



**Conflict-sensitivity in research
on conflict-related memories**



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Doing research in conflict areas ?

Good research is...

- ▶ impartial
- ▶ transparent
- ▶ cooperative
- ▶ well-planned

In conflict areas...

- ▶ “not choosing sides” might turn out to be impractical on the field
- ▶ too much communication can put at risk researchers or participants
- ▶ multiple interlocutors make research projects vulnerable to spoilers
- ▶ circumstances can change rapidly in an unpredictable way



Approaches to conflict-sensitivity

- ▶ **Conflict-sensitivity as an ethical requirement**
 - ▶ How to avoid doing harm (to participants, researchers and stakeholders) ?
- ▶ **Conflict-sensitivity as a heuristic tool**
 - ▶ How to enrich the research process by being reflexive about the researchers' positions in a conflict setting ?
- ▶ **Conflict-sensitivity as a pragmatic orientation**
 - ▶ How to differentiate essential and non-essential objectives when facing paradoxical requirements?



Case of the Pluralistic Memories Project

- ▶ **Research framework :**
 - ▶ Multilateral research partnerships between Switzerland, Sri Lanka, Burundi and Palestine
 - ▶ Funded by SNF and SDC (r4d project)
 - ▶ Commitment to the KFPE principles
- ▶ **Essential objectives :**
 - ▶ Document a diversity of conflict-related memories
 - ▶ Analyse/facilitate pathways from narrative pluralism to collective resilience
 - ▶ Strengthen local researchers and research capacities



Examples of difficult choices

- ▶ **Building research partnerships, choosing sides**
 - ▶ Example: when the time is not ripe to document *all* perspectives in an ongoing conflict
- ▶ **Documenting personal memories, limiting transparency**
 - ▶ Example: when research material needs to be anonymised and access restricted
- ▶ **Using sensitive language, filtering questions**
 - ▶ Example: when certain wordings are too loaded to be used in a research interview



Adapting to changing circumstances

- ▶ In conflict areas, methodological choices need to be open to reconsideration when research conditions suddenly change for the worse (e.g., political crisis, outbreak of violence)
- ▶ ...or for the better
 - ▶ Example: when a peaceful regime change opens new opportunities for research partnerships on transitional justice



Advice for researchers

- ▶ Beware of unrealistic standards; clearly prioritise certain goals over others
- ▶ Exclude research settings that are incompatible with essential goals
- ▶ Be prepared to make difficult choices, to compromise on non-essential goals and to adapt to changing circumstances



Wishes for research policies

Conflict-sensitive research is likely to be facilitated by research policies that...

- ▶ limit incentives for a “promise-the-moon” approach to research in conflict areas
- ▶ are sensitive to the risks of promoting interactions with stakeholders in terms of “the-more-the-better”
- ▶ evaluate research outcomes in the light of context-specific constraints and opportunities in conflict areas

