Article

Local Positionality in the Production of Knowledge in Northern Uganda

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Abstract

This article examines the positionality of local stakeholders in the production of knowledge through fieldwork in qualitative research in Northern Uganda. While scholarly literature has evolved on the positionality and experiences of researchers from the Global North in (post)conflict environments, little is known about the positionality and experiences of local stakeholders in the production of knowledge. This article is based on interviews and focus groups with research assistants and respondents in Northern Uganda. Using a phenomenological approach, this article analyzes the positionality and experiences of these research associates and respondents during fieldwork. Three themes emerged from these interviews and are explored in this article: power, fatigue, and safety. This article emphasizes that researchers need to be reflexive in their practices and highlights the need to reexamine how researchers are trained in qualitative methods before going into the field. This article is further critical of the behavior of researchers and how research agendas impact local stakeholders during and after fieldwork.

This article examines the positionality of local stakeholders in the production of knowledge through fieldwork in qualitative research in Northern Uganda. One's positionality is understood as "where one stands in relation to 'the other' in research" (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411). Positionality of any person involved in research wither a research assistant or outsider is not fixed as it evolves as researchers and collaborators relate to each other and to the context being studied. This article discusses the positionality of both research associates and participants in studies in relation to the outside researcher. Previous studies have mostly focused on the positionality of the researcher in sensitive postconflict environments (Büscher & Vlassenroot, 2010; Hoffman & Tarawalley, 2014; Jenkins, 2018; Lesutis, 2018; Turner, 2010; Williams, 2017) or documented the ethical dilemmas of a researcher's positionality including working with translators, fixers, or research assistants in the field (Malony & Hammett, 2007, as cited in Jenkins, 2018, p. 1). Others problematize these assistants' contributions to knowledge production by stressing their importance in collecting and analyzing data in sensitive contexts (Jenkins, 2018; Schiltz & Büscher, 2018; Temple & Edwards, 2002; Turner, 2010). Yet there is scant literature on the positionality of the research assistants themselves who live and work in fragile contexts and respondents whose stories are central to our understanding of these contexts. Turner (2010)

argues that despite excellent research discussing positionality ethics and research dilemmas, we know little about the positionality of these "voices of the other," whether research associates, local collaborators, or translators, whose voices have "been rendered invisible and effectively silenced" (p. 206). This article builds on Turner's work and others to discuss the positionality of research associates and participants in research. Throughout this article, I will use terms such as "research assistants" to refer to individuals who work as research associates (Fertaly & Flury, 2019). I also use "respondents" to mean those who are interviewed in studies. In other sections when referring to both research associates and respondents, I use "local participants" or "local stakeholders." I use the term "local" to mean those from Northern Uganda or other communities where research is carried out to differentiate them from individuals who might be involved in research but are not from Northern Uganda or context being studied.

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This article is multilayered in its contributions. It begins with a discussion of methodological considerations to articulate how my own background as a research associate in East Africa afforded me a complex insider/outsider positionality and the impact this had on collecting and analyzing data for this project and the knowledge produced (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Second, I review current debates on knowledge production and scholars' positionality in postconflict contexts relating to Northern Uganda. Third, I discuss narratives of researchers and respondents from Northern Uganda and their positionality and experiences during fieldwork assisting or responding to outside researchers. The conclusion provides a set of questions, research and ethical dilemmas, and recommendations for researchers in conflict and postconflict settings to consider in designing, implementing, and sharing their findings. But first, a discussion on my own positionality and methodology is important.

Methodology and Framework

This study uses a phenomenological approach which refers to the lived experiences of individuals (Giorgi, 1997). In this article, it is used to understand the experiences of research assistants and respondents in the research process in Northern Uganda. As an approach, phenomenology allows for analysis of the experiences of local participants, examining their perspectives from their participation in fieldwork. This approach has informed the choice to use the lenses of power, fatigue, and safety to derive meaning from these experiences recorded through interviews and focus groups.

This study evolved out of a different project on memorialization of the past in postconflict Northern Uganda. It was sparked by situations including discussions with individuals who were involved in research that I met at official forums and informally. When I began to find participants for my study or to find or do interviews on memorialization, issues and themes such as research fatigue, safety, and power kept reappearing in conversations. From there, it grew into a research project of its own. From the start of this project in Northern Uganda, I continuously evaluated and discussed with colleagues my potential bias and opinions on this topic to minimize their impact on the knowledge produced (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Hycner, 1999).

I conducted an initial focus group and one-on-one in-depth interviews, as well as a second focus group in a different location. The associates, I spoke with had clients who were predominantly scholars from the Global North (meaning Europeans, U.S. Americans, and Canadians) or international organizations (such as the United Nations, International Criminal Court [ICC], and so on). More than half of participants in both focus groups have earned at least one master's degree, and some have degrees from both Uganda and international universities and through various trainings had a good understanding of qualitative methods. While some of my interlocutors lived through the war, others returned to Northern Uganda after it ended, and others had moved there for work.

In total, I collected 12 semistructured interviews using open-ended questions, in some cases alone and in others with assistance of two researchers from Northern Uganda. The focus on the small number of interlocutors allowed for in-depth discussions on themes. The focus groups had eight participants each and were carried out between December 2017 and January 2018, and from June to September of 2018, with a total of 4 months spent in the field collecting data and attending workshops on this topic. Twenty-eight people were interviewed and included an equal number of men and women aged between 27 and 45. The selection criteria were based on their previous experiences as research assistants or having been respondents in a study or both. The purpose of this research was to highlight the experiences of stakeholders in Northern Uganda. In collecting data, I worked with two research associates who played important roles in this study. They were deployed for 6 weeks each and worked with me across Northern Uganda and Kampala, focusing on these issues of local positionality and knowledge production. While most interviews with research associates or fixers were conducted in English, some interviews with respondents were in Acholi and one of the research associates provided translation and transcription into English.

These local stakeholders played a vital role in shaping my knowledge of what transpired in Northern Uganda. The translator often made comments and provided context for what a respondent was saying in Acholi and those contributions have sharpened the analysis in this article. During my interactions with research associates, we discussed issues of power that equally emerged when deciding on how to conduct interviews with respondents. In some cases, I allowed the research assistant to lead the interviewing process as he or she expressed a better understanding of the context. We equally worked out payments for their work based on rates that we discussed; for translation, we used professional fees. For focus groups, I did not intervene much apart from asking question; instead, I listened to how each of the associates told their stories. Sometimes we collectively chose to allow for debate among two or three participants until they exhausted their points. The local research assistants also had good relationships with one another and with the respondents we interviewed since in most cases they had interacted on other projects. All these interactions and discussions among different stakeholders contributed to the experiences that are explored in this article. I am grateful for their contributions.

In addition to interviews, I attended two workshops where issues of power relations, fatigue of communities, and safety of interviewees and assistants featured in discussions. Each of the workshops I attended had a minimum of 20 participants. There were no foreign academics, consultants, or donors present in these workshops, which, as one participant remarked, allowed people to speak freely about the daily reality on the ground. This provided for an interesting analysis of how conscious they were of power dynamics that are based on race (Kobayashi, 1994). So often in these kinds of forums with international experts or donors, participants may focus on what they think the donor or expert wants to hear. My focus was to allow the

research associates and respondents, to tell their stories during research projects. For the purposes of privacy, I have used pseudonyms for respondents. We will first explore some debates on the politics of research in Africa and positionality of African scholars in politics of knowledge production.

Method

In her study on working with research associates on postelection violence in Kenya, Jenkins (2018) argues that we need to "interrogate the realities of how our knowledge has been produced" and encourages researchers to "engage in more open and honest discussions of the methodological and ethical challenges of conflict research" (p. 1). It is this the kind of honesty I pursue in contextualizing my insider/outsider status in this research. Earlier in my career, I worked as a research associate, a fixer, and a translator in east and central African countries for more than 5 years, including in Northern Uganda. As is often the case for research associates, I was also a respondent in many studies that focused on young people in postconflict countries. My career evolved and I became a researcher with multiple identities, as an African man based in the diaspora and in a European institution. In returning to Northern Uganda to conduct research, it became evident that I was considered an insider/outsider, a position that has both advantages and disadvantages as my multiple identities held different meanings to different stakeholders involved in this study: "'To be an outsider within' it is argued, means that in spite of one's involvement/identification as an insider, one can never be totally accepted by the community in question" (Beoku-Betts, 1994, p. 419). I was familiar with the profession of these research associates from past personal experiences, thus making me an "insider." But I was also an "outsider" to Northern Uganda's unique context, having been away from the field for many years (Merton, 1972, p. 2). Some of the advantages my positionality afforded me included a better understanding of cultural practices and behavior of stakeholders in Northern Uganda than an outsider would have (Beoku-Betts, 1994; Collins, 2002; Merton, 1972). Equally, my unique experiences and skills as a former research associate and interviewee informed my ability to both ask these questions and to get answers that other researchers from outside the profession or the region might not have access to. Yet I was aware of the need to constantly question myself and avoid the kind of exploitation that the Ugandan anthropologist Christine Obbo (1990) has argued characterizes much research, using her own example as an educated knowledge local research assistant.

However, I had to also be critical of my positionality. Some researchers have argued that one's insider/outsider positionality can create other barriers in understanding and interpreting these experiences (Beoku-Betts, 1994; Riessman, 1987). Thus, in collecting and analyzing data, I continuously remembered that a good insider/outsider researcher allows "narrators to speak for themselves, takes cues from them, and listens with a minimum of interruptions" (Riessman, 1987, pp. 234–235). Thus, although I had familiarity with certain dilemmas explained by participants of this study, I intentionally listened to their stories, which have informed this article's analysis.

Politics of Knowledge Production in Northern Uganda

Existing literature defines fieldwork as a method that allows researchers to approach the world outside a specialized research setting of laboratories (Finley & Cooper, 2014). Recent debates among majority Global North scholars have focused on and written on research dilemmas and the positionality of researchers from various backgrounds working in sensitive contexts (Cresswell & Creswell, 2017; Lesutis, 2018; Thomson, Ansoms, & Murison, 2013). It is argued that, for example, a researcher's gender, ethnicity, and class determine the opportunities and challenges they may encounter in collecting data (Bouka, 2013).

Yet the body of available literature is largely concerned with the researcher's positionality (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018; Thomson, 2010), and local research assistants' positionality is rarely examined. Even in studies that focus on African societies, African scholars' positionality is marginalized; yet the knowledge they possess is important in production of knowledge about their societies (Bouka, 2013; Hountondji, 2002; Murunga, 2005; Rutazibwa, 2014; Schumaker, 2001; Veney & Zeleza, 2001; Zeleza, 2003, 2006). In addition, "institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" support discourses about the "other" (Said, 1978, p. 2; cited in Smith, 1999, p. 2). Thus, the production of knowledge on African continent and the process and methods employed in collecting knowledge must be decolonized and recognize the contributions of other stakeholders including the positionality of research assistants (Mama, 2007). It is for this reason that the marginalization of non-western researchers' positionality and interests has become a point of debate (Briggs & Weathers, 2016; Bouka, 2018; Schiltz & Büscher, 2018). This study builds on previous studies by exploring experiences of local stakeholders' positionality in research in Northern Uganda.

Debates on Power, Fatigue, and Safety in Knowledge Production

A power imbalance exists between a researcher and their local research assistant and respondents. Recent literature has described how these associates navigate power structures in their relationships with researchers. Some researchers have argued that research assistants have power given they carry out multiple functions in the research process (Hannerz, 2004; Jenkins, 2018). They secure interviews and help the researchers understand cultural nuances, help in research designs, or close doors to risky contacts to protect the research and the researchers (Jenkins, 2018). Local associate can be individuals or staff of community organizations (Schiltz & Büscher, 2018). They are among the first local elites to benefit from humanitarian crises as interpreters and guides (Büscher & Vlassenroot,

2010). While as gatekeepers of the field assistants have the power to "make or break" one's study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), they also often find themselves negotiating from a less powerful position for compensation and over working hours. Respondents are often considered "oppressed, powerless, and disadvantaged politically and economically" (Finley & Cooper, 2014, p. 13). They are invited to participate in the study through various means but often by research assistants (Schiltz & Büscher, 2018). Some participate out of a personal choice to tell their stories. Indeed, their hidden power is accorded to them by the fact that they possess stories that are at the center of these studies.

In addition, these local stakeholders experience research fatigue (Eckl, 2008; Rogers, 2008; Wood, 2006). Outsiders interested in studying sensitive contexts tend to conduct research in response to international media coverage of crisis, available funding opportunities, and personal interests or experience. In conducting their fieldwork, they often prefer respondents who are survivors of abuse. And due to issues such as a culture of hospitality, the initial need to speak out, being coerced to speak by authorities, or lured by incentives, they end up in vulnerable positions (Rogers, 2008). Thus, these local stakeholders recovering from violence can at times become overwhelmed by questions and frequent visits and eventually tell researchers what they want to hear.

Research fatigue can lead to exploitation and distrust among stakeholders (Khavarpour, Clapham, & Stevenson, 2006). For example, cases of mistrust and fatigue emerged in postapartheid South Africa (Tomlinson, Swartz, & Landman, 2006). Resentment from local communities can be attributed to lack of benefits of participation. In many instances, researchers promise that their study will present facts to authorities or the international community and there will be change, but this rarely happens; when it does the interlocutor does not link such change to their participation in a research project (Finley & Cooper, 2014; Lake, Muthaka, & Walker, 2016).

In addition to issues related to power and fatigue, scholarship has demonstrated that all stakeholders in knowledge production in the field face safety challenges in postconflict environments and that they vary depending on topic and context (Fuji, 2012). Unlike humanitarian workers who might be working in the same context as the researcher, "researchers do not provide basic needs such as food, water or healthcare to people in need" (Brounéus, 2008, p. 143). Although outside researchers are often confused with being aid workers as they work in the same contexts and are often White (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018), it is often quickly established by interlocutors that researchers do not bring any of those things. Therefore, they do not always get special treatment like aid workers (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018). It is left up to each researcher to rely on their skills to explain the importance of their projects and provide incentives that can help in building trust with the community for the safety of those involved.

Furthermore, a researcher can put an interviewee and research associate at risk by asking "threatening questions from neighbors or authorities" (Brounéus, 2008, p. 143). The project

can result in trauma for the interlocutor and their personal safety during and after fieldwork, especially if one is carrying out research that touches on trauma or makes one retrieve memories of violence. Researchers have therefore asserted that a researcher should think through his or her safety and the safety of those involved from the start of the project (Mertus, 2009; Turner, 2010). Furthermore, scholars have asserted that it is important to remember, "at the heart of both types of care is a belief in human dignity and the equal moral worth of human kind" (Mertus, 2009, p. 166). In the next sections, this article shows that these themes have been part of knowledge produced on Northern Uganda over the past decade. But first, I will provide some context for Northern Uganda's sensitive environment.

Northern Uganda: A Brief Context

In 1986, the National Resistance Movement and its National Resistance Army (NRA) won the Bush War (Fisher, 2013). The victory ended decades of internal wars in most regions of Uganda (Ginyara, 1989). One of the exceptions was Northern Uganda. The region continued to struggle with widespread violence from different groups including the one led by Alice Lakwena (Behrend, 2000). "To pacify Acholiland" Branch (2005) wrote, "the NRA undertook a counter-insurgency without the insurgency" given they could not find the enemy they were looking for (p. 10). Among these informal groups that carried out mass violence against the population, featured the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) that fought the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) which replaced the NRA as official Uganda army, for decades. Following the general amnesty to former LRA fighters in 2000, international humanitarian workers flooded the region (Branch, 2013; Finnström, 2012) as is often the case in other postconflict countries (Bah, 2013). In addition, the opening of cases against LRA commandants in Uganda and at The Hague-based ICC resulted in international news coverage of the conflict. This attracted researchers, especially to Gulu, both academics and aid workers. Researchers who learned about the long-term human rights abuses and gruesome killings grew in high numbers; they collaborated with Kampala-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Gulu University and community-based organizations already existing in Northern Uganda or newly created ones (on the conflict and its aftermath, see Allen & Vlassenroot, 2008; Baines, 2007; Branch, 2011, 2013; Dolan, 2009; Finnström, 2008; Nhema & Zeleza, 2008; Omeje & Hepner, 2013). Among the academics who visited Northern Uganda included senior professors and graduate students, both for their own projects and sometimes on behalf of NGOs as consultants. As a result, new research entrepreneurs, also known as assistants, fixers, enablers, or brokers, emerged to work as mediators of knowledge production (Obbo, 1990; Schiltz & Büscher, 2018). Curtis's (2019) research shows that the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences indexed 1,689 articles with Uganda in the title between 1995 and 2018, compared to 675 peer-reviewed works on Rwanda and 136 on Burundi (p. 6). Although not all of the

indexed works are on Northern Uganda, the numbers give us an idea of how important Uganda was to researchers on different topics compared to Burundi and Rwanda in the same region and period.

Both researchers and associates depended on accessing local communities who survived, witnessed, or participated in the crimes that were committed on different sides of decades-long conflicts. Yet the respondents in this study explained that while there were positive outcomes of participating in these projects, research practices employed by scholars resulted also in negative experiences for both research assistants and participants while research unfolded and once the research projects concluded. In the next section, I explore three themes in relation to doing fieldwork and producing knowledge on Northern Uganda after the LRA and UPDF conflict: power, safety, and fatigue.

Findings and Reflection on Fieldwork in Northern Uganda

In this study, three issues related to power consistently mentioned in both focus groups and interviews were: who has the power to determine payment, negotiate working hours, and control research tools. It was noted that most researchers from western countries plan budgets in advance; therefore, they sometimes arrive in the field with a fixed amount to offer to the research associate, with no room for negotiation (Anonymous, participant interview, 2018). One of the participants linked this to the process of getting "clients." They receive an e-mail or a phone call with someone interested in hiring them after a reference from a colleague and propose to pay what the last client paid despite differences in the level of complexity of projects or duration. The first meeting can be the most awkward because of wanting to be selected to work on the study while negotiating for a good salary in competition with other colleagues. In my discussion with Laker, who works as a fixer and translator on a part-time basis, she told me how she negotiates with an awareness of her positionality:

> You see, when a client arrives in Uganda, they already know in most cases that the prices of hiring someone are low. Then they ask you what price you want. Some people have a fixed price per day. But then it also depends on how long the project will take. If it will take many days, then I will be willing to reduce the price. Most of the clients I have had who are experienced researchers rarely negotiate and I also don't give them a hard time because the good ones teach you a lot. I also think because I am a woman and young-looking; they want to empower me. I have not had many people refuse my daily rate, but I have also asked around and know it is competitive. It has not always been like this though; in the beginning when I was a student at university, I used to accept any offer of price as I was learning also and appreciated the opportunity to be trained. Then, I met colleagues and learned that they were making money from this business of doing research. (Laker, participant interview, 2018)

Research assistants like Laker are both empowered and vulnerable (Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Obbo, 1990). Like many research associates, this process of negotiating payment remains an awkward process and operates in the black market of knowledge production (Molony & Hammett, 2007; Mwambari & Owor, 2019). Laker has learned over time that being silent can allow her to access more jobs and therefore make more money. Researchers are empathetic to her as an African woman who needs help and is vulnerable. One of the few Ugandans to document their negative experiences as a researcher associate is the anthropologist Christine Obbo (1990) who detailed how the context of unemployment and poverty makes it possible for researchers from outside to come and exploit their local associates (p. 292).

The question of money was popular in my discussions with those who participated in this study. Participants explained that while those who work for research organizations are paid rates set by managers or a fixed salary, those who are self-employed have had to accept a smaller amount because of many factors including timing of the client. In most cases, researchers determine the payment for the research associate (Jenkins, 2018). In some cases, it is based on local rates for similar informal work (that does not have taxes), but sometimes it is based on nothing at all or arbitrarily based on the project budget. In some cases, outside academic or funding institutions establish a rate based on the fixer's academic credentials. But as one participant mentioned, it pains these research associates to be paid less while the researcher stays at an expensive hotel and insists they have a small budget.

Unlike compensation for research associates, scholars have long debated if and how best to compensate respondents' time (Dunn & Gordon, 2005). While some argue that it is important and ethical to compensate respondents' time, others argue that financial incentives should not be part of this relationship (McNeill, 1997; Wilkinson & Moore, 1997). Others bring food or offer money for their time as it encourages participation in the study (Boddy et al., 2010; Grady, 2005). In any case, my interviewees insisted it is ethical to develop a budget, guidelines, and rationale and discuss it with participants prior to the study. The power to negotiate these sensitive issues is not equally distributed. For example, a former warlord now in an official government position is more powerful than a community member without an official position and will therefore determine how the interview evolves (Berry, 2002).

It can also be difficult to negotiate working hours. A majority agreed that the researcher has the money and therefore the power. Too much negotiation can cause the loss of a client. In fact, the toughest aspect of these negotiations is not just money or compensation but how much work a researcher expects from the research assistant. Laker told me that up to now all her clients have respected the fact that she has children and has to go home early. When she had her son, she took a few months off but then resumed doing only translations and transcription work at home. Akello's experience with a humanitarian organization differed:

One time, we were working on a long project in camps. The project was well funded because many Whites were living in Gulu and we had to travel to camps around by ourselves and bring data. It was hard. They expected us to start at 8 a.m. and work throughout the day, going around the camp, among people who are tired, suffering of illnesses, and angry just asking questions. Each day, we worked till 8 p.m. when it was dark. We even had to buy flashlights just to get around the camp. I tried to explain that it was difficult and that it was dark and dangerous especially for the women in research group. But they did not listen as they insisted there was not enough time for them to finish. And we did not get paid any extra money. (Akello, participant interview, 2018)

Akello's story was particularly touching for everyone in the group. The men realized some of the dangers their women colleagues faced. As a mother, Akello continued to come home late to young children including an infant. But at the same time, these children were the reason she worked. After the war, camps were traumatizing and her "White" bosses (as she referred to them) came few times and for the shortest time possible. Since it was a big organization, her frustrations were shifted from one person to another. Although it was agreed Akello's case was a bit extreme, others had experienced long working hours traveling to remote places with individual researchers under pressure in terms of time and the need to interview many people.

Although local regulations were suggested as a means to protect research assistants from exploitation, participants were concerned that such regulations would negatively affect prices and the government would want taxes and registration for everyone. Some of those who had registered their own small businesses were proregulation while the self-employed were against it (Schiltz & Büscher, 2018).

Additionally, some research associates want to contribute to designing the research project and to being recognized in any eventual publications. Michael is in his 40s now and has worked both as an independent researcher and for organizations for the past 10 years. He enjoys research and has a European master's degree, which he felt qualified him to do research under his own name. When I asked about his experience with foreign researchers over the past 10 years, he immediately started by talking about the mismatch between what they are told in their universities and the reality on the ground. He explained:

... My favorite group to work with are PhD students. In fact, I give them a discount because I know they don't have money and they are more flexible. You see when many foreigners arrive here to do research, they have already been told what to think. Some even already have questions. When we do our first meeting, I want to train them on local culture and some etiquette that can help us move faster. Depending on their age and gender I also tell them about dressing. They are usually happy to hear all that but when it comes to their research instruments, they don't want to be flexible. The most senior are also the most difficult. They just don't like you telling them you can ask this question in another way or a survey will not work. For example, I was recently hired on a big project

and the senior investigator brought all of these young college students to help on the project. Their approach was ridiculous, and they also wanted us to work for them not with them. We were like supposed to do whatever they wanted. I realized this was going to spoil my name and also work in the community, so I refused the contract. (Michael, participant interview, 2018)

Michael explained that his experiences with foreigners were especially difficult. He was frustrated because he had done a master's degree in Europe and worked for many years in the field; he cared about his reputation, the research project itself, and doing a good job. PhD students, he said, are willing to be guided and will often listen to him. But in some cases, he has been silenced and the researcher is the one who determines whether a conversation with a respondent should be extended or not (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). However, in this context, it is important to have an honest discussion between the associate and the outsider researcher to establish a mutual agreement of rewards in order to minimize exploitation.

Fatigue

During a workshop I attended, one of the representatives of a victims' Cevil Society Organization (CSO) lamented that there had been too many studies that produced no appreciable results known to victims' groups. As a leader of the organization she did not mind speaking up; in fact, she told me later over a cup of tea that she had even benefited from her position. She is always invited to workshops and in most cases is given "transport," meaning some money for attending, which she appreciates. However, members of her organization complained that they have been talking to all these people who promise change, but the victims have not seen any changes. Her comments prompted me to investigate this issue further in both focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

In one of the focus groups, we did an exercise to rank respondents who were most famous. They first ranked former commandants (both boys and girls), known survivors of rape, cultural leaders, religious leaders, and those involved in reconciliation processes. Omana, a young former soldier, explained in a one-on-one interview why they experienced fatigue. By the time we met, he had been interviewed for at least 10 projects. He is a well-known former child soldier because he is friendly. I checked with at least five research associates and they all knew him and had used him before when a researcher wanted a former child soldier. Omana shared, "I don't like the questions that some Whites ask me because I have answered them many times. Like if I had a girlfriend in the bush or if I forced one of them to have sex with me. They also ask if I am angry or one even asked me if I had AIDS" (participant interview, 2018). He was particularly frustrated by the fact that no one asks him what he wants to do, or how much money he needs to go to school. He said that he was "used" and is sometimes paid, but many times they invite him to eat and buy him beer without any further compensation.

Unlike Omana, Jacky explained that she was tired of answering questions about who raped her. She has now refused to participate in research. In fact, it took some negotiating for her to accept this interview. We had to visit her home 3 times and each time we discussed other topics to create familiarity with her. We also had to assure her that her traumatic experiences would not be part of the questions we asked. It was after these assurances that she agreed to an interview. She explained:

> White people ask me many times who the father of my daughter is. It is not something I want to discuss but some of them bring photos of some men wearing soldiers' uniform. I say but I already told you people that I do not remember. I am tired of repeating it. If the last person wrote my story, why not read it? Now I don't accept to receive guests anymore because it was too much and also for my kids. They don't leave us any food or money. I don't want anyone knocking on my door anymore or calling me. (Jacky, participant interview, 2018)

Florence, who is also a survivor of rape, told me a similar story:

> I have welcomed both men and women who ask me to talk about my relations with some men. They ask many questions about things that have to do with life in the camp. It's not in my culture to discuss these things openly but then one lady came and told me they wanted to punish some men who . . . [then she kept silent] but I told them I do not know them. I am tired of them coming because they just give you like 5,000 USH or bring sugar and rice. I thank them for the food but it's also many visits. Sometimes they used to be many days in one week. They also visit for a long time and I have other things I need to do. (Florence, participant interview 2018)

Omana, Jacky, and Florence spoke of being tired of long visits that were sometimes unplanned. Some research associates told me that some of the questions researchers want answered are difficult and culturally inappropriate to translate into Acholi to someone like Florence who is older and expects respect from much younger research associates. Florence was particularly hard to interview for us. She could not finish certain sentences and was sometimes silent before answering a question. She did say at the end that she wanted to forget what happened, but "people" keep coming to ask. Given her experience in the war, she became a target like other victims of war with the most "attractive" stories (Kobayashi, 1994; Schilitz & Büscher, 2018). Yet had she been in Europe or United States, a researcher would have to go through a long process of establishing trust and a relationship and adhere to all kinds of protocols to ensure a survivor of such atrocities is protected (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018). Given weak regulatory systems and the lack of dignity given to respondents, researchers report that they can easily access medical records and sensitive information (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018).

In addition, navigating fatigue among respondents is equally difficult even for local researchers from other parts of Uganda who know the region very well and have been doing research for a long time. One of the research consultants told me that recently she went to a community to carry out a survey for a client working on victims' issues. However, the community leaders and members engaged her in a debate on what else she wanted and how her information would benefit them. She explained how the last study was different from this one. Ever since, she decided to change the locations of her studies and mix locations to avoid such tensions in the future. She explained that especially with the ICC cases, many human rights organizations, the ICC itself, and many other CSOs had started receiving funds to do research to inform decisions.

Safety

Among the most important issues in conducting research in postconflict societies is the issue of personal safety. Few researchers remember to check on their research associates once they leave the field. In most cases, the research associate is left dealing with negative consequences as a result of being part of a particular project. These challenges can include being imprisoned, data being stolen, harassment by the police or local authorities, and being blamed by community members for selling their stories and not returning any money or promised outcomes. This is particularly the case in research that touches on corruption in the police, government human rights violations in war, and other security-related topics. In one of the focus groups, Jacob, an experienced researcher, recounted:

> . . . We had finished doing a study on corruption in the police force. The police men we had interviewed maybe reported us. It was bad. Because we noticed that this lady [meaning the researcher] was being followed. Everywhere we went, in café or at a restaurant, there was one person who kept on seating near us and looking to who we were interviewing. We tried to explain to her that we should stop and that she was being followed but she ignored it. Then after she left someone stole my computer, my flash disk from home. It got bad when I was harassed and accused of sending intelligence to outsiders. Then I was arrested for a few days. (Jacob, participant interview, 2018)

This was the first time he was followed and taken be interrogated. He refused to cooperate and eventually the case died out. However, Jacob told us he was then hired by another scholar who wanted to interview people on certain human rights violations committed by the government in a different location. It was a well-known national project and the researcher had been cleared by an ethics committee. They did all the work but after the researcher left, he got into trouble again. He explained:

> Another time, the researcher left. Then I was to send a report of our findings on another sensitive topic on human rights, but my e-mails were deleted somehow. Luckily, I had saved the interviews in different places and I really wanted the report to go out so that the truth on this issue would be known. I finished my work and found a way to send it, but nothing happened. The researcher just went quiet; even when I tried to write him e-mails, he never replied. The people we interviewed had risked their lives and I had risked mine for no reason. (Jacob, participant interview, 2018)

Jacob knew what he wanted and like other researchers in his context had an agenda (Büscher & Vlassenroot, 2010). He repeatedly insisted that as a research associate interested in security studies, he embraced any opportunity he got to work on sensitive topics that other people would fear. When asked if he was putting his life in danger, he said he saw it as a personal mission to use research and those researchers with mutual interest to expose human rights violations. Yet Jacob's story is different from Akello's concerns, where she was worried about her basic personal safety while working late and walking around a camp with flashlight at night. Thus, the safety of research associates and informants is a sensitive matter even in cases where their identity is concealed in research outputs.

Despite these safety challenges being the responsibility of the researcher as they promise when applying for ethical clearance, often these concerns are left to the local research associates and respondents to deal with. Some of these safety challenges come after the outside researcher has left fieldwork (Thomson et al., 2013). Furthermore, Cronin-Furman and Lake (2018) write: "Whereas American and European academics are often able to mobilize foreign passports or take advantage of humanitarian networks to evacuate rapidly if a security situation deteriorates, local interlocutors rarely can" (p. 608). However, as has been noted in this important study, researchers present their perspectives of being confronted by realities they do not foresee or plan for. One of the researchers Cronin-Furman and Lake interviewed summarized the questions that she grappled with:

> How do I respect the safety, security, and integrity of my informants, where there is such a clear power and benefits disparity? Because I'm White, will they speak to me even though it may present a danger (that I don't know about) to them in the future? How can I honestly portray my research and the real potential it has to be beneficial to them while still accomplishing what I need to accomplish? (p. 609)

Findings, Ethical Dilemmas of Fieldwork, and Recommendations

The discussion and findings on positionality of local stakeholders in Northern Uganda points to ethical dilemmas of doing research in sensitive contexts. De Laine (2000) argues that ethical dilemmas in research are "a problem for which no course of action seems satisfactory" (pp. 2–3). Furthermore, "ethical dilemmas are situations in which there is no 'right' decision, 'only a decision that is thoughtfully made and perhaps 'more right' than the alternatives" (pp. 2–3). A starting point is that there are no easy answers to how best to engage with local fixers or research associates in addition to navigating expectations from review boards (Clark, 2016, p. 34). It is therefore not the intention of this article to provide answers to these ethical dilemmas; rather, I seek to provide some recommendations that can be useful for researchers in their reflections before, during, and after fieldwork.

Discussions with Laker, Akello, Omana, Jacob, Jacky, and Florence as well as other participants in this research project revealed that researchers, both local and international, need to reevaluate their behavior during fieldwork and how they manage the web of relationships central to doing fieldwork (Cramer, Johnston, Oya, & Sender, 2015). This is not new as many review boards such as institutional review boards (IRBs) and research ethics committees exist to minimize harm to participants in research (Kass et al., 2007); similar institutions exist at the national level, like the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology. Four points are important to highlight that can help navigate fieldwork and avoid or address challenges while working with a research associate.

First, it is important to rethink methodology training that researchers receive prior to carrying out fieldwork. Although there is an increase in researchers reflecting on their positionality and the impact of their research on the communities they study, there is a need to change "mono-cultural research methods to inquire into multicultural or non-Western societies" (Gobo, 2011, p. 428). There is therefore a need to provide better training for researchers, including seasoned researchers, who continuously use old behaviors that include colonial, racist, and oppressive procedures on different levels. These include not listening to research associates even when their own safety is at stake or not respecting their intellectual abilities. Since research associates' reimbursement is rarely regulated by local agencies, leaving all the power to the researcher, it is their responsibility to be transparent and provide guidelines and a rationale to their temporary employee in a transparent manner.

In addition, power does not just mean more control over compensation but acknowledgment of associates as coproducers of knowledge, not just assistants. Researchers should acknowledge their collaborators' influence in generating knowledge in different disciplines and the original contributions they bring to the table (Gupta, 2014; Jenkins, 2018; Middleton & Cons, 2014). Researchers can also report back to IRBs and about the reality on the ground to update their institution's ethics boards to remain current in information provided to future researchers who want to work in sensitive contexts.

Secondly, the results of these interviews demonstrate a need to identify and understand what to do when a community is experiencing research fatigue on certain topics or in general. In addition, as researchers we need to rethink the colonial practices, privileges of our positionalities and elitism embedded in fieldwork regardless of one's discipline. This mind-set often allows researchers to insist on carrying out research in a community that is experiencing fatigue or to avoid researching in particular areas experiencing a high number of outsiders at a particular time because of international media reports, like in the case of Northern Uganda decade ago (Branch, 2013; Fisher, 2013).

Third, scientists need to take seriously the safety concerns of all stakeholders that their topics might attract when choosing locations to travel in postconflict areas. These issues include sensitive information about rape, trauma, or crimes committed

against one's family. It is also important for researchers to think through ethical questions of what data are "collected" or simply stolen from public records, especially if one is taking original records from war and postwar settings where such practices can be done easily (Cronin-Furman & Lake, 2018). This is no different from what was done by colonialists stealing artifacts and ancient texts to store in European archives and museums away from those who could rightfully claim them as their own cultural productions.

Finally, in this study, research associates alluded to the fact that sometimes outsiders ask tough and rude or culturally insensitive questions that cannot be translated. In such cases, if an assistant informs the researcher that the question cannot be asked, it is good not to push the assistant but to paraphrase the question or abandon it altogether. Thus, a risk assessment must be continuous from the beginning and included after fieldwork is concluded (Fujii, 2012). While there have been some positive steps in ensuring that colonial tendencies are kept to a minimum in the research process, there is still a high level of elitism and patronage in how researchers exercise their power over their local partners or interlocutors. Many outsiders who come to the field lack the humility, patience, and wisdom required when interacting with a new cultural context and coming to collect data.

As this study reveals, it is important to rethink not only how researchers are trained before going to the field and the content of their methods classes but also to enforce rules on an institutional level that can give more consideration and thought to the community of researchers and respondents who create and sustain knowledge. This is especially important in postconflict societies, where researchers can humanize the process, respect local partners, and accept failure when it happens. It is important for researchers to follow through and send along their findings as they promise in documents for ethics clearance. Some of the options available to researchers include offering trainings that decolonize methodologies and offer antiracist and anti-oppressive trainings to both senior and junior researchers before and after fieldwork, although this decolonizing will depend on each scholar's interpretation (Branch, 2018; Mbembe, 2016). Such trainings might be offered as part of the ongoing support from professional organizations but should also be part of graduate training.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted three areas of concern for research associates and respondents who have participated in the production of knowledge in Northern Uganda. Despite reflections from researchers in different disciplines working in postconflict countries, there is little information on experiences and perceptions of how these research assistants and respondents experience the process and manage different situations they face. Issues of power, personal safety, and research fatigue emerged as the most pressing ones in this study.

Further research is needed into how local associates understand and interpret the research process, procedures, and what they think about different kinds of researchers being local or international in conflict and postconflict countries. Future studies to continue this debate are needed and can also compare postconflict contexts with research assistants in more peaceful countries from the Global South such as Tanzania, Malawi, or Zambia.

Finally, there is a critical question of reflection for ethical clearance bodies concerned with these matters in war and postconflict contexts. It can be very easy to access research permits and not follow through with any protocols given the context of fragile states. However, some researchers also complain that in some countries such as Ethiopia and Rwanda, local research clearance is restricted and can result in a researcher being followed and later protesting such government surveillance. The question local authorities must ask is how they regulate this industry that presents challenges and opportunities to research associates in a way that both protects important knowledge from being co-opted from future generations and constructively interrogates how such regulations affect the research associates who benefit from the current disorganization of the industry. These concerns require robust engagement by governments, regulatory boards, researchers, and, critically, research assistants and local participants.

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