises are not treated as exceptional. Rather than claiming empirical generalisability, the article advances a form of analytical and conceptual generalisation. The post-Soviet transformation is approached as an intensified case in which the limitations of procedural ethics become particularly visible. However, similar ethical tensions have been widely documented in contemporary research on migration regimes, informal economies,

authoritarian governance, and global labour relations - contexts likewise marked by instability, asymmetrical power relations, and systemic ethical violations (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Struwig, 2025; Zou, 2021).

In this sense, the case functions as a heuristic device that allows for the exploration of ethical dilemmas that increasingly characterise fieldwork beyond post-socialist settings. The ethics of truth framework proposed in this article is therefore not bound to a single historical or geographical context but intended as a flexible orientation applicable to diverse research environments in which neutrality cannot be assumed, and ethical responsibility must be negotiated within relations of power rather than outside them.

By foregrounding situated judgment, reflexivity, and political responsibility, the methodology adopted here aligns with critical ethnographic approaches that view ethical practice as immanent to the research process itself (Burawoy, 2009; Madison, 2011). This approach does not reject accountability, but reconceptualises it as relational, historically situated, and inseparable from the pursuit of truthful knowledge in ethically complex settings.

TRUTH AND MORALITY IN WORKPLACE FIELDWORK

Case study background

In this article we identify and discuss ethical issues drawn from fieldwork research carried out in the FSU by *Claudio* during the decade 1997-2007 (Morrison, 2007). The research employed ethnographic and qualitative research methods developed by Clarke (1993) and Burawoy (1998) to explore enterprise restructuring and social change during transition, focusing on the soviet textile-clothing industry. This consumer industry uniquely felt the pressures for market restructuring and represented an ideal case to contrast western capitalist and socialist modes of production. Association with the longitudinal multi-sited and multi-country projects, run collaboratively by the Warwick-based Centre for Comparative Labor Studies and the Institute for Labor Relations Research (ISITO) in Moscow, allowed for iterative processes of triangulation and validation of findings and analysis (Morrison et al., 2023).

In 1997, *Claudio* joined a Russian textile company as a management consultant trainee furnished with academic knowledge of the Soviet factory system but no experience of workplace daily life and its politics. A break-up in relations between consultants and local management allowed him to develop strong ties with gatekeepers and secure access to the researched community. UK funding (PhD, British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship held at Warwick University) allowed to continue in this experience. The research investigated organizational change, management and the labor process to explain apparently irrational managerial practices and worker's patience vis-à-vis western bewilderment at their failure to embrace the market economy.

Out of neutrality: morality, loyalty and embeddedness in fieldwork

The trainee entered the Russian company with an EU-sponsored team of western consultants aiding industrial restructuring of the local textile industry. The institutional framework and participants' behavior approximate those observed by Kogut and Spicer (2005). The team chief was a capable accountant, fully aware that the firm's poor finances needed more than classical remedies yet reproducing standard restructuring routines. The project head abroad was principally concerned with successful reporting to funders. Most team members, habituated to short-term assignments in homogenized global markets, responded to a highly demanding context either by minimizing contact or engaging in hazardous behavior. Consultants faced Russians' demands for greater support, ambiguous commitment to restructuring and suspicion at outsiders' interference. Internally, the company environment was also rife with conflicts between diverging interests and conflicting loyalty claims. Against this background the trainee was tasked with collecting data on factory premises, including employment in workshops, a deceptively menial task. Soviet factory-level data were notoriously unreliable as local management hoarded resources and lied

about availability. The prospect of cuts strengthened this behavior. The researcher traded unrestricted access to workplace premises and support for data gathering with keenness to understand line managers' caution towards restructuring. Line managers insisted on double-entry records for staff and machinery separately to account for unreliable employees and worn-out equipment. Locally depleted resources counted as essential buffers but were seen as wasteful extras by far-removed top management. The findings to the dismay of project headquarters, openly questioned consensus about project achievements, the first of many breaks, in Badiou's sense (2001), unwittingly generated by the research's commitment to unveiling the truth about Transition as wholesale transformation induced by capitalist restoration. When Western consultants were evicted from the site for of insider trading, the researcher retained access by switching loyalties to his Russian gatekeepers. Taking the Russians' side appeared both morally justified and holding further opportunities for research. Gaining gatekeepers' trust, however, proved a necessary but not sufficient condition to fulfil his commitment.

Within the Russian company structure resentments and diffidence were widespread; the outcome of power-wresting conflicts among managerial factions and between factory management, outside owners and bureaucrats resulting in red tape and biased narratives. Stratagems were deployed to acquire broad knowledge from different points of view. Over years, the researcher bonded with several gatekeepers – Kolya, a rising star in management with strong analytical skills and a critical outlook; Vitya, a foreman with strong working-class ties; and Nadya, landlady and head of company catering, who introduced *Claudio* to women workers' circles. The process of becoming an insider had to be constantly countered by a *shift to the side* to challenge the power structures which constrained respondents and the common sense which masked them. On reflection, empirical research establishes a social relationship which is inevitably connected with our personal and intellectual life.

Participant observation also raised ethical issues as pressures were exerted to comply with societal unwritten rules, such as male camaraderie and hierarchical loyalties, questioning the researcher's affinity with the adopted community. The condition of *being inside on the side* allowed him to navigate these claims, opening gaps within an apparently homogenous culture. These moves challenged presumptions on both sides, providing opportunities for truth to emerge. Reflexivity was constantly required for identifying and navigating these processes.

To summarize, two aims arise: a) to assume the respondents' point of view, taking their side "selflessly" (Bourdieu et al., 2002: 614), and b) seeking the truth about their social condition, constantly distancing oneself from their given understanding and behavior. This process was facilitated by the deep fault lines opened by chaotic change in an otherwise tight-knit societal structure. Key ethical challenges arose at key moments: in relationships with authorities to obtain access and avoid red tape; in researcher-respondent engagements during fieldwork. The following sections analyze such cases.

Isn't the truth always biased?

The ethnographer working with a relatively small number of respondents and without a rigidly pre-ordained workplan is easily open to accusations, as well as the real risk of bias. These risks weighed constantly over the research given heavy reliance on gatekeepers and personal ties with respondents. To counter them, triangulation between accounts by respondents with antagonistic interests was employed, engaging not just top or middle managers but workers of different status, skills and gender. Every encounter did not merely add to a cacophony of contrasting narratives but pursued a careful reconstruction of the structure and dynamics of the organization's social relations.

Collecting data and interviewing in a Russian proved a much harder task than initially envisaged. Respondents were hesitant to reveal information, either for fear of management reprisals or to conceal working practices. Western analysts often translate their ignorance of (post-)Soviet reality in negative accounts. The author's sought precisely to understand how things worked rather than stating they did not (by Western standards). Acquiring genuine and

comprehensive factual accounts proved to be a tortuous, time-consuming process evading a linear, standardised strategy. Left to their own devices, respondents seemed equally hopeless: responses ranged from enthusiastic adherence to the status quo – "everything is fine" – or muted stoicism – "it has always been like this, what's the point in discussing it" – to outbursts conflating complaints and accusations.

This is well exemplified by conflicting explanations of unsatisfactory productivity in the workshop. Management blamed workers' laziness, while consultants deemed worker's contribution immaterial. Line managers blamed both top management absenteeism and workers' unruliness. Fieldwork's notebook records read:

> For Kolya it all boils down to this: the *bolshoyj obman* [great cheat], as he calls it, between production management and administration. The latter set targets without caring about provisions, the former must cope by bending the rules and tolerating indiscipline. Vitya though is very dismissive of the managers' role: they arrive at eight in the morning, when problems have already piled up, and sit down waiting for reports to come from foremen [. . .] personally I do not understand what we need these managers for (Field notes, Textile factory, Ivanovo 2005).

Interviewing workers turned out to be a more difficult task. They refused individual interviews and only agreed to answer written queries. The answers read as a collective grievance:

> Women operators of the carding shop wrote: The change in the shift system has cast a significant influence on our work. [Author's note: the old system entailed a night shift only twice a month, now it has increased to twice a week] We believe that it is very difficult for women to work on a night shift, both physically and psychologically. Night shifts are particularly tiring, but for women there is no chance to rest afterwards as they still have a family, a home, and a plot of land [to manage] (Field notes, Textile factory, Ivanovo 2005).

The researcher's reaction was to request further individual interviews with key workers and foremen, pressing questions about their coping strategies. Fieldwork notes record dilemmas surrounding such stubborn, and naïve pursuit:

> Women do not want to be interviewed! In retrospect it was a mistake to reach them through Kolya. I got used to managers and forgot that with workers it is different! Nadya laughed at me: "did you really believe they would answer your questions, why should they?" The same happened with the shop mechanic: [laugh] they will never tell you how they make-up things! Kolya explains: they do so [collective replies] since the 1930s great repressions, they are afraid of victimization. He has found someone who can speak out though, a former party officer, now a spinner, she is not afraid. Her view is that: workers fear managers because if a worker receives a reprimand the others would rather side with managers […] if I acted as trade union leader, they would find a way to kick me out'. I must push with Kolya and the others till they let me understand the technology and the ways around it. […] We've finally made it – I knew they know it but rather did not say or simply thought it irrelevant. You should not take anything for granted with them! (Field notes, Textile Factory, Ivanovo 2001).

Workers' diffidence was understandable: they safeguard hard-won skills from indiscreet eyes, afraid that research would spearhead reforms worsening their condition. An issue often ignored by supposedly overprotective ethical

rules. However, respecting their silence would mean unwittingly collaborating with management at marginalizing workers. This early experience has prompted the realization that spontaneous accounts will not emerge without careful consideration, not just of data collection techniques, but also of the ways, place and circumstances in which vulnerable respondents are approached.

Risk of bias also arises from respondents' self-gratifying accounts as exemplified by this culture-laden dialogue with a key respondent. It followed a factory incident – an explosion in Kolya's shop caused by steam from a defective pipe which had accumulated in an unchecked storage room. *Claudio* expressed outrage that such inefficiencies were tolerated, and instead health and safety regulators targeted line managers like Kolya – for not ensuring that the door was open. Kolya thought otherwise arguing that the researcher's reaction typifies Western assumptions of technological infallibility. Soviet society, he explained, accepted that there is no such thing as risk-free activity and consequently relied on workers to minimize hazards from technological shortcomings. For the researcher this point approached the sort of captivating abstractions "which afford all the pleasures of lucidity without questioning anything essential" (Bourdieu et al., 2002: 616). Researcher's questioning shifted to the causes of the incident – absence of maintenance, design failures, wrong investments. Ultimately both parties focused on technology as a social control tool; the Soviets lacked control over lower managerial layers, hence their stress on the human factor, while nominal abundance of resources lowered concerns about failures and human costs. Emancipative dialogues, escaping fatuous cultural theory, can question managerial ideologies engendering the induced process of self-analysis that Bourdieu and Žižek consider the only effective way to the truth. In ethical terms, the hermeneutics of an interview process reveal that questioning both people and culture is the necessary condition for truth to emerge from each point of view.

An important part of training for social research is learning both the role of researcher and the ethics underlying this role (Haynes, 2017; Hughes, 1994). Participant observation should not be merely conceived as neutral presence in a situation because sometimes it requires breaking stereotypes to grasp the order of a representation. By practicing autonomy of action and thought and confronting authority, researchers build legitimacy in the field and overcome positional power asymmetries.

Gender and the ethics of embeddedness

Gender equality and vigilance towards any form of harassment is a major concern of ethical academic institutions and Western political agendas. This notwithstanding, Western agents in the global South are often perceived as sexual predators and exploiters, be it due to investments in subcontracted sweatshops (Munck, 2002), controversial humanitarian interventionism (Chomsky, 1993) or sexual tourism (Woan, 2008). This is very much the case with Italian entrepreneurship in the "Wild East" (Gambino & Sacchetto, 2007; Redini, 2008).

The researched community had experiences of such misbehavior and gatekeepers related them to *Claudio* implicitly suggesting that he had to clarify his moral conduct. Fieldwork notes recorded:

> Difficult to understand what women respondents may expect of me [. . .] Kolya told me there were only two Italians here before on factory related business. One kept having affairs and promised marriage to each of them. He did not make a good impression. The other was possibly worse – he refused relations with factory girls and asked for prostitutes. Kolya doesn't appear judgmental, like saying that he does not mind either way (Field notes, Textile factory, Ivanovo 1997-2000).

These imageries and anxieties constantly accompanied the researcher during fieldwork. To complicate matters further, his status as an insider also raised countervailing expectations about masculinity. Once, Vitya enlisted the

help of a young female trainee to guide *Claudio* in town. The latter invited her to a meal to carry out an interview. The event did not go unnoticed; her husband grew suspicious, so much so that by the following day he was steaming towards *Claudio* while he was exiting the factory gates accompanied by his manager friends. They settled the situation and by the end the man approached him and apologized, confirming he had been reassured about the researcher's innocence. In a second case, it was such 'integrity' that put the researcher in trouble. A factory engineer asked for a frank chat and related rumors about his masculinity citing avoidance of female company and failure to take advantage of his status; eventually he announced his relief when the researcher's closest acquaintances concluded that his behavior simply epitomized exemplary old-style communist morality.

This outcome resulted from a strategy aimed at retaining the trust of gatekeepers without embracing their chauvinism. Following "reflex reflexivity" (Bourdieu et al., 2002: 621) the researcher never abandoned them, even in dubious circumstances, yet never shying away from questioning their behavior, further opening these issues for discussion with female worker. This approach avoids the tropes of foreign moralism, instead expressing alternative attitudes in practical and political terms familiar to researched communities. It highlights the need to mediate the representation that the other attach to us and openly to discuss it during fieldwork. This strategy yielded a) acceptance of the researcher's behavior in the local political culture, b) recognition that alternative stances are possible *within* that culture and c) exposure of their political, falsifiable character, opening the possibility for inquiry.

Ultimately, the insider's gradual integration in the social structures of the research community does not solely blur boundaries between cultures but serves to sharpen the focus on the social hierarchies within them (Argyrou, 2000). This contrasts with postmodernist celebrations of cultural difference which falter once confronted with *the other*'s disturbing content (Žižek, 2003: 19–24).

Discussion

Research communities and organizations are often built around antagonizing interests, presenting researchers with an ethically complex reality rather than the pristine environment posited by conventional ethics. The fractured post-Soviet space exemplifies such circumstances, offering both heightened risks of betrayal and opportunities for truth (Badiou, 2001). Pursuing loyalty to the truth generates "ethically relevant moments" (Guillemin & Gillian, 2004) that challenge traditional ethical paradigms.

Our research experience revealed that accessing the field and engaging respondents often entailed taking sides and developing strong bonds with gatekeepers. This deep immersion, while exposing us to the risk of bias, allowed for more incisive and revealing data collection strategies. Gaining insider status, though involving potentially risky or morally ambiguous situations (Polese, 2013), proved essential in uncovering underlying social dynamics.

Contrasting loyalty to organizations (employers) with loyalty to the truth highlights the contradictions of academic non-partisanship. Participant observation demands acquiring legitimacy in the research space, yet also defying common sense and authorities to uncover the social order (Hughes, 1994). Rejecting neutrality, researcher's autonomy is sought in relation to the real situation's social order.

This radical stance does not prioritize political engagement over knowledge production but recognizes that objective research must challenge the status quo to unveil its essential contradictions. Validity, therefore, cannot be solely equated with the orderly collection of respondents' viewpoints but always requires the extraction - in a Bourdieusian sense - of the social mechanisms managing their relations and the analysis of power structures ordering them.

Research ethics should push us to describe socio-economic processes while recognizing that we are talking about human beings, countering the nihilism inscribed in the ethical turn (Badiou, 2001). The distinction is perhaps between those who commit to highlighting the most uncomfortable contradictions and those who opt for softer

arguments or, worse, submit to powerful clients' interests (see Kogut & Spicer, 2005).

Fieldwork experience shows that the researcher's inevitable intrusiveness can be compatible with a non-violent approach; "induced self-analysis" can be as much a "joyful" process as it is a "painful" one (Bourdieu et al., 2002: 616). Reflecting on the statute of truth helps reassess the bias problem. Truth is always biased due to the irreconcilable nature of social reality (Žižek, 2003), and recognizing this partiality is essential for honest and rigorous research.

CONCLUSIONS

Current discussions on research ethics tend to focus on procedural improvements, proposing notions of multiple ethical communities (Dougherty & Atkinson, 2006) and aspirational ethics (Bell & Bryman, 2007). However, these proposals risk reducing emancipation to irrelevance once adopted as universal generic principles (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Armstrong, 2009).

A pluralism in research methods that overcomes the false universalism of programmatic ethics, making ethics a shared framework open to interpretation and subject to the commitment of making research's ontology explicit, would be a safer option. This pluralism should welcome full recognition of research aimed at challenging the status quo and powerful stakeholders' interests (ESRC, 2010), while subjecting pro-market and management-sponsored research to equally scrupulous scrutiny for its often-overlooked risks of bias, intrusion, and harm.

Accountability of the research process and its actors cannot be ensured simply by mimicking the super-partes positioning and rigor of hard science through standardization, emotional neutralization, and objectifying data analysis language. This approach conceals the unspeakable in ethnography: its constantly tense and changing social relations. Ethnography's scientific legitimacy remains under scrutiny because the positivist myth of standardization keeps reality's multiplicity and contradictions out of reach (Bourdieu et al., 2002).

New forms of accountability overcoming procedural ethics cannot be imagined without challenging both the neutrality and isolation of the researcher. The workplace morality outlined in this study relies on "the concept of an ethical, reflective and deeply social agent" (Bolton & Laaser, 2013: 509), founded on a popular ethics that sanctions direct action (Thompson, 2001: 332).

The Badiou-inspired ethics of truth can sustain an "intelligent accountability" founded on trust and loyalty (Roberts, 2009), overcoming the researcher's authorial isolation through co-participation and co-passionality. This approach raises participants' status and makes researcher-respondent relationships explicit, placing the tacit knowledge and beliefs achieved in the field of practice at the centre of knowledge production.

Analytically, the rigorous reconnection of subjective lived experiences with objectively reconstructed structures, achieved through knowledge co-production, answers questions about researcher' individual rigour and potentials political bias (Rydzik & Bal, 2024: 565). Operationally, internal accountabilities substantiating change-oriented knowledge production, participants' empowerment and awareness growth (Di Nunzio, 2022; Sousa, 2022) should supersede current models privileging external accountability which rely on quantifiable measurement of impact to satisfy financial and legal liabilities towards institutional bodies and external sponsors. Such liabilities cannot be ignored, however, and further debates should rethink forms of accountability toward science, the university and external bodies in light of the suggested shift to a stakeholder-centred, participatory approach to research.

In sum, this study suggests that what respondents and researchers should focus on is not merely the production of individual narratives but the unearthing of class (and other) relations. The researcher does not become a spokesperson for any distinct group or cause but tries to understand without being condescending, allowing empirical research to reflect not only on miseries and contradictions but also on the potential of our society.

Claudio Morrison and Devi Sacchetto. Regulatory Ethics Versus Ethics of Truth: Exploring Procedures and Methodological Outcomes of Accountability Systems in Fieldwork Research

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규제의 윤리 대 진리의 윤리: 현장연구에서 책무성 체계의 절차와 방법론적 결과에 대한 탐구

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본 논문은 포스트모던 사상의 물질주의적 비판을 활용하여 현장 연구(fieldwork research)와 관련된 연구 윤리와 절차를 비판적으로 검토한다. 책무성(accountability)에 기반한 학문적 거버넌스 체계는 윤리적 근거로 인해 의문을 제기받아 왔다. 본 연구는 주류 윤리학의 이론적 전제를 문제 삼으며 대안적 접근방법을 모색한다. 먼저 부르디외, 그람시, 뷰라워이의 해방적 인식론에 따라 비판적 방법론의 계보를 밝힌다. 다음으로, 구소련 이후의 직장에 대한 민족지학적 연구를 통해 현장 연구에서의 도덕적 문제들을 탐구한다. 1990년대 러시아의 대규모 민영화에 관여했던 학자들의 책무성의 실패는, 구소련 이후의 러시아를 민족지학의 도덕적 실천을 위한 중요한 시험대로 만든다. 비윤리적인 세계에 직면했을 때, 연구자는 되돌아보면 윤리적 절차를 위반하는 책략(stratagem)에 의존할 수밖에 없었다. 우리는 단순한 도구주의에 굴복하지 않고도 대안적 접근법을 찾을 수 있는가에 대해 의문을 제기한다. 우리 연구는 연구의 사회적 맥락을 참여와 헌신과 함께 반응하는 도덕성을 밝힌다. 바디우의 진리의 윤리에 영감을 받은 연구 윤리는 성찰성(reflexivity), 참여, 그리고 해방을 과학적 타당성만큼이나 연구 윤리에 핵심적인 요소로 인식한다. 현장 연구의 복잡한 정치적 맥락을 넘어 연구자를 인도하는 접근 방법은, 해방 투쟁과 그에 연루된 이들에게 충실할 것을 궁극적으로 요구한다.

주제어: 책무성, 윤리, 탈사회주의, 질적 연구, 민족지학

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