

official in X county, which is near a major urban center” or “academic with economics specialization at a top 50 university”...etc. Although this level of disclosure is far from perfect, it at least provides readers with some sense about the qualification of the informant in a given topic area.

Special care to protect subjects’ identities also must be taken during the research process and in the final products. For one, to the extent that the researcher is keeping a list of informants, that list should be stored separately from the interview notes. Both the list of informants and the interview notes should be stored in a password-protected setting, perhaps in two secure clouds outside of the authoritarian country. At the extreme, the researcher may—while in the country—need to keep only a mental list of informants and only noting the rough positions of the informants in written notes. In China, for example, foreign academics have reported incidents of the Chinese authorities breaking into their hotel rooms to install viruses and spyware on their computers. Thus, having a password-protected laptop is far from sufficient. When academics are citing interview notes in their writing, they must obfuscate or even exclude key details about the informants such as their geographic location, the date of the interviews, and specific positions in an organization.

To be sure, these rules of thumb go against the spirit of data access and research transparency. They also make pure replication of qualitative interview data-collection impossible. At most, other scholars may be able to interview informants in similar positions but likely in different geographical locations, and subsequent interviews may yield totally different conclusions. However, this is a tradeoff that researchers of authoritarian regimes must accept without any leeway. Because informants in authoritarian regimes can face a wide range of physical and financial harm, their safety must come first before other research criteria.

Although researchers of authoritarian regimes cannot provide complete transparency in their interview data, they can compensate with a multi-method, multi-data approach that provides a high degree of transparency for other non-human sources of data. Increasingly, researchers who glean some key insights from interviews are also testing the same hypotheses using nonhuman quantitative data such as remote-sensing data,⁵ economic and financial data,⁶ textual data,⁷ and elite biographical data.⁸ These datasets are typically collected from publicly available sources such as the Internet or satellite imageries and made widely available to other researchers for replication purposes.⁹ Instead of only relying on somewhat secretive interview data, researchers of authoritarian regimes can increasingly make full use of other data sources to show the robustness of their inferences. This does not mean that interviews are no longer needed because nothing can quite replace interviews in the initial hypothesis generation stage. It does

mean that hypothesis-testing has become much less “black boxy” for empirical research of authoritarian regimes.

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Transparency in Intensive Research on Violence: Ethical Dilemmas and Unforeseen Consequences

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Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson
University of Minnesota

Elisabeth Jean Wood
Yale University

Scholars who engage in intensive fieldwork have an obligation to protect research subjects and communities from repercussions stemming from that research.¹ Acting on that duty

Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson is Assistant Professor at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. She is online at sparkins@umn.edu and <https://www.hhh.umn.edu/people/sparkinson/>. Elisabeth Jean Wood is Professor of Political Science at Yale University. She is online at elisabeth.wood@yale.edu and <http://campuspress.yale.edu/elisabethwood>. The authors would like to thank Séverine Autesserre, Tim Büthe, Melani Cammett, Jeffrey C. Isaac, Alan M. Jacobs, Adria Lawrence, Nicholas Rush Smith, and Richard L. Wood for their helpful comments and suggestions on this essay.

¹ We generally take “intensive” fieldwork to mean fieldwork that is qualitative and carried out during long-term (six months or more), at least partially immersive stays in the field, incorporating methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, focus groups,

⁵ Mattingly 2015.

⁶ Wallace 2015.

⁷ King et al. 2013.

⁸ Shih et al. 2012.

⁹ See, e.g., Shih et al. 2008.

not only paves the way towards ethical research but also, as we argue below, facilitates deeper understanding of people's lived experiences of politics. For scholars who study topics such as violence, mobilization, or illicit behavior, developing and maintaining their subjects' trust constitutes the ethical and methodological foundation of their ability to generate scholarly insight. Without these commitments, work on these topics would not only be impossible; it would be unethical.

As scholars with extensive fieldwork experience, we agree with the principle of research transparency—as others have noted,² no one is *against* transparency. However, we find current efforts in the discipline to define and broadly institutionalize particular practices of transparency and data access, embodied in the DA-RT statement,³ both too narrow in their understanding of “transparency” and too broad in their prescriptions about data access.

In this essay, we advance four arguments. First, there are meanings of “transparency” at the core of many field-based approaches that the initiative does not consider.⁴ Second, standards governing access to other kinds of data should not in practice and could not in principle apply to projects based on intensive fieldwork: “should not in practice” in order to protect human subjects; “could not in principle” because of the nature of the material gathered in such research. Third, while we support the aim of researcher accountability, a frequently advocated approach—replicability—while central to some research methods, is inappropriate for scholarship based on intensive fieldwork, where accountability rests on other principles. Fourth, the implementation of a disciplinary norm of data access would undermine ethical research practices, endanger research participants, and discourage research on important but challenging topics such as violence.

We illustrate the issues from the perspective of research on or in the context of violence (hereafter “violence research”). Our emphasis on ethics, our views on empirical evidence and its public availability, and our concerns regarding emergent conflicts of interest and problematic incentive structures are relevant to scholars working in an array of sub-fields and topics, from race to healthcare.

Transparency in Research Production and Analysis

We agree with the general principles of production and analytic transparency: authors should clearly convey the research procedures that generate evidence and the analytical processes that produce arguments. Those conducting violence research necessarily situate these principles within broader discussions of trust, confidentiality, and ethics. When field researchers think about transparency, they think first of their relationships

and community mapping. We use the terms “subjects,” “participants,” and “interlocutors” interchangeably.

² Pachirat 2015; Isaac 2015.

³ DA-RT 2014.

⁴ Isaac (2015, 276) asks “whether the lack of transparency is really the problem it is being made out to be,” by DA-RT, a concern we share.

with, disclosures to, and obligations towards participants and their communities.⁵

The values of beneficence, integrity, justice, and respect that form the cornerstones of what is broadly referred to as “human subjects research”⁶ are put into practice partially, though not exclusively, via the principles of informed consent and “do no harm.” Informed consent is fundamentally a form of transparency, one that DA-RT does not address. In its simplest form, informed consent involves discussing the goals, procedures, risks, and benefits of research with potential participants. Because the possible effects of human subjects research include what institutional review boards (IRBs) rather clinically term “adverse events” such as (re)traumatization, unwanted public exposure, and retaliation, responsible researchers spend a considerable amount of time contemplating how to protect their subjects and themselves from physical and psychological harm. Most take precautions such as not recording interviews, encrypting field notes, using pseudonyms for both participants and field sites, embargoing research findings, and designing secure procedures to back up their data. In the kind of research settings discussed here, where research subjects may literally face torture, rape, or death, such concerns must be the first commitment of transparency, undergirding and conditioning all other considerations.⁷

Transparency is closely related to trust. Those conducting intensive fieldwork understand trust as constructed through interaction, practice, and mutual (re)evaluation over time. Trust is not a binary state (e.g., “no trust” versus “complete trust”) but a complex, contingent, and evolving relationship. Part of building trust often involves ongoing discussions of risk mitigation with research subjects. For example, during field work for a project on militant organizations,⁸ Parkinson's Palestinian interlocutors in Lebanon taught her to remove her battery from her mobile phone when conducting certain interviews, to maintain an unregistered number, and to buy her handsets using cash. They widely understood mobile phones to be potential listening and tracking devices.⁹ The physical demonstration of removing a mobile battery in front of her interlocutors showed that she understood the degree of vulnerability her participants felt, respected their concerns, and would not seek to covertly record interviews. Over time, as Parkinson's interlocutors observed her research practices through repeated interactions, experienced no adverse events, read her work, and felt that their confidentiality had been respected, they became increasingly willing to share more sensitive knowledge.

We and other scholars of violence have found that participants come to trust the researcher not just to protect their identities, but also to use her judgment to protect them as unforeseen contingencies arise. While having one's name or organization visible in one context may provide some measure

⁵ Wood 2006; Thomson 2010.

⁶ Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services 1979.

⁷ For a more in-depth discussion, please see Fujii 2012.

⁸ Parkinson 2013a.

⁹ Parkinson 2013b, Appendix C.

of protection or status, in others it may present significant risk. And “context” here may change rapidly. For example, scholars working on the Arab Uprisings have noted that activists who initially and proudly gave researchers permission to quote them by name were later hesitant to speak with the same scholars due to regime changes and shifts in overall political environment.¹⁰ There is often no way to know whether an activist who judges herself to be safe one day will be criminalized tomorrow, next month, or in five years. Those in this position may not be able to telephone or email a researcher in order to remove their name from a book or online database; they may not know until it is too late.

In the more general realm of “production transparency,” field-intensive research traditions broadly parallel many other methodologies. The best work explains why and how field sites, populations, interview methods, etc. fit within the research design in order for the reader to evaluate its arguments. Many of these field-based methods (e.g., participant observation) also require researchers to evaluate how elements of their background and status in the field affect their interactions with participants and their analysis. Reflexivity and positionality, as these techniques are termed, thus fundamentally constitute forms of transparency.¹¹

Thus we suggest that the principle of production transparency should be informed both by human subject concerns—particularly in the case of violence research—and by the nature of the evidence that intensive fieldwork generates.

Turning to analytic transparency, we agree: an author should convey the criteria and procedures whereby she constructed her argument from the evidence gathered. For research based on extensive fieldwork this might mean, for example, being explicit about why she weighed some narratives more heavily than others in light of the level of detail corroborated by other sources, the length of the researcher’s relationship to the participant, or the role of meta-data.¹² Furthermore, the author should be clear about the relationship between the field research and the explanation: did the scholar go to the field to evaluate alternative well-developed hypotheses? To construct a new theory over the course of the research? Or did the research design allow for both, with later research evaluating explicit hypotheses that emerged from a theory drawing on initial data?

Data Access

The values of beneficence, integrity, justice, and respect imply not only that participants give informed consent but also that their privacy be protected. For some types of research, maintaining subject confidentiality may be easily addressed by

posting only fully de-identified datasets. But in the case of intensive field research, “data” can often not be made available for methodological reasons, and in the case of violence research, it should almost always *not* be made accessible for ethical reasons.

The very nature of such empirical evidence challenges the principle of data access. Evidence generated through participant observation, in-depth interviews, community mapping, and focus groups is deeply relational, that is, constructed through the research process by the scholar and her interlocutors in a specific context. As other authors in this newsletter underscore,¹³ these materials do not constitute “raw data.” Rather, they are recordings of intersubjective experiences that have been interpreted by the researcher.

We add that the idea of writing field notes or conducting interviews with the anticipation of making sensitive materials available would fundamentally change the nature of interaction with subjects and therefore data collection. Among other problems, it would introduce components of self-censorship that would be counterproductive to the generation of detailed and complete representations of interactions and events. Under requirements of public disclosure, violence scholars would have to avoid essential interactions that inform the core of their scholarship. A responsible researcher would not, for example, visit a hidden safe house to conduct an interview with rebel commanders or attend a meeting regarding an opposition party’s protest logistics. Any representation of such interactions, if they were to be ethically compiled, would also be unusably thin. More broadly, to imply that all field experiences can and should be recorded in writing and transmitted to others is to deny the importance of *participation* in intensive fieldwork: taking risks, developing trust, gaining consent, making mistakes, sharing lived experiences, and comprehending the privilege of being able to leave.

In some settings, even if researchers remove identifiers—often impossible without rendering materials useless—posting the data would nonetheless do harm to the community and perhaps enable witch hunts. For example, although field site identities are sometimes masked with pseudonyms, they are sometimes very clear to residents and relevant elites. If field notes and interviews are easily accessible, some research participants may fear that others may consequently seek to retaliate against those whom they believe shared information. Whether that belief is correct or not, the damage may be harmful, even lethal, and may “ruin” the site for future research precisely because the so-called “raw” data were made accessible. Posting such data may undermine *perceptions* of confidentiality, and thereby indirectly cause harm.

Nonetheless, on some topics and for some settings, some material can and should be shared. For example, if a scholar records oral histories with subjects who participate with the clear understanding that those interviews will be made public (and with a well-defined understanding about the degree of confidentiality possible, given the setting), the scholar should

¹⁰ Parkinson’s confidential conversations with Middle East politics scholars, May and June 2015. These conversations are confidential given that several of these researchers are continuing work at their field sites.

¹¹ See Schatz 2009; Wedeen 2010; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006. See Carpenter 2012; Pachirat 2009; Schwedler 2006 for examples of different approaches.

¹² Fujii 2010.

¹³ See, e.g., Cramer 2015; Pachirat 2015.

in general make those materials available. The Holocaust testimonies available through the Yale University Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (HVT) and the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History provide good examples and have been innovatively employed by political scientists.¹⁴ Even when consent has been granted, however, the scholar should use her own judgment: if posting some sort of transcript might result in harm to the subject, the researcher should consider not making the transcript available, even though she had permission to do so.

The Goals of Research Transparency in Intensive Field Research

As social scientists, field researchers are committed to advancing scholarly understanding of the world. This commitment does not, however, imply that researchers using these approaches thereby endorse a norm of accountability—replicability—appropriate to other methods. What would “replicability” mean in light of the nature of intensive, field-based research?

“Replicability” is often taken to mean “running the same analyses on the same data to get the same result.”¹⁵ For some projects on political violence, it is conceivable that this could be done once the data had been codified. For example, presumably a scholar could take the database that Scott Straus built from his interviews with Rwandan *genocidaires* and replicate his analysis.¹⁶ But could she take his transcripts and interview notes and build an identical database? Without time in the field and the experience of conducting the interviews, it is very unlikely that she would make the same analytical decisions. In general, one cannot replicate intensive fieldwork by reading a scholar’s interview or field notes because her interpretation of evidence is grounded in her situated interactions with participants and other field experiences.

Without access to data (in fact and in principle), on what grounds do we judge studies based on intensive fieldwork? We cannot fully address the issue here but note that—as is the case with all social science methods—field-intensive approaches such as ethnography are better suited to some types of understanding and inference than others. Scholars in these traditions evaluate research and judge accountability in ways other than replication.¹⁷ The degree of internal validity, the depth of knowledge, the careful analysis of research procedures, the opportunities and limitations presented by the researcher’s identity, the scholarly presentation of uncertainties (and perhaps mistakes): all contribute to the judgment of field-intensive work as credible and rigorous.¹⁸ Furthermore,

scholars in these traditions expect that the over-arching findings derived from good fieldwork in similar settings on the same topic should converge significantly. Indeed, scholars are increasingly exploring productive opportunities for comparison and collaboration in ethnographic research.¹⁹

However, divergence of findings across space or time may be as informative as convergence would be. Failure to “exactly replicate” the findings of another study can productively inform scholarly understanding of politics. Revisits, for example, involve a scholar returning to a prior research site to evaluate the claims of a previous study.²⁰ The tensions and contradictions that projects such as revisits generate—for example, a female researcher visiting a male researcher’s former field site—provide key opportunities for analysis. Divergence in fieldwork outcomes should not necessarily be dismissed as a “problem,” but should be evaluated instead as potentially raising important questions to be theorized.

Unforeseen Consequences of DA-RT’s Implementation

In addition to the above concerns, we worry that DA-RT’s implementation by political science journals may make field research focused on human subjects unworkable. Consider the provision for human subjects research in the first tenet of DA-RT:

If cited data are restricted (e.g., classified, require confidentiality protections, were obtained under a non-disclosure agreement, or have inherent logistical constraints), authors must notify the editor at the time of submission. The editor shall have full discretion to follow their journal’s policy on restricted data, including declining to review the manuscript or granting an exemption with or without conditions. The editor shall inform the author of that decision prior to review.²¹

We are not reassured by the stipulation that it is at the editors’ discretion to exempt some scholarship “with or without conditions.” There are at least two reasons why it is highly problematic that exemption is granted at the discretion of editors rather than as the rule.

First, confidentiality is an enshrined principle of human subjects research in the social sciences as is evident in the Federal “Common Rule” that governs research on human subjects and relevant documents.²² To treat confidentiality as necessitating “exemption” thus undermines the foundational principles of human subjects research and would unintentionally constrict important fields of inquiry. The idea that political scientists wishing to publish in DA-RT-compliant journals would either have to incorporate a full public disclosure agreement into their consent procedures (thus potentially hamstring-

¹⁴ See, e.g., Finkel 2015.

¹⁵ King 1995, 451 n2. King expressly notes that this process should “probably be called ‘duplication’ or perhaps ‘confirmation’” and that “replication” would actually involve reproducing the initial research procedures.

¹⁶ Straus 2005.

¹⁷ Wedeen 2010; Schatz 2009; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Straus 2005; Wood 2003; Autesserre 2010; Parkinson 2013a; Mampilly 2011; Pachirat 2011; Fujii 2009.

¹⁹ See, e.g. Simmons and Smith 2015.

²⁰ Burawoy 2003.

²¹ DA-RT 2014, 2.

²² Protection Of Human Subjects, Code of Federal Regulations, TITLE 45, PART 46, Revised January 15, 2009. <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/ohrpreulations.pdf>.

ing the research they wish to conduct) or have to risk later rejection by editors who deny the necessary exemption places fieldworkers in a double bind. Interviewing only those who agree to the resulting transcript's posting to a public archive will restrict the range of topics that can be discussed and the type of people who will participate, thereby fundamentally undermining research on sensitive topics including, but not limited to, political violence.

Moreover, chillingly, this statement places the researcher's incentives and norms at odds with those of her interlocutors. Due to the risk of non-publication, the researcher has a conflict of interest; the reward of publication is available unambiguously only to those who convince interlocutors to agree to digital deposit regardless of the topic of inquiry. But how could the Middle Eastern activists referenced above give *informed* consent for a researcher to publicly deposit interview transcripts, given that they could not possibly know in 2011 that they would be targeted by a future regime in 2015? The answer is that when it comes to some topics, there is really no way to provide such consent given that it is unknown and unknowable what will happen in five years. Moreover, even if they did consent, can the researcher be sure that the interview was fully anonymized? The ethical response for a researcher is to publish research on sensitive topics in journals that do not subscribe to DA-RT principles and in books. However, 25 of the major disciplinary journals have affirmed the DA-RT statement. (One leading APSA journal, *Perspectives on Politics*, has refused to endorse it;²³ others such as *World Politics*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *Politics and Society* have yet to decide.) The result will be that junior scholars who need publications in major journals will have fewer publication venues—and may abandon topics such as violence for ones that would be easier to place.

These are not abstract concerns. A number of young violence scholars pursuing publication in major disciplinary journals have been asked during the review process to submit confidential human subjects material for verification or replication purposes. Editors and reviewers may be unaware that human subjects ethics and regulations, as well as agreements between researchers and their IRBs, protect the confidentiality of such empirical evidence. To the extent that journal editors and reviewers widely endorse the DA-RT principles, early career scholars face a kind of Sophie's choice between following long-institutionalized best practices designed to protect their subjects (thereby sacrificing their own professional advancement), or compromising those practices in order to get published in leading journals. We trust that journals will come to comprehend that endorsing a narrow understanding of transparency over one informed by the challenges and opportunities of distinct methodological approaches limits the topics that can be ethically published, treats some methods as inadmissible, and forces wrenching professional dilemmas on researchers. But by that time, significant damage may have been done to important lines of research, to academic careers, and to intellectual debate.

²³ Isaac 2015.

Second, the discretion to decide which research projects earn an editor's exemption opens scholars to uninformed decisions by editors and opens authors, reviewers, and editors to moral quandaries. How can we, as a discipline, ask journal editors who come from a broad range of research backgrounds to adjudicate claims regarding the degree of risk and personal danger to research subjects (and to researchers) in a host of diverse local situations? How can a scholar researching a seemingly innocuous social movement guarantee that field notes posted online, won't *later* become the basis for a regime's crackdown? What if a journal editor accepts reviewers' demands that fieldnotes be shared, pressures a junior scholar who needs a publication into posting them, and learns five years down the line that said notes were used to sentence protestors to death? The journal editor's smart choice is not to publish the research in the first place, thus contracting a vibrant field of inquiry.

The ethical default in these situations should be caution and confidentiality rather than "exemption" from mandatory disclosure. The discipline should not construct reward structures that fundamentally contradict confidentiality protections and decontextualize risk assessments.

Conclusion

While DA-RT articulates one vision of transparency in research, it neglects key aspects of transparency and ethics that are crucial to intensive field research and especially to studies of political violence. If applied to intensive field research, blanket transparency prescriptions would undermine the nature of long-established methods of inquiry and institutionalize incentives promoting ethically and methodologically inappropriate research practices. In these settings, DA-RT's requirements may make consent improbable, inadvisable, or impossible; undermine scholarly integrity; and limit the grounded insight often only available via field-intensive methodologies. The stakes are more than academic. In violence research, it is the physical safety, job security, and community status of our research participants that is also at risk.

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The Tyranny of Light

Timothy Pachirat

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

*In these dark rooms where I live out empty days
I wander round and round
trying to find the windows.*

*It will be a great relief when a window opens.
But the windows aren't there to be found—
or at least I can't find them. And perhaps
it's better if I don't find them.*

*Perhaps the light will prove another tyranny.
Who knows what new things it will expose?*

—Constantine Cavafy

"I celebrate opacity, secretiveness, and obstruction!" proclaimed no one, ever, in the social sciences.

As with "love" and "democracy," merely uttering the words transparency and openness generates a Pavlovian stream of linguistically induced serotonin. Who, really, would want to come out on record as a transparency-basher, an openness-hater?

But as with love and democracy, it is the specific details of what is meant by transparency and openness, rather than their undeniable power and appeal as social science ideals, that most matter. This, to me, is the single most important point to be made about the DA-RT¹ initiative that has provoked this QMMR symposium:

DA-RT does not equal transparency, and transparency does not equal DA-RT.

Rather, DA-RT is a particular *instantiation*, and—if its proponents have their way—an increasingly institutionalized and "incentivized"² *interpretation* of transparency and openness, one which draws its strength from a specific, and contestable, vision of what political science has been—and, equally important—what it should become.

DA-RT proponents argue that they are simply reinforcing a key universal value—transparency—and that they are not doing so in any way that troubles, challenges, reorders, or

Timothy Pachirat is Assistant Professor of Political Science at The University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He can be found online at pachirat@umass.edu and at https://polsci.umass.edu/profiles/pachirat_timothy. For conversations and comments that have helped develop his thinking in this essay, the author would like to thank: Tim Büthe, Kathy Cramer, Lee Ann Fujii, Jeff Isaac, Alan Jacobs, Patrick Jackson, Ido Oren, Sarah Parkinson, Richard Payne, Frederic Schaffer, Edward Schatz, Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, Joe Soss, Lisa Wedeen, and Dvora Yanow. The essay's title and accompanying Constantine Cavafy epigraph are taken wholesale from Tsoukas 1997.

¹ Data Access and Research Transparency.

² Translation: rewards and punishments can and will be applied for compliance and noncompliance.