Methods and ethics with research teams and NGOs:
Comparing experiences across the border of Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo

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FIRST DRAFT: August 2007
THIS DRAFT: June 2008

Word count: 8,476

Invited book chapter for *Doing Research in Difficult Situations,* Ed. by John C. King, Chandra Lekha Sriram, Julie A. Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega, and Johanna Herman.

Previously presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, 29 August – 2 September 2007.

The author would like to thank Melani Cammett, John Gerring, Christopher Muller, Lee Ann Fujii, and Elisabeth Jean Wood for comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

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This essay focuses on methodological and ethical issues that arise in research projects conducted with research teams and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Although these research partners are central to many social science projects, they have remained the "ghosts in the machine," with little recognition of how their involvement, conditioned by local factors, shapes the methods, ethics, and results of research. Drawing on experience conducting field experiments with research teams and NGOs in Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo, I describe how differing levels of *violence*, *state control*, and *population fractionalization* gave way to divergent methodological techniques and ethical dilemmas within similar research projects on either side of the border. While many of these contextual factors are particular to conflict and post-conflict countries, this examination reveals more generally how contextual factors affect research teams and NGOs to produce different methodological and ethical concerns. A more systematic contextual understanding of research partnerships can improve research training, design, and the quality and the understanding of data collected.

Methods and ethics with research teams and NGOs: Comparing experiences across the border of Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo

Rwanda, May 2005

I sat in an immaculate office in the Rwandan capital Kigali with a bureaucrat who crossed out words on my questionnaire with a black bic pen. "Your research team cannot ask about 'ethnic groups.'" He dug the pen into the paper. I sighed inwardly, although this was the expected response. I wasn't an independent researcher who could slip under government radar—I was working with a registered NGO. "Then, could I use the word 'group,' in general?" I felt confident my participants would understand group to mean ethnic. "No." the bureaucrat shook his head. You can't use the word *group*. I started to fidget. I was supposed to research ethnic relations without using the word 'ethnic' or 'group.' "What word do you suggest, then?" He tapped his pen against my questionnaire. "Perhaps, 'people.' For example in question number 15, "I would be willing to allow my daughter to marry *people*?"

Later that day my Rwandan research assistant spoke in low consoling tones. "We will write 'people' and say 'people,' but as we explain the question, participants will understand what we mean. Everyone speaks in code here." Recent arrests of Rwandan researchers working for an international organization weighed on my mind. "But if this code is so easy to understand, what is the difference—aren't our researchers still at risk for discussing ethnicity?'" He shrugged. "Our participants know us, so I don't think there will be a problem. And I don't think we have another choice."

Democratic Republic of Congo, July 2007

In an office tucked under palm trees north of Goma, DRC, I squeezed onto a narrow wooden bench with ten researchers and one driver to face the mayor's desk. "*Karibu,* welcome" the mayor smiled at us. I explained that we were evaluating an NGO-produced radio program about community relations, and I presented him with our *ordres de mission*. He nodded and started to sign and pass them back to us. "Many people will be grateful that an NGO is showing interest in our situation. You are invited to work in the neighborhood where I live." I explained that our choice of neighborhoods and people was random. He smiled a bit regretfully and turned to a faded hand-painted map on the wall. "I should update you on the security situation. You should not go farther than these neighborhoods here, because outside there has been some fighting."

Back in our vehicle, we reviewed which languages we would probably use that day—Swahili, Kinyarwanda, Mashi, French for the 'intellectuals.' Discussions about language provoked the chronic good-natured teasing between the researchers about their different accents and origins. I assigned two to the local radio station to interview participants we had invited via radio broadcast. All twenty had arrived by foot early that morning. Just as everyone dispersed and I had settled into my own work, I received a text message from the head of our NGO. "Attack 9km from your location. Evacuate immediately with the convoy waiting at Presbyterian lodge." My research assistant broke the news to the participants waiting at the radio station. "Please stay," a few entreated. "Be brave. This happens all the time...” But within an hour we had contacted the rest of our researchers using hired motos and cell phones and were riding back to Goma in 4x4’s while our participants walked home.

I. Introduction

This essay is about conducting fieldwork with teams of researchers and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Drawing on four years of experience directing field experiments with NGO programs and research teams in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), I focus on the methodological and ethical decisions involved in this work. In both countries I conducted national (Rwanda) and sub-national (DRC) field experiments, gathering quantitative and qualitative evidence to measure the impact of NGO-produced radio programs aimed at increasing constructive political dissent and community collective action (Paluck, 2007; in press, Paluck & Green, 2008). As anticipated by many other discussions of research methodology and ethics (CITE), my methodological techniques and ethical concerns were shaped by the differing political and social environments of Rwanda and the DRC—specifically, differing levels of violence, state control, and population fractionalization.

Less frequently do textbooks and research reports discuss the way context shapes methodological and ethical issues with specific reference to research teams (such as data collection assistants, surveyors, or enumerators) and to partnering or sponsoring organizations (e.g., non-governmental organizations). My research relationship with research teams and NGOs, and their relationship with participants and other local actors, had a profound impact on the kinds of data I was able to collect and how I interpreted those data. Typically, methodological and ethical discussions focus on the role of the principal investigator and her relationship to the research participants: for example, they discuss challenges in obtaining access to communities, boundaries of researcher-participant relationships, and concerns about participant confidentiality and protection (e.g. Lareau & Shultz, 1999; Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Wood, 2006). This paper seeks to explain how work with research teams and NGOs raises different methodological and ethical issues that are neglected at a significant cost.

The social sciences boast a long tradition of using large teams of researchers to compile significant datasets to be used by academics, governments, and organizations. Social scientists interested in social, political, health, and economic interventions (particularly in conflict or post-conflict areas where NGOs are concentrated) also evaluate NGO programs or affiliate with NGOs for logistical and security support or for access to local populations. Yet documentation of this research process largely keeps research teams and organizations invisible: they are the “ghosts in the machine,” to borrow Ryle’s (1949) phrase. To date, there has been little discussion of how collaboration might affect research methods and ethics. I argue that when the data collection process is invisible, analytic opportunities, data problems, and appropriate contextualization are often lost.

The fundamental goal of this essay is to shed light on the process of working with research teams and NGOs. Some of the observations I use from my own research projects in conflict and post-conflict contexts may prove particular to those settings and research questions, but it is likely that many can be generalized to various challenging fieldwork settings and across disciplinary lines. Initiating a wider discussion on this topic among other researchers who collaborate with research teams and organizations will further illuminate unexplored conditions of collaborative research.

I exploit variation on either side of the Rwanda – DRC border to show how fieldwork context significantly affects methodological and ethical decisions particular to collaborative research. Differing levels of violence, state control, and population fractionalization in either country affected my decisions about, for example, how I identified the research project, who I hired for the research team, how I handled day to day debriefing methods, and how I managed my obligations to my partner organization. Researchers working in different contexts and in different times may confirm or dispute the importance of these contextual elements and contribute others. More systematic analysis of these issues will help researchers to anticipate how their methods and ethics will be shaped by research collaboration in various field contexts, and will improve the quality of research design, data, and analysis.

The rest of this essay proceeds as follows: for necessary background, I briefly describe my research projects, and I define and describe levels of violence, state control, and population fractionalization in Rwanda and DRC during the time of my work with research teams and non-governmental organizations. I analyze how differing levels of these three factors on either side of the Rwanda—DRC border affected critical methodological and ethical concerns pertaining to my research collaborations. I conclude with recommendations for research planning, training, and reporting on collaborative research projects in fieldwork conditions generally and challenging conditions in specific.

II. Background: Research Project and Context

Research project

In both Rwanda and the DRC, I evaluated the impact of "entertainment education" radio programs aimed at changing citizens' beliefs and perceived norms with respect to violence, community, and authority, and at promoting actual dissent, collective action, and tolerance (Paluck, 2007, in press; Paluck & Green, 2008). The same regional NGO (LaBenevolencija) produced both programs, and in both countries I utilized a randomized field experimental design, collecting quantitative and qualitative evidence with teams of local researchers. I led these teams in the field with the assistance of a permanent research assistant who worked with me from the start of the project to its finish, who helped me with logistics, planning, and research team leadership, and who generally served as a cultural interlocutor.

Rwanda. In each of 14 communities representing salient identity groups across Rwanda, I randomly selected a stratified sample of 40 adults for a total sample of 560. After matching the most similar communities into pairs, I randomly assigned one within each pair to listen to the "reconciliation" radio program and the other to a different entertainment-education radio program addressing health behaviors. The same set of researchers visited each community and played the randomly-assigned radio program on a cassette player to each community's participant group (in Rwanda, people typically listen to the radio in groups).

After one year, my research assistant and I led a team of 15 Rwandan research assistants to each site, collecting data using quantitative surveys, open-ended focus groups, interviews with families and community members, and observations of participant behavior (Paluck in press). I returned the next year to follow up with the same participants.

Democratic Republic of Congo. In the eastern Kivu region of DRC, I studied the impact of a radio talk show that was broadcast after a Congolese entertainment-education soap opera (created by the same regional NGO), aimed at community building. The talk show encouraged listeners to discuss the soap opera topics with friends and family, and featured listeners' letters about previous episodes. I identified non-overlapping broadcast areas in the Kivu region and randomly assigned some areas to broadcast only the radio soap opera, and others to receive the soap opera followed by the talk show (Paluck 2007).

After one year of broadcasting, I took two different research teams into the field (one for North and one for South Kivu) to measure outcomes in a random sample of residents in each broadcast area. We conducted over nine hundred quantitative and open-ended interviews, and measured a behavioral response at the end of each interview.

Research context

Below I identify and define the three contextual dimensions along which variation in Rwanda and the DRC most affected my methods and ethical decisions with these research teams and NGO bureaus. They are 1) violence, 2) state control, and 3) population fragmentation.

Violence. I define physically violent acts as those targeted at certain genders or class groups (e.g., rape, killing or capture of young men or boys, attacking prosperous families), at political individuals or groups (e.g., assassinating political party members) or ethnicities (e.g., killing people identified with one ethnic group, displacing regional "non-natives"). Civilians, militia, the state, or international actors may commit such violence.

Rwanda from 2004-2007 experienced relatively low levels of violence, thanks to the security established by its powerful and well-organized government. However, the threat of violence for rural citizens was often implicit in their denouncements of witnesses and of local judges in the community courts set up to try genocidal crimes, and in state intimidation of journalists and human rights activists. Lending weight to this implicit threat were extrajudicial killings of community court witnesses (by citizens and unknown actors) including killings of suspects detained by the government (HRW, 2006a; Waldorf, 2006).

On the other hand, during the two years in which I worked in the Kivu region of Democratic Republic of Congo (2006-2007), the region was experiencing "one of the world's worst humanitarian crises" (ICG, 2005; 2007). Physical violence against civilians and between various armed groups in the region caused thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of displaced people, all despite the presence of the largest and most expensive mission of United Nations (UN) peacekeepers in the world.

State control. By state control I mean the level of state presence and surveillance in local (fieldwork) contexts and in the operations of independent organizations and researchers working in the country. This includes the state's control of the movement, speech, and general privileges of organizations, researchers (citizens and foreigners), and citizens who become research assistants and participants. Others have defined state control in more operational terms, such as the "probability that a certain event or class of events will not occur within a defined area within a defined period of time" (Race, 1973; cited in Kalyvas, 2006, p. 210). My more general definition serves my present purposes, which are to evaluate how the state affects the behavior and concerns of research teams (who are usually citizens of the state), and of the NGO.

By any definition the state in Rwanda is visible and powerful at all levels; Rwanda's president Kagame was elected in 2003 with 95% of the vote, and his government retains tight control on speech, economic (particularly agricultural) activity, and other freedoms (Ansoms, 2007; HRW, 2007, ICG, 2001). Rwanda is effectively a one-party state; journalists practice self-censorship to avoid official sanction, and the current constitution bans speech about ethnicity as "divisionist," a charge that is applied liberally opponents of the state. I needed four months of sustained in-country work to obtain research permissions to work at 14 research sites from each relevant national ministry, governor, mayor, all the way down to each *nyumbakumi* (the local person responsible for a group of ten houses).

The DRC, on the other hand, recently held its second-ever presidential elections in 2006, ending a transitional government installed by the United Nations after several bloody years of war. The government has a tenuous grasp on the eastern Kivu region in particular, where armed groups refused to integrate into the national army and preyed upon the local population during my fieldwork. The population of eastern Kivu views their government as corrupt and inept (a fair accusation of a country that cannot account for a quarter of its national budget) and in many interviews research participants asked, "why did we bother to vote?" reflecting their realization of the governments' unwillingness or inability to improve their situation.

Population fractionalization. Social scientists frequently use the number and proportions of identity groups in a population to predict that country's economic and political development, quality of governance, and the like (Collier 1998; Elbadawi & Sambsnis 2002; LaPorta et al. 1999; Posner 2004). The way in which a population is divided into ethnic, religious, linguistic, or regional groups also matters for methods and ethics of research, particularly when the project employs teams of local researchers and works with local organizations that are situated in certain regions and focus on certain populations. Just as some researchers have demonstrated the need to identify locally meaningful cleavages in measures of population fractionalization (Posner 2004), only some out of all "official" group cleavages may be significant for a collaborative research project. Significant population fractionalization (i.e., many groups, or a few disproportionately-sized groups) may compel NGOs to tailor their work to different groups' agendas. Research team members in the field may conduct their work differently or relate to various participants in different ways because of the salience of their own and the participants' identity.

In Rwanda, population fractionalization is much greater than the Hutu and Tutsi distinction rent by the genocide; in addition to the Batwa, a small (pygmy) minority group, Rwandans are divided into regional groups, historical diaspora groups (e.g., "caseloads" of refugees across time, returnees from Congo, Uganda, and Burundi, Rwandans who "never left"), and class groups (Ansoms, 2008). Much post-conflict NGO and research activity focuses on the Hutu-Tutsi divide, but public discussion of this identity distinction is muted by the official government stance that there are *no* distinct identity groups in Rwanda. Underneath is a less salient but very sensitive distinction between Tutsis who survived the genocide and those who were living outside the country at that time, as well as regional groups representing the historical seats of power for different political parties, all recognizable by accent (Rwanda's lingua franca is Kinyarwanda).

Identity groups are more numerous and openly acknowledged in the Democratic Republic of Congo. DRC is home to approximately 250 ethnic groups and 700 languages and dialects. In the eastern Kivu region we used five different languages to conduct interviews, and recorded self-identification with over 20 ethnic groups. No government narrative discourages identification with an identity group; open identification with certain ethnic or pan-ethnic ("Bantu") identities has drawn the lines of battle for many years in the east. Different groups claim rights to citizenship, land, and grievances against other groups and countries (specifically Rwanda).

The level of violence, state control, and population fractionalization repeatedly affected my methodological and ethical decisions during fieldwork in Rwanda and DRC. I specifically examine issues of *identification* (e.g., of the research project as part of or separate from the NGO; of researchers themselves), *security* (e.g., psychological and physical safety of the research team; the security of the NGO's legal standing), and *expertise exchange* (e.g., my relationship to the NGO and the research team; the feedback I invited from each).

III. Methodological and ethical issues

i. Identification

In Rwanda and in DRC I made different decisions about identifying the research project as collaborative with or separate from the NGO, about which identities to include on the research teams, and about how to observe participants' identity or ask them to self-identity.

Identifying the research project. Investigators have an ethical obligation to identify the research project with enough clarity and detail for people to make a fully informed decision about whether they would like to participate. This obligation is often in tension with the need to avoid communicating the investigator's ideological or political leanings or general hopes for study findings. Working with a partner organization often accentuates this tension because organizations often have a widely known, or even misinterpreted ideological orientation. I found that the level of state control in Rwanda and violence in DRC led to different decisions about how to identify the research project to people so as to secure their consensual, willing participation.

In Rwanda, I hoped to disassociate the research project from my partner NGO because of the close association between NGOs and the government in local settings. I introduced the project to our participants as an independent study that I, an American student, was conducting about the "media and social life" in Rwanda. Although I did not hide that I was interested in evaluating the NGO's radio programs, I emphasized my identity and goals as a student of Rwanda when I first met with each group of participants.

This separation helped to address my concern that a clear connection between the research and the NGO would invite "correct" responding from participants who would assume (correctly) that the NGO (and any government officials associated with the NGO) would desire positive answers with respect to their mission of ethnic reconciliation and trauma healing. It did seem that participants identified me primarily as a student—at one site in the west of the country, the participant group would somberly greet me by asking "are you getting good grades?"

In DRC, violence guided my decision to take cover in a trusted identity, namely that of an NGO. Identifying the research with an NGO won the trust of our participants and contributed to the safety of my research team. Violence in eastern DRC has fostered mistrust in the international community (represented by the UN peacekeeping mission) among Congolese, who accuse the UN of disregarding citizens' welfare and creating more problems. My study participants had no reason to trust an American student or university, but they did associate NGOs with humanitarian aid that was a positive force for civilians.

My discovery of the importance of NGO identification in DRC is best illustrated by my initial struggle against the use of NGO t-shirts. Most NGO's produce t-shirts emblazoned with their logo, and the t-shirt of my NGO partner was colorful and eye-catching, advertising the radio show's name and broadcast schedule. I was alarmed on the first day of our fieldwork when the research team turned up wearing the t-shirts, which my research assistant had distributed. I saw them as bright flags reminding our participants of a rich organization's desire for them to know about this radio program concerned with peace and community. However, as one of my researchers protested, "*Les tricots nous protègent*" (the t-shirts protect us). Indeed, later that day a man started harassing one researcher who had approached him for an interview. He was demanding to know her "real motives" until another passerby noticed the scene and exclaimed "Oh, another person from that NGO! They are everywhere!" The t-shirts gave credibility to my researchers' claims that they were from an NGO doing research, not spying or hustling for money as was common in some of the rougher *quartiers* where we worked.

Identity of researchers. Research participants use researchers' physical appearance, accent, mannerisms, and multilinguial abilities to identify them with certain ethnic, regional, and even political groups. It is an important methodological and even ethical consideration to compose a research team that will invite the confidence and frankness of the whole range of participants in the sample. The collection of identities on a research team can also make them more or less likely to be perceived by participants as biased, foreign, or unfriendly, which would hamper their ability to work, risk the NGO's reputation, and in some cases put the researchers in danger. Levels of violence, state control, and population fractionalization each country affected the considerations I used when hiring a research team that could reflect important identities in the research population.

In Rwanda, to arrive at a rural community with a disproportionate number of Tutsi researchers would have clearly associated the project with the real and perceived Tutsi dominance in the government (in some rural areas more than 90% of the population was

Hutu). However, seeking an ethnically representative team is often not a straightforward task—and in Rwanda especially, it was illegal to ask candidates about their ethnicity or to self-identify on their resume or in conversation. Moreover, I needed a team that would be *perceived* as balanced—self-identification was not the only thing that mattered. Like most places in the world, ethnic misclassification in Rwanda is rampant.

With the help of my primary Rwandan research assistant I assembled a research team by guessing ethnic identification based on applicants' appearance, self-reported birthplace and current residence, and education. I grossly underestimated the importance of accent and dialect when hiring my first research team. Many of the Tutsi researchers I hired were born or had lived for a long time as a refugee outside of Rwanda. They had different accents and sometimes mingled their mother tongue with neighboring languages, which were immediate signals of ethnicity, geography, and class to our research participants. The accents sometimes provoked laughter from participants during our customary group greetings at the start of each research day, and according to the researchers, made it more challenging to establish rapport (which underlines to the need to pad the beginning of an interview with benign conversational items).

With this lesson, and with the great variety of groups and languages in eastern DRC, I sought ethnic and linguistic diversity on my research team, which was not as difficult to identify. Following an employment test (which required applicants to describe how they would respond to various research dilemmas), we asked applicants about their background, and they often volunteered ethnic and regional identity readily: "I'm a Mubembe from Uvira." My Congolese research assistant also asked questions in a variety of languages, to be sure that our research team would be able to collectively handle the wide variety of languages *and* regional dialects. In a few cases, I had to use linguistic identity as the deciding factor between two candidates.

Levels of violence in each country also affected the gender balance on each of my research teams. While in Rwanda I was able to find equal numbers of female researchers for my team, in the DRC I was able to hire only 2 qualified women candidates (out of a team of 20 total researchers). In the midst of high levels of physical violence, women lose out the most in educational and professional opportunities (although certainly other cultural and political factors were at play).

Besides a general ethical objection to gender inequity in hiring, I worried that the overrepresentation of males on the team would bias participants' responses, particularly those related to violence (which often means sexual violence for women of this region). There is a great deal of motivation for women to remain silent about sexual violence, particularly in DRC, because it is considered the woman's fault and a personal shame. However, we noted in Rwanda that women participants *chose* to speak with male researchers just as often as they chose female researchers (we allowed a choice of interviewers when several were available at the same time).

In DRC participants could not select their interviewer since researchers worked separately when randomly approaching individuals. In this context I could empirically test whether there was differential reporting to male and female researchers about gender-sensitive topics. I found to my surprise that female participants discussed their experience of rape just as often to the male researchers as the female researchers. The only factor that seemed to influence whether rape was mentioned was the quality of the interview—whether the researcher reported that the there was a good rapport, something which varied for each individual researcher. This finding supports some researchers' observations that interviews are often more open when the participant feels "different" in some way from the researcher (whether according to gender, ethnicity, class, etc). Some hypotheses about why this might be so are that the interviewer is treated more like an outsider who must be educated, or because there is less suspicion or self-comparison than there is between two "insiders" (see Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 88).

Identification of participants. Decisions about how to compose a representative sample and how to compose questions about participants' identity shift under differing conditions of violence, state control, and population fractionalization. In both Rwanda and DRC, sampling a range of identity and age groups that my research assistant, partner NGO, and I projected to be affected by the radio program was difficult for different reasons. My university's committee for the protection of human subjects did not approve of my proposal to conduct research in the prisons in Rwanda because of the strict government control over which prisoners were allowed to participate. My partner NGO was not willing to drop this aspect of the research design, so I conducted research in the prisons for the NGO in a purely "consultative" role and was prevented from reporting on data from the prisons in an academic setting. In DRC, I was unable to collect data in two regions where our radio program was broadcast because of recurring violence in those areas, and even in areas where we could travel, our research was often delayed or cut short by short outbursts of local violence.[1]

Despite obstacles presented by the level of state control in Rwanda and by the threat of violence in DRC, I found ways to ask about the identity of participants in both countries using different kinds of compromises. Asking about participants' identity in Rwanda was illegal (technically termed "divisionist"). I was concerned for the safety of the research team—three weeks prior to the start of our fieldwork several Rwandan researchers working for the an international organization were arrested for conducting research perceived as divisionist. My partner NGO risked being penalized or even expelled from the country for violation of this law.

I was able to get a global estimate of the ethnic makeup of my Rwandan sample by extrapolating from historical data in the regions where I was working. However, to attain an individual measure of ethnic identification, I asked two Rwandan colleagues who had been visiting each research community for one year prior (as part of the research design) to help me identify the ethnicity of each participant from our lists. The researchers marked a "1, 2 or 3" next to each participants' name to correspond with Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, using the information collected in the survey on each person's birthplace, movement during the genocide and afterward (e.g., which refugee camps they stayed in), current address, and their personal recollections of the participant. I paid them for this task before we began, and I

[1] This violence caused the displacement of thousands of people, with an indirect impact on our research—some displaced people were not living in places where we had broadcast the same radio program, which confounded our experimental treatment.

emphasized that they could take the money and opt out of the work. In all honesty I knew that I could not erase all coercive elements from the fact that I, the employer, was asking them to do a job for me that was illegal. In the end I used the ethnic information only for my own purposes, to reassure myself there were no predictable global ethnic differences in the results (there were not). If I had found differences, I would have quarantined them for a number of years.

In DRC, the weak to non-existent government regulation in DRC meant that I did not submit my questionnaire to any government officials. The permissions process was limited to two hours—one for contacting the relevant local official to say the team would come to the area, and a second for visiting the office and asking him or her to sign our *ordres de mission* (letters from the head of our NGO stating our authorization and purpose). However, ethnically targeted violence made participants suspicious of questions about ethnicity.

"Kabila" (Swahili for ethnicity) was the fourth item on our questionnaire. The research team and I decided on a way to soften this question by taking advantage of the ethnic diversity in the general region. "I don't live here" researchers would begin, "could you tell me which ethnic groups live in this area?" Ninety nine percent of the time this was sufficient to induce the participant to identify their own ethnicity, perhaps by saying "there's the Nande, and then also the Hunde, like me...".

ii. Security

Concerns about security encompass both physical and psychological security of the research team and the partner NGO. The difficult nature of fieldwork was exacerbated by varying levels of violence, state surveillance, and antagonistic identity groups in the population. In both countries I learned methods to ensure the psychological health and physical security of the research team. High levels of state control and surveillance in Rwanda compelled me to take special measures with respect to appropriate speech (and appropriate silence), to ensure the safety of the NGO's reputation; in DRC I had to adjust to security procedures within the NGO system established in response to violence.

Physical and psychological security of research team. In both Rwanda and DRC, each researcher conducted an average of 4 interviews per day, with interviews lasting seventy-five minutes in Rwanda and two hours in DRC. In the rural areas where we primarily worked, it was rarely feasible to eat or drink during the day, on the one hand because there was not much available to buy, but more importantly because it was unethical to eat in front of most participants, whose level of poverty or distance from home meant they too had nothing. On top of these difficult conditions was the interview itself, which covered topics like prejudice, memories of violence, and trauma. Although committees for the protection of human subjects rarely inquire about the well being of research teams, I was just as often concerned about the psychological and physical security of the research team as I was about the participants.

These conditions made me acutely aware of the importance of team morale building and relaxation at the end of a long day (during and after a meal). A common research design is to scatter researchers to cover each area individually over a longer period of time, but I believe that the solidarity achieved by working together as a team unit in one area was a distinct advantage. In both Rwanda and DRC, the research teams lived and ate together in the same tiny rural lodgings, and evenings after a day of interviewing were punctuated by a great deal of laughter and storytelling. The threat of violence outside our rooms in DRC made togetherness mandatory—no one wandered outside after dark. I encouraged researchers in DRC to use their general observation notebooks for writing personal reactions to the research as well, in the interest of defusing their stress.

During evenings over meals and afterward, I held back from asking a great deal about the events of the day. I reserved such questions for the period at the end of each workday when I spoke with each researcher about his or her completed interview records. However, listening to the broad-ranging evening conversations were often just as educative for me as were formal discussions about the project. After dinner when people retired to their rooms, I would return to mine and read through as many interviews as possible, so as to point out blank spaces or unclear notes, and to write down follow-up questions the next morning.

Differences in the security measures I took in Rwanda and DRC sprung from differing levels of state control and of violence. In Rwanda, I was sure to inform, re-inform, and remain on good terms with authorities in the area so that my researchers could be confident moving around and asking questions without trouble. More than once I was obliged to leave an interesting focus group or conversation in order to speak with a curious member of the local police or military forces who had wandered onto our site. In DRC I took many routine physical security precautions such as buying all of my researchers "minutes" for their cell phones to keep in touch, carrying a satellite phone, and asking researchers to meet up and walk back to our hotel together at the end of the day. I adopted security suggestions from my research team, who knew the areas well. I avoided some security procedures recommended by foreigners when possible, for example traveling with the international peacekeeping force, because of the local population's intense dislike of them. Instead we were able to travel safely in convoys with other NGOs.

Security of NGO. To a certain extent, conducting fieldwork with an NGO transforms an independent researcher into an NGO representative. Respecting the security of my partner NGO's standing in each country involved careful attention to the state in Rwanda and to patterns of violence in DRC.

In Rwanda the challenge was to ensure that the research team and I did nothing to jeopardize the NGO's standing with the government. This included methodological adjustments such as avoiding contentious or controversial questions in our questionnaire, controversial comments when in the field, and for me personally, refraining from overt critiques of the government in my own academic writing or speech. A researcher from my team even warned me that I should not keep company (i.e., have dinner or be seen) with known critics of the government when living in the capital. (I did not always follow this advice, after weighing the small chance that the NGO would be penalized against the benefit I derived from gathering different perspectives.)

In DRC the greater concern was following the NGO's rules of physical security, which protected the team but also in many ways limited the research. The rules were frustrating when they delayed or prevented research, and it became important not to lose sight of the importance of security as violence became normalized. Complicating this issue was that occasionally the security rules of the NGO contradicted the instincts of my research team. While I was obligated to follow NGO rules, I also trusted the wisdom of the researchers, who knew the milieu extremely well. I walked a delicate line in which I respectfully tried to serve as a representative of my team's judgments to the NGO while also cooperating with their final judgments. In the end, it was usually the case that the NGO took good precautions and that I had no choice but to cooperate if I wanted to continue my work.

iii. Expertise exchange

Research collaborations are built on expectations of the exchange of expertise, which shifted under the different conditions of violence, state control, and population fractionaliztion in Rwanda and DRC. Below I specifically discuss conditions that shaped my invitation of the feedback and interpretation from the NGO and my research teams and other issues that arise in maintaining a respectful and productive research relationship.

Feedback. I relied on the research teams in both countries to a great extent for initial feedback on the research questionnaire and for ongoing feedback on the research process. Every research training session that I held in Rwanda and in DRC doubled as a chance for me to expose my questionnaire to a group of local experts (the researchers).

No one in Rwanda was better than my researchers at advising me on how much our participants felt constrained by government surveillance and at alerting me to nuanced signs of trust or suspicion. After the first pretest in Rwanda, the team agreed during a roundtable discussion that answers were routinely superficial for one particular question— *Would you share a beer with a person from 'another group'?* (a standard social scientific question of social distance). One researcher suggested a simple but crucial variation on the question: *Would you share a beer with a person from the 'other group,' if the bottle was not opened in your presence?* This variation touched upon the deep cultural suspicion of poisoning, and participant responses took an interesting and dramatic turn after we changed the question. I would not have been brave enough to break out of this standardized question had it not been for the insistence of the researchers and their own familiarity with the limits of public discourse in that context.

In DRC, I doubled the amount of time allotted to the research team training sessions to accommodate the long and lively discussions about the composition and translation of interview questions. Most of this discussion resulted from the researchers' knowledge of the great diversity among participants—their different languages, dialects, and customs. An example is our hours-long debate over the choice of material for a behavioral measure—would we give participants beans, rice, sugar, or salt to test their willingness to aid other ethnic groups (by asking them to give some proportion of the food)? Beans were judged to be too common in the north, rice too precious in all rural areas and unethical to ask for a donation; sugar was suggested, but since it was a luxury item we finally agreed that salt was the best measurement tool—essential and thus meaningful.

Inviting interpretation. I usually review my interpretations of the data with members of the research team. In Rwanda I limited these discussions so as to protect researchers from government interest in our findings. I worked on data analysis primarily with one researcher who had only joined the team for the final posttest. Because he was not individually familiar with each participant, he was relieved of a certain amount of responsibility in the case that the authorities contacted him for specific information (they never contacted the researcher, although they did contact me). In DRC I did not hesitate to discuss the data, because we were not closely monitored by powerful political groups.

Relationship with researchers Researchers from countries like Rwanda and DRC are often looking for an educational experience as well as references for their next job, which are difficult to come by in both countries (due to chronic instability this problem is even more pronounced in the DRC). Sometimes I felt as though I was cheating the researchers of a full educational experience because of my need to keep them "blind" to hypotheses, and I never seemed to have the time or funds to hold an additional training session after we had finished the project.

In both countries, I tried to help researchers continue to find jobs; I designed certificates of research assistance and I continue to write recommendation letters to potential future employers. I gave the researchers an option to be listed on my website, and all of them chose visibility to my colleagues, who might also hire them over anonymity. The research is relatively short-term and never pays enough for the researchers to survive with their big families, and I am constantly aware of this in the field when I see researchers skimp on the dinners they buy in order to save money for people back home. On this point, I recommend making at least one meal part of the standard salary or per diem. Research supervisors should be constantly aware of the tradeoff their employees often make between sharing their earnings and maintaining their present well being.

Relationship with the NGO. For the privilege and opportunity to conduct research on and NGO's program, I often felt I owed the NGO the help they requested with extra jobs like writing questionnaires for other programs and statistical consulting. I tried to stay away from advising about substantive issues that would affect the program I was evaluating. I have always felt one ethical obligation in particular, which is to write a non-academic report aimed at the NGO's donors. I believe it is unfair to give the NGO an academic report that will not be read by donors or by other NGOs, although I have observed this to be common practice with many other NGO-academic relationships.

Occasionally an NGO's needs conflict with my own academic research ethics. One situation arose in Rwanda when a high-ranking government minister called the NGO, stating that he had some questions for me about the community where the research team had worked that week. He specifically wanted to know how community members had responded to my questions about their local genocide trials (*gacaca*). I told the NGO administrators that I would not reveal my data to this minister, that I was bound to confidentiality as an ethical obligation to my participants. Understandably worried about souring their relationship with the government, the NGO administration asked me if there was a way to share averaged or masked data. I knew even group-level data would put my participants at risk because it would be easy for the government to find out who had participated in the study. Fortunately in this case, I was able to avoid a confrontation by postponing meetings with the minister until the subject dropped.

On a more banal point, most NGOs are not prepared to handle the sudden spike in demand for logistical support created by a research project and the accompanying research team. A collaborating researcher should be prepared to act as a logistician, accountant, mediator, shopper, and even chauffeur—all roles that I assumed in order to realize the fieldwork plans. I learned NGO organizational language and procedures—foreign words like proforma and ordre de mission, acronyms like MOU and TOR—and mastered dozens of forms, contracts, and banking regulations. I was often called on to intervene in salary negotiations and advances for my researchers, discussions about car drivers and mechanical problems, and office politics. This kind of work is perhaps more stressful in a society that is also violent or politically repressive, but the work is similar within all field offices—office, manual, and all other types of labor distract from research. It is part and parcel with working on large-scale collaborative projects.

IV. Conclusion

Research collaborations with teams of interviewers and partner organizations have long been important to social scientific investigation. However, methodological and ethical considerations that arise in these collaborations—e.g., those pertaining to identity, security, and expertise exchange—are often overlooked. Demonstrating how collaborative research in different field contexts gives rise to different research strategies reveals the centrality of the collaborative relationship to research design and analysis. In my own research, varying levels of violence, state control, and population fractionalization on either side of the Rwanda-DRC border brought methodological and ethical issues of research collaboration to the fore.

Heretofore experience with the stakes of collaborative research has not been systematically analyzed in the interest of guiding or teaching research design and analysis. The absence of discussion is arguably most damaging for researchers in conflict and post-conflict settings where the methodological and ethical stakes are high and where collaborative projects are common. The unique contribution of this paper is to make visible these issues of research collaboration and to stimulate systematic thinking about how these methodological and ethical issues are affected by the research context.

No matter the type of overarching research logic (e.g., field experiment, case study) or kind of data collected (e.g., quantitative survey, qualitative focus group), decisions about the role of research teams and organizational partners bear on the quality of data collected and the interpretation of those data. Many of these points may sound familiar to qualitative researchers who are practiced in analyzing the interaction of the social scientist and her participants. For quantitative researchers, the thrust of this paper is relatively more novel but equally important—instances from my own mixed quantitative and qualitative fieldwork demonstrate there is just as much room for interpretation in the collection and analysis of quantitative field data as qualitative.

I have drawn from my research experience with small regional non-governmental partner organizations, but I believe many of the same issues arise with larger international non-governmental organizations. One important question is how the methodological and ethical issues change when researchers work with governments as their "partner organization." In this case, state control carries a whole new meaning for research teams—it can facilitate or limit their work to a much greater extent than I described here. Future discussions of collaborative fieldwork could productively address this kind of collaboration.

Recommendations

Depending on their own research questions and locales, researchers may be able to use some of the specific descriptions of my own research choices as recommendations for their work. The most universally applicable recommendations of this paper are, of course, to remain aware of the methodological and ethical issues of collaborative fieldwork and to communicate these issues in research reports and to people new to fieldwork.

With respect to the operative issues of fieldwork, I would add two specific recommendations: one, to appreciate the value of a primary local research assistant (or research team leader), and two, to maintain a presence in the field. My first recommendation stems from the vital role played by my primary research assistants in both Rwanda and DRC. I was fortunate to have the capacity to hire long-term research assistants who facilitated countless interactions for me and who worked closely with me to understand and to shape my methodological and ethical decisions. If hiring a long-term research assistant is not feasible, I suggest at the very least that one research team member be designated as the team leader. I found it important to have assistance managing the data collection from a person who was intimately familiar with the geography of our research sites and with the citizens who were our research participants and our research team colleagues.

My second specific recommendation, to maintain a presence in the field, is important for obvious reasons provided throughout the paper. All of my observations and subsequent critical decisions about methods and ethics with respect to my fieldwork partners came from my intimate engagement with all aspects of the field research. I argue that the principal investigator should always be present to monitor the research team and to work with the partner organization on the ground, no matter what kind of data needs collecting. An instructive example comes from a household consumption survey conducted in DRC a few years prior to my own research. The research team hired for this project spent one month with the same few families in remote villages, measuring and recording every item of their income and consumption down to a gram of salt. Because families were not paid for their participation, researchers were forced to give them a little money from their own pocket as incentive to continue (researchers were not paid if the surveys were returned incomplete). These small donations, as well as the food offered to the researchers while they stayed with the family in the household, shaped the results of the study, but there was no way for the researchers to report this to the investigators back in the capital, Kinshasa. Thus, even the most "straightforward" data collection of weights and numbers is heavily influenced by social relations, which are neglected at a significant cost.

The corresponding recommendation of this paper is to describe and analyze methodological and ethical quandaries and decisions when writing and teaching about fieldwork. In the body or appendix of their research reports, researchers should report problems and decisions taken with respect to their fieldwork collaborators, and how they believe these decisions affected their data quality and interpretation. Increasingly, research journals are allowing researchers to publish extra materials online, so notes on special considerations for methods and ethics with fieldwork partnerships would be appropriate for such online addenda. The more that these discussions appear in print, the more available they will be for social science students who are preparing to do fieldwork. Ultimately, open communication about these issues will recognize research teams and partner organizations for what they are—not "ghosts in the machine," but centrally important research collaborators. This recognition is not only long overdue, it is critical to the quality of research produced by these collaborations, and to the design of future research projects.

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